

# Frères Ennemis



*The French in American Literature,  
Americans in French Literature*

**William Cloonan**



# Frères Ennemis

*The French in American Literature,  
Americans in French Literature*

WILLIAM CLOONAN

LIVERPOOL UNIVERSITY PRESS

First published 2018 by  
Liverpool University Press  
4 Cambridge Street  
Liverpool  
L69 7ZU

Copyright © 2018 William Cloonan

The right of William Cloonan to be identified as the author of this book  
has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs  
and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval  
system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical,  
photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission  
of the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication data  
A British Library CIP record is available

print ISBN 978-1-78694-132-9 cased  
epdf ISBN 978-78694-935-6

Typeset by Carnegie Book Production, Lancaster

# Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi
Introduction: A Clash of the Comparable	1
Chapter I: The Creation of the American in Paris: <i>The American</i>	13
Chapter II: The Splendor and Misery of the American Scientist: <i>L'Ève future</i>	40
Chapter III: The American Woman and the Invention of Paris: <i>The Custom of the Country</i>	68
Chapter IV: The Expatriate Idyll: <i>The Sun Also Rises</i>	98
Chapter V: Truths and Delusions: The Cold War in <i>Les Mandarins</i>	126
Chapter VI: Embracing American Culture: <i>Cherokee</i>	151
Chapter VII: An American Excursion into French Fiction: <i>The Book of Illusions</i>	179
Chapter VIII: Rerouting: <i>Ça n'existe pas l'Amérique</i>	206
Chapter IX: L'Américaine in Paris: <i>Le Divorce</i>	234
Conclusion: Stasis and Movement	259
<i>Selected Bibliography</i>	275
<i>Index</i>	287



**For Betty**





# Acknowledgments

I have been inspired and supported throughout my career by Robert Saba, Harry Rosser, and Alexander Dunlop, who provide stringent critiques while remaining the best of friends. A more recent friend, but equally a source of inspiration, is Alec Hargreaves, who has helped me greatly through his encouragement and his knowledge of modern and contemporary France's political and social history. Terri Johnson has been a tremendous asset in terms of research. Over the years she has managed to uncover both what I had been seeking and what I ought to have been seeking. I am very grateful to her. Wolfgang Adolph has been a calming presence during my too frequent computer crises; his knowledge in that area is vast, as is his ability to assure people like me that, even if a chapter has suddenly seemed to vanish into cyberspace, it is not really lost. Lindsey Scott has proven to be an outstanding proofreader and kindly critic regarding matters of content and form as well as a gifted indexer. Jean-Philippe Postel has been an excellent reader and proofreader, as well as a meticulous and inspired critic, particularly concerning my comments on French culture. Finally, I am deeply grateful to Chloé Johnson and Anthony Cond, both editors at Liverpool University Press who have shepherded me from start to finish through the process of writing this book.



## Preface

Les deux Princes sortaient pour s'arracher la vie,  
Que d'une égale ardeur ils y couraient tous les deux,  
Et que jamais leurs cœurs ne s'accordèrent mieux.

(Racine, *La Thébaïde ou Les Frères  
Ennemis*, Act V, scene iii, 110)

André Fougeron's (1913–1998) painting *Atlantic Civilization* (1953), which adorns the cover of the volume (and can be seen on the Tate's website) could serve as an iconic image of Franco-American relations from the nineteenth century to at least the middle of the Cold War. The painting mingles social critique with caricature, the serious with the silly. In a series of striking, if burlesque, figures, Fougeron presents an impressive array of French dissatisfactions with Americans, as well as with their own government's obsequiousness during the *Yankee* postwar occupation. At the center of the canvas is a gigantic automobile which vaguely resembles an Oldsmobile with an armed German soldier emerging from the roof. Next to the car is a subservient, overweight French politician acquiescing to the American desire to rearm Germany. His corpulence contrasts with the thinness of the elderly, possibly homeless, French couple on a bench. Younger people peer out from an air-raid shelter made necessary by American saber rattling. Children play in pollution caused by factories belching smoke, factories doubtlessly financed in part by American industrialists. A marble pedestal serves as the base for an electric chair evoking the recent execution (1953) of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg for spying against the United States. The lazy

*Frères Ennemis*

soldier with a girlie magazine alludes to the unwanted and often dangerous presence of the American military on French soil, while the black boy shining shoes references American racism. Less overtly anti-American, the image of the H.L.M. (*habitation à loyer modéré*) recalls the urgent need for cheap housing after the war to shelter French citizens displaced by Allied bombings. A poster on the wall to the right, coupled with the coffins and the dead child in the arms of a woman of color, recall France's recent colonial misadventures.

While the French griefs against *l'Amérique* may not be completely justified, they are at least open to discussion. But the presentation here is so lacking in nuance as to preclude any reaction other than rejection or acceptance. Elements not presented in the painting are references to the causes of American displeasure with the French. The Gallic belittlement of the Marshall Plan, as a political ploy to strengthen American power in France; the widespread insistence by French intellectuals that the Cold War, created by the Americans, required France to make a clear choice between solidarity with the Soviet Union or the United States, a choice that was self-evident for the left; the haughty disparagement of American consumer goods and popular culture by a nation which craved both – these were some of the factors which led Americans to lose patience with the French and proclaim with increasing shrillness that America had saved France during the war with little help from the local citizenry. Here too, despite the rhetorical overkill, there were issues which merited discussion, but more often than not, it was posturing and exaggeration on both sides which carried the day.

*Frères Ennemis* seeks to examine the literary expression of the mutual frustrations and antagonisms bedeviling two nations which share largely similar values, but frequently find themselves at odds, often for reasons which appear trivial next to what unites them. Less bloodthirsty toward each other than Racine's Étécole and Polynice in *La Thébaïde*, France and the United States nevertheless often appear to behave like two warring siblings, more given to bombast than persuasion. The ensuing chapters will chronicle the acting out of this phenomenon at different moments in time. In the waning years of the Cold War, French attitudes, at least in their literary expression, would soften somewhat, as more nuanced versions of *l'Amérique* and its denizens began to appear in contemporary novels. Just as historical and cultural events contributed initially to each nation's antagonistic perception of the other, these same factors, encouraged by the

*Preface*

eight years of the Obama administration, have affected France's currently more tolerant view of the States. Opinions tied to current events are notoriously fragile, and it remains to be seen to what degree the current openness, at least in literature, to the American experience will survive the presidency of Donald Trump.



# Introduction

## A Clash of the Comparable

[Franco-American relations] have been, are, and always will be conflictive and excellent. It is the nature of things ... the U.S. finds France unbearably pretentious. And we find the U.S. unbearably hegemonic. There will always be sparks, but not fire ...

(Jacques Chirac, cited in Richard Kuisel,  
*The French Way*, 91)

It stands to reason that France was seen by many, especially in France itself, as the obvious cultural counterweight to America ... France [saw itself] as an enlightened civilization whose fruits could, and indeed should, grow with profit everywhere. Americans had a similar view of their republic and its mission in the world.

(Ian Buruma, *Year Zero*, 292)

Jacques Chirac's description of the Franco-American rapport as a seemingly endless acting out of tensions and rapprochements between *frères ennemis* provides a succinct, accurate summary of French and American personal and political behavior since the nineteenth century. Both nations have always been capable of finding something annoying or disappointing in the comportment of the other but, barring unforeseeable events, the two powers remain destined, or condemned, to be allies on the international scene, all the while eying their personal dealings with a degree of *méfiance*.

It is important to bear this simple truth in mind throughout the following analysis of the ways in which French and American fiction depict

the often fraught encounters between the citizens of the two countries. France and the United States are frequently at odds but, perhaps despite themselves, they are always allies. Allies who rarely forego the occasion to look down on each other, but without ever seriously contemplating a breaking up of their alliance.<sup>1</sup> Still, the somewhat confrontational national perceptions are striking and contribute to the “special” relationship that exists between the two countries and peoples.

The study of French and American attitudes toward each other is hardly new. To cite a selection of the more recent works, Jean-Philippe Mathy's *Extrême-Occident* (1993) attacks Franco-American tensions from a variety of perspectives, including literature, history, the social sciences, and even travel writing. In his *French Resistance* (2000), Mathy continues his examination of “Franco-American culture wars” through deft analyses of specific moments of Franco-American friction, such as the issue of “French Theory,” the Sokal Affair,<sup>2</sup> and different national understandings of colonialism and postmodernism. François Cusset's *French Theory* (2003) considers the often uncritical American reaction to what he termed “French Theory,” an American rather than a French creation, as it emerged from the works of French thinkers such as Derrida, Lacan, and Foucault. The title of Philippe Roger's *L'ennemi américain: généologie de l'antiaméricanisme français* (2002) clearly conveys its content. Charles Glass's *Americans in Paris: Life and Death under the Nazi Occupation* (2010) also has a self-explanatory title. Richard Kuisel's *Seducing the French* (1993) and then *The French Way* (2012) explore France's efforts to accept and/or reject the American cultural invasion after World War II. David McCullough's *The Great Journey* (2011) describes the often conflicted reception which American travelers received in France during the nineteenth century. Brooke Blower's *Becoming Americans in Paris* (2001) analyzes the way the French and Americans in Paris reacted to political events between the two world wars and how these reactions affected their perceptions of each other. Jeffrey Herlihy-Merat and Vamisi Koneru edited *Paris in American Literatures* (2013), while Adam Gopnik edited *Americans in Paris* (2004). Somewhat earlier, in 1955, Thelma Smith and Ward Miner published *The Contemporary American Novel in France*. While literary references appear in all of these works, the primary analytic perspectives are for the most part drawn from history and the social sciences. The last three texts, while obviously dealing with literature, are not particularly concerned with Franco-American tensions, although the subject does emerge at times.



*Frères ennemis* is the first study to examine these tensions exclusively in terms of their literary expression. I do not wish to examine Franco-American attitudes toward each other in general, but rather the ways in which some specific viewpoints are filtered through selected, important literary texts. The novels I will study in the first five chapters and then again in Chapter IX all reflect, with some significant variations, a paradigm that represents a particularly important way in which the French and Americans have understood each other over time. I do not maintain that this paradigm constitutes the unique manner in which the French and Americans view each other in literary texts or that it remains stable over time. In fact, I insist that the paradigm's longevity is due precisely to its ability to respond to political and social changes over the last 150 years. I argue that the framework I am about to describe has proven sufficiently supple to react to the shifts in the Franco-American rapport from approximately 1870 to the middle of the Cold War. From the end of the Cold War to the present, this paradigm largely does not apply. The one exception will be discussed in Chapter IX.

This paradigm had its origins in the nineteenth century; it was challenged and dramatically rejected by a French writer in the 1980s, only to re-emerge in an American novel at the end of the twentieth century. While American literature maintains a certain fidelity to the past in its way of viewing the French, Gallic attitudes concerning Americans have proven much more open to change. French literature broke with the paradigm in the 1980s, and has recently begun to explore new ways of viewing the American experience. Both of these phenomena will be examined in detail.

While I provide historical and cultural information for each chapter to better situate the text, the primary focus is on the individual novel under discussion. My interest is not simply in the tensions between the two countries, but also their transformation and expression in a work of literary imagination. For example, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam crystalizes France's love-hate relationship in the personage of Thomas Edison, Hemingway decries the American exploitation of France and Spain through a rather devastating portrait of expatriates, and Simone de Beauvoir conveys Franco-American Cold War clashes through a love affair between a French woman and an American.

Although historical and cultural contexts figure heavily in this study, I believe the best way to uncover the special nature of literature's contribution to an understanding of Franco-American tensions

requires careful, close reading – a technique that will be employed in the discussion of every novel in order to highlight the ways in which subtle and imaginative treatments of comparable materials can provide very different appreciations of the tensions between the two nations.

A novel by Henry James, *The American* (1877), and a sociological study by Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique* (1835), introduce a pattern of relationships between the French and the Americans, which will undergo developments and permutations up until the post-World War II era. Essentially, the paradigm portrays the French as perceiving Americans as forceful and wealthy, but uncultivated and naïve, while for the Americans the French appear as well-educated heirs to once-great cultural and political traditions which are now considered to be in decline. In addition, the Americans view the French as somewhat untrustworthy and in financial straits.<sup>3</sup>

This paradigm in its pristine form appears to be based on rather rigid dichotomies: the present and future (American)–the past (French), naïve (American)–sophisticated (French), wealth (American)–financial need (French), open-minded (American)–close-minded (French), trustful (American)–distrustful (French), exploited (American)–exploiter (French), culturally inferior (American)–culturally superior (French). If this were the extent of the paradigm's value, it could serve as a basis for a somewhat pedestrian reading of *The American*, but little else. What extends the paradigm's value is, like Ray Noble's musical piece which provides the title for Jean Echenoz's *Cherokee*, its capacity for multiple, even extreme variations. In examining the novels in chapters one through five, and then in Chapter IX, these dichotomies, while remaining in place, will be largely reversed, or at least significantly altered. These changes will reflect the transformation of the respective importance of the United States and France on the world stage.

Edith Wharton's *The Custom of the Country* contains the clearest depiction of the paradigm's transformation while guarding its essential elements. The novel, whose changes to the paradigm will be reflected in subsequent texts as well, offers an almost complete reversal of the prototype. The French are now cast as the naïve elements, while a form of sophistication is attributed to the *nouveaux riches* Americans who exploit the French in their native country. Open-mindedness increasingly becomes a French attribute. The American money to which Christopher Newman was mostly indifferent in *The American* becomes in later novels a weapon

for both controlling the French and keeping them at a distance. Americans grow suspicious and distrustful of the French, even as Gallic curiosity about them is on the rise. Growing self-confidence, even arrogance, on the part of American characters will reflect the nation's burgeoning political and social prestige while French frustration will often seem the result of their country's drifting into a position of secondary international importance.

If a major function of the literary analysis I will provide involves discussing the paradigm's reversal, that is not to say that while the dichotomies remain constant, they simply switch national identities. The vitality of the paradigm is contained in its instability. Some broad general changes do accompany the historical development of France and the United States, yet on a personal level there is considerable inconsistency. Individual French characters at times dominate and at other moments are dominated. The same American can be strong or weak toward a French person, depending upon circumstances.

It is this instability of the paradigm, its suppleness and openness to change, that creates its dynamism. Roland Barthes's essay "Le mythe, aujourd'hui" in *Mythologies* (1957) provides a perspective on how easily images of the Other can form, and how subject they are to myriad, even contradictory alterations. The qualities which Barthes assigns to myth are also the attributes I associate with the Franco-American paradigm I have described.

For Barthes, there is nothing timeless or static about modern myth. Rather, it is a "système de communication ... un mode de signification" (181) which is subject to variations and possibly even disappearance, depending on the pressures bearing upon it: "Il n'y a aucune fixité dans les concepts mythiques: ils peuvent se faire, s'altérer, se défaire, disparaître complètement ... parce qu'ils sont historiques, que l'histoire peut très facilement les supprimer" (193). Due to its volatility, the myth can never be a symbol, which for Barthes must have a fixed meaning; instead it is what he terms a *concept* which provides a degree of meaning, but on a temporary basis (191). Hence the significance which the *concept* conveys is never without ambiguity: "Le savoir contenu dans le concept mythique est un savoir confus, formé d'association molle, illimitée. Il faut bien insister sur ce caractère ouvert du concept: ce n'est nullement une essence abstraite, purifiée; c'est une condensation informe, instable, nébuleuse, dont l'unité, la incohérence tiennent surtout à la fonction" (192). However, mythic ambiguity is never totally random; there always remains an at least tenuous

relation between the concept and the person or situation to which it refers: "la signification mythique ... n'est jamais complètement arbitraire; elle est toujours en partie motivée" (199). Perhaps the most striking quality of the modern myth, certainly its "caractère fondamental," is that it is "*approprié*" (192; emphasis added); it is a meaning assigned in accordance with the needs of a particular moment.

Barthes provides an example of the mythmaking process based on a photo he saw in *Paris Match* of an African soldier saluting the French flag. For some this could be an encouraging reminder of the beneficence of the French presence in Africa, which provided the poor natives with the possibility of a European education, modern health facilities, and job training. The soldier's salute becomes, then, an expression of gratitude and love for all that France has given to his people and himself. Although acknowledging the coherence of this interpretation, Barthes rejects it and instead opts arbitrarily, based on his own political viewpoint, to see the soldier as a representative of "l'impérialité française" (191). One could also add a third, more extreme, mythic interpretation and propose, equally arbitrarily, that, with the passage of time and changes in the political situation in Francophone Africa, this loyal and grateful soldier could suddenly morph, in the eyes of the French, into a black guy with a gun.

The specific opinions or desires of the subject being mythicized are unimportant since "le mythe est une parole définie par son intention" (197). With regard to this particular African soldier, it is insignificant what he thinks or even if he has the slightest idea that his personal presence, as he stands before the French flag, is being given a broader meaning. His situation has made him an individual transformed, however temporarily, into a mythic figure by another party.

At the end of his mythic transformation, the African soldier looks exactly as he did at the beginning, even if in the mythmaking process his existence has taken on a more complex, yet fragile, meaning. Should circumstances change, his mythic status could come to signify something entirely different, or it could disappear completely. Thus, the soldier represents something greater than himself only when some individual or group wishes that to be the case.

For Barthes, the modern myth is subject to constant change, reinterpretation, or even outright rejection; its meaning is transient and never devoid of ambiguity. The significance associated with particular mythic constructions is never a reflection of the self-evident. Rather, it is assigned

in accordance with the needs of a particular situation. All of which is to say that the cardinal characteristic of myth is its instability.

The great value of Barthes's conception of modern myth for this study lies in its insistence upon the instability of the myth itself. In the novels under discussion, deciding that someone is a "typical American," or a "typical French person," often involves calling upon not-so-latent cultural assumptions about national identity, but the actual profiling of the other in this manner can be the affair of a moment, a reaction to stress or need. In some circumstances, a person seems to conform to the rather arbitrarily created identity that another group has created for him or her, yet even shortly thereafter, in a different situation, this "typicality" can be readily abandoned. In *The American*, the French family, the Bellegardes, can be seen from Christopher Newman's perspective as the embodiment of a long and distinguished cultural tradition, but at other moments they represent unscrupulous and dishonest manipulators of their only asset, an unmarried daughter. For the Bellegardes, Christopher can be a potential *mécène*, capable of resolving their financial problems, or, in another context, simply a crude American who made a fortune selling bath tubs. In *L'Ève future*, Thomas Edison is at times a scientific genius practically without equal, but at others a naïve, psychologically immature man capable of inflicting great harm on the world. Lewis Brogan, the American lover of the French woman Anne Dubreuilh in *Les Mandarins*, can view the French as a talented and sophisticated people, but when angered he describes them as too caught up in emotional matters and ungrateful for their rescue by the Americans during World War II. Anne can respond enthusiastically to Lewis's sexual attractiveness as well as his shy romantic gestures even as she discovers his penchant for manipulation and his childish, brutal reactions when he does not get his own way. In *Le Divorce*, Uncle Edgar can be charmed and impressed by the much younger American girl, Isabel Walker, but in the midst of a family crisis, he begins to perceive her as the embodiment of all that is dangerous and hypocritical about the United States. Isabel's parents are very well treated by the French when they first arrive in Paris and seem grateful, but they can never abandon the sorts of clichés about French people that were bandied about in *The American*. True to Barthes's notion of myth, what all of these examples have in common is not that a person initially appears one way, but then turns out to be quite different. Rather the characters are imagined unconsciously by others as embodying both or several conflicting identities, and the choice of one or the other will

depend upon the particular circumstances of the moment. The typicality of a French person or an American is at best a partial, temporary identity, a helpful cliché in times of tension when complexity readily yields to simplification.

An additional value of Barthes's understanding of myth is that it is anchored in history and thus subject to changes reflecting new historical developments. Barthes's theory of modern myth readily lends itself to the study of fictional characters who, to greater or lesser degrees, are considered representative of their countries, with the understanding that the particular interpretation of the nature of this representation can change due to the pressures of contemporary events. The era in which each novel is situated contributes to the creation of national perceptions, since the myth of the moment depends largely on the historical circumstances affecting encounters with the foreigner.

As valuable as Barthes's concept of myth will be, I do not propose to offer a theory and then simply proceed to pinpoint its presence in a variety of novels. My goal is to show how Franco-American tensions are presented and developed in complex works of art. This requires close readings, which will often venture into areas that are not particularly germane to Barthes's theory, but are essential for appreciating the overall significance of the text and its relevance to the general theme of this study. Barthes's theory of modern myth provides a broad intellectual frame which helps account for the inconsistent and somewhat arbitrary assumptions that the French and Americans have made about each other, essentially from the late nineteenth-century to the end of the Cold War. However, it cannot account for the intellectual and artistic uniqueness of the works under discussion. If *le mythe, aujourd'hui* helps demonstrate a degree of continuity among a variety of novels, the close readings bring out their differences quite strikingly, and by doing so maintain each novel as a separate entity that provides a new perspective on a general theme shared with other works.

*Frères ennemis* deals with selected examples of French and American literature from approximately the end of the American Civil War to the present. Given the broad sweep of this study, the choice of texts was extremely difficult. The one constant in my decisions was that each selection should be a serious work of art that would extend the discussion and not simply reiterate what could be found in earlier novels. In an obvious effort to avoid reiterations of the same commentary without any

evolution or devolution in the portrayal of the French and the Americans, I sought texts that offered significant permutations or challenges to the dominant paradigm introduced in the chapter dealing with *The American*. In chapters VI, VII, and VIII, I concentrate on works that took the discussion of Franco-American images beyond the paradigm and in new directions.

*Frères ennemis* is divided into nine chapters and a conclusion. Each chapter focuses on a specific work. Chapter I centers on Henry James's *The American* (1877), which establishes, in conjunction with Alexis de Tocqueville's *De la démocratie en Amérique* (1835, 1840), a framework for French and American views of each other which, despite some radical modifications would persist until the end of *les Trente Glorieuses*. Chapter II discusses Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *L'Ève future* (1886) as an example of conservative French intellectuals' deep concern regarding the combination of American overconfidence and dangerous psychological immaturity. In Chapter III, Edith Wharton's *The Custom of the Country* (1913) describes Americans' initial curiosity about the French and respect for their cultural achievements becoming tinged with elements of scorn. The novel reverses the paradigm of the sophisticated French and the naïve American while highlighting the American capacity to succeed in taking over and Americanizing significant sections of Paris. Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), the subject of Chapter IV, displays a growing American indifference to France and indeed Europe as a cultural mecca. This takes the form of turning the Old World into a vast playground for expatriates from the New World. In Chapter V, Simone de Beauvoir's *Les Mandarins* (1954) describes the well-founded fear in leftist French intellectual circles of American political and cultural dominance in a France struggling to emerge from World War II. French intellectuals' dislike of the American presence reflects their rather unsophisticated proclivity to imagine that political engagement in the Cold War requires an either/or choice between the Soviet Union and the United States. For that reason, the love affair between Anne and Lewis in *Les Mandarins* is of capital importance, since it provides a concrete, much more nuanced embodiment of the genuine tensions between France and *l'Amérique*, tensions which reproduce the nationalistic stereotypes first encountered in *The American*.

Chapter VI marks a major shift from the relationship patterns presented in Chapter I. Jean Echenoz's *Cherokee* (1983) describes a France no longer intimidated by Americans and their strong cultural presence on French soil. Rather than fearing the possible succumbing of traditional Gallic values to

the “American Way of Life,” Echenoz’s novel details the French selective absorption of American products and their transformation into attributes of the “French Way of Life.” Chapter VII focuses on Paul Auster’s *The Book of Illusions* as an example of French literary strategies influencing the creation of an American novel. The very positive reviews which Auster has received in France are discussed as an effort by French critics to reassert the power and appeal of French culture in an increasingly Americanized world. A discussion of the American enthusiasm for what became known as “French Theory” provides the intellectual frame through which I view the *phénomène Auster*.

Dominique Falkner’s *Ça n’existe pas l’Amérique* (2010) is the subject of Chapter VIII. It presents a new approach to a consideration of the United States and its inhabitants. Falkner’s work is less theoretically driven than the American-centered essays of Jean Baudrillard or Bernard-Henri Lévy. *Ça n’existe pas l’Amérique* concentrates on the particular rather than the general and eschews sweeping pronouncements about the American character. The Falkner chapter also introduces the discussion of a relatively new orientation in the contemporary French novel: a tendency to set narratives in the States, to focus on the American experience as lived by both well-known and ordinary Americans. This new direction is not without an accompanying social criticism, but not in the same way as French artists have approached this subject in the past. In the final chapter, Diane Johnson’s *Le Divorce* (1997) is read as a contemporary version of *The American*. As such, the French-American paradigm first articulated in James’s novel is revisited and somewhat updated, yet the basic assumptions about Franco-American relations are not significantly challenged. If there are some timid nods toward a more contemporary sensibility in Johnson’s novel, *Le Divorce* nevertheless essentially remains faithful to a hoary paradigm dating from the 1870s.

## Notes

1 Admittedly, at times, and for short periods, this does not seem to be the case. To cite a fairly recent tension and remaining with Jacques Chirac, his decision in 2003 not to support the proposed American invasion of Iraq created something of a Franco-American brouhaha. It prompted the Chair of the Committee on House Administration, Bob Ney, to decree that henceforth



French fries would be known as “freedom fries” in the three Congressional cafeterias. Certain restaurants throughout the United States followed the congressman’s lead, but American enthusiasm for the new nomenclature diminished along with the fading popularity of the new war. Ney resigned in 2006 and eventually spent time in prison for fraud. After his departure, French fries quietly reappeared on congressional menus. While President Chirac’s declaration led to an immediate heightening of tensions, their manifestations rapidly proved to be more ridiculous than significant.

2 In 1996 an article by Alan Sokal, a professor of physics at New York University, appeared in *Social Text*, a journal centered upon postmodern cultural studies. The essay argued that quantum physics was a social and linguistic construct. The article was a hoax, intended to call into question jargon-ridden essays based on extreme, unsubstantiated theories associated with thinkers such as Lacan, Foucault, and Derrida, whose works were used and abused during the craze for what came to be known as “French Theory.” It provoked an uproar in the scientific and humanities communities.

3 James’s and de Tocqueville’s works were serious efforts to describe the French and American character. It is a measure of their impact on the popular imagination in France and the States that their ideas concerning the two peoples have had, in parodic form, an extra-literary life in the public sphere among citizens of both countries, who have never heard of either author or the books they wrote. It remains not uncommon today to encounter Americans who believe the French are over-cultivated snobs inhabiting a country of declining importance and morally indebted to the United States, while the French see Americans as rather naïve and immature denizens of a powerful but overbearing republic.



## CHAPTER I

# The Creation of the American in Paris

## *The American*

La France est une nation exemplaire, dont la vocation était de guider l'humanité autant par sa puissance politique effective que par sa créativité culturelle et scientifique – une vision que partageaient aussi bien les conservateurs que les progressistes.

(Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Ce pays qui aime les idées*, 230)

By the mid-nineteenth-century, America was already a synonym in certain French circles for whatever was disturbing or unfamiliar about the present.

(Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect*, 188)

It's a queer feeling to find oneself a foreigner.

(Nathaniel Willis, *Pencilings by the Way*, 8)

When Christopher Newman, the main character in Henry James's *The American* (1877), first strolls into the Louvre's Salon Carré, his presence there has no ramifications for art history. However, in a modest manner, his ensuing activities will add a dimension to the development of American fiction, since his story is among the first dealing with the adventures of an American abroad.<sup>1</sup> Yet Newman's most important impact will not be precisely in the area of literary aesthetics. Rather, his experiences or, more properly, the experiences which his creator affords him, will have

an influence in the broader realm of Franco-American cultural history. In the personage of Christopher Newman, Henry James created an enduring image of the American in Paris, an image, as will be seen, greatly indebted to Alexis de Tocqueville's *De la démocratie en Amérique* (1835). What proved to be a creation more specific to James is the image of the French, negative in the extreme, which would come to have a broad currency in the American imagination. These two images of the American and the French person, simplistic in both instances, were nevertheless destined to persist with several permutations right up to the end of the twentieth-century. Yet the irony regarding James's portrayals of Americans abroad and, to a much greater degree, his depictions of the French, is that neither image was based in any significant way on James's experiences with Americans in Paris or any group of French people who might by whatever standard be considered typical. What instigated the development of these representations and provided in large measure the impetus for the writing of *The American* was an experience James had in the theater in 1876.

Due to the whims of his eccentric father, Henry and his siblings had traveled abroad extensively from a very young age. Henry James Senior was obsessed with providing the finest possible education for his male offspring, and to that end he dragged them across Europe in search of ideal schooling. Thus the James family had an exposure to Europe that was quite uncommon for Americans of that era. As a young adult at the beginning of his literary career, James returned to Paris in 1875. He is said to have had excellent French. According to Michael Gorra, James possessed "so decided a command of French that his English would later be convicted of Gallicisms" (16). He also had a great interest in Paris's *théâtre du boulevard*, and considered himself an expert in that area.<sup>2</sup> In 1876 he went to see a play by Dumas  *fils*, *L'étrangère*, which starred Sarah Bernhardt in the title role; this comedy in five acts incensed and deeply shocked the young James.

*L'étrangère* is the story of Mrs. Clarkson, an American with a shady past and dubious morals who shows up in France followed by her estranged husband, Mr. Clarkson, with whom she remains on friendly terms. Although the Clarksons are certainly gold diggers, events will rapidly illustrate that they possess hearts of the same substance. Mrs. Clarkson befriends a countess trapped in a loveless marriage. Her wealthy middle-class father essentially sold her to an indigent duke; the father got a title, and the nobleman money. The countess has a secret, platonic lover too poor to have ever been considered seriously by her family. Mrs. Clarkson arranges for

Mr. Clarkson to pick a quarrel with the vile duke, who duly challenges the uncouth American to a duel. The aggrieved party, Mr. Clarkson, chooses pistols (this choice will become important in *The American*), and promptly dispatches the countess's husband, thereby allowing her to reunite with her beloved. At the play's end, Mr. and Mrs. Clarkson decide to leave corrupt Europe for the pure air of America. In the context of the play, the uneducated, naïve, and rather vulgar Americans nonetheless possess the ethical high ground, or at least a moral superiority to the sly, duplicitous French.

Although much-anticipated in the Parisian theater world of 1876, the play proved a disappointment. The drama did, however, succeed in annoying James considerably: "I confess that *L'Étrangère* strikes me as a rather desperate piece of floundering in the dramatic sea" (*Parisian Sketches* in *The American: Norton Critical Edition*, 332). He treats it extensively in his *Parisian Sketches*, and concludes his discussion with an ill-tempered personal attack on Dumas *filis*'s admission to the Académie française: "he has about as much business in the Academy as in the Cabinet of the Emperor of China" (335). Nowhere in his remarks does James give the impression that in this play Dumas *filis* might have sensed something about the vitality of the young American nation, or might have been influenced by de Tocqueville's depiction of Americans.

More than anything else, what James disliked in *L'Étrangère* was the depiction of Mrs. Clarkson as a mulatto, the offspring of a plantation owner and a slave: "Why should she be an American, why she should have Negro blood, why should she be the implacable demon that she is represented ... She is, on Dumas' part, an incredible error of taste" (*Parisian Sketches*, 332). James's racism - his willingness to recognize that while Mrs. Clarkson is undoubtedly an American product, yet not of the desirable sort - is probably typical of his cultural milieu and era, and a result of the influence of his father, who believed in "the natural inferiority of black people. He regarded them as 'among the lowest persons intellectually in whom the sensuous imagination dominates'" (Menand, 87). Whatever one chooses to make of the James family's racial opinions or the artistic gifts of Dumas, it is evident that *The American* is dependent upon the structures and dualities which Dumas *filis* established in *L'Étrangère*. As Oscar Cargill puts it, "Although he scoffed at Dumas' play, James was strongly influenced by it" (45).

Cargill shows that the behavior of James's characters often stands in direct contrast to those in Dumas's play: the Clarksons want to get back

to the States, Christopher Newman does not; Mrs. Clarkson seeks social acceptance in Europe while Newman is largely indifferent; Mrs. Clarkson gets the main problem resolved by a duel, an activity that Newman considers barbarous (45–46). While Cargill's points are certainly well made, much more striking are the similarities between the play and the novel. The behavior of the leaders of the Bellegarde family in *The American* provides a much more highly developed and subtler version of the duke's comportment in *L'étrangère*, and Christopher Newman's combination of shrewdness, naivety, and honor provides a whitewashed equivalent of Mrs. Clarkson. While *The American* certainly was intended as a rejoinder to *L'étrangère*, its greater significance lies in its taking over the pattern established in the play, and then creating from it a much more satisfying work. The superiority of the novel lies in the greater complexity of its characters, particularly Christopher Newman, whose characterization entwines elements from then recent American history (the Civil War), from the burgeoning financial opportunities open to ambitious Americans in the latter nineteenth century, and from Alexis de Tocqueville's reflections on the American character.

The major factor that contributed to the creation of the personality and values of Christopher Newman was Alexis de Tocqueville's two-volume *De la démocratie en Amérique*, published in the 1830s. In *La Muse démocratique*, Mona Ozouf points to James's awareness of de Tocqueville: "James, qui avait fait de certains de ses héros des lecteurs de Tocqueville, a lui-même consacré aux rapports difficiles de 'art et de la démocratie' un livre qui fait écho à nombre d'observations tocquevilliennes" (49–50). Yet even without these references it would be impossible to imagine someone like Henry James, with his extensive interest in American-European relations, not having read de Tocqueville's celebrated work with considerable care. However, before turning to de Tocqueville's influence on *The American*, it is worth noting that, in addition to his choice of title, James takes pains to emphasize the qualities that make Newman the image of the American: "an observer ... would have had no difficulty in determining the local origin of this undeveloped connoisseur ... The gentleman ... was a powerful specimen of an American" (17–18). He possesses "the flat jaw and sinewy neck ... frequent in the American type" (18). Concerning Newman's face: "that blankness which is not simplicity, the look of being committed to nothing in particular, of standing in an attitude of general hospitality to the chances of life, of being very much at one's own disposal, so characteristic of so many American faces" (18).

If the physical depiction of the typical American is James's invention, the psychological, ethical, and mercantile values he ascribes to Newman largely reflect ideas put forth by de Tocqueville. In *Tocqueville's Discovery of America* (2012), Leo Damrosch nicely distills de Tocqueville's assessment of the American character: "America was the nation of paradox, of individualists who were deeply conformist" (102). This is Newman in a nutshell.

In many ways, Newman approximates de Tocqueville's conception of the typical American. Practical in most matters, he does not exactly undervalue intellectual work (*Démocratie*, I, 102), but is not averse to physical effort, and does not appear to draw a dramatic distinction between the two activities. Newman is less interested in general ideas than are the French (*Démocratie*, II, 33), but is most willing to engage in finding concrete solutions to real problems. This tendency governs his initial reaction to the Bellegardes' announcement that the family will not honor their promise and allow Claire to marry him. He is simply astonished and at first finds it difficult to believe since, as de Tocqueville writes about Americans, Newman considers that everything must have a rational, logical explanation, and that nothing is beyond the limits of the human intellect (II, 15). That he could be rejected by an impoverished French aristocratic family simply because he is in business does not make sense to him. As an American, Newman illustrates de Tocqueville's contention that in the United States all honest professions are honorable (II, 214). Finally, de Tocqueville stresses that it is common in the United States for a man to make a great fortune, lose it, and then gain another one (II, 280, 325). Christopher Newman embodies this experience.

Newman also illustrates some of de Tocqueville's subtler contentions about Americans. For de Tocqueville, a major quality of Americans is that they avoid an *esprit de système*, any narrow, rigidly one-sided way of viewing an issue, and do not necessarily follow tradition, family rules, or class opinion; they find answers for themselves, and stress the results of their quests over the means of fulfilling them (II, 13). This pragmatism characterizes Newman's general approach to Europe. Whatever possibly traumatic event drove him to Europe, once he is there he wants to achieve some practical goals, such as exposing himself to cultural artifacts and finding a first-class wife. He goes about this in a straightforward, matter-of-fact manner. He moves about extensively on the Continent, reads travel books, and hires guides to maximize his cultural acquisitions. In terms

of his marital ambitions, he does all he can to overcome the obstacles the French family presents to marrying their daughter, Claire.

De Tocqueville maintains that no country has fewer lazy people than the United States (II, 198), and James seconds this claim through an interesting image pattern. The parts of Newman's body that are always emphasized are his legs, which are consistently described as stretched out, as if even in repose he is somehow in motion or at least ready to move; they become the physical symbol of his constant activity, his voyage across the Atlantic to Europe, his engagements with the American expatriate community and the French aristocracy, his travels in Europe, then to England, back to France, a return to the States followed by his coming back to Paris, and finally his return to his native country for good.<sup>3</sup> Newman cannot be "an idler" (125); everything he does has a goal. As will be shown later, the American's attitude, and the image associated with it (the outstretched legs), stands in marked contrast with the predominant image associated with his French adversaries.

The young Henry James's most obvious symbol in *The American*, his main character's name, seems embarrassingly simplistic by today's standards, yet, however grating, it serves to situate Christopher Newman in his historical context. He is very much the new American man, wealthy due to his own initiatives and, like Christopher Columbus - who, a French character in the novel explains, "invented America" (21) - he is very much out to discover a new world. He is without a doubt the pivotal figure of the novel. In the 1907 "Preface to the New York Edition" of *The American* reprinted in the *Norton Critical Edition* of the novel, James maintains that whatever the faults in his characterization of the man, "I leave the record to stand or fall by his more or less convincing image" (15).

In *Henry James: A Life* (1985), Leon Edel portrays Newman, rather remarkably, as an "innocent Western Barbarian" (197), a term he takes over somewhat uncritically from an American expatriate's description of Christopher Newman in the novel. In a subsequent essay, "Henry James: The American-European Legend," Edel describes nineteenth-century Americans as possessing "an innocence devoid of a sense of the past" (*Henry James: A Life*, 411). If by "the past" one means European history, or if "barbarian" refers to a lack of visual or literary culture, then these assertions are arguable, but James and his American contemporaries had, in fact, a very keen memory of a recent traumatic event in their national history, the Civil War. Louis Menand's *The Metaphysical Club* deals in part



with the effect of this war on the New England intellectual community. Neither Henry James nor his brother William fought in the Civil War, but their two other brothers did. Both returned deeply scarred by their experiences, a situation that was more the norm than the exception among the combatants. By setting his novel in 1868, James was assuredly playing on the memory of this bloodbath which resonated with his American readers.<sup>4</sup>

Early in the novel the reader learns that Newman rose to the rank of brigadier general during the war, and that later he made and lost several fortunes before establishing himself as a successful businessman. What precipitated his decision to put his financial career on hold and head for Europe was a strange occurrence that took place on his way to a business meeting in New York. A rival had cheated him out of sixty thousand dollars, and Newman had set out to get his revenge, but in the cab he was taking to the confrontation he suddenly lost interest in vengeance and, at least temporarily, his career. He abandoned his desire for retaliation, and booked a ticket for Europe. To what extent might one be able to see in this abrupt change a delayed reaction to the war and its vindictiveness, a sudden need for self-evaluation? The war had undoubtedly marked him deeply: “his four years in the army had left him with an angry, bitter sense of the waste of precious things – life and time and money and ‘smartness’ and the early freshness of purpose; and he had addressed himself to the pursuits of peace with passionate zest and energy” (31). When Newman tells Mlle Nioche that he wants pictures that are “bright and gay” (59), or explains to her father that he wants cheerful conversation (25), these are not the remarks of a shallow person: they come from a man who has experienced too much of the opposite. Newman is a complex individual, neither a total innocent nor a barbarian, even though he sometimes gives the impression of having some attributes of the former. Julie Wolkenstein, in *La Scène européenne: Henry James et le romanesque en question*, offers a tantalizing suggestion about Newman that certainly speaks to the shrewdness behind his putative innocence: “Il y a du Monsieur Jourdain chez cet aventurier perdu dans la jungle du Faubourg Saint-Germain” (18-19). M. Jourdain is, of course, the hero of Molière’s *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670), a man whose genuine naivety does not preclude calculation and instinct, which permit him eventually to see through the variety of social masks presented to him by a destitute nobility trying to exploit him. Newman may well have been a little confused by his first

encounters with the Bellegardes, but his perplexity does not last long, and he tends to become a pretty astute observer of this French family, even though he is shocked when they break their word to him.

Although Christopher Newman reflects in so many ways de Tocqueville's general portrait of Americans, the most unexpected similarity stems from the Frenchman's claim that while Americans are obsessed with acquiring goods, sometimes the desire breaks down, and they lift their eyes toward higher things (II, 188). This is precisely the pattern that Newman follows. An accomplished businessman, his financial success is considerable, but does not satisfy some inchoate yearning, which winds up driving him to Europe. This longing for some ill-defined satisfaction reveals another side of Christopher's character. While he is primarily a man of money, in an odd way he is also something of an artist. To appreciate this aspect of him, it is first necessary to look at Newman's approach to money making, and his principles of acquisition, since the art object he creates will have practical as well as artistic value; it will partake of the commercial as well as the aesthetic.

Early in the novel Newman asserts that his "sole aim in life had been to make money" (32), however, this desire is far from simple. He is neither greedy, stingy, nor lavish in his spending; the acquisition of money is an end in itself, an activity that gives direction to his days. As he explains to his beloved Claire, "I cared for money-making, but I never cared particularly for money. There was nothing else to do, and it was impossible to be idle" (160). This latter-day disciple of Benjamin Franklin envisions making money as an elaborate, fascinating game where losing is simply a mishap on the ineluctable road toward winning, and where the eventual victory provides the basis for the next commercial venture. This is why Newman reproaches his friend Valentin de Bellegarde for the inappropriate use of a putative financial term: "Hang it, no man is rich" (91). "Rich" implies stasis, an end point or termination. There is no such state in the world of high finance; there is only forward movement in the quest for profit. Stopping inevitably entails loss. For this reason Christopher sets out to tour Europe while the widow Claire de Cintré is unreachable at her *château* during the summer. Culture is also capital, and he wants to amass as much of it as he can. In his commercial career Newman has experienced highs and lows, buying and selling different businesses with varying success, but at the beginning of the novel the balance sheet is clearly in his favor, and he is poised to develop his profit margin in new areas.

Much less clear is Christopher's general attitude toward art. Obviously he wants to acquire examples of it to ship back to the States, but his approach to these acquisitions is almost comical. His first word in French is, "*Combien*," uttered in an effort to assess the price of a poor copy of a work in the Louvre that he wants to purchase from Mlle Nioche. While he is only interested in purchasing copies of works he likes, the originals have to be famous. A copy will do fine, but he draws the line at "a copy of a copy" (27). Although Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935) was written long after the publication of James's novel and deals primarily with photos and film, its salient points, so at odds with the American businessman's understanding of art, provide a perspective from which one can better understand the practical nature of Christopher's acquisition practices.

For Benjamin, mechanical reproduction represents something new, and here I will assume that copying originals, while hardly new, is nevertheless a form of mechanical reproduction. Benjamin argues that even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in several elements. First of all is its presence in time and space. The original is always the product of a specific historical period and a precise location. While the copy can more or less duplicate the look of the original, it will always be a secondhand version of the master work. More significantly, mechanical reproduction always produces a work of lesser value because it lacks what Benjamin calls the "aura" which suffuses the original. The awareness that the work is original, and thus unique, constitutes its aura. Benjamin maintains that this uniqueness of a work of art, the source of its aura, is also inseparable from its embeddedness in the fabric of tradition. When the artwork is separated from its tradition, its value changes; removed from its origins, its worth now stems from its exhibition value.

For Christopher Newman, a work of art's aura is of no significance; what matters is its display value. A reproduction that he can exhibit will do nicely, since it provides a sense of the original and will find a place in the cultural arsenal the American went abroad to assemble. With regard to Benjamin's claim that the uniqueness of a masterpiece comes from its being part of a cultural tradition, post-Civil War Americans, and more generally nineteenth-century Americans, had few ties and little knowledge linking them to the pictorial heritage of Europe. Newman will use the copies he buys to validate his position as a "cultured person," someone whose considerable capital extends beyond the financial. The works he

will hang on his walls will attest not to his participation in some grand aesthetic tradition but to achievements in other realms, which have provided him access to treasures of a different variety. In his attitude toward the acquisition of art works, Newman is crass almost to the point of caricature. Since he is oblivious to any notion of aura, of something unique and special surrounding an aesthetic object, it is all the more surprising that he nevertheless finds an aura surrounding his own artistic creation: the woman quite literally of his dreams.

There is a broad critical consensus that Claire de Cintré is the least satisfying character in the novel. In "A Surge of Patriotic Indignation," Oscar Cargill explains James's alleged lack of success with this personage in an admirably tactful manner: "James' greatest failure in this book is not to acquaint his reader thoroughly with his heroine; he withholds a great deal about Claire de Cintré" (*Norton Critical Edition*, 438). The character named Claire is the most opaque personage in the novel. Readers never have a chance to enter her head and see the world from her viewpoint. Despite the aura Christopher will create around her, on the few occasions where she actually speaks, she describes herself as "weak" (163), and "cold ... old ... a coward" (164). Claire may be weak, but she is not deceptive. She says that "there is no mystery about me; you see what I am" (112). Yet Christopher will have none of that; he must see her differently and he does, albeit not precisely through his own eyes. He sees her, rather, "in [his] imagination" (112). The words Newman uses to describe Claire will partake to a small degree of the language of religion ("she is a saint," 78), but aesthetic and commercial images will prove more dominant. In the face of a rather commonplace reality, he will invent a glorious fiction whose name is Claire de Cintré.

When Newman initially begins to discuss taking a wife, he assures the expatriate Mrs. Tristram that he wants "a magnificent woman" (44). Yet even at this early stage, while the aesthetic element is certainly present, there is also a degree of commercial consideration. He wants "a beautiful woman perched on a pile, like a statue on a monument" (44), who also must be "the best article in the market" (44). This scene occurs before Christopher has even set eyes on Claire; he is starting to create the mold into which he will fit Mme de Cintré. When he finally does meet her, he describes her, on the basis of little real knowledge, as possessing "goodness, beauty, intelligence, a fine education, personal elegance – everything, in a word that makes a splendid woman" (106). The majority of these qualities

(goodness, intelligence, a fine education) are not really evidenced anywhere in the text, but that does not matter since Newman is not seeing the woman in front of him, but rather the image of the woman he wants to see in front of him.

As part of the creation of Claire, Christopher continues to sprinkle a dash of the commercial into the aesthetic. If she is “a very expensive article” (110), she is also “an admired object” (110). Newman imagines the Bellegarde home in the Faubourg Saint-Germain section of Paris as something of a theatrical set where Claire was part of “the play he was seeing acted” (98), which involved her whole family, but where she was clearly the best performer on stage (98). In the latter portion of the novel, while the possibility of marrying Mme de Cintré still seems feasible, Christopher’s concern for his creation and desire to protect it takes a maternal form. Claire becomes “a much loved child” (114), and Newman’s tenderness toward her has “the quality of a young mother’s eagerness to protect the sleep of her first-born child” (150). The mother has played a major role in the creation of the child, and that is what Newman has done with the Mme de Cintré he loves. Mingling once again the commercial and the creative, he imagines the world’s admiration for what he has produced as “adding to [his] prospective glory of possession” (118). The praise for the art object is also an homage to its creator and will conceivably enhance his reputation in the cultural, and perhaps even financial marketplace, since of all the objects collected in Europe, the beautiful French wife is clearly the most impressive and striking proof of his success.

Christopher Newman, in his curious complexity, provides the perfect example of what Leo Damrosch meant when, in summarizing de Tocqueville, he said that for the Frenchman the paradox of the American nation is that it is made up of individualists who are deeply conformist (102). James created a character who strictly conforms to the stereotypes which he, certainly influenced by de Tocqueville, ascribed to the typical American. Yet, by design or chance, the character escapes from total conformity, displaying a streak of imagination and inspiration, even if it is unconscious and limited to only one creation.

Given the central role of Christopher Newman in *The American*, it is easy to forget that he is not the only American in the novel, and that the others, the Tristrams and the Reverend Babcock, while of secondary importance, do contribute to further clarifying the image of the American abroad by demonstrating they are not the true representatives of the

American in Europe. Newman is a man constantly in motion, a person Valentin describes as “being thoroughly at home in the world” (94). He has emerged from his nation’s civil war physically unscathed; he has made money and presumably continues to do so while in France. He is curious, yet confident, impressed by Europe, but not in awe of it: “He believed that Europe was made for him, and not he for Europe” (*American*, 66). Yet, that much said, he claims that he has come to Europe “to get the best out of it he can” (33). Christopher Newman is the United States moving forward on the world scene. In this respect he will stand in contrast to his compatriots living in Paris and to a lonely American somewhat unwillingly abroad.

Tom Tristram and his wife are active members of the expatriate community in Paris. Tom is a snob and a bore – “Paris ... it’s really the only place for a white man to live” (307) – but Mrs. Tristram is a cultivated, intelligent woman who provides Newman with an important piece of information which he never seems to fully understand. Talking about the perceptions the French will have of him, she notes: “it has nothing to do with you personally; it is what you represent” (42). Whatever Christopher’s true identity, as an American businessman in Paris he will be viewed by the Bellegardes, with the occasional exception of Valentin, as a representation, a type, never as an individual.

Mrs. Tristram also displays some rather subtle insight concerning her friend Mme de Cintré. At the end of the novel, when Newman finally concedes that he has lost Claire forever, Mrs. Tristan delicately asks him, “Are you sure you would have been happy?” (294). He avoids a direct answer, but at this point Christopher’s idealized Claire has already begun to yield to the real one, the woman he never knew and probably could not love. Mrs. Tristram’s words constitute a gentle invitation to draw logical conclusions from his recent discovery of the true Mme de Cintré, certainly not a bad person, but a very ordinary one, unable to escape the constraints of her heritage and social traditions. Yet for all her insight and tact, Mrs. Tristan remains a member of the marginal society that is the expatriate community. Although her address, boulevard Haussmann, is a symbol of modernity (more about that in a moment), and her husband boasts of the latest conveniences, “the gas lamps and furnace holes” (36) in their large apartment, they are not really part of the modern world, neither the American one nor the French one. Tom Tristram does nothing; he is perpetually in motion but, unlike Newman, he is going nowhere. For all her qualities, his wife seems to live in a permanent state of boredom and

quasi-stasis. She fancies she is pursuing some vague projects, but what they are exactly is unclear even to herself (36). Having abandoned their nation's own present and future, they have buried themselves in a somewhat imagined European past,<sup>5</sup> where a foreign city like Paris is the only place for them to be, provided they are surrounded by modern conveniences and a strong colony of like-minded Americans.

The other American presence in the novel is Mr. Babcock, a young Unitarian minister on leave from his church so that he can finish off his training with the European Grand Tour. Newman meets him while on his own tour, in Holland. There could not be a greater contrast between the two men. Christopher claims he feels like a child in Europe (32), which is to say that he is unsure, yet curious and quizzical, while Babcock sees himself as a truth-seeker (71) who "in his secret soul ... detested Europe" (69), and imagines himself as someone who knows that "Life and Art *are* extremely serious" (73; emphasis original). For Babcock, "European life seemed ... unscrupulous and impure" (70), whereas the experience of Europe provided "a placid, fathomless sense of diversion" (68) for Newman. Babcock feels he must protest against "Newman's gross intellectual hospitality" (69), his open-mindedness to things he encounters in the Old World, while Christopher, although puzzled by his acquaintance's strong opinions and reactions, displays no interest in trying to change Babcock. When the young minister decides that he can no longer travel with this "unregulated epicure" (69) and must abandon him, Newman merely remarks that he can easily make new friends (71).

Today's readers will be struck by the obvious homoerotic dimension of Babcock's feelings about Newman, but in terms of being an alternative national type, what disqualifies the minister is his lack of intellectual curiosity, his implicit adherence to the past, and his cultural rigidity. European art and traditions do not appear to him as stimulating and different; they simply threaten his "American" values. Babcock must draw conclusions (72), while Christopher is usually non-judgmental in terms of the people, objects, and ideas he encounters in his travels. Babcock represents a religious institution, albeit a liberal one, but in *The American*, religion, be it the young minister's Protestantism or the Bellegardes' Catholicism, is associated with a tradition that is becoming a less and less viable force in the modern world. This change is illustrated by Newman's tolerance of religion, coupled with his refusal to allow it to play a significant role in his life. Out of curiosity he asks Claire if she is Catholic, yet her

affirmative response has no particular effect on him: "He had never let the fact of Catholicism trouble him; Catholicism to him was nothing but a name" (246). Perhaps unconsciously, Newman exposes Babcock's inner confusion, his distance from modernity, his adhesion to past values, and the frailty of his beliefs and self-knowledge, by sending him as a parting gift a statue of "a gaunt, ascetic-looking monk, in a tattered gown and cowl, kneeling with clasped hands and pulling a portentously long face ... though through one of the rents of his gown, you espied a fat capon hung around the monk's waist" (73). No note from Newman accompanies this present, and none is needed. Babcock is not the man he wants to appear to be. He is not a hypocrite, but a person whose public religiosity and censorious tendencies cloak a different, more insecure identity that he struggles to conceal from himself and others. Whatever the nature of his desires, foreign surroundings and ideas are sources of discomfort; they provoke a disequilibrium, a longing for secret pleasures which, like the monk's capon, he endeavors to hide. By contrast, Newman is indeed the typical American in this novel because he is self-assured, neither intimidated by his new surroundings nor compelled to justify his national heritage when confronted by European history and accomplishments.

A salient feature of the French people Newman encounters in Paris is that all of them, in very different ways, are associated with the past. During his first visit to the Louvre, itself a symbol of past glories, he meets Mlle Noémi Nioche and her father. M. Nioche is a failed businessman whose only current activity is following his daughter around and doing her bidding. At Noémi's insistence, he proposes giving the American French lessons because, "Our French conversation is famous ... It's a great talent" (23). Essentially he is turning his country's language and, to a lesser degree, its culture into commodities to be offered to a wealthy American. Newman's reply is instructive: "I can't fancy myself chattering in French ... And yet, I suppose that the more a man knows the better" (24). Christopher expresses a polite interest, but displays no great desire to learn the language of the country where he is residing. However, he begins lessons with M. Nioche, in a rather lackadaisical manner. Later in the novel he has the occasion to display his foreign language skills. In response to Mlle Nioche's assertion that he is happy in Paris, Newman replies, "*Je le veux bien!*" ... proving that he had learned more French than he admitted" (62; emphasis original). This simple sentence is not a particularly convincing indication of Newman's progress in the language,



but singling out this rudimentary phrase does suggest that Christopher's knowledge of French, however limited, has some significance in the novel.

With the exception of Mlle Nioche at the beginning of the novel, every important French character in *The American* speaks English to Christopher Newman, even though James does at times give the impression that his main character can at least understand French. Still, given the example of his spoken French, it seems unlikely that Christopher could participate in a serious conversation in that language, and in this novel just about all the conversations are serious. While it is apparent that it would be absurd to expect long passages in a foreign language in a work written in English for an Anglophone audience, Newman's relatively low level of French and his disinterest in the language remain an important motif. It emphasizes that French people who wish to communicate with him must adapt to his limitations.<sup>6</sup> Thus the French in their own country must accommodate themselves to the American's inability to communicate seriously in any language except English. The implication here is that English is already the language of modernity and power. For people who expect to function on the world stage, knowledge of English is becoming increasingly necessary, as it is the language beginning to replace French on the international scene. This is why the Nioches and the Bellegardes must speak English, whereas Newman can occasionally indulge French when he is in the mood. In *The American*, even in terms of language, France is the then and the United States the now.<sup>7</sup>

Mlle Nioche's relationship to the past is more complicated. When Newman first meets her she is making a poor copy of a work by an Old Master. When pressed by the American to finish the copy and sell it to him ("*Combien*") at what will be an outrageous price, she consents, but Noémi Nioche has no illusions about her artistic gifts or her place in society. In her second encounter with Christopher in the Louvre, she tells him bluntly, "I have no talent" (64). Perhaps not as a painter, but she has carefully studied her social environment: "she had kept an eye upon all the variously embodied human nature around her, and she had formed her conclusions" (60). Principal among these conclusions was that she is a young woman from a poor, lower middle-class background with no great skills and limited opportunities for a good marriage due to a lack of a substantial dowry. Her future presented itself as a dull existence, possibly as a seamstress, governess, or clerk, the lot of so many young urban women in nineteenth-century France. What Mlle Nioche does have is beauty,

but of even greater use is her intelligence. She takes the measure of her situation and the options it affords her and makes the conscious decision to be a courtesan. Her success in this undertaking is partly a tribute to her body, but mostly to her brains, which permit her to manipulate her suitors to their detriment but to her greater reputation and glory. As a high-class prostitute she will occupy a marginal, yet comfortable space in modern society, but in order to do so, she must embrace the oldest profession in the world.

Christopher Newman's principal French interlocutors, as well as his principal adversaries, are the Bellegarde family. The Bellegardes project themselves as the incarnation of *la vieille France*, but their lineage does not quite support that, since on the maternal side their noble status dates only to the sixteenth century. Mrs. Tristram, doubtless seizing on this point, describes them as "the skim of the milk of the old *noblesse*" (47; emphasis original). Whatever the precise value of their pedigree, the Bellegardes are arch-conservatives. They do not support Louis-Napoleon's Second Empire (1850-1870), and certainly would not have supported his uncle Napoleon Bonaparte's First Empire (1804-1814). They probably would have rallied to the restored Bourbon monarch Louis XVIII (1814-1824). However, the world where they would have felt most at home was pre-revolutionary France. In their current situation, they sustain the cause of "the divine right of Henry of Bourbon, Fifth of his name, to the throne of France" (153). These are the people whom Newman, a man who has sold washtubs and worked in the leather business, must convince that he is an appropriate match for their one marriageable daughter and only financial commodity, Claire de Cintré.

In a novel not bereft of ironies, the greatest has to be James's choice of the Bellegardes to incarnate the French. They belong to a minority wing of a fading social class, the nobility, which will soon essentially pass out of French history, or at least no longer seriously aspire to play a significant role in the governance of their country. In this respect it is essential to recall that *The American* was published in 1877, some years after significant events in both American and French history took place.

If 1868, the year the novel begins, resonates in the American imagination because of the Civil War, this period also has an important implication for French history. Two years later, in 1870, the French would fight a disastrous war against the Germans. Their defeat would sweep Louis Napoleon and his government into the dustbin of history. The Second Empire would be succeeded by the Third Republic (1870-1940), a society where people like

the Bellegardes would be even more of an anachronism than they already were in 1868.

In his *Henry James Goes to Paris*, Peter Brooks offers a convincing explanation for James's odd choice of a family like the Bellegardes to oppose Newman. Brooks points out that, for all his travel and language skills, the young James had never spent a long time in France. In addition, his view of the French was conflicted. In a letter written to his brother William in 1876, while he was composing *The American*, James admitted that: "The longer I live in France, the better I like the French personally, but the more I am convinced of their bottomless superficiality" (*Norton Critical Edition*, 341).

Although he had letters of introduction to Flaubert and through him met other modern artists such as Zola and Turgenev, James was at this point in his career very traditional in his artistic tastes. As Brooks points out, he preferred Balzac's writings to those of his French contemporaries like Flaubert and Zola (119). He failed initially to grasp the point of Impressionism (30), and generally was more at ease in conservative milieus. Also, like many travelers abroad, James's exposure to the different layers of French society was quite limited. In Paris he mingled with the American expatriate community, which failed to impress him. Writing to his mother in 1869, James characterized the expatriates he encountered as "vulgar, vulgar, vulgar" (*Norton Critical Edition*, 321).

In his relations with French people, he tended to frequent the Orléanist monarchists (Brooks, 13). The Orléanists were a branch of the Bourbon family who managed to put one of their own, Louis-Philippe, on the throne (1830-1848).<sup>8</sup> While as a political party they were at times more liberal than their Bourbon cousins, they were still royalists whose power and influence in post-revolutionary France would be short-lived. During the era in which this novel is set, Orléanists were a diminishing social force in French life and politics.

That said, the Bellegardes would have found the Orléanists too liberal for their tastes. This family represented the extreme right of royalist beliefs; they were a minority within a minority. Thus, to the extent that James's choice of the Bellegardes can be viewed as indicative of average French people, the image projected is utterly false, since it proposes an anachronism as a norm. Nevertheless, he described this family and their circle with such power and conviction that he created the illusion that they embodied views that were at once widespread and typical among the French population. His success in this area is largely due to his striking

portraits of the matriarch, Mme de Bellegarde, her would-be rebellious son, Valentin, and their gloomy Parisian residence, all of which stands in marked contrast with the American and where and how he lives.

Social geography is very important in *The American*. The Bellegardes live in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, one of the oldest parts of the city, where to this day elegant homes are cloistered behind forbidding walls which provide little indication of what they are protecting. This is indeed *vieux Paris*, and James exploits this fact to establish an important contrast between the lodgings of the French and the Americans. The descriptions of the Bellegarde home are unremittingly somber: "The place was all in the shade; it answered to Newman's conception of a convent" (50). Emphasizing the theme of enclosure and even entrapment, Peter Brooks speaks of the "fortress-like hotel in the Faubourg Saint Germain" (*The Melodramatic Imagination*, 156), while Mona Ozouf writes of "l'hôtel des Bellegarde ... : défendu par un portail noir et des murs impassibles, avec sa cour fermée où l'ombre règne en maîtresse et l'avertissement sinistre qu'on ne reçoit pas" (25). Whatever the time of day, everything seems to take place in the shadows in the Bellegarde residence. Darkness is the dominant motif. The people invited to the Bellegarde's *soirées* all are royalists and appear to be as old as Mme de Bellegarde, yet another indication of this social class passing out of history. Finally, their country *château*, Fleurières, is invitingly described by Newman as "a Chinese penitentiary" (237). All this stands in sharp contrast to where Christopher and other Americans live.

In 1853 Louis-Napoleon assigned the task of renovating Paris on a large scale to Baron Georges Haussmann, Prefect of the Department of the Seine. This involved replacing narrow, twisting streets with grand, straight boulevards and building new parks and public areas. The project was still ongoing when Haussmann was forced to resign in 1870. Some of the most dramatic examples of Haussmann's renovation took place on the Right Bank. These new urban areas rapidly created by the Prefect became prized real estate and the symbol of modern Paris. These stylish new *quartiers* were particularly attractive to wealthy foreigners and *nouveaux riches*. The Tristrams live on the Right Bank's boulevard Haussmann, as eventually will Christopher Newman, who had specified that he wanted an apartment with "very large rooms" that would be "light and brilliant and lofty" (78). Tom Tristram found him just such a place "on a first floor, and [it] consisted of a series of rooms, gilded from floor to ceiling ... and [was] chiefly furnished with mirrors and clocks" (78). It should not be surprising

that Newman's principal furnishings in his bright new surroundings consist of clocks and mirrors since they serve the same function as the American's outstretched legs. Perhaps even more so for a combat veteran who had risked his life: time is precious and should not be wasted. The ticking of the clocks and a glance at oneself or others in a mirror demonstrate that time is moving on, that the precious moments one has are not to be idled away. While time is most certainly money for the American, in a larger sense, time is quite simply a constant passage and, as such, serves as a reminder of human finitude.

Newman's lodging, filled with light and plenty of open space, contrasts dramatically with the dark, suffocating ambiance of the Bellegarde abode. Although the tension between Haussmann's Paris and the Faubourg Saint-Germain is stark, in one instance James attenuates this dichotomy. Valentin de Bellegarde is the youngest in the family; he is also the only one who forms a real friendship with the businessman. He appreciates the American and what he represents but, despite Christopher's encouragement, Valentin never seems to believe he could break away from the pattern of idle existence imposed upon him by his noble lineage: "I couldn't make money, because I was a Bellegarde, I couldn't go into politics, because I was a Bellegarde ... I couldn't marry a rich girl, because no Bellegarde has ever married a *roturière*" (93; emphasis original). Unlike the rest of his family, Valentin has a small apartment on the Right Bank in the rue d'Anjou Saint-Honoré, an old street located on the edge of Haussmann's renovations. Its proximity to Newman's lodging suggests an openness to change and modernity, but the furnishings tell another story: "the place was low, dusty, contracted, and crowded with curious bric-à-brac ... his walls were covered with rusty arms ... his doorways draped in faded tapestries" (96). Valentin may wish for a different life, but the image patterns confirm that he will never be able to break with the past.<sup>9</sup>

Yet even more than image patterns, a series of incidents involving Valentin demonstrates his inability to overcome his origins and find a place for himself in the modern world. One evening Newman bumps into him at the opera, where Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (1789) is being presented.<sup>10</sup> Valentin confides to Christopher that, against all good sense, he is attracted to Mlle Nioche. When he visits her in her opera box, he discovers another man there, Stanislas Kapp. The two quarrel over the affections of Noémi, and Valentin challenges Kapp to a duel, which will result in the death of the youngest Bellegarde.

Valentin wanted to fight with swords, but as the aggrieved party, the choice is Kapp's and he opts for more modern weapons, pistols.<sup>11</sup> Stanislas Kapp is the son of a wealthy beer merchant from Strasbourg. This has both social and political ramifications, each of which places Stanislas in the world of modernity. A member of a successful merchant family, he represents the ascending middle class which will soon be governing France. At the same time, his name and place of origins suggest a strong Germanic heritage. Kapp embodies somewhat farcically the emerging young German nation, which will rise to prominence with its crushing victory over the French in 1870 which will eventually lead to the creation of the bourgeois dominated Third Republic.

It is at this juncture that the young Bellegarde's first name becomes important. While Valentin is certainly a French name, it is not a particularly common one. Yet in 1859 it enjoyed a certain prominence. This is the year of the very successful premiere of Charles Gounod's opera *Faust*, which features Valentin, a heroic soldier and the brother of Marguerite, the young woman wronged by the eponymous hero. He challenges Faust to a duel and is killed. Gounod's Valentin dies defending the honor and reputation of an innocent woman exploited by a powerful man. When this situation is reprised in the duel between Valentin and Stanislas, the result is parody. The point of contention, Noémi Nioche, is worlds away from the virtuous Marguerite, yet the duel she provokes has at once sad and ridiculous consequences: an idle member of a moribund social class is killed by a *nouveau riche*. A fading social class is dominated by a rising one.

As he lies dying, Valentin explains that stupid as it was, the duel had the value of returning him to an era where people like himself mattered: "it has a kind of picturesque charm which in this age of vile prose seemed to me to greatly recommend it. It's a remnant of a high-tempered time; one ought to cling to it" (211). The book he has at his bedside initially seems to confirm Valentin's nostalgia for "a high-tempered time." Pierre Choderlos de Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782) details the intrigues and sexual adventures of the French noble class in the waning years of the *ancien régime*. A duel is fought, but unlike that between Valentin and Stanislas, it leads to something positive: the exposure of a brilliant but particularly evil member of the aristocracy. The vision of the aristocracy which this novel projects has little positive about it. The clever members of this society are cynical and corrupt; only the naïve and foolish are honorable. Valentin's fondness for this book indicates not only that he cannot function in the

present, but also that he never really understood the nature of a past he claims to so admire. His world is a fantasy.

The most powerful, yet also the most contradictory Bellegarde is clearly the mother. Mme de Bellegarde's most striking physical features are "her cold fine eyes" (120). Claire's and Valentin's are mentioned too; they are notable physical attributes associated with the family. The Bellegarde eyes are the symbolic equivalent of Newman's outstretched legs, and as such they constitute another pattern which James employs to heighten the difference between the French and the Americans. Legs are for motion and in Newman's case they are almost always active, constantly moving through time and space, helping him to acquire social and cultural knowledge. The eyes take in images; they are passive recipients which capture surroundings without generating anything new. Christopher Newman discovers new worlds in his travels; with the occasional exception of Valentin, the Bellegardes only see, and only want to see, their old world. Newman journeys through the present and toward the future while the Bellegardes attempt to stop time, and in doing so sink deeper into the past.

By far the clearest indication of the alternate universe in which Mme de Bellegarde lives is the matriarch's admission, when talking to Newman, that she is not really at ease in Paris: "I can't say I know it. I know my house - I know my friends - I don't know Paris" (121). Mme de Bellegarde's commitment to a bygone era is such that she has no curiosity concerning the modern city where she makes her home, and in any case, in her own mind she does not live in the Paris of the Second Empire, the site of modernity. Yet, given her wholesale rejection of the present and her seemingly pathetic desire to dwell in a fantasized past, it is all the more startling to realize that the character outside her family whom she most resembles is Mlle Noémi Nioche.

When Newman suddenly appears in the Parc Monceau, the startled Mme de Bellegarde addresses him rather nastily: "You are like a peddler with something to sell" (282). Christopher is a respectable businessman who sells items that are useful to others. The real peddler is Mme de Bellegarde, who sells what Noémi Nioche sells: human flesh. Where Mlle Nioche does so consciously with her own body, the older woman manages to avoid confronting what she does by using another person. Before the novel began, she essentially bartered away her daughter to the elderly M. de Cintré, who had the tact to die shortly after the marriage. Mme de Bellegarde was not giving her daughter to this man for prestige

or enhanced social standing. She was doing it for money. Although her methods are different, and her self-knowledge less developed than Noémi Nioche's, both women are in the same business: providing a desirable female body for financial gain. When Christopher was trying to buy Noémi's painting in the Louvre, she calculated how rich he might be, how naïve about art prices, and then came up with an exaggerated but acceptable figure. Mme de Bellegarde is not quite that astute, since her intense need for money – "I am on my knees to money" (86) – and her desire to know the American's net worth allow for little subtlety on her part. Lacking as she does Noémi's finesse, when Christopher Newman tells her that he is rich, she blurts out: "How rich?" (128).

Perhaps the most curious parallel between the two women involves their respective social backgrounds. Although their origins are quite different, they have some things in common. Noémi comes from a social class that is condemned to a piteous existence. Once she realizes this, her aim becomes to escape her background and find a more interesting and lucrative position in society. Mme de Bellegarde may well be from the nobility, but this class is also going nowhere. If it displays any vitality, it is in the way it indulges its fantasies of the past. For Noémi, survival means bettering herself by profiting from the opportunities offered by the modern world. When Stanislas Kapp and Valentin begin to threaten each other, Noémi instantly grasps the publicity value of their quarrel: "M. Kapp, turn him out; or, M. de Bellegarde, pitch him into the pit, into the orchestra – anywhere! I don't care who does which, so long as you make a scene" (208). Since the French girl's future depends upon remaining in the public view, the American adage that all publicity is good publicity would make perfect sense to Mlle Nioche. For Mme de Bellegarde, survival is a very different proposition. It is simply a matter of finding the means to shelter herself and her family from modernity. In both instances, survival depends upon money, and the instrument for securing this is the female body.

A final resemblance between the two women is that each has limited time to achieve her goals. This is notably the case with Mlle Nioche. What she sells to secure her present and future is her own body, which for the moment reflects youth and beauty, attributes she knows will eventually begin to fade. If she wants a comfortable place in modernity, she will have to find a way to secure her future, despite aging. Mme de Bellegarde is really the more desperate of the two. Whatever potential her young son, Valentin, had for a wealthy marriage is now gone forever, and Claire's



resale value disappeared the day she entered the convent. The one son who remains to her is married to a wealthy woman, but throughout the novel there are insinuations that the wife is becoming increasingly dissatisfied in her marriage. The reader might have a degree of confidence that Noémi Nioche will manage to cope with her situation, but the looming presence of the Franco-Prussian War and its implication for French society make it a fair assumption that Mme de Bellegarde and her world are destined to disappear into a distant, dead past.

The scene that precipitates the novel's conclusion is one of the rare moments in *The American* that takes place out of doors. The setting serves to enhance the contrast, implicit in the novel, between a world of light (Newman) and one of darkness (Bellegarde). This is the only time when Mme de Bellgarde and her older son, Urbain, are seen away from their home and in the sunlight. Newman confronts them in the Parc Monceau with the proof that they have murdered Mme de Bellegarde's husband. The Parc Monceau dates from the eighteenth century, but the *parc* as we know it today had received a major overhaul as part of Haussmann's renovations. So the Bellegardes are, however unwillingly, in the world of modernity and without immediate access to the security of their home. For the only time in *The American* they seem nonplussed and beat a hasty retreat to their carriage, then head for the Faubourg Saint-Germain.<sup>12</sup>

Dissatisfaction with the ending of *The American* was voiced even among James's contemporaries. An anonymous reviewer writing in *The Galaxy* of July 1877 is fairly typical: "a lame and impotent conclusion ... the retirement of Mme. de Cintré ... the bringing to light of the deep of darkness that would have ruined the ancient house of Bellegarde, all are frittered away, and the end of the story 'peters out'" (*Norton Critical Edition*, 394). Readers then, and to a degree now, were annoyed that Newman did not somehow rescue Claire from the convent and that the Bellegardes did not receive the comeuppance they deserved. Yet, in another sense, the ending leaves open to speculation two important issues. The first is why do the Bellegardes not react in some forceful way when they discover that Newman has the compromising letter? The second is why does Christopher suddenly abandon his desire for revenge and return to the United States?

Mrs. Tristram, a relatively shrewd observer, offers a compelling explanation for the Bellegardes' silence toward the end of the novel. In discussing the matter with Newman, she theorizes: "My impression would be ... they believed that after all, you would not really come to the point.

Their confidence ... was in your remarkable good nature!" (309). This interpretation is supported by none other than Henry James: "My subject was: an American letting the insolent foreigner go, out of his good nature, after the insolent foreigner had wronged him and he had him in his power" (*Norton Critical Edition*, 343-344). However, while there can be little doubt what the author intended, his multilayered text offers the possibility of another reading.

Apart from the murder of M. de Bellegarde, the family has been largely passive. After his confrontation with Stanislas Kapp, Valentin simply follows the code of his social caste even as it leads him to his death. Claire's decision to enter the convent bespeaks no sudden religious vocation, but rather the easiest, most socially acceptable way to retreat from a complicated situation. Mme de Bellegarde and her son initially acquiesce to a marriage for financial reasons. Yet they were never keen to see Claire married to an American businessman, and when the opportunity briefly presents itself to palm off Mme de Cintré on an English cousin, they seize the occasion. This is their most active decision in the whole marriage process. However, when this option falls through, they just revert to their traditional way of life. They dismiss the possibility of an American marriage and then do what they have always done: they simply turn their backs on modern reality.

Throughout *The American* the Bellegardes are content to do as little as possible to confront their pressing needs. They make no consistent effort to improve their financial situation, nor do they display any effort to find ways to protect themselves from the changing social situation in France. The Bellegardes simply refuse to confront the realities of the world around them. Excepting the moments when their financial exigency and greed dominate their thinking on the American, they do not show the slightest interest in trying to get beyond the stereotypes and clichés they associate with his nationality. For these reasons I would suggest that a more consistent interpretation of the Bellegardes' failure to react aggressively to the threat posed by the letter in Newman's possession is that they are acting as they always have. Essentially, they do nothing, on the assumption that nothing will change and that they will be unaffected by whatever is taking place outside the refuge of their home in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, a place where the realities of the modern world will remain forever unwelcome.

If the Bellegardes remain largely and consistently passive throughout the novel, at the end of *The American* Christopher Newman does undergo a

change of sorts, one that uncharacteristically pushes him toward the past. Initially after Claire enters the convent, Newman travels to England and then to the United States, where he informs friends that “he had brought home no ‘new ideas’ from Europe” (303). Eventually he returns to Paris, vowing to spend the rest of his life there in some kind of vigil in front of the Carmelite convent in the rue d’Enfer. Then he changes his mind again, packs his affairs, and goes back to the States without supplying any reasons for the new decision except that “he could close the book and put it away” (306).

When Christopher Newman first came to Paris, he was trying to add new dimensions to his life. He wanted to fall in love and get married. He explains to Mrs. Tristram: “I will say frankly that I want extremely to marry. It is time, to begin with; before I know it I shall be forty” (43). As his language indicates, this was an intelligent, rational decision, and his courtship of Claire displayed the same attributes. He would provide her with a cost/benefit analysis of the reasons for marrying him; he has ample funds for travel, cultural events, and a house anywhere in the world. In a word, an amorous Newman remained very much a mercantile Newman. With his marriage plans scuttled, Christopher abandons courtship mode and reverts to a business model. What he had hoped to bring back to America, the equivalent of his “new ideas,” was a French wife, but that clearly was not working out, and there was no indication that it ever would. He carefully balances the pros and cons of remaining in Paris and decides that the cons far outweigh the pros. So he leaves. One has every reason to believe that the “book” he closes in Paris is tantamount to a ledger.

Fueled by a dislike of an ultimately unsuccessful play by Alexandre Dumas  *fils*, *L'étrangère*, and influenced by Alexis de Tocqueville's monumental study of the American nation and the characteristics of its citizens, *De la démocratie en Amérique*, in *The American*, Henry James created an enduring image of the American abroad and offered a harsh assessment of the French character. James's American is young, virile, financially independent, ethical, and curious about France and Europe in general, but culturally naïve, a sort of man-child. His French counterparts, on the other hand, are people with a superficial sophistication but very little cash, keenly aware of France's cultural traditions, at home in the world of moral ambiguity, and at once fascinated and appalled by the idea of an America destined to dominate Europe and the world.

These rather simplistic portraits were nonetheless destined to survive, with variations, in French and American literature for a remarkably long time. Five of the following eight chapters will discuss permutations of this paradigm, created less through observed and lived experience than through the literary imagination.

## Notes

1 Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* was published in 1860. This is a novel set in Italy, but its primary foci are young American artists' encounters with European culture and their subsequent efforts at creative responses. The interaction between Americans and Europeans is not a major concern. As Leon Edel points out, before Henry James, writers barely examined "the American-European theme" (*Henry James*, 198). At least at first, and by virtue of his having few serious rivals, James became known as the foremost interpreter in fiction of the experiences of Americans abroad.

2 James stated: "The French stage I have mastered. I say that without hesitation. I have it in my pocket" ("From James's Notebooks." *The American: Norton Critical Edition*, 372).

3 In this context it ought not to be forgotten that Newman made his decision to forgo vengeance and head for Europe while riding in a cab, that is to say, while in motion.

4 In *The French Side of Henry James*, Edwin Fussel suggests that James chose 1868 because it provided him with a degree of historical certainty: "if there was one thing certain vis-à-vis contemporary France it was the Second Empire was dead beyond recall" (26). The demise of the Second Empire is a hovering presence in the novel, and will be discussed later, but in terms of the formation of Newman's character, the relevance of 1868 has much more to do with the recently ended Civil War.

5 William Rieder provides a fascinating discussion of the nineteenth-century American expatriate in France in *A Charmed Couple: The Art and Life of Walter and Matilda Gray* (New York: Harry Abrams, 2000). Walter Gray had a relatively successful career painting interiors for the wealthy. He displayed no interest in the innovations affecting the visual arts in France at that time. Matilda spent most of her time socializing with the Anglophone expatriate community. They both knew Henry James, who was occasionally a guest at their *château* where, much like the Tristrams, they had been quick to install modern conveniences.

6 Edwin Fussel is equally convinced that the clash between the English and French languages plays an important role in the novel: "the question of national

language difference is central, thematized, and well-nigh overwhelming” (42). Yet he draws a very different conclusion from what I present in this chapter: “[Newman’s] inability to speak and understand French ... surely stands behind such remarks as ‘I feel as simple as a little child’” (43).

7 The power relation between the French and English languages will figure in subsequent chapters as well.

8 Louis-Philippe was the cousin of Charles X, who succeeded Louis XVIII. Charles was deposed in 1830, and Louis-Philippe became the “citizen-king.” Although still technically a monarchy, the idea of the state governed by a king was already eroding.

9 A somewhat similar pattern is evident when Claire decides to enter a Carmelite convent. Initially she is in the convent in the avenue de Messine, which is one of the broad streets created by Haussmann and is located on the Right Bank. There, Claire would at least have some proximity to the modern world. However, later she is transferred to the convent in the rather melodramatically named rue d’Enfer (the street actually existed in the nineteenth century), which was on the Left Bank and not far from the Faubourg Saint-Germain, thus further confirming her devolution from the present into the past.

10 This opera, which deals with a member of the declining aristocracy who nevertheless has great success with women, serves as a background in the scenes in the opera house where Valentin labors unsuccessfully to charm Mlle Nioche.

11 This is the same choice depicted in *L’étrangère*, where Mr. Clarkson rejects the duke’s request for swords and chooses pistols. It is also of modest interest to know that Mrs. Clarkson’s first name is Noémi.

12 A variation on this light-dark dichotomy concerns Mme de Cintré. When a disconsolate Newman talks to Mrs. Bread about Claire’s decision to enter the convent, the elderly woman replies: “You pushed her into the sunlight ... they [the Bellegardes] pushed her back into the shade” (255). Later, when Christopher attends Claire’s vow-taking ceremony, he tries to see her through the screen which is set up to shield the postulants from the outside world: “But he could see nothing; no light came through the crevices ... there was darkness with nothing stirring” (276). Claire has definitively passed out of the sight of the modern world.

## CHAPTER II

# The Splendor and Misery of the American Scientist

## *L'Ève future*

Je me demande à quoi peut ressembler l'Américain.

(Christophe Carlier, *L'euphorie des places de marché*, 79)

Darkness permeates Villiers d'Isle-Adam's *L'Ève future*, even if this darkness is sometimes flecked with light. In the epigraph introducing the first chapter of the novel, one reads a citation from Gilles Fletcher: "*Les iris et les rondes étincelles de rosée, / Qui pendaient à leurs feuilles azurées, apparaissaient / Comme des étoiles clignotantes qui pétillent dans le bleu du soir*" (39; emphasis original). In the last passage in the novel, the main character "écouta ... l'indifférent vent de l'hiver qui entrechoquait les branches noires, – puis son regard s'étant levé ... vers les vieilles sphères lumineuses qui brûlaient, impassibles, entre les lourds nuages et sillonnaient, à l'infini, l'inconcevable mystère des cieux" (349). What appears to dominate here is the brightness of the stars but, in fact, their light, or rather humanity's ability to perceive it, is due to the somber background of the night. Darkness thus constitutes the frame within which light is perceived and, more broadly, the perspective within which the narrative unfolds.

The novel begins at night in Menlo Park, "une habitation qu'entouraient de profonds jardins solitaires" (39), and darkness accompanies every important development in the text. For instance, to discover the Ideal Woman (Hadaly), one must first descend into a deep, dark cavern, "le royaume de taupes" (163), where the only light possible is artificial. Once

illuminated, what stands out is the design on the ceiling: “l’image du Ciel tel qu’il apparaîût, noir et sombre, au-delà de toute atmosphère planétaire” (166). At the center of this sky is “un astre,” but once again it is only visible because of what lies behind it.

Lord Ewald and Hadaly, the android Edison created for him, begin to become lovers during a starry but deeply shadowed night: “le ciel est redevenu clair,” but “l’ombre s’approfondissait et devenait sublime” (305). Because Lord Ewald believes that he is not with Hadaly but a real woman, he is suddenly happy to think he is in the company of Alicia Clary, and thus begins to find something repellent in the idea of the “Ideal Woman” which Edison has created for him: “le noir prodige de l’Andréide traversa ses pensées” (305). Hadaly’s association with darkness is further enhanced by her own words, “Nuit ... c’est moi ... je suis l’être obscure” (321), yet this affiliation “épouvantait la nuit” (324). If, from Hadaly’s perspective, she is a figure of the night, her artificiality makes the natural evening shadows recoil in horror.

In *L’Ève future*, darkness and related terms (*nuit, noir, sombre*, etc.) represent the vast swath of reality that mankind has yet to explore, while the stars, pinpricks of light against an ebony background, symbolize humanity’s achievements: its impressive, albeit very limited, unraveling of the mysteries of the universe. Darkness is also associated in a somewhat different and ominous way with the product of *le grand mécanicien* Thomas Edison’s experiments: the creation of the android Hadaly. The night recoils from the android because its existence violates the natural order, not because it seeks to be a replication of a woman, which is not what Hadaly is, but because the android is a perversion, by means of simplification, of womanhood, of the human being. That pride of place would be given to the somber is the central irony in a novel that initially stresses the achievements, only to accentuate the limitations of the main character, Thomas Edison, one of the most enlightened personages of his era.

Villiers’s *L’Ève future* is a peculiar novel. For Gwenhaël Ponnau it is “un livre sans précédent, déroutant aussi” (52), and Jacques Noiray considers it a “roman américain” (10), even though Villiers “n’est donc pas classable” (10). Wieslau Mateusz Malinowski characterizes the novel as a satire that the author “s’exerce en premier lieu contre la société américaine du temps, qu’il ne connaissait que par ses lectures” (56). The late A.W. Raitt summarizes Villiers’s ideas in the novel as “vagues, contradictoires, à peine sérieuses” (59). This from a scholar who was probably the most influential

commentator of his generation on Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, and one of the editors of the Pléiade edition of Villiers's collected works.

The strange, somewhat disorganized impression the novel makes is due in part from its publication history. Villiers began working on the text in 1877, inspired by the invention of the phonograph by Thomas Edison. The initial version of what would become *L'Ève future* started appearing in 1880 as *L'Ève nouvelle*, serialized in *Le Gaulois*, a prestigious Parisian daily. Since it seemed to puzzle readers, publication was halted after fourteen installments. Villiers managed to find a new outlet in a little-known journal, *L'Étoile française*, which serialized the story for two months until Villiers abruptly stopped publication right before the final installment, which he wanted to revise. It was not until 1884 that Villiers once again began seeking an outlet for his novel. In 1885 he managed to place the work, newly entitled *L'Ève future*, with a weekly magazine, *La Vie moderne*. This final revision was serialized from July 18, 1885 until March 27, 1886. Yet publication was held up on several occasions as Villiers undertook further revisions (Raitt, Préface to *L'Ève future*, 7–8). These revisions were not minor affairs; they affected the content as well as the style. For example, as Jacques Noiray points out, the enigmatic Sowana, a mysterious presence throughout the text, only appeared in the final version (297).

Associated with the novel's long and difficult gestation is the question of Villiers's opinions, some of which will be discussed below. Normally it would seem unnecessary or, at best, of secondary importance to raise the subject of how an author's personal opinions may or may not be reflected in their creative writing. The general assumption would be that one is reading a text as a freestanding creation and not as a soapbox for authorial belief. Yet the length of time that went into the writing of this novel, along with the frequent and at times substantial revisions, has produced a hybrid text replete with passages that convey Villiers's ideas as well as others which seem to contradict, or at least considerably soften, what he has expressed in different venues. If nothing else, this tension must be acknowledged, particularly because the critical tendency in analyzing Villiers's œuvre has been to emphasize the rapport between his ideas and what appears in this novel.

Villiers was a man of strong, firmly held beliefs, many of which he sought to incorporate into his novel. In some instances he was quite successful, notably in his presentation of modern science as a source of fascination, awe, and danger. In other areas he was successful in ways



that would annoy more liberal readers, particularly with regard to the image of women that emerges in *L'Ève future*. While he certainly aimed to castigate the modern woman, what comes forth in his work is something more nuanced, much less a critique of women than of the men who belittle them in words and actions. This is a perspective of which Villiers undoubtedly would not have approved. Hence the principal difficulty in a literary analysis of the novel lies in the clash between Villiers's well-known opinions and how they are reflected, and at times altered, in the text. The solution I have chosen is to always give priority to the final version of *L'Ève future*, which will mean that at times I will propose a reading that would seem to reflect Villiers's views, and at other moments I will offer an interpretation at odds with his pronouncements elsewhere. I doubt that Villiers would have condoned my central thesis: that Edison's belittlement of women is at once a critique both of a genius's limited understanding of human nature and of the American character.

I will begin by discussing Villiers's reasons for placing Thomas Edison at the center of his novel and then turn to the reputation of scientifically gifted Americans in nineteenth-century France. Subsequently, I will examine Villiers's somewhat conflicted view of modern science and the ways in which his attitudes toward modernity in general are quite similar to those found in an important anti-modern current then prevalent in France. I will then turn directly to a textual analysis of *L'Ève future* in an effort to demonstrate that if Villiers represents Edison as a genius of dazzling intellect and accomplishment, he also depicts an American who displays little understanding of human behavior, especially that of women. Generally, the fictional Edison is a person most comfortable when he can hold others at a distance. With specific regard to women, he seeks, through scientific manipulation, to program their comportment in ways best suited to please men. Combined with his great scientific ability, this limited respect for human nature makes him, and by extension the American nation he represents, a potential danger to humanity.

In his preface to *L'Ève future*, Villiers emphasizes that his main character, Thomas Edison, is not intended to represent the real Thomas A. Edison, a man who in Europe and America was already "une *LÉGENDE*" (37; emphasis original). He claims that the "l'Édison du présent ouvrage, son caractère, son habitation, son langage et ses théories sont - et devaient être - au moins passablement distincts de la réalité" (37), and finally, "le héros ... est ... avant tout, le sorcier de Menlo Park - et non M. l'ingénieur

Edison, notre contemporain” (37). While it is obviously true that a fictional recreation of a famous person can never be a perfect replication, and that the fictional Edison, “l’homme qui a fait prisonnier l’écho” (39), is removed from its historical model, Villiers is still being rather disingenuous. The American’s notoriety could only increase interest in the story, especially when Villiers implies that “M. l’ingénieur Edison, notre contemporain” can also appear to be “le sorcier de Menlo Park,” a phrase which will have important reverberations in this chapter. Villiers’s novel benefited from the inventor’s instant name recognition and the aura of genius that surrounded him, just as Balzac’s *Le Chef-d’œuvre inconnue* (1831) rouses the readers’ instant reaction of interest and respect when they learn the young artistically curious painter is Nicolas Poussin. Villiers had made a shrewd choice in naming his main character. It was a calculated decision that would pique the curiosity of his contemporaries and simultaneously set the stage for a broader critique of the American nation.

According to Jacques Noiray, the first mention of the historical Edison in the French press occurred in 1877 (*L’Ève future* 23), after which his reputation spread rapidly. He was particularly well known in France, since that country was among the first to profit from his inventions: “Thomas Edison’s electric light bulb, introduced in 1879, as well as his system to generate electricity, took hold rapidly ... By 1883 ... the Paris Opera and the Saint-Lazare railway station had been converted from gas to electric lights” (McCullough, 406). By the time of the Exposition Universelle of 1889,<sup>1</sup> “the inventory of Edison’s inventions and devices [totaled] 493, and of all those creative Americans whose work was shown, none had such celebrity as Edison.” “What Eiffel is to the externals of the exposition,” said the *New York Times*, “Edison is to the interior. He towers head and shoulders in individual importance over any other man” (McCullough, 417). McCullough claims that Edison’s enthusiastic approval of the Eiffel Tower contributed significantly to its acceptance by the French public (417).

If Edison were the most prominent American inventor known to the French in the latter portion of the nineteenth century, he was hardly the only one. Americans had become so well known in the applied sciences since the end of the Civil War that “feats of American engineering and construction had been attracting the attention of the world” (McCullough, 406). At the Exposition Universelle of 1855, “a gold medal was conferred on Singer sewing machines, Colt revolvers, McCormack reapers and Professor Morse’s telegraph” (220). In the Exposition Universelle of 1867, “The favorite

American import, to judge by the crowds it drew, was a soda fountain ... Thomas Eakins [the painter] wrote to his family of waiting in a line a block long for a drink from it" (247). And to return to the 1889 exhibition, "American machinery and products on display included giant steam engines and steam pumps ... lawnmowers and typewriters" (415).<sup>2</sup>

America's burgeoning reputation in science and mechanics, the country's talent for the practical, began to appear to the French as something of a national proclivity.<sup>3</sup> The numerous American inventions "commencent à imposer au grand public français l'image d'un peuple pratique, industriellement puissant, techniquement fécond parfois jusqu'au bizarre ou au fantastique" (Noiray, 58). Yet this was not without a very perceptible downside. The great American talent in these areas was perceived in some quarters as a positive counterweight to grave weaknesses in more personal areas, notably a lack of aesthetic sensibility and a shallow understanding of the complexity of human emotions.<sup>4</sup> In the late 1820s, James Fennimore Cooper took his family to France, where he was well received as a leading American novelist. While he appreciated the adulation and truly enjoyed his time in Paris, he rather ruefully remarked, concerning France's limited appreciation of American culture, "The people seem to think it is marvelous that an American can write" (McCullough, 74). Most appeared ignorant that any book had ever been published in America "except for Dr. Franklin and *M. Cooper l'Américain*, as they call me" (McCullough 74). Later in the century, this French suspicion concerning the American national character expressed itself most forcefully in criticisms surrounding the Eiffel Tower. McCullough writes that while most Parisians were interested in Eiffel's project and that Edison's support of the tower was a major factor in its eventual winning of general acceptance, it was denounced by others as "much too large, too dangerous, unacceptably ugly ... 'more in character with America (where taste is not very developed)'" (405). The dislike for the tower in intellectual, as opposed to popular, circles was such that a petition was circulated and signed by fifty prominent French artists, including Charles Garnier, Ernest Meissonier, Charles Gounod, Alexandre Dumas, and Guy de Maupassant, protesting against this "Tower of Babel," considered so ugly that "not even 'the commercial nation of America,' would want such a structure" (407). Villiers would exploit Edison's reputation as a genius to great effect, at the same time as his novel highlighted the putative weakness of the American character, epitomized by "le sorcier de Menlo Park," not so much in the area of aesthetics as with regard to emotional

matters. This complex involvement with a fictionalized outsized American, his qualities and faults, is perhaps why Jacques Noiray characterized *L'Ève future* as “ce roman américain” (10). While one can question Malinowski's claim that such a dark story is a “satire,” he seems to be on much firmer ground when he argues that it concerns not simply a gifted individual but “la société américaine” (56).

The great enthusiasm which Thomas Edison elicited among the French temporarily overshadowed a deeper, darker feeling of anti-Americanism which would nonetheless affect Villiers's portrayal of the great inventor. This sentiment in France, admirably detailed in Phillipe Roger's *L'ennemi américain* (2002), has a long and enduring history<sup>5</sup> but manifests differently depending upon the period under discussion. In Villiers's time, there were essentially two sources of French anti-Americanism. One was somewhat personal and confined to people like the author of *L'Ève future*: the influence of Baudelaire's views on the United States upon a slightly younger generation of artists and intellectuals. The second was more widespread and affected French society as a whole: the Gallic perception of the alleged true motivations behind the American Civil War.

Baudelaire (1821–1867) was probably the principal artistic and intellectual influence on Villiers. For the older poet, the United States was scarcely different from another country he detested, Belgium: “Comme on chantait, chez nous, il y a vingt ans, la gloire et le bonheur des Etats-Unis de l'Amérique. Sottise analogue à propos de la Belgique” (Baudelaire, paraphrased in Roger, 94). In the manuscript of the unfinished *Belgique déshabillée*, Baudelaire seems to conflate the two countries, finding common ground in their “Esprit d'obéissance et de Conformité.” Both are places where “Tout le monde est commerçant, même les riches.” As Philippe Roger observes, “c'est bien à la Belgique que Baudelaire jette toutes ces pierres; mais l'Amérique est derrière” (94).

Baudelaire's dislike of the United States stemmed in large measure from his evaluation of what he believed to be the American mistreatment of an artist he admired greatly, Edgar Allan Poe. He considered Poe almost a Christ-like figure, someone “qui a beaucoup souffert pour nous” (Baudelaire, cited in Roger, 94). Baudelaire's knowledge of the States and the vicissitudes of Poe's life were limited, but this did not prevent him expressing very firm opinions. According to Philippe Roger, the life and death of Poe constituted for Baudelaire a condemnation of the American nation (95), a country where “un mouvement utilitaire ... veut enchaîner

la poésie comme le reste” (Baudelaire, cited in Roger, 95). Baudelaire remarked in his essay on Poe that: “Les documents que je viens de lire ont créé en moi cette persuasion que les Etats-Unis furent pour Poe une vaste cage, un grand établissement de comptabilité, et qu’il fit toute sa vie de sinistres efforts pour échapper à cette atmosphère antipathique” (cited in Roger, 95). In Baudelaire’s thinking at its most pessimistic, Europe’s decline was accompanied by America’s rise, and the world was destined to finish *américainisé* (96).

When Baudelaire remarked that twenty years earlier the United States had been seen differently, he refers to an era when de Tocqueville’s influence was still strong. Yet de Tocqueville’s impact on the French view of the *l’Amérique* would be challenged by historical events later in the century. The American Civil War “marque ... le grand retour des États-Unis sur la scène idéologique et imaginaire française” (Roger, 105). France was officially neutral concerning this conflict, but that stance fooled nobody. It was an open secret that the Emperor Napoleon III favored the South. He launched his ill-fated campaign to make Maximilian of Hapsburg king of Mexico shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War. In doing so, he sought to profit from American disarray and believed the success of his enterprise would create a “digue infranchissable aux empiétements des États-Unis” (110–111).<sup>6</sup> The idea that France could profit economically and politically from supporting the Confederate cause, however surreptitiously, was also a consideration. A unified American republic was a potential economic and political giant and, as such, threatened French interests in these areas. Split in two, it would pose much less of a danger. Yet, despite sympathy for the South, there was also the more Machiavellian sentiment that the ideal outcome would be that neither side won, that the North particularly would be drained by the conflict and thus unable to become a major force on the international scene.<sup>7</sup>

There was, of course, one major impediment to the French enthusiasm for the Southern cause: slavery. “En France, les plus fermes soutiens du Sud se démarquent sans ambiguïté de la doctrine confédérée sur la légitimité de leur ‘institution particulière’” (Roger, 118–119). To assuage Gallic sensibilities concerning this “institution particulière,” representatives and supporters of the Confederacy in France launched an argument that proved fairly effective: “l’esclavage est déjà en voie d’extinction et son abolition immédiate ne justifie en aucun cas une guerre civile” (108–109). For these apologists for the South, this putatively obsolescent institution was being

used by the *Yankees* to cloak more nefarious aims. The North's goal was really economic; it wanted to crush the South in order to impose its fiscal dominance on that section of the country, in order to increase fortunes in the North. If this argument might have appeared somewhat surprising on the American continent, it had a rather positive reception in France. Yet this was only the beginning.

Edwin de Leon, the Confederate representative in France, proved to be a formidable polemicist. In a variety of publications and numerous conversations he let it be known that for the *Yankees*, "la croisade en faveur de la race noire dissimule une expédition contre la race latine" (124). This dubious thesis rapidly expanded and assumed a life of its own. It developed beyond the ethnic to the political in an article published in the newspaper *La Patrie*, which argued that Russia, "le bourreau de la Pologne" (125), and as such another French *bête noire*, was similar to the North, since both nations were obsessed with the suppression of dissidents (125). Eventually the Anglo-Saxon axis, which consisted of Great Britain and the Union side in the Civil War, would be vying for supremacy over the "Latin" world whose leader was naturally France. Were the North to defeat the South, the next target of Yankee aggression would be Latin America (131). This appraisal, however woolly, proved to be "éparse mais insistante dans la presse de l'Empire" (127), and if there was something good perhaps to be said for the English, by contrast, "Les Américains [étaient] les apprentis sorciers" (129). The North's defeat of the South only increased anxiety concerning the ambitions of this now unified and mighty nation.

This, then, was the climate of opinion concerning the United States when Villiers began drafting *L'Ève future*. There was great popular admiration and respect for the individual genius of Edison and more generally for American ingenuity, but also a powerful suspicion of the United States' political intentions and cold calculations regarding the rest of the world. On a more personal level, Villiers was greatly aware of his much-admired Baudelaire's contempt for American putative utilitarianism and artistic insensitivity. All three factors, one positive and two negative, would play roles in the development of Villiers's Edison; so too would Villiers's complex and conflicted relationship with modern science.

While Villiers certainly recognized that Edison's strength is in the realm of research and discovery, his enthusiasm for scientific inquiry in general was not without qualification. There has been an extended scholarly debate concerning Villiers's attitude toward science. Once considered an

absolute opponent of modern science and the scientific mentality, Villiers's approach is now viewed as more nuanced, with the positive outweighing the negative. Max Daireaux seems to sum it up nicely, if somewhat rhapsodically, when he writes that Villiers's evaluation of the reality and potential of science "est faite de contradictions, d'incertitudes, de repentirs ... Il la déteste pour ce qu'elle représente ... le progrès ... l'expression triomphante du matérialisme, tentation infernale de l'esprit" (248). Nevertheless, "il quête ses moindres manifestations, lui prête d'éprouvantes possibilités, éprouver à la frôler de troublantes voluptés" (249). Jacques Noiray adds that Villiers "se tenait au courant des dernières découvertes de la science et de la technique" (*L'Ève future ou le laboratoire de l'idéal*, 11), while, despite Villiers's concerns about the ultimate goals of scientific inquiry, for A.W. Raitt, "les prodiges scientifiques de son époque le séduisaient autant qu'ils l'alarmaient" (178).

What Villiers despised in science was its all too frequent association in the nineteenth century with a simplified form of positivism, which essentially maintained that the only truth was scientific truth and that science was the only viable path to knowledge. In Villiers's earlier fiction, Tribulat Bonhomet, a character who appears in several stories, represents all that is repellent in positivism. He is arrogant, superficial, and cruel. In a story entitled "Le Tueur de cygnes," he kills a swan just to enjoy the bird's song, reputed to be most beautiful at the moment of its death. In "Claire Lenoir," he smugly dismisses a friend's concerns about the existence and role of God as unworthy of a modern man's attention. A man of no real achievement, scientific or otherwise, Tribulat Bonhomet, who characterizes himself as the archetype of his era, stands in sharp contrast with Villiers's highly successful (in some areas), more open-minded Edison, who is far from insensitive: "Edison incarne parfaitement ce type de savant 'poétique,' homme de rêves et d'intuitions plutôt que de méthode positive" (Noiray, *Le Romancier et la machine*, 267). Unlike Edison, Tribulat Bonhomet is the epitome of bourgeois complacency, the essence of a modernity that Villiers found insupportable.

Because Villiers's contempt for his age was so total,<sup>8</sup> and his condemnations so strident, there is a temptation to dismiss him as a bizarre anomaly, a man simply out of touch with the world wherein he lived, a person who in his own way is as removed from reality as his polar opposite Tribulat Bonhomet. This is, however, far from the truth. Despite Villiers's rhetorical excesses, he is very much in the tradition of a powerful intellectual current

in the nineteenth century and beyond that consists of a collection of very different thinkers who defy easy classification but have been grouped by Antoine Compagnon under the broad rubric of “the anti-moderns.”

In *Les Antimodernes de Joseph de Maistre à Roland Barthes* (2005), Compagnon describes a disparate group of intellectuals who never constituted a “movement” and differed in many ways, but did share a common intellectual orientation that consisted of an informed suspicion of the modern world and the direction in which modernity was taking French society. Compagnon lists in this category such nineteenth-century luminaries as François-René Chateaubriand, Balzac, Joseph de Maistre, Ernest Renan, Albert Thibaudet, Charles Maurras, and Léon Bloy. The great difference between these men and more traditional conservative thinkers is that “les antimodernes authentiques – ne seraient autres que les modernes, les vrais modernes, non dupes du moderne, déniaisés” (Compagnon, 8). For Compagnon, these were not people who had fled from contemporary society; on the contrary, they had truly understood it. These men had studied it deeply<sup>9</sup> and repudiated the direction modernity was taking. This rejection meant they were critical of the Enlightenment heritage,<sup>10</sup> lamented the loss of social structure and order which accompanied the French Revolution, and often championed the Roman Catholic Church, not so much for its beliefs as for its ability to impose discipline on the under classes.<sup>11</sup> Principal among their adversaries was “le materialisme bourgeois, certes, mais c’est avant tout la démocratie, caricaturée dans le suffrage universel, qui a privé la France d’une élite” (39). Whether practicing Catholics or not, the anti-moderns seem to have preserved a strong sense of original sin, of human nature as flawed, tenets they believed their more optimistic eighteenth-century predecessors had discarded: “La raison est insuffisante en politique, parce que l’action humaine ne se fonde pas sur la raison seule. Les passions, à la fois individuelles et collectives, exercent leur influence sur les affaires, et les intérêts troublent la vue” (51–52). Due perhaps in large measure to the anti-moderns’ distrust of humanity’s ability to understand its own tainted nature, these thinkers were skeptical at best concerning their contemporaries’ indiscriminate confidence in an inevitably bright future. Their “méfiance à l’égard du progrès devient un lieu commun de l’antimodernité” (61). In the late nineteenth century, modernity and progress would often be associated with the United States.

The political and social views ascribed to the champions of the *antimoderne* are largely those of Villiers as well. The similarity is even more



pronounced regarding literature. Maurras proclaimed that “Le romantisme, victoire du féminin, a triomphé du mâle amour des idées” (Compagnon, 133). In the eyes of some, women were becoming too assertive and independent. This was a perspective Villiers shared. Concerning the novel in general, Thibaudet noted that “Le romancier authentique crée ses personnages avec les directions infinies de sa vie possible, le romancier factice les crée avec la ligne unique de sa vie réelle. Le vrai roman est comme une autobiographie du possible” (267). Villiers’s novel, in so many ways a strange, indeed incredible fiction, mingling as it does ersatz science, minute yet misleading mechanical description, and philosophic discourse with unbridled fantasy, is very much an exploration of “les directions infinies de [la] vie possible,” while at certain moments it transforms the improbable into the possible. According to Antoine Compagnon, “le génie antimoderne s’est réfugié dans la littérature, et dans la littérature même que nous qualifions de moderne, dans la littérature dont la postérité a fait son canon, littérature non traditionnelle mais proprement moderne car antimoderne, littérature dont la résistance idéologique est inséparable de son audace littéraire” (10). *L’Ève future*, in so many ways audacious and certainly unclassifiable, and while extremely unlikely to enter into many people’s literary canon, is nonetheless very much a novel strongly resistant to encroaching modernity.

At the center of the novel is Thomas Edison. From the outset Villiers provides Edison with an appearance that suggests an artistic as well as a scientific sensibility. He resembles in stature the French illustrator/engraver Gustave Doré (39), and has “presque le visage de l’artiste *traduit* en un visage savant” (39; emphasis original). Yet this same face is also “une vivante reproduction de la médaille syracusaine d’Archimède” (40). As the description implies, while Edison’s genius is clearly of the scientific order, he has a humanistic perspective as well. He speaks with respect of the Bible, refers to Romeo and Juliet as well as to Daphnis and Chloé, and appears to have an interest in the beauty of nature. He demonstrates gratitude and affection toward Lord Ewald and his own children, even if the latter appear only as voices on the telephone; he suffers from the humiliation and destruction of his friend Anderson, and displays great compassion for his friend’s wife. Edison is no narrow-minded specialist; he has the intelligence and sensibility that *ought* to make him aware of the grave dangers inherent in his project. And in a way he does; it is extremely important for the understanding of the novel and the issues surrounding it to realize that Edison does not replicate a woman, and indeed does not really try.

Edison never creates in Hadaly the equivalent of Alicia Clary. While the inventor can fabricate a beautiful woman's body, sounds, and scents, Hadaly by design never really equals a woman in complexity; she is a simplified version of the feminine, one intended to provide a man with the pleasures of a woman's company, but without the inconveniences of alleged female faults. This distance from the live model is not a reflection of some scientific weakness; it is willed by the android's creator. Edison's failings are not in the scientific domain; they are in a more personal realm and concern his highly suspect desire to *improve* womankind by simplifying her nature. In undertaking such a project, Edison demonstrates his failure to grasp the aspirations and social situation of the modern woman, whose unlikely representative in this novel is Alicia Clary. Edison's shallow appreciation of women becomes a metaphor for the flaws in the American nation, a country poised to play a major role in international politics, while somehow remaining dangerously naïve about human beings.

Yet before examining Edison's weaknesses in detail, it is first necessary to look once again at science in the novel, not in terms of Villiers's views on the subject, but rather how the scientific tradition is presented in *L'Ève future* and what it elucidates about Edison the professional, as opposed to Edison the individual. This will permit a better understanding of the extent of his error. At the same time, an appraisal of the role of scientific research in the novel will make clear Villiers's argument that there is nothing inherently wrong with science and its myriad potentials for enhancing human existence, but that its capacity for good or ill depends entirely on the person manipulating the scientific knowledge in question. This distinction between the personal and the professional Edison is crucial if one wishes to avoid the sorts of misunderstandings found in Marta Giné-Janer's statement that "La condamnation de la science et de ses capacités d'aider à mieux vivre, à résoudre les conflits sentimentaux de l'homme moderne, reste ... entière" (118). Obviously science can help people to live better, and this benefit is due to people like Edison the professional. But science's ability to resolve human emotional problems is questionable at best, and the Edison who undertakes this latter task is very much the willful individual.

In one of the early scenes of *L'Ève future*, Edison laments that his recent invention of the phonograph makes it all the more frustrating that one cannot hear the voices and sounds of earlier eras. In addition to Alchimedes, the spoken words of Aristotle, Pythagoras, the building noises

that accompanied the engineers of Karnac and the architects of Angkor Wat will never be heard by the modern world (60–61). Edison is listing his predecessors in discovery. He does not imagine himself a rebel or a renegade from tradition, but very much someone building, albeit with better tools, on the inspiration and perspiration of those who have come before him. What characterizes the majority of the people to whom he refers in this section is that their genius was in the practical sphere, which corresponds with Edison's own talents. While the American is certainly a scientist, Villiers tends to refer to him as "le grand mécanicien" (44), "l'électricien" (48), and even "le professeur" (50), rather than as a pure scientist. Edison's genius was to transform the abstract and theoretical into the practical. Not only did the real Edison invent the light bulb, he also created the means of safely distributing electrical currents across relatively large spaces, such as the Gare Saint-Lazare and the Palais Garnier.

Later in the novel, when Edison wishes to honor more recent researchers who had experimented with the possibility of creating an android, he lists predecessors ranging from the Middle Ages (Albert the Great) to the middle of the nineteenth century (Leonard Maelzel) (120). Here again we are dealing with men who, however benightedly, sought to extend the frontiers of human knowledge. Villiers seems intent upon placing the "sorcerer of Menlo Park" in a daring, distinguished tradition of scientific inquiry leading to practical results. Edison is indeed a bit of a sorcerer.

The use of the sobriquet "sorcerer of Menlo Park" is not fortuitous. The word "sorcerer" has more than the whiff of the diabolic; it conjures up images of warlocks and satanic activities, and certainly Villiers's application of the term to Edison does not initially appear to be a form of flattery. More recently, one critic was moved to suggest that in the person of Edison, Villiers "se moquait du sorcier moderne" (Jacques-Henry Bornecque, 108), and A.W. Raitt proposed that Villiers may have been associating Edison with alchemy (185). Yet such totally negative assessments of sorcerers and alchemists are somewhat simplistic. Medieval sorcery was a primitive form of science whose practitioners were trying to unlock the secrets of the world with the very limited tools at their disposal. Whatever their more questionable activities might have been, these people were attempting to conduct experiments, seeking to explore the nature of the universe. Whether Villiers intended it or not, his choice of the word "sorcerer" and then the names he associated with it in *L'Ève future*, place the notion of sorcery in the scientific tradition.

In a moment of excitement and admiration for Edison, Lord Ewald proclaims that “il me semble que je me trouve chez Flamel, Paracelse ou Raymond Lulle” (122). All three were medieval researchers considered notorious sorcerers in some circles but distinguished researchers in others. They might have indulged in what today would be considered dubious experiments, but it would be unfair to dismiss them as charlatans or swindlers. They were the scientists of their era and, along with their colleagues mentioned above, they function in this novel to establish Edison’s credibility as a legitimate researcher, a man working in a tradition that dates back to the earliest epochs of Western civilization. Thus the statement by the otherwise insightful Max Daireaux that *L’Ève future* is “une œuvre ... où la science ne compte pas” (400) is quite misleading. Without a sure grasp of Edison’s standing in his field and the proud tradition of which he is part, it would not be possible to fully understand the enormity of his error, the effort to create a simplified version of a human being, nor the fatal weakness which caused it.

Another aspect of *L’Ève future* that seems to have led to some confusion and potential misunderstanding of Edison are the references to God. While the real Thomas A. Edison was a free thinker and probably an atheist, Villiers’s Edison defends a more nuanced position. For him the existence of God is a personal matter: “Dieu, comme toute pensée, n’est dans l’Homme que selon l’individu. Nul ne sait où commence l’Illusion, ni en quoi consiste la Réalité” (66–67). Yet since the concept of God is “la plus sublime ... possible” (67), to dismiss “de ses pensées l’idée d’un Dieu ne signifie pas autre chose que se décapiter gratuitement l’esprit” (67). In light of these remarks, the fictional Edison would appear to be something of a deist, a man without a particular religious affiliation but nevertheless interested in entertaining the notion of God in order to add a fuller, more intellectually and artistically pleasing, dimension to life. This does not seem to be someone particularly interested in challenging the Divinity.

Yet Edison has at times been viewed precisely as a theological maverick, a scorner of divine supremacy. According to Marta Giné-Janer, “Edison définit son entreprise créatrice comme un terrible défi lancé à Dieu” (111). Villiers’s Edison never really says he is challenging God, but two comments in the text might serve to encourage that viewpoint. When first broaching the subject of creating an android, Edison explains his aim in language redolent with Biblical overtones. He intends “faire sortir du limon de l’actuelle Science Humaine un Être *fait à notre image*, et qui

nous sera ... *ce que nous sommes à Dieu*" (125; emphasis original). Edison is not putting himself on an equal plane with God. He is saying that the android will be in relation to him what humans are in relation to God. The scientist, like God, will create, but the scientist's achievement will always be inferior to that of the Godhead. The inventor will forever stand in relation to God as an inferior, not the equal of the Divine. The android, whatever its form, coverings, and programming, will just be a machine, forever deprived of the free will that supposedly distinguishes mankind from everything else in the universe. To put the matter differently, one can say that from a religious perspective all scientific activity is an effort to wrest knowledge from the mystery of the world God created. In this respect, the scientist is trying to replicate what God does, but only in the way that pious Christians strive to emulate God by modeling their conduct on the Supreme Being while knowing full well they will never attain divine perfection. Villiers's language is certainly overblown, but in no way do Edison's activities constitute a challenge to God's supremacy.

In the second comment, Lord Ewald says of the construction of the android that "*il me semble que ce serait tenter ... Dieu*" (127; emphasis original). In light of Edison's previous remarks about his work in relation to God, Ewald seems not to have understood that Edison's enterprise is much more scientific than theological. However, in fairness to the British noble, Edison's response only heightens the melodrama of the moment. Lord Ewald wants to know whether Edison will provide the android with "*une intelligence*" (127). Edison replies, "*Une intelligence? non: L'INTELLIGENCE, oui*" (127; emphasis original). This is an expression of hubris on Edison's part. While he may be able to fabricate some sort of mechanical brain that will be equal or superior to the human variety, his android will never really be a human being. The best that Hadaly will be able to do is to pass for a woman. She may fool the people she encounters in society, but social events will be rare since Lord Ewald wants to limit her contact with the outside world. He intends for her to stay with him at his secluded country estate in England. The two people who are aware of Hadaly's origins know that she is a highly perfected machine and nothing more. As Lord Ewald later learns, the android will be programmed to respond without fail to his personal, male inclinations and desires. The android will never have the capacity for the sorts of complex and even contradictory reactions presented by human beings. One can only imagine a God more amused than challenged by Edison's "creation."

To the extent that Edison the scientist appears at times to be a more titanic over-reacher (to use Harry Levin's expression) than he usually appears, this is due in large measure to Villiers's often hyperbolic style. Individual passages or analogies in the novel imply meanings and directions that are at odds with the final version of the text. A good example is the implication that Lord Ewald's relation to Edison is comparable to Faust's rapport with Mephistopheles. The Faustian ambiance begins in the *Avis au Lecteur*, where Goethe's *Faust* is first mentioned, and many overt references to the play appeared in the part of the novel entitled "Le Pacte," which Villiers eventually suppressed (Raitt, 197-198).

That Villiers was interested in incorporating elements of *Faust* into *L'Ève future* seems undeniable, but as a result of his cuts and rewritings, the Faustian analogy with Lord Ewald and Edison is tenuous. Quite aside from the age difference between the young Lord Ewald and the elderly Faust, the latter is a scientist and thinker of some repute whereas Lord Ewald is little more than an aesthete. Faust had substance and great intellectual curiosity, whereas Lord Ewald is more a connoisseur of strong sensations and languishing poses. The deist Edison is no Mephistopheles. His aim is not to damn, but to help Lord Ewald, whose happiness, rather than soul, is at stake. Edison agrees to aid Ewald not for nefarious reasons but out of a combination of friendship and scientific curiosity. Villiers was certainly correct to repress the section called "Le pacte" because Lord Ewald and Edison's covenant is not a diabolical bargain but, much more modestly, an agreement that the young man will receive a mechanical replica of a woman approximating Alicia Clary.

While Ewald and Edison are clearly not modern-day equivalents of Faust and Mephistopheles, they are joined together in a different manner. Ewald's extreme and negative views about women associate him with dandyism, a fashion of the latter part of the nineteenth century that influenced some writers but which also had an impressive following among artistically inclined, indolent, wealthy young men. Baudelaire published the essay *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* in 1863, which contains his celebrated portrait of the dandy, of which Lord Ewald is the perfect physical and intellectual embodiment: "élevé dans le luxe et accoutumé à l'obéissance ... d'une physionomie distincte ... pas d'autre état que de cultiver l'idée du beau dans [sa] personne, de satisfaire [ses] passions, de sentir et de penser" (*Le Peintre*, 1177, *Oeuvres complètes*). The dandy's major activity is love, but this exalted emotion must never "devient une

répugnante *utilité*” (1178; emphasis original). Baudelaire’s opinion that the aesthetic climate of England is more favorable to dandyism than in France might help account for Ewald’s country of origin, at the same time as the English Lord’s passivity heightens the reader’s sense of the dynamism associated with the industrious American.<sup>12</sup>

Edison is, of course, far removed physically and intellectually from dandyism, except in one powerful respect. The reason he so easily accepted Ewald’s view of Alicia, and was capable of evincing such hatred for Evelyn Habal, is that he shares, consciously or not, the dandy’s view of women as described by Baudelaire. Edison acted out these views with regard to Evelyn, just as Ewald did concerning Alicia. The French poet describes *la femme* as “*un bel animal ... pour qui et par qui se font et se défont les fortunes*” (1181; emphasis original). She is “*une divinité, un astre ... une espèce d’idole, stupide peut-être, mais éblouissante enchanteresse qui tient les destinées et les volontés suspendues à ses regards*” (1181). While the truly beautiful woman uses make-up to highlight her perfections, lesser creatures paint themselves to “*se cacher*” (1185).

According to Baudelaire, gifted actresses playing sublime roles are to be most admired, even though they must walk a very fine line: “*Si par un côté la comédienne touche à la courtisane, par l’autre elle confine au poète*” (1188). An artist in the theater, but also a disturbing sexual presence on and off stage, Baudelaire’s actress essentially finds herself in an impossible situation: she cannot be the exquisite object of male desire outside of the roles she plays. Her beauty will remain the same, but in most instances she will not have access to the verbal charm and wit provided by those roles. Baudelaire disposes of the rest of womankind in a couple of brief paragraphs. Essentially, they all aspire to achieve the grandeur of the great actresses, and most fail to varying degrees. At the very bottom of the female hierarchy one finds the *foemina simplex*, the streetwalker whose body and bearing display the “*hideuse santé de la fainéantise*” (1189).

Evelyn Habal is obviously a *foemina simplex*, her unappealing physicality cloaked by make-up and other artifices. She is the woman who destroyed the health and fortune of Mr. Anderson. Alicia is the not-very-bright *divinité* whose *astre* loses its sheen when the theater lights go up. As Ross Chambers notes, “*Alicia ... comédienne malgré elle, n’est parfaitement belle que quand elle joue un rôle sublime*” (141). Each woman embodies aspects of Baudelaire’s description of the modern female. Hadaly was invented to do men’s bidding, a point emphasized on several occasions, but

most strikingly when, after Ewald accepts her, she responds in language redolent of the Annunciation: “Qu’il en soit donc selon sa volonté” (115). Edison has programmed the android in such a way that for Hadaly man is God. Evelyn and Alicia are also in large measure creations of two men’s narrow understanding of women. Edison displays no interest in learning what might have pushed Evelyn into the profession she practices, and Ewald refuses to entertain the possibility that Alicia might be more at ease as a human being than as an artwork.

Edison’s refusal to appreciate the depth and complexity of women manifests itself in two ways. The obvious one is in his overt attitude toward women, but more subtly it is implicit in the nature of the project he has chosen to undertake: the manufacture of a robot that will resemble a woman in physical appearance, voice, and odor, but which will be deliberately equipped with a very limited emotional and intellectual range. Edison cannot imagine a woman having any purpose in life except to serve a man; a woman, when not dangerous to men, as was Evelyn Habal, is an ever-obedient servant to male needs. In Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, another brilliant inventor manages to create life but for some reason neglects to make his creation physically attractive. There is a similar conundrum in *L’Ève future*. Edison can replicate a woman and can even program his android with a degree of sensitivity, and a variety of emotions. Yet why are the sensitivity and emotions so limited? Edison expressly built in Hadaly’s emotional and intellectual dependence. For him a woman is either a virgin (Hadaly) or a whore (Evelyn Habal),<sup>13</sup> and, outside these extremes, real women can only distinguish themselves in the realm of art, where their true selves are subsumed into the roles they play, the songs they sing, or the paintings or sculptures they inspire. Lord Ewald claims that Alicia Clary’s soul is not the equal of her body. This assertion will prove to be as simplistic as it is unjust. However, it is absolutely true when applied to Hadaly.

If Edison’s personal opinion of women is marked by dandyism, his technical skills remain quite American. The Edison who appears in *L’Ève future* has without a doubt the mechanical ability to assemble a lifelike robot, and in fact Villiers displays a sufficiently impressive array of pseudo-scientific jargon to allow the reader to believe, at least for the duration of the novel, that such a machine could actually be constructed. The inventor’s error is not of a mechanical nature but rather a conceptual one. Had his aim been simply to build the latest version of the elaborate mechanical toy that his predecessors, such as Léonard Maelzel, had constructed for



the amusement and admiration of European audiences, the results might have been instructive in terms of applied science. Maelzel once amazed onlookers by fabricating an entire orchestra of automatons but nobody, except perhaps impressionable children, could have believed they were real. Edison's ambition is much greater. He wants to create an android who could pass for a living woman to the outside world, but who will possess nothing of what might be termed female strength or, for that matter, human foibles. While one might characterize such a project as grandiose, satanic, magnificent, or some equally awe-filled adjective, it is really shallow and infantile. His description of the process of fabricating Halady makes evident his own insecurities.

Like a child frightened by the enormity of the world he finds himself in and the apprehensiveness it engenders, Edison proposes "une positive, prestigieuse, et toujours fidèle Illusion" to replace "la mensongère, médiocre et toujours changeante Réalité" (267). The aim is not to replicate reality, but to escape it. The ultimate beauty of Hadaly is not in her proximity to humanity, but in her great distance from everything that constitutes human existence, starting with its physicality: "L'Andréide ... n'offre jamais en rien de l'affreuse impression que donne le spectacle du *processus vital* de notre organisme" (214-215; emphasis original). Edison explains to Lord Ewald: "L'Andréide ne connaît ni la vie, ni la maladie, ni la mort. Elle est au-dessus de toutes les imperfections et de toutes les servitudes! Elle garde la beauté du rêve! ... Jamais son cœur ne change; elle n'en a pas" (252-253). Consequently, it will be Ewald's duty, according to Edison, "de la détruire à l'heure de votre mort" (253).

If Edison's invention will not exactly be a toy comparable to the earlier devices of some of his predecessors, it remains nonetheless a plaything, physically, as well as emotionally and intellectually, but mostly it is a childish fantasy brought into being by an extremely gifted adult for another, less-talented adult. The creation of an android is an undertaking that does not challenge God or evoke comparisons to the diabolic. Instead it exposes the pretention and emotional immaturity of a man, albeit a very brilliant one, ill at ease in an adult universe.

Edison's inability to relate to his fellow humans beyond a superficial level emerges too in the physical distance he maintains between himself and others. Deborah Conygham notes that: "Edison emploie tout moyen de communication comme instrument de séparation entre lui-même et le monde extérieur" (26). When Edison talks to his children or Sowana, it is by

telephone. His laboratory is separated from his home (*L'Ève future*, 40), and, except for the initially impromptu visit of Lord Ewald, he works alone and in isolation: "cette existence d'isolement suffisait à mes ambitions rêveuses et je m'estimais des plus heureux" (74). This sense of self-imposed solitude is further enhanced by the green space of Menlo Park, which consists of "profonds jardins solitaires" (39). Given Edison's lack of rapport with his fellows, Conyngham's comment on the goal of his scientific endeavors is provocative: "Le défaut des inventions d'Edison est qu'elles représentent un progrès quantitatif au lieu de qualitatif" (24). As a judgment on the real Thomas Edison, this would make no sense. The electric light has obviously enhanced the quality of life of millions, as did the pleasure given by the phonograph, and these are but two of the historical Edison's numerous contributions to human betterment. Yet with regard to Villiers's Edison, Conyngham's remark has pertinence. When the fictional Edison talks about his inventions, it is not their ability to help humanity that he stresses. What is at the center of his thoughts when he contemplates his achievements is the way they will enhance science and his own reputation, by making him the contemporary embodiment of progress in the field. For Edison, the human dimension of an experiment is always secondary to its scientific value; he has no problem with the end justifying the means: "Il ne soucie que du but grandiose; les détails ne méritent à ses yeux que le regard dont un philosophe honore toujours trop de pures contingences" (57). While as a philosophical position this premise is certainly debatable, its enunciation in the novel is followed immediately by a scene which confirms Edison's insistence that the scientific goal is paramount and provides a striking example of emotional obtuseness. It concerns a train wreck.

Edison had invented a new and powerful mechanism which was supposed to prevent railroad crashes. In principle, his invention was programmed to work perfectly, but due to human errors committed by train engineers, who did the opposite of what Edison instructed, two trains collided. The accident claimed "plusieurs centaines de victimes" (57). Edison's reaction focuses on the scientific setback. Concerning those who had inadvertently provoked the accident, all he could manage was "Stupides maladroits" (58), and a later expression of puzzlement that "les Américains hésitent à se risquer en une seconde expérience et ... au besoin dans une troisième" (58). What this scene so vividly demonstrates is not so much callowness on the inventor's part, although that is certainly evident. It primarily illustrates Edison's inability to grasp the human dimension of

his experiment, to understand that people are fallible and rarely, if ever, possess his intellectual abilities, but that this does not render their lives unimportant. For him, efficient performance and obedience to the rules he has established trump more humanistic considerations.

Edison's implicit disdain for human beings and their foibles is most strikingly illustrated in his treatment of women. There are three principal female figures in *L'Ève future*. They are the seductress, Evelyn Habal, the android, Haladay, and the actress/singer, Alicia Clary. There is also the mostly comatose Mrs. Edward Anderson and the mysterious female presence of Sowana, a last-minute addition to the novel.<sup>14</sup> While the three main women in the novel are very different, they have one thing in common: they are all products of artifice. Evelyn Habal's fatal beauty is based on falseness. She wears a wig, has dentures, paints her face and body, and bathes herself in perfumes to mask her body's smell. Alicia Clary's beauty and vocal attributes are only at their fullest when she is on stage, playing a role. In addition to being a machine, Hadaly is, according to Ross Chambers, "une actrice, comme Alicia" (41). Of the three, Evelyn Habal is the greatest object of Edison's contempt due to her deception of Edward Anderson, his friend. Yet her difference from the other women is only one of degree. Edison and Lord Ewald condemn Evelyn Habal and Alicia, because they are women of their century, and praise Haladay, because she is a male invention.

Since the physical descriptions of Evelyn Habal strain credibility, it being improbable that such a synthetic creature could have seduced and ruined any man, it is hard to give her much credence; she is much more of a caricature than a viable character. Yet she has a significant function in the novel. Edison's rage at the woman who destroyed his friend makes it easier to understand the ease with which he later adopts Lord Ewald's view of Alicia. Evelyn Habal is everything Edison detests in the modern women: she is independent of male control, she has her own ambitions that do not conform to his (and Lord Ewald's) stereotype of what a woman should be, and, most of all, she is able to assert power over men. Not surprisingly, Evelyn Habal is the reason he created Hadaly (176), since "*Le propre de l'Andréide est d'annuler ... [in a man] de désirs bas et dégradants*" (209-210; emphasis original).

To the extent that it can be said there is a woman at the center of this novel, it is not really the female equivalent, Hadaly, but the much-maligned Alicia Clary. When Ewald, perhaps in a charitable mood, seeks to characterize Alicia Clary, he concedes to Edison that she is not *bête* (90) but rather

*sotte* (91). While the clear distinction between these two terms might be lost on many of us, for Lord Ewald it is a reflection of Alicia Clary's essential mediocrity (91). While she is an extremely beautiful woman with a fine stage presence and a lovely voice, once removed from the theatrical setting, her true nature emerges, and she loses all her charm. There is a sharp contrast between her body and her soul (77-78).

Lord Ewald's list of Alicia Clary's shortcomings is impressive. She dislikes contemporary music, represented by Wagner (whom Baudelaire worshipped) and Carl Maria von Weber's *Freischütz*. Although she bears a striking physical resemblance to the Venus de Milo, when she is brought to the Louvre to see the statue, the only thing that strikes Miss Clary is that her prototype lacks arms. While she has theatrical and vocal gifts, they are merely her "gagne-pain" (83), even though she occasionally affects to be a more ethereal *artiste*, despite having no understanding of art as a higher calling. She is at times given to thinking, an activity that does not please Lord Ewald: "Si elle était privée de toute pensée, je pourrais la comprendre" (93). She is also "une femme d'*esprit*" (91; emphasis original), an expression Lord Ewald understands as pejorative: "L'*esprit*, dans le sens moderne, c'est l'ennemi de l'intelligence" (91). In sum, for Lord Ewald, Alicia Clary is at once "la déesse Raison" (92), and the "une Déesse bourgeoise" (86), two major faults which brand her a modern woman, a person whom neither Edison nor Ewald can abide.

Scholarship devoted to *L'Ève future* has tended to share Ewald's opinion that Alicia is *sotte*,<sup>15</sup> yet I do not think the text supports such a judgment. The aristocrat sees her as *une femme d'esprit*, the sort of woman a decadent like Ewald could not endure. Among the many unjust judgments concerning Alicia Clary, this reproach maligns her by crediting her with too much intelligence and independence. Yet in no way can she be associated with women who refused to be placed on a pedestal by men seeking to keep them in a straightjacket in the guise of adoring them. Alicia Clary is no such *pétroleuse*. She is independent only by circumstances and intelligent in an average way. She may be a great beauty, but she is not a great intellect and only intermittently a great artist. She is not *sotte*. She is an ordinary, poorly educated young woman determined to create a decent life for herself, despite the numerous obstacles besetting women of her background in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

The portrait of Alicia Clary that appears in *L'Ève future* is created largely by one man (Lord Ewald) and then endorsed by another (Edison). The

reason their view of her can initially appear rather compelling is that, as Gwenhaël Ponnau remarks, “Alicia Clary ... parle ... assez peu” (81). Since she is unaware that she is an object of scorn, she sees no need to defend herself. Yet, while her words are hardly plentiful, her few comments, along with the story of her life, present a different picture from the male image of her.

That Alicia does not enjoy contemporary music speaks to her taste, not her intelligence. Born into a family of modest means, she quickly realized that only she could improve her lot in life. In a word, she is in a situation quite similar to that of Noémi Nioche in *The American*. While both are beauties, Alicia does not have the French woman’s cold, calculating spirit; but she does possess talents for acting and singing. Both women learned to live by their wits. For Lord Ewald, Alicia possessed “une candeur cynique” (85), a pejorative expression which might otherwise be formulated as the clear-eyed capacity to judge her social situation honestly and then take steps to improve it.<sup>16</sup> If Alicia is struck by the Venus de Milo’s lack of arms, it is partly because she understands that a woman’s beauty involves all of her physical attributes. What might seem impressive in a statue would not further her career in the theater or society.<sup>17</sup>

Miss Clary confides to Edison that “je veux être célèbre – puisqu’il paraît que c’est à la mode” (272). This statement is met with disdain from both the inventor and Ewald, but if a woman like Alicia, with few options, is to succeed, she must be noticed and admired. Once again, her situation resembles Noémi’s: her physical attributes will not last forever, so she must exploit them to the maximum in the present, and then hope to find a comfortable situation later where she will be supported by a man. Both women hover on the edge of bourgeois society and each seeks a means of consolidating her position in that world or, as in Alicia’s case, perhaps doing a bit better. Noémi chose to become a courtesan because the family fortune precluded an advantageous match, and the reader has every right to imagine that she will find a means of setting herself up for a comfortable old age. There is nothing in Alicia’s comportment toward Ewald that suggests she is madly in love with him, but he does represent for her the possibility of an auspicious marriage. Neither Ewald nor Edison can appreciate that Alicia Clary is not a fool. She is indeed a very modern woman, all too conscious of her limited options in the society of her day. She has calculated her assets and will attempt to use them wisely.

The aura of darkness which hovers over *L'Ève future* is certainly an image for all the riddles of the universe that science has yet to resolve, but it also suggests the dangers of striving to resolve these enigmas in an imperfect way. It is difficult enough for psychiatrists to understand the complexities of the human mind, much less for their colleagues in more mechanical disciplines to attempt to replicate its workings in a machine. Yet Edison does not attempt this latter, extremely ambitious task. He strives instead to build a machine capable of reproducing the few aspects of the feminine that he, the "sorcerer of Menlo Park," deems worthy of preserving. In his own way, Edison succeeds, but only by fabricating a caricature of a woman. At the beginning of *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, Baudelaire describes the state of genius as "l'enfance retrouvée à volonté" (1159). Taken out of its context and applied to the main character in *L'Ève future*, the expression seems perfectly apposite. This Edison is an intellectual giant yet an emotional child.

However limited Edison the individual may be, Edison the inventor is a stranger to doubt and insecurity; his self-confidence never wavers. As the novel ends, after learning of Hadaly's destruction, the suddenly silent Edison contemplates the stars in the night sky. This silence would seem to suggest that the inventor has abandoned any desire to rebuild another android. Indeed, he earlier said as much: "je ne fabriquerai plus d'andréides. Mes souterrains me serviront à me cacher pour y mûrir d'autres découvertes" (344-345). Yet this is also a man who responded to a murderous train wreck only with annoyance at the engineers whose errors had compromised his experiment and expressions of surprise that the experiment would not be repeated. Who is to say that this brilliant man might not in time return to his work on androids? Hadaly's demise was not due to any scientific mistake on his part; his machine functioned just as he intended. Edison can to some degree harness the elements, but he cannot control them. Wind and fire, symbols of Nature's overwhelming power, destroyed the ship transporting the android to England. Edison possesses the formulas and machinery needed to build a second Hadaly. Given the inventor's personality and scientific curiosity, one cannot say with certainty what could happen if he encountered a second Lord Ewald, or if the first, instead of ending his life, returned to Menlo Park as distraught as he was the first time.

Although the Edison in *L'Ève future* represents some of the finest qualities of citizens of the United States, the French did not without justification fear the powerful, ingenious Americans as much as they might have admired

them. This anxiety had its origins in a tradition of anti-Americanism that dates back to the eighteenth century and for Villiers's generation had been most recently enhanced by the way the Civil War was presented in French newspapers and revues. Baudelaire based his dislike of the United States on his rather selective understanding of the way Americans had treated Edgar Allan Poe. In *L'Ève future*, Villiers took another approach. He only dealt with a single American, but chose to base his fictional main character on a man who was probably the best-known American in France. Villiers's novel more than allows for Edison's genius but also highlights a shallowness akin to childishness, especially with regard to female emotions and behavior.

The application of the Franco-American paradigm presented earlier in this study is limited here, but nonetheless significant. *L'Ève future* has no French characters, and takes place in the United States rather than in Europe. What it does feature is an American at once strong and successful, yet seriously, even dangerously, naïve. However, the vitality of the paradigm stems more from another factor in the novel, namely the French image of Edison, here represented by Villiers's voice. In analyzing the main character's role in the novel, in the interest of clarity, I have had recourse to dichotomies: professional-personal, adult-child, wise-immature, scientist-tinkerer, rather than in each case emphasizing the quicksilver nature of these brandings. It was important to draw these distinctions as they occurred, but not to distract from the precise argument of the moment by constantly calling attention to their instability. In Villiers's novel, Edison is rarely portrayed as one without the other, his qualities and faults are intertwined; together they are an integral part of his genius as Villiers imagined it. Only circumstances provide the momentary dominance of one over the other. Edison is not two-faced; he is multifaceted, and the disparate aspects of his personality are constantly at odds. His volatile nature, his brilliance, and his superficiality drive the main issue raised in my treatment of *L'Ève future*, namely, what does the future hold for France in a world seemingly destined to be dominated by a nation of such confident, gifted, and immature people?

## Notes

1 This event took place three years after the publication of *L'Ève future*, but Edison's role in and around the exhibition attests to the enormous and growing prestige he enjoyed in France around the time Villiers published his novel.

2 Perhaps to demonstrate that Americans were capable of combining the artistic and the commercial at the Exposition Universelle, “a New York confectioner provided a full-size replica of the Venus de Milo in chocolate” (McCullough, 415). The Venus de Milo plays a less appetizing role in *L'Ève future*.

3 With regard to French achievements in the scientific realm, Sudhir Hazareesingh writes: “Les dernières décennies des Lumières marquent l’apogée de l’influence politique et culturelle de la France en Europe, tout particulièrement dans le domaine scientifique” (137). American scientific successes provide another example of the nation’s increasingly dominant position *vis-à-vis* France in the nineteenth century.

4 Here again we encounter the influence of de Tocqueville, who questioned the capacity of Americans to ever create great art. It is a tribute to de Tocqueville’s prestige that this concern was shared at times by prominent Americans. In 1834, when four panels in Washington’s Capitol Rotunda had been set aside for historical paintings, John Quincy Adams questioned whether American artists would be up to the task (McCullough, 149).

5 Philippe Roger points out in *L’ennemi américain: généalogie de l’antiaméricanisme français* that the term *antiaméricanisme* “est le seul substantive en ‘anti-’ formé en français sur un nom de pays” (16).

6 Napoleon’s Mexican adventure failed in part due to an angry Lincoln’s refusal to recognize Maximilian’s sovereignty, thus assuring the collapse of the imperial project. This fiasco and the United States’ role in it would exacerbate tensions between France and the North.

7 This fear of burgeoning American strength was not unjustified. In terms of geographical expansion and population growth, the United States was something of a phenomenon: “Between 1800 and 1850, twenty-one states were admitted to the Union, for a total of thirty-four; the national population exploded, going from around 4 million to 31.5 million” (Philip Gura, xi).

8 A.W. Raitt remarks in *Villiers de l’Isle-Adam et le mouvement symboliste* that “La moitié de l’œuvre de Villiers consiste donc en une campagne féroce contre les idées de son temps” (165).

9 Concerning Villiers’s appreciation of his era, Jacques Noiray remarks that “ce qu’il possède au plus haut point, c’est le sens de la modernité” (11).

10 According to Joseph de Maistre, “Il y a dans la Révolution française un caractère *satanique* qui la distingue de tout ce qu’on a vu et peut-être de tout ce qu’on verra” (Compagnon, 103; emphasis original).

11 “Le christianisme, et surtout le catholicisme, étant ... un système complet de répression des tendances dépravées de l’homme, est le plus grand élément d’Ordre Social. ... Le Catholicisme et la Royauté sont deux principes jumeaux. ... la Religion, la Monarchie, deux nécessités que les événements contemporains proclament” (Balzac, cited in Compagnon, 73).



*The Splendor and Misery of the American Scientist*

12 The choice of Ewald's national identity concerns the implicit distinction made in the novel between the English and the American character. Lord Ewald is representative of young men of his social class: wealthy, idle, bored, and inclined to dandyism. As such, he constitutes an image of an England quite similar to France, to the extent that their prestigious accomplishments in the past and the present (the nineteenth century) have peaked and are beginning to fade. Edison projects in a unique and powerful way the dynamism and talents associated with Americans, who increasingly incarnate the direction that modernity will take.

13 Mrs. Anderson is of course neither, but she is comatose throughout much of the novel and thus primarily an object of pity.

14 In her comatose state, Mrs. Anderson turns out to be something of a *voyante*. Edison eventually combines her human form with a scientific creation and the result is Sowana, a creature of electrical currents. Integrated into Mrs. Anderson's body, Sowana has a limited function; she helps collect elements from Alicia Clary that will eventually enter into Hadaly's mechanisms. At the end of the novel, Mrs. Anderson's soul is somehow infused into Hadaly, which leads to Anderson's death. Sowana's role remains ill-defined in the novel and certainly not well integrated into the story.

15 Consider a remark of a very distinguished critic of Villiers, Jacques Noiray, in his introduction to *L'Ève future*, that Alicia Clary is "merveilleusement belle et désespérément sotte" (85).

16 Since there is an obvious correlation between the "Eve" in Evelyn Habal's name and the Biblical figure, it has been tempting to view Evelyn as the old, sinful Eve who contrasts with Hadaly, the improved, futurist version of womanhood. In a similar spirit, one might wish to find in Alicia's surname, Clary, a pun on "clarity" which, I would argue, reflects the young woman's straightforward nature.

17 Lord Ewald would probably have been very happy if he could contemplate her as one does a statue. The only inconvenience here, as Ewald realizes, is that she would have to be dead and thus subject to decomposition (101-102).

## CHAPTER III

# The American Woman and the Invention of Paris

### *The Custom of the Country*

L'Américaine est l'avenir (déjà présent) de l'Américain.

(Charles Crosnier de Varigny, cited in  
Philippe Roger, *L'ennemi américain*)

“Undine Spragg – how *can* you?” are the opening words of *The Custom of the Country*. They reflect Mrs. Spragg’s exasperated sense of wonder and confusion concerning her daughter’s comportment. These sentiments are often shared by the reader as well. Who is this undereducated, small-town girl who claws her way to the top of the American expatriate world and becomes a leading figure in Parisian society? Why does she act the way she does? What complicates the response to these questions is that the story initially appears to supply a very straightforward answer, but which, upon examination, proves to be dissatisfying.

This novel, published in 1913, might easily be read as the story of a woman deeply frustrated by her economic marginalization in a man’s world. A character in *The Custom of the Country*, Charles Bowen, gives a certain credence to this approach when he describes the infantilization of society women in the Gilded Age. According to Bowen, these women are loved and admired by husbands who nevertheless do not take them seriously:

The fact is the average American looks down on his wife. ... It’s normal for a man to work hard for a woman – what’s abnormal is his not caring to tell her anything about it [his job] ... Why haven’t we

taught our women to take an interest in our work. Simply because we don't take enough interest in *them*. (757; emphasis original)

Bowen's point is that the American socialite is frustrated because she is permitted to play no role other than a decorative one in her husband's accumulation and enhancement of wealth. She is kept away from his financial affairs and confined, as it were, to a gilded pedestal. This is, Bowen argues, a source of resentment and frustration among women and helps account in part for the burgeoning divorce rate. As a description of the social position of the well-off woman at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, this portrait may well have merit, although it has been contested.<sup>1</sup> Yet it is hardly applicable to Undine, who both embraces and exploits the limits of her social position. She questions neither her role as a female whose beauty is an asset that enhances the reputation of her male companion nor the function in general of women in society. Annoyance at unforeseen obstacles, more than anger, characterizes Undine's attitude toward her social situation, and her petulance can be easily soothed by an immediate influx of money, a substance she finds indispensable but whose origins are of no interest to her. For Undine, "Money disappeared, but always returned" (948). Mrs. Fairford, Bowen's interlocutor, succinctly and astutely remarks, concerning Undine's putative need to be informed of the family's financial situation by her husband, that "She'd be bored to death if he did" (757).

It is Undine's insatiable craving for money and what it brings which accounts in part for the intensity of the moral condemnation her character has provoked in readers and critics from the time of the novel's publication until today. In an article entitled "Landscape with the Fall of Undine," Margaret Murray provides excerpts from the reviews of Wharton's novel that appeared shortly after its publication. According to the *New York Times* of the day, Undine "is merely greed personified - without ... heart, conscience, sense of honor or sense of humor ... scruples never enter her head" (118). The *Saturday Review* of the era echoed these sentiments about Undine: "She does not have a single redeeming feature" and, if that were not sufficiently damning, the *Saturday Review* writer adds, "Mrs. Wharton has assembled as many detestable people as it is possible to pack between the covers of a six hundred page novel" (118). Murray sums up the initial critical reaction to Undine as follows: "Contemporary critics were at pains to point out how thoroughly distasteful Undine was to them" (118).

Over a hundred years later, the sense of moral opprobrium which Undine generates has remained largely unabated. For Robin Peel, “Undine is one of the terrible engines of destruction that horrified Wharton and, what is worse, she stands as a metaphor for the future” (203). Carol Wershoren finds that Undine “does not seek human contact or emotions from others, because she sees others only in terms of their usefulness” (59), while Blake Nevius considers her “the spirit of materialism incarnate” (152). In a similar vein, Cynthia Griffin Wolff writes that the novel has “no moral center” (232) and that Undine is a “creature without a soul ... the perfect and monstrous emblem of the time” (233).

These condemnations are powerful, but whether they provide an accurate appraisal of the character is another matter. The “real” Undine would certainly be crass, vulgar, and dishonest, but if the fictional Undine continues to fascinate as much as outrage, that is in large measure due to the way the text directs attention less to Undine’s numerous flaws (although they are certainly indicated) than to her unrelenting pursuit of social success and the delight this engenders in her. To appreciate this subtle shift in focus involves first of all separating authorial intent from the finished text. While it cannot be doubted that Wharton was appalled by what her main character represented and sought to condemn her conduct, her portrait of Undine is not primarily moralistic. The novel clearly focuses on Undine’s achievements rather than on the ethical principles she might have ignored on her way to success. From the very first page, Undine is presented essentially as she will be throughout the novel: egocentric, crass, and ambitious. She will rapidly lose her naivety as she develops her guile. This is the only significant change in her character. Her ambition is intense but what spurs it, other than pure self-interest, remains largely unexamined. In the process of writing *The Custom of the Country*, Wharton seems to have unconsciously shifted the focus from the psychological make-up of the individual character to her actions. There is no effort to delve into Undine’s putative insecurities and only a limited effort to detail the factors which spur her drive for success.<sup>2</sup> While Wharton makes evident the ways in which the young woman’s single-mindedness creates havoc in polite society, wrecks at least two men, and psychologically damages her own child, these activities are not the center of the story; they are collateral damage. The novel’s emphasis is elsewhere.

What characterizes Undine Spragg is not who she is in some profound psychological sense, but what she does; for such a person, failure is

occasionally acceptable, or at least part of a process, provided it proves to be the stepping stone to eventual success. To a greater or lesser degree, all the society women in the novel partake of some of Undine's characteristics, but none is her equal in the intensity of the drive to succeed.

The value of approaching Undine as someone more developed than an allegorical figure, yet lacking in complexity and depth, is twofold. First of all, it moves the discussion away from self-righteous, moralistic conclusions, while remaining closer to the substance of the text. Henry James points toward a plausible explanation of why traditional moral values are not the main concern in *The Custom of the Country*: "We move in an air purged at a stroke of the old sentimental and romantic values" (cited in Walton, 114). The novel is not focused on the sort of complicated individual description or moral dilemmas one might find in earlier fiction, even including Wharton's own *The House of Mirth* (1905), where the heroine's greatest struggle is to know herself and find love. Nor does it dwell at any length on right and wrong. Instead, *The Custom of the Country* centers on what is practical and achievable for a woman; it is not about what a woman should do, but what she can do. The novel is much more descriptive than judgmental. It is certainly a satire of the female American social climber, and while Wharton may well have loathed everything Undine represented, the story she tells nevertheless treats her creation with a grudging respect, tinged with a degree of admiration for her indefatigable spirit.

Secondly, concentrating on Undine in terms of her insatiable ambition, rather than as a totally realistic character, helps account for some of the novel's and the main character's peculiarities. In terms of verisimilitude, Carolyn Wolff has rightly remarked that "the novel's realism is strained almost to the point of collapse" (231), while Blake Nevius has noted that "Psychologically [Undine] ... is the most uncomplicated heroine in Edith Wharton's gallery" (149). One might also add that she remains the most successful. Undine is not very financially astute, yet this ignorance proves no great problem since she is "the only one of Wharton's early heroines to deal successfully ... with social and economic reality" (Ammons, 111).

Certainly Undine has little or no interest in intellectual matters or the arts, except for how they might be used for decorative or manipulative purposes. Her story unfolds at a moment of great financial upheaval in her native country, radical changes precipitated to a great extent by the arrival of robber barons on the scene. Yet Undine displays little interest in any history other than her own. The character Charles Bowen claims

that Undine Spragg represents the success of American capitalism (759), a sentiment Hermione Lee appears to echo when she writes that “Undine may be ignorant of business matters, but she embodies the forces of capitalism” (*Edith Wharton*, 436). Yet nothing in the novel suggests that social forces, as opposed to societal fashions, have molded or are molding her. Certainly she displays no struggle to come to terms with her own identity amid the changes affecting American society as a whole. Her emergence on the scene might well accompany the latest triumph of capitalism, but while she must certainly be to some degree the result of the social agitation around her, the novel forgoes a detailing of the process of her formation and presents Undine as the finished product of that system, a person who never doubts her social values or ambitions, primarily because she never even questions them.

Very few of the socially significant issues of the Gilded Age are presented in the novel, and those which are receive only a tangential development; they serve primarily to make clear the obstacles which Undine confronts and the ways she overcomes them. The historical setting’s primary role is simply to provide the backdrop; while Undine is most definitely a figure of the Gilded Age, the nature of this society, outside of the narrow world in which she functions, is not the focal point. The reader knows the approximate historical period wherein the story unfolds, but the precise timeframe remains somewhat unclear.<sup>3</sup>

It is tempting, but somewhat misleading, to compare Undine to the robber barons, exemplified by her first (and fourth) husband, Elmer Moffatt. She has his drive and the additional asset of being able to bend otherwise powerful men to her will. She has his lack of scruples, along with his relaxed attitude toward ethical issues, and, even more than Elmer, an obsessive focus on her goals. Yet she has an inherent weakness which distinguishes her from the robber barons. Her major handicap is that she is a woman. Although Undine is quite capable of succeeding in a man’s world, she cannot do so without a man; because of gender inequality she will always be in an inferior position, socially speaking. Typically, Undine chooses to work with this situation, rather than rail against its injustice. Nonetheless, she can never have a totally independent triumph. *The Custom of the Country* manages the impressive feat of describing in very concrete terms the force of female ambition, as well as its inherent social weakness, which can be largely overcome, or at least minimized, by the strength of a woman’s character and cunning.

From her earliest appearance in the text, Undine instinctively understands that her goal is not to challenge the social system but to exploit and enjoy it. If it were indeed true that “the American man lavishes his fortune on his wife because he doesn’t know what to do with it” (758), that would be just fine with Undine. She would know what to do with the money. Indeed, she would have more ideas for spending it than her husbands had the means of earning it. In *The Custom of the Country*, Undine usually finds herself surrounded by socially powerful American women with access to great wealth. While none so thoroughly embodies the single-minded pursuit of the social success which money makes possible, the fundamental difference between Undine and the more established socialites is that only she realizes that the pursuit of success never ceases.<sup>4</sup> The achievement of one goal just opens a vista onto the next. Undine Spragg is the quintessence of the female American social climber of boundless ambition who finds in Europe the perfect background to display her one great creation: herself.

Perhaps the most amazing thing about the main character in *The Custom of the Country* is that throughout the novel she displays a staggering amount of unpleasant, parvenu attributes that she manages to turn into assets which facilitate her relentless ascendancy to the top of the social ladder. Undine comes from a little town in rural America,<sup>5</sup> but to reach the heights of the social hierarchy in Apex City is well below her ambitions. Even as a child when she displayed the most lukewarm interest in children’s games (635), Undine had higher aspirations, and they were all focused on social advancement, something she would eventually succeed at brilliantly, though not by virtue of a superior intelligence, which in the traditional understanding of the term she does not possess. She is not thoughtful, has little time for self-reflection or doubt, and is totally self-absorbed: “It never occurred to her that other people’s lives went on when they were out of her range of vision” (894). Her single foray into culture, in an effort to impress Raymond de Chelles’s French friends, involves several trips to the Louvre, which only ends in disaster: “She was disconcerted ... by finding that everybody appeared to know about the things she thought she had discovered, and her comments clearly produced more bewilderment than interest” (980).

If Undine is a woman of little intellectual substance, she is also not particularly imaginative, but this too quickly becomes an advantage as it helps define her goals, which are quite simple. She desires: “what others want” (687). Undine does not have to waste her time figuring out what she

would like to possess or become since those knotty issues have already been resolved by contemporary fashion. Her approach to social success is therefore uncomplicated: to succeed in society one has to share the same aspirations as the social leaders and, ideally, achieve more of these goals than others in her milieu: "Undine always liked to know that what belonged to her was coveted by others" (771). An important tool in this endeavor is most obviously her great beauty, but a striking physical appearance and her delight in "the general homage to her beauty" (683) are not sufficient to achieve her ends, as she learns when she attempts to break into French aristocratic society: "Her entrances were always triumphs; but they had no sequel. As soon as people began to talk they ceased to see her" (979). This setback annoys her and leads her to a quick and unsuccessful attempt at cultivating herself through several disastrous visits to the Louvre. Yet even in this failure what becomes starkly apparent is that "any sense of insufficiency exasperated her" (979). Undine's beauty is ultimately less significant than her other assets, which are her resiliency and determination to succeed. As her father puts it: "I presume you realize it ain't easy to change Undine, once she's set on a thing" (839). She will either learn the rules of success in a particular social context or, failing that, she will aspire to a milieu whose social or financial standing trumps that of the group which denied or limited her access. This is what she does when, partially in response to perceived snubs by French aristocrats, she marries Elmer for the second time. Rather than simply being a striking beauty favored by chance, she "is a hard-headed pragmatist who quickly sizes up the realities of a situation" (Showalter, 91). Whatever Undine Spragg might lack in intellectual curiosity or aesthetic sensibility, she more than counterbalances through guile.<sup>6</sup>

Undine's determination is also enhanced by factors that in most other contexts would be considered faults: her very narrow view of the world and her total freedom from self-doubt. She is fundamentally oblivious to most of the world, including her son, and only takes seriously people who share her aspirations and values: "Undine's estimate of people had always been based on their apparent power of getting what they wanted - provided it came under the categories of things she understood wanting" (988). Largely indifferent to values other than her own, she does not tolerate viewpoints opposed to hers; she finds them to be extremely suspect: "it was impossible for Undine to understand a social organization which did not regard the indulging of women as its first purpose, or to believe that



any one taking another view was not moved by avarice or malice" (980). To provide a concrete example of this attitude, she assumed that the annoying news that her husband Ralph had fallen ill, and thus she must return from Europe immediately, had been cooked up by his mother and sister "to spoil her pleasure" (818). At the end of a discussion with Elmer Moffatt, where Undine tries to convince him of the putative faults of her then husband, Raymond de Chelles, the narrator notes: "It was essential to her at that moment to be told that she was right and that everyone opposed to her was wrong" (996). Remove the "at that moment," and one has a succinct expression of Undine's sense of herself and what she expects from other people.

Lacking superior intelligence or great imagination, what feeds Undine's determination is her suppleness. Initially, it has merely a physical manifestation: "she was always doubling and twisting on herself" (625), but eventually the physical morphs into the social. Dreaming of a circle of dotting admirers, she imagines herself "twisting this way and that, fanning, fidgeting, twitching at her draperies," as she did in real life when people were noticing her. Her incessant movements were not the result of shyness: "she thought it the correct thing to be animated in society, and noise and restlessness were her only notion of vitality" (635–636). The social utility of movement even extended to props. Noticing a woman with a lorgnette, Undine "was instantly struck by the opportunities which this toy presented for graceful wrist movements and supercilious turns of the head" (653). Ultimately the twisting and turning acquire an important internal dimension and become a metaphor for what Robin Peel describes as Undine's infinite adaptability (203), an advantage which allows her to overcome all obstacles standing in the way of her social advancement.<sup>7</sup> Undine is an actress rather than an ordinary individual, a beautiful façade rather than a person. As Mrs. Heeny observes, "I never met a lovelier form" (623). A talented social actress, Undine instinctively appreciates the value of close observation, which leads to astute conclusions: "*It is better to watch than ask questions*" (664; emphasis original), and the need to know her audience, "she caught and stored up every personal reference" (644), in an effort to either emulate or impress the right people. If, at the time of her marriage to Ralph, Undine's "pliancy and variety were imitative rather than spontaneous" (718), as she adjusted to her role-playing over time, she would no longer be "consciously acting a part," since any "new phase was as natural to her" as any other (798). After a period of trials and

occasional errors, by the end of the novel Undine had fashioned herself into a perfectly functioning social machine, a consummate social presence whose triumphs only whet her appetite for more challenges. Her gains and occasional losses clearly parallel the career of the alpha male in the novel, Elmer Moffatt, whose activities and shifting fortunes loosely associate him with the robber barons of the Gilded Age.

Elmer Moffatt is the Christopher Newman of a later, more cynical, and less ethically restricted age. Like his predecessor, he has made and lost considerable amounts of money, and does not seem particularly affected by either his successes or his failures. Elmer learns from both and moves on. Yet if Elmer appears to represent some form of a robber baron in *The Custom of the Country*, this is of secondary importance. Wharton concentrates less on his actual financial machinations or their place in turn-of-the-century American history. She is more concerned with establishing the image which his background and achievements create for him in society, an image which for someone like Mr. Spragg, is largely negative: "He'd go and ring the devil's front door if he thought he could get anything out of him" (784). Many of Moffatt's activities confirm this ominous picture. He is not a reliable business partner, he constantly shifts alliances and investment areas and frequently has trouble with the governmental authorities attempting to verify the legality of his complicated financial transactions. Yet Wharton provides Elmer with a complexity and a degree of sensitivity which will demarcate him from Undine, a person to whom he is so similar in other respects that descriptions of the financier might readily be applied to the socialite.

The similarities begin with their goals. Both aspire not simply to succeed but to be the very best at what they do. Undine wants to be at the very top of the social ladder. Possessions will serve as an indication of her superiority, whereas Elmer aspires "to have the best ...; not just to get ahead of the other fellows, but because I know it when I see it" (976-977). With regard to Elmer's suppleness, Undine notes that "something in his look seemed to promise the capacity to develop into any character he might care to assume" (693). She is referring to any role in the world of high finance. Were the area of exploitation shifted to the realm of high society, these words might readily be applied to herself. Over the course of the novel both Elmer and Undine learn to evaluate the shifting parameters of their respective worlds and then behave in the appropriate manner to insure the highest level of achievement.

Ralph Marvell's description of Elmer seems equally germane to Undine: "He strikes me as the kind of man who develops slowly, needs a big field, and perhaps makes some mistakes, but gets where he wants to in the end" (790). From the outset, Undine and Elmer knew what they wanted to do and where they wanted to be; each had setbacks, but their goal never changed and their confidence that they would succeed never wavered. Undine recognizes this determination in Elmer, because it is also her own. Her admiration for Elmer Moffatt is at once genuine and an expression of her own narcissism.

A final point of similarity between these two strong-willed people involves "collection." Toward the end of the novel, the reader learns that Elmer Moffatt might be the greatest collector in America (1007). The word "collector" is significant. Elmer, like Christopher Newman, is not a connoisseur; he needs others to choose for him the objects which will serve as a vindication of his success and will serve as markers of his social standing. His *objets d'art*, like the books that fill his library but which are inaccessible to a potential reader (1004), are part of an elaborate setting which serves, much as theatrical props, to establish and enhance the achievements of their owner. They tell the world not only that Elmer Moffatt has arrived, but that he has every right to be where he is.

Possessions serve a similar purpose for Undine. In a moment of frustration with Raymond de Chelles, her third husband, she can nonetheless take comfort in her surroundings: "She liked to see such things around her - without any real sense of their meaning she felt them to be the appropriate setting of a pretty woman, to embody something of the rareness and distinction she had always considered she possessed" (984). Confident in herself as a beautiful adornment, she knows she will shine more brightly surrounded by comparable *objets d'art*.

While the similarities between Elmer and Undine are most striking, what is more instructive are their differences, since they establish the woman, rather than the man, as the more driven, potentially dominant figure. Elmer's weakness is his humanity. For all his ambition and ruthless pursuit of wealth, he is not lacking in certain decent human qualities, attributes which Undine does not share.

Although Elmer Moffatt was wronged by the Spraggs, who broke up his marriage with Undine, he does not appear to hold any grudges. Perhaps his business instincts simply dominate his emotions, but there is a consistent pattern of Elmer behaving in a rather decent way. He is no altruist, but

neither is he always a cold-blooded manipulator of others. When Undine's second husband's career is floundering, Elmer provides some advice that makes Ralph, however briefly, a good amount of money. Moffatt profits as well, but so does Undine's rather financially inept spouse. When Ralph is desperate to raise money to prevent Undine reclaiming their son Paul, Moffatt tries to help out. He invests Ralph's money in a financial scheme which, if successful, would provide the requisite cash. The investment does eventually pay off, but too late to help Ralph. Toward the end of the novel, when Undine is railing against her third husband, Raymond de Chelles, whose lack of wealth, coupled with his adherence to family traditions, she finds unbearable, Elmer simply remarks, "His ancestors are *his* business. Wall Street's mine" (1001; emphasis original). However uncouth Elmer appears, he displays intermittently a sensitivity to others that Undine completely lacks. Finally, unlike the boy's mother, Elmer Moffatt evinces a genuine interest in the poor lost soul that is Undine's son from her marriage to Ralph.

In the final sections of *The Custom of the Country*, Elmer displays a very clear-headed, disabused understanding of who Undine is, yet, despite knowing her as he does, the condition he sets for helping Undine is that she marry him, again. This implies a degree of at least residual affection, even love for her, whereas her reasons for reuniting with him are entirely self-interested: "Here was someone who spoke her language, who knew her meanings, who understood instinctively all the deep-seated wants for which her acquired vocabulary had no terms; and as she talked she once more seemed to herself intelligent, eloquent and interesting" (975). Elmer Moffatt has made a brilliant career in financial speculation, but his career is not the sum total of his life, whereas "her career" (861) is Undine's life.

Given Undine Spragg's strength and clear focus on her goals, why then does she fall victim to what in the *fin-de-siècle* United States was increasingly becoming the custom of the country: the widespread practice of women divorcing men?<sup>8</sup> The answer has to do in a variety of ways with her youth, inexperience, and an initially limited understanding of the social world in which she determined to excel. Parental pressure led to Undine's first divorce from Elmer Moffatt but, whatever her state of immaturity, her instincts, even then, were sound. Elmer, young, unproven, without any support outside himself, was indeed the right choice. Somehow she knew that but was unable to act in defense of her instincts.

With Ralph Marvell it was another matter. When she encountered him, Undine did not yet understand the social geography of New York City. Ralph's family had long been pillars of the city's social scene; they were part of a veritable elite,<sup>9</sup> but their influence was already waning. The southern part of Manhattan, where the Dagonets lived (Washington Square) was no longer fashionable, and the family fortune was diminishing. The new money, that of the parvenus busy building flashy new residences, was invested in the Upper East Side, a shift Undine only grasped after her marriage to Ralph: "she had given herself to the exclusive and dowdy when the future belonged to the showy and the promiscuous" (748). Although this marriage was a disaster with tragic consequences for Ralph, Undine did come to appreciate an essential part of herself. If Ralph loved being in isolated places in Italy with his new wife, Undine "was sick to death of being alone with him" (718). In this marriage Undine confirms her true identity as a public figure. She needs to be surrounded by an enraptured audience who view her as an icon of beauty rather than an individual human being. She shuns the intimate and is indifferent to the power of sexual attraction: "she always vaguely wondered why people made 'such a fuss'. ... A cool spirit within her seemed to watch over and regulate her sensations, and leave her capable of measuring the intensity of those she provoked" (816). A creature seemingly immune to the attractions of love, Undine knew that success was all the romance she needed.

Her marriage to Raymond de Chelles takes place at a low point in Undine's life/career. Her failure to persuade Peter Van Degen to marry her after she had broken with Ralph was a serious setback, which by her own estimation had exiled her to the "wilderness" (864). She is, at least for the moment, a fallen woman, and thus anathema to the leaders of New York society. Undine cannot return there nor reasonably expect to find a new husband among the American social elite. However, at approximately the same time, she learns about "other American women, the women who had married into the French aristocracy, and who led, in the high-walled houses beyond the Seine which she had once thought so dull and dingy, a life that made her own seem as undistinguished as the social existence of the Mealey House" (811). With America temporarily off-limits, and French society suddenly the latest ideal, Raymond de Chelles's fate is sealed.

It is at Raymond de Chelles's entrance into the novel that the question of the French and the French way of life begins to become important.

Undine's initial exposure to Europe during her honeymoon with Ralph had proven a serious disappointment:

I don't like Europe ... it's not what I expected, and I think it's all too dreadfully dreary. ... It's dirty and ugly – all the towns we've been to are disgustingly dirty. I loathe the smells and the beggars. I'm sick and tired of the stuffy rooms in the hotels. I thought it would all be so splendid. (722)

Yet shortly thereafter she will be happy and totally at ease in a European context. Undine has not somehow become acclimatized to this different world; she has invented her own France, and particularly her own Paris, an alternative universe consisting of luxury hotels, broad modern boulevards replete with expensive shops, exclusive restaurants, and, for the most part, the company of rich Americans.

Undine “seemed to have mastered her Paris by divination, and between the bounds of the Boulevards and the Place Vendôme she moved at once with supernatural ease” (731). Her Paris has nothing to do with unpleasant places, smells, or people, or with France's political or social reality for that matter. In fact, it has little to do with the real Paris. Her “city of lights” is a fantasy world that revolves around the “central sun of gold” (749), whose focal point is the not very subtly named hotel the Nouveau Luxe. Charles Bowen, whose comments on American high society manage to be moderately insightful while usually a bit off the mark, views the place with unguarded fascination. He finds there the “incorrigible habit of imitating the imitation” (802). For him the Nouveau Luxe represents:

what unbounded material power had devised for the delusion of its leisure; a phantom “society” with all the rules, smirks, gestures of its model, but evoked out of promiscuity and incoherence while the other had been the product of continuity and choice ... the instinct which had driven a class of world-compellers to bind themselves to slavish imitation of the superseded. (802–803)

Bowen is certainly correct that American riches have thrust traditional French society from center stage, but he is more than slightly misleading when he talks of the American parvenus' “slavish imitation” of a once-famous French lifestyle which no longer has currency. Undine and her friends are

not imitating an obsolescent social elite, they are using the French and their country, primarily Paris, as an elaborate stage on which to create something new, a fantasy based only in part on the earlier model.<sup>10</sup> They are not functioning out of cultural insecurity but out of a sense of superiority, a total confidence in their achievements and their right to dictate new standards of behavior. At the basis of this “right” is, of course, money. The culture these people are acquiring has little to do with ideas and everything to do with objects. At the beginning of the novel, Undine and her parents have taken up residence in New York’s Stentorian Hotel which features the “Looney rooms,” complete with portraits of Marie-Antoinette and Madame Lamballe. While it is unclear whether the guests know who Marie-Antoinette was or anything about Madame Lamballe and her relationship to the queen, the question is unimportant. The pictures represent culture and the hotel has them. Hence, those who have paid for the right to spend time in these rooms partake of the “sophisticated” ambiance created by what hangs on the walls.

The manifestation of luxury which Undine and her friends are displaying is not a continuation of what had predominated in the past, since the past has become, in the eyes of rich Americans, merely a vast antique market, a sort of adult EuroDisney *avant la lettre* for the wealthy and blasé: “[Undine] had assumed that Paris existed for the stranger, that its native life was merely an obscure foundation for the dazzling superstructure of hotels and restaurants in which her compatriots comported themselves” (811).<sup>11</sup> This is why access to the American expatriate world is largely limited to their own kind, a notion clearly expressed by Undine’s acquaintance, Mrs. Rollivier: “I don’t care much about meeting foreigners” (852). In the sanctuary of the Nouveau Luxe, the French and the assorted Eurotrash who are occasionally granted entrance are the exceptions rather than the rule; those who are permitted access must appear in the Americans’ eyes to be truly exceptional or extremely useful and have the titles to prove it. In *The Custom of the Country*, the Paris that counts is the American one; to the extent the French have a habitation which represents their country and culture, it is Raymond de Chelles’s château, the rather transparently named Le Saint Désert, located in an isolated corner of France where wealthy Americans would not normally go.

What creates this new and affluent influx into Paris is the burgeoning American economy. Although France in the latter part of the nineteenth century was still recovering from the psychological wounds of the defeat of 1870, it was nonetheless confident about its achievements and future as

the Expositions Universelles of 1878 and 1889 indicate. The United States, on the other hand, was experiencing an economic and industrial boom without precedent:

Between 1865 and 1901 the American Industrial Revolution transformed the United States from a country of small and isolated communities scattered across 3 million square miles of continental territory into a compact economic and industrial unit. ... It was fabulously rich in minerals, possessing about two-thirds of the world's coal; immense deposits of high-quality iron ore; great resources of petroleum; and in the West, a natural treasury of gold, silver and copper. ... Although in 1860 the United States was still a second-rate industrial power, by 1890 it led Britain, France and Germany. (Cashman, 12)<sup>12</sup>

The American expansion in its own West, and the increase in wealth and resources which accompanied it, had a very perceptible downside. In the West, the Indians who were not killed were pushed to the margins of society and their territories confiscated. The best of their lands were taken over by whites. The Indians who were tolerated were those who could offer some service to their conquerors. The parts of Indian culture that were not destroyed were Americanized.

Without the overt brutality and attenuated ethnic cleansing experienced in the American West, the mass arrival of American money in Europe, along with the dominance it provided within the narrowly constricted Paris of the great hotels and broad boulevards, can be read as a sort of *urban colonization*. The Americans usurp property by essentially taking over a place such as the Nouveaux Luxe, which in any case appears to be named in their honor. They impose their language within the borders of the hotel. They are indifferent to the parts of Paris outside the narrow parameters they have established, and they are only interested in the French who can be useful to them, either as an aristocratic presence at their sides to legitimize the American ubiquity in fashionable Paris, or because these people possess things the wealthy socialites wish to obtain, such as paintings, sculptures, and tapestries. The French could also be useful as servants, provided they possessed a reasonable amount of English.

At the time of the novel the United States is beginning to emerge as the world's leading economy, and its wealthy citizens have an arrogance based



on their bank accounts. From France they want only what they can exploit to their own ends; secure in the fortress-like Nouveau Luxe, they take over the better sections of the city, remain totally indifferent to Paris's social issues, and carefully vet the locals who will be permitted in their presence. They do not replicate a France either new or old; they create a new world on French soil, an artificial, but extremely appealing and agreeable society for the right people. The first person to acknowledge how the Americans have transformed their Parisian environment is a Frenchman, Raymond de Chelles: "it's charming and sympathetic and original - we owe America a debt of gratitude" (803) is his initial reaction.<sup>13</sup> Raymond will, of course, have reasons to rue these words, but at this point in the novel, he senses that something new is happening, yet remains open to the bizarre transformation of the surroundings which the Americans are affecting in the middle of his nation's capital. Much more than his stuffy American friend, Charles Bowen,<sup>14</sup> Raymond appreciates that the Americans are creating around the Nouveau Luxe an alternate universe where it is possible to indulge in pleasure without the danger of losing social status: "This, in the social order, is the diversion, the permitted diversion, that your original race has devised: a kind of superior Bohemia, where one may be respectable without being bored" (803). In his closing comments Raymond adds rather presciently: "If I married I shouldn't care to have my wife come here too often" (803). One of the sadder ironies of *The Custom of the Country* is that the first person to recognize the unique nature of the American presence in Paris is also among its first victims.

The concept of urban colonization reflects a significant variation on the Franco-American paradigm. The roles of French and Americans are largely reversed. While the Americans can make no real claim to cultural sophistication, they still possess the money and are not in the least naïve in their use of it. The requisite culture can be bought. Most significantly, they have taken on the role of the unscrupulous and exploitative, the part assigned to the French in *The American*. Raymond de Chelles is neither exploitative nor unscrupulous, but he is extremely naïve. He totally misjudges Undine, mistaking surface for reality, and believing her intentions to be honorable. He speaks the truth to her and imagines she responds in kind. Much like Christopher Newman and Claire de Cintré, but with more disastrous results, his Undine Spragg is a figment of his imagination. As Raymond learns more about her, his sense of her identity as an individual and an American vacillates wildly, while Undine's understanding of him, once she

realizes he cannot support them in Paris, never really changes. From that moment on, he ceases to exist for her except as an annoying obstacle that will have to be discarded.

Raymond de Chelles represents much more than another of Undine's former husbands. Géraldine Chouard, somewhat too enthusiastically, describes him as an "Homme de patrimoine ... il incarne à lui seul l'histoire de France, une civilisation triomphante d'élégance et de distinction, aux antipodes de la lointaine Amérique" ("Undine ou la fluctuation," 112). Although Raymond does represent French traditions in the novel, they are not without their gray areas. Moreover, if he incarnates certain sorts of French values, they are not the ones that predominate in the Third Republic.

The Third Republic was founded in the chaotic aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War (1870), a period in which a defeated and humiliated France was undergoing a profound reassessment. Initially it was possible that the country would revert to a monarchy. Its first president, Patrice de Mac-Mahon, was a royalist who attempted unsuccessfully to move the new government to the right and to establish the Bourbon Comte de Chambord as King of France. This effort proved unsuccessful as French voters opted for a more liberal agenda. By 1875, the "République parlementaire ... était définitivement fondée" (Azéma and Winock, 116), and by 1879, "Le Sénat est désormais républicain" (Baquiast, 30). While the possibility of a second restoration was now definitively averted, and postwar France was beginning to work toward re-establishing itself as a major European force, in terms of economic growth among industrialized nations, the country remained relatively weak. Compared to the United States, France was mired in "une période de stagnation relative" (Azéma and Winock, 127). Even by the time the fledgling Republic had finally triumphed over its internal enemies, the royalist faction, the nation had not yet achieved "pleinement entrée dans l'ère industrielle" (Azéma and Winock, 129).

The political and social importance of the French aristocracy had been declining since the Revolution, although it did enjoy a renaissance of sorts under Napoleon III. With the establishment of the Third Republic, its influence only continued to wane as the power of the more liberal middle class increased: "En majorité, ces classes moyennes sont politiquement à gauche et s'affirment égalitaires" (Azéma and Winock, 137). An aspect of the middle class's political agenda was to rid "l'État des ... strates d'Ancien Régime" (Azéma and Winock, 156), an aspiration which involved an open

hostility to the aristocracy's oldest ally, the Catholic Church, which was perceived as "le bouclier de l'Ancien Régime" (Azéma and Winock, 172). This opposition was so pronounced, virulent, and persistent that Jacqueline Lalouette chose to call her 2002 history of the Third Republic *La République anticléricale*.

Raymond de Chelles, whose values are by no means as regressive as those of the Bellegardes in *The American*, is nevertheless, like them, a figure whose world is ineluctably fading from history. Even more than tradition, what de Chelles represents is an avatar of an irretrievable past, something that Charles Bowen inadvertently suggests when he refers to his French friend as a "precious foot-note to the page" (804), but nonetheless a "charming specimen of the Frenchman of his class" (804). In *The Custom of the Country*, a historically enfeebled segment of French society, embodied in Raymond de Chelles, will be overrun and buried by an American bulldozer in the person of Undine Spragg.

To the extent that Raymond and Undine can be made to represent their respective countries, Wharton chose to emphasize their differences,<sup>15</sup> the changes wrought by the passage of time and the ascension and decline of national prestige. As framed in the novel, the American woman will accept these changes, and the Frenchman will not. At Raymond's very first appearance in *The Custom of the Country*, Charles Bowen makes a comment concerning his friend's ultimate loyalties which proves prophetic: "That [his] inherited notions would in the end prevail" (804). Much like Valentin de Bellegarde, Raymond wishes to be open to the present and the future, and initially he makes an effort to be so, but eventually he will revert to family and French traditions, partly due to a genuine belief in them and partly in frustrated reaction to Undine's refusal to accept them.

Principal among these values is respect for the family, something Undine appears not to really understand. Yet this is not entirely true. She knows what it means, because she has experienced its pressures during her first marriage and rapidly chose to reject it. As Claude Grimal notes in "The Right Set: Histoire, Objets, Éthique," with regard to the ring Ralph gave Undine: "Son acceptation suppose une allégeance à la famille et à l'histoire de la famille ... elle refuse l'histoire de la famille Marvell, elle l'efface" ("The Right Set," 31). Ralph Marvell brings her into a family circle that prizes, as do the de Chelles, loyalty to each other and upstanding social behavior. Like the de Chelles, the Dagonet-Marvells live in a home removed from the center of society. Their Washington Square residence is in a section of New

York that is no longer the center of fashion. The de Chelles' Saint Désert is the French equivalent. Both homes contain cultural icons: heirlooms for the Americans, Boucher tapestries for the French. Even though no family member appears to have spent much time examining these artifacts, they represent each clan's involvement in their national cultures. If Raymond and Ralph opt to remain faithful to family and tradition, Undine represents a new American orientation, which respects neither the French nor the American sense of the past (except for its decorative value). She is in the process of forging a very different identity which proved to be as disquieting to the Dagonet-Marvells as it would to the de Chelles.

The most striking difference between the French and the Americans concerns the question of divorce and the alternative preferred in French society. As a Catholic, Raymond cannot accept divorce and must remain married to one woman for the rest of his life, no matter how unhappy he might be in the relationship. Yet his situation is not entirely bleak. Part of the aristocratic tradition to which he adheres implicitly allows a man to have one or several mistresses, a practice deemed "acceptable" if it remains discreet and the wife continues to be shown respect and affection in public. This is a practice based on discretion; to call it male-oriented, hypocritical, and sexist may well be true, but it seems more germane to the novel to note that this practice is part of the fabric of Raymond's society; the novel makes it hard to imagine any French woman marrying into that stratum of French society having any illusions about fidelity. Should a married French woman take a lover, presumably she would be bound by the same unwritten rules. This is what is suggested through the character of the Princess Estradina, who uses the presence of Undine during her travels to cloak her relations with a married man.

Divorce is arguably a more honest procedure and certainly a source of empowerment for women. Yet, more to the point, it is American, modern, and totally without ambiguity or pretense. In Undine's hands it is a tool for advancement. She was briefly the mistress of Peter Van Degen, but that proved to have been a disastrous decision. It made her, if not a social pariah, then a social "item" in a way she did not wish to be, and when Peter decided not to marry her, she was for a time a social outcast. Marriage proved a better solution because, as Charles Bowen astutely observes, "One could not be divorced without it" (806). Divorce legitimizes, or at least attenuates, the stigma of a marital break-up by providing an aura of social acceptability. After all, divorce is legal. Given her lack of romantic inclinations,

her little interest in sex, and indifference to children, the option of divorce is what makes marriage efficient and appealing to Undine. It provides for a clean break and, with it, the possibility of total freedom, things that Raymond could never allow himself.

The tension between Raymond and Undine proves particularly destructive to Raymond because he never understands the extent of Undine's difference from other women he has known. Like her second husband, he makes the crucial mistake of assuming Undine is a child, a sweet innocent creature he can mold into the woman he wishes her to be (Wershoren, 67). What he fails to grasp at first is that there is nothing innocent about her; nor can she, usually, be manipulated by men. Undine is the new woman, unfettered by the past and only concerned with the possibilities offered by the present and future. Traditions, be they French or American, are in themselves of little importance to her. She can become a Catholic and seek an annulment from the Catholic Church because both are part of the road toward success through marriage; the idea of a genuine religious conversion is hardly thinkable for her. Undine cannot change religions when she never really practiced one. She makes no serious effort to adhere to Raymond's values once he moves her out of Paris into the country, where she begins to realize that he is not as rich as she had supposed.

If toward the end of their marriage Undine is annoyed with Raymond, but otherwise indifferent to him, Raymond's frustration and anger with her suggests a lingering passion, which erupts in a tirade. This marks his last appearance in the novel. The tirade, for all its intensity, indicates how little Raymond has grasped the phenomenon that is Undine. He begins by exclaiming, "You are all alike ... you come among us from a country we don't know, and can't imagine, a country you care for so little that ... you've forgotten the house you were born in" (982). Certainly the Americans whom Raymond has met are variations on the same motif of money and attendant arrogance. It is also true that the French are less familiar with Americans than they realize, something which becomes apparent in Raymond's contention that Americans have forgotten their origins. As the final pages of this chapter will indicate, this will certainly not be the case with Undine and Elmer.

"You come among us speaking our language and not knowing what we mean; wanting the things we want, and not knowing why we want them; aping our weaknesses, exaggerating our follies, ignoring or ridiculing all

we care about" (982). The question of the language spoken in this novel is once again of some importance. Obviously Undine must have learned some French – to speak to servants and to participate even passively in the conversation of her French acquaintances. Yet in *The Custom of the Country*, Ralph Marvell is the only American who really speaks foreign languages with interest in the cultures they reflect (724). Other Americans, such as Mrs. Shallum, "though in command of but a few verbs, all of which, on her lips, became irregular, managed to express a polyglot personality" (725), while her husband, in possession of "a colorless fluency in the principal European tongues ... seldom exercised his gift except in intercourse with hotel managers and head-waiters" (725), whom he considered a "gifted but unscrupulous class" (725). In this novel, French is most often a tool needed for conversing with one's social inferiors; it is not considered a language comparable in value to English. Learning a foreign language is one of the minor annoyances of being in France but a necessity if one is to deal with the help. As in *The American*, the predominance of English reflects an American sense of superiority, and for the French to profit on any level from the American presence in their country, they must speak to these visitors in a foreign language. If Americans speak French without really knowing what the French are saying in terms of culture and values, it is because ultimately they don't care. Paris, the French, and their traditions constitute an elaborate theatrical setting for what these social climbers want; these places and people are the props from which the denizens of the Nouveau Luxe will create their version, not of what Europe was or is, but of what it should be to conform to American tastes. For this reason, Raymond seems to exaggerate when he claims that Americans ridicule French values, since the Americans pay them little heed. However, he is on much firmer ground when he claims that Undine and her friends simply ignore everything that the French care about. The Paris which concerns these visitors is not the French one; it is the American one.

In *The Custom of the Country*, several events prefigure the inevitable triumph of the Americans at the expense of the French. Raymond is anxious to have a son to carry on the family name. When Undine fails to conceive, his family assumes that the fault is hers. Yet she has already borne a child; she is the one capable of reproducing herself and moving forward. The absence of offspring is due to Raymond, and his sterility represents the enfeeblement of a once-distinguished lineage, just as Undine's fecundity foreshadows a world peopled and dominated by Americans.

In Elizabeth Boulot's *Edith Wharton: The Custom of the Country*, the author mentions that "Raymond de Chelles s'intéresse ... à la vie politique locale" (86). This might seem innocuous enough, but in fact it further highlights the disparity between French and American ambitions. Raymond is a member of the French aristocracy; he is well-educated and has grown up in a world of privilege, yet he has a circumscribed vision and narrow aspirations; holding office in a rural village is the height of his ambitions. What education Undine has consists of what she provided for herself through observation and imitation, yet her desires for advancement have no limit, and with each victory they only become greater. More than anything else, what will seal her triumph over Raymond – and, figuratively, the victory of the Americans over the French – is Elmer's purchase of the Boucher tapestries at Le Désert. Raymond is forced to relinquish them by financial necessity. The Americans might have prevailed in this struggle, but the novel makes clear that this American supremacy is hardly laudable.

When Raymond accuses Americans of always changing (982), he certainly has Undine in mind, and what he says is essentially true. From an inexperienced girl with an undulating body, she has become a woman of astonishing and unprincipled social adaptability. Yet, as the novel draws to a close, there is a suggestion that her ambition and freedom from ethical constraints may have, figuratively speaking, a geographical source. Strikingly enough, the place where she first absorbed the values that will guide her decisions throughout the novel is not sophisticated New York City, but rather boring little Apex,<sup>16</sup> a town Undine could not wait to escape (629), a burg of such seeming inconsequence that the novel never really makes clear where it is.

The lack of a fixed location makes Apex something of a mystery, a mythical site rather akin to what the French today refer to *la France profonde*. This is an idyll inhabited by allegedly pure, pristine French men and women who embody the nation's finest values, untouched by the sundry corruptions of modern civilization.<sup>17</sup> To the extent that in *The Custom of the Country* there is a semblance of an *Amérique profonde*, the place of origin of the nation's core values, it is Apex City, whose American values are far from positive, however.

Toward the end of the novel, Elmer somewhat heatedly says: "We're differently made out in Apex. When I want that sort of thing I go down to North Fifth Street for it" (1001). Elmer is reacting to Undine's not very subtle hint that she could become his mistress were he to help her cope

with her difficult marriage to Raymond. A similar scene occurs earlier in the novel when Undine, between husbands and burned by an extra-marital affair, reacts to Mme Trézac's (the former Miss Wincher) suggestion that becoming Raymond de Chelles's mistress would not be such a bad idea, were it discreetly handled. "We don't look at things that way out at Apex" (888) is Undine's prim rejoinder.

Both conversations involve an "illicit" sexual relationship, which is rejected through a reference to Apex. One can, of course, view these scenes as a reaffirmation of traditional, hometown American values. Yet in Elmer's case, and certainly in Undine's, these sudden turns toward middle-class conventionality seem somewhat surprising. One can perhaps accept Elmer's interest in marrying Undine out of a combination of love (he has, after all, already married her once before) and some residual respect for a bourgeois moral code. Yet at the same time, given that he makes his living at the limits of legality, he might wish to be as respectable as possible in other aspects of his life. Having a beautiful mistress could win him admiration in boardrooms, which were exclusively male, but it would also limit his access to the posh society he wished to join.

Undine's case is more extreme. As she learns to her chagrin, a mistress is always something of a social inferior, no matter how politely her situation is handled. While any woman in Undine's world will always be a secondary figure to a man in public, an extension of his greatness for the world to admire, to be a mistress is even less than a secondary position. It can complicate significantly the woman's social situation. Discretion precludes her receiving full recognition for who she is; her access to social functions is limited, and the shadow of social opprobrium always lingers. Undine had tried that route with Peter Van Degen, in the hope of eventually marrying him. This proved to be a miscalculation that for a time hurt her social standing. If she appears prepared to take that risk a second time, it is because she is out of options. She is trapped in a failed marriage, in need of money, and forced to spend most of her time away from Paris in a country estate she cannot abide. Being kept by Elmer would provide immediate financial relief and access to some parts of Parisian society. It would not be a perfect solution, but the best one currently available to her.

When Elmer rejects her arguments, she is at first "discouraged" but then quickly "fascinated" (1002) when she senses that he is proposing marriage. She rapidly realizes that, unlike Van Degen, she can count on Elmer coming through for her since he, like herself, "knew what he



wanted, saw his road before him, and acknowledged no obstacle" (1003). If this scene with Elmer initially reflects yet another of Undine's miscalculations due to her aiming simply for the second best option, she quickly appreciates the utility of seizing the opportunity of Elmer's offer, which would solve all her problems with only marginal and temporary costs to her reputation. She is an American woman who has divorced; in this respect she is one among many. Undine is married to Elmer by the opening of the next chapter.

In Apex City the most important rule is to do what one wishes as long as social decorum is respected. Undine has understood from a very young age that there are unwritten codes governing social intercourse which must be maintained, not for moral considerations, but because flaunting societal norms could become an obstacle to advancement. What Elmer seems to have garnered from his time in Apex is that business has no ethical restrictions that can withstand success. If one's ventures become profitable, all other considerations assume a minimal importance. That much said, the successful businessman must try as best he can to nod in the direction of social decorum without, however, losing his primary perspective, which is to make money.

Apex's role as the incubator of a new set of values is even more apparent concerning divorce. New Yorkers, despite their façade of sophistication, view divorce with disapproval and disgust as this novel and Wharton's later *The Age of Innocence* (1920) make clear. Apex is a different matter. As Collomb-Boureau suggests, the attitude of the citizens of this small American town toward divorce is "plutôt laxiste" (40), and there is "aucune parole donnée qui ne puisse se reprendre" ("Costumes, fortunes, énergies," 40). What has been done can be undone, if handled properly. This would seem to be one of the principal lessons which Elmer and Undine learned from their experience in Apex.

Apex, unlike the heavily European-influenced New York, is a pure American product; its customs are indeed "of the country." What characterizes Apex's beliefs is strict observance of the letter of society's laws without any particular concern for the spirit of these rules. Mr. Spragg took care of his daughter's marriage to Elmer without any great difficulty or public scenes. He also established his wealth through some dubious machinations which left him in control of water rights in the town. In both instances scandal was averted, and social protocols maintained, so no harm was done. Elmer was initially less successful. His financial dealings

led to him having to leave Apex, but later, after his brilliant achievements in business, his earlier peccadillos cease to be an issue. From the Apex perspective, success forgives all sins.

In this novel, Apex and not New York establishes the principles that will govern the American future. New York's international orientation is something of a handicap since the new set of national values emerging at this time, as reflected in the novel, are quintessentially American, emerging from somewhere in "the heart of the heart of the country."<sup>18</sup> The Old World does not corrupt the denizens of the New World, because these Americans never went abroad in search of European values. What these predatory tourists want in France are aspects of its culture that can be molded to fit into the American model of Europe. The gilding of the Gilded Age is superficial and serves to coat a visceral coarseness whose concrete manifestations take the form of greed, arrogance, unfettered ambition, a sense of entitlement, and a bemused approach to other cultures and peoples who did not have the good fortune to be American and rich. Undine's ethical weaknesses are at once exacerbated and perfected in Europe, but their origins are unabashedly American, an America symbolized by Apex City.

Apex's purest product is Undine. At one point she rather smugly remarks that she is not "an immoral woman" (849), and she is correct. As the prototype of the new American woman she is not immoral, she is amoral; ethical consequences of actions are really of no significance to her, even though they must be accorded the appropriate lip service. Moral standards are like the other obstacles she confronts: matters which will either be dealt with or ignored, depending upon the circumstances. As a woman, she will always have need of a man in order to succeed, and that most often involves marriage, but as Elizabeth Ammons observes, "she does not fear marriage as a threat to her autonomy ... she has no illusions about the marriage union as a bond of love which will perfect her personal happiness or complete her personality" (97-98). Everything that is important for her is practical, achievable, and exploitable. Remarkably lacking in affect or conscience, Undine views social customs, whether they involve getting married, changing a dress, or throwing a party, as tools to help her achieve her goals.

Undine exudes success at the end of the novel. She is rich, socially prominent, and well established in "one of the new quarters of Paris" (1003). Her *hôtel* features the conspicuous display of the de Chelles' Boucher

tapestries, rather like spoils of war, illustrating the American woman's triumph in France. The young girl who started out in the Stentorian Hotel surrounded by copies of French culture has become an accomplished socialite who possesses the originals. And when she stands in front of them, they highlight her beauty. But despite all her achievements, Undine remains restless: "Even now ... she was not always happy. She had everything she wanted, but she still felt, at times, that there might be other things she might want if she knew about them" (1012). In addition to her annoyance at the possibility of missing something, there is a growing impatience with what she does have: "there had been moments lately when she had to confess to herself that Moffatt did not fit into the picture" (1012). Also, there is frustration that her new goal, to be the wife of an ambassador, appears beyond her reach because she is a divorcée. She is then discontent in her present situation, bored in her marriage, and stymied in her latest ambition. For this reason, many critics would agree with Julie Wolkenstein, that for the first time in the novel Undine experiences a veritable "échec" (148) and finally she must confront her own unhappiness along with the sense of frustration, if not failure, it entails.

Despite the tone of the novel's last chapter, there is really no reason to assume that Undine's ambitions will finally be thwarted. Her triumphs throughout the novel, despite the odds stacked against her, have often had on readers and critics the effect of "a deliberate unsettling of every comfortable conviction" (Wolff, 235). Her new ambition to marry an ambassador is not an impossible dream for an Undine Spragg. This is a woman who used and discarded two husbands and could easily let one go again. She is a person who survived, and indeed triumphed over, two public divorces and a brief career as a kept woman. She became a Catholic when a religious affiliation was required and was in the process of raising money for an annulment of her marriage to Ralph when he conveniently committed suicide. An annulment in the Church is a costly and complicated process, often involving a decision that the former marriage had never been consummated, an argument weakened somewhat by the presence of Undine's son. That Undine was raising funds to begin the annulment process is a testimony to her belief that money can smooth away all sorts of problems, be they secular or religious.

Nor is there any particular danger that her current situation might engender a degree of self-reflection. Nowhere in the novel has she displayed the slightest interest in self-knowledge, and it is hardly imaginable she

would begin now. Of course, the obstacle to becoming an ambassador's wife is significant, but barriers have tended to inspire rather than limit her: "for Undine it is precisely obstacles that generate desire ... The previous forty-five chapters have taught us that nothing makes Undine more powerful than desire" (Bentley, 210). Certainly Undine approaches her latest challenge with the attitude she has maintained whenever an individual or an institution has stood in the way of her desires. Preventing her from becoming an ambassador's wife simply occasions the response she has had to all annoyances throughout the novel: "I never heard of anything so insulting,' ... as if the rule had been invented to humiliate her" (1014). Undine sees no serious reason why she cannot be an ambassador's wife aside from the small-mindedness of her enemies.

Her ambition is, of course, gender limited. She thinks she can become an ambassadress since she can manipulate social codes, but she cannot alter nature. Her entry into the diplomatic corps requires a husband, but that has never been an issue for Undine. If Elmer proves not to be "man" enough for her goal, then she will surely find someone else, and when she eventually takes possession of an American embassy, she will hunt about once again for something new to want.

Undine is in several ways similar to Camus's Sisyphus, a legendary figure forever attempting to bring an impossible task to a successful conclusion. The difference, of course, is that Sisyphus's labor was a punishment and Undine's a choice. Also, Undine, unlike Sisyphus, proves successful. Yet both are hardheaded, relentless strivers. This American woman will be forever dissatisfied as she struggles for more, while the mythical figure will remain disgruntled but stoically committed to striving. Neither Undine nor Sisyphus will ever achieve stasis, that still point where they can finally rest on their laurels, not because of the obvious obstacles both encounter, but because neither really wants closure. For each, it is the striving, not the goal, that provides satisfaction. At the end of his essay, Camus proclaimed the eternally malcontented Sisyphus happy. As we close the pages of *The Custom of the Country*, we would be well advised to follow Camus's lead and consider that Undine Spragg, reigning over a newly Americanized Paris, contemplating the latest slight to her ambitions, and considering how she will react, is in her own way happy.

## Notes

1 Elaine Showalter takes direct issue with Bowen's assessment: "despite Charles Bowen's speech and the many restrictions placed on women in the business world, in many respects Undine's American society is far more egalitarian with regard to gender than English or French society of the same period" (91).

2 These factors consist of the possible influence of her small-town upbringing in Apex, a town that stands for the sorts of "American values" prevalent in the novel. Apex's significance will be discussed in the concluding pages of this chapter.

3 Claude Julien places the novel in the period between 1903 and 1913 ("La folie des grandeurs," 8), while in the same volume Claude Grimal proposes 1899 to 1907-1908 (23). Nelly Valtat-Comet claims the novel ends in 1913 (65). Laura Rattray is content to say that the novel is set in the 1900s (12).

4 In this respect she is closer to Christopher Newman in *The American* than to any woman, or even man, in *The Custom of the Country*, with the exception of Elmer.

5 Another instance of the distance this novel takes from more "realistic" narratives is that the location of Apex is never clear. Is it in upstate New York or the Midwest? The question of Apex, where it is, and what it represents, will become significant toward the end of this chapter.

6 Undine has occasionally been compared to Emma Bovary, whose capacity for cunning is considerably more limited than Undine's. A more intriguing, albeit imperfect, comparison would be Mme de Mertueil in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*. Both women are master schemers with few scruples. Both are talented manipulators of men. Both struggle mightily and largely successfully to overcome the limits of their gender. The differences, however, are that Mme de Mertueil is a self-educated intellectual who provides reasons in *Lettre* 81 for her anger at male-dominated society and her desire for revenge. Undine, on the other hand, is more the pragmatic American, with no particular concern about gender inequality. Her only need is to know the rules of the game so that she can play and win.

7 According to Nancy Bentley, Undine is a "self-made woman" whose "success is due to her lack of a consistent self" (175).

8 Bentley records that "Government studies in the 1880s and 1890s reported that the number of divorces was climbing at a dizzying pace, about five times the rate of the population increase by the end of the century. Between 1867 and 1929 - close to the span of Wharton's lifetime - the divorce rate rose 2,000 percent. ... Two-thirds of all suits ... were filed by women, just one token of the way that American divorce was formalized as a feminine institution" (161).

9 Ralph's maternal grandfather figures in *The Age of Innocence* (1920), a novel published after *The Custom of the Country* but set in a period prior to it (1875): "the Dagonets of Washington Square ... came of an old English country family allied with the Pitts and Foxes" (*The Age of Innocence*, 1054).

10 Julie Wolkenstein recognizes that the *nouveau riche* American presence in Paris involves more than "slavish imitation": "La perception américaine est tout d'abord porteuse de renouveau, et valorisée ici aux dépens d'un objet européen taxé de désuétude" ("La représentation de la France dans *Custom of the Country*," 148).

11 Undine will briefly revise this judgment when she marries Raymond de Chelles, but then she will quickly come to understand that while Europe makes a nice backdrop, the social elite that counts is American.

12 As vast as were the possibilities for wealth in the United States, investments were not without risks, as even Elmer's career indicates. Thus, the American frenzy to acquire in Paris, as well as the compulsive need to travel from one luxury waterhole to another, may in part be due to the sense that financial resources might suddenly disappear.

13 Later Undine will complain that Raymond has "never attempted to discriminate between Americans" (952). Yet how can he, since he has only seen myriad variations on the same prototype.

14 Although Charles Bowen is often treated with great respect by commentators such as Cynthia Wolff, for whom the "most reliable voice" in the novel "is that of ... Mr. Bowen" (232), I tend to agree with Nelly Valtat-Comet's harsher assessment: "Sous une fine couche de vernis progressiste, on discerne toutefois très vite chez Bowen une préférence pour une société très patriarcale et réactionnaire" (40). As Valtat-Comet also points out, Bowen's tirade about the American socialite as decorative object whose function is to underscore her husband's success appears largely taken from the works of Thorstein Veblen (40). Bowen is a member of the social in-group whose function is to provide a degree of social titillation to his peers with occasional acerbic comments, yet without ever really challenging the status quo and rarely offering a completely original insight.

15 In her Introduction to Wharton's essay *French Ways*, Diane de Margerie remarks that this book "enlightens us more on what Edith Wharton came to find in France than it does about the French" (vii). This is undoubtedly true. Sweeping generalizations about foreign nations are inevitably more illuminating of the author than the country discussed, yet in this instance the novel makes more of national differences than the essay: "the differences between ourselves and the French are mostly on the surface" (*French Ways*, 15).

16 Collomb-Boureau writes "Apex, c'est l'ennui mortel" (40).

17 *La France profonde* is a highly charged political concept often used by

*The American Woman and the Invention of Paris*

the extreme right in France to demarcate the true France which has never been corrupted by cultural diversity, immigration from the Third World, or American popular culture.

18 The title of a short story by William Gass, published in a volume of the same name (1958).

## CHAPTER IV

# The Expatriate Idyll

## *The Sun Also Rises*

It was in Paris ... that Hemingway ... staked out his theme ... the old Jamesian theme of the American abroad.

(James Mellow, *Hemingway*, 6)

Paris is the Mecca of the bluffers and fakers in every line of endeavor from music to prize fighting.

(Hemingway, cited in James Mellow, *Hemingway*, 162)

Cohn is potentially more interesting than we are likely to judge him.

(Michael Reynolds, *The Sun Also Rises*, 55)

Georges Duhamel (1884–1966) is largely forgotten today. Yet in the interwar period he was quite well known in his native France, winning the Prix Goncourt for *Civilisation* (1918) and eventually being elected to the Académie française. *Civilisation* is a fictionalization of Duhamel's experiences as a field doctor during World War I; it consists of a series of vignettes that describe French soldiers in their heroism, misery, and fear. In no case is the *poilu's* behavior, be it strong or weak, subject to second-guessing or scorn. *Civilisation* describes the various reactions of decent, ordinary men to a level of chaos and destruction the world had never witnessed, “ces Français dont le monde connaît trop mal et la grandeur d'âme, et l'indomptable intelligence et la touchante naïveté” (9). Their lives at the front had marked



them psychologically – “Leurs voix étaient celles de jeunes hommes, leur expérience militaire celle de vieillards” (8) – while their wounds had left permanent physical scars that were sometimes the subject of macabre humor. To be assigned a bed in “La chambre de Revaud,” it was required to have “*des choses curieuses extraordinaires, un petit boyau crevé, ... ou la moelle épinière déboitée, ou encore un de ces cas ‘que le crâne est embouti ou que l’urine ne sort plus là où elle sortait avant c’té guerre’*” (12–13; emphasis original). And, just as with Jake Barnes, the hero of *The Sun Also Rises*, there was a young soldier “que la mitraille l’avait cruellement frappé dans la virilité” (38).

World War I was first and foremost a shock – to the moral, political, and aesthetic values of those who participated.<sup>1</sup> The initial jolt resulted from people just not expecting the war to be much different from its predecessors; many anticipated a brief, *gentlemanly* encounter where civilized Europe would be sure to put the upstart Huns in their place.<sup>2</sup> But the Great War was simply not like the conflicts which preceded it. This war was international; for the first time, the United States moved outside of its isolationist enclave and onto a much larger stage. It was bigger, noisier, longer, more chaotic, and deadlier than any bloodletting in history. Paul Fussel once observed, “Every war is ironic because every war is worse than expected” (7). If this is indeed the case, then the irony of World War I was very great and cruel.

The title of Robert Graves’s autobiographical *Good-Bye to All That* (1929) effectively conveys what the war turned out to be and how it affected the generation of 1914 as well as those who would follow. The young Graves marched enthusiastically off to battle, as if he were to engage in the greatest cricket match of his life,<sup>3</sup> only to discover a reality he never dreamed possible. After the initial advances and retreats, both sides settled into a prolonged struggle featuring bloody encounters and often indecisive skirmishes, where one side or the other would emerge from trenches to gain or lose a little slice of ugly terrain. At the Battle of the Somme, Graves was so severely wounded that he was presumed dead, and his family was so informed. By the war’s end, he was radically different from the naïve young man who had believed he was off to France on a lark. Despite his subsequent literary successes, Graves remained permanently alienated from the complacent middle-class values he almost died defending and lived most of the rest of his life in a self-imposed exile from England.

*Civilisation* was published in 1918, in the immediate aftermath of the war, when the memories of the conflict were still vivid and the overt signs

of its physical consequence on bodies and the environment everywhere apparent. It is not a sophisticated literary work, nor is it particularly modern; the reliance on anecdotes that are never really woven together gives the book the feel of a very old-fashioned narrative, a series of vignettes related only by the common experience of war. Nevertheless, if it remains moving today, it is certainly because of the vivid descriptions of what these young men endured without really understanding what they were fighting for beyond the defense of some glorified notion of *la France éternelle*. Yet in *Civilisation* there is a strong sense that those who survived would struggle to put their lives and what was left of their bodies back together and attempt to reintegrate themselves into society.<sup>4</sup>

*Civilisation* describes the Great War in its immediacy; it details what French soldiers felt while they were recuperating from wounds as the war continued to rage. *The Sun Also Rises* is a very different work. It takes place in the postwar period and concentrates on a circle of individuals who seem to have discovered the secret of prolonged adolescence. Set in 1925, it deals with Anglophone (primarily American) expatriates who have chosen for the most part to live and carouse in Paris, with an occasional foray into another European country. This is a highly crafted novel replete with literary and religious allusions, a narrator bearing a horrendous war wound, a beginning that seems abrupt, and an ending which at first does not appear to be one. Gertrude Stein dubbed people like the characters in *The Sun Also Rises* “the Lost Generation,” a formulation Hemingway accorded a certain importance by using it as one of the epigraphs to his novel, along with a citation from *Ecclesiastes*.

If the notion of a “lost generation” adrift in one of the most beautiful cities in the world has had an appeal to successive generations of young people, most critics have tended to view Jake Barnes’s entourage, and even Jake himself, with a more jaundiced eye.<sup>5</sup> For Michael Reynolds, the so-called lost generation was “never really lost ... It was a generation which drank more than it should have because it was illegal to drink in the U.S. during Prohibition” (1). David Daiches questions just how lost Hemingway’s characters are: “It is not ... that his characters do not know where they are going, but they do not go anywhere with the proper intensity or vitality. They seek to give a semblance of intensity to their living, through drink, travel, or by watching the intense life of others” (179). In “Death of Love in *The Sun Also Rises*,” Mark Spilka contends that Jake Barnes “has always been an emotional adolescent” (42).

Of all the critics who keep their distance from the lost generation, the most psychologically probing has been the novelist James Farrell, who sees Hemingway's characters essentially as immature *poseurs*, people who adopt an air of alienation allegedly based on some traumatic experiences but who, eight years after the armistice, have turned putative psychological damage into something of a fashion statement, a style of behavior wherein a disabused image possesses a certain social cachet:

Disillusionment with the war was more or less accepted [in *The Sun Also Rises*] ... [as] a re-examination of the character of disillusionment [in the novel] ... suggests. This mood had become a way of feeling and acting; in fact, a social habit ... characters express their bitterness, their feelings of disenchantment, with calculated bravado ... They act like people who have not fully grown up and who lack the self-awareness to realize this; in fact, they possess no desire to grow up. (3)<sup>6</sup>

H.R. Stoneback provides an apt summary of this influential strain of critical opinion that often stands in contrast with more fanciful readings of *The Sun Also Rises*:

It has not always been obvious to readers and commentators that Hemingway does not present Gertrude Stein's "lost generation" proclamation as a slogan to be endorsed, but as fatuous grandiloquence to be undercut, not only by the wisdom reflected in the second paragraph, from Ecclesiastes, but also by the action and design of the novel. (4)

Jake and his entourage represent the disenchanting postwar generation in Paris during the 1920s. His immediate circle consists of two English people, Lady Brett Ashley and Mike Campbell, and a fellow American journalist and author, Bill Gorton. They have all been touched by World War I: the men directly as combatants and Brett indirectly. She lost her first love to the dysentery associated with the unsanitary conditions at the front and then was further scarred by an abusive relationship with another man. This group projects an air of disillusionment and alienation reflected most strikingly in their tendency to avoid the expression of strong emotions, except at sporting events such as in the bullfighting scenes, or

when dealing with one of their fellow expatriates, Robert Cohn, whom they mostly dislike. They delight in heavy drinking and other prototypical manly activities (fishing, boxing, bullfighting); they display a slight scorn for American tourists in Europe, and show little interest in returning to their homeland. While there can be no doubt that the war and its memories play a role in their behavior, with the passage of time this alienation has found its social expression in a form of affectation: a blasé, detached stance toward the world around them, and often to each other. The alienation of Jake and his entourage has become largely a pose, a calculated posturing which allows these expatriates to exploit their environment and the local inhabitants without having to assume any responsibility for their personal behavior.

Robert Cohn is something of an exception. He lingers on the periphery of the group, at times projecting a certain nobility and at others exemplifying his erstwhile friends' loutish behavior. Yet he is in some striking ways different from them. These differences feed their dislike for him but also make him a very important character in the novel.

The most salient features of Robert Cohn are that he is Jewish, a father, whiney, and usually sober. For Jake's entourage, these are just the beginnings of the problems they have with him. Cohn is a Jew in an ostensibly Christian environment, a parent in the company of the childless, a bundle of insecure energy in an atmosphere of cool detachment where an air of slight boredom is the norm, a man given to unmanly crying jags. Cohn is someone who drinks sparingly yet with melodramatic consequences; a man who has a fancy Ivy League education but finds himself in a milieu that appears to place a higher value on "street smarts." He is a published novelist with literary ambitions in a world where ambition itself is viewed with suspicion and literature is a fleeting topic of conversation. As if this were not enough to make him marginal, according to Jake he does not even like Paris (48-49). Given all these perceived negatives, Michael Reynolds's summation of Cohn's importance seems quite just: "The novel's initial view of him is so biased that the reader can never take him seriously" (23).

A common assumption among critics and general readers is that Cohn's marginality is due not simply to his being Jewish, but also his lack of participation in the Great War.<sup>7</sup> This lack of combat experience explains for some his lingering adherence to moribund chivalric and romantic attitudes which no longer have a place in the modern world. Mark Spilka makes the case nicely:

Cohn's romanticism explains his key position in the parable. He is the last chivalric hero, the last defender of an outworn faith, and his function is to illustrate its present folly – to show us, through the absurdity of his behavior, that romantic love is dead, that one of the guiding codes of the past no longer operates. (35)

Michael Reynolds reiterates this judgment: “Robert Cohn may still throb to the romantic values of an earlier era, but he has no place in modern times” (38).

Despite the critical tendency to dismiss Cohn, I think his role in *The Sun Also Rises* is central. Though he is similar to the other expatriates in sharing several of their faults, by virtue of his differences he also exposes their affectations and sterility. More importantly, the chivalric and romantic attitudes which Spilka and others associate with him, coupled with his activities as an author, suggest that that these proclivities in Cohn are not simply outdated personal quirks. These attitudes become allusions to an English literary tradition dating roughly from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century. Cohn, by virtue of his ambition, and his personal shortcomings, becomes an embodiment of a literary heritage severely tried by the events of the Great War, one that is weakened but not dead. His foibles and often pathetic behavior are the physical correlative of this fragmented tradition, but his persistence is the persistence of literature itself, which will find a means of reasserting itself as it always has after the latest catastrophe that human beings have managed to inflict upon themselves.<sup>8</sup>

This is not to say that Cohn will be the great postwar novelist. Nothing suggests that Cohn will be the one to produce a significant work of art; in fact, the novel strongly intimates otherwise. One scene in *The Sun Also Rises* illustrates his basic weakness as a writer. There is only one mention of classical Greek literature in the text: Cohn's reference to Brett as Circe, the demi-goddess able to turn men into pigs with a stroke of her magic wand: “He calls her Circe ... He claims she turns men into swine” (148). Over time Circe became the image of women who were able to expose in men their swinish, sexually driven nature, and this is what Cohn's words suggest. The trouble with this learned allusion is that it does not really make sense in the context of the novel. Whatever Brett's faults, her insecurities, her willfulness, and her constant fluctuations with Jake hardly make her the equal of the much more clearly focused Circe. The classical reference thus

functions to illustrate Cohn's tendency to respond to contemporary reality in a melodramatic fashion, using what in this context is an exaggerated literary allusion. The only artistic value in comparing Circe and Brett is to underscore the difference between the two.<sup>9</sup> We know next to nothing about Brett's sexual partners before the story begins. The novel reports that she has slept with three men. Mike is perpetually pickled and usually nasty; he needs nobody's encouragement to behave like a pig.<sup>10</sup> Neither before nor after his time with Brett is Pedro Romero anything like a swine, and the same can be said for Robert Cohn. The Circe reference highlights Cohn's tendency to lose self-control and indulge in hyperbole, an emotional and artistic weakness that could adversely affect his literary sensibility and hamper his ability to complete a great work of art. What he will produce is the sort of literature he has already authored: second- or third-rate novels. Yet his very mediocrity speaks to his important role in Hemingway's text; he will not be the great artist of the future for reasons of personal talent. However, his incapacity to create at a high level also reflects his function as the representative of an enfeebled, out of date literary tradition, too mired in the past to properly confront the present. In his person and his production, Robert Cohn incorporates the tattered condition of English literature, as well as the difficulty inherent in creating a truly modern art in the aftermath of the war.

What matters in *The Sun Also Rises* is not Cohn's talent, but that he has the courage to attempt to live in the world and write serious fiction. His activities demonstrate that war or no war, trauma or no trauma, the effort to create fiction continues, despite periodic assertions that, for one reason or another, literature is no longer possible. World War I traumatized the human psyche with the use of weaponry the world had never seen (tanks, airplanes, bigger and longer-range cannons, poison gas), just as World War II would shake confidence in revered Enlightenment values through the introduction of industrialized genocide, terror bombing, and the deployment of atomic bombs. In the aftermath of these catastrophes, literature was initially under great duress, but would eventually reassert its strength. Yet the task would not be easy. In *The Sun Also Rises*, Robert Cohn is the pathetic symbol of the slow, failure-laden effort to renew literature after the war. His personal weaknesses and artistic limitations stand as illustrations of the extent to which confidence in the ability to articulate the postwar condition has eroded, but his dogged persistence speaks to the fact that while the fictional enterprise can be severely tried by historic

events, the desire to create a literature willing to confront the contemporary situation has never really disappeared.

Robert Cohn's tumultuous relations with the other expatriates also has literary implications. His vitality not only contrasts with the lethargy of those around him, but it also represents in a different way literature's latent strength and potential to renew itself despite the pressures weighing upon it. His differences from them, essentially his activity contrasted with their passivity, suggest attributes needed for artistic creation. At one point during the fiesta Jake remarks that "Brett saw how something that was beautiful done close to the bull was ridiculous if it were done a little way off" (171). To tinker with this description and apply it to Cohn, one could say that from a certain distance his comportment can readily appear overwrought and even silly, yet more closely observed, particularly in contrast with his friends' behavior, it proves quite significant in the novel.

This is most apparent in Cohn's willingness to try to express emotion and to acknowledge the intensity of his feelings. Despite his excesses in this area, he sincerely wants a deeper friendship with Jake, who does not respond to his overtures. He cries after fighting with Jake and Romero and after being rejected by Brett. If others in Jake's entourage might have been content with a brief fling with Brett, Cohn wanted her love and was prepared, in a knightly fashion, "to do battle for his lady love" (182). The expatriates greet his outsized expressions of anger, love, and remorse with somewhat amused disdain; for them, Cohn is the embodiment of all that is unacceptable and unmanly.<sup>11</sup> Yet, if the relationship between Jake and Brett were to be taken at all seriously, and Brett be considered something other than an *allumeuse*, they too would want love, passion, and a life together. This is what they imply in their conversations, albeit in a deliberately distanced language. Jake's "Isn't it pretty to think so" (250), the final sentence in the novel, and a response to Brett's imagining of the life they might have had together, cloaks a sense of failure and futility in an ironic and blasé phrase.

The strength of Jake's feelings for Brett, along with his frustration at not being able to act on them, emerge early in the novel. When Brett makes an unexpected appearance at a *bal musette* in the company of two homosexuals, Jake gets angry at the presence of the gay men, who will serve a variety of functions in the novel. He stalks out of the bar and goes to another one where the beer and cognac he drinks fail to calm him down. While Jake's comportment might simply be explained as a

manifestation of homophobia, it could also be a displaced reaction to the unanticipated apparition of the woman he loves but can never have. Cohn is an often embarrassing personification of the feelings they can neither fully articulate or act upon. In Cohn's very excess he nevertheless demonstrates that the desire for warmth, tenderness, and love, however unfashionable these emotions have become among the expatriates, very much continues to exist.

The oft-repeated cause of the alienation of Jake and his companions is the trauma of World War I. While there is obviously no time limit on the duration of mental and physical suffering, when the novel begins the war has been over for about eight years, and for most people life has moved on. Jake's wound will, of course, never disappear since it remains part of him wherever he goes, but as James Farrell observes, "Jake Barnes ... has more or less reconciled himself to his condition" (4). The rest of the bunch, including Brett, seem rather comfortable in their putative estrangement. They eat and drink well, essentially spend their time moving from one diversion to another, are perfectly integrated in their little world, and exhibit an indifference to the customs of those around them. They display no anxiety concerning the possibility of not belonging. Their disenchantment appears to be a feeling they can flaunt or forget at will.

This is not the case with Robert Cohn. As a Jew, he is the perennial outsider, destined by his ethnicity to linger at the edge of any social group other than one made up of his own people. If combatants in World War I were victimized by the complex political machinations<sup>12</sup> that led to the war, and then by the war itself, this condition was nonetheless temporary. Those veterans lucky enough to survive at least had the possibility of being honored as war heroes and finding a comfortable niche in society. As a Jew, Cohn is forever the potential victim of events in which he plays a minor role or no role at all. If he is to some degree always alienated from society, it is not his choice. It is a visceral part of his identity. He may not have fought in the Great War on behalf of glorious, if half-articulated, ideals, but he has fought for a very practical goal: to preserve his dignity and freedom at Princeton University from well-educated racists.

It cannot be chance that Hemingway made Cohn a Princeton graduate: "Edward Slosson's 1910 volume, *Great American Universities*, reported that anti-Semitism was 'more dominant at Princeton than at any other 'major' university he studied. It was commonly said that 'if the Jews once get in,' they would 'ruin Princeton as they have Columbia and Pennsylvania'"



(Stoneback 9). In the midst of a high-quality education Cohn discovered the reality of anti-Semitism, which he opposed in the ring with success. Yet his victory was temporary. Participants in World War I were actively engaged in combat within a delimited timeframe (1914–1918), whereas Cohn's war, the necessity that at times he must struggle mentally as well as physically, risking psychological and corporal harm, is ongoing since his enemy, racism, knows neither geographical boundaries nor time constraints.

Another aspect of Cohn's identity that demarcates him from the other is his profession. He is a novelist, a bad one as it happens, yet his occupation stands in marked contrast with Jake's work as a journalist. While it is unquestionably true that an excellent newspaper article is better than a poor novel, in *The Sun Also Rises*, the distinction between the two forms reflects the difference between a search for depth and a satisfaction with surface. Ideally, a novel is an effort to delve into the intricacies of its subject, to move beyond immediate appearances, and uncover more complex meanings to the actions depicted. *The Sun Also Rises* provides a good example of such a novel. Newspapers report daily events, occasionally with great perspicacity, but the nature of journalism is such that the writer is always limited by time and space, as well as by the rapid development of stories being covered. As a result, what characterizes the best newspaper articles is a clear description of what happens along with a recapitulation of the more obvious causes leading up to the event. A brilliant newspaper piece may also provide trenchant insights, but the nature of the genre, and the need to meet deadlines, normally preclude extensive analyses.

In *The Sun Also Rises* this general contrast between fiction and reporting takes a somewhat more subtle form. Bill Gorton says to Jake, "you claim you want to be a writer ... You're only a newspaperman" (118). This suggests that both Bill and Jake consider writing, presumably fiction, a higher calling, one that Jake is unable to pursue. Of course one could ascribe his writer's block to wartime experiences, but it could also be the result of laziness, lack of discipline, or immaturity: "Barnes ... has always been an emotional adolescent" (Spilka, 42). In a broader sense, Jake's inability to even begin the novel he aspires to write is the clearest indication that, despite appearances,<sup>13</sup> he has a place among the Lost Generation.

Certainly, the possibility of exploring reality in depths not permitted in journalism is not excluded by either Bill or Jake. The postwar novel, great or otherwise, is not deemed impossible, it just hasn't been written as yet,

partly because people like Jake are unwilling to make the effort, or others like Cohn lack the requisite talent.

Because Robert Cohn is a Jew who travels quite a bit, it might be tempting to associate him with the legend of the Wandering Jew. This would be quite misleading. The Wandering Jew's movements have no purpose; they are part of his condemnation for having insulted Christ as he went up Golgotha. Cohn's travels almost always have a goal. He goes to Spain in pursuit of Brett, just as he came to Paris to write a novel, which he did, but of late he no longer feels at home there. Since his recent success with publishers in New York, he seems more interested in returning to the city that appears to be a Mecca for ambitious Anglophone writers. Bill Gorton, who in addition to being a journalist has also written a play, will leave for New York toward the end of the novel (235). Paris in particular, and Europe in general (Gorton came to Paris from Vienna), do not seem to be sites that favor American creativity, at least among the Lost Generation.

The artistic problem with Paris, a problem Cohn senses, is not the city. Paris in the 1920s was perhaps the cultural center of the world in terms of music, dance, visual arts, and, to a slightly lesser degree, literature. In *The Sun Also Rises*, the great obstacle for an American writer living in Paris was not the city itself, but the climate of sterility created by the American expatriate community.

Jake's war wound has rendered him physically impotent but, figuratively speaking, so are the other expatriates in his immediate entourage. They consume food and drink while talking incessantly; with the exception of Bill Gorton, they create nothing. Nor do any of them, except Cohn, have children. In the scene where Jake encounters Brett after an absence, he takes umbrage at the presence of homosexuals at her side. The function of the homosexuals in the novel is open to a variety of not necessarily contradictory interpretations, but in the present context these men add to a climate of sterility. As does the short-haired Brett dressed in male clothing, or for that matter the French prostitute with the dual-gendered name, Georgette, who dances with one of the gay guys and later proclaims, "Everybody's sick. I'm sick too" (23). Her comment is not in reference to homosexuality but rather a reflection of the general sterility of the postwar era as experienced by the Lost Generation in Paris.

Robert Cohn is once again the exception to this widespread sense of unproductiveness. A father of three and a published novelist whose second book is about to appear, he is productive both physically and artistically.

He wants to leave Paris to escape the ambiance of jaded lethargy the Americans have created. Whether he goes to New York to improve his career prospects or makes a voyage to South America for undisclosed reasons, an important consideration is to avoid a growing sense that “my life is going so fast and I’m not really living it” (18).

Despite appearances, the Americans in *The Sun Also Rises* are very much in the tradition of Americans in Paris found in *The Custom of the Country*. Although Jake and his entourage are very different from the denizens of the *hôtel Nouveau Luxe* in terms of social class and comportment, their attitude to Europe in general, and Paris in particular, is remarkably similar to what one finds in Wharton’s novel. For both groups, Paris is a carefully demarcated playground, a backdrop for their pleasures, a reassurance of their sophistication, but certainly not a location for hard work or literary creation. In Wharton’s novel, this “imaginary Paris” extended from the Place Vendôme, across the Opéra to the *grands boulevards*, whereas the “Paris” of *The Sun Also Rises* is essentially the Latin Quarter and Montparnasse on the Left Bank. In both novels, the role for the native population is severely limited. Except for nameless waiters, a concierge, and a prostitute, there are even fewer French people in *The Sun Also Rises* than in *The Custom of the Country*, and unlike the Wharton novel, there is not a single French character of any significance in Hemingway’s text. In general, Hemingway’s expatriates exhibit an impressive indifference to the people in whose country they find themselves. The best example of this arrogance is provided by Robert Cohn. At one point in Spain, Cohn wonders, “Where are the foreigners?” (158). Bill has to remind him: “We’re the foreigners” (158).

Cohn’s comment is as instructive as it is stupid. As discussed in the Wharton chapter, Undine Spragg’s Paris did not really exist. It was a creation of American wealth and power, an alternate universe with fixed geographical boundaries where the rich could frolic without concern for the country they were nominally living in or for the sensibilities of the locals. The reality of Paris, the existence of actual French people, was of little interest to them. Hemingway’s Americans do not have the financial resources of Undine Spragg and her crowd, but they have enough money. They can enjoy Paris and Spain without taking either place particularly seriously, except as sources of amusement and diversion. Geographical locations provide a vaguely exotic setting for the bubble in which they float through Europe. All that matters to them is themselves, the satisfaction of their needs and an enhancement of their sense of being, in some

unexplained way, cosmopolitan. Cohn's crass observation about foreigners provides an accurate example of a certain expatriate mentality.

Language skills are also an issue in both novels. The ability to communicate in a foreign language does appear more widespread among the expatriates in *The Sun Also Rises* than it does in *The Custom of the Country*. While there is the lady who "in the excitement of talking French was liable to have no idea what she was saying" (26), Jake can express himself in French and Spanish, Brett studied in Paris (248) so she must know the language, and the perpetually intoxicated Mike can speak Spanish. There is little indication about the linguistic abilities of Cohn and Bill Gorton. Perhaps the foreign language speakers in the group have only a functional level of communication, or perhaps they are quite fluent, yet clearly for them a knowledge of languages is not viewed as an inroad to a new culture or a tool which would allow them to discuss serious issues with the French or the Spanish. Whatever level of fluency they possess, they use their skills merely to facilitate dealing with the practical necessities of their daily lives, and, in any case, concerning serious matters, they expect a response in English from the locals.

In terms of the Franco-American paradigm, once again there are similarities between the Wharton and the Hemingway novels. First of all is the reversal of the initial dichotomy. In *The Sun Also Rises*, as in *The Custom of the Country*, American naivety has become American cynicism, and naivety, at least initially, has become a foreign affair. If in *The American* the images of the Other were unstable, subject to constant change, in both of these novels the foreign disillusionment with Americans, if slow in coming, has a permanence about it. The American vision of Europeans in *The Sun Also Rises* does retain an unstable element, but only because the expatriates think so little of and about these people. Rather than consider the French and Spanish as individuals with their own thoughts and feelings, they view them as facilitators who add local color and, by doing so, burnish the expatriates' prestige. Georgette, with her disabused manner and decaying teeth (see note 17), appears to be more of a decoration than an object of sexual desire. For the expatriates she illustrates how cool and unconventional they are. In Spain, Montoya goes from liking the Americans to just wanting them out of his inn. This radical change has no effect on the expatriates, perhaps because they are indifferent, or perhaps because they never took him seriously in the first place. As in *The Custom of the Country*, Europeans in Hemingway's book are either servants or props.

In "Hemingway and Europe" John Aldridge observes that Hemingway's characters "have little to do with Europe" (in Claridge, 9), and maintains that "one finds in his books very little portraiture of Europe and Europeans" (8). This is certainly true in *The Sun Also Rises*. Europe provides fun and games at low prices; it is a continent where the principal expatriate activity is to take. To the extent that Hemingway writes about "Americans in Paris" in this novel, the emphasis is clearly on "Americans."

Cohn's wondering aloud about life passing him by leads Jake to scoff at his anxiety, but he is perhaps not as different from Cohn as he thinks. When Brett asks him why he brought Georgette to the *bal musette*, he succinctly replies that he was "bored" (31). Boredom is the experience of being helpless before the passage of time, the inability to find something that will engage the mind, body, or both. It is the passive acceptance of life's inexorable, purposeless movement that is precisely what Cohn fears, and which he seeks to defy through writing. Jake's boredom is emblematic of his entourage. While the expatriates ply their bodies with food and drink, the constant drunkenness suggests that this activity is as much an escape as it is a supposed pleasure. They drink to excess because they do not know what to do with themselves. Jake at least has the merit of being able to state the issue clearly (boredom), but then he does little about it, and his inertia contrasts with the often-frenetic activity of Cohn. Although Cohn is usually the butt of sarcasm and laughter, he represents an effort to live his life as fully as he can. Yet, he is affected by the ambiance provided by the American community in Paris. If his self-confidence increased while he was in New York, it begins to desert him in Paris (52): "I'm sick of Paris and I'm sick of the Quarter" (19). His desire to leave the city is based on a healthy instinct to escape from an omnipresent malaise, which could ultimately hinder his artistic creativity. The problem, of course, is not Paris but the milieu he frequents there.

The boredom of the expatriates begs the question of why they choose to continue living in Paris. The most obvious explanation is that in the aftermath of World War I the dollar was indeed almighty, alcohol was relatively cheap, and Prohibition had made drinking in the States very expensive and somewhat dangerous. The expatriates stay away from the United States for what appear to be adolescent reasons. Life is so much more carefree and easier for them in Europe. They are in no sense dissidents; indeed, they do not seem to have serious issues with the United States. In fact, regarding American values, the expatriates demonstrate an adherence to some of the worst attitudes prevalent in their native country.

These Americans living so far from their homeland display racist attitudes all too typical of mainstream America in the 1920s. Robert Cohn is first of all a “kike” who, according to Jake, “had a hard, Jewish, stubborn streak” (18), a judgment reiterated in a variety of ways throughout the novel by the other expatriates. When Bill Gorton was in Vienna he befriended a black boxer, a “wonderful nigger” (77). From Bill’s perspective there is nothing particularly pejorative in the language he uses; he does not think his words are potentially insulting to people of color, but then he never seems to wonder why the black fighter has chosen to live in Cologne with his wife and family rather than return to his homeland (77). Closely related to racism in the novel is homophobia. Jake is annoyed and angered by Brett’s arrival with two gay men, and Bill, in attempting to express his friendship to Jake admits that he could not say as much in New York because “It’d mean I was a faggot” (121). Bill’s comment is to a degree ironic, since it precedes some silly references to homosexuals, “Abraham Lincoln was a faggot. He was in love with General Grant. So was Jefferson Davis” (121). Nevertheless, his words reflect a dismissive, condescending view of homosexuals.

One might consider these racist and sexist remarks typical of the era and suggest that bringing attention to them is simply an example of contemporary political correctness. Yet these sorts of comments are made by people supposedly more sophisticated than the folks back home. They suggest that if expatriates are people who have chosen to stay abroad, this decision has almost nothing to do with an effort to think differently, to re-examine their values, and perhaps profit from new perspectives which may be available in Europe. In fact, they are little more than ordinary Americans who, for reasons initially beyond their control (the war), experienced a dramatic change in their geographical location. Rather than the new surroundings leading to different, conceivably broader perspectives, the expatriates have carried some of the least enlightened ideas of American society with them to Europe. The influence of Paris and Europe, along with the exposure to foreign cultures and peoples, has done nothing to alter their mindsets. They are as oblivious to the new viewpoints Europe might offer as they are content to exemplify some of the more unsavory aspects of American culture.

This can also be seen in their avoidance of contact with the local population and their tendency to stay together as a group. After World War I the United States tried, initially with some success, to return to

an isolationist stance, making immigration harder, rejecting adhesion to the League of Nations, and generally attempting to maintain a distance from Europe and its potentially nefarious influences. In a parodic form the expatriates do the same thing. They live in the midst of Europe but in an American, or at least Anglophone, enclave and, for the most part, demonstrate little haste or enthusiasm about admitting foreigners into their circle.

Finally, if the expatriates affect a somewhat free-spirited, bohemian air, it is because most of them have a source of income that comes from home. Jake and Bill are working journalists who are financially independent, but Cohn receives money from his wealthy mother in New York. Mike has managed to lose a fortune, but he too receives money from his family, and Brett has some sort of inheritance. Their existence on the fringes of European society is only possible because of the good will of people whose values and lifestyles they would most probably deride. From this perspective, Philip Young's contention that "In Hemingway's waste land, there is no hope" (cited in Knodt, 111) seems excessive. The expatriates do not inhabit a waste land, nor are they without hope, despite Brett's occasional declaration that she is miserable (70); they move from one café or one country to another more anxious about the liquor supply at the next watering hole than the human condition. This group is essentially unaware of its social environment while perpetually in pursuit of the next diversion. When the dollar collapses in 1929, and they can no longer continue to live as they have, they will most certainly not despair. They will catch the next boat home and return to the land that in many respects they have never left.

Unlike Georges Duhamel's straightforward narrative in *Civilisation*, *The Sun Also Rises* is a much more consciously literary work. An aspect of its complexity emerges in the frequent recourse to religious, historical, and literary allusions. Among the most significant are references to the Western Judeo-Christian tradition (Jacob and the Angel, pilgrimages to St. James of Compostela and Lourdes), to historical personages and events (Marshall Ney, the Battle of Roncevaux in 778), and to literature (Roland, Oliver, from *The Song of Roland*).

T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) employs a literary technique that Hemingway occasionally echoes in *The Sun Also Rises*. It involves using cultural and religious allusions drawn from the past, not to show similarities with their contemporary avatars, but to underscore the vast difference

between the heroic prototype and its current exemplar. In Eliot's poem, the clerk with carbuncles is not even a remote equivalent of Anthony, Tristan, or the Earl of Leicester, but he is the representative of modern lovemaking in its most degraded form. An example, albeit less extreme, of this usage in *The Sun Also Rises* would be the juxtaposition of Jake Barnes with the Jacob who appears in the Hebrew Bible.

The Book of Genesis recounts Jacob's heroic struggle with a representative of God, usually considered an angel. They battle to a draw but, impressed by Jacob's strength, courage, and endurance, the mysterious stranger changes his adversary's name to "Israel," meaning "he who struggles with God." In *The Sun Also Rises*, to the extent that there is an implicit comparison between Jacob and Jake Barnes, it is not very flattering to the latter. Jacob fought with confidence in God and with the firm belief that his effort was part of a divine plan. While he is injured in the thigh, he emerges from the battle with his sexual organs and faith intact; he will produce numerous progeny. We can assume that Jake too fought bravely, but his wound has rendered him impotent and left his trust in God shaken, if not destroyed. This is reflected quite clearly on his occasional visits to churches, where he proves disinterested in wrestling with God. In one instance, an attempt to pray for himself made him sleepy, so instead he "prayed that the bull-fights would be good ... that it would be a fine fiesta, and that we would get some fishing" (103). To the extent that prayer has any significance for him, it resides in its potential to ensure diversions.<sup>14</sup>

In *The Sun Also Rises*, Hemingway does not often juxtapose to stress dichotomies. Usually, he parallels the past and the present for different purposes. If, for Eliot, the past weighs heavily on the denizens of the present, the past is at best a discrete presence in Hemingway's novel. The expatriates are either largely unaware of the potentially larger historical contexts surrounding their activities or blithely indifferent to them. Theirs is a world of a near-perpetual present with some infrequent nostalgia for the past. They may live encircled by culture, but they show little interest in it. With the occasional exception of Jake, for the expatriates the immediate pleasures Paris and Europe provide are infinitely more attractive than delving into the self or pondering the implications of a distinguished but wounded cultural heritage. If postwar Europe is in many ways a waste land, to think about this would simply be a waste of time for these people.

Hemingway's cultural and literary allusions underscore the American indifference to their surroundings and what they might learn from



European culture, which is nominally their cultural heritage as well. Unlike Cohn's direct comparison of Brett and Circe, Hemingway's use of allusions is discrete; like the faraway Roncevaux that Jake points out to Bill, the references seem off in the distance, hinting at possible comparisons that the characters in the novel can choose to examine or avoid.

Jake and his friends spend a lot of time in the area of the rue Soufflot and the Panthéon. This is a part of Paris filled with small, winding streets. One of the longest and straightest of them is the rue Saint-Jacques. This street is frequented by Hemingway's Americans because of the quantity of its cafés. It runs directly to the Tour Saint-Jacques, the only remnant of a thirteenth-century church, Saint-Jacques de la Boucherie. For centuries it was from this religious site that pilgrimages set out on the road to Saint James of Compostela in Spain. The pilgrim's purposes could be quite varied, but they shared a certain consistency. Some sought miracles, some pursued divine forgiveness, while others undertook the hazardous trip simply to demonstrate and reinforce their religious beliefs. Yet what motivated them all, at least officially, was a faith in God, the certitude that however difficult the present life, trust in divine guidance would guarantee them a passage to a better one. Their lives, as trying as they might have been, made sense and had a purpose.<sup>15</sup>

For the expatriates, the *quartier de Saint-Jacques* is just another place to carouse. They demonstrate no metaphysical or spiritual crises in this or any other section of Paris. Nor do they demonstrate any real knowledge of where they are, except to know the names of some of the sites. The rue Saint-Jacques runs by the church of Val-de-Grâce, an edifice built by Anne of Austria to commemorate the birth of her son, the future Louis XIV. Eventually it intersects the boulevard de Port-Royal, the section of Paris that in the seventeenth-century housed a convent that was the center for the Jansenists, a religious faction ostensibly affiliated with the Catholic Church, but strongly influenced by Saint Augustine, and through him by John Calvin. Jansenism attracted some of the most brilliant minds of the era and constituted a serious challenge to Catholic religious practices. This section of Paris is replete with religious echoes; it is a neighborhood once frequented by people like Blaise Pascal and Antoine Arnaud, men obsessed with trying to follow the narrow path to God. These sorts of anxieties are foreign to the Americans. If they set off for Spain from this location, their goals have nothing in common with what motivated the pilgrims on the road to Saint James of Compostela.

During an evening stroll, Jake and Bill pass the famous restaurant/café, the Closeries des Lilas and consider the statue of Marshal Ney, one of Napoleon's greatest and bravest generals. Born in relatively modest circumstances, Ney rallied quickly to the French Revolution as a young man and then to Napoleon, in whose major campaigns he served with distinction. He was wounded on several occasions. When a defeated Napoleon was exiled to Elba, Ney chose to serve the restored monarchy of Louis XVIII. Yet at Napoleon's return from the island, Ney deserted to the former emperor's side and remained faithful to Napoleon until the end at Waterloo. Shortly thereafter he was executed as a traitor by the government of the Bourbon king. Jake's reaction to the statue is "He looked fine. Marshal Ney in his top-boots, gesturing with his sword among the green new horse-chestnut leaves" (37). Jake may well know something about Ney's story and its possible relevance to himself: idealism, courage, war wound, possible disillusionment at the end of the conflict, but he chooses to make no such connections. His Ney is just a dramatic figure in striking boots.

Shortly after Jake and Bill enter Spain, Jake points out the Roncevaux Pass off on the horizon. This is where a great battle was fought in 778 between the rearguard of Charlemagne's army, commanded by Roland, who sought to defend the main body of French troops against Basque soldiers. Later in the ninth century this event was transformed into the *Song of Roland*, and the duplicitous Basques were replaced by wily Saracens. At the center of this *chanson de geste* were the heroic Roland and his faithful friend Oliver, both of whom fought bravely before going down to superior forces in glorious defeat. Afterwards, Charlemagne returns with his army, engages the Saracens, and wins the battle. The sacrifices of Roland, Oliver, and their soldiers were not in vain. Here again is a possible allusion to the war Jake and Bill experienced, as well as an affirmation of male friendship. Roncevaux is an invitation for the two veterans to see their wartime existence in a broader, more sublime context, one that might suggest that their struggles were ultimately more meaningful than they might have imagined. The sighting of the Roncevaux Pass with its allusions to a great battle and *The Song of Roland* are references Jake and Bill might well have profited from exploring, but which they prefer to ignore.

"We crossed the Spanish frontier" (98). In *The Sun Also Rises*, the passage from France to Spain involves more than exchanging one country for another. France is a cityscape represented by Paris, whereas Spain

is bucolic in its scenery and simple in its village life. France and much of Western Europe are areas ravished by war; they bear the scars of the modern world.<sup>16</sup> Spain, however, did not participate directly in the Great War and was untouched by its destructiveness. France, then, is the present and Spain the past. France is jaded and Spain relatively innocent. The Americans' wanton behavior and indifference to local traditions will contribute to the Spanish loss of innocence and, in the process, nudge Spain in the direction of modernity.

The corruption Jake and his friends bring to Spain is not some sort of philosophical disillusionment with the state of the world. It is much more banal.<sup>17</sup> They do in Spain what they have done in France; they exploit the population and its resources in the interest of their own pleasures. When Jake and Bill arrive at the inn in Burguete, Jake initially dickers with the innkeeper over the price of her rooms but eventually agrees to pay what she asks since the wine is included. The two Americans then proceed to drink excessively: "We did not lose money on the wine" (116). Eventually, "The old woman [the innkeeper] looked in once and counted the empty bottles" (116). Jake records this scene and the woman's reaction but does not draw any conclusions from it.

This pattern of straining the hospitality of their hosts will only accentuate during the duration of their stay in Spain. The Americans arrive, encounter an initial good will, and then slowly wear down the patience of the Spanish with their lack of self-control and obliviousness to the local customs. Montoya initially greets Jake as a friend but, once he sees the expatriates plying young Pedro Romero with cognac the evening before he enters the bull ring, his enthusiasm for the Americans begins to cool. After Romero's fistfight with Cohn, Montoya loses all respect for his guests and barely acknowledges Jake by the end of the visit.

There are, however, two customs the Americans do honor: the fiesta and the bull fights. They like the fiesta in Pamplona, which occurs once a year, because it is the way they try to live every day. They like the bullfights even if, with the exception of Jake, they know little about them. What they admire is the manliness they witness in the bullring and the traditions surrounding the *corrida*, although Brett fails to appreciate the homage Romero accords her in presenting her with a bull's ear. She just throws it in a drawer and promptly forgets about it (203). Principal among the activities associated with the bullfights which the Americans respect is the running of the bulls.

In order to get the bulls from the crates in which they were shipped to Pamplona and into the ring, they must be run through the city streets. Keeping with the local tradition, young men seize this occasion to race in front of the animals, thereby displaying their courage by daring the bulls to impale them.<sup>18</sup> In a novel where the expatriates demonstrate no interest in physical activity except in the trout fishing scene, this is the only moment where some of them actually get exercise. Yet, as a proof of manliness and courage, this is a silly and gratuitous activity. More importantly, the image of running away is a metaphor for what these men have been doing throughout their time in Europe, namely running away from life. By staying abroad, they are trying to escape from the sorts of obligations associated with the transition into an adult world.

A major presence in the Spanish portion of the novel is Pedro Romero. While Mark Spilka's reference to him as "the real hero" (17) seems exaggerated, Romero's role is certainly important; he is the last true representative of a code of comportment that championed honor, transparency, and discipline. Bullfighting for him and those who admire it is more than a sport or a profession; it is a primitive religion, a re-enactment of an enduring myth that pits man against adversity in the form of an animal. If man is to triumph, he must display intelligence, courage, guile, and respect for his adversary. These are qualities Romero possesses to an exceptional degree but which are becoming rarer in the modern version of bullfighting. As Jake explains, "Romero never made any contortions, always it was straight and pure and natural in line" (171). This is not the case with the other bullfighters, who gesticulate wildly "to give a faked look of danger" (171). For Jake and Montoya, Romero "was a real one. There had not been a real one for a long time" (168). Romero's dressing room, where he puts on his costume and prays before each fight, has the ambiance of a monastic cell, while the prayer and the bullfighter's distinctive regalia suggest membership in a religious order. Romero's dedication to his craft reflects a devotion to values that are not simply of this world, to principles which extend beyond the destruction of a large beast.

The central scene during the Spanish sequence in *The Sun Also Rises* concerns the fight between Cohn and Romero. The scene is silly enough in itself, the pride of both men making it impossible for either one to stop. Cohn must always defend himself when attacked, and Romero cannot yield before danger. Cohn is at his most ridiculous here, hitting Romero then wanting to shake his hand, and finally going off to his room to cry.

Romero is the more stalwart, even if his willingness to continue taking punishment provokes befuddlement as well as admiration. Yet as farcical as their actions appear, the scene involves more than a quarrel between two testosterone-laden young men; it brings into conflict two sets of values which actually have at least two salient points in common. Each man is an imperfect representative of ideals greater than himself, values that are associated with the past.

Cohn embodies literary values and techniques which have been sorely tested, and to some degree outmoded, by the Great War. Romero is a reminder of a bullfighting tradition becoming more and more out of date. At the same time, he is associated with religion (Catholicism), which is becoming increasingly irrelevant in this same world. There is considerable irony in these men being burdened with such associations. Cohn's language and comportment may at times recall elements of early English literature, yet aside from an occasional turn of phrase, he is hardly a chivalric or romantic figure, and Romero's fling with Brett undercuts the pristine values he otherwise embodies.

The point of contention between the two is Lady Brett Ashley, the most enigmatic character in the novel. The man she claims she wants, she cannot have and frequently abandons. Yet on occasion she gives the impression that she always wants to be with Jake, only to withdraw and disappear again for a time. She changes moods with quicksilver speed: flirtatious, depressed, contemplative, playful, open, opaque, amorous, bitchy. Besides Jake, only Cohn and Romero seek more than a transient relationship with Brett and appreciate that she is more than a beautiful woman. They seem to have sincere, deep feelings for her, yet she rejects them both.

Brett reaches a point where she simply cannot stand Cohn: "My God! I'm so sick of him ... He depresses me so" (185). This scene occurs in Pamplona, shortly after she has spent time with him in San Sebastián. Romero's desire that she allow her hair to grow provokes Brett's break with him: "He wanted me to grow my hair out. Me, with long hair. I'd look so like hell" (246). Both Cohn and Romero are defenders of tradition, a secular one and a quasi-religious one. The world has become quite different, and in the end Cohn and Romero cannot accept this difference embodied in Brett; they want her to conform to what they think she is, but they cannot fathom who she really is. Cohn refuses to believe that his time with Brett at San Sebastián meant less to her than it did to him, while Romero cannot free himself from a stereotypical idea of a woman even if the absence of

stereotype is what drew him to Brett in the first place. The value sets that these two men represent were factors in drawing them to Brett; they helped them glimpse something special about her. These same values, anchored in the past and unable to accommodate themselves to the modern world, are figuratively what pushed Brett away from them.

*The Sun Also Rises* appears to have no conclusion. Rather than a veritable ending, the novel can seem to just stop. This is not the case, however. Hemingway has so carefully constructed the final scene that it strongly implies what is to come after the last page.

Brett has sent a telegram from Madrid to Jake. She has just broken up with Romero and is alone and depressed. He quickly joins her. They have their usual sort of monosyllabic conversation as they move idly around the city from bar to bar. What they have to say to each other is not much different from what they had said in the past:

“Barmen and jockeys are the only people who are polite anymore.”

“No matter how vulgar a hotel is, the bar is always nice.”

“It’s odd.” (248)

It is at this juncture that the epigraph from Ecclesiastes comes into play: “One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth forever ... The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down ...”

Hemingway’s citation of Gertrude Stein on the Lost Generation was meant ironically, and so also it would appear is the Biblical citation. Ecclesiastes’ noble cadences recount an eternal movement ordained by God. Human beings will live and die, seasons will change, and days and months will pass, but the world will continue. With this continuity comes the possibility of hope, the desire that sorrow will eventually yield to joy, that humanity’s lot might somehow improve over the passage of time.

The sun that rises over Jake and his friends is otherwise; it will shed light not on change, movement, or possible development, but on endless, purposeless repetition. Jake occasionally recognizes this: “I had the feeling as in a nightmare of it all being something repeated, something I have been through and now I must go through again” (71). Jake and his friends will experience over and over the same low-level unhappiness, the same forced gaiety, the same boredom; they will engage in the same largely aimless conversations and express in the same blasé tones the same vaguely articulated ambitions, which will never be realized. Jake’s last words,

which are also the last words of the novel, reflect this apprehension that things will always be this way. To Brett's lament that their lives together could have been much better, he simply replies, "Isn't it pretty to think so" (251). Nothing in the novel suggests that Brett and Jake had ever had better times with each other. What Brett thinks of as their past is merely an earlier moment of their unchanging, repetitive present. Jake, who met Brett while recovering from his war wound, never had her sexually and never will, just as the book he imagines writing will never be finished. If Brett were ever to find a man with whom she could be happy, it could never be Jake or someone from his entourage. To find another person she could love and be loved by, she would have to break out of the expatriate cocoon, something she cannot, and does not want, to do. Unhappy she may be, but more often than not she is comfortable in her unhappiness and not miserable enough to change the way she lives. This is why the novel ends with such seemingly arbitrary abruptness. The main characters will repeat on the next new day what they had done the day before. Time will pass and the next unwritten, but already known scene will be acted out in Paris, Rome, London, or some other major European city. The geographical location will make no difference. The general contours of the day will remain the same; a different setting, perhaps some new faces and cafés, but nothing will really change.

*The Sun Also Rises* is a successful postwar novel of the sort Cohn would have wanted to write but never could. It eschews bromides, "weighty" allusions, and confidence in a brighter future. It is modern in its ability to suggest the breakdown of certain Western cultural and religious values, a collapse whose preparation was long in the making but which was precipitated by the Great War. Yet once it has described what no longer works, the novel offers no happy alternative to the morass which humanity has created for itself, except in the deeply ironic sense of demonstrating human adaptability, the ability to exploit the most tragic of events. War trauma must indeed be terrible, but over time the expatriates in *The Sun Also Rises* manage to turn real shock into a fashionable social stance that permits their shirking of the responsibilities of adulthood and citizenship.

The novel isolates several symptoms of postwar existential malaise (the diminishing force of organized religion; the increasing sense of life as purposeless; the effort, aided by alcohol, to create an alternative universe in a foreign land where one can remain forever young and free of societal obligations). Yet it can neither provide nor propose the cure. At best, it can offer a bandage for the wound: literature. Without ever being able to

equal religion's claim to make total sense out of the human condition, the literary text can, to a degree, offer people comfort, amusement, and at times the illusion of a better understanding of the world around them. The sun will rise, days will come and go in a continuous cycle broken only by death. Insofar as some dignity can be found in this otherwise meaningless passage, it will come from the artist's ability to capture the ephemeral, the often banal pleasures and sorrows of daily life, and by doing so give the transient a certain aura of the eternal. Jake may well be literally impotent and his friends the same in a figurative sense, but literature, challenged by historical events, ill-served by many of its practitioners, and perhaps in a fallow period, will, like the sun, rise again.

## Notes

1 My comments on the effects of World War I are based in part on my essay, "Expressing the Inexpressible" (15-16).

2 Paul Fussel, citing A.J.P. Taylor: "There had been no war between the Great Powers since 1871. No man in the prime of life knew what war was like. All imagined it would be an affair of great marches and great victories, quickly decided" (21).

3 Fussel: "The first Christmas of the war saw an absolute deadlock in the trenches. Both British and German soldiers observed an informal, *ad hoc*, Christmas Day truce, meeting in No Man's Land to exchange cigarettes and take snapshots" (10). An equally bizarre anecdote involved British soldiers' kicking a soccer ball before them as they headed off to battle (Fussel, 27).

4 In 1932, Céline published *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, which begins with vivid passages describing the war experience of his main character, Bardamu. If *Civilisation* stresses the human destruction caused by increasingly more sophisticated weaponry, *Voyage* insists that humanity's greatest danger is human beings. The apparent need to kill and maim seems to have a life of its own. Bardamu maintains that the Germans, along with his French colonel, might know why men are killing one another, but he himself, "je ne savais pas" (11). For him, "la guerre ... c'est tout ce qu'on comprenait pas ... une immense, universelle moquerie" (12). Throughout these sections on the war, Céline compares the slaughter on the battlefield, "toutes ces viandes" (18), to what transpires in *un abattoir*, the implied difference being that the results of the latter can at least be eaten. The French officers are incompetent and indifferent to their soldiers' lives (17), and the French civilians whom Bardamu encounters manage to find sententious reasons for not aiding their defenders



(35). Given these circumstances, the best *le petit poilu* can hope for is to be taken prisoner (37). Céline's novel was published less than twenty years after Duhamel's, but their reactions to the war are eons apart. It is not simply that Duhamel's emphasis on firepower contrasts with Celine's sense of human stupidity and callowness, the postwar lives of war veterans create another significant difference. One has the impression that Duhamel's soldiers, despite their suffering and injuries, will attempt to reintegrate into French society, while Bardamu is long condemned to be an outsider, a wanderer whose rage at the ways of the world is primarily harmful and destructive to himself. Even at the end of *Voyage*, when he decides to finish his medical studies, it will be to become a doctor serving marginal people. The intensity and duration of his reaction to the war, but also his belated effort at some form of social reintegration with the idea of being of some use in society, contrasts radically with the complacent alienation of Hemingway's expatriates.

5 For James Farrell, "the novel appealed to younger generations more than to Hemingway's contemporaries" (*The Sun Also Rises*, 5).

6 Hemingway offers a more uninhibited critique of people associated with the lost generation: "The scum of Greenwich Village, New York, have been skimmed off and deposited in large ladles on the section of Paris adjacent to the Café Rotonde" (Mellow, 162).

7 There is no direct reference to Cohn's lack of wartime participation, even though, according to H.R. Stoneback's well-informed speculations, "it is likely that [Cohn] entered Princeton in 1909 and graduated in 1913" (8). If this were the case, he would have been the perfect age for military conscription. Stoneback strongly suggests that Cohn is based on the writer and editor, Harold Loeb, who was also an expatriate. Yet if Robert Cohn were indeed based on Harold Loeb, then Cohn, too would have been spared direct participation due to weak eyesight. In the novel, Cohn wears glasses.

8 At an early stage in the creation of *The Sun Also Rises*, Hemingway apparently gave some thought to giving an early version of Robert Cohn the main role: "Gerald Cohn is the hero" (Mellow, 308). He would, of course, discard this idea, but it is a measure of the importance Hemingway accorded Cohn that he has so many scenes with Jake. Cohn is also the first character to appear in the novel.

9 Hemingway uses this technique, which consists of employing an analogy to stress the difference rather than similarities between two people or situations, to much greater effect later in the novel.

10 Late in the novel, Brett refers to Mike's boorish behavior: "he didn't need to be a swine" (185).

11 One of the most curious references to Cohn is Jake's statement that "He probably loved to win [tennis] as much as Lenglen" (52). He is referring to

Suzanne Lenglen, one of the early giants of French tennis. In a long career (1914–1926), Lenglen won 241 titles, including Wimbledon every year from 1919 to 1925, with the exception of 1924. In the expatriate world, comparing a man to a woman is obviously demeaning, but Jake's choice of Suzanne Lenglen is equally a reflection of the respect he has for Cohn's abilities and achievements.

12 Christopher Clark's *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (2013) provides a detailed account of the intrigues, errors, stupidity, and greed which lurched Europe, and then the United States, into a major international conflict.

13 Jake seems the most balanced person in his group. He gets along with people of different backgrounds and cultures, enjoys simple pleasures such as fishing and time in the countryside, and makes his best effort to be tolerant and open-minded. Yet, aside from his incapacity to make a start on the novel he wishes to write, a strong indication of his alienation from the world around him is his strange passivity in the face of events with potentially dire consequences. He does nothing to prevent his friends causing havoc in the Spanish town, nor does he do anything until it is too late to intervene in the quarrel between Cohn and Pedro.

14 The relationship between religious tradition and its declining power in the modern world is even more pronounced in relation to Brett. Although she occasionally proclaims her unhappiness and provides a vague sense of some sort of existential anxiety, her efforts to find solace in religion do little except illustrate how small a role religious practices or tradition have played, and continue to play, in her life. At one point, she confides to Jake that she wanted to hear him go to confession (154). Of all the rites associate with the Catholic Church, the practice of confession is among the best known to non-Catholics. Confession is conducted between the penitent and the priest; no third party can be present. Later, when she says she feels like praying for Romero, she goes to a church with Jake where she lasts a few moments before wanting to leave as quickly as possible: "Come on ... Let's get out of here. Makes me damn nervous" (212). Brett considers herself "damned bad for a religious atmosphere ... I've the wrong type of face" (212). Brett could never be subject to a religious crisis because her ignorance of religious practices is such that she would never recognize such a crisis. A comparable example of the deployment of religious imagery that ultimately plays no significant role is the use of water. Jake and especially Brett are often bathing. In a religious context, water can be a symbol of baptism, spiritual cleansing, and salvation. It has a more modest function in *The Sun Also Rises*. Water washes away the body's exterior dirt. Just as Jake's profession as a journalist suggests a certain limitation to surfaces, water in this novel has no deeper purpose than cleansing the skin.

15 The American tourists on a pilgrimage to Lourdes are a continuation of this tradition, albeit a somewhat parodied one, since Hubert and his family interrupt their religious journey for a few days on the beaches at Biarritz. Bill and Jake treat them with a mild condescension, Bill terming them “Pilgrims. Goddamn Puritans” (91). Nevertheless, however amusing this family from Dayton, Ohio may appear, their lives have a goal which is coherent, at least to them, whereas Jake and Bill are traveling for amusement and to pass the time.

16 Hemingway personifies the postwar desolation of Europe and its history of constant carnage through two characters. The French prostitute Georgette, an attractive woman until she opens her mouth and reveals her rotting teeth, is France after the war, a country which still projects a lovely façade but whose inner core has been devastated. Georgette’s comment, “Everyone is sick” (23), is figurative, reflecting a much-weakened France still struggling with “the memory of France’s losses, which included 1.4 million dead, 3.5 million wounded, 600,000 widows, 750,000 orphans. The fall in the birth rate during the conflict coupled with the 1919 Spanish flu epidemic accelerated the phenomenon of France’s aging population” (Bouvet and Durozoi, 57). At one point Brett’s friend, Count Mippipopulous, strips off his shirt and reveals the scars on his back from “seven wars and four revolutions” (66). This is the recent history of European conflict and European colonialism imprinted on the living flesh of someone who participated. While H.R. Stanley attempts to identify the wars and revolutions (101-102), the exact names are less important than what they indicate about the constant strife in European history. The near ceaseless violence, of which World War I was only the latest and largest expression, had figuratively and literally scarred the inhabitants of the Old World.

17 In 1936, Georges Duhamel published *Scènes de la vie future*, a strong, intelligent critique of the potentially nefarious influence which the United States was and would continue to exercise on Europe. Duhamel expressed his fear that the United States would be the future of Europe, due to its power, self-confidence, and money. The book was quite popular in France and evoked serious discussion. The negative American influence in Europe as depicted in *The Sun Also Rises*, which consists mostly of exploiting the local population’s food and drink, seems silly by comparison.

18 With regard to this activity, I am a firm partisan of the bulls.

## CHAPTER V

# Truths and Delusions

## The Cold War in *Les Mandarins*

In the space of five years we have acquired a formidable inferiority complex.

(Jean-Paul Sartre, cited in Tony Judt, *Postwar*, 100)

La littérature américaine pas plus que l'Amérique n'est pas un bloc homogène et fermé, comme on a trop tendance à le croire de loin.

(Simone de Beauvoir, *L'Amérique au jour le jour 1947*, 81)

In the forties and fifties, America was not very much *liked* by Europeans, and by the French in particular ... Europeans detested America because they detested *themselves*.

(Claude Roy, cited in Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect*, 187; emphasis original)

In the opening pages of *Seducing the French* (1993), Richard Kuisel notes that Gallic stereotypes of Americans in the post-war era “had been established by 1930. Americans were adolescents, materialists, conformists and puritans. And perhaps racists to boot” (13). As we have seen, such less-than-flattering French images of Americans have a longer lineage and at times reflect legitimate concerns about the potential perils of American cultural and political expansionism. The Cold War heightened, developed,

and confirmed, at least in the eyes of some, France's darkest fears about the burgeoning American hegemony. By the end of World War II, the United States had become the most powerful nation in the world and, for a time at least, the only one with the capacity of nuclear destruction. Yet for readers today, whatever their national origins, a willingness to appreciate the legitimacy of French uneasiness might not completely offset the puzzlement at the virulence and exaggeration of their reactions, particularly those generated by the Parisian intellectual elite, which at times seem long on hyperbole and short on sense. Jean-Marie Domenach's comment that "American society is totalitarian; it is possibly the most totalitarian society in the world" is typical (Kuisel, *Seducing the French*, 116).

Although there was certainly much to critique about *l'Amérique* in the postwar period, *Les Mandarins* (1954) stresses French intellectuals' often Manichean approach to political affiliation (either with the United States or with the Soviet Union; there is no position in between). This has the merit of being a relatively accurate rendering of the dominant Parisian stance at the time. In reading de Beauvoir's novel, it becomes apparent that this simplistic dichotomy is connected to the growing insecurity within the Parisian intellectual community concerning their role and importance in the modern world. This is what gives the title, *Les Mandarins*, its piquancy. The word "mandarin" has its origins in ancient China, where it referred to a quite gifted man who had studied extensively, passed multiple arduous examinations, and was subsequently recognized by society for his powerful intellect, which was then supposed to be put to use for the betterment of the empire. The mandarin was a very distinguished person, but in the world of 1945 *Les Mandarins* questions whether such an individual may have become somewhat obsolete, a figure of the past, a remnant of a world distant in time and space, increasingly anachronistic in the present. The novel reflects the fear of the postwar French intelligentsia, hidden at times behind blustery proclamations of intransigent positions, that this might indeed be their fate.

*Les Mandarins* begins in the heady times just after the liberation of Paris, and traces the slow decay of the initial optimism and enthusiasm at the possibility of creating a new, more just society. What becomes increasingly apparent in the course of the narrative is the difficulty, perhaps the impossibility, of affecting meaningful social change. On initial reading, the sections dealing with international and internecine political strife, and the intellectual's effort to find an ethically defensible position

in this maelstrom, appear to constitute the more important part of the novel. From this perspective, the love affair between Anne Dubreuilh and Lewis Brogan becomes something of a highly personalized addition on the author's part, one that unfolds in the United States, rather than France, and has little in common with the complex, challenging issues hotly debated in Paris.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter I will argue otherwise. The scenes set in Paris and the focus on politics provide the background for the confrontation between France and the United States, which will be embodied in the tumultuous relationship between Anne and Lewis. The seemingly endless squabbles among French intellectuals underscore the complexities of the postwar age, the difficulties of the choices to be made in a milieu where the notion of compromise was largely excluded; the hesitations and self-doubts of these men illustrate that navigating peacetime was in significant ways more stressful than surviving wartime: "La Résistance était une chose, la politique une autre" (*Les Mandarins*, 21). For these reasons, while opposition to American policies are frequently voiced in Paris, the primary focus in these portions of the novel is on the quandaries facing French intellectuals: are they still a relevant force in the modern world and, if so, how do they maneuver between the dictates of their individual conscience and the need to be part of a larger group in order to be effective in the political arena? In *Les Mandarins*, the more direct, yet nuanced, confrontation between French and American values unfolds, not in Paris, but in *l'Amérique*.

The attraction/repulsion that characterizes the rapport between Anne and Lewis is first and foremost highly personal and involves just two individuals. Yet it is also possible to see their mutual behavioral patterns of love, annoyance, insecurity (on Anne's part), anger, and then love again before an ultimate disillusionment, as analogous to the complex relationship between the United States (Lewis) and France (Anne). Obviously, any argument for analogy has its dangers. Analogy can be located on such a general level that it really provides little of interest or, worse, can be proven to be seriously misleading. Yet the use of analogy in analyzing *Les Mandarins* has the merit of humanizing the tensions between France and the United States. If the Parisian sections frame the quarrel as a clash of policies and ideas unfolding on a geopolitical level, the fraught interactions between Anne and Lewis emphasize that this conflict also involves two sets of human beings, each with qualities and flaws. Imagining Anne and Lewis as representatives of their respective

countries brings to the fore the complexity, and even contradiction, in the two nations' at times tortuous shared history, elements that are lacking in the Parisian intellectuals' blanket condemnation of the United States. The Parisian view of *l'Amérique* is driven by a rather limited notion of *Realpolitik* and has next to nothing to do with personal experience; none of these intellectuals ever goes to the States, and the only American who plays some part in their lives is an Office of Strategic Services (OSS) agent. Anne, on the other hand, spends considerable time in the United States, and struggles to work through a variety of conflicting emotions about Lewis, feelings that parallel French reactions in general to the American presence in France.

Lewis, a creative and powerful force in the novel, is at various moments kind, choleric, helpful, and infantile. These are the qualities and faults which *Les Mandarins* associates with his native country. The fact that Lewis will at times display some positive "American" attributes is significant, since the one member of the Parisian intellectual milieu who occasionally defends the United States, Scriassine, is scarcely heeded by his colleagues. More generally, little effort is expended in Paris trying to appreciate the American position. Finally, developing an analogy between the personal and the political as manifest in the almost constantly strained relation between Anne and Lewis gives *Les Mandarins* a tighter internal coherence, since it illustrates that the love affair is not a distraction, but an extension, and integral part, of the broader political discussion at the center of the novel.

In the France of the immediate postwar era, Gallic distrust of the United States had a variety of causes. There was a deep suspicion of American political intentions regarding France. This lack of confidence was heightened by Washington's desire to rearm Germany,<sup>2</sup> a policy associated with the Marshall Plan, which was in turn looked upon as a ploy to heighten French dependence upon the American occupier. The Marshall Plan was part of the U.S.'s Cold War strategy, and this association only increased Gallic unease since, "in the eyes of many French people at that time, by no means all of them sympathetic to communism, the West was responsible for the Cold War" (Judt, *Past Imperfect*, 177). In addition, American popular culture, along with its attendant "American values," was considered a threat to French tradition and way of life. Finally, the lingering presence of the American military on French soil was a source of growing anger and frustration for the local inhabitants.

The only American character in the initial portions of *Les Mandarins* is Preston, a man who was part of the Liberation celebration and later turns out to be an OSS operative. In a conversation with Henri Perron, the idealistic editor of *L'Espoir*, an independent journal in dire financial straits, Preston declares that he and his nation share his political concerns about Fascist Spain and that “la république sera rétablie en Espagne, dans les meilleures conditions” (*Les Mandarins*, I, 212). According to Preston, “Personne n’est plus ouvert que l’Américain aux critiques constructives” (I, 213), even though “la France est mal placée pour juger notre politique méditerranéenne” (I, 213). The purpose of Preston’s visit to Henri is to offer financial assistance to *L'Espoir*, without, according to the American, desiring to influence the review’s editorial policy.

This scene encapsulates several of the reasons for the French distrust of the Americans. Preston presents himself as a friend who just wants to be helpful financially and claims to fully support Henri’s initiatives. Yet he tries to persuade Henri that the American backing of Franco is temporary and not worth serious attention at the very moment when this question is being discussed in *L'Espoir*. While Henri is free to write what he pleases, the American cautions that “vous feriez le jeu de ceux qui veulent nous présenter comme des impérialistes” (I, 212). Preston claims to share Henri’s position on Spain, which he deems “humanitaire,” but then adds that it “n’est pas valable politiquement” (I, 212). In the guise of friendship and the championing of freedom of the press, Preston is pressuring Henri to remember how weakened France remains and how dependent on American support. For these reasons, it would be wise for *L'Espoir* not to trample on American sensibilities. Henri is not the least bit fooled or intimidated; earlier in the novel he has already noted how pragmatism, rather than principle, governs American decisions and alliances. The U.S. ought to have helped to get rid of Salazar in Portugal, but that will not happen anytime soon Henri notes, since the Portuguese are about to sell airbases in the Azores to the Americans (I, 175).

Another source of French concern was the American possession of the atomic bomb and the possibly racist motives for dropping it on the Japanese. Robert Dubreuilh, Anne’s husband and the principal representative of the French intelligentsia in the novel, wonders why the Americans did not give more warning to Japanese officials before dropping the bomb, and why they did not choose a German city, except that the Germans are white, whereas the Japanese are “des jaunes! Ils détestent les jaunes” (I, 373). In



any case, the real target, according to Robert, was neither the Germans nor the Japanese: “Ils sont tout contents de montrer au monde entier de quoi ils sont capables” (I, 373).

If these reasons for distrusting the Americans are not without foundation, the Gallic animosity was also further fed by rumors and half-truths. At one point, Robert is convinced that “L’hégémonie américaine: c’est la sous-alimentation, l’oppression, à perpétuité pour tous les pays d’Orient” (I, 376). Lambert, a journalist who is at times a friend of Henri and at others an enemy, reports that after the liberation of the concentration camps the Americans caused the death of countless inmates by providing them with inappropriate food<sup>3</sup> and were slow in repatriating displaced persons (I, 276). Not all the rumors are gruesome. Earlier in the novel the same Lambert asks Scriassine, the often pro-American intellectual, about American alcohol consumption: “C’est vrai qu’ils en boivent douze [verres] par jour ...?” (I, 32). The response underscores the potential weakness of any generalization as well as the silliness of the question: “*Ils, qui ça, ils*” (I, 32; emphasis original).

In *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*, Tony Judt asserts that France could not have survived without the Marshall Plan, and thus he finds it ironic that “it was in France that the Marshall Plan faced the greatest possible popular criticism. Around mid-1950 only one adult in three acknowledged having even heard of the Marshall Plan and of these 64 percent declared it to be ‘bad’ for their country” (96; emphasis original). In *Les Mandarins*, Robert criticizes the French government for accepting this American largesse: “Je leur reproche de ne pas y voir plus loin que le bout de leur nez ... Ils acceptent l’aide américaine; un de ces jours, ils s’en mordront les doigts: de fil en aiguille la France va tomber sous la coupe de l’Amérique” (I, 184). A moment later, Robert makes his fears more explicit: “Ça sera joli le jour où nous serons colonisés par l’Amérique!” (I, 185). Much later in the novel, Henri Perron echoes these sentiments: “Une Europe colonisée par l’Amérique, c’est justement ce que [l’on] voulait éviter” (*Les Mandarins*, II, 156).

Henri and Robert’s nervousness concerning the United States’ ever-expanding intrusion into French life is not unique to them nor to those who shared their anti-Americanism. Scriassine, despite his pro-American stances, also foresees France’s traditions being threatened by an encroaching modernity associated with *l’Amérique*: “Les progrès de la science et de la technique, les changements économiques vont à tel

point bouleverser la terre que nos manières même de penser et de sentir en seront révolutionnées; nous aurons du mal à nous rappeler qui nous avons été” (I, 56).

In France, modernity was considered overwhelmingly American: “The French response to America in the twentieth century derives, in large measure, from an assumption that the New World is a social model for the future” (Kuisel, *Seducing the French*, ix). Perhaps nowhere was the American modernization of French life felt so strongly than in the cultural realm, where a once-dominant civilization was in the process of being shunted aside by a brassy upstart. Even as attendance at American movies, the consumption of Coca-Cola, and the purchase of American household appliances increased,<sup>4</sup> so did resentment of what was perceived as the crassness of American culture.<sup>5</sup> This resentment is particularly strong among the intellectuals in *Les Mandarins* since culture for them is much more than a decoration or a relaxing pastime; it provided access to ways of seeing the world and thus is inextricably bound up with the social issues of the day. The center of French cultural life was, of course, Paris, yet as Robert ruefully notes, all that is now a thing of the past: “au pays de Diderot, de Victor Hugo, de Jaurès, on s’imagine que la culture et la politique marchent la main dans la main. Paris s’est longtemps pris pour Athènes. Athènes n’existe plus, c’est fini” (I, 54).

Robert Dubreuilh is the leading, and most driven, intellectual in the group: “Par comparaison Henri était tenté souvent de se juger dissipé, paresseux, inconsistant” (I, 20). The decline of French cultural and political significance parallels what Robert perceives as the lessening of the intellectual’s importance. This fear of the mandarin caste’s impending demise appears to add a note of desperation and simplification to his pronouncements, concerning both his professional activities and, as will be seen shortly, the role of the Soviet Union in the modern world.

Robert initially appears at a loss in the aftermath of a war that cost him the optimism and confidence that he could relate to the new era where “il y a des millions d’hommes pour qui la littérature c’est zero” (66). Such a statement is typical of many of his comments. If the remark possesses any degree of truth, it is because in the aftermath of a major social upheaval such as a war, the needs of most people are practical and immediate; reading serious, demanding literature in this context is an elitist activity of secondary importance. Robert’s pronouncements seem more accurate when he claims that if civilization is to guard traditional values such as

truth, morality, and individual liberty, it will be necessary to “réinventer” them so that they can be relevant to modern society (I, 283). Yet that is a task he feels unsure he can undertake, and as the novel progresses his proclamations become all the more strident as they reflect his growing insecurity. By the latter part of *Les Mandarins*, he is maintaining that in the political and cultural spheres, “Un intellectuel n’a plus aucun rôle à jouer” (199), an assertion contradicted by his own persistence in writing about current events. He may well question the value of the books he writes: “les livres que je pourrais leur [les lecteurs] offrir seraient ou nuisibles, ou insignifiants” (200), but he nonetheless persists in producing them. A man of thought, Robert is increasingly tempted by the romance of action. Even Henri is taken aback by his friend’s condemnation of literature and his defense of violence as a new form of humanism in the postwar period (II, 308).

Robert’s cultural disillusionment may well be due to the wounded vanity of a very intelligent writer no longer sure of his talent and his rapport with his readers. Whatever one chooses to make of what he says, his abstract thoughts concerning the value of literature and the possible obsolescence of the engaged intellectual remain in the realm of ideas, where they can be accepted or rejected at little personal cost. His political pronouncements and writings are another matter, since what he proposes has the potential to affect, for better or worse, large numbers of people.

Before and during the war, Robert had seen himself as a free-thinking intellectual who followed his conscience in all matters and made no compromises in expressing what he thought was right. The postwar finds him in a dilemma. The relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States is becoming increasingly strained due to the Cold War, the question of Germany, political unrest in Eastern Europe, and saber-rattling on both sides. Despite misgivings, he feels compelled to make a clear and unequivocal decision for one camp or the other. Due to reasons mentioned earlier, his view of the United States is not positive, and this negative perspective is probably enhanced in a concrete way by the extensive physical presence of American soldiers in France.

While the American military certainly contributed to the French economy, the conduct of the G.I.s created all sorts of tensions with the French population.<sup>6</sup> When Anne discusses the American occupation with some veterans, one rather sheepishly admits: “nous nous sommes vite fait detester ... nous nous sommes conduits comme des brutes” (II, 401). The

physical intrusion of the Americans into French space, plus the Gallic distrust of American intentions in Europe, created a climate where “from 1947 and with growing frequency in the half-decade to follow, all sympathy for American policy, all expression of support for Anglo-American interests, in France or abroad, was stigmatized as ‘collaboration,’ and the United States cast, by analogy, as the ‘occupier’” (Judt, *Past Imperfect*, 52).

The Soviet Union was obviously not without blemishes, but did have certain advantages, at least for someone like Robert. It had no significant physical presence on French soil. It was far away and concerned with internal matters and East European countries which, for a time, were of no great consequence to the French. Russia was perceived as the true hero of World War II. Its armies stopped the Germans at Stalingrad and subsequently “liberated” countries and people as they pushed toward Berlin. *L'Amérique*, on the other hand, was the land of conservatism and capitalism, “le pays qui prend ... systématiquement le parti des privilégiés” (I, 156). In contrast, the Soviet Union was reputed to be creating a workers’ paradise. Also, in a century which had witnessed three triumphant Fascist revolutions (Germany, Spain, and Italy), the Russian Revolution was the only successful one on the left. Thus, for many intellectuals, the U.S.S.R. represented the only hope for a better future.

In an article entitled “The Conflict of Ideologies in *The Mandarins*,” William McBride observes that “*The Mandarins* contains no, or virtually no, discussion of Marxism as a theory apart from its ‘official’ standard-bearer of the time, the Communist Party” (35). The point is well taken. If Robert is to align himself with the cause of the Soviet Union, his choice will have little or nothing to do with his attitude toward Marxism. He will do what he does for pragmatic reasons. He must be more practical than ideological, which is to say that he must work with, and possibly join, the French Communist Party (FCP), if he wishes to affect concrete changes in society.

The FCP had a distinguished war record, playing a major part in the Resistance and losing many of its adherents in the process. For this reason it termed itself *le parti des fusillés*. In the postwar period the FCP made itself into the major spokesman for the working class and generally polled well in national and local elections. Therefore, to oppose the Party, according to Robert, is to work against the people: “Le P.C. demeurait ... le seul espoir du prolétariat français et si on cherchait à le discréditer, c’est qu’on choisissait de servir la réaction” (II, 146).<sup>7</sup> Yet, as Robert knows, it is also tightly bound

to Moscow and never deviates from the Stalinist line, a potential problem he finds overblown: “le danger stalinien est une invention américaine” (I, 183). The gross exaggeration of this remark only highlights the fact that working with the FCP involves putting at least a part of one’s critical faculties on hold and accepting the constraint of making oneself, to a degree, tolerant of the whims and actions of the Soviet Union. All this at a historical moment when news of the gulags was beginning to emerge,<sup>8</sup> and show trials and purges were on the upswing in the Soviet bloc. While Robert never joins the Party, he follows the official Party line increasingly closely. This means denying the gulags and minimizing the trumped-up nature of the show trials. Finally, when forced to acknowledge Soviet abuses, he argues that some harm is inevitable on the road to the greater good. This tendency to justify the unjustifiable, to downplay the brutal, and abandon the rational for the ideological descends to its nadir when Robert attacks Henri for contemplating breaking from the official Party line and denouncing the gulags and trials in *L’Espoir*: “Réfléchissez, ... Ce que vous allez faire, ça s’appelle une trahison” (II, 145).<sup>9</sup>

In *Past Imperfect*, Tony Judt offers an explanation of *trahison* that is quite germane to Robert’s use of the term. For the postwar leftist intellectual in France, treason was “an insistence upon following the dictates of one’s own conscience even at the price of breaking with one’s political allies” (51).<sup>10</sup> This is precisely what Robert accuses Henri of doing. Robert’s contorted use of the word is only the most extreme reflection in the novel of the extent to which he has compromised himself in the ostensible interest of creating a more just society. A man of ideals before and during the war, his idealism could not remain unscathed in the postwar era.<sup>11</sup>

Paule is a character who appears in the opening pages of *Les Mandarins*; she flits in and out of the story and then just fades away toward the end. She is Henri’s former, now jilted lover; she most often seems a rather ludicrous figure, especially when compared to Robert and Anne. Yet in a very simple, clarifying way, her actions and decision-making reflect some of the salient attributes and faults of her more complicated friends. For all the pathos Paule evokes, she embodies, in the realms of ideas and emotions, the principal weaknesses of both Robert and Anne, although much more significantly with regard to Robert. As such, she functions as the lynchpin that holds the two major sections of the novel together.

Paule cannot accept that Henri really has left her, even after he has gone off to Portugal with Robert and Anne’s daughter, Nadine, and later

begins a disastrous affair with Josette, the young actress who had been a collaborator during the war. Henri makes no effort to hide his activities from Paule, but the more obvious they appear to her and everyone else, the greater the effort she makes to explain them in such a way that, in her mind at least, her own integrity, and Henri's love for her, remain intact. Anne remarks that "elle est parfaitement lucide" (I, 323), yet this lucidity is in the service of an illusion needed to preserve the integrity of her inner personal world.

Paule has the capacity to look directly at reality, at the obvious and self-evident, and see something totally different. This refusal to face the truth remains strong even after Henri marries Nadine. Paule remains convinced that she and Henri belong together, "nous sommes un seul être" (I, 300). She sustains the certitude of Henri's love for her by a sleight of hand of textual interpretation. Exasperated by Paule's refusal to leave him in peace, Henri writes her a letter in which he makes clear that he no longer loves her nor wants to be with her. In conversation with Anne, Paule at first claims that all she wants from Henri is friendship, but then when pressed by her friend, she admits:

Je l'aime hors de ce monde: en quoi cela gêne-t-il notre amitié? Et d'ailleurs il l'exige, cet amour, dit-elle d'une voix violente ... Cette lettre est d'une hypocrisie révoltante! Enfin, relis-la: *Essaie* de ne plus penser à moi. Pourquoi ne dit-il pas simplement: Ne pense plus à moi? Il se trahit, il veut que je me torture à essayer, mais non pas que je réussisse. Et au même moment, au lieu de m'appeler banalement: chère Paule, il écrit Paule. (II, 194)

This willingness, to the point of folly, to find a rational explanation one wants for a situation that clearly reflects the opposite of what one desires echoes Robert's strained justification for the activities of the Soviet Union - "L'U.R.S.S. ne veut rien annexer du tout" (I, 185) - and his often simplistic anti-Americanism - "le danger stalinien est une invention américaine" (I, 183).

While both Robert and Paule are deluding themselves, Paule's blindness, since it is personal and restricted to a narrow sphere, can be viewed as ridiculous, sad, or both. Robert's is a different matter. He is a public intellectual who, despite his personal self-doubts, has the capacity, through his books and articles, to touch a relatively large number of people.

As a mandarin in a country that may still appreciate such people, his words risk having dangerous consequences. Early in *Les Mandarins*, Robert makes a remark about Paule that is also pertinent to himself: “Le meilleur de sa vie est derrière elle. Maintenant que la guerre est finie elle espère retrouver le passé” (I, 62). Robert is himself no stranger to the inability to cope with the present and at times seems to be nostalgic for the past, yet his sense of his intellectual integrity forces him not to retreat from the modern world. This decision is, of itself, honorable, but its practical expression, along with the implications of what he says, bode ill for France’s present and future.

Eventually, Robert will admit that the Soviet Union has weaknesses. Yet even then he will attempt to justify continuing to deny the existence of the gulags or the importance of the show trials on the basis that exposing the U.S.S.R. will give fodder to the enemies of the Soviet experiment and confuse those who wish to find in Moscow a model for a new and better society (II, 138). Robert is never as closed off from reality as Paule, but he does share her tendency to confuse what he wants with what is. In *Les Mandarins*, the personal and the professional, love and political involvement, are intertwined.<sup>12</sup>

While Robert and Paule are different in most ways and comparable in only one significant respect, juxtaposing Paule and Anne would seem to invite a study in similarities. Both are attractive women in early middle age who make fools of themselves because of a man. Yet while it is undeniably true that Paule and Anne sacrifice major parts of their identities due to their passion for Henri and Lewis respectively, they are, and remain, very different people. Paule once began a career as a singer but then abandoned it for Henri. As she explains to Anne: “un grand amour me semble une chose bien plus importante qu’une carrière” (I, 295). Anne will eventually experience a comparable temptation with regard to Lewis, but will never quite succumb. Her profession as an analyst is fundamental to her identity, even if at times it bores and depresses her. Language problems as well as what one assumes would be licensing issues would make it very difficult for her practice her profession in the United States. Despite her strong feelings for Lewis, Anne never loses her sense of reality. Shortly after her affair with him begins, she sadly but presciently recognizes that “nous n’étions pas un couple; nous n’en serons jamais un” (II, 42).

Early in *Les Mandarins*, before Anne meets Lewis, she will somewhat haughtily explain to Paule that “aimer n’est pas une occupation” (I, 196), yet later when this confident assertion is sorely tested, she will, after some

hesitation, manage to remain true to what she had said. Where Paule appears to delight in the helplessness love makes her feel, “Un grand amour laisse rien de disponible à une femme” (I, 295), Anne fights this tendency in her relationship with Lewis. What emerges from the comparison of the emotional attachments of Paule and Anne is that although they bear a superficial similarity, their reactions to the vagaries of their emotional lives are significantly different.

With Paule there are few indications of the workings of her inner self; what one discovers is simply her loneliness without Henri and her strategies for avoiding having to accept the reality of his departure. Despite at times losing her self-control, and even her dignity, because of her love for Lewis, Anne nonetheless remains conscious of the effect Lewis is having on her and increasingly aware of the unpleasant truths about the man she finds so alluring. These aspects of Anne will assume a major importance in the final sections of this chapter, where she will come to represent France while Lewis plays the same role for the United States.

Anne owes a large part of her inner strength to Robert. She was a young and naive student when she fell in love with him, and due to this love, “je n’ai plus jamais peur, de rien. Je n’avais qu’à prononcer son nom et j’étais en sécurité” (I, 41). The latter part of this citation may sound like something Paule might say about Henri, but Robert provided Anne with a freedom Paule could never achieve: “il m’a protégée de l’isolement sans me priver de la solitude” (I, 76). Robert gave Anne independence, a quality she appreciated in her relationship with him, and which would also help her in her affair with Lewis. As a student, Anne was an introvert: “il n’avait que les livres et les idées qui tenaient le coup, eux seuls me semblaient réels” (I, 75). Encountering Robert brought her down to earth, and through him she began to initially weigh the possibility that “l’humanité allait quelque part, l’histoire avait un sens, et ma propre existence aussi” (I, 75).

Robert taught Anne a great deal, but she never became his clone. He had great confidence in the eventual triumph of humanity over social injustice, yet despite Anne’s enormous admiration for him, and the initial appeal of Robert’s idealism, she could never quite share his confidence in a brighter future: “Je ne suis pas sûre ... qu’il m’ait jamais tout à fait convaincu” (II, 71). Perhaps he was the more brilliant of the two, but she possessed the greater common sense. When Robert is agonizing over his role in postwar society and the value of literature itself, Anne reassures him that he can best serve the revolution by writing; then, in response to



his pessimism concerning the endurance of culture, she observes that the need for art is more powerful than the ugliness of contemporary events. In any case, the world would be a sadder place without the arts (I, 66). She also realizes, much faster than Robert, that “La guerre finissait: une nouvelle histoire commençait où rien n’est plus garanti” (I, 67–68). Although married to a political activist, Anne realizes that “La politique tient si peu de place dans ma vie” (I, 127). Stranger still for a woman educated *dans le pays de Descartes*, she does not always trust clear and distinct ideas precisely because “Les idées sont toujours trop claires” (I, 69). Anne is a woman with few certainties but an impressive amount of common sense and a strong, questioning mind.

Robert and Anne represent not exactly two different generations of French intellectuals but two very different images of France. Robert initially had the confidence of a pre-war mandarin, a faith in himself that would be sorely tried, less by the war than by the *après-guerre*. Anne is part of a younger group that, due to the chaos of the war, never had time to make its mark: “Avant la guerre, j’étais trop jeune pour que mes années me pèsent; ensuite pendant cinq ans je me suis tout à fait oubliée” (I, 129). Anne, and others like her, never had the opportunity to establish individual identities in the eyes of the public or become completely respected by their slightly older peers. At one point, Scriassine conveys to Anne the affection but slight condescension of her elders: “vous avez l’air d’une jeune fille bien élevée qui laisse causer les grandes personnes” (I, 117). If Robert represents a more self-assured, pre-war France, Anne is the France emerging from the war: intelligent, curious, in some ways more open-minded than Robert and those like him, but lacking confidence concerning her place in the world. While Robert remains quite secure in his anti-Americanism, Anne is at once fascinated and disappointed with *l’Amérique* embodied in Lewis. Yet she will also arrive at a more nuanced understanding of this powerful, seemingly unreflective country, which seems in love, or at least at ease, with its own contradictions. Finally, if Robert expresses the viewpoint of an intellectually powerful minority, Anne, with her suspicion of ideas that are too clear, embodies the more hesitant, yet open-minded, attitudes of ordinary, intelligent French people.

In terms of Lewis and Anne representing the United States and France in *Les Mandarins*, a pivotal moment occurs when Anne confronts Lewis with his lie about being compelled by his publisher to abruptly leave Mexico and go to New York. In the ensuing argument, Lewis accuses Anne

of selfishness and egocentricity, charges that more logically ought to have been directed against himself: “Il faudrait que vous soyez seule à compter, que rien d’autre existe, que je vous subordonne toute ma vie alors que vous me sacrifiez rien de la vôtre. Ce n’est pas juste” (II, 265). Anne’s retort makes pretty much the same point about him, albeit more succinctly: “C’est vous qui êtes injuste” (II, 265). Two powerful personalities with clashing egos, but hardly equal egos. Anne is a proud woman but an insecure one and, due to her love, in a defensive position. She has great intelligence but there is little force behind it; she can never win an argument with Lewis, even when she is right, as she is in this instance. This is partly because Anne is in awe of Lewis and does not wish to displease him, even if it means acquiescing to an untruth: “moi qui m’étais promis de ne jamais le décevoir, je l’avais déçu irrémédiablement. J’étais la *seule* coupable” (II, 268; emphasis original).

In her weakened, secondary position, Anne represents a postwar France that initially has great respect and admiration for the America which Lewis embodies. Yet as these good feelings come under attack for the reasons discussed above, France cannot sever her attachment to the States, even at the expense of her pride; despite herself, and partly due to her declining position on the international stage,<sup>13</sup> France has to tolerate American arrogance and self-righteousness, attitudes which only exacerbate her sense of dependence. Earlier in the novel, Lewis takes a malign pleasure in the reactions his conduct elicits from Anne. He is “fier” to learn from Anne that “Vous m’avez fait peur” (II, 45). She retorts that he ought to feel “honteux” but, in this instance as in others, her desires have little effect on him, since he knows she is incapable of breaking away from him.

More often than not, Lewis’s behavior is childlike. On Anne’s second trip to Chicago to see him, he acts like an excited little boy wearing “une casquette de baseball” (II, 222), and on the flight to Mexico, Lewis’s first experience in a plane, “Il garde le nez collé à un hublot ... il riait aux nuages” (II, 226). These associations are benign enough, but Lewis also demonstrates the willfulness and petulance of a child. He is frequently childish. As his abrupt departure from Mexico indicates, he does what he wants, when he wants. According to Lewis, the Anne he claims to love is “une femme qui répond toujours” (57), and later he expands on this notion: “Que j’aimerais une petite épouse indienne qui me suivrait sans protester partout où je voudrais” (277). What he expects of Anne is total obedience, an “ideal” she could only fulfill by obeying all his wishes and humiliating herself, a temptation to which she occasionally yields.

Lewis's willfulness is particularly evident in his emotional attitudes toward Anne. At one point in the novel, and seemingly out of nowhere, he tells her: "Anne! ... restez avec moi" (II, 244). She has already explained the personal and professional reasons which make this impossible, but he just ignores them, since from his perspective his word is law. Later, he abruptly changes his mind and announces to Anne that he no longer loves her. When pressed for an explanation, the best he can muster is, "Je pense que l'amour est moins important que je ne l'avais cru" (II, 267).

While the narrative constantly privileges Anne's thoughts and inner turmoil, there is little effort to enter Lewis's mind, to understand why he acts as he does. He behaves as if he is some sort of deity who has no obligation to explain his actions to his inferiors. It is Anne's task to adjust to his whims without ever really questioning the reasons for his comportment. This is quite apparent with regard to the language in which they communicate.

On their first meeting, Anne remarks that Lewis's French is "affreux" (II, 26), while he says that her English is worse than the Chicago winter (II, 27). This is understandable enough during their initial encounters, but then it is Anne who must make the effort in English, while Louis makes no further attempt at French. Over the course of their affair, her English presumably improves. When at a later stage of the novel, she asks about his willingness to move to France, his brusque reply is: "Je ne parle pas français" (II, 245). For Lewis, that settles the matter. Of the two, his is the dominant personality; that a French woman's only option if the relationship is to continue is to speak and write to him in English clearly indicates who is in the superior and who is in the inferior position.

Lewis's image as a spoiled child and Anne's acquiescence to his whims provide a telling image of the relations of the United States and France during the Cold War. Americans, flush from their victory in Europe, and with their economy booming, were in a position to dictate to the French and often did just that. France's role was to swallow its pride and obey, even at the price of considerable humiliation and acrimony: "the French ... resented the very fact they had been liberated by the Americans, resented their humiliated postwar status and ... the need to go cap in hand to Washington for assistance with French reconstruction" (Judt, *Past Imperfect*, 195). One might add that when they got to Washington they had better be able to speak English if they were hoping for a real dialogue with their hosts.

When Anne and Lewis are in Mexico, there is a moment when he suddenly races up a high pyramid, leaving Anne behind him. She at first has trouble spotting him way up there, but then, “je l’ai aperçu tout en haut de la grande pyramide; il agitait la main, il avait l’air tout petit” (II, 232). This is Lewis as the embodiment of the United States: standing high above the others, he waves his hand in triumph, doubtless without realizing that this gesture is perhaps not as heroic as he thinks, since from a broader perspective, he perhaps does not loom as large as he thinks he does (“Il avait l’air tout petit”).

Before the terrible scene in Mexico, when Lewis unilaterally makes an abrupt decision to leave, Anne’s view of Lewis had been much simpler. Back in Paris between her first and second visit to the States, Anne finds herself musing on her life with Robert and whether Lewis will change her feelings toward her husband. She realizes that Lewis does not in any way lessen her attachment to Robert, but then she adds: “la présence de Robert, si immense fût-elle, ne comblait pas l’absence de Lewis” (II, 62). While nothing changes in her relationship with Robert, Lewis certainly adds something; he renews the erotic dimension of her existence and frees her to rediscover her emotions, two experiences which during the war had ceased to figure in her life and only returned when she encountered the American. In these respects, Lewis certainly contributes to Anne’s personal renewal, just as the American aid was of great help to a struggling France. Prior to meeting Lewis, and shortly after the end of the war, she had wondered whether she was “enterrée vive dans le passé” (I, 364). Lewis will liberate Anne from such sterile thoughts through reawakening her sexuality. With him she has the impression that “J’avais vingt ans, je vivais mon premier amour et c’était mon premier voyage” (II, 224). Lewis has rejuvenated Anne, brought her back to a life where the idea of happiness and emotional fulfillment seem much more possible. In the first flush of her passion for Lewis, Anne does indeed sound like a gushing teenager delighting in her first love, “Son désir me transfigurait” (II, 39), spinning his words in such a way that they enhance her happiness: “Mon cœur se serra; il avait dit ‘à la maison’ comme si nous avons été mari et femme” (II, 47).<sup>14</sup>

This is an Anne reborn; she has become a different person, and this is especially striking when she returns to Paris and sees her country from a new and unflattering perspective. She views other French women who “portaient des jupes de cotonnades aux couleurs joyeuses mais comme leur peau et leurs cheveux me semblaient mornes.” The same is true for the

automobiles she sees on the city's streets: "vieilles, naines, infirmes." These sights make her realize that she has "repris pied dans la réalité" which is postwar France. That reality is "Pauvreté, inquiétude: aucun doute, j'étais chez moi" (II, 60-61).

Lewis must be credited with helping Anne reintegrate the modern world and escape from an otherwise sterile present. As such, he represents the positive contribution of the United States to the re-establishment of France. For all the pain Lewis ultimately causes her, Anne's relationship with him restores her interest in life and her willingness to be part of it. In this context Anne is France rediscovering its latent energy, while being helped in this endeavor by American material support. Her concern, early in the novel, about aging - "C'est naturel que ma vie de femme fût finie" (I, 118) - represents a fear that France as a nation was becoming irrelevant in the postwar era, an anxiety turned into a certainty by Robert: "La vérité c'est que nous ne comptons plus" (I, 254). Anne's renaissance with Lewis belies this dour judgment.

Just as Lewis restores Anne's sense of herself as an attractive woman whose life is far from over, the Marshall Plan played a significant role in helping France emerge from its postwar shambles, revive its economic life, and eventually take a seat on the Security Council of the United Nations. The French were, of course, very conflicted about the Marshall Plan both in principle and concerning what they had to give for what they got (trade deals favoring the United States, the large-scale importation of American movies and American popular culture in general, etc.). In a modest fashion, Anne's affair with Lewis parallels the French relationship with the United States and its aid. She is grateful for her time with Lewis, who lifts her out of the emotional doldrums and renews her rapport with the present, but these benefits come at a price, which in the end proves too high, since it endangers her self-confidence and self-respect.

While a degree of altruism doubtless played a role in America's effort to help its greatly weakened ally, the primary reasons were certainly self-interest. In addition to the economic factors, the U.S. needed a stronger, rejuvenated France both for the additional military support it could offer in any struggle against the Soviet Union and to provide bases for the American air force and army. Integration of military personnel with the local population was not at all encouraged by the U.S. Command. What the American leadership wanted primarily was use of French facilities and space; they wanted what was tangible and available, but were indifferent

to other aspects of French life. Lewis's need for Anne displays similar characteristics: "Il ne connaissait ni mon pays, ni mon langage, ni mes amis, ni mes soucis: rien que ma voix, mes yeux, ma peau" (II, 56). Anne may well be a highly educated and cultivated woman, but these aspects of her are of little interest to Lewis; in fact, he denigrates her intelligence with condescending praise: "Je vais finir par croire qu'il y a un cerveau dans ce petit crâne" (II, 274). For Lewis, Anne's primary purpose is to serve his needs. Yet what ultimately protects Anne is the very part of her that Lewis derides: her critical intelligence will eventually allow her to break with him, just as France would, in time, distance itself from the need for American support.

Over the course of the novel, Anne becomes increasingly enlightened concerning Lewis and aspects of his country. This development implies that she, and the France she represents, are moving toward a better understanding of American attitudes in certain domains, particularly politics. This is strikingly evident in her growing disillusionment with American intellectuals whose attitudes stand in stark contrast to those of their French colleagues. Robert remarks early on that "intellectuels sont ravis quand on les encourage à n'être ni chair ni poisson" (I, 189). He is, of course, referring to French intellectuals, a judgment which, given what transpires in the novel, seems overstated, but it is pertinent to their American counterparts. Shortly after her arrival in the States, Anne echoes Robert's sentiments in direct regard to American intellectuals: "ici les intellectuels peuvent vivre en sécurité parce qu'ils se savaient tout à fait impuissants" (II, 15). What is initially a rather amused annoyance will take on a more serious dimension, as she begins to get a much truer picture of Lewis, what he really stands for, and the potential parallel between her lover and the American intellectual community.

At first, Lewis incarnates the Gallic fantasy of the tough-guy American writer: "ce spécimen américain classique: écrivain-de-gauche-qui-s'est-fait-lui-même ... toujours en colère" (II, 14-15). Yet, as she later discovers, his political activism does not extend beyond some gestures toward social protest: "écrire, parler à la radio, et quelquefois dans les meetings pour dénoncer quelques abus, ça le satisfaisait pleinement" (II, 15). His bond with the underprivileged consists mostly of slumming; he frequents rough neighborhoods and people to drink there with the locals. He does not have any real *engagement* except for a rather patronizing admiration directed "aux gens qui tentaient ... des évasions personnelles dans la littérature,

l'art, la drogue ... le crime" (II, 242). He displays no serious interest in what is happening in France. His only political statement about France is a reiteration of the most widespread American complaint about the French: "Quel peuple ingrat! Nous l'avons gavé de lait en poudre, nous allons l'inonder de coca-cola et de tanks, et il ne tombe pas à nos genoux" (II, 402). It is possible that Lewis is joking here, but his words indicate that he is unable to go beyond clichés in discussing France. Finally, with regard to intellectual matters in a more general sense, Anne notes that it appears that ideas upset his mental equilibrium and make him feel "perdu," deprived of his "goût de la sécurité" (278).

As Anne's relationship with Lewis deteriorates, her image of the United States darkens. Her relations with American intellectuals illustrate this devolution. The American intellectuals Anne encounters do not have such simplistic attitudes as Lewis, nor do they seem ill at ease with ideas, but they have one very significant similarity: in terms of political activism, they are essentially passive. In *Les Mandarins* this passivity is not simply due to their alleged powerlessness, but is associated with the material ease of their existence and willingness to leave dirty work to the government. Those who do demonstrate any interest in politics only express some vaguely leftist inclinations while following their government's lead and moving to the right. When first in the United States, Anne is attracted to an American professor named Philipp whose views she thinks are comparable to her own. Yet as she extends her time in the United States, she realizes that political discussion does not appear to play a large role in the lives of educated Americans. Most of the people she meets are decent enough, but their tranquil existences are far removed from what is being said, done, and lived in Europe. Although one woman, Dorothy, does chide Lewis for his references to the ungrateful French (II, 402), such moments are rare. When, toward the end of the novel, Anne again meets Philipp and his wife Myriam, their lifestyle has improved markedly. Myriam offers a strained explanation for their acquiescence to a more luxurious existence, one which purports to demonstrate their social consciousness: "Il faut ... avoir joui du confort américain pour comprendre à quel point le confort compte peu" (II, 420). In terms of politics *per se*, this American couple has become more conservative. When Anne reiterates her claim that "tous les intellectuels américains plaident l'impuissance" (II, 421), and that such an attitude could lead to fascism in the States and even war, Myriam replies curtly, "Vous parlez comme une communiste" (II, 421). Philipp is not much

different. To Anne's question of why his political views have changed so dramatically, he responds that the menace of the U.S.S.R. is such that it is no longer possible to "défendre la démocratie par des méthodes démocratiques," even though he personally deplores "des excès" which the new policies entail (II, 422).<sup>15</sup> At this moment, in terms of relatively simplistic solutions to truly complicated issues, he seems to have become Robert's conservative counterpart.

In *Les Mandarins*, the politics of French and American intellectuals are radically different but equally rigid: militant anti-Americanism versus inflexible anti-communism. One side is active, the other more passive, yet they share a willingness to compromise their critical judgment and principles to maintain their personal sense of self-righteousness. This is why Anne is such an important character in the novel. She is a woman of the left, but she is not driven by either ideology or some fashionable version of *Realpolitik*. Her frustrations with the United States, like her exasperation with Lewis, are understandable and based on personal experience with her lover in his country. The turmoil of her life in the U.S. fleshes out the often rote condemnations of the States offered by her more intellectual French friends. As such, her perceptions of *l'Amérique* are more compelling than Robert's blanket refusal to find anything worthwhile in the U.S. While the Parisian intellectuals certainly point to many American failings, their critique lacks a certain weight because it seems so facile, so typical of a social class, and thus an expression, *avant la lettre*, of a Cold War version of leftist France's political correctness.

Although Anne has rejected many of the clichés about the States bandied about in fashionable Parisian salons (II, 83), on the basis of what she has lived, she is forced to recognize a significant change in her appreciation of the U.S.: "j'avais aimé ce pays" but "Maintenant l'Amérique, ça signifie bombe atomique, menaces de guerre, fascisme naissant" (II, 388). Lewis has played a decisive role in this new assessment, since, to the extent that he represents his nation, he provides confirmation of French suspicions about Americans, namely that theirs is a magnificent country, one convinced of its power, but clumsy in its use of it. While Americans are a people of great talent, they may not have the maturity to use it wisely.<sup>16</sup>

The relationship between Anne and Lewis reflects the Franco-American paradigm first described in *The American*. What is different in *Les Mandarins* is the power relationship within the couple. As in *The Custom of the Country*, the American is now the dominant force whom



the French, in the person of Anne, must please in order to maintain the relationship. Anne can only be with Lewis by accepting a subservient position and avoiding direct criticism of his intransigence. Yet this unequal *rapport de force* is very unstable. Lewis and Anne are extremely volatile; their emotions toward each other can change quickly. Lewis can be a great lover for Anne or a spoiled child, depending on the moment, whereas Anne can be an extremely intelligent and sensitive woman for Lewis or a stubborn foreigner unable or unwilling to appreciate the extent of his greatness. This personal dimension also reflects the political one. By the end of the novel, Anne and Lewis are no longer together in a sort of master-slave relationship. However, no mention is made of a definitive break-up. What is clear is that they will not be together as they have been in the past. The same applies to France and the States. The extreme dependence of the French on American aid in the initial postwar period diminishes with time; there is no dramatic suspension of their alliance, but France, like Anne, is getting consistently stronger, while *l'Amérique*, like Lewis, might not yet realize that significant changes are taking place and that the French are growing increasingly frustrated by American arrogance.

Anne's growing disenchantment with Lewis reflects widespread French experience in the 1940s and '50s. More concretely, what she has seen during her visits does little to give her confidence in American leadership during the Cold War and beyond. Early in her relationship with Lewis she wonders if she will ever really know him (II, 236). Now, from her own perspective, she believes that she knows him and the United States rather better than she would have liked.

Despite Anne's justifiable disappointment with Lewis, she nevertheless profits greatly from her sojourn in the States. Her American experience reactivates her analytical skills, reinvigorates her intellectual curiosity, and potentially turns her into a more politically involved individual than she was before she met Lewis. What remains to be seen is whether any of these positive effects can be sustained when she leaves Lewis and returns home.

When Anne arrives in France, disillusioned with Lewis and with his country, what she finds in her native country is hardly more encouraging. She encounters a nation still struggling with the residue of the war and still hesitant about its future direction. Shortly after returning, Anne is forced to deal with the execution of a suspected collaborator by a vigilante. If the war with the Germans is over, the war among the French, where putative traitors are pursued by alleged heroes, is still raging. Robert is as he

has always been: kind, attentive, and emotionally removed. Her daughter, Nadine, despite a marriage to Henri and the birth of a child, remains headstrong and unstable. To the extent that Nadine embodies the younger French generation, this is hardly a positive sign. Anne contemplates suicide.

In the end she rejects this possibility and voices instead some quiet, yet genuine, interest in the future: “Qui sait? peut-être un jour serai-je de nouveau heureuse. Qui sait?” (II, 501). Tellingly, this modest assertion of the possibility of a better future is expressed in France and involves finding some worthwhile cause and someone to love, presumably in her own country: “Puisque mon cœur continue à battre, il faudra bien qu’il batte pour quelque chose, pour quelqu’un” (II, 501). In these, the last words of *Les Mandarins*, Anne is voicing the desire that, despite political and personal obstacles, she will be able to reassert herself as a citizen and an individual. Earlier in the novel, she had lamented that she was too young to make a name for herself during the war, had lost five years due to the conflict, and felt that life had passed her by in the postwar era (I, 129). Now she knows better, namely that time is a positive as well as a negative factor in life. As long as she is alive, changes of all sorts remain possible. She begins to experience a modest optimism, due in part to her American experience, where her interest in social activism was revived, and realizes that there is a place for her in the rebuilding of French society. In this respect, she is representative of the determination of many French, to move beyond the past, reconstruct the present, and create the basis for a better future, a future which, like it or not, will inevitably involve the United States.

## Notes

1 In letters 264 and 273 of her *Lettres à Nelson Algren*, Simone de Beauvoir attempts, most unconvincingly, to reassure Algren that her novel had little to do with their relationship: “l’histoire d’amour ... diffère énormément de la réalité de notre histoire, dont j’ai seulement essayé de communiquer un écho” (846–847). While the novel is most certainly autobiographical, that element in *Les Mandarins*, and its function as a *roman à clé*, have nothing to do with the themes I wish to discuss and thus, the biographical elements upon which many of the portraits are loosely based, will not figure in my discussion, except when I cite in endnote 8, a reference Tony Judt makes to Sartre and de Beauvoir.

2 This particular aspect of Franco-American relations does not appear in *Les Mandarins*, but American support of a rearmed Germany meant that “the

interchangeability of Americans and Germans became common currency in many circles” (Judt, *Past Imperfect*, 200), an association that further exacerbated tensions between France and the United States.

3 This is a very misleading half-truth. When the camps were liberated, American soldiers, along with other liberators, attempted to help the starving inmates with military rations and whatever else was available. As it turned out, the inmates’ bodies could not always support this radical dietary change, and some died as a result.

4 One is free to condemn this intrusion into French life, but it remains worth noting that as late as 1954, “only 7.5 percent of French households owned a refrigerator, 10 percent a washing machine, and 18 percent a vacuum cleaner” (Kuisel, *Seducing the French*, 105). The presence of such modern conveniences grew in France in large measure due to the American presence. It is more than possible that the “Americanization” of France, at least regarding the influx of household appliances, was somewhat less resented by women.

5 The “crassness” of American culture was certainly exaggerated in France. An anecdote in *Seducing the French* illustrates the absurd forms this belief could take: “the rumor spread that Coca-Cola intended to advertise on the façade of Notre Dame” (55).

6 Mary Louise Roberts’s 2013 study, *What Soldiers Do*, documents American soldiers’ acts of violence toward women and the general disruption they created in French communities.

7 Robert’s sense of the potential political power of the French Communist Party was shared by the Americans. According to Walter Lafeber, in 1946 “Truman had so feared a French Communist party seizure of power from within that in May he secretly ordered the U.S. Army in Germany to prepare to march into France” (47).

8 Judt writes that “By the late 1940s, information about life under Stalin and his system was readily available to anyone” (*Past Imperfect*, 101).

9 Intellectuals’ intense conviction that the French Communist Party was the only possible vehicle for social change often led to virulent denunciations of any anti-communist line. According to Claude Bourdet, a leftist journalist and concentration camp survivor, “Anticommunism is a force for death ... a force for war” (Judt, *Past Imperfect*, 222), and then there was Sartre’s notorious “An anticommunist is a dog. I don’t change my views on this, I never shall” (Judt, *Past Imperfect*, 13). Camus would later nuance his opinion, but at one point he apparently believed that “Anticommunism is the beginning of dictatorship” (Judt, *Past Imperfect*, 179).

10 In *Past Imperfect*, Tony Judt shows himself to be no admirer of Simone de Beauvoir, yet his description of the leftist postwar French intellectual closely parallels her portrait of Robert Dubreuilh. The probable reason is that de

*Frères Ennemis*

Beauvoir modeled Robert to some extent on Jean-Paul Sartre, and Sartre is a major figure in Judt's study.

11 Although Henri appears to be a more open-minded and humane figure than Robert, he too compromises his values after the war when he falsely testifies in favor of a collaborator who has threatened to blackmail his girlfriend.

12 This intertwining of the personal and the political leads to one of the novel's subtler ironies. Anne is deeply involved *emotionally* with Lewis, who represents the States. Robert is deeply involved *intellectually* with the Soviet Union. From this perspective, both Anne and Robert have their love affairs in the novel.

13 François Mauriac provided a striking image of a once-powerful France reduced to insignificance when he spoke of "a France sitting quietly between Honduras and the Republic of San Marino" (*Past Imperfect*, 258).

14 Mary Evans also underlines the rather juvenile state Anne is reduced to by her love for Lewis when she compares the French psychologist to characters in Harlequin romances: "Rather like the heroines of the novels of Barbara Cartland or Denise Robins, Anne finds herself 'transformed' by male sexual desire" (82).

15 In this respect, Philipp's somewhat strained argument recalls the OSS agent Preston's hypocritical attempt to assure Henry that the U.S. was against Franco but did not believe the moment was right to act.

16 With this view of Americans, *Les Mandarins* displays an unlikely similarity to *L'Ève future*.

## CHAPTER VI

# Embracing American Culture

## *Cherokee*

Nous vivons à l'époque des mystifications.

(Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*, 305–306)

En dépit du prestige dont jouissent en France les intellectuels, et du culte de Descartes, la pratique trahit un certain mépris pour les idées, ou du moins pour leur efficacité.

(Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, *Le Défi américain*, 67)

Par leur légèreté, les romans de Jean Echenoz proposent ... une approche inquiète de l'être au monde.

(Bruno Blanckeman, *Les Récits indécidables*, 69)

Jean Echenoz's *Cherokee* marks a watershed in French literature concerning the depiction of *l'Amérique* and its cultural impact. In the works previously discussed, there has been a consistent developing pattern in the image projected of Americans. They were financially powerful and scientifically gifted, yet culturally naïve and psychologically immature. As such, the increasingly triumphant United States presented a growing danger to a France whose international reputation was on the wane. This tension reached its height immediately after World War II, when French intellectuals in particular perceived the United States as an imperialist power whose ambitions constituted a major threat to European peace and

French independence. In addition, the influx of American products into France (household appliances, movies, fast food, etc.) was perceived as a threat to French values and the nation's traditions.

Georges Perec's *Les Choses* (1965) provides an eloquent expression of the widespread concern about burgeoning American-inspired French consumerism. The novel deals with a young, ambitious couple, Jérôme and Sylvie, who see themselves as part of the new, hip generation destined to profit from France's growing economic prosperity. They are *psychosociologues*, a trendy term for poll-takers. They chart the rampant consumerism among young French people. However, what started out as a wish to buy becomes a need to buy, and Sylvie and Jérôme themselves fall victim to this new disease. They fill their lives with things, fail to finish their degrees, escape for a time to North Africa, only to return to France as impoverished as they had been when they left. Ultimately, they recognize the failure of their dreams, symbolized by their decision to abandon the soul of contemporary France, Paris, for the wilds of Bordeaux. *Les Choses* may be read as a cautionary tale concerning the potential dangers of *les Trentes Glorieuses*. Perec was certainly expressing a justifiable fear among intellectuals and politicians in France that the economic boom was something other than an *aubaine* for the French public.<sup>1</sup> The dangers were real, yet too easy to ignore.<sup>2</sup>

*Cherokee* breaks with this pattern of nervousness about the new consumerism ushered in by the plethora of American products on the French market. Published in 1983, approximately eight years after the end of the *Trente Glorieuses* (1945–1975) it reflects a France optimistic about itself and the strength of its cultural identity, and thus less intimidated by the American influences affecting French life.<sup>3</sup>

*Cherokee* is a comedy that details the ways in which American imports have changed French life, but without posing a serious threat to Gallic cultural values, whose strength lies precisely in their ability to absorb and evolve. Rather, the novel contends that, however great the potential dangers of the consumerism associated with the influx of American goods, France has proven capable of accepting these products without being dominated by them. *Cherokee* suggests that both American music and film, specifically, have contributed to making French art a more effective instrument with which to explore the contemporary world.

On first reading, *Cherokee* can appear to be a hodgepodge of literary references, technical experiment, slapstick, sudden bursts of violence,

mysterious characters who remain so, and movie citations. All these elements are presented in a style whose often staccato rhythms and abrupt shifts in perspective seem to emulate jazz cadences. Yet *Cherokee* is not a disorganized inventory of various strategies available to the contemporary novelist. The novel is a complex, well-structured comedy that functions on a variety of intersecting levels; it relates to theoretical and thematic issues, examines the pleasures and pitfalls of illusion, investigates role playing, and, most significantly, engages in a bit of stagecraft which transforms the text into a unique form of the *ciné-roman*.

In *Cherokee* Echenoz exploits the French love of American cinema. The omnipresence of American movies and the ways they affect human behavior will serve as a metaphor for the rampant, American-inspired consumerism rapidly expanding in France from just after the war up to the middle of the 1970s. While this consumerism obviously has its dangers, it is not without certain advantages, and it is precisely the latter that the novel develops.

The consumer and the moviegoer have several things in common. Although both may actually be responding to clever advertising, they believe they are consciously choosing what they do, whether it is making a new purchase or seeing the latest film. One is acquiring objects and the other dreams. In themselves, these are perfectly legitimate pastimes and sources of considerable pleasure. On a subliminal level, however, matters are more complicated. The consumer and the moviegoer risk imagining that what they buy or see can transform them into different people and reshape their world. For the consumer, possessions are more than things; they are symbols of social status and success. Thus the consumer does not define himself, the objects that surround him do.<sup>4</sup> The movie aficionado does not simply watch a film; it becomes part of him, incorporating heroic prototypes, famous scenes, and well-known exchanges into his own identity. The avid movie fan is even capable of imagining himself as a film character, and substituting the fantasy projected on-screen for the place he actually inhabits in the everyday world. Both the consumer and the movie lover tend, unconsciously, to see their lives through the filter of their particular, yet complementary, obsessions; their worlds are to a degree fantasies, but such a consideration seems minor next to the pleasure their illusions provide.

The sheer delight in consumerism is omnipresent in *Cherokee*. It is represented partially by jazz. A well-known African-American creation, a music enjoyed in France long before World War II, jazz is for Echenoz

the musical form that best captures the hectic rhythms of the postwar era while providing comfort, diversion, and happiness. Also, at a historical moment when French critics were still decrying American pop culture's potential to overwhelm traditional French values, jazz provides a striking example of the opposite: it demonstrates France's capacity to absorb an American product into its own culture and make it a popular, enjoyable part of French life.<sup>5</sup> It is a measure of the importance accorded to jazz that, in the world of this novel, it has supplanted its classical counterpart. The only person with any interest in the latter musical form is the head of the detective agency, Benedetti, whose car radio plays "une musique mièvre ... quelque chose du Léo Delibes ou Vincent d'Indy" (213). Throughout *Cherokee*, Benedetti is associated with a rapidly fading past represented by, among other items, classical music of the "easy listening" variety. In addition, his business is failing, his wife dying, and his car is in need of repair. Jazz, on the other hand, reflects the abrupt mood changes and scene shifting in the novel. It also provides a degree of solace and escapism from the problems the characters have created for themselves.

Part of the success of American creations in postwar France, be they objects to sell, music to listen to, or movies to see, was due to the fact that Gallic culture was perceived as being in crisis, while the American equivalent was recognized as booming. In *Cherokee*, French literary and visual culture is, for the moment at least, relegated to the scrap heap of history; if it retains a place in French society, it is a tenuous and uncomfortable one. Early in the novel, Georges, the main, if not the most important character, carries a valise laden with books to his Uncle Fernand's warehouse in the hope of selling them (20). What Georges receives for his pains is a cup of coffee.

These are French books, and Fernand's warehouse, which is just outside the city in a rundown *quartier* where the streets are named after Impressionist painters, is already bursting with such items (181). Fernand says that books are worthless since "les gens ne lisent plus" (93). Clearly he is referring to the French classics; the market for comic books and popular fiction remains strong, as the reading materials in the detective's bureau show.<sup>6</sup> However, this is not to say that the more traditional volumes are useless. In Fernand's living quarters, the tables and chairs consist of piles of French books and magazines.

Fernand is also Fred Shapiro's uncle. Unlike Georges, Fred gives the impression of having little interest in French literary culture, except in one



instance. While he is awaiting some bit players from the Comédie Française whom he has hired for drama of his own invention, Fred is reading *Phèdre*, “ravi que ce nom fût une anagramme phonétiquement correcte du sien” (75–76). When he asks two of the actors who have minor roles in *Phèdre* about the play, his question “les fai[t] rire” (77); these *comédiens* recite their lines without being particularly interested in their significance. To the actor’s enquiries concerning whether Fred is creating his drama for revenge against someone, his negative reply, couched in one of Racine’s most famous lines, “Sa vaine inimité n’est pas ce que je crains” (Acte 1, scène 1, *Phèdre*) presumably falls on uncomprehending ears.

In *Cherokee*, French culture appears to have been shunted aside by the invasion of American pop culture and allowed only a marginal place in French society. What was once at the center of the nation’s life is now confined to its periphery, represented by a warehouse on the fringes of the capital city, cluttered with no-longer-read books, and neighborhoods dotted with streets whose names many residents probably no longer recognize. The actors who desert the Comédie Française for a more contemporary theater are leaving an institution that celebrates past French glories, but has become something of a museum where not even the actors seem to understand what is happening on stage.

Yet if traditional French culture has been marginalized in *Cherokee*, this is not to suggest that this will be its permanent state. The books in the warehouse have not been pulped or otherwise destroyed. When people are once again interested in reading them, they will be available. With the ever-expanding urban spread of great cities like Paris, the streets currently on the periphery, bearing the names of famous painters, may one day find themselves yet again at or near the center of the metropolis. If the Comédie Française currently appears moribund, new directors with new productions and better-trained actors can easily change that. *Cherokee* depicts French art in a period of transition provoked in large measure by the influx of American popular culture but, as will become apparent toward the end of the novel, Gallic creativity is quite capable of absorbing these new influences and using aspects of them to enhance contemporary French art.

France had changed greatly from the world depicted in *Les Mandarins*, as had the nation’s attitude toward the American intrusion into its culture. In some ways this change was affected rather more easily than many had supposed, since in the immediate postwar era the French fear of being

buried under American imports was widespread, yet this anxiety would prove to be exaggerated.

Among the many Gallic concerns surrounding the American presence in postwar France was that the plethora of American products aimed at a large audience – soft drinks, fast foods, comic books, movies, gadgets, household appliances, etc. – were invading the country and challenging French cultural traditions. In a word, it was feared that the American Way of Life would triumph over the French Way of Life, that heightened consumerism would result in an ever-increasing Americanization of France. Although critics on the left and the right railed against American influence, American marketing was not to be denied, and American goods rapidly became readily available. Eventually the French began to enjoy the convenience of the appliances, the pleasure and excitement of the movies and comics, and even the taste of cokes, hot dogs, and hamburgers. Quite aside from the pleasures these items provided, a significant aspect of their popularity was that they were “American.” In an irony that someone like Charles de Gaulle would never have appreciated, “‘Made in America’ suddenly held the same cachet that Americans have always awarded to products coming from Paris” (Kuisel, *Seducing the French*, 212).

The French Way of Life was not as endangered as previously imagined. French society underwent an extensive economic transformation immediately after the war in the period known as *les Trente Glorieuses*. During these years, wages, productivity, and social benefits rose considerably and rather quickly, permitting the average citizen access to items that in another era might have been the stuff of dreams. Objects that once had seemed exclusively American were becoming integrated into the fabric of French society. Largely as a result of the burgeoning economy, French consumerism and productivity began to rival, at least in enthusiasm, that of its American counterpart: “If the effort toward increased productivity and the subordination of all usages to the imperatives of greater output is termed Americanization, then the whole of Europe, including France, is ... in the process of becoming Americanized” (Aron, 60).<sup>7</sup>

If there were a single book which played a major role in the demystification of *l'Amérique* and its denizens, their marketing skills, and their striking economic achievements in Europe, it would certainly be Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber's *Le Défi américain*. Published in the autumn of 1967, by Christmas it had sold over 400,000 copies. Replete with facts, figures, and charts, yet written with great clarity, Servan-Schreiber's

book provided his large audience with considerable information about the American success and how it was managed. For Servan-Schreiber, the explanation had much less to do with some nebulous quality like “the American character” and more to do with hard work and skillful planning: “Les Américains ne sont ... pas plus intelligents que les autres. Pourtant ce sont bien des facteurs humains – faculté d’adaptation des individus, souplesse des structures, puissance créative des équipes – qui sont à la base de leur succès” (310). If *Le Défi américain* has one clear message, it is offered at the beginning of the book in remarkably simple and blunt terms: “Pourquoi eux, et pas nous?” (39).

Political and intellectual changes also favored a softening in Franco-American tensions. By the time of Sartre’s death in 1980, the rather simplistic dichotomies of the Cold War had either evaporated or been severely questioned. This was in large measure due to the activities both international and national of the Soviet Union. The Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 seriously tarnished the U.S.S.R.’s image as a socialist paradise, a protector of the workers of the world, and the only viable alternative to rampaging American capitalism and racism. Solzhenitsyn’s *The Gulag Archipelago* (1973), revealed the Soviet work camps to a large public, even though their existence was already known. As early as 1956 Krushchev had exposed the Soviet Union’s show trials of real and imagined dissenters from the Stalinist line, and while these revelations took time to take hold in France, they inevitably weakened confidence in the Soviet alternative. In doing so, they made the United States seem somewhat less of an ogre. Richard Kuisel nicely captures the irony of this situation: “it was the misbehavior of the Soviets rather than American efforts at persuasion that sapped the vigor of ideological anti-Americanism” (*Seducing the French*, 128).

That is not to say that *l’Amérique* had won the battle for the hearts and minds of the French. There were substantial reasons why “American efforts at persuasion” had not proven particularly successful. The Vietnam War (1959–1975) met with widespread disapproval in France, as did racial intolerance. Also, de Gaulle was frequently at odds with American foreign policies (Kuisel, *Seducing the French*, 134). Yet the Gallic view of the States was changing. American struggles in Vietnam radically diminished its image as an all-powerful behemoth, and the 1960 Civil Rights Movement demonstrated a serious commitment to racial justice. Certainly French knee-jerk anti-Americanism was in the process of being tempered in the

1960s and 1970s, and the earlier “either/or” attitudes toward the reigning superpowers were being replaced by a more pragmatic approach. Writing in *Le Monde*, Maurice Duverger illustrates this change, but without abandoning skepticism about American intentions in Europe: “Entre l’Europe soviétisée et l’Empire atlantique, la seconde solution est décidément préférable, car dans le premier cas, l’esclavage serait certain, au lieu dans le second, la guerre deviendrait seulement probable” (cited in Roger, 423–424).

A final reason, less for a new enthusiasm for the United States than for a more reasonable and informed view of Cold War tensions, had already been mentioned in *Les Mandarins*: the weakening influence of the leftist French intellectual. For Robert Dubreuilh, the leading representative of the intellectual elite in de Beauvoir’s novel, the decline of the mandarin class was one of the aftershocks of World War II, due in large measure to the increasing importance of practical, geopolitical considerations over ethical judgments. Yet a more modest explanation for the declining role of the intellectual in the postwar period was a growing dissatisfaction with the mandarins themselves.

The predominant intellectual voices immediately after the war were on the left, and generally pro-Soviet and anti-American. The most notable and influential figure in this group was Jean-Paul Sartre, who imposed his personality and intelligence upon the era.<sup>8</sup> His championing of the Soviet cause in *Les Temps modernes* and other venues drowned out in the immediate postwar period the more moderate voices such as those of Raymond Aron or Albert Camus, who sought less Cartesian approaches to Cold War issues. For their efforts they were rewarded with either neglect or scorn by their more left-wing counterparts. However, with the passage of time, events undercut the left’s and Sartre’s positions concerning such things as the gulags and the show trials, making it increasingly difficult to sustain a rigorously pro-Soviet Union position. With the 1956 invasion of Hungary, Sartre formally split from the French Communist Party, ending a tortuous period of fellow traveling partially replicated in *Les Mandarins*. Later he would be a vociferous opponent of the American war in Vietnam, but his influence was never again what it had been just after the war. His decline was also the decline of the left in general. While the latter remained a powerful voice, it no longer dominated as the unequivocal voice of the French intelligentsia. By the end of *les Trente Glorieuses*, there was no longer an “official” intellectual position in France, and thinkers who had been given little credence during Sartre’s heyday began to have more

receptive audiences, even if the overall prestige of the intellectual caste was still on the wane. According to Pascal Ory and Jean-François Sirinelli, “Vers la fin des années soixante-dix, la société française ... commence de tenir un discours pessimiste sur l’intelligentsia” (227). Whatever the impact of intellectuals on French society today, in the sixties and seventies simplified views of the United States and the Soviet Union became harder to maintain, because a greater variety of opinions was being accorded serious attention.

Jean Echenoz, born in 1947, grew up during the *Trente Glorieuses*. He witnessed France’s impressive economic recovery as well as the decline, or at least the lessening, of anti-American sentiment. Like others of his generation, he was exposed to American popular music, films, and literature, all of which would play roles in his fiction. *Cherokee* (1983) appeared eight years after the end of the *Trente Glorieuses*.

Jean-Gérard Lapacherie describes one of the salient features of the narrative approach in *Cherokee*: “la représentation, au sens théâtrale de mise en scène, dérisoire, désinvolte et parodique des conventions culturelles de la représentation” (20). In this novel, Echenoz toys with traditional literary conventions, most prominently the use of symbolism and allusion, textual strategies which artificially enhance the meaning, the putative profundity, of a text. Yet this is not simply an idle exercise in style. The games which Echenoz plays in his text compliment and clarify the larger thematic issues being addressed in *Cherokee*:

Jean Echenoz apporte un nouvel élément de réflexion sur la question des rapports complexes du roman à la réalité, en montrant comment le choix assumé de l’artifice et le refus de l’illusion réaliste peuvent apparaître comme des voies possibles pour se saisir du nerf des choses, pour toucher ... une cible qu’on affecte ... de ne pas viser. (Lebrun, 85)

As will be seen later in the chapter, Echenoz’s challenging of literary conventions is accompanied by the growing importance he accords to cinematic ones.

Echenoz’s use of literary allusion provides a good example of the novel’s playful approach, while at the same providing a commentary on the workings of literature. It is a commonplace in literary criticism to focus attention on names, objects, or allusions that seem suggestive of some

deeper significance. There are many such in *Cherokee*: Dascalopoulos, the high priest of the *rayonniste* cult, and Spielvogel, the doctor whose name means “play bird” in German. There is a cuckolded husband named Degas, and Jenny Weltman (in German “man of the world” or “person of the world”). Degas has a friend named Smirnoff, but vodka plays no role in the novel. A female elephant trainer with the impressive moniker of Leslie Bogomoletz makes a brief appearance, which proves inconsequential, and the parrot, Morgan, occasionally utters “Mehr Licht” (“more light”), Goethe’s last words. A nun resembles the beautiful stage and screen actress Edwige Feuillère, and a policeman who has no English is nonetheless trying to learn the language by reading William Gordon’s novel *Caleb Williams* (1794) as part of a “bain linguistique” (95).

What all these seemingly significant names, expressions, and references have in common is that, in terms of the novel, they mean nothing at all. They have no greater significance, beyond the words themselves. They are just occasionally bizarre names, a famous fragment, and a forgotten fiction that pop up and then disappear without adding anything to the story. The first character one encounters in *Cherokee* is a hulk of a man with the potentially suggestive name of Crocognan. Given the character’s slowness of thought and penchant for violence, a reader might wonder if his name suggests “Cro-Magnon,” a possibility greatly enhanced by Crocognan’s tendency to settle matters through violence, to *cogner*. Not so, according to the narrator, who remarks that “cela ne veut rien dire” (13). Such a comment could be applied to most of the names and allusions in the novel. In life one can encounter all sorts of events and references which trigger the memory, but these experiences need not have anything significant about them. They are simply chance, ultimately meaningless encounters which occur in daily living. By replicating such happenings in his novel, Echenoz is offering an ironic nod toward the nature of reality, which fiction has no obligation to emulate literally.<sup>9</sup>

Something comparable occurs with putative symbols. Since Georges Chave is a central character in *Cherokee*, one could be tempted to see his surname, “Chave,” as a variant of the Italian word for key, “chiave,” thus making Georges the key to the novel. Yet that is hardly the case, Fred proves to be much more important. Georges himself claims, *à propos* of his family name, that “il y a un boulevard à Marseille qui s’appelle comme ça. C’est là qu’on coupe les têtes aux gens, dans le temps” (69). His first name, Georges, is anodyne enough, but then he has a dream where he is

being pursued by a dragon (204). Is this some twisted version of Georges as a latter-day St. George intent upon saving Jenny Weltman, or then again could Jenny be the dragon seeking to consume Georges? Neither reading makes much sense. Early in the novel, Georges's larcenous and murderous cousin, Fred Shapiro, throws two knives in the ocean one after the other. A diver finds them "juste au même endroit, posés en croix, l'un sur l'autre" (24). A reader's immediate impulse might be to search for some symbolic literary significance, but the search would be in vain, even though the knives will constitute a modest allusion in a cinematic context.

The toying with literary conventions in *Cherokee* does not mean they are abandoned. At the same time as certain textual strategies are being exposed as forms of subterfuge, the author continues to deploy them. This will be particularly apparent in the discussion, later in this chapter, of the religious imagery associated with the bungling detective, Ripert, and the *maison* Ferro. In *Cherokee*, Echenoz plays with the techniques of telling a story at the same time as he tells a story using these same techniques. Traditional literary conventions may be played with, but they are too useful to be discarded. As Bruno Blanckeman notes that in Echenoz's writing, "L'héritage des fictions classiques voisine avec celui des tentatives expérimentales plus récentes" (33).

This approach has a certain fey quality to it, a lightness of touch conveyed through a literary style polished enough to appear casual. *Cherokee* offers a form of social critique but one that consciously eschews moralizing. Echenoz is a witness, not an activist, and his novel is content to describe French society at a particular moment, without proposing to change it. Sartre insisted that "La fonction de l'écrivain est d'appeler un chat un chat" (304). In his own way, Echenoz does that, but the feline that emerges in *Cherokee* is a Cheshire cat.

The novel's seemingly clumsy descriptions also serve a function comparable to the use of names and allusions, since the grating, or at least excessive, quality of these passages once again turns the reader's attention away from the story to the question of literary artifice. Echenoz's descriptions often do not clarify or integrate readily into the narrative; they simply startle. In the initial description of the hot-tempered Crocognan, one reads that he is wearing a little rain hat, which "s'étalait comme un poisson plat sur le sommet de son crâne" (9). A woman with a minor role in the novel is presented as having "un visage de bonne fée incestueuse, comme le portrait-robot établi par un homme qui voudrait décrire à la fois

Michèle Morgan et Grace Kelly à cinquante-cinq ans, cet homme étant Walt Disney” (28). Ferguson Gibbs, Fred’s somewhat naïve accomplice, is presented as a cultured and well-groomed person until he smiles, “découvrant un chevauchement de dents mal implantées, battues d’épis à l’instar de sa chevelure, mal penchées en tous sens comme de vieilles pierres tombales” (107). A faucet in an abandoned building leaks. For the sundry spiders and cockroaches who congregate near the faucet, which is their only water supply, the dribble constitutes “une sorte de preuve de l’existence de Dieu” (154). The clunky descriptions and the hollow allusions which appear throughout the novel have the effect of upsetting readers’ concentration while reminding them, by the departure from acceptable authorial practice, of the artificial nature of fiction.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, by increasing readers’ sensitivity to the volatile nature of the rapport between reality and illusion, *Cherokee* prepares them for the more developed examination of these concepts in relation to cinema and, to a lesser degree, jazz.

On the first page of *Cherokee*, one learns that Crocognan “aimait les images des choses” (9). This introduces a motif that will echo in myriad ways throughout the text, but its first, most obvious reference is to the movie image and the images which film permits people to have of themselves and their world. References to film abound in the novel; a wall in Georges’s apartment is papered with photos of mostly American movie stars.<sup>11</sup> His cousin Fred draws inspiration from porno films and violent movies featuring thugs motivated by “l’esprit du lucre qui guide leurs bras” (22).

The physiques and actions of certain characters call to mind American film icons. The detectives Ripert and Bock are obviously modeled, in their shapes and ineptness, on Laurel and Hardy, Hollywood stars from the 1920s through the 1940s. The tall, thin Ripert, who takes all the hard knocks, is Laurel, and the big, clumsy Bock, who nevertheless sees himself as the brains of the operation, is Hardy. To further enhance the American connection, when Bock needs an effective firearm, he turns to “une Colt .45 ... Des macarons ornés de l’aigle américain décoraient les plaquettes de crosse” (197).

A more imaginative variation on the movie star motif involves Crocognan’s associate, Donald, first encountered in a phone booth: “un haut personnage d’une trentaine d’années, vêtu d’un costume tyrolien, et dont le crâne rasé s’ornait d’une longue mèche filasse qui ballottait solitairement sur son oreille” (148). If the “costume tyrolien” suggests German origins, the “longue mèche filasse” hints at aspirations to be perceived as an American



Indian. Both aspects of Donald are subsequently combined as he becomes the “Apache bavarois” (154), then the “Cheyenne transalpin” (159). As a German, he is something of an outsider in France; as an Indian, he evokes memories of social marginalization and near disappearance from history. Donald is a man of few words who moves quickly and stealthily along hidden paths, albeit in *une grande surface*. In these respects he incarnates/parodies the image of the Native American found in Hollywood movies. Donald is proud and dignified, the embodiment of tinsel town’s version of the almost Noble Savage, slightly corrupted by modern life. He manages to function on the edges of society but is really not part of it. Certainly, along with Crocognan, he represents an approach to crime that is rather old-fashioned, characterized as it is by potentially violent acts and direct involvement with theft. This contrasts with Fred’s more modern approach to the profession, where the idea is not to take forcefully from others but to have suckers, such as the *rayonnistes*, line up to give him money. Like the Indian, Donald, for all his skills and knowledge of the terrain, is an anachronism destined to soon fade from history.

While Donald as a version of a Hollywood Indian is an intriguing possibility, his name suggests another Hollywood connection, this time to a particular celebrity. “Donald” is a name rarely heard in German or French. Yet in French at least, it does have a specific reference to a fast moving, guileful, slightly larcenous figure who is also a major movie star: Donald Duck.

The American movie motif in *Cherokee* is not limited to associations with movie stars, American history, and handguns. Its more important function is to demonstrate how film culture has entered people’s lives and to some degree shaped their view of reality. To varying extents, the main characters in this novel tend to see themselves as actors/actresses in a Hollywood movie,<sup>12</sup> a self-delusion that blurs the clear demarcation between make-believe and what can be believed. Yet, at the same time, this rather porous approach to reality is hardly confined to the characters of *Cherokee*. Numerous movie fanatics would feel quite at home in this twilight world.

Movies do not simply entertain and divert: the images they create become the filters through which the world is perceived. This is particularly apparent in the behavior of Ripert and Bock, but the tendency is not limited to them. When Crocognan knocks Ripert to the ground, the detective’s first instinct is to imagine the cinematic version of the event:

“Ripert avait vu au cinéma des hommes qui se battent reçoivent des coups terribles, tombent, se relèvent aussitôt pour donner d’autres coups terribles à d’autres hommes qui tombent à leur tour, se relèvent et ça n’en finit pas” (49). Ripert immediately describes these images as “de la frime” (49), but the fact remains that he indulges them. His initial reaction is to see what is happening to him as part of a film. Echenoz takes pains to avoid the possibility of attributing Ripert’s response uniquely to the detective, since he prefaces Ripert’s reaction to the one-sided fight with “Comme nous tous” (49). As described in *Cherokee*, to see life, at least initially, as a movie, is not an individual aberration but a social phenomenon.

Bock experiences a similar turn toward the cinematic when he contemplates sneaking up on, and intimidating, Georges’s former girlfriend, Véronique. He imagines the scene in terms of an American *film noir* scenario, complete with subtitles: “Comme il eût été simple d’entrer sans façons, d’un coup de pied dans la porte, de dire à cette femme trois mots d’une voix fatiguée, en américain, et que de tremblants sous-titres vermiculaires vinssent s’étaler à ses pieds ...” (197–198). Ultimately he resolves for a more modest approach and just opens the door, but once again, his more immediate instinct had been to opt for the film version.

The most complex and revealing example of cinema’s intrusion into life occurs when Georges first encounters Jenny Weltman, who “était coiffée comme Angie Dickinson dans *Point Blank*” (59). Georges will become obsessed with Jenny largely because of this image of her drawn from the cinema, an image which proves multilayered. Georges is not really smitten with Jenny, nor exactly with Angie Dickinson. He sees Jenny through the prism, not of Angie, but of a character the actress portrayed in a particular film. The woman he yearns for is not the real Jenny Weltman, whoever she might be, nor the real Angie Dickinson, but a product of his imagination nurtured by a movie he has seen. Shortly thereafter, he will describe Jenny as “une image, déjà dans sa mémoire” (63). What he treasures is the image, whose mystery and attractiveness have their unique source in a movie. Where Ripert and Bock can eventually distinguish between the cinematic representation and the more banal reality, it is unclear whether Georges ever does,<sup>13</sup> at least until the end of the novel, where his true identity is revealed.

In a large measure, the tendency in *Cherokee* to depict life as a vast movie scenario accounts for the story’s unreal, dreamlike quality. The common assumption is that films are make-believe; viewers may become deeply involved in a particularly emotional scene, but in the back of their

minds they know it is just a movie. This combination of both believing and not believing what they see on the screen has a numbing effect on their sensibility. Thus, Fred can murder one man and contribute significantly to the death of two others, without ever being concerned about what he has done, except to wonder idly: "Pourquoi est-ce que je les tue comme ça. Ces vieillards" (184). Yet the reader of *Cherokee* is probably not much affected by Fred's murders either, because these killings occur in the cinematic ambiance of a comedy into whose magic circle they have already entered.

Occasionally, characters in the novel give the impression that they know they are part of a movie. Georges is attacked, drugged, and kidnapped. Véronique is also kidnapped, but neither seems very troubled by these events (although Georges does briefly get upset when he learns he is about to become a human sacrifice). In these instances, the characters in the novel mostly behave like actors in a film who play their roles without believing for a moment that what was happening could be real.

While a cinematic atmosphere pervades *Cherokee*, there are two moments when the enchanted atmosphere of movies, that sense of being totally involved in the film, but not really believing that what one sees is true, are shattered. Both involve Ripert. Early in the novel, he is badly beaten by Crocognan and left covered with bruises. Yet there is no sense of human suffering; the fight scene and the subsequent image of Ripert swathed in bandages are rather funny, since the readers do what Ripert briefly did: they view the occurrence as part of a movie. Later on, Georges and Ferguson Gibbs brutally strike and kick Ripert without any real provocation. He screams in pain, "Pourquoi on a fait ça, pourquoi on a fait ça?" (123). His cry destroys the cinematic mood and readers feel his suffering. The character in the novel/movie has, however briefly, become a human being. The second incident is more dramatic. Indeed, it is fatal. Ripert bursts in on a confrontation between two police officers and Fred with his henchman. One of the latter nervously shoots Ripert, who starts shrieking. To silence him, Fred fires his pistol, which until this moment had been considered "sans utilité pratique ... un simple signe" (224), which is to say a prop. The bullet kills the wounded man.

Bock's reaction is the most telling. Upon realizing that his friend is dead, "Il n'aurait pas cru cela possible" (124). This was not supposed to happen, certainly not in a comedy. The novel briefly veers toward *film noir* as Bock starts firing wildly with his American pistol. Yet a police officer manages to quickly restore order, and the ludic element rapidly reasserts itself.

These moments of genuine suffering represent the intrusion of reality into the most developed and protected of fantasy worlds. While cinema, both as an art form to divert and as a semi-conscious model for conduct, can protect an individual from personal or social reality for a certain time, reality can occasionally intrude. Echenoz at times shatters the cinematic illusion as he does its literary counterpart; in both instances he disrupts his audience's concentration on fantasy to remind them that they are involved in a very sophisticated form of make-believe.

Moviegoers are consumers. The very expression "to take in a film" implicitly links movies and ingestion. As with food, films are a source of great pleasure but, just as one can overeat, a person can overindulge in the silver screen. The result will not be heartburn but a possible loss of contact with reality. This is the dangerous aspect of consumerism: not that people would buy more things that would facilitate and enhance their lives, but that possessing would become an end in itself. Fred Shapiro provides the clearest example of this phenomenon.

While it is safe to assume that Crocognan steals in order to obtain money he will then spend, Fred's goals are less clear. His hiring of actors to play the role of thugs indicates that he has money to spare. Yet he lives quietly in a hotel and avoids lavish expenses. If the money associated with the Ferro inheritance promises to be considerable, he nonetheless remains involved with the effort to bilk the *rayonniste* cult, an undertaking whose financial rewards will be considerably more modest. Just what he seeks in his sundry shady enterprises remains something of a puzzle.

In a novel where American films are of paramount importance, it is only right that an explanation for Fred's behavior might be found in an American film classic. *Key Largo* was released in 1948. John Huston was the director, and it starred Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall, Edward G. Robinson, and Lionel Barrymore. During a hurricane that strikes the Florida Keys, Johnny Rocco (Robinson) and his henchmen take over a motel and sequester Frank McCloud (Bogart), Nora Temple (Bacall), and James Temple (Barrymore). After an angry exchange between James Temple and Johnny Rocco, the criminal strikes the old man who is confined to a wheelchair. Nora, enervated, screams at Rocco, demanding why he does what he does, what he really wants. Rocco suddenly pauses, as if to ponder the question. At this point, Frank intervenes and says he knows what Rocco wants; he wants "More." Rocco smiles and agrees.

Fred Shapiro wants more. The Ferro inheritance, the donations from

the *rayonnistes* are not ends in themselves, they are just stages in Fred's endless need for acquisition. Fred is the extreme, indeed parodic, example of the French consumer who desires objects not for their utility, nor ultimately even for whatever social standing they may provide, but just for the thrill of acquiring. Fred, like the inveterate consumer, has realized that enough is never enough, and that the thrill of gaining is infinitely more pleasurable than the object gained. His is an insatiable hunger that is stimulated rather than sated by consuming objects great and small.

If there is an explanation for rampant consumerism in postwar France, *Cherokee* does not supply it. Dominique Viart remarks that "chez Echenoz, on n'affronte pas la métaphysique ni le vide existentiel, on les fuit" (254). Viart's point is well taken, but to say that Echenoz does not confront supposedly deep issues does not mean he does not play with them. In *Cherokee*, the decline of religion and the spiritual void it creates, as well as the failed effort to resuscitate some transcendent belief through bizarre cults, serve as a tongue-in-cheek explanation for the turn to frenzied acquiring, which provides transient, if not eternal, consolation. The loss of spirituality is linked to the rise of consumerism.

The character in the novel who is the most abused, and eventually killed, is Ripert. His first name, which is reiterated several times in the novel, is Christian, and he hangs around his neck "une minuscule médaille pieuse" (32). Ripert is a caricature of Catholicism, a once-powerful source of meaning and purpose, whose influence is currently in steep decline. This erosion of the Church's significance is represented by Ripert's essential ridiculousness, as well as his inability to cope with a modern world which will cast him out.<sup>14</sup>

To say that traditional organized religion is rapidly becoming a thing of the past is not to suggest that the quest for spiritual significance is totally lacking in modern France. Prior to the introduction of the *rayonniste* sect in the novel, Benedetti encounters a young lady in the street who is hawking some ersatz faith which rather unconvincingly proclaims that "L'axe du monde passe par votre cœur" (98). If the religious impulse is embattled, it is far from dead in *Cherokee*. It finds its fullest expression among the *rayonnistes*.

It is tempting to contrast the *rayonnistes'* ludicrous beliefs and practices with those of their more august predecessors, notably the Catholic Church, but to do so would be to miss the irony of their presentation in *Cherokee*. Allowing for differences in clothing and details, the *rayonnistes'* activities

do not really contrast with Catholicism; they parallel and parody some significant beliefs of the Catholic Church. The *rayonnistes* strive for religious ecstasy through sexual titillation. At a crucial moment in their ceremony, the scantily clad goddess stands up and lets fall the sheet draped around her. The sight of her naked body becomes the *rayonnistes'* equivalent of the Beatific Vision.

Encountering the Supreme Being through sexual excitement is a longstanding mystical tradition in the Church. The assumption is that the closest counterpart to the spiritual ecstasy of union with Christ is the intense pleasure provoked by its carnal equivalent with another human being. This phenomenon is described by Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, among other mystics. Bernini gives the fullest artistic expression to this practice in his statue *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (1652).

A crucial moment in the mass occurs when the faithful receive communion, which in Catholic doctrine involves partaking of the body and blood of Christ in the form of the host. The belief that the communion wafer actually becomes the Godhead is much disputed by other Christian religions, some of which find it ridiculous. The *rayonnistes* consume string beans, one assumes for reasons similar to the Catholic communion. To consider the latter's practices absurd must necessarily cast doubts on those of the former since both groups are doing essentially the same thing: they are eating something presumed to have divine powers. Religion has not exactly lost its hold over human beings in *Cherokee*; it has merely been recycled to better suit the tastes of the modern world. Yet, whether the old or the new version, religion can only satisfy the need for transcendence and transformation of a very small, diminishing group.

In *Cherokee*, the religious impulse is hardly dead, but it fails to provide an alternative to the excesses of consumerism. With much less pretension, in a modest and imperfect way, jazz does just that, by proposing a more substantial and beneficial form of consumerism. The novel is far from suggesting that jazz has replaced religion as a source of meaning in the universe; at best jazz is an all-too-human creation, limited in time and with no aspirations to be anything other than what it is: a succession of sounds and silences that gives pleasure. Yet, unlike religion, it has a large and expanding following in a France still emerging from the war. Jazz can provide its audience with moments of transient beauty, solace, and escape in a difficult world where questions of life's ultimate meaning no longer seem worth asking.

The novel's title, *Cherokee*, refers to a musical piece of the same name composed in 1938 by Ray Noble. Megan Cunningham explains that the original composition lasts between three and ten minutes, depending upon the particular version (6). Quite aside from the merits of Noble's work, it is probably more famous for the quantity of improvisations it has inspired. It is a musical piece with a very clear structure (AABA), yet with a great openness to all sorts of reworkings of its themes.

Jazz in *Cherokee* is not simply a matter of the novel's title and then a few passing references. Scholars have given great importance to jazz in *Cherokee* on both technical and thematic levels. In her unpublished Master's thesis, Cunningham makes a compelling argument that the fictional version of *Cherokee* adheres to the essential structure of Noble's "Cherokee."<sup>15</sup> Christine Jérusalem provides a precise explanation of the general sense that many sentences in the novel reflect a jazz tempo: "Prenant modèle sur le rythme de jazz, la phrase joue de la reprise (homophonies diverses) comme de la rupture (effets de syncope multiples)" (8). In terms of the thematic implications of jazz in *Cherokee*, Eric Pieto relates "the austere angularity of bebop and the improvisational ethos of the jazz combo" to "Echenoz's preference for characters who move through the landscape, seeking not *triumph over* the contingencies of human experience ... but to *work with them*, in improvisational fashion" (100; emphasis original).

It is a measure of Echenoz's capacity for improvisation that he manages to tell the serious story of jazz's origins in a comic vein. Pieto has emphasized the amusing aural similarity between the title, *Cherokee*, and the *perroquet* stolen from Dr. Spielvogel. For Pieto this enhances his sense that Morgan (*le perroquet*) is at the "center of the novel's plot" (105). Without sharing Pieto's view of the bird's centrality to the novel, I do believe Morgan adds significantly to the jazz motif. Jazz is the creation of black musicians whose ancestors were captured in Africa and sold into slavery. Morgan's travels replicate the slave journey from the African homeland to the European continent. The parrot was born east of Cameroon, captured by white explorers, and shipped out of Africa on a boat which stopped briefly at the Cape Verde Islands before eventually landing in France. Morgan was then taken over by an ornithologist in Bruges, who presumably bought him. When this man goes bankrupt, the bird is auctioned off and purchased by a nun (the one who looks like Edwige Feuillère). She eventually donates the parrot to a traveling circus. When the circus owner decides to "abandonner le show-business pour épouser un marchand de miel" (142), she sells him

to Dr. Spielvogel. In the course of Morgan's journeys he accumulates, much like slaves, a large body of suffering and experience, much of which presumably emerges in the sounds he makes.

References to jazz, its instruments, its players, and its sounds, echo throughout *Cherokee*, but its presence is not confined to specific citations of works, composers, and players. In a bizarre scene at the novel's beginning, Crocognan has just left the hangar where he has been hiding and is making his way toward a nightclub. He checks his watch only to discover that it has stopped. He "défit la boucle du bracelet, secoua la montre dans son poing, l'ausculta encore puis la jeta devant lui, l'écrasa comme une blatte en accélérant le pas" (10). By destroying the watch, Crocognan is stepping out of real time. Although there will be numerous references to hours and days in what follows, this is now all part of a musical composition that, as will be discussed shortly, will eventually be part of a film. The novel, from beginning to end, is set in the often staccato rhythms of jazz, whose pace, as evidenced in Crocognan's sudden acceleration, is faster than that of ordinary time. The novel does not simply seek to make references to jazz; it strives to suggest to the reader that "il est aussi en train 'd'écouter' une pièce musicale" (LeBrun 85). *Cherokee* attempts to reflect in prose something akin to Noble's musical creation. From this perspective, the novel might even be considered an improvisation on the musical piece, "une interprétation peu courante de *Cherokee*" (24).

Jazz's beneficent role in the novel is highlighted by a contrast with another forceful musical form. In the first chapter, Crocognan goes to a discotheque where he hears music that rapidly gets louder until it becomes "une musique violente" (11), an aural nightmare. It is blaring disco music whose volume increases as Crocognan descends more deeply into the nightclub's caverns. Its beat provides background for the ensuing struggle between Crocognan and a man trying to knife and rob him. This is a music from hell, associated with greed and brutality. A variation of it appears again in the scene where Georges, shocked by his uncle's murder, goes at night to the "garage Pellegrin" (176), whose eponymous, money-grubbing owner is a taciturn figure resembling Vulcan laboring at his forge. (Since the novel is a comedy, it should be noted that the Vulcan-figure is striking his *dentier*). The music created by the banging is pure noise, a cacophony which assails Georges and makes it impossible for him to think.

Even though jazz provides the major musical accompaniments in *Cherokee*, it is not associated with any of the violence. Shortly before



Ripert's murder, the radio was playing jazzman Kenny Drew, but the music stopped almost simultaneously with the firing of the shot, and "Il y eut un silence" (224). Jazz's implied disassociation with the killing is confirmed by the insistence that Ripert came on the scene at a bad moment; his arrival disrupted the development of the music as well as the scene, "produisit un contretemps, comme une fausse note dans une exécution" (224). To the extent that Ripert's arrival was an improvisation of sorts, it was a bad one, an unwanted, misguided variation on Kenny Dew's theme, whereas the disco music and the clanging hammer in the garage were true accompaniments of attempted robbery and murder.

As *Cherokee* draws to a close, the presence of jazz becomes more overt. The musical ambiance that will suffuse the scenes in the *maison* Ferro is introduced by amateur musicians. Georges, Crocognan, and Bernard Clavel form an unlikely trio attempting to play jazz on makeshift instruments, but once the action moves to the Ferro house, all the music is supplied by professionals, except for the false note created by Ripert.

A religious ambiance surrounds the house, which is described as a "temple" (201), and its inner sanctum "ressemblait à une sacristie ... où Georges fut ... revêtu d'une sorte d'aube" (206) in preparation for his role as the sacrificial victim. Since a *temple* is a Protestant church, it is tempting to view this scene in a traditional religious context and consider whether the setting conveys a tension between the old (Catholicism) and the new (Protestantism): a rigid set of beliefs challenged by more supple values. Since religion only has a minor, largely ironic role in the novel, I would read these putative religious references differently: as a suggestion that what is adored in this modern house of worship has little to do with traditional religion. Faith in God has found its imperfect substitutes in either jazz or money. If one views the *maison* Ferro as a sort of jazz hall, where a variety of musicians play to attentive audiences, then it represents consumerism in a positive light, a place where listeners absorb lovely sounds. However, should one stress the house as the hiding place for the missing inheritance, then the pursuit of money becomes the dominant motif, as consumerism morphs into greed.

Given these two options, it is obvious that the latter is the stronger. Fred and his associates want at least the Ferro money, and the *rayonnistes*, despite the string beans they are offered, really want their cash back. This is not to say, however, that jazz does not have a role in a world that has chosen unbridled consumerism.

Mayhem characterizes the goings-on in the *maison* Ferro, but the rather frenzied activities are brought, to some degree, under control by the jazz pieces that accompany them. Since the various jazz excerpts are all part of a radio show that Fred supposedly just happened to turn on, they constitute musical improvisations responding to individual scenes of senseless human behavior. While the jazz harmonies do little to calm most of the people in the house, they do have a beneficent effect on a connoisseur. For a keen listener like Georges, who has in his tiny apartment 468 records “principalement de la musique de jazz” (16), the radio broadcast “devait être consacrée aux continuateurs de Bud Powell” (226). He can at once identify the music and fall under its spell. Jazz has, for Georges at least, managed to some degree to turn chaos into beauty, to lift an otherwise ugly moment to a higher level.

At the end of the fighting in the *maison* Ferro, Ripert is dead, Fred has disappeared, and Gibbs is being questioned by the police. Yet in the penultimate scene, which is Ripert’s funeral, a semblance of order has been restored. Except for Fred, all the main characters are present. Fergusson Gibbs has not been taken into custody; Georges is also free. To the extent that there is any revelation, it is that Ripert was a bigamist. At this point, it would seem the novel has come to an end. Yet there is what amounts to a brief, revealing coda.

The last scene in *Cherokee* finds Georges sitting in a car next to Jenny Weltman; Fred is in the driver’s seat. The three are remarkably calm. Fred has seemingly recovered from his close escape, and Georges displays neither rancor toward his cousin nor excitement at the proximity of Jenny. They appear more collegial than anything else. The realization that they are quite at ease with one another initially seems a puzzle, as do Fred’s last words, the last in the novel: “Qu’est-ce qu’on fait maintenant?” (231). It almost seems that the three of them are used to working together and have somehow just stepped out of the novel. Yet this is not exactly the case. They have just stepped off a movie set. Jenny and Georges are actors who have completed their roles in a film written, produced, and directed by Fred Shapiro, who also co-starred in his own production.

Considering the novel as a fictional version of a film, a wry version of a *ciné-roman*, clarifies much of the ambiguity in the text, particularly with regard to Georges’s role. He plays Fred’s secret accomplice, who is part of the scenario his cousin concocted from the beginning. He appears to happen to be in the discotheque when Cocognan is attacked. In itself, that could

just be chance, but it seems less so in light of subsequent events. By helping him, Georges wins his friendship, which will prove useful for the rest of the story. When Ripert returns to the detective bureau beaten up, how does Georges immediately know the culprit is Cocognan and that Mme Degas will be found in his proximity? How does he know that Morgan the parrot has been taken to the Cirque d'Hiver, and not to some other hiding place? When he is sent to the Bibliothèque Nationale by Benedetti to research aspects of the Ferro inheritance, why does he read novels until the allegedly fortuitous encounter with Jenny Weltman? Why is he so calm when attacked by Fred's actors/thugs on two occasions? When he is brought, presumably for the first time, to the *maison* Ferro, how does he know it – "C'est la maison Ferro, non?" (202)? The facility with which he identifies this place, quickly finds Mme Degas and Morgan, and remains relaxed despite the supposed dangers around him means that he must have had some prior knowledge of what was going to happen. He had read the script. Finally, one recalls the *voyante* who predicted at the beginning of *Cherokee* that Georges will get rich. This could be an allusion to the Ferro money he helped steal. Georges is, from this perspective, receiving the share of the loot that he earned. Yet once Georges jettisons his film role and reassumes his identity as an actor, the money becomes the wages he will receive for his part in the movie.

Fergusson Gibbs describes Fred, rather accurately, as both an "homme d'affaires" and a "psychopathe" (209). These are attributes that will serve Fred well in his artistic endeavors, where, in addition to being an actor, he functions as a producer and director. He has the organizational skills and marketing savvy of a successful businessman. The demons that torment him also propel him toward his goals, and, unlike less fortunate sufferers from psychiatric problems, he can usually control and channel his internal fiends in productive ways. His being a con man also contributes to his creativity, since artists also use subterfuge to provide willing audiences with illusions, an option Echenoz exposes in the novel. His use of jazz as background music is inspired. His French audience knows jazz well and can easily accept it as the sound of modernity.

Like all good directors, he understands how to get the best performance from the talent at his disposal. When Georges expresses annoyance at being rather suddenly considered for the starring role in a human sacrifice scene, Fred first complements his cousin, "tu as bien joué ton rôle" (219), but he then goes on to explain that the actor need not always know why a scene is played a certain way. That is the director's job. In fact, scenes

sometimes play out better when the actor is not “au courant, il valait même mieux que tu ne le sois pas” (219). At such moments the actor need only follow the director’s guidance: “Ne cherche pas à comprendre, fais comme je te dis, tout ira bien” (219).

As his explanation to Georges illustrates, Fred appreciates the value of improvisation when controlled by a good director. On one occasion, Jenny complains about another director’s lack of imagination and rigid adherence to the script. Fred sees her point at once: “C’est vrai que s’en tenir au texte, à la longue, c’est un peu toujours pareil” (187). A good director for Fred is someone who constantly has ideas, is open to sudden inspiration, and then is ready to implement changes based on his latest thought. The script’s function is merely to supply the outline of a story and some dialogue, which a director will feel free to tinker with and alter as he sees fit. Fred is surely a director of this caliber.

Yet one might be inclined to think that some of Fred’s directorial decisions are less successful than others. Ripert’s brutal beatings by Georges and Gibbs, his death, and Brock’s agony at his friend’s demise seem out of place in the movie Fred is making. Such objections, or at least concerns, will diminish once we understand the kind of film Fred is shooting.

*Cherokee* is a novel about the making of a modern Franco-American comedy based on French consumerism represented primarily by the influence of American films on the Gallic psyche. This is a movie intended to win critical acclaim, please audiences, and make money in both France and the States. In order to do so, it must consider the tastes of the French and American movie going publics. While the two are not entirely different, each does have its own preferences and desires which must be satisfied.

For the French audience, framing the film as a *polar* is appealing, as is moving beyond that format and entering slightly uncharted waters, thereby supposedly adding a little intellectual heft. The inconclusive ending is also desirable. The bad guy getting away has a certain intellectual cachet. Is Fred a victim of society? Is he in revolt against oppressive bourgeois values? Or perhaps a true revolutionary? In any case, ambiguity always does well in contemporary French art because it attracts critical support. As do literary and cinematic allusions. What French movie buff would not immediately grasp that Fred’s act of throwing knives into the water was an evocation of Roman Polanski’s 1962 *Knife in the Water*, or that the references to Laurel and Hardy and *Point Blank* are homages to American cinema?

The implied critique of consumerism will also work in France; the film condemns *excessive* consuming, but nobody in the audience will believe that this refers to his or her behavior. At the same time, the movie recognizes the pleasure and even necessity of acquiring. This is a “feel good” sort of social criticism. It makes people imagine themselves in some vague way *engagés* with a weighty issue and thus somehow superior to the less socially sensitive without having any real burden placed on them. French moviegoers can laugh at the influence American film is having on some of their compatriots, while believing that the fantasies Hollywood creates have no such hold over them.

Since the North American market is larger than its French counterpart, care must be taken to soothe and amuse American sensibilities. This requires severely limiting the scope of any social critique and, without wishing to offend foreigners too much, make clear the superiority of the New World’s culture. So the American audience has the pleasure of noting Hollywood’s success abroad and can take satisfaction in the well-known fact that the French are crazy about and want to imitate American clothing, music, and movies. There is the mandatory chase sequence, although with a foreign twist: instead of the pursuit being made by car, plane, or on horseback, it is on foot through a mall. Clearly, Europeans do not have American financial means at their disposal to sustain a more elaborate and costly pursuit. Then there is the near-Hollywood ending. Almost all the strings are tied, and there is the semblance of closure. Yet more thoughtful viewers will realize that Fred remains at liberty, the position of Gibbs and Georges *vis-à-vis* the justice system remains unclear, and the Ferro money has presumably not been recovered. As explained above, these not-so-latent ambiguities are a concession to the French market. From an American perspective, these lacunae at the end could provide the basis for a sequel and, if successful, perhaps a prequel as well.

Finally, there is the question of sexuality and violence. Hollywood has always understood that healthy doses of both sell tickets. Yet American movies claim to eschew unnecessary sex and violence, so the issue is how does a director get as much sex and violence as possible into the film without running afoul of the movie code? So the nudity is associated with a crazy, non-Christian religion, and the violent scenes are quickly muted by the comic ones. The foreign setting helps as well. Such carryings-on cannot be considered typically American, but they are probably the sorts of things that are common in Paris. Purists may argue that in these areas

Fred did not do a particularly good job, but he must be credited with being aware of American needs and the limits placed upon the amount of mayhem he can provide.

For Fred and fellow actors Jenny and Georges, all this is now history. What remains to be considered is the next project, the next movie. That is the sense of Fred's no longer enigmatic question: "Qu'est-ce qu'on fait, maintenant?" (231). As a movie villain forever wanting more, Fred proves to be an excellent actor; as a director, he has made a frequently inspired, but flawed film. So he will try again, forever pursuing the mercurial image of the perfect work of art, one that integrates omnipresent American influences without losing its inherent French identity.

*Cherokee* is a novel that displays no particular anxiety in the face of the American pop culture invasion of France. Instead, it absorbs these pressures and influences and makes them an integral part of its text; they become elements which contribute to the work's success. In this respect, Echenoz's novel is quite different from the fiction studied in preceding chapters, where the American presence, in its various manifestations, is perceived as a threat to France's traditional values. Although *Cherokee* marks a break with the more established formulations of the tensions between the two nations, it must be stressed that this change is confined to a single literary text and does not apply to French literature of the 1980s in general. Yet, as will be seen, *Cherokee* is a harbinger of things to come in the contemporary French novel.

## Notes

1 Gaëlle Bantegnie's *France 80* reads like an update of *Les Choses*. It chronicles the same obsession with consumerism for the 1980s as well as the subtle dissatisfaction it entails.

2 *Une autre histoire des "Trente Glorieuses": modernisation, contestations et pollutions dans la France d'après-guerre*, co-authored by Céline Pressis, Sezine Topçu, and Christopher Bonneuil, does not ignore these dangers. It details some very negative aspects of this period of French prosperity and economic progress. *Une autre histoire* is quite informative about France in general during the period, even though it accords little space to the impact of American popular culture.

3 According to Richard Kuisel in *Seducing the French*, anti-Americanism in France had begun weakening in the 1960s (152).

4 This is something that Christopher Newman realizes in *The American*, albeit in an inchoate manner, and Undine Spragg exploits shamelessly in *The Custom of the Country*.

5 Probably the most famous appearance of a jazz motif in twentieth-century French fiction occurs in Sartre's *La Nausée* (1938). For the perpetually depressed and often disoriented Antoine Roquentin, jazz, in the form of Shelton Brooks's "Some of These Days," constitutes one of his rare sources of pleasure and eventually of hope. Although the music recurs several times in the novel, its most important appearance is in the final pages, where Roquentin's anxiety and nihilism are somewhat relieved by this melody sung by a black woman. "Some of These Days" is music that permits him "une espèce de joie" (247). Ultimately, it will inspire him to summon his courage and attempt to write a novel that will help people, not to escape life but to confront it more directly: "Il faudrait qu'elle [l'aventure décrite dans le roman] soit belle et dure comme de l'acier et qu'elle fasse honte aux gens de leur existence" (247). Jazz is more widespread and varied in *Cherokee*; it is not confined to one piece or to the reflection of one mood. Jazz is the musical expression of postwar French modernity in Echenoz's novel, and as such it accompanies and reflects the emotions, actions, and thoughts of the characters. Jazz is an important element in *La Nausée*; it is an essential element in *Cherokee*.

6 In the detective bureau where Ripert and Bock work, the reading materials essentially consist of "quelques romans d'espionnage et revues de bandes dessinées pour adultes" (33).

7 A more humorous equivalent of Aron's remark is found in Annie Ernaux's *Les Années*: "Une pub disait *l'argent, le sexe, la drogue, choisissez l'argent*" (219; emphasis original).

8 The title of Bernard-Henri Lévy's *Le Siècle de Sartre* eloquently expresses the exaggerations to be discovered in the text, but it probably would be reasonable to speak of *la décennie de Sartre*, in order to acknowledge the philosopher's enormous prestige and influence just after the war.

9 For a more extensive discussion of this phenomenon, see Chapter VII.

10 Echenoz also achieves this end by introducing characters in such a way that the reader assumes they will have some significance and then simply making them disappear from the novel. The woman elaborately compared to Michèle Morgan and Grace Kelly is one such example. Who is Muriel Posadas, the young girl who watches string beans boil (125) for the masseur (for that matter, what is the masseur doing in the novel)? Then there is the adolescent, "la petite Evelyne" (144) being disciplined by the mother superior in the convent for something she claims she did not do. Finally, there is the young woman with whom Georges flirts on a train to Paris. She seems interested in

him, but after identifying a picture of Georges to a total stranger, she “disparut à tout jamais” (148).

11 Georges’s clothing is “Presque toujours de fabrication américaine” (18).

12 The irony is that they are indeed actors in a movie, but this only emerges at the end of the novel.

13 A more modest example of perceiving individuals in terms of cinematic models occurs when, sequestered together, Véronique tells Georges that the night before he arrived, two toughs burst into the room where she was imprisoned. One was “un brun sec genre italo-américain (je vois, dit Georges)” (205). How could a young woman in France describe someone as “italo-américain,” had she not discovered such a stereotype in the movies? Judging from Georges’s reaction, he may have seen the same film.

14 As if to hammer home the French lack of respect for Catholicism, and perhaps for organized religion in general, Echenoz has Ferguson Gibbs urinate on a church (159).

15 In *Fusionnement de la littérature, du film et de la musique: Cherokee et Lac de Jean Echenoz*, Cunningham writes concerning the structural similarities between the musical piece and the novel: “Bien que ‘Cherokee’ puisse être divisé en quatre sections avec deux thèmes principaux, le roman d’Echenoz peut aussi être divisé en quatre sections. Comme on verra à travers cette étude, le thème A, répété deux fois, correspond à la première moitié du texte, tandis que le thème B correspond aux scènes d’action dans les chapitres vingt à trente-et-un. Musicalement, ce thème semble passer plus vite parce qu’il y a quatre changements successifs de tonalité à travers seize mesures, au lieu d’avoir un seul changement progressif, comme celui qui existe dans le thème A. Puis, avec la mort de Ripert dans le chapitre trente-et-un, l’histoire fait un retour au début, et donc un retour au thème A, qui semble passer moins vite harmoniquement parce qu’il ne comporte qu’une seule tonalité qui dure pendant seize mesures. Ce changement final indique la fin du tempo plus fort du roman et de la pièce musicale, ainsi que la fin de l’action dans l’œuvre de Jean Echenoz” (4-5).



## CHAPTER VII

# An American Excursion into French Fiction

## *The Book of Illusions*

Ideas have a much shorter life in France than in the United States.

(Jean-Philippe Mathy, *French Resistance*, 36)

Auster is an American entirely oriented toward Europe.

(Pascal Bruckner, cited in Dennis Barone, *Beyond the Red Notebook*, 31)

My stories come out of the world and not out of books.

(Paul Auster, cited in Alike Varvogli, *The World that is the Book*, 6)

Our lives are no more than the sum of manifold contingencies.

(Paul Auster, *In the Country of Last Things*, 30)

If there is one solid and non-negotiable principle in the American novel, it is that something must happen.

(Warren Motte, 73)

*Cherokee* marked a departure from the frequently voiced fear that traditional French cultural practices had been severely weakened by the influx of American pop culture. Jean Echenoz demonstrated in his text that French

literature was perfectly capable of absorbing and transforming American influences, then incorporating them into the contemporary French novel. Paul Auster's writing, here represented by *The Book of Illusions*, also challenges overly facile assumptions about American cultural dominance by providing a different perspective on Franco-American literary relations, and the balance of power between the two nations in these areas. Initially, this may appear a surprising claim, since *The Book of Illusions* is set entirely in the United States, and there is no mention of France or anything particularly French. Yet French literature and culture are assumed by many critics on both sides of the Atlantic, but particularly in France, to have been a major, if not the principal influence on the American author. This reverses the more common tendency to see the United States as playing the predominant role in cultural exchanges between the two countries. Since the Gallic presence in Auster's work is often proclaimed, and then justified, with the airiest of arguments, one function of this chapter will be to pinpoint, in the course of analyzing the novel, specific elements in *The Book of Illusions* that reflect the influence of French literature. In the concluding paragraphs, I will speculate concerning a possible reason why French critics stress the importance of French elements in Auster's work. To better create a context for this discussion, it will first be necessary to describe two moments in Franco-American cultural history where forms of French theorizing had a powerful, albeit controversial, effect on the American intellectual/academic landscape, and undoubtedly, in one form or another, played a role in the Francophile Paul Auster's intellectual development.

In 1966, a conference entitled "The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" was held at Johns Hopkins University. It was destined to create a major upheaval in the American intellectual and academic landscape. The guests of honor figured among France's intellectual luminaries and included Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, and Tzvetan Todorov. Gérard Genette and Gilles Deleuze had also been invited; they could not attend but both sent "un texte ou une lettre dont les organisateurs font part aux centaines d'auditeurs" (Cusset, 39). This conference marked the triumphal arrival in the United States of post-structuralist theory, which rapidly became known simply as "French theory." As such, it became an American cultural phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> For about a twenty-year period, varieties of critical approaches to literary texts, associated at times loosely with the ideas of the participants at the 1966

*colloque*, became the dominant forms of literary analysis, pushing, at least temporarily, more traditional forms of exegesis (Marxist, psychological, contextual, etc.) into academic limbo.

This is not the first time in the twentieth century that French theorizing had a consequential impact in American universities. The frenzy and controversy surrounding the American reception of French theory recalls the enthusiasm, and often heated disputes, connected to the arrival of the *nouveau roman* on the American academic scene, primarily but not exclusively in French departments. Looking briefly at these two cultural phenomena will provide a context for evaluating the commonly expressed, yet rarely examined, critical assumption that Paul Auster is the most French of contemporary American novelists.

Both the French desire for new fictional forms and the American enthusiasm for French innovations were, at least in part, reactions to warfare. For the French, it was World War II, with its revelations of genocide, coupled with the terror bombing on both sides and the dropping of the atomic bomb, that made more traditionally humanistic approaches to the writing and studying of literature appear woefully inadequate and outdated. To a large degree, the *nouveau roman* would be a reaction to this dissatisfaction and impatience with older literary formats. For the Americans, the growing disenchantment with the Vietnam War, particularly among students, contributed to the enthusiasm for new French critical practices. If, as François Cusset argues, after 1970 the brutal repression of student dissent made the possibility of radical social change seem no longer possible in the States, the appeal of a dramatically new way of analyzing their culture and literary artifacts constituted something of an alternative for young Americans (65). At the same time, a desire to renew critical methodologies was growing in the professorial ranks:

A commonly held view on the success of French theory in America is that it provided a new generation of young professors and graduate students radicalized by the political upheavals of the sixties ... with an interpretative method that infused the canonical reading protocols of the New Criticism with the ideological dimension it had lacked in the conformist atmosphere of the Eisenhower era. (Mathy, *French Resistance*, 37)

What was desired by the “French theory” enthusiasts were new approaches

which would potentially offer better ways of understanding both the literary text and, perhaps also, the complex fabric of American society.

The terms *nouveau roman* and “French theory” provided what appeared to be quite straightforward categories for what were really very complex creations. The expression *nouveau roman* signaled one of the great marketing successes of Jérôme Lindon’s Les Éditions du Minuit. Ably seconded by the novelist/polemicist, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Lindon managed to package a disparate group of writers (Samuel Beckett, Claude Simon, Nathalie Sarraute, etc.) under the rubric of *nouveaux romanciers*. The most apparent similarity among the *nouveaux romanciers* was that they were all published by Minuit. These novelists were certainly not the only ones writing somewhat innovatively in France but, due in large measure to the grouping and publicity Minuit provided, they soon became synonymous with all that was really new and exciting in contemporary French fiction.

Just as the term *nouveaux romanciers* provided the semblance of similarity among artists who were often quite different, under the umbrella of “French theory” were assembled a very diverse array of thinkers, philosophers (Derrida, Lyotard, Foucault), literary critics (Barthes, Georges Poulet), sociologists (Lucien Goldman), and psychologists (Gilles Deleuze) who might have had little in common beyond a desire to forge new intellectual tools to explore the contemporary world. Also, for a time at least, “French theory,” like the *nouveau roman* during its heyday, became the code word in American universities for all that was exciting and progressive in contemporary thinking about literature and culture.

The enthusiasm created by the *nouveau roman* in American academic circles was primarily of the intellectual sort, but it also permitted beleaguered humanities departments, particularly those involved with foreign languages, to reassert their relevance and prestige in a modern university increasingly dominated by the sciences. “French theory” had a comparable effect on American universities in the 1970s and 1980s. Menaced, as always, by the encroaching academic power of the sciences, literature and language departments seized upon the new French import, which supplied analytical approaches often based on linguistic theory. Thus, for many it was more objective, less impressionistic or subject to individuals’ personal prejudices. While certainly not a hard science, this critical orientation had a scientific aura about it. It also possessed the additional merit, from an American perspective, of being applicable in a

number of relatively new academic disciplines, such as cultural studies, gay studies, and religious studies. Finally, in terms of ideological benefits to the more traditional academic departments (English, Modern Languages, History, Psychology), Michèle Lamont maintains that humanities programs saw in these new theories a way to “reaffirm the distinctive features on which their prestige was based, that is, high culture” (614).

A major difference between the *nouveau roman* and “French theory” was that, while the former was a rethinking of the French novel that American scholars in the 1950s and ’60s were eager to investigate, the latter was to a large degree an American invention, as scholars in the United States often decontextualized French ideas and appropriated them to their own needs, disciplines, and intellectual interests. This process was not without its ironies. Among the most prominent of the French intellectuals associated with “French theory” were Foucault and Derrida, who were philosophers by trade; while American analytic philosophers displayed little interest in their work, literary departments and related programs were quick to see the ways in which essentially philosophical ideas could contribute to literary and cultural analysis.

An ironic similarity between the *nouveau roman* and “French theory” is that they maintained a forceful presence in American universities even after French interest in this postwar conception of fiction had begun to diminish, and the reputations in France of thinkers associated with “French theory” had started to wane: “au moment où Foucault, Lyotard et Derrida devenaient incontournables dans l’université américaine leurs noms connaissaient en France une éclipse systématique” (Cusset, 32).

As a student at Columbia University in the 1960s and then early 1970s, Paul Auster was coming to intellectual maturity during a period when “French theory” was much discussed in departments of literature. He interrupted his studies in the late 1960s to spend several years in France, where he perfected his knowledge of the French language and developed a strong interest in French culture. He has translated prominent French poets, and translations of his own work into French regularly sell extremely well in the Hexagon.<sup>2</sup> Writing in *Livres-Hebdo*, Laurence Santantonious reports that “l’écrivain new-yorkais ... [a] les ventes en France qui avoisinent 100,000 exemplaires” (“Un Auster qui se narrent,” 23). In 1992, the French government made Auster a Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, and in 2005, he was promoted to the rank of Commandeur de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. Although there can be

no question about Auster's close ties the Gallic world, it remains to be determined just how this proximity is reflected in his work.

This question is quite important since, for many people, what distinguishes Paul Auster from his fellow contemporary American novelists is the allegedly "French," or at least "European," quality of his writing. Tom Theobald quotes a reviewer for the *London Times* referring to the American author as a "Francophile existentialist" (7), and Sven Birkerts boldly asserts that "the premises in [his] novels are resoundingly French" (Theobald, 9), without explaining the nature of these premises. French reviewers have certainly encouraged the idea that Auster has been greatly influenced by their country. Jean-Philippe Mestre is typical of many critics when he writes that Auster is "le plus français des écrivains américains" (*Le Progrès*, 21). Others, such as André Clavel, have expanded the scope of Auster's cultural importance beyond the Hexagon, "le phénomène Auster ... un phénomène ... plus européen qu'américain" (*Le Temps*, 17).

Just as a reader might be forgiven for wondering what a "Francophile existentialist" or "French premises" are, a slight befuddlement might be extended to "le plus français des écrivains américains." This is not to say there is no truth in this latter statement, but it stands in need of clarification.

Pascal Bruckner likewise enlarges Auster's geographical parameters to include the Old World when he concentrates on the novelist's themes: "Auster is an American entirely oriented toward Europe. But this proximity is misleading ... Auster, deeply anchored in the New World, does not write European books in America; he enriches the American novel with European themes" (31). While Bruckner's argument has the merit of providing a more specific answer to the question of Auster's relation to Old World culture, his response remains unsatisfactory. What are European themes? Surely American literature treats love, sex, politics, war, and peace while occasionally reflecting on the more theoretical issues of the nature of fiction and the role of the artist. For that matter, what are European books? If they are works written in Europe, how then might one characterize Thomas Mann's *Dr. Faustus*, composed in the most un-Germanic setting of Southern California between 1943 and 1947. Or, if a European book is a work written by a European, how does one classify *Lolita*, published in Paris in 1955, then in the United States in 1958, and written in English by a polyglot Russian residing in upstate New York? All that said, while Birkerts, the unnamed *Times* man, and Bruckner's responses raise more questions than

provide answers, they are certainly correct to discern a certain European, I would say primarily French, atmosphere in Auster's texts.<sup>3</sup>

The most striking element in more scholarly engagements with Auster is that, while the French influence is often alluded to, almost nobody makes the role of French culture clear in their analysis of the novelist's texts. An exception is Bernd Herzogenrath in *An Art of Desire: Reading Paul Auster*. This study provides a detailed examination of Auster's fiction published before 1999 from a Derridian and, to a lesser degree, a Lacanian perspective. Herzogenrath makes a compelling case for approaching the novels in this manner without ever claiming that Auster has extensive knowledge of either Derrida or Lacan; he seems less interested in arguing that Auster has read these theorists' work than in demonstrating that their frames of reference can provide an enlightening approach to this American author's fiction. He notes that Lacan's "psychoanalysis ... lends itself as a useful and relevant background for the type of fiction which negates the idea of the autonomous individual" (5-6). While Auster's characters, often beneficiaries or victims of chance, rarely seem autonomous, much the same can be said about characters who appear in other novelists' work. Herzogenrath's methodology would presumably not be limited to Auster's fiction.

The most extensive effort to place Auster in the context of French thought has been Tom Theobald's *Existentialism and Baseball: The French Philosophical Roots of Paul Auster*. Theobald seeks to analyze French intellectual influences on Auster's writings by focusing primarily on four texts: *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), *The New York Trilogy* (1987), *The Music of Chance* (1990), and *Leviathan* (1992) and then "tracing the influence of surrealism, the existential philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, and the literary philosophy of Maurice Blanchot" (9) on these works. Theobald argues his case with enthusiasm and erudition, but since his study stops short of *The Book of Illusions* (2002), aside from providing concrete markers of a French presence in Auster's work, it is of limited direct use to my analysis. Yet limited use is not no use. Although Theobald recognizes the potential presence of Derrida in *The New York Trilogy*, he is clearly more at home dealing with early and mid-twentieth-century French influences (Surrealism, Sartre, Blanchot). Concerning the relationship between Auster's work and that of his contemporary colleagues, Theobald makes a suggestion that may initially seem curious: "Paul Auster ... appears closer to compatriots like Norman Mailer, Saul Bellow and Philip Roth than to the postmodern

generation" (10). Theobald locates Auster's engagements with American and French influences more in the modern than the postmodern period. I agree and think that, despite Auster's obvious awareness of "French theory," in *The Book of Illusions* a considerable amount of his involvement with French culture seems rooted in a quite un-postmodern period. In addition, I believe the most inherently Gallic presence in *The Book of Illusions* is more structural than thematic, with even one of the novel's major themes, chance, having structural ramifications. However, before addressing the thematic and structural dimensions directly, I would like to show that the American novelist's debt to French culture can sometimes take a playful form.

*Mythologies* is probably Roland Barthes's most popular book, not simply for its radically contemporary theory of myth, but also for its striking vignettes, which display the everyday functioning of myth in today's world. Normally Barthes begins with a description of some modern phenomenon (wrestling, the launch of a new car model, the popular mystique surrounding a movie star) and then shows the ways this event or person has altered, however slightly, our sense of reality. Something comparable occurs in *The Book of Illusions*.

The subject is the on-screen presence of the silent film actor Hector Mann, specifically the way the movie camera adds dimensions to his appearance which otherwise might not be noticed. The focus is on his mustache and facial expressions. Due to the camera's close-up,

the mustache appears to be moving on its own ... the mouth curls a bit at the corners, the nostrils flair ever so slightly, but ... the face is essentially still, and in this stillness one sees oneself as if in a mirror, for it is in these moments that Hector is most fully and convincingly human, a reflection of what we all are when we are alone with ourselves. (*Book of Illusions*, 30)

This passage reads like a pastiche of one of Barthes's vignettes in *Mythologies*. A relatively common occurrence, in this instance the use of a movie technique, is described in such a way as to become a reflector of broader social/cultural issues – specifically, in this instance, the ways in which technology alters our ways of seeing and thinking. In passing someone like Hector Mann's character in the street, one would not have enough time to look closely and see one's humanity in his face. The movie camera permits this to occur.



A more significant indication of a French presence in Auster's work involves his most recurrent and commented theme: the concept of chance. Chance always plays an important role in his fiction. To cite just a few examples from *The Book of Illusions*, David Zimmer's family is destroyed and his life at least temporarily wrecked by a plane crash; he is in turn rescued from suicidal depression by a chance encounter with the films of Hector Mann. Hector himself finds himself through pure happenstance in Sandusky, Ohio, a place he claimed to have lived in some of his Hollywood-inspired hagiographies but never has. Now that he is there, he enters into an arbitrarily chosen bank when an attempted robbery occurs. He thwarts the hold-up but is severely wounded. He is nursed back to health by a woman who just happens to recognize him since she is a fan of his now old movies.

The concept of chance played a central role in French intellectual and literary controversies in the twentieth century. Theobald has discussed Auster's debt to Surrealism and that movement's fascination with chance. Yet another twentieth-century group also had a strong interest in chance but in a way diametrically opposite to the Surrealist position. I am referring to Oulipo (Ouvroir de littérature potentielle).

For the Surrealists, chance was to be applauded; it could function as a means of circumventing the power of the conscious mind and tapping into the wealth of inspiration lurking in the unconscious. Through techniques such as the *cadavre exquis* (a haphazard assemblage of words or images) or automatic writing, the surrealist artist attempted to break through the barrier of consciousness and create radically different works which could reveal new and startling truths about the human condition. Chance could also occasionally function as a theme. In his only novel, *Nadja* (1928), André Breton provides a fictional illustration of an unanticipated encounter with a mysterious woman and its effect on a young writer.<sup>4</sup>

Chance is viewed in a diametrically opposed fashion by the members of Oulipo, who stress the carefully constructed nature of a work of art. Hazard has no place in an Oulipo creation. While artists are certainly creators, to be part of Oulipo, they must also be thinkers, capable of carefully planning and crafting their art. For Oulipians, the more complicated the creative task, the greater the finished work's potential for greatness or at least to constitute itself as an impressive achievement. In terms of minute planning and execution, Georges Perec's *La Disparition* (1969), a novel of about three hundred pages in which the vowel "e" never appears, is the most famous

example of an Oulipo effort to formulate a difficult literary problem and then resolve it.

While Auster must have been aware of Oulipo, and of the novels of its most famous member, Georges Perec, he chose not to follow their lead in rejecting chance. It remained central to his fiction but used in a way very different from its treatment by the Oulipians or the Surrealists. Auster's fiction reflects chance as a motif which affects human beings in the conduct of their lives. For the Surrealists and the Oulipians, chance is primarily a theoretical concept associated with the nature of artistic creation. For one group chance is an asset; for the other it is anathema. Broadly stated, Surrealists write; Oulipians rewrite. Auster's use is much more practical than theoretical. Chance plays various roles in life. It can affect individuals' comportment for good, for ill, or can simply provoke curious, unanticipated occurrences of little consequence.

Although chance is a major motif in the novel, the predominant French contribution to *The Book of Illusions* lies in the ways Auster structures this text.<sup>5</sup> In order to best explain the structural strategy Auster employs, I must resort to some generalizations about French and American fiction. There are certainly numerous exceptions to the patterns I will describe, and it is not my goal to be essentialist. Instead, I wish to show how *The Book of Illusions* reflects a tendency to favor reflection over action, the psychological over the physical – hallmarks, I maintain, of many of the finest examples of French literature. Auster follows a pattern consistent with a very traditional form of French fiction, one that in a broad sense separates the French from the American novel. This is also a structure that has famously drawn the ire of one very prominent postwar French literary theorist and *nouveau romancier* who considered it unsuited to the needs of contemporary French fiction.

The American novel in general prioritizes action, something Deleuze seems to endorse when he “attributes the ‘superiority of Anglo-American literature’ over the French literary tradition to its constant use of mobility, flight, and exile, an endless process of uprooting or ‘deterritorialization’” (cited in Mathy, *Extrême-Occident*, 187). Warren Motte puts the matter quite succinctly: “if there is one solid and non-negotiable principle in the American novel, it is that something must happen” (73; emphasis original).

This is not to say that the American novel lacks thought or that it is devoid of ideas. To take a single prominent example, Thomas Pynchon's work teems with reflections on all sorts of intellectual and political matters,

but they are integrated into the ceaseless, indeed chaotic activity characteristic of his fiction. The French novel was quite different at least until the post-World War II era.<sup>6</sup> Action seems to have functioned as a tool for thought, of the psychological or philosophical variety. The traditional French novel was often quite cerebral, and an occurrence would immediately provoke lengthy reflections. If the foregoing statement, despite its generalized nature, seems accurate when applied to a work like *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678), it is equally pertinent to novels by Balzac, Flaubert, Gide, and Camus. Traditionally, the French novel is hardly devoid of action, but the activities of the main characters, no matter how dramatic, have usually remained secondary to reflections about what has occurred, will occur, or to the ideas/remembrances they engendered.<sup>7</sup> This is a pattern which has existed in French fiction for a long time; French readers are used to it and appreciate it.

In the postwar heyday of the *nouveau roman*, it is precisely this sort of novel that Alain Robbe-Grillet decried for its frequent excursions into what he considered to be outdated psychological or philosophical labyrinths at the expense of describing in a straightforward manner the events which were transpiring. In "Une voie pour le roman futur" he laments that:

La sacro-sainte analyse psychologique constituait, déjà à cette époque [celle de Mme de La Fayette], la base de toute prose ... Un 'bon' roman, depuis lors, est resté l'étude d'une passion - d'un conflit de passions, ou l'absence de passion ... La plupart de nos romanciers contemporains du type traditionnel ... pourraient recopier de longs passages de *La Princesse de Clèves* ou du *Père Goriot* sans éveiller les soupçons du vaste public qui dévore leur production ... Tous [ces romanciers] avouent, sans y voir rien d'anormal, que leurs préoccupations d'écrivains datent de plusieurs siècles. (15-16)

Obviously Alain Robbe-Grillet does not believe that such outmoded patterns can do justice to the contemporary world.

Despite Robbe-Grillet's rejection of this type of fiction as distinctly unmodern, *The Book of Illusions* conforms to the schema he decries. An incident takes place and then is immediately subjected to an extensive analysis, which only pauses due to the occurrence of another incident, but then the reflections continue, as the second incident normally leads to an extension and development of the thoughts stimulated by the first. The bulk

of *The Book of Illusions* unfolds not in New England, nor in New Mexico, but in David Zimmer's mind. This predominance given to thought over action differentiates Auster's work from that of his contemporary American colleagues and has contributed to his popularity in France. If American readers are sometimes confused by, or impatient with, this paucity of anecdote and the extent of the reflections in Auster, a French audience is much more at ease with this structure.

Nevertheless, while Auster partakes of a longstanding French tradition in the structuring of his novels, he remains a contemporary writer in a way that authors like Dan Brown or Marc Lévy are not. The difference is in the realm of ideas and themes. Brown and Lévy generate bestsellers by offering a compelling story that rarely challenges their readers either stylistically or conceptually. Essentially, they package their stories in an easily accessible format, containing titillating or shocking scenes, or bizarre ideas, which nonetheless do not push readers beyond their intellectual comfort zone.

It is just the opposite with Auster. In *Le Vent Paraquet* (1978), Michel Tournier makes a comment about his own fiction which is also applicable to Auster's work: "Mon propos n'est pas d'innover dans la forme, mais de faire passer au contraire dans une forme aussi traditionnelle, préservée et rassurante que possible une matière ne possédant aucune de ces qualités" (190). Paul Auster presents his novels in a well-known format (to the French at least), but then what he has to say is far from typical. This combination of the traditional and the subversive suggests why Auster "has frequently been compared to authors ranging from Nathaniel Hawthorne to Alain Robbe-Grillet" (Barone, 1). At some points Auster's novels read like well-known works, but these passages are interspersed with sections that challenge the reader's intellect and even his credulity.<sup>8</sup> In *The Book of Illusions*, these seemingly conflicting elements, the traditional and the contemporary, are particularly apparent in three major aspects of the novel: the omnipresence of "chance," the surprising similarities between David Zimmer and Hector Mann, and the atypical treatment accorded to "illusion."

A writer who allows chance to play a crucial role in his fiction needs a good bit of artistic courage. Chance is a reality of everyday life, where bizarre things can happen without apparent cause. They can lead to crucial developments in a person's life or have no significance at all. Yet, in literature, a seemingly gratuitous event can appear contrived and upset

the narrative flow, undermining an otherwise sophisticated development. Worse, a seemingly clumsy intrusion into the text suggests an effort on the author's part to move the story out of an impasse. As a result, what had been evolving in a coherent fashion can suddenly appear artificial or strained. Incorporating the aleatory into a literary text risks destroying, however briefly, the illusion of verisimilitude, which a writer like Auster labors to project.

Chance is clearly more than a clumsy device for creaking the narrative forward in *The Book of Illusions*. Auster uses it consciously and extensively; it is of major importance for him because it is an integral part of reality, one that is admittedly difficult for fiction to convey effectively but essential to his art since "My stories come out of the world and not out of books" (Varvogli, 6). To write about the world as he perceives it requires Auster to give considerable space to chance, since its erratic appearance and the pain it can generate illustrate for Auster that, "in many cases, reality is far more terrible than anything we can imagine" (interview with Joseph Mallia, cited in Smith, 29). Auster practices his own version of realistic fiction, precisely by confronting chance, rather than attempting to elide it, just as Jean Echenoz's empty symbolism in *Cherokee* constitutes a form of realism by encouraging a reflection on the contrived nature of literary techniques.<sup>9</sup>

If chance can play an important role in life, it can also be misleading by suggesting that something is quite important when in fact it is not. A chance message from a friend precipitated David's work on his Chateaubriand translation, which then leads to the seemingly obvious paralleling of Chateaubriand and his book with David and his. Chateaubriand had wanted *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* to appear after his death, but financial exigency forced him to publish parts of it during his lifetime. In what reads as a quick aside, David makes clear when his *Book of Illusions* will be available: "If and when this book is published, dear reader, you can be sure the man who wrote it is long dead" (318). We can therefore assume that David has indeed died and that his book is posthumous, just as Chateaubriand intended his to be. Both men are also writing intellectual and psychological autobiographies.

Yet upon closer examination this parallel quickly begins to wear thin, and what emerges is really how different these men and the worlds they inhabited were. Chateaubriand led a rich and at times contradictory life. Politically active, he had little difficulty switching sides as his interests and

political reality dictated. A man with a religious and romantic temperament, he had many loves and relationships, including one with God. His title, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, speaks to his religious convictions, which allowed him to be confident that life had a purpose and that there was another, better world.

All these factors separate the two men. Where Chateaubriand very consciously wrote for money, David has no financial worries due to the settlement associated with the plane accident. He can write what he wants, when he wants. David's life, when compared to Chateaubriand's, seems rather narrow. Were it not for a great personal tragedy, he would have lived, presumably happily, the life of a family member, teacher, and scholar. David is a Jew but has neither a religious affiliation nor a particular interest in questions of faith. Chateaubriand, a Christian, was engaged with religious issues all his life, and his title, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, reflects a belief in a better world after death. As such, it stands in contrast with the one David proposes for the translation: *Memoirs of a Dead Man*, whose starkness conveys no sense of an afterlife.

In contrast to Chateaubriand's active existence, David's is sedentary. If anything can be learned of David's political engagements, it is through the titles of the books he has written: "The first one, *Voices in the War Zone*, was a study of politics and literature ... The second one, *The Road to Abyssinia*, was a book about writers who had given up writing, a meditation on silence" (14). David's study of Hector Mann's films appears to concentrate on individuals' aspirations and foibles and engages little with social or political issues. The pattern in these three monographs indicates a slow, consistent withdrawal from the sociopolitical sphere into an increasingly personal realm.

In contrast to Chateaubriand's highly emotional involvement with politics throughout his life, David retreats more and more into isolation, breaking ties with colleagues and friends and choosing to live alone in the country. David's fourth work, *The Book of Illusions*, concentrates on his life since the death of his family and the subsequent suicide of a woman he loved. Finally, little is known of him after *The Book of Illusions*. Like the figures he treats in *The Road to Abyssinia*, the latter part of his life is presumably "a meditation on silence." David Zimmermann may well read Chateaubriand with pleasure and translate him with interest, but the two men live in very different worlds.<sup>10</sup> The fact that he happened to be thinking about Chateaubriand when he received the offer to translate the

French author is certainly fortuitous, but its role in the unfolding of the plot remains limited.

That is not the case with David and Hector Mann, who were also brought together by chance. Although ultimately a very important difference between them will emerge, they have many things in common. Their similarities are implied in the novel's first, deliberately ambiguous, sentence: "Everyone thought he was dead" (1). By using a masculine pronoun instead of a name, Auster leaves the reader briefly uncertain who is being referred to, and while the confusion dissolves in the second sentence, this initial ambiguity foreshadows the situation common to Hector and David. Neither man is in fact dead, but both give the impression that they have disappeared from the earth. As David begins to write the book, his friends are wondering if he is still alive, since he was so shaken by his family's death that he has fallen out of sight. His academic career ended as abruptly as did Hector's cinematic one, both due to tragic deaths. Yet, in each instance, circumstances would rejuvenate the two men. David began the book on Hector Mann to preserve his sanity, and probably his life, after the airplane crash, and Hector returned to film and filmmaking after the death of his son, Taddy. The common thread here is that both men needed some form of creative activity, be it artistic or scholarly, to cope with their unbearable sense of loss.

While chance events abound in *The Book of Illusions*, and constitute an important theme, they also function as a structuring device. This use of chance is brought to readers' attention by what seems to be an impatient remark about Mann made by David: "What made no sense was that he had popped up in Sandusky, Ohio, but the truth was that most things made no sense" (198). From this perspective, chance, as mercurial as it may be, can nevertheless play a major role in the unfolding of a human life; it can link events and people in the most arbitrary manner. Rather than recoil at the obvious dangers of making transitions appear clumsy and forced, Auster seizes this aspect of chance to emphasize the haphazard nature of reality, whose unfolding is subject to no particular laws. What can happen, may happen; to a degree logic and plausibility can play roles in art, but life has no such restraints. Chance is an inscrutable, but nevertheless significant part of reality, and Auster places it at the center of his novel. In *The Book of Illusions*, chance is not limited to the occasional mundane or bizarre occurrence; it is a device to join one encounter with another. Thus, because Hector turned up in Sandusky, because he went to an arbitrarily

chosen bank, because he thwarted a hold-up and thereby saved the life of the woman he would marry, the novel is propelled forward, giving meaning, however transitory, to the lives of Hector, and even David, since the latter's interest in meeting Hector got him out of the funk that followed the publication of his monograph on the actor/director.

In *The Book of Illusions*, chance is the motor that drives David's narrative forward; it is the hinge that joins one series of events to another and facilitates the novel's development. The airplane accident initiates the action; the discovery of Hector Mann's movies draws David out of his despair; Alma's discovery of David's monograph leads her to go to New England and then him to New Mexico. Presumably it is Alma's rather arbitrary suicide which permits him to finish his manuscript. In the fictional world of *The Book of Illusions*, chance is at once the recognition of the unpredictable in life and, somewhat paradoxically, a means of giving a heightened coherence to the novel.

Early in *The Book of Illusions*, David laments that "We all want to believe in impossible things ... to persuade ourselves that miracles can happen" (5). In more distant eras, it might have been possible for a work of fiction to develop through a series of miracles, but the religious beliefs required to make such a structure possible are no longer viable today. Auster, a man of an age where instability and uncertainty are rampant, chooses to bolster the coherence of his text through an element that reflects instability and uncertainty, the chance occurrence. Chance encounters in *The Book of Illusions*, unforeseen and unanticipated events which can shatter or develop characters' lives, also function as structural devices which propel the narrative forward.

The goal of David's writing and Hector's moviemaking constitutes the most compelling and important similarity between them, a similarity that has to do with the nature of illusion which they strive to attain through creative work. In the title, "illusions" is in the plural and indeed there are several forms of illusions in the novel. The young Hector Mann becomes a star in the twentieth century's newest form of illusion, the cinema. Later, he makes a good living having sex with a female partner before an audience which can fantasize about their playing the male or female role. Hector's numerous, largely invented identities at the beginning of his film career allowed his fans to imagine all sorts of things about him. What these illusions have in common is that they are directed at an audience. The form of illusion he shares with David is otherwise.



The importance of illusion in this novel has little to do with the audience's experience. Illusion is the desired state of the author, be he a writer or a filmmaker, who seeks, in the process of creation, an escape from the painful reality that has come to dominate his life. In *The Book of Illusions*, the need for this illusory state is more pronounced, or at least more prolonged, for the artist than for the scholar. One assumes that when David finished the book we are reading as *The Book of Illusions*, he must have exorcised his demons, since there is no mention of creative activity subsequent to his completion of the text after Alma's suicide. Hector, on the other hand, seemed to have needed to continue making movies until he became too ill to work.

Yet a salient quality they both share is that neither David nor Hector has any interest in the ultimate fate of his creations. Whether their works will figure as "major" contributions to art or culture or be totally unnoticed is a matter of indifference to them. The question of glory through the production of great works has no meaning for them, since in Hector's case his films will be destroyed at his death – "He would make movies that would never be shown to audiences" (207) – and David will be dead before his book is published, if it is published at all (318). What they seek is access to an alternate universe by means of the process of creation; the act of making a film or writing a monograph provides them with a form of escape, protection from an intrusive, hurtful world. The creative process shelters them from the events and memories that poison their existence in the everyday world. That protection is of greater importance than what they produce.

Early in the novel, David remarks that "when a man has nothing to look forward to, he might as well be dead" (9). Finding that something that gives life some degree of meaning is not easy. Family might have proven to be a long-term option for David, but now he will never know. Translating was a stop-gap measure; it was never a strong enough interest to release David from his torment and provide life with a purpose, however temporary or delusive: "I wasn't really alive. I was just someone who pretended to be alive, a dead man who spent his days translating a dead man's book" (102). Translation requires knowledge, hard work, and a degree of imagination but, for David at least, it is not sufficiently creative, which is to say protective. Writing of his personal experience did, however, provide the needed stimulation and shelter.<sup>11</sup>

David says that Mann's films got him out of a seemingly endless depression by making him laugh. That was the inspiration for his

monograph. Yet it rapidly becomes apparent that what began to deliver David from his lassitude was less his subject, the films of Hector Mann, than the need to research and write, activities which allowed him to lose himself in what he was doing without any thought to the outcome or the practical benefits of his efforts: "I did not question whether any of this was worth doing" (19). The issue is less the value of the project than the simple fact that he could escape reality by working on a book; while a subject of interest provided the initial stimulation, what matters now is the act of writing itself, which permits him to push aside his guilt, fears, and concerns for the future. Writing moves David into a different world, an alternative universe which will endure until the completion of the project: "I wasn't really in Brooklyn ... I was in the book, and the book was in my head, and as long as it stayed inside my head, I could go on writing the book" (55). David's aim was to remain within his head and involved in his project because there he found protection from the pressures threatening to destroy him. Writing the Mann monograph constituted a safe harbor for a time but, after its completion, he sank back into depression and returned to a life of isolation. When Alma finally tracks him down, he is pursuing a cranky existence miles away from his fellow human beings. With the inception of his *Book of Illusions*, David was able to address deeply personal themes with more discipline than just memory: his once-burgeoning career, the tragedy that ended his professional life and nearly killed him, the role which Hector Mann's films played in controlling his sense of loss and lack of purpose, and his effort to try to love again. The creation of the book ushered David into an illusory world where the terrible memories plaguing him were to a large degree held at bay by his efforts to get them onto paper. His focus was more on the act of writing down his memories than on the memories themselves.

David says that when the young Hector was a rising star in Hollywood, he projected many, often contradictory, images of himself (83). His real identity was a mystery to others and possibly to himself. James Peacock suggests that "no qualitative difference [existed] between the 'real' Hector and the roles he plays as a silent actor" (154). I do not think that is quite right. As a young man and actor, Hector had no real identity. His talent was so natural, his success so certain, that he could live happily on the surface of life, just floating along with the seeming nonchalance of his various screen identities. Just as David was thrust out of a happy and complacent existence by tragedy, Hector's life is also shattered by the unintended

killing of one of his girlfriends. However fake his numerous Hollywood identities were, he now must adopt a series of truly false ones as he flees possible prosecution. This is the first time in the novel that Hector seems vulnerable as himself and not as one of his screen creations. What allows him to survive at first is the discovery of an art more substantial than what is displayed in his Hollywood movies: the art of literature. Great books now accompany him in his darkest hours and make his life at least intermittently bearable: “*Never more lost than now ... never more alone and afraid – yet never more alive ... I talk only to the dead now. They are the only ones I trust, the only ones who understand me*” (147–148; emphasis original).<sup>12</sup>

This awakening to literature is the beginning of his ability to cope with his guilt. It is a helpful start but will not prove sufficient. The next stage in his movement back toward the world of the living comes when he foils a bank robbery and protects Frieda Spelling. This may be a redemption of sorts, as the life he saved will, to some degree, balance the one he helped take. Shortly after his recovery, he and Frieda marry and move to New Mexico. Their lives seem quite ordinary until their son’s death, at which point the only thing that will keep Hector functioning as a human being is to return to the cinema, this time as a director rather than as an actor. He will make movies that have little in common with his Hollywood efforts. These works are darker, much more ambiguous in their characterizations and meanings, and, if *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* is typical, lacking in closure. That is, the issues raised are never fully resolved. As such, they may well reflect Hector’s state of mind, for what is important to him is not what the movie might mean but the ongoing process of making it.

Until now I have insisted upon the similarities between David’s and Hector’s need to maintain themselves in an illusory state induced by creative activity, whatever form it takes. Yet there is crucial difference between David and Hector. This difference emerges in their answers to the question of whether it is possible to escape the endless cycle of needing the illusion induced by creative activities in order to function to some degree in the real world. *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* suggests strongly that, for some people at least, escape is impossible.

This short film starts with a writer, Martin Frost, coming to stay at Frieda and Hector’s house in their absence. He awakes one morning to find next to him in bed, inexplicably, a beautiful girl of mysterious origins who says her name is Claire Martin. After some initial tension between them, they become lovers. Frost had been suffering from writer’s block,

but his relationship with Claire restores his creativity. Yet the more he produces, the weaker Claire becomes. Eventually, he realizes there is a sinister correlation between his success as a writer and the decline of her health. In desperation, Frost tears up his manuscript and miraculously Claire's health begins to improve.

At first, nothing seems special about the heavy irony of this reversed Pygmalion story. That is, until the very end when, as Frost destroys his work, Claire tells him "you can't do this, it's not allowed." As he persists, Claire just repeats, "What are we going to do ... Tell me, Martin, what on earth are we going to do?" (368).

Claire knows something Martin Frost does not. Namely, that if, for the moment, he is a lover ready to sacrifice everything for his beloved, this emotional intensity will not endure. He will be always driven to create, and eventually he will come to regret his impulsive decision to destroy his manuscript. He may stop loving her, or his passion might wane, but the creative impulse will always be there and must be sated. Claire knows that despite his current total involvement with her, these feelings are to some degree transient, whereas Martin's creative urge is permanent, and to a degree destructive to others, as Claire's failing health attested. Hector seems to have a premonition of the disquieting truth that real-world relations could never completely satisfy him. Shortly after he married Frieda, "he knew ... that the life they were about to build for themselves was founded on an illusion" (287) but not an illusion strong enough to shelter him for a long time.

*The Inner Life of Martin Frost* was made by Hector and concerns his own needs. As an artist, he requires illusions in which he can more or less hide, or at least lose himself. The silent films provided one form of illusion, where he could simply be someone else. The discovery of literary classics provided him with an alternative world, as, at first, did marriage to a woman who loved him deeply. All these illusions had their value and sustained him at stressful moments in his life. But they were not enough. At one point, David implies that while Taddy's death was the immediate cause of Hector's return to filmmaking, it was not the unique factor that led the artist back into the studio. He just had to be working on films: "Make films, yes. Pour every ounce of your talents and energies into making them" (278). There is no mention here of marketing, pleasing an audience, or garnering praise. Despite the traumatic experiences of his life, in the end Hector made films because he really had no choice. The making of them was all that mattered:

“Make them as though your life depended on it ... once your life is over, see to it that they are destroyed” (278). Hector’s primary audience was himself. He was not concerned about what others thought; once the film was finished and in the can, it was no longer of interest to him; it was time to begin another one. This is not at all David’s situation.

David’s need for illusion is quite different. What prompted him to write his book was not exclusively the loss of his family, his frustrating trip to New Mexico, or the death of Alma. It was all of these things at once. The process of writing his *Book of Illusions* saved his sanity and perhaps his life. Once he had purged himself of all this anger, frustration, and guilt, he was a free man, so liberated from his painful past that he had no need even to see his story in print. Just as the making of a film was a goal in itself for Hector, the process of telling the story was what motivated David. Where Hector’s temperament requires a constant involvement in an illusory world, for David the writing of *The Book of Illusions* served a twofold purpose: composing it provided him access to a world whose intensity protected him from a too-threatening reality. Finishing it liberated him from the potentially destructive nature of his memories. The past does not change, and some memories never die, but David found a means of coping with both. This might explain the brief passage toward the end of the novel where he mentions his hope of one day discovering some of Hector’s films, which, despite everything, may well have survived (321). As a movie goer and a late-blooming cinema scholar more or less returned to a normal life, he would just like to see these films.

*The Book of Illusions* is an extended meditation on different approaches to creativity, an examination of circumstances that can provoke the need to create, a consideration of the goals of the creative act, and finally a recognition that while some people need to persist in the effort to continue to produce, others can abandon the effort all together. To indulge, yet again, in a generalization which certainly will have exceptions, such cerebral considerations are rarely found at the center of an American novel but are common in the French novel, where the mingling of the philosophical and the fictional has often been the marker of serious writing. Yet if action is a staple of American fiction, it is often handled clumsily in *The Book of Illusions* (compare the first meeting of Alma and David), where it serves primarily as a background for a study of the workings of the mind. All these factors appear broadly typical of the French fiction that Robbe-Grillet decried. The very cerebral treatment of the role of illusion in the novel as an

end in itself, a means of both controlling and escaping from a meaningless and painful world, also seems more Gallic than American. The same might be said for the insinuation that art, like life, has no intrinsic value but that the former can make the passage through the latter a lot easier.

Even given that there are similarities between Auster's novels and relatively typical aspects of French fiction, what remains unexplained is why the French express such enthusiasm for this American author that he seems to be more appreciated in France than in his native country? Annick Duperray raised this general issue in her opening remarks at a conference on Auster: "l'œuvre de Paul Auster connaît en France plus de succès que partout ailleurs; On lit souvent que l'affirmation peut paraître abusive si l'on songe à la dimension internationale de notre colloque" (9). Auster has had success and gained a following in many places besides France, yet it remains the case that the French connection often appears the most prominent.

Undoubtedly, France has played a major role in Auster's artistic and intellectual development, and to a degree this is the most forthright explanation for his popularity there. French readers can find in his texts elements which remind them of their own, very distinguished cultural traditions. Yet, without wishing to denigrate Auster's artistic talent, I would also like to suggest that more complicated, sociological factors have also played a role in the excellent reception his works have found in the Hexagon.

In the nineteenth century it was clear that France was the West's cultural arbiter. However, French cultural authority has declined markedly in the face of the insurgence of American popular culture, and many critics do not share Echenoz's confidence that French literature will transform this new influence to its own ends. Whatever one might choose to think of the interloper's influence, American clothing, movies, fast food, marketing, and television series have become imposing forces in France.

According to François Cusset, if "French theory" marked the highpoint of France's intellectual prestige in the States, it also was its swansong. He argues that in the immediate aftermath of World War II, French culture invaded the New World in the forms of "le surréalisme d'école, l'existentialisme sartrien et l'histoire *des Annales*" (27; emphasis original), which were then followed and pushed into the shadows by "French theory." Cultural influences are rarely absorbed without being altered by the host culture to some degree, so it is not particularly surprising that the American enthusiasm for Surrealism usually fell short of a commitment to radical political positions. Yet it would appear that the general orientation

of Surrealism, Existentialism, and the Annals School survived the Atlantic crossing more or less intact.

This was not the case with “French theory,” which became so far removed from its Gallic origins, and thus so different from what was happening in France, that in trying to describe this cultural phenomenon Cusset felt compelled to give an English title – *French Theory* – to a book written in French in order to stress that this new cultural event was essentially an American creation, one for which there was no true verbal equivalent in the French language. “French theory” was something quite other than a collection of theories emanating from the Hexagon. France had plenty of approaches to philosophy, sociology, and literature, but nothing similar to the American transformation of several lines of intellectual inquiry into one broad, albeit unstable, category. This transformation initially involved turning a small group of French intellectuals, mostly philosophers, into oracles whose methods and goals found little resonance in American philosophy departments but were eagerly seized upon (and contested) in other academic disciplines. For a time “French theory” so dominated the intellectual discussions and activities in the liberal art sections of American universities that not to be doing some form of “French theory” was not to be truly active in contemporary scholarship. Yet what is most striking about this phenomenon is less its Gallic origins than the changes which French ideas underwent in order to serve the differing needs of a variety of academic disciplines. American scholars were certainly influenced by their French counterparts, but they did more than just echo or reflect what they had learned. They turned theory into practice and forged from it research tools supple enough to function in a number of different domains. The end result was a very American product presented in French packaging. “French theory” was only to be found in the United States.

Whatever its hybrid origins, “French theory” was new and stimulating (in both a positive and negative sense) for American intellectuals. Lauded by some and decried by others, “French theory” initiated debates on the nature and goals of critical practices in particular disciplines and their relevance, if any, to American society. To the extent that intellectual discussion of important matters is always valuable, this was an exciting period in American cultural history. During the same time in France, this was not the case. When Jean-Philippe Mathy rather provocatively asserts that “Ideas have a much shorter shelf life in France than the United States” (*French Resistance*, 36), he is claiming that while ideas need longer

to take root in the States, “the size of the intellectual market and the relative autonomy of the various theoretical subcultures allows them to flourish long after they have wilted on the Left Bank” (36). He contrasts this with France, where he sees new ideas as having a rather circular existence; they arrive to considerable enthusiasm, have their moment of glory, but then eventually decline, only to return in a repackaged form. In Paris, intellectual assumptions and theories are constantly mutating but not really changing, since “crops of ‘new philosophies’ ... are often nothing more than fifty-year old ideas everyone has been busy forgetting” (36).

Cusset has a similarly dour view of the state of French intellectual life marked by “l’inexorable déclin de l’influence intellectuelle française dans le monde depuis l’apogée de la théorie française – déclin auquel la France ‘pensant’ n’a pas l’air en mesure de remédier de si tôt” (324). Although both Mathy’s and Cusset’s views contain a fair measure of hyperbole, they do reflect an increasingly widespread opinion that France’s cultural importance is diminishing. If the Americans can usurp aspects of French intellectual life and transform them into an indigenous creation called “French theory,” Echenoz notwithstanding, French intellectuals have generally found it harder to do the same with American cultural imports.

America’s cultural emergence and France’s perceived decline may well be factors contributing to the French enthusiasm for Paul Auster. One might wonder whether recognizing Auster as a major talent whose work has been strongly influenced by French literary tradition allows French critics to maintain that their country’s literary culture still influences not simply other countries but also the world’s supposedly major power. I earlier quoted a variety of critics vaunting the allegedly Franco-European qualities inherent in Auster’s work. Didier Decoin provides a somewhat different dimension when he writes in *Le Magazine littéraire* that “Que Paul Auster soit le meilleur romancier américain d’aujourd’hui ... était déjà flagrant” (66). On first reading, such a statement seems excessive. Proclaiming any novelist the finest in the nation is at best a personal opinion, and at worst rhetorical overkill – as is, to be sure, the adjective *flagrant*. What is apparent to one person is not necessarily obvious to another. Yet, if placed in the context of Franco-American culture wars, the statement possesses a certain coherence. By praising an American writer so deeply marked by France as the best of his generation, Decoin is implicitly saluting French culture for having so greatly contributed to Auster’s ascendancy in his own country.



Paul Auster's popularity in the Hexagon constitutes an implicit affirmation that France's capacity to stand up to the American behemoth in the cultural domain remains to some degree intact. By the end of the twentieth century, the Americanization of France had altered the country's lifestyles with a plethora of fast-food restaurants, clothing styles, movies, and music. American television series and conveniences had become integral to French home life. American novels had invaded *les librairies grandes et petites* with great success. Paul Auster was among these new American literary voices, yet what separated him from, say, Jim Harrison, Richard Ford, Toni Morrison, or Thomas McGuane, was a sentiment common among French critics that his work drew inspiration from French literary and cultural practices. Whether or not one shares Didier Decoin's assessment of Auster's place in the hierarchy of American letters, his French connection remains unassailable and speaks to the enduring vitality of an artistic heritage that had become a source of national concern. In a time of widespread insecurity concerning France's standing in the contemporary world, the importance of France and the presence of its literary tradition in the work of a prominent American author could well be a source of national pride.

## Notes

1 As François Cusset convincingly demonstrates in *French Theory*, the craze associated with its expansion throughout the United States affected the realms of popular as well as high culture. For the purposes of my argument, I will concentrate on the importance of these ideas in the context of the American university.

2 The fact that he is photogenic and handles himself well on French television has also helped enhance his career in France.

3 Like most scholars who choose to comment on Paul Auster, I feel there is something distinctly French about his novels, particularly *The Book of Illusions*. By emphasizing "French" rather than "European," I am first of all trying to remain within the parameters of this study. However, there is a more significant reason for avoiding the use of "European." Both categories, French and European, are quite general, but while I believe it is possible to demarcate structural aspects of Auster's work which seem to reflect, *mutatis mutandis* a well-known French literary pattern, the term "European" strikes me as simply too vast to be applied in a meaningful manner to any work of

literature. Kundera, for example, is certainly European, but what is gained by using his European identity as a critical tool? Would it not be more helpful to speak of his homeland, Czechoslovakia, as a source of certain experiences and influences, and his adopted country, France, as contributing others? Also, is British literature European literature and, if so, in what sense? I believe affixing the adjective “European” to an artist’s work, if something other than a broad geographical location is meant, raises more issues than it resolves.

4 Theobald treats the Surrealist concept of chance and its relation to Auster’s work in great detail, although he says nothing about Oulipo.

5 The structural pattern I am about to describe can be found in his other novels as well.

6 The ways in which the contemporary French novel differs from its more traditional predecessors will be discussed in the next chapter.

7 Since my reflections at this juncture in the chapter remain on a general level, a comment attributed to the actress Sophie Marceau concerning the “typical” French movie seems to me to be also applicable to the “typical” French novel: “Annie sleeps with Daniel and Jérôme sleeps with Claude, then Daniel sleeps with Claude and then they discuss it all in a restaurant” (cited in Morrison and Compagnon, 37). The act is the catalyst for the subsequent extended discussion.

8 In a well-known critique of Paul Auster that initially appeared in *The New Yorker* under the title “Shallow Graves,” James Wood complains that “80% of typical Auster proceeds in a manner indistinguishable from American realism – the remaining 20% does a kind of postmodern surgery on the 80%, often casting doubt on the veracity of the plot” (274). Percentages aside, Wood is correct to sense a disequilibrium in some of Auster’s texts. I think this is due to the extensive analysis of the events within the novel, which can appear to hinder the development of the plot.

9 Auster plays occasionally with symbolism rather like Echenoz does. Is Homer’s Hector in any significant way like the Greek hero? Frieda Spelling’s first name is shared by D.H. Lawrence’s wife. Is that important since Lawrence and his Frieda were in New Mexico, as were Hector and Frieda? I think in every case the answer is, “No.”

10 Hector’s early adventures, his activity in a new art form, his chaotic personal life, his involvement in a killing, his disappearance, and his eventual reinvention of himself would appear to be much closer to Chateaubriand’s lifestyle than anything David ever did.

11 Situating *The Book of Illusions* is a twofold task. It is the name of a novel by Paul Auster but, in the context of this fiction, it is a memoir by David Zimmermann of a very difficult period in his life. If Zimmerman’s work were to have a title different from that of the Auster novel, his suggestion for

his translation of Chateaubriand, *Memoirs of a Dead Man*, would be quite appropriate.

12 A major thesis in Mark Brown's *Paul Auster* is that the novel "meditates on the relative values inherent in the practices of the film maker and the writer" (118) and that "the novel stands as a testament to both the power of storytelling and the primacy of the form" (118). I must take issue with this. I do not think there is any literary-visual hierarchy in the novel but rather that readers are invited to assume a major distinction between Mann's early films and his more substantial, darker, later ones. David and Hector need their respective ways of creating illusions for themselves. What matters is that each achieves his goals through the form of expression he adopts.

## CHAPTER VIII

# Rerouting

## *Ça n'existe pas l'Amérique*

L'Amérique n'est ni un rêve, ni une réalité, c'est une hyperréalité.

(Jean Baudrillard, *Amérique*, 32)

Chacun son Amérique.

(Dominique Falkner, *Ça n'existe pas, l'Amérique*, 39)

L'Amérique est la version originale de la modernité, nous sommes la version doublée.

(Jean Baudrillard, *Amérique*, 76)

Laquelle?

(Narrator's response when asked what he thought of *L'Amérique* in Dominique Falkner, *Ça n'existe pas, l'Amérique*, 64)

A défaut d'identité, les Américains ont une dentition merveilleuse.

(Jean Baudrillard, *Amérique*, 37)

The more bacon you eat, the closer to heaven you git.

(neon-sign observed by narrator in Dominique Falkner's, *Ça n'existe pas, l'Amérique*, 57).

At the same time as American academia's enthusiasm for the French critical methodologies lumped under the general rubric of "French theory" began to wane, and the once-dominant theories started to take a place in humanities departments among other critical approaches, a curious literary phenomenon began to emerge in France. Starting approximately from the traumatic events of September 11, 2001 and continuing to the present, more and more fiction written in French, either by authors associated directly with the Hexagon or from the broader Francophone community has begun to concentrate on various aspects of American life and culture in ways that were different from the past. This renewed interest in the States spans the world of contemporary French fiction to include both writers associated with the Hexagon and those lumped together under the rubric of Francophone. My point is to describe a widespread phenomenon which involves writers who publish in French whatever their background. While criticisms of American society remain an aspect of the French novel's version of the States, in recent years the personal has tended to overshadow the political. The American novel itself has become an increasing target of parody and pastiche, yet these are essentially playful approaches, which reflect at least as much respect for the American model as they do a certain bemusement at perceived American literary conventions.

The United States had become a new source of fascination for French writers. Now fascination is not necessarily the equivalent of admiration, and among the texts appearing in the last fifteen years or so, there have been critiques of American racism, politics, religious enthusiasm, and the illusion industry embodied by Hollywood. Yet these critiques have not been as vehement or self-righteous as they had in the past. American faults, social tensions, and hypocrisy are certainly signaled in these books, but they are rarely the main focus. Understanding the country, its accomplishments and failures, its aims and illusions, and its citizens currently seems more interesting than simply chronicling perceived American blunders and recurrences of social injustice.

In what follows I will not observe the usual, if somewhat fragile distinction between French and Francophone writers. The phenomenon I am about to describe is prevalent in both of these general categories, and reflects the relatively recent, widespread interest in the States among writers publishing in French however different their backgrounds might be. I will create, for the purpose of illustration, three broad categories of fiction that embody aspects of this current French interest in the States

and briefly discuss selected examples from each. I will not argue that these three categories are in any way definitive; they are simply a rather artificial means of providing a structure to a large number of otherwise very different novels whose main point in common is that they deal with the States. The choice of three categories is somewhat arbitrary. I might easily have included several more, but increasing the number would still not convey the variety of approaches to the American experience one finds in the French novel today. My goal is not to simply draw up lists of writings on this subject, but to provide a sense of the nature and variety of contemporary French fiction's renewed interest in *l'Amérique*. Since title-dropping is at least as annoying as name-dropping, I will provide in the endnotes a more extensive list of the works that seem appropriate to my subject. These lists will not be exhaustive.<sup>1</sup> After the general discussion of the three groupings of French fiction, I have deliberately chosen to concentrate on a text which does not fit into any of them, first of all to emphasize, once again, that the diversity of these recent texts defies easy categorization, and secondly to explore in some detail how this new writing proposes a different approach to viewing and discussing the United States.

Not surprisingly, the most extensive group of French novels dealing with the United States concentrates on *les personnalités américaines* from the past and present. This includes, among others, a political luminary who preferred working in the shadows, nineteenth-century folk heroes, stars from the entertainment industry who lit up the stage and screen with varying degrees of intensity, and at least one nascent literary artist.

Marc Dugain's *La Malédiction d'Edgar* (2005) is the story of the F.B.I.'s first and most infamous director, J. Edgar Hoover, recounted by Hoover's second-in-command and longtime lover, Clyde Tolson. The novel highlights Hoover's closet homosexuality, his racism, and obsession with keeping extensive and compromising files on prominent Americans whose politics or personalities were anathema to him. Dugain also gives credence to the rumor that Hoover had a hand in the assassination of John Kennedy. There is nothing really new here about this mixture of facts and gossip, certainly not to Americans and probably not to the French either. What makes *La Malédiction* stand out is not any startling political analysis, but Dugain's effort to make sense of his subject's myriad contradictions. Hoover becomes a conflicted individual who sought to save the United States by undercutting the nation's essential values. Dugain flirts with explaining Hoover's secretive, vindictive nature in terms of his sexual

identity and visceral jealousy of prominent individuals, but finally leaves the question open. What emerges in this novel is a man as fascinating and complex as he was dangerous.

Eric Vuillard's *Tristesse de la terre* (2014) is an exploration of aspects of the American character. Initially, it deals with one of the country's most successful *cabotins*. Buffalo Bill was an inspired con man. He invented the "Wild West," destroyed herds of buffalo, exploited the Indians who worked for him, made and lost a great deal of money, and proposed a tidied-up version of the massacre at Wounded Knee. Once again, there is nothing particularly new about this. Had the story stopped with Buffalo Bill's demise, it would have little special about it. Yet after disposing of Buffalo Bill, Vuillard continues with a brief addendum focusing on the long-forgotten Wilson Alwyn Bentley, a New Englander who quietly and successfully devoted his life to the study of snowflakes. He made important scientific contributions to the field of snow hydrology without having the slightest clue concerning how he might profit from his discoveries; he died in poverty and obscurity. In *Tristesse de la terre*, Vuillard draws no startling conclusions about the American character. He seems content to allow readers to contemplate two extremes of American comportment, each in its own way incomprehensible.

In *Théorie de la vilaine petite fille* (2014), Hubert Haddad examines a group of American "stars" now largely forgotten. In 1848, Kate Fox claimed to be possessed of spiritual powers that would permit her to summon forth and communicate with the dead. Her sister Margaret soon discovered similar capacities and the oldest sister, Leah, rapidly grasped the financial advantages of this "spiritual gift." For many years the sisters profited from their alleged talent, Kate more or less believing that she actually possessed some unique power. The women attracted large crowds and, up until the Depression, they made lots of money. To the extent that Haddad offers an explanation for the Fox sisters' popularity, it is rather modest. For him, the women proposed a solace which "les confessions traditionnelles" (339) were unable to provide to a population stunned by a civil war, financial instability, and natural disasters. Haddad makes no sustained effort to separate the intertwined strands of the genuine and the fraudulent in Margaret and especially Kate. He allows the phenomenon of the Fox sisters to remain a fascinating, yet very American, enigma.

Mathieu Larnaupe's *Notre désir est sans remède* (2015) recounts the life of an ill-fated 1940s Hollywood star, Frances Farmer, and her brief celebrity. While he deals with the transformation of the American cityscape by the

omnipresence of movie theaters, “*les nouvelles cathedrales de l’humanité*” (13; emphasis original), Farmer is the main focus. She was an outspoken leftist but Larnaude avoids the easy temptation to attribute her downfall entirely to her politics. Her social activism did not help her career, but neither did her alcoholism. Farmer emerges in this novel as an idealistic, courageous, and flawed woman.

Perhaps Marilyn and Elvis are currently the greatest American icons. So it is with a certain trepidation that one picks up Caroline De Mulder’s *Bye Bye Elvis* (2014). In De Mulder’s chronicling the King’s early life and success (his talent, his love for his mother, his ineptness with women, and growing addictions) few Elvis fans will discover anything they did not already know. However, when she introduces the reclusive John White holed up in Paris, the story moves to another level. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde opined that when good Americans die, they go to Paris. De Mulder does him one better, suggesting that they might get there a bit earlier than he predicted. Could the mysterious John White actually be the man who departed this life in Graceland on August 16, 1977? De Mulder makes of a great American icon an even more mysterious person than Elvis’s most rabid fans might have imagined.

Frédéric Beigbeder’s *Oona & Salinger* (2014) is about Oona O’Neil and the author of *Catcher in the Rye*. Oona and J.D. met when she was a young society beauty, the daughter of the playwright Eugene O’Neil, while he was struggling to find himself as a writer. They had an affair that proved more tortuous than satisfying, and eventually Oona broke it off to marry Charlie Chaplin. Beigbeder tells their story in a racy manner, drawing a compelling, catty portrait of New York social life after the war. He offers opinions on many things, such as Oona’s relationship with her father, and then with her much older husband, as well as Truman Capote’s role as the chronicler of New York’s rich and idle. What he leaves, probably deliberately, unexamined is the extent to which Salinger’s clumsy affair with Oona affected him as a writer.

The second grouping of French novels dealing with the American experience contains texts where real or imagined Americans react to quotidian events that can be banal or ugly. These works do not eschew social critiques; I maintain simply that these elements are not the central aspect of the novels. Catherine Mavrikakis’s *Les derniers jours de Smokey Nelson* (2012) certainly would appear to strain my thesis that social criticism is not uppermost in the novel. The author dedicates her book to



an American lawyer who has devoted his career to defending indigents accused of serious crimes. A poor, black man brutally murders a white couple and their children. The wrong man is initially arrested for the crime, essentially because he is black. Finally, the real culprit, Smokey Nelson, is arrested and condemned. He remains in prison for almost eighteen years before being executed. Obviously, it is impossible not to see in this novel an indictment of bigotry in the American justice system and the national racism it reflects. Yet the most riveting parts of *Smokey Nelson* deal with the enigma of Smokey's model behavior in prison, the opacity of his murderous motivations, and the collateral pain he has inflicted on three otherwise innocent people, who have suffered irreparable damage from his act. Social issues are important in this novel, but the strength of *Smokey Nelson* lies in the effort at psychological analysis of the culprit and those who will suffer forever because of what he did.

Kitty Genovese's story is real. She was an ordinary young woman living in Queens, someone who worked hard during the week and liked to play on the weekend. One evening in 1964, when she was returning home from an outing, she was set upon by a man who stabbed her numerous times. Despite her repeated screams, nobody in her immediate neighborhood attempted to help her. This ghastly event is the subject of Didier Decoin's *Est-ce ainsi que les femmes meurent?* (2009). Decoin's interest is not in the murderer, or even in Genovese as a person, although he supplies details about both. What puzzles him is the passivity of the neighbors. It is a tribute to Decoin's skill as a writer that he avoids all temptations to moralize and to take the ethical high road. What lingers about this novel, as about the crime itself, is the haunting question posed by a woman living in Genovese's building who was not there the night of the murder. She asks her husband who was also absent, "Es-tu si sûr que tu serais descendu?" (219).

Jocelyn Bonnerave's *Nouveaux Indiens* (2009) is the story of a French anthropologist interested in studying a very exotic tribe: intellectuals and artists living in the Berkeley area. His America is that of George W. Bush, a world where the ways in which alleged friends and colleagues consume each other appears to be a metaphor for a new American pastime: the denigration and destruction of those with whom one does not agree. The novel is something of a half-hearted *policier* where the murderer gets off at the end, but the really striking element is the anthropologist's conclusions about the States, conclusions that resonate in the text I will discuss in detail. For the narrator of *Nouveaux Indiens*, there is no single *Amérique*

but rather a geographical grouping characterized by multilayered contradictions: “Il n’y aura jamais une seule Amérique, barbare ou promise ... Les Etats-Unis sont parcourus de fictions. Elles sont des centaines, chargées, contradictoires ... Il suffit d’en produire d’autres” (169).

A subset of this category featuring imagined Americans are novels about Americans or French that reflect various *idées fixes* about the two nationalities at the same time as the authors mock such tendencies. Eliane Saliba Garillon’s *Le Journal impubliable de George Pearl* (2015) would probably assure French people who like their ideas about Americans *claires et nettes*. Even in retirement George is crusty, vulgar, and overbearing. A self-made man, he has zero tolerance for failure: “l’unique obstacle à l’ascension humaine était la bêtise” (12). He considers earning money the major American indoor sport (90). George’s adherence to a professional life of constant competition has even alienated his colleagues: “Pearl était tellement insupportable qu’on le surnommait Pearl Harbor” (10). Unimpressed by culture of any sort, George particularly loathes Thoreau, even though he grew up in a house where the author of *Walden* once lived. It is only at the end of the novel when George, near death, reveals a sentimentality he had always sought to hide. Uncouth, obsessively aggressive in business, yet with a storeroom of closeted, somewhat vulgar emotionalism, this for some is the “typical American.”

Lise Charles presents in *Comme Ulysse* (2015) the portrait of an attractive, artistic, and intelligent young French woman who is completely closed-minded when it comes to the States. Lou feels herself to be, rather like the sixteenth-century poet, Joachim du Bellay, to whom the title alludes, something of an exile in a foreign world, although she displays no burning desire to return home. She is relieved to discover that the locals she encounters are “pas trop stupides” (125). She suffers remarkably little culture shock because the best aspects of the country are already quite familiar to her: “quand tu vois quelque chose d’à peu près charmant aux États-Unis, tu peux être sûr qu’ils l’ont piqué aux Européens” (200). Lou is an engaging example of someone who never needs to really look, since she already knows what she will see: “L’Amérique c’est comme ça qu’on me l’avait décrite ou comme ça que je l’imaginai” (143). Lou intends to return to France and write a book about her experiences abroad, which is certain to bring delight to some and consternation to others.

The final, and by far, the smallest category (three principal entrants), refers to novels written in French that offer a parody/pastiche of American

fiction. Joël Dicker published in 2012 a pastiche of the American detective novel: *La Vérité sur l'affaire Harry Quebert*. In this version, the sleuth is Marcus Goldman, a young Jewish novelist suffering from writer's block. When Marcus discovers that his mentor, Harry Quebert, has been accused of murdering his then lover when she was fifteen years old, the young writer rushes to his aid. What follows is a series of *aventures rocambolesques* worthy of a *roman fleuve* or a television series intended to run for one season. True to an American T.V. format, Marcus is seconded by a gruff but kind black detective. Eventually, they establish more or less the truth of the affair and in the process more or less prove that Harry is innocent. This novel demonstrates a rather thorough knowledge of small towns in New England. Most of the story is set in non-existent Somerset, New Hampshire, so the reader can only assume an authorial *clin d'œil* when Marcus strolls into a diner and asks the waitress for a cognac.

Antoine Bello appears to maintain that if the great American novel were written today, it would focus on contemporary financial practices and their numerous irregularities. Composed in epistolary style, the story of *Roman américain* (2014) unfolds via email in a gated community in Florida whose inhabitants are making and losing impressive amounts of money through the sale and resale of life insurance contracts. Dan Silver is in email contact with his friend Vlad Eisinger, a journalist who has written a series of *exposés* for a national newspaper. In graduate school Vlad had wanted to be novelist and, as Dan points out, he has become a very American one: "Tu cherches à chroniquer ton époque à travers le négoce de polices d'assurance-vie, comme Steinbeck ou Melville se sont servis de la mécanisation de l'agriculture ou de la chasse à baleine" (95). Particularly striking is the description of the American character: "ce mélange d'optimisme et de candeur, de cupidité et de vertueuse hypocrisie" (113). *Roman américain* describes Americans not simply as contradictory, but as a people completely at ease in their contradictions.

In the first sentence of an essay on Tanguy Viel's *La Disparition de Jim Sullivan* (2013), Warren Motte wryly remarks that: "These days it takes a Frenchman to write a great American novel" (66). That Frenchman is not Tanguy Viel; rather it is his narrator, who understands that American fiction is pushing its French counterpart off center stage. The narrator begins with the rueful observation that Francophone readers, including himself, seem to prefer American fiction to the French equivalent, a "fact" demonstrated by his personal library, which contains "plus de romans américains que

de romans français” (9). While American novels are not the only ones read beyond their borders, the problem for the narrator is that the French equivalents do not have a comparably broad audience. France strikes him as inspiring little interest outside the Hexagon; he seriously doubts that a work where “le personnage principal ... habiterait au pied de la cathédrale de Chartres” (10) would have much appeal to an international readership.

Jim Sullivan never appears in the novel; he has disappeared into the desert before the narrative opens. The main character is Dwight Koster, an American academic who works on *Moby Dick*. Dwight is married, prone to anxiety attacks, and leads a typical, rather boring existence, until he gets involved with a graduate student. This rapidly devolves into a series of sleazy activities, which terminate with Dwight’s disappearance/death in the same desert where Jim Sullivan was last seen.

Motte points out that “the narrator tends to look toward the principle of *event*, because if there is one solid and non-negotiable principle in the American novel, it is that something must happen” (73; emphasis original). While this is undoubtedly true, the narrator of *Jim Sullivan* also displays a slightly addled sense of the importance of (what he believes to be) American literary conventions: “j’insiste sur certains détails, non pas qu’ils soient importants en eux-mêmes, mais parce que j’ai remarqué que l’on n’écrit pas un roman américain sans un sens aiguisé du détail, que la saleté de la douche ou le ressort grinçant du matelas” (23). He notes the American willingness to engage with current events – “C’est une chose dont on ne peut pas se passer en Amérique. La présence d’événements récents qui ont eu lieu en vrai” (25) – and a predilection for flashbacks, at times for their own sake: “en matière de roman américain, il est impossible de ne pas faire des flashbacks, y compris les flashbacks qui ne servent à rien” (35). Finally, if the narrator of *Jim Sullivan* has had problems dealing with multiple story lines, he has never doubted that it is with these elements that “on écrivait un vrai roman américain” (59).<sup>2</sup> Both Dicker’s *La Vérité sur l’affaire Harry Quebert* and Bello’s *Roman américain* could illustrate this latter point. *La Disparition de Jim Sullivan* manages to parody aspects of American fiction at the same time as it caricatures Gallic concerns about the growing predominance of this same literature in their country.

The purpose of the initial part of this chapter has been to indicate not simply the extensive amount and variety of French fiction devoted to the States in recent years, but also to argue that perceived American political and social flaws are not the primary concerns of these novels.

Social criticism is always there, but it is not really the centerpiece of the text. It is not surprising that of the three arbitrary categories I have proposed, the one dealing with *personnalités* is the largest. American icons are for the most part also European icons. This is particularly true of movie stars, given France's great love for Hollywood and its *films noirs*. Certain politicians (Kennedy, Nixon, Hoover) have their own notoriety. This new attitude toward *l'Amérique* is one of fascination, which, as previously noted, need not be confused with admiration, although there is some of that as well. In what follows, by concentrating on one text, Dominique Falkner's *Ça n'existe pas l'Amérique: carnet de route*, but with constant references to another, earlier treatment of approximately the same theme, I hope to illustrate in a more concentrated manner that the ways of focusing on the States and the conclusions drawn are going through a subtle transformation in recent French writing.

Dominique Falkner's *Ça n'existe pas l'Amérique* (2010) is a work that defies easy classification. It contains elements of auto-fiction, since the name of the narrator is also that of the author, and the events recounted parallel a trip Dominique Falkner actually made. At times it reads like a road novel, but unlike a more canonical work in this genre, such as Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957), the narrator's personal involvements and opinions are secondary to those of the people he meets. *Ça n'existe pas l'Amérique* might loosely partake of travel literature, but the author's penchant for detours to backwater areas and apparent indifference to maintaining any time schedule would probably lessen his book's appeal to tourists. Finally, Falkner's book is a highly selective, somewhat fiction-alized history of the regions his narrator travels through.

*Ça n'existe pas l'Amérique* chronicles one man's trek from Chicago to Missoula, Montana during which he encounters ordinary and extraordinary Americans (at times the same people) and often unusual scenery. Most importantly, it sketches a new way of looking at the United States, and as such it provides an excellent example of French literary efforts to explore alternative avenues to the examination of the American experience. To illustrate better the uniqueness of Falkner's approach, I will contrast it with Jean Baudrillard's *Amérique*, a work which, despite its rhetorical fireworks, presents a rather traditional French view of the States and the alleged threat which the upstart country presents to European culture

A sign one frequently encounters at rural railroad crossings in France and in small-town stations reads: "Attention, un train peut cacher un

autre.” What is true about railroads is occasionally true about books. Just to read the title of Dominique Falkner’s *Ça n’existe pas l’Amérique* makes one think immediately of Jean Baudrillard, because one of his books might well have had a rather similar title. His treatment of the Iraq War, which initially at least seems to make an argument along the lines of “ca n’existe pas la guerre en Irak,” was actually entitled *La Guerre du Golfe n’a pas eu lieu* (1991). Quite aside from word choices, the true comparability between Baudrillard’s 1991 piece and Falkner’s *Ça n’existe pas l’Amérique* resides in both titles counter-intuitiveness, irony, and provocativeness. Yet a more pertinent similarity is with another of Baudrillard’s works. *Amérique* is an account of his voyage through parts of the United States.

*Amérique* appeared in 1986 and *Ça n’existe pas l’Amérique* in 2010. Between their publications, the world had changed radically, at least for Americans, due to 9/11, and while the two books display occasional similarities, they are ultimately quite different in terms of concentration, content, and conclusions.

Neither writer attempted to see the entire country. Baudrillard makes some observations about New York and Salt Lake City but his *Amérique* is essentially California. Falkner travels from Chicago in a northwestern direction into Montana. Baudrillard comments on what he sees from the sky and what he notices when driving around, particularly in Los Angeles. Presumably, he sleeps in hotels or in friends’ homes. Falkner clearly has sufficient funds to rent a car or take a bus and to stay in motels when he likes, but he also hitchhikes. He occasionally sleeps outdoors in a sleeping bag and once finds himself compelled to pass the night in a phone booth. Baudrillard was about fifty-five when he made his trip and Falkner around thirty-nine when he made his. Baudrillard’s observations are of the abstract, philosophical sort; he speaks about *les Américains* only in a general sense and never as individuals. The ideas Falkner presents most often emerge from people he has encountered and with whom he has discussed concrete, even banal issues. Another factor which might lead Falkner to refuse broad generalizations about Americans is that he has considerable experience living in the States. where he has more or less resided for about twenty-three years. Whereas Baudrillard studies a “people” Falkner has spent a lot of time with individuals.

Baudrillard’s Americans have a certain consistency about them; Falkner’s do not. Finally, both men came to *l’Amérique* with different sorts of intellectual preparation: Baudrillard with his academic background in

sociology and philosophy, Falkner with a lifelong fascination with the country, and, judging from the bibliography, a decent amount of research. In addition, a keen interest in the States apparently runs in his family. When he announced to his dying grandfather that he would soon be leaving for the States where he hoped to meet a long-lost uncle, the old man surprised the grandson and in the process reversed Oscar Wilde's pronouncement: "J'y serai avant toi ... J'ai tout prévu et je voyage sans bagages" (10).

*Amérique* is a polemic whose view of the United States is primarily drawn from Baudrillard's pre-existing intellectual assumptions, confirmed by time spent on the West Coast. His perceptions are filtered through his concept of hyperreality, a hypostatized place where reality and fiction are inseparable, yet fiction rapidly outdistances reality. In his usual provocative fashion, because he perceives American society as the most postmodern of societies, Baudrillard declares the country to be "*la seule société primitive actuelle*" (13; emphasis original). This would appear to brand the States as a backward place, until one realizes that it is "*la société primitive de l'avenir, celle de la complexité, de la mixité et de la promiscuité la plus grande, celle d'un rituel féroce, mais beau dans sa diversité superficielle*" (13). Simply put, "*L'Amérique n'est ni rêve, ni une réalité, c'est hyperréalité*" (32). To understand such a place, one must be willing to "*entrer ... dans l'Amérique comme fiction ... l'Amérique est quelque chose qui nous dépasse tous*" (33).

Baudrillard's *Amérique* is much more a theoretical concept than a historical reality, a space at once sophisticated and naïve, filled with people "*convaincus de tout et qui cherchent à convaincre*" (43): a hyperreality so "naturally" artificial that even the desert has no need of Hollywood to display its cinematic dimensions, since "*la nature elle-même a réussi ici, bien avant les hommes, son plus bel effet spécial*" (69).

Baudrillard's great contribution to the discussion of the image of the States in France is to identify, and then stress, that – at least in certain parts of the country, notably California – there is an ever-increasing confusion between image and reality and that this phenomenon is of no particular concern to the locals. Another group is deeply concerned, however, if not precisely by the image-reality phenomenon, then by the encroaching dominance of the United States, not just in politics but in culture as well. I am referring to Europeans.

Although Baudrillard's title is *Amérique*, judging by the space allotted to Europe in this text, it might equally have been entitled *Amérique et l'europe*, a lowercase *europe* accompanied by a definite article, which

would draw attention to its absence in front of *Amérique* as well as the latter's capitalization. Lowercase *l'europe* would indicate its diminished and diminishing importance with regard to its neighbor across the sea, as well as its geographical limits. In Western Europe at least, cultural and geographical boundaries have been demarcated and show little possibility of change, whereas the upper-case, article-free *Amérique* suggests a large, expanding force whose limits are not yet in sight. This is essentially the way Baudrillard sees the relationship between the United States and Europe – and, I would add, particularly France. This latter point is crucial. For the most part, Baudrillard speaks in *Amérique* of Europe and Europeans, but his comments about Europe's fears of the United States strongly echo French concerns about France's slippage in international cultural prestige. In order to avoid any misrepresentation of Baudrillard's comments, I will maintain his use of "European," but I would ask readers who have followed the arguments in this book since the first chapter to note how what he says reflects a very French malaise.

In the early sections of *Amérique*, American dominance is far from evident. Baudrillard provides a striking, presumably ironic image of Europeans secure in their intellectual superiority and rather pleased by the rancor they believe it engenders among their country cousins: "Nous avons en Europe l'art de penser les choses, de les analyser, de les réfléchir. Personne ne peut nous contester cette subtilité historique et cette imagination conceptuelle, cela, même les esprits d'outre-Atlantique en sont jaloux" (27-28). Yet this declaration of the grandeur of European thought does not seem to carry much weight in the States, not because it is true or untrue, but because the inhabitants of the New World, as described by Baudrillard, are not particularly jealous of European putative intellectual superiority. They are rather indifferent to it. This is due to: "La conviction idyllique des Américains d'être le centre du monde, la puissance suprême et le modèle absolu" (76). Were this simply a stand-off of continental-sized egos, the matter might not be so important; according to Baudrillard, however, if the Europeans are a tad presumptuous concerning their assumed cultural superiority, "la conviction ... des Américains ... n'est pas fausse" (76).<sup>3</sup>

For Baudrillard, this American complacency is not misplaced since Europe appears to have stopped somewhere in the nineteenth century. "Ce qui saute aux yeux à Paris, c'est le XIXe siècle" (70), a moment when it was indisputably the cultural capital of the West.<sup>4</sup> Since then it has slowly



lost ground before increasing American dominance. While there has been resistance to this trend, the results have been less than positive: “L’Amérique est la version originale de la modernité, nous sommes la version doublée ou sous-titrée” (76). Obviously, Europeans struggle to free themselves from this new cultural hegemony, but “Nous ne les rattraperons jamais ... Nous ne faisons que les imiter, les parodier avec cinquante ans de retard, et sans succès” (78). The Americans’ distancing of themselves from the Europeans is not the result of some superior intelligence and cannot be completely ascribed to technological advantages. In great measure, it is a question of self-confidence coupled with the pragmatic sense that the only important problems are practical ones. While Europeans are free to speculate, Americans exist to achieve: “Le réel n’y est pas lié à l’impossible, et aucun échec ne peut le mettre en cause. Ce qui est pensé en Europe se réalise en Amérique – tout ce qui disparaît en Europe réapparaît à San Francisco!” (83).

Baudrillard concludes by arguing that Europeans have failed to understand that although the Old World may envy aspects of American talent, consciously or not, Americans remain largely indifferent to what Europe has to offer, or if something does strike their fancy, they will simply appropriate it. The European perception of Americans as naive or lacking in depth is of little consequence to the latter. With occasionally important insights (the blending of reality into image) and a great deal of presumably ironic hyperbole – “Le four à ondes, le broyeur à ordures ... évoquent irrésistiblement la fin du monde” (34) – as well as sometimes just plain silly comments – “Les Américains, c’est bien connu, sont fascinés par les Jaunes” (84)<sup>5</sup> – Baudrillard is ultimately making an often-heard argument: Europe (France) is the past, while the United States is the present and the future.

In *Ça n’existe pas l’Amérique*, Dominique Falkner does not so much reject or accept this argument; he simply pays it no attention. At the onset of his trip, in the airplane heading for Chicago, a German expresses admiration for the American ability to just pick up and go. If one part of the country is not working out financially, personally, or professionally for an individual, perhaps another will. He then adds somewhat ruefully, “C’est une forme de courage qui n’existe pas en Europe, où la fatalité fait partie de la vie” (12). This *fatalité* is the book’s only evocation of Europe’s alleged inferiority to the United States, but it will prove important.

Falkner’s *l’Amérique* is quite concrete, a practical place which nonetheless can provide, at times, a rather surreal impression; guns

abound amid landscapes dotted with symbols of piety, “Les églises ... c’est comme les bistrotts en France. Il y en a tous les dix mètres” (56). Yet in a commercial giant such as the United States, a concern for salvation is not without its business potential. A neon sign announces: “*The more bacon you eat, the closer to heaven you git*” (57; emphasis original), reminding the initially puzzled traveler that at least one path to the afterlife is slathered with cholesterol.

A similar entrepreneurial spirit, as well as an interest in leaving this earth in the direction of a presumably better world, is displayed by Dr. Evermore (a.k.a. Tom Every, a retired demolitions expert), the inventor of the Forevertron, built in the 1980s. This contraption, long a staple of the Guinness Book of Records (it was the largest scrap metal structure in the world, until it lost its title to Gary Greff’s Geese in Flight in 2001), is described by Falkner as a “vaisseau spatial de sept cents tonnes qu’il avait entièrement construit avec les pièces de carrosserie et de moteurs de la casse dont il est propriétaire” (57). Its purpose is to function as “une catapulte géante, destinée à les arracher, sa femme et lui, à la terre le moment venu” (58). Dr. Evermore’s response to the obvious question about departure dates is rather vague, except to assure his visitors that, according to his calculations, the world can hold out for about twelve more years before “le Grand Chaos final” (58). The narrator reports this encounter and prophecy without comment. Avoiding explanations and implicitly inviting readers to draw their own conclusions is typical of Falkner’s approach throughout *Ça n’existe pas l’Amérique*.

Despite Dr. Evermore’s concern about the impending “Grand Chaos final,” the Northwest was, and remained for some, a perfect place they had no intention of leaving; one man established his personal kingdom there. Driving close to Burlington, Montana, Falkner paused to pay his respects “sur la tombe du seul roi que l’Amérique a connu: King James” (31). James Strang, born in 1813, converted to Mormonism at an early age, eventually founding his own community. He then proceeded to emulate the activities of Joseph Smith, finding tablets, having revelations, and ultimately declaring himself “Le Prophète” (31). A final vision told Strang he was destined to be a great king ruling over a new church located on Beaver Island, Michigan, the largest island in Lake Michigan. His pronouncements and self-coronation attracted a following. Unwisely, his first royal decree restored polygamy, which led to his demise: Strang was eventually murdered by two irate husbands. Still, he remains the United States’ only native-born king.

While King James has been largely forgotten in the Northwest, what has not been forgotten is the territory's violent history. Contemporary politics is a continuous source of frustration for the locals – “Les Bush, c'est des maquignons, de vrais escrocs” (45) – but the real dramas are larger in scope. The narrator encounters racism directed against Mexicans and blacks, yet what dominates is the historical mistreatment of the Native Americans: “Les historiens estiment à plus de trois cents le nombre de traités ainsi ratifiés, signés, puis cassés par les différents gouvernements américains qui se sont succédés à la Maison Blanche” (126). The survivors of these tribes, decimated by governmental dishonesty and alcoholism, attempt to eke out a marginalized existence selling fragments of their largely defunct cultures in museum shops and at powwows aimed at tourists. The theme of what today would be called “ethnic cleansing” is a leitmotif throughout the book; once again, however, the author does not comment directly upon it. He allows the people he meets to illustrate in their stories and lives what the destruction of Native American culture has meant; he supplies some historical background and then permits readers to do the rest.

The French presence in the American Northwest does not escape Falkner's attention. In 1883, Antoine-Amédée-Marie-Vincent Amat-Manca de Vallombrosa de Morès arrived in the Northwest. After graduating from Saint-Cyr with honors, the marquis married the daughter of a rich New Yorker and moved with his wife to her family's newly acquired estate in Montana, La Bocca. Once there he engaged in a series of unsuccessful financial ventures, which cost his father-in-law a good bit of money and earned him the title of “*the Crazy Frenchman*” (118; emphasis original). The marquis's ideas were not necessarily bad. He built a slaughterhouse and refrigerated wagons to ship meat across country, but somehow the venture failed. Undeterred, he created a stage coach line, but to similar effect: “L'aventure des bad-lands avait coûté deux millions de dollars. *Le Crazy Frenchman* rentra en France” (119; emphasis original).

More frustrating still from the French perspective was the destiny reserved for the achievements of the explorer Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, seigneur de La Vérendrye. In 1743, he claimed the Badlands in the Dakotas in the name of Louis XV. Unfortunately this proclamation was largely forgotten. It was only in 1913 that some children found “La plaque de metal vert-de-gris où La Vérendrye stipulait, en latin, que les bad-lands appartenait au royaume de France” (122).

As it turns out, not all the French whom Falkner hears about are dead. People tell him of a fellow countryman who lives in the mountains, largely off the land. In his spare time this loner translates Whitman's *Leaves of the Grass* into French (147). Who once was Jean-François is now Jeff. When initially asked his opinion about the United States, Jeff responds in a tone which projects the cool detachment and wit one might associate with a Parisian intellectual. He manages to distance himself somewhat from the question and interject a slight disdain, but also a hint of begrudged admiration: "Que penser d'un pays ... ou la fumée de cigarette est considérée plus dangereuse que les armes à feu en vente libre" (148). Yet moments later he assumes a different stance. He shows the narrator a letter from his cousin who wants to visit him in his mountain retreat. The cousin is a student at Louvain "qui cherche la vérité" (149). Jeff's reaction projects more than a whiff of American pragmatism: "Quelle idée! Aucune vérité ne tient la distance face au poids de la vie. Ce qu'il faut, c'est croire avec force à certaines illusions" (149). Jeff first dismisses a form of thinking that has few practical consequences and then, more interestingly, finds positive aspects in illusion. Illusion can deceive, but it can also serve as a stimulus to pursue a goal that may turn out to be achievable. This sense of illusion as a potential asset, a form of ambition, and a willingness to pursue a dream appears to be something that Jeff discovered in the States, since it was here that this man born in the Jura radically changed his lifestyle, moved to a simple cabin in a much more agreeable mountain setting, gave up many social amenities, and devoted his life to cultivating the land, hunting, fishing, and translating poetry. In Jeff's world, illusion is not necessarily an idle fantasy: it has the potential to serve as a catalyst, an impetus to undertake new projects that will have some practical import. This apparently occurs more readily *en Amérique* than in France.

In *Ça n'existe pas l'Amérique*, a European fatality, initially evoked in the book's opening pages, is contrasted with an American activism. The discussion centers on the common European assumption that Americans are naïve. Yet in Falkner, and to a degree in Baudrillard, naivety is much more an active than a passive force. Baudrillard found a mysterious power in American naivety (96), while Falkner quotes an anonymous source to the effect that "Oui, l'Américain croit ... au père Noël. Ce qui est étrange, c'est exactement ce qui fait sa force" (151). In *Amérique*, Baudrillard bemoaned the inevitable decline of Europe. At the beginning of *Ça n'existe pas l'Amérique*, a German speaks of "European fatality," a seemingly weighty concept.

Yet, from an American perspective, fate is nowhere inevitable outside of classical tragedy; indeed, it does not really exist. At best, it is a concept one applies after an incident to create at least the semblance of coherence in a string of events. Fatality might well be a misnomer, a fancy way of explaining away failure or of adding at least the appearance of grandeur to the self. To what extent is *la fatalité* a carefully, perhaps unconsciously cultivated image, which adds a whiff of *profondeur* to individuals since it is intended in large measure for external consumption? Yet it might also be an impressive term for limiting one's aspirations. And if this fatality is cultivated, might not American naivety be equally constructed? To what extent is fatality in this context a form of passivity, and naivety a derisive term for ambition, for the firm conviction that something can be done, that movement is more desirable than stasis? Criticisms proposed by two Europeans illustrate this possible misconception of American naivety.

At one point, Falkner's narrator meets an Italian who complains that "Ces Américains ... ils courent, ils courent ... On se demande où ils vont" (214). At another, a Danish woman repeats the oft-heard comment that "Les gens ont toujours quelque chose à la bouche en Amérique ... du chewing-gum, du pop-corn, un carré de chocolat, une bouteille de soda, quelque chose" (145).

Both the obsessive exercise and the non-stop consumption can be viewed as a form of American gullibility, an acquiescence, unconscious or otherwise, to a media bombardment that dictates what one must do either to be healthy and beautiful or to be in a world of permanently ephemeral gustatory pleasure.<sup>6</sup> From this perspective, American lives are directed by the power of advertising, which individuals follow all too docilely. That running and constant eating push the body in opposite directions is secondary to the fact that each, in its way, represents a surrender of personal choice, a naïve willingness to take pleasure in being led.

The Italian and the Dane both reflect a combination of slight annoyance and bemusement at what Americans are doing and, in each case, imply that it is "typical," of the denizens of the New World who function happily on the surface of life, an unreflective and media-controlled people.<sup>7</sup> Certainly the two Europeans do not bother to wonder if the constant jogging and eating might reflect, in modest ways, more complex, even darker ambitions.

Exercising and ingurgitating can be considered aggressive activities, which may be performed for good or bad ends. Both involve a degree of conscious choice, a refusal of passivity, as well as a certain restlessness,

the “wanting more” from *Key Largo*, which is discussed in the chapter on *Cherokee*. American advertising can encourage and direct these desires, but an affirmative response to these pressures need not be a purely passive or naïve reaction. It can equally be a channeling of energy, a striving for something more satisfying, however ill-conceived. The Americans whom Falkner describes most often do not see life as an unfolding of some ineluctable destiny<sup>8</sup> but as something to be struggled with and against, however absurd the form that struggle can sometimes take. The choices they make may be pathetic (bulimia) or ridiculous (Dr. Evermore), but they are not motivated simply by naïveté, unless *naïveté* is redefined as a confidence that a goal can be reached coupled with a willingness to do what it takes to achieve it.

If Baudrillard projects an impersonal caricature of Americans, “À défaut d’identité, les Américains ont une dentition merveilleuse” (37), the Americans who emerge in *Ça n’existe pas l’Amérique* are individuals. Like Jeff, they may sometimes be aware that they are pursuing illusions, but this does not seem to strike them as a particularly bad thing. This rather pragmatic approach contrasts strongly with Jeff’s cousin’s *nombrilisme*, which seems destined to lead nowhere and accomplish nothing.

When the narrator finally finds his uncle in Montana, the older man makes an interesting distinction: “les Européens ont un visage; les Américains portent des masques” (218). Baudrillard draws a comparable conclusion about Americans, or at least Californians, claiming that in Reagan’s state: “On ne juge que sur l’image” (96). Here again is a clear distinction, however dubious, with the alleged European openness contrasting with the American façade. However, to what degree are the words “image” or “mask” simply misleading, expressions used to explain away what the European is unwilling to see? Namely, ambition, a degree of cynicism, and the readiness to do what is needed to succeed? If to speak of the States in terms of naivety is a gross simplification, it might be well to balance that judgment by a darker, yet equal and opposite, simplification. A professor whom Falkner meets attributes to Harold Pinter this rather morose viewpoint: “L’Amérique est un monstre plaqué d’or” (205). Both these judgments appear superficial in the context of Falkner’s book, but Pinter’s comment has the value of pointing to something more potentially complex, even dangerous behind the smiling American façade, namely a striving, a dissatisfaction which can never be totally appeased. *Ça n’existe pas l’Amérique* avoids extremes in its judgments and simply proposes that

Americans are neither *Candides*, nor *Vautrins*, but a people who inhabit some sloppy middle area, one difficult to define and resistant to clichés.

What best illustrates the major difference between Baudrillard and Falkner are their respective titles, although on one level they are initially saying the same thing. *Amérique* is a broad philosophical concept with occasional geographic markers (Los Angeles, Salt Lake City, Monument Valley). Yet it is also a place without fixed boundaries, since Baudrillard argues that the expansion of the hyperreality it generates is potentially unlimited. Falkner's title also began life as a concept, not one drawn from Baudrillard, but from a more unlikely source: "Vous aimez Henry Miller? Il a cette phrase incroyable: 'Ça n'existe pas l'Amérique, c'est un nom qu'on donne à une idée abstraite'" (51). Where Baudrillard denies the existence of *l'Amérique* by turning the country's historical and geographical space into a general category dotted with place names, Falkner accepts Miller's claim that the word *l'Amérique* is in itself a large, empty category, *une idée abstraite*, but he replaces the colossus with many smaller, often very different, *Amériques*. Baudrillard's *Amérique* begins as an abstraction and remains that way. For Falkner, the abstraction that is *l'Amérique* quickly yields to circumscribed, quite concrete parcels of land and peoples which make up the United States.

For Falkner, there is no single *Amérique*. When a woman asks him, "que pensez-vous de l'Amérique?" (64), he responds simply, "Laquelle?" (64). There is a nation-state called the United States, a country of fixed boundaries with interests extended all over the world. But within the country's geographical borders, there are not always striking similarities between the inhabitants; indeed the differences seem paramount. Given the variety of regions and backgrounds Americans come from, it is simply impossible to provide a single image of the country or its denizens. In addition to regional differences, there are class, racial, and religious divergences, and while it may be true for some people that "Être malheureux est un crime aux États-Unis" (60), this much-vaunted American optimism may be a determination, at times at all costs, to succeed. In any case, there are many versions of the States,<sup>9</sup> and Falkner makes clear that he is examining just one of them.

He also avoids sweeping conclusions, since neither the areas he passes through nor their inhabitants are completely objective entities. They are visited by tourists (such as Falkner), studied, gawked at, liked, or disliked by individuals with their own ideas, biases, and interests. At the same

time, the locals have their version of why they live where they do, how well they fit in, and what they are striving to achieve in their corner of the country. Most of the Native Americans are broken and bitter due to their history and experiences, yet one, Chippera, became a poet to celebrate his tribal background, while another wears a pin which proclaims, "*Je suis fier d'être potawatomi*" (36; emphasis original). A truck driver explains to his French hitchhiker that they are currently traversing "*God's Country*" (184; emphasis original), and a woman offers a rather folksy, yet enlightening image for the States' often problematic relationship with the rest of the world: "L'Amérique est un gros chien sympathique dans un appartement trop petit. Chaque fois qu'il remue la queue, il casse quelque chose" (64). Falkner catches something of this diversity of opinion in a succinct, wry comment: "Chacun son Amérique" (39).

The great merit of *Ça n'existe pas l'Amérique* is its avoidance of universalizing judgments and insistence on the specific, on what can be said with reasonable accuracy and what for the moment cannot be determined. This is the sense of the work's subtitle: *carnet de route*. A roadmap provides a rather bare-bones sense of an area: where one is and what one has to do to get somewhere else. Filling in all the rest, determining what should be seen and what is not worth the time, are decisions that can be the product of research and/or whim and in any case are the result of the individual traveler's choice. Falkner's text is the product of such a process. It represents a modest effort to explore a relatively small part of the United States and to do so with a mind as open as possible.

Whatever *Ça n'existe pas l'Amérique* lacks in theoretical perspectives, it makes up for in privileging the complexity of its subject. Baudrillard ends his *Amérique* with the somewhat lugubrious, or at least melodramatic, question: "Comment peut-on être Européen?" (102). Falkner does not bother wondering how someone can be American, because he has already noted that the possible answers are myriad. Nor does he return to France once he has found his long-lost uncle. Instead, he leaves the airport, goes to the bus station, and boards a bus for Idaho, apparently intending to continue his explorations *d'autres petites Amériques* by developing and then following another *carnet de route*.

While 9/11 was a catalyst for the French rethinking of the United States, I believe it is not the only explanation for this change in attitudes, which had its origins in the later twentieth century. This was the period where the French began to realize that while *l'Amérique* remained a giant, and arguably



the most powerful nation on the planet, it had become a crippled one, and hence somewhat more human. The French witnessed the Americans replicate their own failure in Vietnam. They noted their inability to resolve issues in the Middle East and then with the rest of the world experienced the end of American invulnerability to attack on September 11, 2001.<sup>10</sup>

The weakened image of *l'Amérique* also paralleled changes in the ways the French began to see themselves. Long prone to excoriating Yankee racism, the influx of North Africans, both legal and illegal, into the Hexagon, the expansion of Muslim communities and the tensions this provoked, the difficulties and at times unwillingness of minority groups to integrate into French life and culture, as well as the expansion of anti-Semitism and anti-Arab sentiments forced the French to confront the widespread reality of bigotry in their country. It became increasingly apparent that if there were somewhere a moral high ground from which one could judge the racial failings of others, France, no more than the States, had any business standing on it.

Associated with racism is the rise of the extreme right in France. Although the country has always had extreme right-wing politicians, they were essentially on the fringe of the electoral process and had little staying power. In 1953, Pierre Poujade created a movement initially to protect small businesses against the encroachment on their markets by *les grandes surfaces*. Eventually, it became involved in a variety of reactionary causes and briefly achieved some political success, but faded away after 1958. The Organisation de l'armée secrète came about toward the end of the Algerian War (1952–1964) and for a while spread panic in France through a series of assassinations and rumors of a *coup d'état*. Eventually it was repressed, and, outside of the fear and, in some instances, support, which the Secret Army generated, it had little lasting effect on the political system.

The Front National is another matter. Founded in 1972 by Jean-Marie Le Pen, it features an inflammatory mixture of xenophobia, anti-immigration policies, and racism. In 2002, Le Pen was one of the two second-round candidates in the presidential elections, and with each election, the Front National's political importance seems to increase. Its popularity has steadily grown among the French citizenry, particularly after Le Pen was succeeded by his much smoother and politically astute daughter, Marine, as the head of the party. The Front National is currently one of the major parties in France, a fact demonstrated not simply by its presence in the final round of the 2017 elections, but also that it managed to gain over

thirty percent of the vote in a losing effort. In the presidential elections of 2002, Jean-Marie Le Pen managed less than eighteen percent of the ballots cast. If it has often been a commonplace for many French to see the United States as a conservative country, these same people have been compelled to contemplate their own nation moving in the same direction.<sup>11</sup>

Certainly in recent years the national political situations in France and the United States have become somewhat similar: a loose, somewhat disorganized left or center-left trying to confront conservative and extreme right elements. This, along with the recognition of the somewhat diminished reputation of the United States on the international scene, France's growing awareness of its own flaws, Islamic terrorism, coupled with both nations' penchants for simplistic solutions for complex issues (the Patriot Act, *l'état d'urgence*) have broken down or at least eased tensions dating at least since the Cold War. France and the United States have been forced by circumstances to accept what they have always known, namely that their similarities outweighed their differences. Concerning their effect on literature, these factors have contributed in France to a new openness toward the United States, a phenomenon which had slowly been developing since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Yet, to understand how this willingness among artists and intellectuals to view *l'Amérique* somewhat more favorably than in the past, or at least with a renewed curiosity, we must address another factor and turn our attention to the election of the forty-fourth president of the United States.

The election of Barack Obama to the American presidency increased France's fascination with the States. It seemed not like an example of *un esprit de contradiction* but contradiction itself, that after eight years of a conservative white man with few intellectual interests and no international travel before his election, Americans would choose a liberal Harvard-educated black man with extensive experience abroad. The election of an African American to the highest office in a country often derided for its racism was stunning enough, but perhaps even more encouraging was Obama's professed desire to move the country beyond its racial divide, to change the way Americans saw themselves and others. Whatever the frustrations and disappointments that would eventually mark the Obama presidency, it began on a note of optimism and hope for a new era, and this enthusiasm was initially shared in France as in most other nations in the world. Coupled with renewed efforts to ameliorate American relations with erstwhile enemies in the Middle East, it appeared for a time that the United

States had embarked in a new direction.<sup>12</sup> Long perceived as a nation of contradictions, with Obama's election the putative contradictory nature of the United States was beginning to be seen somewhat more positively.<sup>13</sup>

There is nothing particularly new about the French seeing the United States as a contradictory society but, traditionally, this has taken the form of a negative judgment, with implicit or explicit accusations of hypocrisy. As has been noted, in the Cold War era a common assumption of the French left was that the Marshall Plan was primarily a propaganda device, a means of infiltrating American power and authority into French life in the guise of humanitarian aid. The coupling of American religiosity with astonishing violence had always been a cause for scorn, as had American proclamations of social equality in a country ravaged by racism.

Since Obama's election, there has been a slight but significant change. This American contradictoriness has begun to be perceived as a potential source of strength for the nation and an object of considerable curiosity for French artists. It has made the American character less one-dimensional and, hence, more interesting to writers who no longer appear willing to jump to facile conclusions about *les Yankees*. In several of the books surveyed in this chapter, French writers have chosen to focus on the apparent contradictions in their American subjects without attempting to resolve them. They have taken note of a situation, underscored its paradoxical nature, but left the possibility of some final explanation to the reader's mind and imagination.

Emphasizing the often complex nature of the American character is obviously not the only motif explored in contemporary French novels dealing with the United States, but it does illustrate a change in attitudes and approaches. In today's French fiction the United States and its citizens are examined from multiple perspectives. Yet the purpose of this chapter has not been to exhaust the list of possible approaches but to describe some of them and analyze in detail one book that illustrates a different approach to the subject. This process has led to two conclusions. One is positive about the French and the other less so about the Americans. Since approximately 9/11, French fiction has taken a new interest in the American experience, and by doing so it has called into question earlier French cultural assumptions about *l'Amérique*. This represents an openness on the part of French literary artists toward the States, a willingness to reimagine the meanings of being American. The obvious question is whether there is a reciprocal effort on the part of American writers to look at the French

differently. The response to this question is not particularly encouraging. While there are many prominent American novelists who are quick to proclaim their admiration for France and all things French, American authors, along with the bulk of their compatriots, essentially continue to situate France's moments of glory in the past and tend to see the country as an elaborate playground.<sup>14</sup> France might well be *éternelle*, but seen through American eyes, the present and the future still belong to them.

## Notes

1 I have listed below novels that express this new interest in the States. The list is not exhaustive. When the title does not make sufficiently clear the relevance of a particular work to this grouping, I provide a brief explanation.

2002

Danny LaFerrière. *Cette grenade dans la main du jeune nègre est-elle une arme ou un fruit. (Serpent à plumes)*. A Canadian writer is hired to conduct a survey of American attitudes toward culture, race, and politics.

2003

Frédéric Beigbeder. *Windows on the World* (Grasset). The title is in English and refers to the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers.

2004

Franz-Olivier Giesbert. *L'Américain* (Gallimard).

2005

Laure Limongi. *Fonction Elvis* (Léo Scheer).

Michel Schneider. *Marilyn, dernière séance* (Gallimard).

2007

Gilles Leroy. *Alabama Song* (Mercure de France). A fictionalized biography of Zelda Fitzgerald.

Frédéric Roux. *L'hiver indien* (Grasset). Enterprising Indians on a twentieth-century reservation find imaginative ways to make money for themselves and their tribe.

2009

Catherine Mavrikakis. *Le Ciel de Bay City* (Sabine Wespieser). A little girl living in Michigan has a rather ordinary life until she discovers her grandparents were Holocaust victims. This provokes her to commit a terrible crime on July 4.

2010

Christophe Claro. *CosmoZ* (Actes Sud). The story of what happened to Dorothy and her entourage after leaving Oz.

2011

Simon Liberati. *Jane Mansfield 1967* (Grasset).

Jean Rolin. *Le Ravissement de Britney Spears* (P.O.L.).

2012

Nathalie Léger. *Supplément à la vie de Barbara Loden* (P.O.L.).

2013

François Saintonge. *Dolfi et Marilyn* (Grasset). In the year 2060 a clone of Hitler meets a clone of Marilyn Monroe, and they fall in love.

2014

Michèle Halberstadt. *Mon amie américaine* (Albin Michel).

Nelly Kapriélian. *Le Manteau de Greta Garbo* (Grasset).

Catherine Mavrikakis. *La Ballade d'Ali Baba* (Sabine Wespieser). A father, known to his children as Ali Baba for his constant travels throughout the States, eventually moves to Canada in search of the big score he never finds.

Céline Minard. *Faillir être flingué*. A send-up of the Hollywood cowboys and Indians movie.

2015

Pierre Ducrozet. *Eroica* (Grasset). The rise and fall of the Haitian-American artist Jean-Marie Basquiat.

Joël Dicker. *Le Livre des Baltimore* (Éditions de Fallois). At once a prequel and a sequel to *La Vérité sur l'affaire Harry Quebert*.

Chahdortt Djavann. *Big Daddy* (Grasset). The title refers to a drug lord who is eventually gunned down by a protégé and the ensuing consequences for individuals and society.

2 I know of no other French novels published in recent years that confront the nature of American fiction as directly as the three I have mentioned (*La disparition de Jim Sullivan*, *Roman américain*, *La Vérité sur l'affaire Harry Quebert*), but there are two others that display a deep involvement with the work of individual American literary luminaries. In 2008 Julie Wolkenstein published *L'excuse* (P.O.L.), which is essentially a contemporary version of Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady* (1881), where an American girl encounters a fatally charming Frenchman who initially enchants her and then marries her. However, unlike Isabelle Archer, she does not surrender her identity and fortune to the man. In Pierre Senges's *Achab* (2015), the captain of the *Pequod* was not destroyed by Moby Dick. In fact, he had a full life before and after that

particular incident. The novel provides a prequel and a sequel to what occurred before the battle with the Great White Whale. It includes Ahab's adventures on the Shakespearean stage in London and in the Hollywood movie industry.

3 Despite the earlier suggestion of Americans being intimidated by Europe's great analytical and conceptual skills, later in his text Baudrillard argues that Americans are simply indifferent to this theoretical talent, because their perspective "est l'inverse. Non pas conceptualiser la réalité, mais réaliser le concept, et matérialiser les idées" (82).

4 In one of the few direct references to France, Baudrillard maintains that "la banalité française est une déjection de la quotidienneté bourgeoise, née de la fin d'une culture aristocratique, muée en maniérisme petit-bourgeois, de cette bourgeoisie qui s'est rétrécie comme une peau de chagrin tout au long du XIXe siècle" (85).

5 This comment seems an appropriately bizarre version of Robert Dubreuilh's remark in *Les Mandarins*: "des jaunes! Ils détestent les jaunes" (I, 373).

6 Baudrillard has a similarly disapproving view of what he perceives as the compulsiveness of Americans' seemingly ceaseless activity: "Toute cette société ... y compris sa part active et productive, tout le monde court devant soi parce qu'on a perdu la formule pour s'arrêter" (78).

7 With the exception of Jeff, the Europeans whom Falkner encounters tend to have a rather shallow understanding of Americans and their own involvement with them. Earlier in his trip, Falkner meets a man from Krakow who has been living for years in the States. During their short ride together, Piotr details his numerous money-making schemes, but in the end he assures his listener that "non, il n'était pas obsédé par l'argent, enfin pas comme les Américains" (38). Some ineffable quality in his European background apparently separates Piotr from the greedy Americans surrounding him.

8 The only group in *L'Amérique n'existe pas* who appear to have given up on life are the Native Americans, and this contrast with the other Americans is the most telling indictment of the thoroughness with which the Indian tribes have been rendered marginal in American society.

9 There is a small linguistic problem concerning terminology, which has not been problematic in earlier chapters, but which must be addressed now. It concerns the geographical space occupied by the United States of America. In French, when *l'Amérique* is employed, it is as an abbreviation of *Les États-Unis de l'Amérique*, so the proper translation must be along the lines of "the United States," or "the States," since "America" is a much vaster space stretching from the North Pole to Cape Horn. Baudrillard's singular use of *Amérique* references an idea much more than a country occupying physical area, yet his reference remains the United States.

10 The shared concern about growing Islamic terrorism also brought the

two countries closer together. Never non-allies, a common foe constrained France and the United States to take their alliance more seriously, to forget subjects of tension between themselves, such as Jacques Chirac's refusal to engage French forces in the war against Iraq, and to work together for a common good.

11 The turmoil created in France by the *mariage pour tous* controversy also suggests that the French may not be that much more "sexually liberated" than the Americans whose supposed Puritanism they have often decried.

12 The fact that the Obama presidency failed to live up to all of the hopes placed in it does not negate that his election seriously challenged many of the stereotypes concerning American society.

13 The possible implications of the election of Donald Trump to the American presidency will be briefly discussed in the concluding chapter.

14 Jim Harrison's *New Yorker* essay "A Really Big Lunch" provides a fine example of the author's Francophilia, but it also seems to turn France into a national culinary museum.

## CHAPTER IX

# L'Américaine in Paris

## *Le Divorce*

Paris affects the American visitors, but it does not seem they affect Paris very much.

(Diane Johnson, *Into a Paris Quartier*, 172)

What facilitated the transfer to the new celebratory mood in the French intelligentsia's perception of the United States [in the 1970s] was that the phenomena taking place on the shores of the Pacific did not contradict the prevalent opinion among the French literati that American culture was unacceptable.

(Jean-Philippe Mathy, *Extrême-Occident*, 198)

Our American [expatriate] world is, as it always has been, a world within a world, more or less invisible to the real inhabitants.

(Diane Johnson, *Into a Paris Quartier*, 180)

Versailles tend à devenir le lieu principal du culte monarchique.

(Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *Le Roi-machine*, 137)

Isabel Walker, the main character in Diane Johnson's *Le Divorce* (1997), represents a tentative effort to project a different American attitude toward



France and the French. This change will develop slowly over the course of a novel, whose principal irony is that as Isabel's openness increases, the French attitude toward Americans, relatively positive at the beginning of *Le Divorce*, begins to regress until, toward the end, it appears to be an updated version of what Mme Bellegarde and her older son thought about Christopher Newman in *The American*.

*L'Américaine à Paris* is the French translation of Diane Johnson's bestseller, which deals with the travails, triumphs, and disappointments of a young American woman in contemporary France. Part of the novel's appeal stems from Johnson's skill at showing, with considerable humor, how French and Americans' perceptions of each other are largely filtered through longstanding clichés. Thus, Americans like Paris but are somewhat distrustful of the French, whereas a Frenchman might be charmed by a young woman's "Americanness," without being able to explain what it is (124). Americans tend to be uncultivated, while the French are sophisticated, yet fearful that their traditional way of life has been imperiled by the changes wrought by the influx of Americans: "The end of *la civilization française?* ... I suppose when it became '*fromage ou dessert*' instead of '*fromage et dessert*'" (41; emphasis original). Johnson even adds a more sophisticated dimension to the bandying about of old saws when she has Charles-Henri, who has left his American wife for a Yugoslav woman who has left her American husband, displays his Cartesian heritage when he notes the neat rationality and balance of the arrangement: "The Tellmans are separated, we're separated. So symmetrical a situation" (56).

*Le Divorce* can be approached from a variety of critical perspectives. The heroine, Isabel Walker, is a film school drop-out, and she makes perfectly clear from the beginning that "I think of my story as a sort of film" (1). References to framing scenes with cinematic techniques abound in the novel, and in *Understanding Diane Johnson* Carolyn Durham sketches a reading of the novel as a detailed draft of a film scenario (75-78).

Another approach, one which interests me more, explores the relationship between *Le Divorce* and Henry James's fiction. Quite aside from Johnson's longstanding interest in James, her heroine's name, Isabel Walker, would appear to be an overt allusion to Isabel Archer, the main character in *Portrait of a Lady* (1882), another attractive young woman who experiences life-changing events in Europe. For Carolyn Durham, "Analogies of name and of situation make Isabel Walker the contemporary counterpart of Isabel Archer" (82). While Durham does not develop in great

detail the possible similarities between the two novels, she does, with some hesitancy, suggest a possible parallel between the ways in which Johnson's Uncle<sup>1</sup> Edgar and James's Gilbert Osmond treat their respective Isabels.

While the text certainly encourages the reader to associate Isabel Walker and Isabel Archer, I think this invitation is misleading. The crucial part of the women's identities is not their given names, but their surnames, "Archer" versus "Walker." Isabel Archer is an idealist and something of a romantic; like an arrow, her imagination soars in Europe, where at first she believes she will discover cultural treasures for which the States has no equivalent, as well as a suave, cultivated lover who will make her happy forever. Yet the arrow eventually crashes to earth. James's novel ends unhappily with Isabel's dreams shattered. In contrast, Isabel Walker is a pragmatist who proceeds slowly and cautiously, one step at a time. She is at first more suspicious of Paris and its seductions than she is in awe of the place: "Even as a little girl, I lacked the endearing property of female credulousness" (20). If she falls in love with Uncle Edgar, she does so somewhat unwillingly and with a rather clearheaded premonition of how it will turn out: "I have met the love of my life, but it is a grotesque and doomed situation" (36). At the end of *Le Divorce*, this Isabel is confused and unhappy but, unlike her Jamesian counterpart, she is hardly broken. While Edgar is certainly cold to Isabel in their final meeting, his behavior is benign next to Osmond's consistently cruel and exploitive treatment of Isabel Archer.

To dismiss Isabel Archer as a serious model for Isabel Walker is not to deny the strong Jamesian presence in Johnson's text, one that is much more pervasive than an occasional allusion. I believe that the Henry James novel that has the most affinities with *Le Divorce* in terms of content and detail is *The American*. In what follows I will argue that *Le Divorce* is a contemporary version of *The American*, one that explores the experiences of an American in Paris from the perspective of the closing decade of the twentieth century, just as James's novel did for the second half of the nineteenth.

The novels are similar in a variety of ways, while their differences reflect the passage of time and changing social mores. Neither the French nor the Americans of 1997 are the same people they were in 1868, and the level of misunderstanding and suspicion is not as total in *Le Divorce* as it was in *The American*. Still, the main characters in both novels share certain salient attributes; the French families in the two novels embody traditional French values, albeit modified by time; the cultural geography of Paris

and the mastering of the French language also play important roles in the unfolding of the plot. The expatriate community assumes a somewhat greater significance in *Le Divorce*, but its isolation from everyday French life is comparable to *The American*. Unlike the one-sided financial concerns which prevailed in James's novel, money is initially not an issue for either the French or the Americans in Johnson's text, although it does become so later in the novel. A night at the opera and the actions of a smitten young Frenchman prove crucial in both works. Finally, the modernity of France, represented by the Parc Monceau in *The American*, is replaced in *Le Divorce* by EuroDisney, the symbol of the successful American cultural invasion of contemporary Europe.

The main difference between the two protagonists is their gender. An obvious, albeit superficial explanation would claim that Johnson made her main character a young woman to encourage the rather misleading comparison with Isabel Archer. Another, simpler one, but also perfectly plausible, is that Diane Johnson simply wanted her main character to be a woman. While both interpretations have degrees of merit, it is equally apparent that the choice of a heroine rather than a hero has significant thematic value. In making his main character a man, James endowed Christopher Newman with a great deal of freedom. He could go where he wanted, say what he wished, and make decisions about his life and future. In the 1990s Isabel Walker enjoys comparable liberty. She could decide what she wished to study in college, then leave university when she felt the need. In aspiring to be involved in film production, she may be attempting to enter what has largely been a man's world, but such considerations never cross her mind. She pretty much says what she wants to say, and lives with the consequences. All of this would appear to suggest that this young woman of the late twentieth century has much the same freedom of action as a contemporary male, not to mention that of a man in the late nineteenth.

But this is not the case. Although Isabel can and will do what she wishes and then accept responsibility for her actions, there remains one area where she is forever courting social disapproval: the control of her body. When she lived in California, her family was uncomfortable with the sexual freedom she displayed; she was at ease with sex and in charge of when and with whom she would indulge her desires. She encounters comparable short-sightedness in the French in Paris. Edgar is a married man, so when they have an affair, Isabel and he try to be as

discrete as possible. Eventually word leaks out, and Isabel has the rather embarrassing experience of meeting her lover's wife, who treats her with mild condescension. This attitude prevails among the other French family members. She is the silly little American who is making a fool out of herself with an older Frenchman. No such opprobrium is cast upon Edgar; his success with a much younger woman simply adds to his reputation. In *Le Divorce*, Isabel Walker represents in many ways the progress women have made in freeing themselves from longstanding social constraints, but her experience is also indicative of the fact that hypocritical social barriers remain for women. Isabel Walker is a modern woman, not simply for her willingness to assert herself, but also for her awareness that her desired independence of decision and action has yet to receive full toleration in what passes for enlightened society.

In *The American*, Christopher Newman was almost constantly in motion, a characteristic which James highlighted by frequent references to his character's legs. When the Bellegarde family was hesitating over whether to allow the American to marry Claire, and she was unavailable for visits, Newman did not idle away his time in Paris. Instead, he set out on a whirlwind tour of Europe. Isabel undertakes no such journey, but she too makes abundant use of her legs. As her name indicates, she is a walker, someone who moves forward at a steady pace. Of course, while accompanying children on little strolls at family gatherings, or walking an expatriate's dog is hardly comparable to a European tour, Isabel is quite active and curious about her environment. Due in large measure to Edgar's help and encouragement, she explores Paris much more thoroughly than Newman ever did. She does not waste her time; like her nineteenth-century counterpart, she seeks to learn from her experiences. Above all she, like him, detests idleness, a condition only once forced upon Newman when he waited helplessly outside the convent in the rue d'Enfer where Claire had entombed herself. Frustrated with her dog-walking activities and her position as a "half-time girlfriend," Isabel: "hated the passivity of this life" (181). But this frustration, this idleness is the exception rather than the rule.

Both Christopher and Izzy, as her family calls her, are pragmatic in their approach to French culture. Newman is interested because he has been informed that it is the best product on the market, and Isabel is in Paris rather by chance, on a family mission. Both eventually come to respect their new surroundings, but Isabel signals her similarity to Newman, and her difference from her sister, Roxy, when she remarks, "I don't share

her unqualified admiration for all things European” (21). Although Paris becomes an attractive place for both Americans, perhaps more so for Isabel, neither ever becomes, or wishes to become, an unabashed Francophile. However their feelings about the French evolve or devolve in the course of their stories, they never lose their critical perspective. They are Americans in Paris, a condition which will always maintain them at a slight separation from their environment and from the French they encounter.

They are also to a degree different from other Americans in the French capital. James hints that Christopher’s Civil War experiences affected him more than he realized, and were perhaps the catalyst for his sudden decision to come to Europe in search of more than a trophy wife and artifacts of European culture. Isabel’s family lives on the West Coast, and that is where she spent most of her young life. Yet she is actually from the Midwest, and this difference is reflected in her long, black hair, which contrasts with the blondness of her Californian contemporaries. In California she fit in, but was never exactly the same as the young people around her. Both Christopher and Isabel are in many ways typical of their historical moment, yet factors of admittedly very dissimilar importance set them apart from their peers. Although a possible war trauma is vastly more serious than a hair color, in each case these elements function to suggest there is something different about these characters. Isabel and Christopher are quite at ease with themselves as Americans, but both novels imply that in subtle ways something is lacking in their lives, and that in Paris they are searching, albeit unconsciously, for whatever they could not find in the States.

Neither Christopher nor Izzy gives the impression of being a particularly gifted linguist, but their presence in a Francophone country puts some pressure on them to contend with the French language. Newman’s approach is casual; he acts as if learning French would be a lark at best. He makes some effort with M. Nioche, but the limited knowledge he displays in the novel suggests he still has a long way to go. As a result, when the French seek to communicate with him, it must be in English. As discussed in the first chapter, the question in *The American* of English versus French reflects the relative importance of the two nations. The United States being very much the present and the future, and France already beginning its decline, English is the language of power destined to dominate in the modern world.

Things are slightly different in *Le Divorce*. The status of English has only been enhanced; it is now the principal language of commerce, travel, and diplomacy. Where Newman was content with his halting grasp of French,

after an initial indifference, Izzy becomes quite frustrated with her slow progress in speaking and understanding. Her interest in mastering French was doubtless sparked by her affair with Edgar, but it extends beyond that. During her time in France she becomes aware that the language is much more than a facilitator for making purchases in shops, asking directions on the street, and engaging in rudimentary conversations; she comes to realize that, to some degree, it is a path to a better understanding of herself, but more significantly of a complex society and those who live in it. In this respect, Isabel is quite different from Christopher Newman. Partly through her growing facility with French, she learns more about France and its inhabitants than Newman ever did. If Christopher had been the new American for the 1860s, Izzy is the new American for the late twentieth century, someone whose sense of herself as an American and a foreigner in France is never in doubt, but who eventually comes to understand that her knowledge of the world can be enhanced by serious engagement with another culture.

Within the American expatriate community in Paris, only Mrs. Olivia Pace and Roxy appear to have any facility in French. Mrs. Pace is an established, active writer who has chosen to live in Paris. She befriends Isabel and frequently corrects her errors in French. Roxy appears quite fluent in the language, more than any other American in the novel, in part because of her marriage to Charles-Henri, but also thanks to her effort at total immersion in all things French. It is unclear how much French, if any, the other expatriates possess.

The image of the expatriates that emerges in *Le Divorce* is not substantially different from what was seen in *The American* and even more so in *The Custom of the Country* (1913), where the American community engages in what I termed “urban colonization” by creating in the middle of Paris an alternative universe from which the French were largely excluded. Johnson’s novel presents something comparable. At the center of expatriate life in *Le Divorce* is the Pace apartment, which is located on the top floor of a building in the rue Bonaparte: “Everyone in the American community hopes to be asked there” (12). Mrs. Pace is something of a matriarchal figure who reigns over a group of Americans who appear ill at ease in their foreign surroundings. Isabel admires Mrs. Pace, but senses “among all the rest of the Americans in Paris ... a clinging together in the face of a foreign culture - one that we all had chosen, however temporarily, but felt to be alien all the same” (11).

Although Mrs. Pace and her husband certainly seem to enjoy Paris, the location of their apartment suggests that the Paris they live in is not precisely the city located in France. The placement of their apartment suggests a certain distancing from the French. They live in a trendy section of Paris, but high above the streets and the everyday world of the city; while they have some French friends, the bulk of their acquaintances are Americans who are anxious to be invited into their home; in a more concentrated fashion, theirs is the alternative universe Edith Wharton captured in her novel, a place in a central part of the city, but removed from Parisian daily life. The Parisian expatriates might occasionally encounter French people of their social class or slightly higher with whom they would presumably converse in English, but dealings with the average French person would be rare. As Johnson noted in *Into a Paris Quartier*: “Our American world [in Paris] is, as it always has been, a world within a world, more or less invisible to the real inhabitants” (180). Johnson’s sense of an American enclave in Paris, largely demarcated from the city the French know, is also reflected in *Le Divorce*.

Paris provides the expatriates with a blasé sophistication, which is most often expressed in questionable profundities: “Every American in Paris is running away from something” (34). The speaker is Ames Everett, an adept at self-pity and one of Isabel’s employers (she walks his dog), who discovers in Paris the supposed difficulty, not of living abroad, but of being American: “It isn’t easy being American ... That is the final reality. It is hard. It is a moral obligation we come here to escape. We are too sensitive – I speak of us expatriates” (35). The expatriates to whom Everett is referring would not include Izzy or Christopher Newman, who are fleeing nothing. They both have a purpose for being in Paris. Very personal reasons brought them to Paris; they are searching for something, not trying to escape.

Paris, for the more typical expatriates in the novel, as it was for their predecessors in *The American*, is the past;<sup>2</sup> it is art of earlier eras (never contemporary works) and antiques that interest them. In *The American*, a crime was committed by French people. In *Le Divorce*, the opposite is true. An antique tureen is stolen by an American art historian’s British lover. The extent to which the American was involved remains unclear, but the act itself, ridiculous in comparison to the murder in James’s novel, is nevertheless symptomatic of the expatriates’ activities in France: with exceptions such as the Paces and Roxy, they take from the country, steal

from its heritage, be it objects or an aura of sophistication associated with living in Paris, and contribute nothing in return.

The Paces live in Saint-Germain-des-Prés. The French family, Roxy's in-laws, have their Parisian home in the Avenue de Wagram. Saint-Germain is one of the oldest neighborhoods in Paris; it is where the Bellegardes lived in *The American*. The Avenue de Wagram was in part renovated in the nineteenth century during the transformation of Paris by Baron Haussmann. At that time, the Avenue de Wagram was considered one of the new sections of Paris. It is in the area where Christopher Newman lived. Thus, it would appear that the Parisian neighborhoods chosen in *Le Divorce* and *The American* are direct opposites.

This is not the case, however. In the nineteenth century, the streets affected by Haussmann's renovations were associated with a new, modern Paris. Living there was expensive, but trendy for foreigners anxious to display their wealth. For the well-healed Christopher Newman, the cost was no obstacle, and was more than balanced by the space and light offered by the apartment he rented in the boulevard Haussmann. By the end of the twentieth century, the *quartiers* associated with Haussmann's changes were still considered wealthy neighborhoods, but were no longer particularly trendy. Over approximately the last half-century that honor has belonged to Saint-Germain-des-Prés, which became the stylish address for well-to-do foreigners, notably Americans. Between the 1860s and the present, the aura associated with different *quartiers* has changed, but in *Le Divorce* the areas occupied by French and Americans reflect the same status as they had in *The American*. The French live in the area of old money and tradition, an oasis of *la vieille France*, while the Americans are in the flashier section associated with the present.

Roxy's in-laws, the Persand family, display neither the dishonesty nor the hypocrisy of the Bellegardes, but they do maintain a firm sense of tradition. While the matriarch, Suzanne de Persand, lives in the Avenue de Wagram during the week, on Sundays her children and their offspring are expected to come to the family *château* near Chartres for lunch; even though no Persand family member seems particularly religious, they are, as is appropriate in their social circle, Catholic, and seem to appreciate Roxy's conversion to their faith. Yet, although the Persands appear to genuinely like Roxeanne, and make an effort to integrate her into their midst, she remains *l'américaine* (23).

Unlike the Bellegardes, the Persands' finances appear stable. They may



not be very rich – Izzy rather cattily notes that in the Avenue de Wagram apartment the Louis Quinze furniture was “covered in faded brocade or fraying needlepoint” (23) – but they are certainly well-off, and appear to have no pressing financial issues. In contrast with the Bellegardes, all the Persands seem quite active, “tall and good at sports” (22). The embodiment of the family’s vitality is Oncle Edgar. In his late sixties or early seventies, Edgar impresses Izzy with his sexual prowess, but his importance in the novel goes well beyond that. A man who has held important positions in the government, Edgar is very much involved in political discussions concerning the role France ought to be playing in the contemporary world, notably in the Bosnian crisis. His principles are conservative, and they clearly resonate with the French public since he is a frequent guest on talk shows. Edgar draws his positions from his knowledge of French political history and thought as well as from his experiences in government and the military. He distills what he believes is a fundamentally French perspective. In an era where cynicism, or at least pragmatism, is usually the order of the day, Edgar continues to think that moral considerations should play a significant role in politics. For him, France, no matter the extent to which its prestige might have diminished, can still be a powerful ethical voice on the international scene.

If French culture and politics appeared moribund in *The American*, and certainly irrelevant to the present, this is not the case in *Le Divorce*. As exemplified by Oncle Edgar, France’s reputation might well have been weakened in today’s world, symbolized by Edgar’s age and particularly his limp, probably the result of a war wound. However, the country, like the septuagenarian, remains intellectually strong and capable of having a positive influence on current events. Edgar is old as his nation is old but, as *Le Divorce* suggests, the activity and contributions of each are far from coming to an end.

In addition to the Avenue de Wagram and Saint-Germain-des-Prés, a third Parisian location merits attention. That is the rue Maître-Albert where Roxy lives, a rather narrow passage whose curious history is reflective of Izzy’s sister’s situation in France. This street is in the fifth *arrondissement*, one of the oldest sections of Paris. Yet the rue Maître-Albert has not been the rue Maître-Albert for all that long. While the street was created in the fourteenth century, the original name was the rue Perdue. Over time the name went through several permutations until 1844, when it became the rue Maître-Albert.

The street is named after Albert the Great (1193–1280), one of the foremost medieval philosophers and theologians. Albert was probably born in Germany and eventually died there. He was largely educated in Italy; between 1241 and 1254, he was at the University of Paris. Except for a brief return to Paris toward the end of his life in a vain effort to settle a dispute at the university, his time in France was relatively limited, perhaps ten or twelve years in a long life.

Albert the Great possessed a powerful intellect; he was one of his era's most gifted commentators on Aristotle, but he certainly was not of French origin. He did, however, eventually achieve notoriety in France, even though Gallic recognition, at least in terms of naming a street after him, was rather late. Nevertheless, he was a foreigner who eventually gained fame in France. In these respects, Albert's life and accomplishments become a parodic model of what Roxy hopes to achieve. While there are some surface similarities between Roxy and Albert (both are foreigners, both intellectuals with limited experience living in Paris), these are far outweighed by the differences. Albert's achievements are based on a life of hard work; Roxy's aspirations are based on some modest success placing poems in small journals.

Both Roxy and Albert went to France for specific reasons; he to work, and she as a new bride with fantasies about her talent and the greatness of her new country. Roxy is an American trying to shed her national identity and become famous as a poet in France, even if French recognition of her achievements might only come in the distant future. She sees herself primarily as an artist and an intellectual whose talent will be nourished by her environment. Albert was certainly an intellectual, but probably indifferent to being in France, since national identity did not yet exist during his era. More generally, it is hard to imagine him believing that the life of the mind had any geographical parameters.

Roxy's devotion to culture and art, and her name, associate her with a much more central French cultural figure. Roxy's full first name is Roxanne; anyone moderately acquainted with French literature will immediately associate Roxy with Roxane, the beautiful young woman smitten with the handsome but inarticulate Christian de Neuvillette in Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1897). Roxane is one of the great heroines of French theater, but she is also a *précieuse*, a blue stocking, an impressionable young woman whose love of the aesthetic and contempt for the mundane enable her to live, at least until Act V, in a make-believe world dominated

by art, poetry, and the memory of a sensitive, poetic young man who never really existed. Love and beauty mark the parameters of her existence.

The parallels between Roxeanne and Roxane are apparent. Like her French counterpart, the American is enamored of a man, Charles-Henri, who is not what she thinks; Roxy, like Roxane, strives to live in an enclosed aesthetic universe to which the vagaries of daily life have no access. Both women prefer illusion to reality. Yet there are differences between them. Roxane is more fortunate in being able to maintain her fantasy existence longer, and even in Act V her realization of her love for Cyrano makes the revelations about Christian's artistic and intellectual limitations more palatable. Roxy is not so lucky. Reality imposes when she is forced to confront Charles-Henri's passion for another woman, his subsequent demands for a divorce, and then to deal with the trauma of his murder.

The street where Roxy lives, and her association with Albert the Great and Roxane, reveal something else about Izzy's sister. Although she is in many ways different from the American expatriates, the references surrounding her link her to the past, and in that respect make her similar to most of the other Americans in Paris. Roxeanne's cultural framework turns her away from the present. She mentions no contemporary painters or writers, and the only French artwork she feels strongly about, a picture of St. Ursula, dates from the seventeenth century. The France she loves, the one in which she wishes to live, requires a nostalgic evocation of a country which probably never existed as she imagines it.

Although Isabel and Roxeanne are related by blood, their personalities and aspirations are diametrically opposed, and their differences are given a particularly literary dimension through references to the Biblical account of Martha and Mary, and Izzy's reaction to Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda*. According to the gospel of Saint Luke (10:38-42), sisters Martha and Mary receive Christ into their home. Mary forgets her chores and just sits at the feet of Jesus taking in what he says. The ever-practical Martha, on the other hand, busies herself with household tasks. In a moment of pique, she complains to Christ about her sister accomplishing nothing, but is rebuked and told that Mary is doing the right thing by listening to him.

In the Biblical context Mary is clearly right and Martha wrong, but Izzy does not see it that way. Luke's account was for her "one of the many Biblical stories from which I had drawn a moral the opposite of the one intended" (305). While Isabel knew she was "supposed to be Mary," Roxy "was Mary" (305). The moral Izzy drew, and for which she feels some guilt, is that trying

to accomplish something in the real world is preferable to idling about with one's head in the clouds. Whatever the worth of Isabel's Biblical exegesis, it accurately reflects the American half-sisters' natures and values. Roxeanne is the contemplative one, prone to passivity concerning the practical world around her, while Izzy has little time for abstractions, no matter how sublime. Roxy's world is one of beauty and truth, while her sister's is that of the waning years of the twentieth century.

Just as Izzy provides a very personal reading of the Biblical passage, her interpretation of *Maria Stuarda* is equally idiosyncratic, yet once again illuminating about her half-sister and herself. In *The American*, the scene at the opera was important because it served to contrast the great passions displayed in *Don Giovanni* with two young men's ridiculous and ultimately tragic quarrel over a courtesan. The experience of the opera in *Le Divorce*, at the elegant Opéra de Bastille with an audience in formal dress, becomes a catalyst that sharpens Izzy's sense of herself as a pragmatist living in the present and wanting to be involved with current events.

In *Maria Stuarda*, the clash between Elizabeth I of England and Mary Queen of Scots centers on whether the English queen will heed the advice of her counselors and have her cousin executed as a possible rival for the throne. Although the story has strong political overtones, in Donizetti's version the clash between is more personal than political, at least on Elizabeth's part, since she signs Mary's death warrant largely because the Scottish queen has stolen the affections of her lover, Leicester.

This is not, however, how Izzy understands the story. Her senses heightened by her stylish surroundings and the beautiful music, she imagines herself as cool-headed Elizabeth, dealing with a politically complex issue which she must nonetheless resolve. Roxy is the beautiful, impractical Queen of Scots whose tumultuous love life costs her a crown and ultimately her life. This is the path of unbridled emotions that Isabel could never take. What excites her, and what she would choose instead, is "the immediacy of power, this richness not of money but of significance, of opulent testimony to politics. My spine warmed ... the music made my throat catch" (184).

In the excitement due to the combination of the music and ambiance at the opera house, Izzy seems to have a personal epiphany concerning who she is and what her priorities are. Yet in one respect she overstates her position. The "richness ... of money" will be very important to her, as it will be to everyone in the novel, with the possible exception of Roxeanne.

Isabel introduces the financial motif early in the novel when she rephrases the opening line of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), which begins, "It is a truth universally acknowledged ..." (33). Austen continues, "that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." While these words might apply perfectly to Christopher Newman, the world has greatly changed since his era, most certainly in gender relations, as is reflected in the way Izzy reformulates Jane Austen's famous sentence to read: "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a young American person not fully matriculated must be in want of a job" (33). Izzy's version no longer centers on a male blessed with a fortune, but concerns young Americans of either sex who may well be interested in falling in love and marrying, but for whom these are secondary considerations. The primary task is making money. For her and her contemporaries, of which Roxy is not one, money is the basis of modern life. Its presence provides the possibility of happiness, while its absence pretty much insures frustration. She sees this most clearly in relation to Roxy: "Say what you like about money, that it's disgusting or a taint, it would make all the difference for Roxy between grimness and a life of art" (255). Isabel's words are not cynical; they are realistic, and not at all reflective of a single age group. Money is at least as much of a concern to the older generation as it is to the younger in this novel.

In *The American*, the financial disparity between Newman and the Bellegardes was quite simple; he had money and they did not. This is not at all the case in *Le Divorce*. Both the Walkers and the Persands are relatively well-to-do families, but they are both modern families, aware that one never has enough money. A tension between the two families, who share the same financial values, emerges concerning the painting of Saint Ursula, a probably fictitious young woman of the fourth century who allegedly led eleven thousand other virgins on a pilgrimage that ended in Cologne, where they were all massacred by Huns.

For years this painting had been in the possession of the Walkers. It was particularly beloved by Roxy, who brought it to Paris when she married Charles-Henri. At the time it was believed to have been the work of a minor master or at best a student of Georges de La Tour, the seventeenth-century French painter. As such, it was supposed to have a modest financial value. All this changed when the painting was declared to be an original de La Tour. Its value skyrocketed, as did the interest of the Persands and the Walkers in possessing the recently declared masterpiece. The French

family claimed that since it was part of the marriage and was currently in France, they had a right to it, whereas the Americans insisted it had always been theirs. French lawyers supported the Presends, while their American counterparts defended the interests of their fellow countrymen.

Although Jane Austen never wrote anything to this effect, it may also be a truth universally acknowledged that money never brings out the best in people. This is certainly the case in *Le Divorce*. The dispute over the painting's ownership severely tries the semblance of friendship and intercultural understanding. No one illustrates this strain more than Uncle Edgar, otherwise one of the most intelligent and tolerant characters in the novel.

While Izzy has the revelation about her priorities at the opera house, the process leading to it begins with her relationship with Uncle Edgar. In addition to his sexual rapport with her, Edgar was instrumental in her cultural and political education. He introduced her to fine food, had an influence on her clothing and appearances in public, and presented her to prominent members of Parisian society. Isabel has no hesitation about recognizing that she "was changing ... and it had to do with Edgar" (141). He was also at the origin of her growing awareness of "the excitement of political consciousness" (141). Yet, despite Edgar's fine qualities, he makes no effort to intervene in the inter-family financial squabble to inject a modicum of reason and common sense. In this instance, his loyalty is not to an ideal, but to his blood.

As a result of money matters, the bond between Isabel and Edgar begins to weaken, and eventually reaches the breaking point with the murder of Charles-Henri, who is killed by an American with a handgun. Edgar's reaction to this tragedy, his understandable grief, leads him to abandon his otherwise nuanced view of Americans and revert to well-known French criticisms and clichés concerning the inhabitants of the United States.

In his *Ce pays qui aime les idées*, Sudhir Hazareesingh proposes that "la pensée française est réputée pour son amour des notions générales" (16). Edgar had always displayed a tendency in this direction, and this proclivity emerges with brutal force when he addresses what he takes to be the American mentality:

You Americans seem to believe that only Americans are unequivocally blessed. That all other nations are constrained by the feebleness of their moral energy or the benightedness of their

institutions ... You Americans have the conviction – perhaps because you have been endlessly told it – that you are the freest nation in the world, which is hardly true. (293)

Edgar then goes on to refer to the high American murder rate and concludes: “Freedom to walk safely down the street is not a freedom you have” (293). In response, Isabel does not deny the gist of what he says but insists she does not think the way he describes Americans as thinking. and hopes that he does not include her in his sweeping reproach. To which he curtly replies: “You are very American, Isabel” (293).

Obviously there is truth in Edgar’s remarks concerning the plethora of guns possessed by Americans and, to a lesser degree, with regard to the American tendency to see themselves and their nation primarily in positive superlatives. Yet, by saying what he does, to whom he does, Edgar is confirming one of Izzy’s more negative judgments, that Europeans are always lumping Americans together (138). Edgar’s generalizations are rather facile, and this otherwise courtly man is quite cruel, not just to include Isabel, a woman he knows very well, in his blanket condemnation, but to turn her into the representative of her nation: “I perceived I was being held responsible for all the deficiencies of my tribe” (293).

In a novel which, unlike *The American*, attempts to offer a more nuanced approach to Franco-American conceptions of one another, this scene illustrates just how fragile is the progress toward the development of mutual understanding. Under extreme pressure, Edgar loses his better, more understanding, self, and can only utter commonplaces. The Americans are hardly any better. In fact, in this novel they are worse, since while one has the right to imagine that Edgar is reacting somewhat uncharacteristically due to painful circumstances, few Americans in the novel display any real openness to the French. The expatriates exist largely in their own world, and some newly arrived Americans come to Paris with their views of the French and their culture already formed. Chester and Margeeve Walker, Izzy and Roxy’s parents, “seemed prepared to like the city, but to disapprove of the French” (215). These otherwise intelligent people would probably feel more at home in *The American*, where national stereotypes are quite simplistic: the Americans are disingenuous and the French duplicitous. Isabel makes explicit the connection to James’s fictional universe, specifically to *Portrait of a Lady* when she mentions that her parents “had been intimating that Roxy had fallen into the hands

of impoverished European fortune hunters, like a victim out of Henry James" (228).

Nothing in *Le Divorce* would appear to illustrate the cultural divide between the French and the Americans better than the presence of EuroDisney, renamed Disneyland Paris after the publication of this novel. In *The American*, the Louvre was the symbol of France's unrivaled position at the center of nineteenth-century European high culture and the nation's political prestige. EuroDisney represents in *Le Divorce* the dominance of American popular culture in the twentieth century. It also reflects the United States' ability to impose its presence anywhere in the world.

EuroDisney is a gigantic theme park extending over twenty-two kilometers; a place where, for the price of a ticket, one can savor the delights of fantasy and make-believe created by the strength of the American imagination. Cartoon characters like Mickey, Donald, and Goofy roam the grounds; they can be addressed, and even touched, by visitors who often wish to have their picture taken with them. The various rides and attractions provide versions so compelling of an "idealized America" (263) that even the normally hardheaded Isabel succumbs to the daydreams these sights and sounds create: "I had to admit it was nice to be back in America, especially America refined to its ideal essence of gingerbread porches and Tiffany glass" (263). Compared to the Louvre, the notion of a theme park can seem to be a terrible cultural devolution, a passage from the sublime to the ridiculous, and anathema to everything France has traditionally represented. However, such a judgment, as self-evident as it may seem, would be hasty. Baudrillard's words were truer than he probably intended when he proclaimed, "La Californie n'a rien inventé" (205). The use of a theme park to project and enhance national heroic images has a long history in France. In fact, the first theme park in modern times was French.<sup>3</sup>

The *château* of Versailles was constructed in the seventeenth century at the height of France's power and prestige. It was completed in 1683. Its purpose was to celebrate France, in general, and the absolute monarchy of Louis XIV in particular. According to Jean-Marie Apostolidès, in the seventeenth century the image of Louis XIV was such that "La France s'est définie comme une nation à travers l'imaginaire du corps symbolique du roi" (*Le roi machine*, 7). In 1683, Louis's reign was at its peak, and the *château's* symbolism enhanced his greatness to the extent that "L'image solaire de Louis XIV ... sera ... fixée à Versailles" (86).



In the Hall of Mirrors, the king is represented in the figure of a Roman Emperor; he is Apollo in the Great Apartment, and in Versailles's Chapel, Louis's place was under a large picture of the Holy Spirit descending upon the divinely chosen person (one of Louis's baptismal names was "Dieudonné") in order to impart wisdom.<sup>4</sup>

The *château* and its gardens were very beautiful, but the main attraction was undoubtedly the king himself. Each day he was surrounded and admired by a large audience of courtiers who had paid a price to be present at Versailles. They had chosen to leave their *châteaux forts*, more often than not to accept less-than-ideal lodging in the palace, and conform to the strict protocol governing daily life at court, a protocol that emphasized the priority of the king. Louis XIV was not first among equals; he was the absolute monarch, clearly superior to all who surrounded him. The nobles would have to sacrifice their personal comfort and freedom for the pleasure of proximity to the royal presence and access to the splendor of the surroundings which they were permitted to visit. The king, like the Disney stars, was a spectacle; if the latter were creations of pure fantasy, the king was also, to some degree, a fantasy figure to his subjects, and his presence at Versailles, amid so many elements exalting his stature, only enhanced that image.

EuroDisney is not simply a French success; it attracts people from all over Europe and visitors from other continents as well. The Disneyland theme park concept, centering largely on escapist fantasies, dates back at least to 1955, when the first park was opened in California. Since then it has inspired many imitations throughout the world.<sup>5</sup> Versailles achieved much the same renown. It became the model for royal residences throughout Europe, where efforts were made to imitate the architecture and the elaborate protocol associated with the Roi Soleil, with varying degrees of success.

Versailles in its heyday was a vibrant image of French absolutism and power. It also was a reflection of the country's exemplary achievements in architecture, painting, landscaping, and literature associated with the century of Louis XIV. The fact that Versailles is essentially a museum today indicates that the particular version of France it glorified has passed into history, whereas EuroDisney's current success illustrates the United States' continuing dominance on the world stage. Yet saying that the sort of theme park Versailles represented, a melding of social and cultural achievement associated with the presence of a powerful individual or individuals, is no

longer alive in France is contradicted by a reading of *Le Divorce*. EuroDisney is not the only theme park in the novel. In keeping with France's diminished importance, it is smaller than the American version but, proportions aside, the second park continues to attract visitors from around the world.

The *quartier* of Saint-Germain-des-Prés appears in *Le Divorce* as a contemporary theme park, a place where a slightly imagined past encounters a fantasy-seeking present, a neighborhood where full access to the delights offered by this world requires that money change hands.

Immediately after the end of World War II the Saint-Germain-des-Prés area of Paris became the intellectual center of France and, for a brief period, of Europe. Boris Vian details its parameters: "1. Au nord: quais Malaquais et Conti, 2. Au sud: rues de Vieux-Colomier et Saint-Sulpice, 3. À l'est: rue de Saints-Pères, 4. À l'ouest: rue Dauphine et de l'Ancienne Comédie" (14). The massive destruction wrought by the war had destroyed or severely hampered the functioning of many European cities, while Paris emerged relatively unscathed since shortly before the French defeat in 1940 it was declared an open city. As a result, at the war's end Parisian buildings were still intact, public utilities and transportation were more or less operational, and finding lodging was a possibility if not a certainty. For these reasons refugees from all over the continent were attracted to Paris. Something of an artistic haven in the pre-war era, Saint-Germain had by 1947 developed a certain cachet which made it "*un des pôles d'attraction du 'monde intellectuel' (sic) ou plus simplement du public*" (Vian, 7; emphasis original).

An artistic and intellectual clientele frequented the Café Flore, the Café Deux Magots, the Brasserie Lipp, or all three, but in the postwar era the *quartier* became particularly celebrated because of the frequent presence of France's most prominent intellectuals, Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre,<sup>6</sup> who spent most of their day in the Flore. Albert Camus was often there, as were the coterie of admirers and acolytes whom these superstar intellectuals attracted. Certainly Saint-Germain was a place of intense intellectual activities. Many of the discussions/arguments found in *Les Mandarins* were supposed to have taken place in one of these cafés. The influential Marxist journal *Les Temps modernes*, founded by Sartre and de Beauvoir, emerged from some of these encounters, as did the once-trendy philosophy known as existentialism. When American tourists again began to return to Europe, Saint-Germain was something of a mecca for the intellectually minded or simply the celebrity gawkers. They would frequent

the Deux Magots, the Lipp, or the Flore in the hope of spotting one of these luminaries or even some of their lesser counterparts. According to Boris Vian, however, even by the time the first onslaught of tourists descended on the *grands cafés*, it was already too late: “On se rua au Flore, aux Deux Magots, au Lipp, à la Rhumerie pour voir les hommes célèbres. Eux n’y étaient déjà plus” (91).

By the time the story of *Le Divorce* unfolds, the postwar Saint-Germain-des-Prés is long gone. The principal attractions are dead, and the number of bookstores in the area is in the process of declining, often to be replaced by high-end boutiques. The cafés remain, and those seated on the terrace have the curious pleasure of hearing street musicians play and sing, with various degrees of success, songs associated with Edith Piaf, Boris Vian, and Juliette Greco, all representatives of the putative golden age of the great French thinkers. Yet the fact that Saint-Germain is now a very different place does little to deter tourists. As Diane Johnson observes in *Into a Paris Quartier*: “The quarter of Saint-Germain-des-Prés may be the most visited and written about of all the Parisian neighborhoods” (7). What draws the tourists, many of whom are American, is “the recent past [the postwar era], the heyday that comes to people’s minds when you say ‘St.-Germain-des-Prés’” (7).

The merchants of this *quartier* seek to exploit this quasi-intellectual mystique. First of all, by attempting to give the impression that not all that much has changed since the late 1940s. The Lipp and Deux Magots continue to award literary prizes, a practice initiated in the 1930s, and the Flore got in on the act by creating the Prix de Flore in 1994. Cultural events still take place in the area, and while not exactly of the popular sort that would feature Mickey or Donald, they tend to emphasize art of the well-known and well-loved variety. Once again, Diane Johnson: “La Place St.-Germain-des-Prés: Concerts are held in the church many nights of the week, heavily emphasizing Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons*” (75).

Yet the real business of Saint-Germain, as of any theme park, is commerce. While tourists are invited to absorb the area’s intellectual atmosphere while sipping a drink at the Deux Magots or the Flore, should they look across the street, they will see in the space where Le Drugstore used to stand an Emporio Armani boutique. Farther to the right is a Sonia Rykiel, and to the south at the Place Saint-Sulpice is an Yves Saint-Laurent store which itself is not far from Christian Lacroix’s boutique. In addition to these name brand operations, there are many smaller clothes and shoe stores seeking to appeal to the foreign visitors. An area which once had

considerable intellectual distinction, is now distinguished in a different manner, having become a “glossy consumer paradise” (Johnson, 9).

There is, of course, nothing wrong with neighborhoods changing and one type of commerce replacing another. The point I wish to make is that in terms of *Le Divorce*, and in the broader context of contemporary Paris, Saint-Germain-des-Prés functions as a theme park: it is an outdoor shopping mall whose attractiveness depends to a significant extent on the exploitation of the area’s earlier history. It provides the fantasy that the past is very much alive, while its real focus is on contemporary consumerism. Just as at EuroDisney visitors can stroll freely about and marvel at what they see, in Saint-Germain-des-Prés they can wander through some of the narrow streets, pay homage to departed icons at Place Jean-Paul Sartre et Simone de Beauvoir (between the Deux Magots and the church of Saint-Germain), and explore the merchandise proposed in boutiques large and small.<sup>7</sup> In their attempts to relive the past, to delve more deeply into French culture while nonetheless enjoying the offerings of the present, these people are abetted in their efforts by English-speaking guides, the waiters, and sales people of the *quartier* Saint-Germain.

The ending of *The American* is a model of clarity and decisiveness; the same cannot be said for the final pages of *Le Divorce*, yet these hint at a significant change in American attitudes toward France. In one of Christopher Newman’s rare emotional moments, he initially decides to stay in Paris and maintain a vigil before the convent Claire has entered in the hope that she would soon change her mind and return to the secular world. However, with the passage of time he begins to accept the foolishness of this gesture. Sadly, but calmly, Christopher determines that he is wasting his time, so cuts his losses and returns to the United States, presumably never to return to France.

At the end of *Le Divorce*, Isabel, rather like Newman, is in a quandary, but one that she cannot yet resolve. Her relationship with Edgar, as with the entire Persand family, is strained and perhaps irretrievably broken. Even if it is not, and she can manage some sort of reconciliation with Edgar, the age difference will eventually exact its toll. She remains in shock over Charles-Henri’s murder and upset by the continuing legal wrangling over the portrait of Saint Ursula. A sensible option for her would be to get out of Paris and return to California, having experienced for the most part a very worthwhile, albeit uncanonical, version of a junior year abroad. She might then re-enroll in film school and in time make a film of her French

experiences based on her narrative (the novel), which she has already framed as a scenario.

Yet Isabel appears inclined to move in a different direction, one which might involve staying in France. It is, however, a measure of her highly emotional state that her language, in mulling this possibility, is uncharacteristically hyperbolic and even melodramatic. She begins with the sort of false profundity favored by her expatriate acquaintance, Ames Everett: "Are Americans still Americans when they are transplanted?" (309). The obvious, indeed banal response is that everyone is to a degree affected by a radical change in environment, but the extent and the duration depends upon the individual. Yet what makes this hypothetical question even sillier is that she implies that it might be applicable to Lieutenant William Calley and herself (309), two people with remarkably dissimilar experiences abroad. Izzy is not Roxy; at no point in the novel has she expressed the slightest desire to abandon her American identity for a French one. Obviously, an extended stay in France will change her, and the degree of that change will depend in large measure on whether she engages more actively with the American expatriate community or ventures instead further into French society. But for the French and herself, she will always be "l'Américaine."

Izzy moves from hyperbole to melodrama when in emotionally fraught terms she imagines herself as a person "without a country, planning to go to Zagreb, planning to lunch with an under-minister of culture, planning to drink a lot of orange tisane, planning to really buckle down to study French" (309).

The crucial word here is "planning"; Isabel remains quite uncertain about what she really will do. Going to Zagreb would combine her personal and professional wishes: to be with Edgar and help out with the refugee situation, but whether either aspiration could be realized remains uncertain. Attempting to perfect her French is admirable, while drinking tea and dating a man closer to her age are activities she could engage in anywhere in the world, although spending time with a French man would help improve her language skills. "Planning" is not, however, "doing," and at the novel's end the normally self-confident and decisive Isabel Walker finds herself in a state of extreme indecision.

This uncertainty is nevertheless the mark of her achievement in France. She has learned to function in French and has begun to develop a knowledge of the country's society and culture that goes beyond what guidebooks normally provide. Christopher Newman had specific goals in

going to France; when they were not met, he simply returned to his native country. Isabel has no specific goals when she arrives in Paris besides the vague desire to help her half-sister. She develops intellectual interests and a personal involvement with an older French man there, yet nothing suggests that she is satisfied with what she has achieved in either area. Her political development is far from completed, and her interest in dating a young French diplomat implies that, if needed, there will be an *après Edgar*. So remaining in France is a positive, albeit more complicated option than would be returning to California and finishing her formal education. While *Le Divorce* lacks the closure and self-assurance of *The American*, it provides something much more modern: the portrait of an American young woman willing to enter into a different culture to such an extent as to occasionally lose her way in it, yet refusing to abandon her efforts to understand different manners of thinking and behaving. None of which is to say that Isabel Walker will choose to stay in France and pursue her informal education. Readers of her story can simply appreciate the parameters of her options as well as the extent to which she departs from earlier portrayals of Americans in France. One can merely hope that such a woman would make the choice that is right for her.

## Notes

1 Throughout the novel Edgar is referred to by the French “Oncle,” rather than the English “Uncle.”

2 Here again, Mrs. Pace is the exception. She lives in the present and that is what she prefers to think about (133).

3 I want to express my gratitude to Professor Robert Neuman, my friend and colleague at Florida State University, for first suggesting to me that Versailles could be viewed as the first modern theme park.

4 Apostolidès provides a very practical example of Louis XIV’s alleged wisdom which underscores the symbolic nature of Versailles, while at the same time enhancing the king’s special role at the *château*: “Versailles se présente tout entier comme une immense piste: chaque statue possède un sens qu’il faut retrouver. L’ensemble du jardin compose un texte dont le roi possède la signification et qu’il déchiffre pour les visiteurs qu’il désire honorer” (56).

5 A short, arbitrary list of such places would include Puy du Fou (1978), Futuroscope (1987), Parc Astérix (1989), and France Miniature (1991), but theme parks have become legion in France and Europe.

6 For Boris Vian, these two were the undisputed stars of the intellectual life in this area of Paris: “le lancement récent de Saint-Germain-des-Prés est en grande partie dû à leur renom littéraire, et que si les tôleurs du coin avaient trois sous d’honnêteté, Simone de Beauvoir et Sartre devraient consommer gratis dans tous les bistrotts qu’ils ont lancés” (123). Vian declares that “Saint-Germain-des-Prés a retrouvé sa splendeur d’antan” thanks to Jean-Paul Sartre (36).

7 Sartre and Albert Camus T-shirts are available but can only be purchased online.





# Conclusion

## Stasis and Movement

Americans have often traveled to France in search of refuge from the pressures of life in the United States.

(Laurence Wylie in Stanley Hoffmann,  
*In Search of France*, 159)

Même les idiots ont cessé d'être heureux.

(Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Ce pays qui aime les idées*, 347)

*Frères ennemis* has focused on the ways in which selected French and American literary texts have constructed the image(s) of the two peoples over the last century and a half. I would like to begin this conclusion with a brief recapitulation of the principal ideas developed in the preceding chapters, and then proceed to consider some broader ramifications concerning what Jacques Chirac described as the “conflictive and excellent” rapport between the United States and France (Kuisel, *The French Way*, 91).

Borrowing significantly from Roland Barthes’s conception of myth, *Frères ennemis* deals in part with images which human beings had and have of each other and of their respective countries, images perceived as unstable concepts, created essentially by mixtures of historical circumstances and the needs of the moment. Henry James’s title, *The American*, illustrates this quite clearly. The main character is finally not Christopher Newman, but rather what he represents, the volatile myth he embodies, which is that of the American. The Bellegarde family undergo the same transformation. Initially, they are simply French people; in the course of

the novel they sometimes become the French. Yet, in accordance with the most significant aspect of Barthes's theory, these images are not stable. They can change in an instant, and the American and the French can briefly become individuals again. Although the form of the national images is volatile, the content is relatively stable, at least in its formulation in James's novel. The American is wealthy, vigorous, yet culturally undeveloped and naïve – the embodiment of the present and the future. The French are intellectually sophisticated and cultured, but financially strained, somewhat untrustworthy, and aware that their nation, for all its achievements in the past, is losing ground to the American upstart. This paradigm for the French and Americans' perceptions of each other is established in *The American*, and recurs in various transformations in American novels until the beginning of the twenty-first century. French fiction embraced a version of this paradigmatic structure up until the middle of the Cold War.

That subsequent American novelists would be tempted to accept, or at least were influenced to some degree, by James's caricature of the French is somewhat surprising but understandable. At the time he published *The American*, James was one of the few citizens of his country with an experience of Europe and a willingness to write about the continent. Thus, his views had more influence than they probably deserved. What he provided, both in *The American* and his other "European" novels, was the initial filter through which other Americans could begin forming their views of Europe. However, quite rapidly, a significant element in the Jamesian paradigm would be reversed. The confrontation of the innocent American and the arrogant French was transformed by Edith Wharton and subsequent writers into supercilious Americans exploiting the more open-minded French. The basis for the supposed American superiority was wealth, even relative wealth (*The Sun Also Rises*), combined with a sense of national entitlement, since the United States was considered by its citizens to be the greatest, most powerful nation in the world.

Why the French would accept a vision of Americans that roughly corresponds to James's portrait is somewhat more complicated. Part of the explanation is due to the fact that de Tocqueville's influential study of the young democracy describes Americans as ambitious, successful, more pragmatic than philosophical, perhaps incapable of great cultural achievements, and yet the harbingers of the world to come. In de Tocqueville's version of Americans, which greatly influenced James, they

were a people to be admired, but also looked down upon to a degree, and feared. De Tocqueville played the same role for the French as James did for the Americans. Both functioned as *passeurs* who brought a different culture to the attention of their fellow citizens, without having particularly strong rivals to counterbalance other viewpoints. However, in addition to the role played by de Tocqueville, the French would witness the political and social involvements of the United States with more interest than the Americans would follow what was happening in France. Between the publication of James's novel and the beginning of the twenty-first century, the United States had established itself as a major world power, if not *the* major power. During the same period, French importance had declined. Thus the Americans, aided by their insular tendencies, could ignore what was happening in France, whereas the French, particularly the intelligentsia, became increasingly suspicious of American aims, and keenly aware of the contradictions within American society. What they experienced, filtered through speeches, newspapers, books, and eventually radio and television, were images of a mighty, politically conservative nation viscerally opposed to communism and other leftist movements. For many in France, the United States was a country attempting to dominate on the international scene while at the same time seemingly incapable of resolving its internal social and racial conflicts. *Les Mandarins*, the last French novel discussed which illustrates a version of the paradigm developed from Barthes's theory of myth, provides a perfect example of this Gallic sense of the States during the Cold War.

It is unlikely that Villiers de l'Isle-Adam ever read Henry James, but he most certainly would have read de Tocqueville, whose portrait of Americans addressed their supposed psychological naivety, their lack of talent for artistic creation, and potential for overconfidence. American psychological immaturity and intellectual arrogance are at the center of *L'Ève future*, a novel which both recognizes and fears the strength of the Yankee determination to succeed. By making Thomas Edison his central character, the French author was reflecting his admiration for American scientific genius at the same time as he was using Edison's status to highlight what he took to be serious flaws in the American character. Edison's psychological and moral shallowness is best perceived in the nature of his invention. He did not create a woman; his android is a caricature of a woman, a replica of a female, but without the aspects of womanhood that men might find offensive. Hadaly is sweet, lovely, gentle, and completely submissive. She

will never question male judgment; she exists to serve Lord Ewald's every whim. In contrast to Edison, Ewald is British, a dandy, and a bit of a fop. Yet his nationality serves an important function in the novel. Unlike his American friend, he does not have the scientific brilliance or imagination to construct such a creature; Hadaly is a tribute to unbridled American ingenuity, unaffected by ethical considerations.

*L'Ève future* contains no French characters. Edith Wharton's *The Custom of the Country* also has limited Gallic presence. It details the strength of American social ambition in France, an ambition that involves slowly but inexorably pushing the few French characters to the fictional and geographical periphery of the story. In what I have termed "urban colonialization," Undine Spragg and her like-minded, albeit less gifted, friends demarcated as their own a significant part of the Paris created by Baron Haussmann, and turned it into an American protectorate where the French, if they were admitted at all, existed to serve the vanity and social ambitions of rich Americans. The French were marginalized in their own city, pushed to the edges of society, if not thrust completely out of the picture.<sup>1</sup> To the extent that remnants of French culture had any function in this new, Americanized Paris, it was to serve as trophies (tapestries, paintings, fashionable real estate), symbols of the Yankee conquest of the Old World.

The Americans in *The Custom of the Country* fancied they were absorbing French culture by possession but they were in fact using the strong American dollar to amuse themselves in a foreign, yet Americanized setting. The characters in Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* come mostly from different social backgrounds than the inhabitants of Wharton's world, and have, for the most part, a much more violent European experience. Yet their activities are really only a logical extension of what Undine Spragg and her friends were doing, although on a different social level. Hemingway's characters turn France and Spain into a vast playground whose sundry entertainments are made possible by a steady infusion of American money. Here again the Europeans (French or Spanish) have become *figurants*, bit players whose primary function is to make sure that *la fête continue*. Occasionally a supernumerary like Pedro Romero usurps a larger role for a time, but eventually fades into the background. What remains is a band of bored, rather childish expatriates living in a self-indulgent universe where one day resembles the next, and where the sun rises only to shine on a repetition of the day before.

Simone de Beauvoir's *Les Mandarins* portrays Franco-American tensions on both the political and the personal level. The novel is divided into two deceptively distinct sections. This simple division does not do justice to *Les Mandarins*' intellectual content. Although it is obvious that a large part of the first section focuses on the putative danger created by American might and presence on French soil, its real subject is the disarray of French intellectuals in the postwar era, and their ill-fated romance with the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> These intellectuals, in opting to ignore the negative aspects of Stalin's regime, sacrificed their credibility, and thereby undermining both their critique of the United States and their defense of the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup>

The much more compelling critique of American arrogance of power emerges in the section describing the love affair between Anne and Lewis. Anne represents France and Louis the United States. If the intellectuals in the first part of *Les Mandarins* confront the United States primarily in terms of the interpretation of ideas and political positions, Anne experiences *l'Américain* and *l'Amérique* in a deeply personal way. She is in the States, involved with one of its citizens, and exposed to various aspects of American culture. For most of their liaison, Lewis bends Anne to his will, and only painfully can she take some distance from him. She loved him at the beginning and, for justifiable reasons, became disillusioned with him by the end. For Anne, Americans possess many qualities, but the problem she discerns in them echoes what was emphasized in *L'Ève future*: the uneasy combination of vast power and a potentially dangerous psychological and emotional immaturity. In the final pages of *Les Mandarins*, Anne returns to a dreary Paris, disenchanted with Lewis but aware that for the foreseeable future he will remain a presence in her life in much the same way as American influence will linger in France.

Anti-American sentiment among France's intellectual elite peaked during the Sartre era; by the 1970s, while the potential for annoyance and real anger remained and was occasionally acted upon, as evidenced by the reaction to Vietnam, the French had moved more toward absorbing American culture rather than rejecting it. The American cultural and commercial invasion of France, which developed apace with the *Trente Glorieuses* and beyond, had simply become part of French life; it affected French households (appliances), leisure time (movies and eventually television serials), cultural activities (pop music and fiction), and even eating habits (fast food).<sup>4</sup>

In Jean Echenoz's *Cherokee*, the American presence is felt throughout: in the music, the film references, and the characterization. The title refers to an American jazz composition, the prose echoes jazz rhythms, and scenes often seem structured as if they were parts of an American movie – which, to a degree, they are. The characters are American cinematic prototypes: the gangster, the shady lady, and two buffoonish detectives. Traditional French culture is relegated to the suburbs, where it is either stored for another occasion in warehouses or transformed into the names of streets in the *banlieues*. All this can sound rather grim, yet if it is treated comically in *Cherokee*, it is because French culture has proven more resilient than many French feared; it has certainly not been crushed by American influences. Rather, in Echenoz's novel, French artistic culture has transformed the American models into something that is truly a hybrid of the two cultures. Historically, jazz, played by French musicians, was prominent in France well before World War II; France had been producing film noir before the Liberation, and if Ripert and Bock recall Laurel and Hardy, they may also remind a French audience of Dupond and Dupont. Finally, the film being made in the novel, presumably to be entitled *Cherokee*, is a Franco-American production and highlights the strengths and weaknesses of both traditions.

If *Cherokee* represented the mingling of two artistic traditions without doing serious damage to either, Paul Auster's *The Book of Illusions* is an American novel strongly influenced by French literary and intellectual culture. Auster came to maturity during the heyday of "French Theory" and has spent considerable time in France. His exposure to French fiction is particularly clearly reflected in *The Book of Illusions*, whose structure gives priority to psychological drama over physical action. This leads to a text more comfortably in the French tradition and thus helps explain the author's popularity and high reputation in the Hexagon, while it also suggests reasons for the lesser enthusiasm his work elicits in his own country. Another quality of Auster's writing that can seem more acceptable to the French than to Americans is his frequent reliance on chance to move his story forward. While chance is a commonplace of daily life, it is potentially a difficult phenomenon to make plausible in a literary text, since it can readily appear artificial and contrived, a contemporary *deus ex machina*. This danger may be less of an obstacle to a literary French readership, which has been exposed to discussions of the concept by the Surrealists and the members of Oulipo, who have argued for and against

the role of chance in artistic creation. To some extent, the enthusiasm which Auster's work has inspired among French critics also reflects the desire of the latter to reassert the vitality of intellectual and artistic life in the Hexagon by arguing that Auster's artistic accomplishments demonstrate France's continuing ability to assert a significant cultural influence even on the dominant Western power.

The United States that Dominique Falkner explores in *Ça n'existe pas l'Amérique* is not really a world power. In fact, it is not even *l'Amérique* as the term is commonly understood. It is a relatively small section of the country running approximately from Chicago to Missoula, Montana. Falkner's approach, in contrast to Baudrillard's, is to emphasize particular experiences over broad judgments. Falkner's slice of the States consists of places which either expose or hide histories of violence, idealism, or greed, areas inhabited by people who are bizarre, intelligent, eccentric, bitter, or some unequal mixture of these attributes. In *Ça n'existe pas l'Amérique* the author does not explain, he describes. The anecdote is given pride of place over analysis, while history is used simply to provide a context for a particular incident, which the reader will evaluate. Little effort is expended on defining the American character or the nature of American society.

The very modesty of Falkner's approach sets him apart from most French commentators who continue to favor a broad perspective on *l'Amérique* and its denizens. Baudrillard published *Amérique* in 1986, but his approach is far from outdated. In 2006, Bernard-Henri Lévy, at the request of *The Atlantic Monthly*, made a trip throughout the United States as a sort of twenty-first-century de Tocqueville. Where de Tocqueville's geographic scope was limited, Lévy covered over twenty thousand kilometers ranging from the East to the West coast. Despite the twenty years separating *Amérique* from *American Vertigo*, their methods, if not writing styles,<sup>5</sup> are quite similar. Both indulge in sweeping generalization,<sup>6</sup> and express admiration for Americans, while suggesting that they are not quite on an intellectual par with their European counterparts. Early in *Amérique*, Baudrillard appears to lament American indifference to the splendor of continental thinking, whereas Lévy expresses his dislike for neoconservative ideas as exemplified by Bill Kristol, who has not read European luminaries such as "Strauss, Arendt, Julien Benda" (283). What distinguishes Falkner's approach from that of commentators such as Baudrillard and Lévy is that he remains with specifics, always leaving the conclusions, grand or modest, to the reader.

Aside from an obvious curiosity about *l'Amérique*, the narrator of *Ça n'existe pas l'Amérique* appears to arrive in Chicago with no particular assumptions about the country. This is not the case with Isabel Walker, the heroine of Diane Johnson's *Le Divorce*. When she lands in Paris, Izzy has many *idées fixes* which, to her credit, she manages to shed over the course of the story. *Le Divorce* is a contemporary rewrite of *The American*; it is a sly novel which develops more than reiterates the major situations and assumptions in James's work. With Johnson, the French become a much more complex people presented with their good qualities and faults, and in no sense moral inferiors to the Americans, which was the case in *The American*. What does linger from the earlier novel is a sense of mutual mistrust between Americans and French. The expatriates seem to be largely contemporary versions of James's expatriate couple, the Tristrams; they are Americans who for the most part band together and carefully monitor their encounters with the "foreigners" who are the French. On the other hand, Isabel develops a much greater interest in the French people and their culture than ever Christopher Newman did. In fact, the most striking innovation in *Le Divorce* is not the gender switch, the hero becoming the heroine, but Isabel's indecision concerning whether she should stay in France or return to the States. In all the novels read in this study, Isabel is the only American who expresses an interest in better understanding *contemporary* French culture and society. It is not coincidental that she is also the only American who makes a serious, sustained effort to learn French. That said, it should not be forgotten that the paradigm Johnson follows in this novel is essentially one featuring rather simplistic dichotomies over one hundred and fifty years old. A possible retort is that such a choice is only natural in a rewriting of Henry James, but one might also wonder why someone with Johnson's extensive knowledge of life in Paris would not chose to develop James's simplifications more thoroughly, rather than merely reframe some of his more questionable assumptions. Of course, a possible rejoinder to this objection would be to say that from Johnson's informed perspective, French and American attitudes toward each other have not changed that much since James's day.

In terms of Franco-American relations, the most significant historical phenomenon during the period from the second half of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twenty-first was the rapid rise of American influence and the slow decline of French prestige. This shift has constituted the background for all the works I have discussed. The United States'



expanding power in international affairs infused its citizens with a certain confidence and even arrogance concerning their national and personal superiority. For the French it was a shock and humiliation to see their reputation decline in the face of a country with little history and minimal cultural achievements. The American books discussed here do not fundamentally challenge this change; it is perceived simply as a historical reality, which energizes Americans in often questionable ways, and expresses itself, in the direst French manifestations, in the nightmare of a brazen people usurping the rights and privileges of their betters. However, in the American novels there are several patterns which underscore the potential dangers inherent in this sense of national pre-eminence.

The first involves the insistent use of English. *The American* made clear that while Christopher Newman was very interested in acquiring a French wife and artifacts of French culture, his desire to learn the French language was limited. In this respect, *The American* establishes a behavioral pattern that would be reiterated in the ensuing novels: where the French are obliged to speak English if they wish to have any meaningful communication with Americans, the Yankees feel no such need.<sup>7</sup> The world of the present and the future is either on the way to becoming American or has already done so. Consciously or not, the Americans and the French know that. In *The Custom of the Country*, the Americans in Paris appear to have a limited grasp of the native language, but their smattering of French is simply a necessary annoyance for them, a tool which allows them to communicate with the help. In *The Sun Also Rises*, Jake and Lady Brett seem to know French, but they are the exceptions and, in any case, apart from an occasional gesture on Jake's part, prolonged conversation with the locals is avoided; one can argue whether these characters reflect, in any but an ironic sense, a Lost Generation, but what they certainly have not lost is a sense of the privileged life bestowed upon them by the almighty dollar. Along with that comes the assumption that if the natives wish to communicate with them, they must do so in the American idiom. Concerning the need to master American English, *Les Mandarins* offers the most ironic example. In a novel whose first part reflects a period of strong French anti-Americanism, a desire to limit the American presence on French soil, the second section underscores on a personal and implicitly political level the need to know English, if for no other reason than to be able to better understand the American lover and the country he represents.<sup>8</sup> Nobody in *Cherokee* speaks English, but to the extent that cultural artifacts are a language of sorts, the American

vernacular suffuses the novel in the forms of movies and their characters, as well as the omnipresence of jazz played by American musicians.

The depiction of the expatriate communities in the American novels also constitutes an implicit caution concerning American dominance. This assumed pre-eminence expresses itself in the behavior of expatriates as a sense of superiority to the French and a preference to remain together as Americans rather than mingle with “the foreigners” or treat them as equals. In *The American*, this was not always the case. Mrs. Tristram was an intelligent and sensitive woman with some French friends who appeared to find in France an alternate, albeit isolated universe, where she could surround herself with like-minded Americans and immerse herself in an idealized version of French culture.

Mr. Tristram, however, was another matter, and the character type destined to have a greater influence in subsequent American literature. He was loud, vulgar, and indifferent to the cultural opportunities available in Paris. In these respects, he was perhaps the prototype of the caricature known as “the typical American tourist.” The expatriates encountered in most of the novels are, with the possible exception of those in *The Sun Also Rises*, not particularly loud and vulgar, but like Mr. Tristram they prefer to keep their distance from the French. This desire is reflected in the places they live and their tendency to band together in a way that either excludes the French or makes them a people of secondary importance. While one might argue that this preferred isolation suggests a degree of cultural intimidation in the face of the French achievements which surround them, I would suggest that it is a projection of an American arrogance of power, which pays lip service to the accomplishments of other cultures but maintains that the American model, for all its flaws, remains the finest. To live abroad allows for a nostalgia with regard to the putative excellences of the United States without having to be involved in the nation’s specific problems. It also permits indulgence in the beauties of another country without having to relinquish one’s sense of national excellence, or overly concern oneself with the host country’s political and social issues. Finally, using a place like Paris as a background for personal activities can be viewed as adding a degree of culture and sensitivity to one’s self-image; it becomes a means of suggesting a certain superiority over less fortunate compatriots.

The image of expatriates in *Le Divorce* is a not particularly subtle variation on this general orientation. The clannishness, the condescension

regarding the folks back home, the assumption that Paris somehow bestows a degree of sophistication on the its expatriate inhabitants if not necessarily on the Parisians – all these remain, but what is added to this mix is an outdated anti-Americanism, which clashes with the more common American nostalgia for the home country. Ames Everett was noted for “the special rancor he bore America, for he never failed to badmouth it” (35). This is a man who, according to Isabel, is famous in the States, “even revered ... in his coterie” (35), yet he dislikes his native country intensely. Perhaps Ames’s hatred has personal origins, but the novel says nothing on this. It is therefore possible that this angry American intellectual is indulging in an anti-Americanism once fashionable in France but which by the 1990s has become much less pronounced. If the clannishness of expatriates indicates that they never really desert the United States, Ames’s behavior suggests that, in attempting to emulate trendy French attitudes, they succeed only in demonstrating that they are as much removed from the world of contemporary France as they are from that of the States. The expatriates in *Le Divorce* live in an elaborate cocoon where Mr. Tristram, after some adjustments for the passage of time and progress, would doubtless feel at home.

It would appear that Christopher Newman is the rare American to arrive in Paris with a relatively open mind. Others ventured overseas with a variety of *idées fixes*, ranging from Undine Spragg’s initial desire to be dazzled by Europeans, a sentiment which rapidly changed into a rather cynical sense of how the cultural products of the Old World could be manipulated to enhance her reputation in the New World, to Isabel Walker’s combination of indifference and slight *méfiance* when first setting foot in Paris. Yet, however different the American characters’ thinking about France, with the exception of Izzy, they all share one fundamental assumption that is illustrated in the opening pages of *The American* when Christopher strolls into the Louvre. France, Paris, and, by extension, Europe, are the past, a world of slightly obsolete cultural monuments which are a major part of the place’s charm and thus have a deep, genuine appeal to American visitors. While Laurence Wylie was correct when he noted that “Americans have often traveled to France in search of a refuge from the pressures of life in the United States” (159), such a statement is probably applicable to most tourists from most countries. However, for Americans in the novels discussed, this “refuge” takes the particular form of concentrating on France’s past glories and turning one’s back on France’s

contemporary situation in order to create a uniquely American refuge on European soil. With the exception of *Le Divorce*, little interest is shown in ordinary French people or daily French life.

The distrust of the French which the Bellegardes created in Christopher Newman persists, certainly in literature, to the present. As we moved from Henry James to Diane Johnson, France for Americans evolved or devolved from being a mysterious place with excellent mementos of the past, to becoming an American colony, then a playground, and ultimately in *Le Divorce*, a theme park. The ending of *Le Divorce* offers a suggestion that the rigid American attitude toward France, its people, culture, and contemporary situation is beginning to change, but for the moment that is more of a hope than a reality.

By contrast, the French attitude toward Americans, after an initial inclination to view Americans along the lines de Tocqueville and by extension James, suggested, and then in a more politically negative fashion, has shown signs of becoming much more nuanced and open to development since the post-World War II era. As discussed in the chapters devoted to *Cherokee* and *Ça n'existe pas l'Amérique*, the American reputation in France was improving due to a combination of the prosperity spurred by the *Trente Glorieuses*, French recognition of its own racism, a perceived weakening of American power, 9/11, and the Obama presidency. One might add that French willingness to venture on vacations outside of the Hexagon and visit *l'Amérique* resulted in a calling into question of some of the crasser French attitudes toward the States. Given all these reasons for a possible change in Gallic attitudes, the French remain, despite their own failures in this area, appalled by American racism, as well as by the easy access to arms, and the United States' inability to untangle the mess created in the Middle East in large part by American international policies.

All the above explanations for France's readjustment of its attitudes toward the American nation have to do with perception of the States, a viewpoint that most likely will be radically altered by the Trump presidency.<sup>9</sup> However, aside from how Trump's policies will affect Franco-American relations, literary and otherwise, French authors' more positive, or at least more open-minded, recent attitudes toward *l'Amérique* have also to do with the frustration common today in France among people of all social backgrounds. Broadly stated, it is an impatience and anger with recent governments' mismanagement of the nation. Particularly since the financial crisis of 2008, France has been largely stagnant. The

economy failed to grow significantly, the nation could not meet its financial obligations to the European Union, unemployment was only beginning to drop but not significantly, efforts at social change were often challenged by a *mouvement social* (which at times seemed to be the only movement in the country), and the nation's international prestige, at least until the election of Emmanuel Macron,<sup>10</sup> was continuing to recede. In recent years, the mood in France, accentuated by terrorist attacks, has become more somber, and the well-known Gallic moroseness, traditionally the badge of French intellectuals, has been spreading to the general population, prompting Sudhir Hazareesingh to quote an unnamed French literary historian's claim that "Même les idiots ont cessé d'être heureux" (347).

This stark picture seems particularly depressing when compared to the more positive image of the United States where the economy is steadily growing, unemployment diminishing, and the median income (slowly) improving. In contrast with France, and despite its own real social problems, *l'Amérique* projects a sense of vitality, which, until Macron, seemed absent in the Hexagon. French literature appears to be involved in an effort to tap into this vitality through novels replete with action, interesting characters, and often bizarre yet compelling stories.<sup>11</sup> These works evoke a fascinating, albeit frequently more violent, world where at the very least, things, good and bad, are happening. French novelists' openness to the United States, and willingness to abandon stereotypical images of *les Américains*, is positive in the sense that it opens up a new area of inspiration, but it also reflects a deep sense of frustration on the part of French artists with the direction in which their own country has been moving or failing to move.

The French view of the United States and its inhabitants has undergone a significant transformation. This is evident not simply in the novels discussed here, but also in the sheer quantity of fiction being produced in France that takes one or several aspects of *l'Amérique* as its subject. From the perspective of the issues discussed in *Frères ennemis*, this current situation is not without a certain irony. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Americans, represented by Christopher Newman, were the open-minded group, curious about France and interested in learning about the country and its people. In the early part of the twenty-first century, the opposite appears to be the case. Americans, as portrayed in their nation's fiction, are content with the image of France as a haven for cultural glories of the past, as a place to visit in order to take one's mind off important, which is to say American, issues. The French, once disdainful of the American

interlopers, now approach the States a little like Christopher Newman first entered the Louvre, relatively non-judgmental and curious, although much better informed. For contemporary French writers, *l'Amérique* is, for the moment at least, a source of literary inspiration as they observe with a keener interest what transpires in that powerful, contradiction-laden country which, for good or for ill, embodies the present.

## Notes

1 It is difficult not to appreciate the irony of descriptions of the French being pushed to the outlying areas of Paris in an early twentieth-century novel, since their contemporary equivalent is the expanding Parisian *banlieues* populated by immigrants who are often, but not entirely, Muslim. The French in *The Custom of the Country* were the embodiment of the past whereas today, “La banlieue constitue donc le cœur de cette nouvelle France de l’après-guerre” (Stovall, 51).

2 According to Tony Judt, “By the late 1940s, information about life under Stalin and his system was readily available to anyone” (*Past Imperfect*, 101).

3 At times French intellectuals’ adulation of the Soviet Union and its leader produced rather amazing rhetorical flights into fantasy. Jean-Richard Bloch, anxious to stress the rapport between the Soviet dictator and the French intellectual tradition, assured his audience that “Il n’y a personne de plus ‘cartésien’ que Staline” (Hazareesingh, 63). While Jean-Paul Sartre contented himself with the simple assertion that “La liberté de critique est totale en URSS” (Hazareesingh, 131).

4 Despite the oft-decried dangers of consuming fast food, and the much-vaunted French contempt for such products, the French were, and probably still are, quite taken with McDonald’s, “because it was fast, convenient, affordable and child-friendly, unlike traditional restaurants, and because the French were ‘fascinated with America.’ This fascination made France the most profitable [McDonald’s] market in Europe – second only to that of the United States” (Kuisel, *The French Way*, 187).

5 Baudrillard is not always the clearest of writers, frequently deploying irony and counter-intuitive statements. Lévy favors a rather breathless prose that dramatizes, rather than explains his thought, and relies heavily on exaggeration. After mentioning that he really knows less about de Tocqueville than Americans who are “Moyennement cultivés et habitués,” he announces that they have a tendency “à voir dans *De la démocratie en Amérique*, non seulement un manuel ou un bréviaire mais une sorte de miroir où, comme

dans les westerns, comme dans *Naissance d'une nation* de Griffith, comme à Rushmore, ils contemplent l'image anticipée de leurs vertus, de leurs vices ...” (11). The centrality in American life that Lévy accords to de Tocqueville’s book will come as a surprise to many Americans, and will certainly provide French readers with a rather distorted view of de Tocqueville’s renown in the States.

6 With regard to general statements, Braudrillard’s were for the most part at least discussable, whereas Lévy’s pronouncements often strain credulity, even if the subject is finally not of the greatest importance. To take but one example, he claims that Americans, unlike Europeans, for the most part do not like cities (51). The basis for this opinion is never clear, nor is its pertinence to his general argument.

7 In the chapter devoted to *The American*, I note that it is normal in an English-language novel that all dialogue appears in English, just as in a French work conversations with foreigners would be, beside the occasional word or expression, in French. The difference in the fiction discussed in this study is that the Americans’ incapacity to express themselves in French and the need for their French interlocutors to address them in English are highlighted. On this point, the recent spate of French novels set in the United States has everyone speaking in French. To cite an example which emphasizes the use of French in an American-based novel, Antoine Bello’s *Ada* (2016) is instructive. *Ada* is the name of an extremely sophisticated computer program that is attempting to improve its English. To do so, the program begins using a variety of ostensibly English clichés, all of which are taken from French.

8 Initially Anne’s English was weak, and Lewis’s French awful, but it was of course the French woman who had to make the effort to develop fluency in English. There was never a question that Louis would undertake the task of learning French.

9 Donald Trump’s election to the American presidency will certainly affect French views of the United States, and probably mute the enthusiasm the country is currently enjoying in the contemporary French novel. His flamboyant personality, his ease with racist and sexist comments, his apparent indifference to the truth, along with his hypersensitivity to perceived slights, and seeming willingness to say the first thing that pops into his head, might provide a goldmine of inspiration to French artists. If so, it must be mined carefully. Caricature would appear to be the most obvious approach to writing about Trump, but it may not be as easy as it appears, since the finest caricaturist of the forty-fifth president of the United States is himself. A harder, but potentially more rewarding perspective for novelists would be fiction dealing with Trump’s supporters, extreme right-wing Christians and secularists, as well as the legion of working-class whites who lost their jobs to technology and more effective or cleaner fuel supplies. In addition to being displaced by

modernity, these people perceive themselves, with some justification, as being scorned by the liberal intelligentsia (“these deplorable people”) whose efforts to appeal to racial and sexual minorities at least have given the impression they no longer were interested in poor white people. A third possible theme for artists interested in writing about Trump’s *Amérique* is the fear engendered by the president’s violent and ill-considered rhetoric in reaction to possible threats to the American nation (“Fire and Fury”). Such language might prove to be little more than bluster and saber-rattling, but given the man’s unpredictability and power, one can never be sure. This fear affects every country on the planet and is perhaps one of the few issues where the American Congress might eventually manage a bipartisan reaction, since a war created by a mistake, a lapse in judgment, remains a war.

10 Once again the election of a new president has the potential to alter the literary landscape. If Macron’s pragmatic approach succeeds in effecting even slight change to labor laws, at breaking the impasse between the *syndicats* and the *patronat*, restructuring healthcare, and perhaps affecting a meaningful educational reform, France will become a different country, arguably one more inspiring to its artists than Trump’s America.

11 To list some of the most recent examples of this phenomenon: Jean Frémon’s *Calme-toi, Lison* (P.O.L.), a fictionalized account of the artist Louise Bourgeois; Benjamin Hoffmann’s *American Pandemonium* (Gallimard), a parody of an American disaster novel/movie; Antoine Bello’s *Ada* (Gallimard) a depiction of computer programming run amok in Southern California; and Simon Liberati’s *California Girls* (Grasset), the story of the havoc created by the Manson gang. All these novels were published in 2016.



## Selected Bibliography

- Albridge, John. "Hemingway and Europe," in Claridge, 3-12.
- Ammons, Elizabeth. *Edith Wharton's Argument with America*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980.
- Apostolidès, Jean-Marie. *Le Prince sacrifié: théâtre et politique au temps de Louis XIV*. Paris: Minuit, 1985.
- . *Le Roi-machine: spectacle et politique au temps de Louis XIV*. Paris: Minuit, 1981.
- Aron, Raymond. "From France." *As Others See Us: The United States through Foreign Eyes*. Ed. Franz M. Joseph. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959.
- Asselineau, Roger. *The Literary Reputation of Hemingway in Europe*. Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1965.
- Atack, Margaret, Diana Holmes, Diana Knight, and Judith Still, eds. *Women, Genre and Circumstance: Essays in Memory of Elizabeth Fallaize*. London: Legenda, 2012.
- Auster, Paul. *The Book of Illusions*. New York: Picador, 2002.
- . *Collected Prose: Autobiographical Writings, True Stories, Critical Essays, Prefaces, and Collaborations with Artists*. London: Faber and Faber, 2003.
- . *In the Country of Last Things*. New York: Viking, 1987.
- Azéma, Pierre, and Michel Winock. *La troisième république*. Calmann-Lévy: Paris, 1976.
- Baldwin, Marc. *Reading the Sun Also Rises*. New York: Peter Lang, 1997.
- Bantegnie, Gaëlle. *France 80*. Paris: Galimard, 2010.
- Baron-Carvias, Annie. *La Bande dessinée*. Paris: P.U.F., 1985.
- Baquiast, Paul. *La troisième république (1870-1940)*. Paris: Harmattan, 2002.
- Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. Paris: Seuil, 1957.

- Barone, Dennis. "Introduction: Paul Auster and the Postmodern American Novel." *Beyond the Red Notebook: Essays on Paul Auster*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995, 1–26.
- Baudelaire, Charles. *Oeuvres complètes. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade*. Eds. Y.-G. Le Dantec and Claude Pichois. Paris: Gallimard, 1961.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Amérique*. Paris: Grasset, 1986.
- Bauer, Dale. *Edith Wharton's Brave New Politics*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994.
- Beigbeder, Frédéric. *Oona & Salinger*. Paris: Grasset, 2014.
- Bell, Millicent, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Bello, Antoine. *Ada*. Paris: Gallimard, 2016.
- . *Roman américain*. Paris: Gallimard, 2014.
- Bendixen, Alfred, and Annette Zilversmit, eds. *Edith Wharton: New Critical Essays*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1992.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zorn. New York: Schocken, 1968.
- Bentley, Nancy. *The Ethnography of Manners: Hawthorne, James, Wharton*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Bessard-Banguy, Olivier. *Le Roman ludique: Jean Eschenoz, Jean-Philippe Toussaint Eric Chevillard*. Paris: Septentrion, 2003.
- Blair, Deirdre. *Simone de Beauvoir: A Biography*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990.
- Blanckeman, Bruno. *Les Récits indécidables: Jean Echenoz, Hervé Guibert, Pascal Quignard*. Paris: Septentrion, 2000.
- Bonnerare, Jocelyn. *Nouveaux Indiens*. Paris: Seuil, 2009.
- Bornecque, Jacques-Henry. *Villiers de l'Isle-Adam: créateur et visionnaire avec des lettres et Documents*. Paris: Nizet, 1974.
- Boulot, Elizabeth. *Edith Wharton: The Custom of the Country*. Paris: Messine, 2000.
- Bourassa, Alan. *Deleuze and American Literature: Affect and Virtuality in Faulkner, Wharton and McCarthy*. New York: Palgrave, 2009.
- Bourre, Jean-Paul. *Villiers de l'Isle-Adam: splendeur et misère*. Paris: Séghers, 1971.
- Bouvet, Vincent, and Gérard Durozoi. *Paris Between the Wars 1919–1939: Art, Life & Culture*. New York: Vendome Press, 2010.
- Brendan, Martin. *Paul Auster's Postmodernity*. London: Routledge, 2008.
- Brooks, Peter. *Henry James Goes to Paris*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.
- . *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, and the Mode of Excess*. New Haven: Yale, 1976.

- Brown, Mark. *Paul Auster*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007.
- Bruckner, Pascal. "Paul Auster or the Heir Intestate." *Beyond the Red Notebook: Essays on Paul Auster*. Ed. Dennis Barone. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995, 27–33.
- Buruma, Ian. *Year Zero: A History of 1945*. New York: Penguin, 2013.
- Cargill, Oscar. *The Novels of Henry James*. New York: Macmillan, 1961.
- Céline, Louis-Ferdinand. *Voyage au bout de la nuit*. Paris: Gallimard, 1952.
- Chambers, Ross. *L'ange et l'automate. Variations sur le mythe de l'actrice de Nerval à Proust*. Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1971.
- Charles, Lise. *Comme Ulysse*. Paris: P.O.L., 2015.
- Chouard, Géraldine. "Undine ou la fluctuation," in Perrin-Chenour, 95–127.
- Clark, Christopher. *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914*. London: Penguin, 2013.
- Claridge, Henry, ed. *Ernest Hemingway: Critical Assessments of Major Writers*. Vol. II. London: Routledge, 2012.
- Clavel, André. "Portrait de Paul Auster. en mystique de la littérature." *Le Temps* (Suisse), le 4 mars, 2002, 17.
- Cloonan, William. "Expressing the Inexpressible: World War I and the Challenge to Art." *French Review*, 87.4 (May 2014), 15–24.
- Collomb-Boureau, Colette. "Costumes, fortunes, énergies dans *The Custom of the Country*," in Perrin-Chenour, 34–47.
- Colquitt, Claire, Susan Goodman, and Candance Waid. *A Forward Glance: New Essays on Edith Wharton*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999.
- Compagnon, Antoine. *Les Antimodernes de Joseph de Maistre à Roland Barthes*. Paris: Gallimard, 2005
- . *Le Démon de la théorie*. Paris: Points, 1998.
- Conyngham, Deborah. *Le Silence éloquent: thèmes et structures de L'Ève future de Villiers de L'Isle-Adam*. Paris: José Corti, 1975.
- Cullen, Jim. *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Cunningham, Megan. "Fusionnement de la littérature, du film et de la musique: Cherokee et Lac de Jean Echenoz." Unpublished Masters thesis, Florida State University, 2012.
- Cusset, François. *French Theory: Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & Cie et les mutations de la vie intellectuelle aux États-Unis*. Paris: La Découverte, 2003.
- Daiches, David. "Ernest Hemingway." *The English Journal*, 30.3 (March, 1941), 175–186.
- Daireaux, Max. *Villiers de l'Isle-Adam*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1936.
- Damrosch, Leo. *Tocqueville's Discovery of America*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012.

## Frères Ennemis

- De Beauvoir, Simone. *L'Amérique au jour le jour*. Paris: Gallimard, 1954.
- . *Le deuxième sexe II*. Paris: Gallimard, 1947.
- . *Les Mandarins I*. Paris: Gallimard, 1954.
- . *Les Mandarins II*. Paris: Gallimard, 1954.
- . *Lettres à Nelson Algren*. Paris: Gallimard, 1997.
- De l'Isle-Adam, Villiers. *L'Ève future*. Paris: Folio-Gallimard, 1993.
- De Margerie, Diane. *Edith Wharton, lecture d'une vie*. Paris: Flammarion, 2000.
- De Mulder, Caroline. *Bye Bye Elvis*. Paris: Actes Sud, 2014.
- De Tocqueville, Alexis. *De la démocratie en Amérique I*. Paris: Folio/Gallimard, 1969.
- . *De la démocratie en Amérique II*. Paris: Folio/Gallimard, 1961.
- Decoin, Didier. "Auster le magicien." *Le Magazine Littéraire*, 16 juin 2002, 66.
- . *Est-ce ainsi que les femmes meurent?* Paris: Grasset, 2009.
- Deutscher, Penelope. *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Ambiguity, Conversion, Resistance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Dicker, Joël. *La Vérité sur l'affaire Harry Quebert*. Paris: Fallois, 2012.
- Donaldson, Scott, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Hemingway*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Donovan, Christopher. *Postmodern Counter Narratives: Irony and Audience in the Novels of Paul Auster, Don DeLillo, Charles Johnson and Tim O'Brien*. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Duffy, Jean. *Thresholds of Meaning: Passage, Ritual and Liminality in Contemporary French Narrative*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011.
- Dugain, Marc. *La Malediction d'Edgar*. Paris: Grasset, 2014.
- Duhamel, Georges. *Civilisation, 1914–1917*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1918.
- . *Scènes de la vie future*. Paris: Fayard, 1930.
- Duperray, Annick, ed. *L'œuvre de Paul Auster: approches et lectures plurielles*. Arles: Actes Sud, 1995.
- Durham, Carolyn. *Understanding Diane Johnson*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2012.
- Echenoz, Jean. *Cherokee*. Paris: Minuit, 1970.
- Edel, Leon. *Henry James: A Life*. New York: Harper and Row, 1985.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Ed. Brooks Atkinson. New York: Modern Library, 2000.
- Ernaux, Annie. *Les Années*. Paris: Gallimard, 2008.
- Evans, Mary. *Simone de Beauvoir: A Feminist Mandarin*. London: Tavistock, 1985.
- Falkner, Dominique. *Ça n'existe pas, L'Amérique: carnet de route*. Paris: Arléa, 2010.

- Fallaize, Elizabeth. *The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir*. London: Routledge, 1988.
- Fargues, Nicholas. *Au pays du p'tit*. Paris: P.O.L., 2015.
- Farrell, James. "The Sun Also Rises." *Ernest Hemingway: Critiques of Four Major Novels*. Ed. Carlos Baker. New York: Schribner, 1962, 4–6.
- Frémond, Jean. *Calme-toi, Lison*. Paris: P.O.L., 2016.
- Fussel, Edwin. *The French Side of Henry James*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.
- Fussel, Paul. *The Great War and Modern Memory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- Garillon, Elaine. *Le Journal impubliable de George Pearl*. Paris: Arléa, 2015.
- Gass, William. *In the Heart of the Heart of the Country*. New York: NYRB Classics, 2014.
- Giné-Janer, Marta. *Villiers de l'Isle-Adam*. Paris: l'Harmattan, 2001.
- Ginfray, Denise. *Edith Wharton: l'objet et ses fictions*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2003.
- Glass, Charles. *Americans in Paris: Life and Death under Nazi Occupation*. New York: Penguin, 2010.
- Gorra, Michael. *Portrait of a Novel: Henry James and the Making of an American Masterpiece*. New York: Liveright, 2012.
- Grimal, Claude. "The right set: histoire, objets, éthique dans *The Custom of the Country*," in Perrin-Chenour, 26–33.
- Gura, Philip. *Truth's Ragged Edge: The Rise of the American Novel*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002.
- Haddad, Hubert. *Théorie de la vilaine petite fille*. Paris: Zulma, 2014.
- Harrison, Jim. "A Really Big Lunch." *The New Yorker*, 80.25 (September 6, 2004), 78–84.
- Hays, Peter, ed. *Teaching Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises*. Moscow: University of Idaho Press, 2003.
- Haytock, Jennifer. *Edith Wharton and the Conversations of Literary Modernism*. New York: Palgrave, 2008.
- Hazareesingh, Sudhir. *Ce pays qui aime les idées: histoire d'une passion française*. Paris: Flammarion, 2015.
- Hemingway, Ernest. *The Sun Also Rises*. New York: Scribner, 2006.
- Herlihy-Merat, Jeffrey, and Vamsi Koneru, eds. *Paris in American Literatures*. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2013.
- Herzogenrath, Bernd. *An Art of Desire: Reading Paul Auster*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999.
- Hoeller, Hildegard. *Edith Wharton's Dialogue with Realism and Sentimental Fiction*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000.
- Hoffmann, Benjamin. *American Pandemonium*. Paris: Gallimard, 2016.

- Holland, Laurence. *The Expense of Vision: Essays on the Craft of Henry James*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964.
- Houppermans, Sjeff. *Jean Echenoz: étude de l'œuvre*. Paris: Bordas, 2008.
- Huvos, Kornel. *Cinq mariages américaines: les Etats-Unis dans l'œuvre de Georges Duhamel Jules Romains, André Maurois, Jacques Maritain et Simone de Beauvoir*. Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1972.
- James, Henry. *The American: Norton Critical Edition*. Ed. James Tuttleton. New York: Norton, 1978.
- . *A Life in Letters*. Ed. Philip Horne. London: Penguin, 1999.
- . *Tales of Henry James*. Ed. Christof Wegelin. New York: Norton, 1984.
- Jérusalem, Christine. *Jean Echenoz: géographies du vide*. Saint-Étienne: Publications De l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2005.
- Johnson, Diane. *Le Divorce*. New York: Plume, 1998.
- . *Into a Paris Quartier*. Washington: National Geographic, 2005.
- . "Introduction." *What Masie Knew*. By Henry James. New York: Modern Library. 2002.
- Judt, Tony. *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals 1944–1956*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.
- . *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*. New York: Penguin, 2005.
- Julien, Claude. "La folie des grandeurs: essai pour une lecture sociale de *The Custom of the Country*," in Perrin-Chenour, 7–25.
- Kaplan, Amy. *The Social Construction of American Realism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Kassanoff, Jennie. *Edith Wharton and the Politics of Race*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Keefe, Terry. *French Existentialist Fiction: Changing Perspectives*. London: Croom Helm, 1986.
- Kelly, Adam. *American Fiction in Transition: Observer-Hero Narrative, the 1990s and Postmodernism*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013.
- Kerouac, Jack. *On the Road*. New York: Viking, 1957.
- Killoran, Helen. *Edith Wharton: Art and Allusion*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996.
- Knapp, Bettina. "Sartre's *Nausée*: Archetypal Jazz." *Dalhousie French Studies*, 10 (Spring–Summer 1986), 44–55.
- Knight, Pamela. *The Cambridge Introduction to Edith Wharton*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Knodt, Ellen Andrews. "Teaching the 'Lost Generation' to the Current Generation through Active Learning." *Teaching Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises*. Ed. Peter L. Hays. Moscow: University of Idaho Press, 2003, 103–116.

- Kuisel, Richard. *The French Way: How France Embraced and Rejected American Values and Power*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.
- . *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Lafeber, Walter. *America, Russia and the Cold War, 1945–2002*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004.
- Lalouette, Jacqueline. *La République anticléricale*. Paris: Seuil, 2002.
- Lamont, Michèle. “How to Become a Dominant French Philosopher: The Case of Jacques Derrida.” *American Journal of Sociology*, 93.3 (1987), 584–622.
- Lapacherie, Jean-Gérard. “Quand le roman représente les conventions qui le régissent.” *Chevillard, Echenoz: filiations insolites*. Ed. Aline Mura-Brunel. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 15–25.
- Larnaude, Mathieu. *Notre désir est sans remède*. Paris: Actes Sud, 2015.
- Larsson, Björn. *La Réception des Mandarins: le roman de Simone de Beauvoir face à la critique littéraire en France*. Lund: Lund University Press, 1988.
- Lebrun, Jean-Claude. *Jean Echenoz*. Paris: Éditions du Rocher, 1992.
- Lee, Hermione. *Edith Wharton*. London and New York: Chatto, Windus, and Knopf, 2007.
- Lévy, Bernard-Henri. *American Vertigo*. Paris: Livre de Poche, 2006.
- . *Le Siècle de Sartre*. Paris: Grasset, 2000.
- Liberati, Simon. *California Girls*. Paris: Grasser, 2016.
- Lubbock, Percy. *Portrait of Edith Wharton*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1947.
- Martin, Brendan. *Paul Auster's Modernity*. London: Routledge, 2008.
- Mathy, Jean-Philippe. *Extrême-Occident: French Intellectuals and America*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993.
- . *French Resistance: The French-American Culture Wars*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Mavrikakis, Catherine. *Les Derniers jours de Smokey Nelson*. Paris: Sabine Wespieser, 2012.
- McBride, William L. “The Conflict of Ideologies in *The Mandarins*: Communism and Democracy, Then and Now.” *The Contradictions of Freedom: Philosophical Essays on Simone de Beauvoir's The Mandarins*. Ed. Sally J. Scholz and Shannon M. Musset. New York: State University of New York Press, 2005.
- McCullough, David. *The Greater Journey: Americans in Paris*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011.
- Mellow, James. *Hemingway: A Life Without Consequences*. Boston: Da Capo, 1992.

- Menand, Louis. *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001.
- Mestre, Jean-Philippe. "Un portrait, Paul Auster." *Le Progrès*, 19 mai 2002, 21.
- Moi, Toril. *What is a Woman and Other Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Morrison, Donald, and Antoine Compagnon. *The Death of French Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010.
- Motte, Warren. "Tanguy Viel's American Novel." *The French Review*, 89 (2), December 2015, 66–80.
- Murray, Margaret P. "Landscape with the Fall of Undine." *Edith Wharton's The Custom of the Country: A Reassessment*. Ed. Laura Rattray. London: Routledge, 2010, 115–125.
- Nadeau, Maurice. *Histoire du surréalisme*. Paris: Seuil, 1964.
- Nevius, Blake. *Edith Wharton: A Study of her Fiction*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953.
- Noguez, Dominique. *Le grantécrivain & autres textes*. Paris: Gallimard, 2000.
- Noiray, Jacques. *L'Ève future ou le laboratoire de l'idéal*. Paris: Belin, 1999.
- . *Le Romancier et la machine: l'image de la machine dans le roman français (1850–1900)*. Paris: José Corti, 1982.
- Norberg, Jakob. "The Political Theory of the Cliché." *Cultural Critique*, 76 (Fall 2010), 74–97.
- Ory, Pascal, and Jean-François Sirinelli. *Les Intellectuels en France: de l'affaire Dreyfus à nos jours*. Paris: Armand Colin, 1987.
- Ozouf, Mona. *La Muse démocratique: Henry James ou les pouvoirs du roman*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1998.
- Patterson, Yolanda. *Simone de Beauvoir and the Demystification of Motherhood*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press, 1986.
- Peacock, James. *Understanding Paul Auster*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010.
- Peel, Robin. *Apart from Modernism: Edith Wharton, Politics, and Fiction before World War I*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005.
- Perec, Georges. *Les Choses*. Paris: Éditions Maurice Nadeau, 1965.
- Perrin-Chenour, Marie-Claude. *Lectures d'une œuvre: The Custom of the Country Edith Wharton*. Paris: Éditions du Temps, 2000.
- Picard, Michel. *La Lecture comme jeu*. Paris: Minuit, 1986.
- Pietro, Eric. "Setting Scores with Vinteuil: Musical Textures in Proust and Echenoz." *Romance Studies*, 32.2 (April 2014), 99–111.
- Ponnau, Gwenhaél. *L'Ève future ou l'œuvre en question*. Paris: PUF, 2000.
- Pressis, Céline, Topçu Sezine, and Christophe Bonneuil, eds. *Une autre histoire des "Trente Glorieuses": modernisation, contestations et pollutions dans la France d'après-guerre*. Paris: La Découverte, 2013.



- Price, Alan. *The End of the Age of Innocence: Edith Wharton and the First World War*. London: Robert Hale, 1996.
- Quarré-Roger, Catherine. *L'enchanteur désenchanté: le monde, le moi et l'autre dans l'œuvre de Paul Auster*. Paris: Publibook, 2006.
- Racine, Jean. *Œuvres complètes I*. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. Paris: Gallimard, 1999.
- Raitt, Alain. *Villiers de l'Isle-Adam et le mouvement symboliste*. Paris: José Corti, 1986.
- Raitt, Alain, Pierre-Georges Castex, and Jean-Marie Bellefroid, eds. *Villiers de l'Isle-Adam. Œuvres complètes*. Vol. II. Paris: Gallimard, 1986.
- Ratray, Laura, ed. *Edith Wharton's The Custom of the Country: A Reassessment*. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2010.
- Rearick, Charles. *The French in Love and War: Popular Culture in the Era of the World Wars*. New Haven: Yale, 1997.
- Reynolds, Michael. *The Sun Also Rises: A Novel of the Twenties*. New York: Twayne, 1995.
- Robbe-Grillet, Alain. "Une voie pour le roman futur." *Pour un nouveau roman*. Paris: Minuit, 1963.
- Roffman, Karin. *From the Modernist Annex: American Women Writers in Museums and Libraries*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010.
- Roger, Philippe. *L'ennemi américain: généalogie de l'antiaméricanisme français*. Paris: Seuil, 2002.
- Rouard, Jean. *Être un écrivain*. Paris: Grasset, 2015.
- . *Misère du roman*. Paris: Grasset, 2015.
- Samoyault, Tiphaine. *Roland Barthes*. Paris: Seuil, 2015.
- Sand, Shlomo. *La fin de l'intellectuel français: de Zola à Houellebecq*. Paris: La Découverte, 2016.
- Santantonious, Laurence. "Un Auster qui se narre," in *Livres-Hebdo*, numéro 466, vendredi, 19 avril 2002, 23.
- Sarraute, Nathalie. *L'ère du soupçon*. Paris: Gallimard, 1956.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *La Nausée*. Paris: Gallimard, 1938.
- . *Situation II. "Qu'est-ce que la littérature."* Paris: Gallimard, 1948.
- Scarth, Fredrika. *The Other Within: Ethics, Politics and the Body in Simone de Beauvoir*. Lanham: Rowman Shittlefield, 2004.
- Scholz, Sally, and Shannon Mussett, eds. *The Contradictions of Freedom: Philosophical Essays on Simone de Beauvoir's The Mandarins*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005.
- Servan-Schreiber, Jean-Jacques. *Le Défi américain*. Paris: Denoël, 1967.
- Showalter, Elaine. "Spragg: The Art of the Deal." *Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton*. Ed. Millicent Bell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

*Frères Ennemis*

- Sickler, Philip. *Love and the Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Henry James*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- Simons, Margaret, ed. *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006.
- Singley, Carol. *Adapting America: Childhood, Kinship and National Identity in Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- . *Edith Wharton: Matters of Mind and Spirit*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Smith, Patrick. "Paul Auster." *American Writers Supplement*. Vol. 12. Ed. Jay Parini. Farmington Hills: Gale, 2002, 21–39.
- Smith, Thelma, and Ward Miner. *The Contemporary American Novel in France*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1955.
- Sollers, Philippe. *Femmes*. Paris: Folio, 1983.
- Sowerine, Charles. *France since 1870: Culture, Politics and Society*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.
- Spilka, Mark. "The Death of Love in *The Sun Also Rises*." *Ernest Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises: A Casebook*. Ed. Linda Wagner-Martin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, 33–45.
- Stoneback, H.R. *Reading Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises: Glossary and Commentary*. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2007.
- Stovall, Tyler. "Entre espoir et désespoir: la France contemporaine et sa banlieue." *La France qui vient: regards américains sur les mutations hexagonales*. Ed. Jean-François Sirinelli. Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2014, 49–75.
- Tabbi, Joseph. *Cognitive Fictions*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.
- Theobald, Tom. *Existentialism and Baseball: The French Philosophical Roots of Paul Auster*. Saarbrücken, 2010.
- Thompson, Stephanie. *Influencing American Tastes: Realism in the Works of Wharton, Cather and Hurst*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002.
- Tintner, Adeline. *Edith Wharton in Context: Essays on Intertextuality*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999.
- Tournier, Michel. *Le Vent Paraquet*. Paris: Gallimard, 1977.
- Tropimova, Evija. *Paul Auster's Writing Machine: A Thing to Write With*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014.
- Twain, Mark. *The Gilded Age and Later Novels*. New York: Library of America, 2002.
- Ullmo-Michel, Anne. *Edith Wharton: la conscience entravée*. Paris: Belin, 2001.

- Valtat-Comet, Nelly. *Edith Wharton: The Custom of the Country*. Paris: Didier, 2000.
- Varvogli, Aliko. *The World That is the Book: Paul Auster's Fiction*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001.
- Vian, Boris. *Manuel de Saint-Germain-des-Prés*. Paris: Editions Scorpion, 1951.
- Viart, Dominique. "Le Divertissement romanesque. Jean Echenoz et l'esthétique du dégagement." *Jean-Echenoz: une tentative modeste de description du monde*. Ed. Christine Jérusalem and Jean-Bernard Vray. Saint-Etienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2006, 243-254.
- Viel, Tangy. *La Disparition de Jim Sullivan*. Paris: Minuit, 2013.
- Vuillard, Eric. *Tristesse de la terre*. Paris: Actes Sud, 2014.
- Wagner-Martin, Linda, ed. *A Historical Guide to Ernest Hemingway*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Walton, Geoffrey. *Edith Wharton: A Critical Interpretation*. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson, 1970.
- Ward, Geoffrey. *A Disposition to be Rich: Ferdinand Ward, the Greatest Swindler of the Gilded Age*. New York: Vintage, 2013.
- Wenzel, Hélène-Vivienne, ed. *Simone de Beauvoir: Witness to a Century*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.
- Wershoren, Carol. *The Female Intruder in the Novels of Edith Wharton*. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982.
- Wharton, Edith. *French Ways and their Meanings*. Berkshire House Publications, 1997.
- . *Novellas and Other Writings*. New York: Library of America, 1990.
- . *Novels*. New York: Library of America, 1985.
- Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. New York: Random House, 1926.
- Willis, Nathaniel. *Pencillings by the Way: Written during some Years of Residence and Travel in France, Italy, Greece, Asia Minor, Turkey, and England*. New York: Morris & Willis, 1844.
- Wolff, Cynthia. *A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- Wolkenstein, Julie. *L'excuse*. Paris: P.O.L., 2008.
- . "La représentation de la France dans *The Custom of the Country*," in Perrin-Chenour, 141-149.
- . *La Scène européenne: Henry James et le romanesque en question*. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000.
- Wood, James. *The Fun Stuff*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2012.
- Wylie, Laurence. "Social Change at the Grass Roots." *In Search of France*. Ed. Stanley Hoffmann. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963, 159-234.



# Index

- Académie française  
admission of Dumas *filis* 15  
election of Georges Duhamel 98
- actresses 136  
as objects for male desire 57,  
61–62  
social 75–76
- Adams, John Quincy 66
- adaptability 75
- adolescence  
Americans as 126, 140–141, 147,  
151, 262  
emotional 107, 111, 261  
prolonging of 100–101, 118
- aesthetic sensibility, American lack  
of 45, 74
- Albert the Great 53, 244–245
- alchemy 53
- Alchimedès 52
- alcohol consumption 100  
excessive 117, 131, 210, 221  
as means of escape 111, 121  
as a prototypically manly activity  
101, 105
- Aldredge, John 111
- Algerian War 227
- The American see* James, Henry
- American money 4–5  
the American in Paris, images of 14,  
151, 234–235, 239
- American pop culture 152–155,  
159–167, 170, 174–176, 179, 200,  
263–264
- American values, commercialism 132  
conflicts with French values  
128–129  
emerging 92  
European threats to 25  
origins of 89–90, 95  
“American way of life” 10, 156
- Americans, reacting to banal or ugly  
events in literature 210–212
- Americans abroad 13, 37–38, 98  
expatriates 24–25, 29, 38, 68, 80–81,  
98–125, 234, 237–238, 240–241,  
245, 249, 262, 266–268  
French reactions to 129
- l'Amérique* 127–129, 131, 134, 139,  
146–147, 151, 263, 265–266,  
270–272, 274  
cultural impact of 151–178  
demystification of 156–157  
the existence (or lack thereof) of  
207–233
- Ammons, Elizabeth 92
- ancien régime* 32, 84–85
- androids 41, 52, 54–55, 57–59, 61, 64,  
67, 261–262  
and male desires 55
- Angkor Wat 53

*Frères Ennemis*

- Annals School 200–201  
anti-Americanism 46, 65, 131, 136,  
139, 146, 263, 269  
  decline of 157–159, 176  
anti-Arab sentiments 227  
anti-immigration policies 227  
anti-moderns 50–51  
anti-Semitism 106–107, 112, 227  
Apostolidès, Jean-Marie 234, 250, 255  
aristocracy 32  
  American attempts to break into  
  the 74, 79  
  French 82, 84–85, 87, 89, 232  
Aristotle 52, 244  
Arnaud, Antoine 115  
Aron, Raymond 158  
art  
  in *The American* 21–23, 25  
  as artificial sophistication 81–82  
  as commodity 77  
  in contrast to finance 71  
  creation as escape 195–199  
  difficulty creating modern 104–106  
  literature as 197  
  societal need for 139  
  of thinking 218  
  women as works of 58, 67  
atomic bomb 130, 146, 181  
aura in a work of art 21–22  
Austen, Jane 247–248  
Auster, Paul 10, 179–205, 264  
  
Bacall, Lauren 166  
de Balzac, Honoré 29, 44, 50, 66, 189  
Bantegnie, Gaëlle 176  
Barone, Dennis 179  
Barrymore, Lionel 166  
Barthes, Roland 5–8, 50, 180, 182,  
186, 260–261  
Basquiat, Jean-Marie 231  
Battle of Roncevaux 113, 115–116  
  
Baudelaire, Charles 46–48, 62,  
64–65  
  on the dandy 56–57  
Baudrillard, Jean 20, 206, 215–219,  
222, 224–226, 232, 250, 265,  
272–273  
de Beauvoir, Simone 3, 126–150, 155,  
158, 232, 252, 254, 256, 261, 263,  
267, 273  
bebop 169  
Beckett, Samuel 182  
Beigbeder, Frédéric 210, 230  
Belgium 46  
du Bellay, Joachim 212  
Bello, Antoine 213–214, 273–274  
Bellow, Saul 185  
Benjamin, Walter 21–22  
Bentley, Nancy 95  
Bently, Wilson Alwyn 209  
Bernhardt, Sarah 14  
Bernini, Gian Lorenzo 168  
Bible 51, 54, 67  
  Hebrew 114  
  references 120, 245–246  
Birkets, Sven 184  
Blanchot, Maurice 185  
Blanckeman, Bruno 151, 161  
Blower, Brooke 2  
Bloy, Leon 50  
Bogart, Humphrey 166  
Bonnerave, Jocelyn 211  
*The Book of Illusions* see Auster, Paul  
Bornecque, Jacques-Henry 53  
boulevard Haussman 24, 30, 242  
Boulot, Elizabeth 89  
Bourbon Monarchy 28–29, 84, 116  
Bourdet, Claude 149  
bourgeois 232  
  complacency 49  
  moral code 90  
  values 174

- Le bourgeois gentilhomme* see Molière
- Bourgeois, Louise 274
- Bréton, André 187
- Brooks, Peter 29–30
- Brown, Dan 190
- Brown, Mark 205
- Bruckner, Pascal 179, 184
- Buffalo Bill 209
- Buruma, Ian 1
- Bush, George W. 211, 221
- Ça n'existe pas l'Amérique* see  
Falkner, Dominique
- Calvin, John 115
- Camus, Albert 94, 149, 158, 189, 252,  
256
- canon 51, 181, 215
- capital  
business 20  
cultural 20–22, 26
- capitalism 72–76, 134, 149, 157
- Capote, Truman 210
- Cargill, Oscar 15–16, 22
- Carlier, Christophe 40
- Carmelites 37, 39
- Cartland, Barbara 10
- Catholicism 25–26, 50, 66, 115  
as allied with the aristocracy 85,  
242  
caricatures of 167–168, 178  
in the postwar world 119, 124  
as relates to marriage 86–87, 93
- Céline, Louis-Ferdinand 122–123
- de Chateaubriand, François-René 50,  
191–193, 205
- Chambers, Ross 61
- chance 186–188, 190–194, 264–265
- chanson de geste* 116
- Chaplin, Charlie 210
- Charlemagne 116
- Charles, Lise 212
- Cherokee* see Echenoz, Jean
- Chirac, Jacques 1, 10, 233, 259
- Chouard, Géraldine 84
- Christopher Newman see James,  
Henry
- ciné-roman* 153, 172
- Circe 103–104, 115
- “city of lights” 80
- Civil Rights Movement 157
- Civil War (American) 16, 18, 38, 44,  
48, 239  
and *The American* 24, 28  
and its impact on French  
anti-Americanism 46–48, 65  
and the New England intellectual  
community 19
- Clark, Christopher 124
- Claro, Christophe 231
- Clavel, André 184
- clocks 30–31
- close reading 4, 8
- Cold War xi–xii, 3, 8–9, 126–127, 129,  
133, 141, 147, 157–158, 228–229,  
260–261
- collection 77
- colonialism 2, 125  
of Europe by America 131
- Columbus, Christopher 18
- Comédie Française 155
- commercialism 132  
and aesthetics 22
- communism 129, 134–135, 145, 149,  
261  
anti- 146, 149, 158
- Compagnon, Antoine 50–51
- concept* 5–6
- confederate cause, French support  
of 47
- consumerism 152–153, 156, 168, 171,  
174, 176, 223
- dangers of 166–167, 171, 175

*Frères Ennemis*

- convent 34–37, 39  
Conygham, Deborah 59–60  
Cooper, James Fennimore 45  
courtesans 28, 34, 63, 246  
courtship 37  
Cro-Magnon 160  
Cunningham, Megan 169, 178  
Cusset, François 2, 181, 200–203  
*The Custom of the Country* see  
    Wharton, Edith  
cynicism 110, 224, 243  
*Cyrano de Bergerac* 244–245
- Daiches, David 100  
Daireaux, Max 49, 54  
Damrosch, Leo 17  
dandyism 56–58, 67, 262  
darkness 30–31, 35, 39–41, 64  
Davis, Jefferson 112  
De Mulder, Caroline 210  
Decoin, Didier 202–203, 211  
Degas, Edgar 160  
Deleuze, Gilles 180, 182, 188  
Delibres, Léo 154  
delusion 135–136, 138  
Depression 209  
Derrida, Jacques 2, 11, 180,  
    182–183, 185  
Descartes, René 139, 151  
deterritorialization 188  
dichotomy 114, 266  
    activity and passivity 105, 111,  
        146  
    attraction and repulsion 128  
    body and soul 62  
    Catholicism and Protestantism  
        171  
    depth and superficiality 107  
    of the Franco-American  
        paradigm 65, 147  
    light and dark 31  
    past and present 114, 171  
    psychological and physical 188  
    reason and passion 50  
    reflection and action 188  
    science and humanity 60–61  
    United States and the Soviet Union  
        127, 133, 157  
    virgin and whore 58  
    vitality and lethargy 105  
Dicker, Joël 213–214, 231  
Diderot, Denis 132  
disco 170–172  
disillusionment 117  
    with Americans 110, 144, 147  
    cultural 133  
    French and American 128  
    with the war 101, 106, 116  
*Le Divorce* see Johnson, Diane  
divorce  
    differing French and American  
        views on 86–87  
    rates 69, 95  
    social consequences of 91, 93  
    trend of women divorcing men  
        78–79, 95  
Djavann, Chahdortt 231  
Domenach, Jean-Marie 127  
Donald Duck 162–163  
*Don Giovanni* see Mozart  
Donizetti, Gaetano 245–246  
Doré, Gustave 51  
Ducrozet, Pierre 231  
duels 16, 31–32  
Dugain, Marc 208–209  
Duhamel, Georges 98, 113,  
    122–123, 125  
Dumas *films*, Alexandre 45  
    *L'étrangère* 14–16, 37, 39  
Duperray, Annick 200  
Durham, Carolyn 235–236  
Duverger, Maurice 158



- Ecclesiastes* 100–101, 120  
 Echenoz, Jean 200, 202, 204  
     *Cherokee* 4, 9, 151–178, 191, 224,  
     264, 267–268, 270  
 Edel, Leon 18, 38  
 Edison, Thomas *see* de l'Isle-Adam,  
     Villiers  
 Les Éditions du Minuit 182  
 Eiffel Tower 44–45  
 Eliot, T.S. 113–114  
 Enlightenment  
     heritage 50  
     values 104  
 Ernaux, Annie 177  
*esprit de système* 17  
 ethnicity, as a means of social  
     estrangement 102–106  
*L'étrangère see* Dumas fils,  
     Alexandre  
 European culture  
     and American indifference  
         114–115, 117, 121, 143–144  
     and American “superiority” 218  
     and American threats to 215  
     and postwar desolation 125  
 European Grand Tour 25  
 Europeans  
     lack of 111  
     as props 109–111  
 Evans, Mary 150  
*L'Ève future see* de l'Isle-Adam,  
     Villiers  
 existentialism 184–185, 200–201,  
     252  
 Exposition Universelle 44, 66, 82  
 extreme right 227  
  
 Falkner, Dominique 10, 206, 215–217,  
     219–227, 232, 265–266, 270  
 Farmer, Frances 209, 210  
 Farrell, James 101, 106, 123  
  
*fatalité* 219–220, 222–223  
 Faubourg Saint-Germain 23, 30,  
     35–36, 39  
*Faust*  
     Goethe's 56  
     Gounod's 32, 45  
 Faustian ambiance 56  
 Feuillière, Edwige 160  
 financial ambition 78  
     and extra-legal activity 76, 91–92  
     of women 69–76  
 First Empire 28  
 Fitzgerald, Zelda 230  
 Flamel, Nicolas 54  
 Flaubert, Gustave 29, 189  
 Fletcher, Gilles 40  
*foemina simplex* 57  
 Ford, Richard 203  
 Foucault, Michel 2, 11, 182–183  
 Fougeron, André xi  
 Fox, Kate 209  
*la France éternelle* 100  
*la France profonde* 89, 96–97  
 Franco-American relations  
     clichés of 235, 248  
     in comedy 174  
     literary 180  
     postwar 139–149  
     softening 157  
     tensions in 263  
 Franco-Prussian War 35  
 Francophone Africa 6  
 Francophone interest in the States  
     207–208  
*Frankenstein* 58  
 Franklin, Benjamin 20  
     “freedom fries” 11  
 Frémon, Jean 274  
 French distaste for America 126  
 French flag, and the African  
     soldier 6

*Frères Ennemis*

- French fries 11  
French Revolution 66, 116  
    and the loss of social structure 50,  
    84  
“French Theory” 2, 10–11, 180–183,  
    200–201, 206, 264  
*French Theory* see Cusset, François  
“French way of life” 10  
Front National 227–228  
furnishings 31  
Fussel, Edwin 38  
Fussel, Paul 99, 122
- Gallic  
    cultural crisis 154  
    distrust of Americans 129–131, 134,  
    146, 156  
    presence in American literature  
    180  
    stereotypes of Americans 126, 144,  
    271  
    values 9–10, 152  
    view of Americans 157
- Garbo, Greta 231  
Gare Saint-Lazare 53  
Garillon, Eliane Saliba 212  
Garnier, Charles 45  
Gass, William 97  
de Gaulle, Charles 156–157  
Genesis, Book of 114  
Genette, Gérard 180  
genius 7, 43–45, 48, 51, 53, 64–65, 261  
Genovese, Kitty 211  
Gide, André 189  
Giesbert, Franz-Olivier 230  
Gilded Age 68, 72, 76, 92  
Giné-Janer, Marta 52, 54  
Glass, Charles 2  
von Goethe, Johann Wolfgang 56, 160  
Goldman, Lucien 182  
Gopnik, Adam 2
- Gordon, William 160  
Gorra, Michael 14  
Gounod, Charles 32, 45  
*le grand mécanicien* 41, 53  
Graves, Robert 99  
Gray, Walter 38  
Greco, Juliette 253  
Grimal, Claude 85, 95  
Guinness Book of World Records 220
- Haddad, Hubert 209  
Halberstadt, Michèle 231  
Harrison, Jim 203, 233  
Haussmann, Baron Georges 30–31,  
    35, 39, 242, 262  
Hawthorne, Nathaniel 38, 190  
Hazareesingh, Sudhir 13, 66, 248,  
    259, 271  
hegemony, American 127, 131, 219  
Hemingway, Ernest 3, 98–125, 260,  
    262, 267–268  
Herlihy-Merat, Jeffrey 2  
Herzogenrath, Bernd 185  
Hitler, Adolf 231  
Hoffmann, Benjamin 274  
Hoffmann, Stanley 259  
Hollywood  
    fake identities in 197  
    Francophone interest in 207, 215,  
    232  
    influence on literature 162–167,  
    174–175, 178, 217, 231, 264  
homoeroticism 25  
homophobia 106, 112  
homosexuality 105–106, 108,  
    208–209  
Hoover, J. Edgar 208–209, 215  
hubris 55  
Hugo, Victor 132  
humanism 51, 61, 133, 181  
Huston, John 166

- illusion 59, 153, 159, 162, 166, 173,  
     179–205, 207, 222, 224, 245  
     as a Gallic characteristic 200  
 imitation 75, 80–81, 89, 96, 175,  
     251  
 l'impérialité française 6  
 impotence 108, 114, 122  
     American intellectual 145–146  
 Impressionism 29, 154  
 Indian ethnic cleansing 82  
 Industrial Revolution, American 82  
 d'Indy, Vincent 154  
 Iraq War 216, 233  
 de l'Isle-Adam, Villiers  
     *L'Ève future* 40–67, 150, 261–263  
     and Thomas Edison 3, 40–67  
 isolationism 113  
  
 James, Henry 231  
     *The American* 4, 7, 9, 11, 13–39,  
     63, 76, 83, 85, 88, 95, 110, 146,  
     177, 234–243, 246–247, 249–250,  
     254–255, 259–261, 266–273  
     and *L'étrangère* 15–16  
     and his family 14–15  
     and moral values 71  
     racism 15  
     and de Tocqueville 16–17  
 Jansenists 115  
 Jaurès, Jean 132  
 jazz 153–154, 162, 168–173, 177–178,  
     264, 268  
 Jérusalem, Christine 169  
 Johnson, Diane 10, 234–257, 266,  
     268–270  
 Judaism 102, 106–108, 112, 192, 213  
 Judeo-Christian tradition 113,  
     124–125  
 Judt, Tony 13, 126, 131, 135, 148–150,  
     272  
 Julien, Claude 95  
  
 Kapriélian, Nelly 231  
 Karnac 53  
 Kelly, Grace 162  
 Kennedy, John 208, 215  
 Kerouac, Jack 215  
 Koneru, Vamisi 2  
 Krushchev, Nikita 157  
 Kuisel, Richard 1–2, 126, 157, 176  
 Kundera, Milan 204  
  
 Lacan, Jacques 2, 11, 180, 185  
 de Laclos, Pierre Choderlos 32, 95  
 Lafeber, Walter 149  
 Laferrière, Dany 230  
 Lalouette, Jacqueline 85  
 Lamont, Michèle 183  
 language 144, 267–268  
     in *The American* 38–39  
     challenges of 137  
     as cultural colonization 82, 87–88,  
     141, 267, 273  
     English as representing modernity  
     26–28, 88, 110  
     importance of 240, 266  
     as practical necessity 110, 237, 239  
 Lapacherie, Jean-Gérard 159  
 Larnaud, Mathieu 209, 210  
 Latin Quarter 109, 111  
 Le Pen, Jean-Marie 227–228  
 Le Pen, Marine 227  
 Left Bank 39, 109, 202  
 Léger, Nathalie 231  
 Lenglen, Suzanne 123–124  
 de Leon, Edwin 48  
 Leroy, Gilles 230  
 Levin, Harry 56  
 Lévy, Bernard-Henri 10, 177, 265,  
     272–273  
 Lévy, Marc 190  
*Les Liaisons dangereuses* see de  
     Laclos, Pierre Choderlos

*Frères Ennemis*

- Liberati, Simon 231, 274
- light  
in contrast to darkness 31, 35, 39, 40  
electric 53, 60
- Limongi, Laure 230
- Lincoln, Abraham 66, 112
- Lindon, Jérôme 182
- literature  
difficulty renewing postwar 104–105  
French influence on Paul Auster 180–205  
toying with conventions of 158–161, 174, 191
- Loden, Barbara 231
- Loeb, Harold 123
- Lolita* 184
- “the Lost Generation” 100–101, 107–108, 120, 267
- Louvre 13, 21, 26–27, 34, 62, 73, 250, 269
- Lulle, Raymond 54
- Lytard, Jean-François 182–183
- machinery 58  
American 45, 149  
in relation to humanity 55, 64  
social 76
- Macron, Emmanuel 271, 274
- Maelzel, Leonard 53, 58–59
- Mailer, Norman 185
- de Maistre, Joseph 50, 66
- Malinowski, Wieslaw Mateusz 41, 46
- Les Mandarins* see de Beauvoir, Simone
- Manhattan 79
- manliness 117–118
- Mann, Thomas 184
- Mansfield, Jane 231
- Marceau, Sophie 204
- de Margerie, Diane 96
- marriage  
ambitions to 93–94  
American 68–69, 72–73, 75–79, 90–91  
as escape 198  
Franco-American 80, 83, 89–90, 240, 248  
French 86, 148  
polygamy 220  
as social solution 86–87, 90–92  
the Marshall Plan xii, 129, 131, 143  
Marxism 134, 181, 229, 252
- materialism  
American 69, 76, 82–83, 126  
of the bourgeois 50  
as a metaphor for the future 70
- Mathy, Jean-Philippe 2, 179, 201–202, 234
- de Maupassant, Guy 45
- Mauriac, François 150
- Maurras, Charles 50–51
- Mavrikakis, Catherine 210–211, 230–231
- Maximilian of Hapsburg 47, 66
- McBride, William 134
- McCullough, David 2
- McGuane, Thomas 203
- Meissonier, Ernest 45
- Mellow, James 98
- Menand, Louis 18
- Mestre, Jean-Philippe 184
- middle class 32, 84  
conventionality 90  
values 99
- Miller, Henry 225
- Minard, Céline 231
- Miner, Ward 2
- ministers, Unitarian 24–25
- mirrors 30–31, 186, 251
- Moby Dick* 214, 231

- modernity 24, 26, 31, 34–35, 43, 49,  
 67, 117, 173, 177, 206, 273  
 America as representing 131–132,  
 219  
 of France 237  
 suspicion toward 50–51  
 Molière, *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*  
 19  
 monarchy 28–29, 39, 66, 84, 116, 234,  
 250–251  
 Monroe, Marilyn 201, 230–231  
 Montparnasse 109  
 moral ambiguity of the French 37  
 Morgan, Michèle 162  
 Mormonism 220  
 Morrison, Toni 203  
 mothers 23, 33, 68, 74  
 love for 210  
 as a means of cultural propagation  
 88  
 Motte, Warren 179, 188, 214  
 movement, as social utility 75  
 movie technology, in literature 186,  
 235  
 moviemaking 194, 254–255  
 as an escape 195, 197–199  
 Mozart 31, 246  
 Murray Margaret 69  
 myth 5–8, 89, 94, 118, 186, 259, 261  
*Mythologies* see Barthes, Roland  
  
 naïveté  
 American 52, 54, 110, 151, 217, 219,  
 222–224, 260–261  
 French 83  
 loss of 70, 99, 110  
 Napoleon, Louis 28  
 narcissism 77  
 national identity  
 and cultural assumptions 7  
 and cultural icons 86  
  
 nature  
 and its power 64  
 of society 72  
 Nevius, Blake 70–71  
 New York City 79, 81, 85–86, 108–109,  
 111–113, 123, 139, 183, 210, 216,  
 221  
 international orientation of 89,  
 91–92  
*New York Times* 69  
 Ney, Bob 10–11  
 Ney, Marshal 113, 116  
 Nixon, Richard 215  
 nobility 31, 34, 251  
 as a fading social class 28, 34  
 Noble, Ray 4, 169, 170  
 the Noble Savage 163  
 Noiray, Jacques 41–42, 44, 46, 49,  
 66–67  
*nombriisme* 224  
*nouveau roman* 181–183, 189  
*nouveaux riches* 4, 30, 32, 96  
*nouveaux romanciers* 182, 188  
  
 O’Neil, Eugene 210  
 O’Neil, Oona 210  
 Obama, Barack xiii, 228–229, 233,  
 270  
 occupation, American of France  
 133–134  
 Old World  
 American encounters in 25, 262  
 literary themes 184  
 as a playground 9, 109, 111, 262, 270  
 postwar 125  
 values 92, 219  
 Orleanists 29  
 Ory, Pascal 159  
 the Other, images of 5, 110  
 Oulipo 187–188, 204, 264–265  
 Ozouf, Mona 16, 30

## *Frères Ennemis*

- Palais Garnier 53  
Panthéon 115  
Paracelsus 54  
paradigms in French and American literature  
    original 38, 65, 146–147, 260  
    reversal of 83–84, 110, 180  
Parc Monceau 35  
*Paris in American Literatures*  
    (Herlihy-Meratt and Koneru) 2  
Parisian intellectual elite 127–129,  
    132–137, 139, 144, 146, 149, 151,  
    158–159, 201–202, 222, 252, 261,  
    263  
*Parisian Sketches* (James) 15  
parodies  
    of American culture 219  
    of American fiction 212–214,  
    274  
Pascal, Blaise 115  
Peacock, James 196  
Peel, Robin 70, 75  
Perec, Georges 152, 187–188  
*les personnalités américaines*  
    208–210, 215  
*Phèdre* 155  
*phénomène Auster* 10, 184  
phonograph, invention by Thomas  
    Edison 42, 52, 60  
Piaf, Edith 253  
Pieto, Eric 169  
Pinter, Harold 224  
pistols, as a modern weapon 32  
Place Vendôme 80, 109  
Poe, Edgar Allan 46–47, 65  
Polanski, Roman 174  
*polar* 174  
Ponnau, Gwenhaël 41, 63  
*poseurs* 101  
positivism 49  
post-structuralist theory 180  
    postmodernism 2, 185–186, 204,  
    217  
    and cultural studies 11  
Poujade, Pierre 227  
Poulet, Georges 182  
pragmatism 17, 74, 95, 130, 134, 158,  
    219, 222, 238, 243, 246  
Presley, Elvis 210, 230  
*Pride and Prejudice* 247  
*La Princesse de Clèves* 189  
products, influx of American  
    151–152, 154, 156  
Prohibition 111  
*psychosociologues* 152  
Pygmalion, reversal of 198  
Pynchon, Thomas 188–189  
Pythagoras 52  
race 48, 83  
    diversity of 225  
Racine xi–xii, 155  
racism, American 106–107, 112,  
    126, 130, 157, 207–208, 210, 221,  
    227–230, 270, 273  
    French 227, 270  
Raitt, A.W. 41–42, 49, 53, 66  
Rattray, Laura 95  
Reagan, Ronald 224  
*Realpolitik* 129, 146  
religion 66, 192  
    allusions of 100, 113, 161, 171  
    in *The American* 25–26  
    as artifice 87, 175  
    bullfighting as 118–119  
    contemporary 194  
    diversity of 225  
    (over)-enthusiasm for 207, 220,  
    229, 273  
    loss of faith 114, 121  
    in the postwar period 102–103,  
    106–108, 114, 119, 121–122, 124

- theories about God 54–55, 115  
 traditional 167–168, 171, 242  
 Renan, Ernest 50  
 reproduction of art, from Benjamin  
     21  
*la Résistance* 128, 134  
 revisions, creating a hybrid text  
     42  
 Reynolds, Michael 98, 100,  
     102–103  
 Rieder, Will 38  
 Right Bank 30–31, 39  
 Robbe-Grillet, Alain 182, 189–190,  
     199  
 robber barons 71–72, 76  
 Robert, Mary Louise 149  
 Robins, Denise 150  
 Robinson, Edward G. 166  
 Roger, Phillippe 2, 46–47, 66, 68  
 Rolin, Jean 231  
*roman à clé* 148  
*romantisme* 51  
 Rosenberg, Ethel xi  
 Rosenberg, Julius xi  
 Rostand, Edmond 244–245  
 Roth, Philip 185  
 Roux, Frédéric 230  
 Roy, Claude 126  
 royalists 29–30  
  
 Saint-Germain-des-Prés 242–243,  
     252–254, 247  
 Saintonge, François 231  
 Salinger, J.D. 210  
 Salon Carré 13  
 Santantonious, Laurence 183  
 Sarraute, Nathalie 182  
 Sartre, Jean-Paul 126, 148–151,  
     157–158, 177, 185, 200, 252, 254,  
     256, 263, 272  
*Saturday Review* 69  
  
 Schneider, Michel 230  
 science  
     American 45, 56, 66–67, 131–132  
     curiosities of 64  
     ersatz 51  
     hard 182  
     mistakes of 64  
     modern 48–49, 60  
     pseudo- 58  
     as related to God 55  
     representations of modern  
         42–43  
     traditions of 52–54  
 Second Empire 28, 33, 38  
 Senges, Pierre 231  
 Servan-Schreiber, Jean-Jacques 151,  
     156–157  
 Shelley, Mary *see Frankenstein*  
 Showalter, Elaine 95  
 silence 35, 192  
     in films 198  
 Simon, Claude 182  
 Sirinelli, Jean-François 159  
 Sisyphus 94  
 slavery 47–48, 158, 169–170  
 Smirnoff 160  
 Smith, Joseph 220  
 Smith, Thelma 2  
 social geography 30  
 socialites 69, 73, 76, 82, 93, 96  
 The Sokal Affair 2, 11  
 Sokal, Alan *see* The Sokal Affair  
 Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr 157  
*The Song of Roland* 113, 116  
 sorcerer 53–54, 64  
 Soviet Union 9, 127, 132–137, 143,  
     146, 150, 157–159, 263, 272  
 Spears, Britney 231  
 Spilka, Mark 100, 102, 118  
 Stanley, H.R. 125  
 Stein, Gertrude 100–101, 120

## *Frères Ennemis*

- sterility 88, 103, 108, 114, 142  
Stoneback, H.R. 101, 123  
Strang, James 220-221  
*The Sun Also Rises* see Hemingway, Ernest  
sunlight 35  
surrealism 185, 187-188, 200-201, 204, 264
- technology as separation from the world 59-60  
telephone 60  
*théâtre du boulevard* 14  
Theobald, Tom 184-185, 187, 204  
Thibaudet, Albert 50-51  
Third Republic 28, 32, 84-85  
Thoreau, Henry David 212  
de Tocqueville, Alexis 4, 9, 11, 14-15, 265  
    on Americans 16-18, 20, 23, 37, 47, 66, 260-261, 270, 272-273  
Todorov, Tzvetan 180  
Tournier, Michel 190  
tradition 85-88, 119  
    of bullfights 117-119, 125  
    of values 132-133, 236  
*trahison* 135  
travelers, Americans in France 2  
*les Trente glorieuses* 9, 152, 156, 158-159, 176, 263, 270  
Truman, Harry 149  
Trump, Donald xiii, 233, 270, 273-274  
Turngenev, Ivan 29  
typical American  
    Christopher Newman as de Tocqueville's conception of 17-18, 20, 26  
    French ideas of the 212  
    physical type 16-18  
typicality 7-8
- United Nations 143  
Upper East Side 79  
urban colonization 82-83, 240, 262
- de Vallombrosa de Morès, Antoine-Amédée-Marie-Vincent Amat-Manca 221  
Valtat-Comet, Nelly 95-96  
de Varennes, Pierre Gaultier 221  
de Varigny, Charles Crosnier 68  
Varvogli, Alike 179  
Veblen, Thornstein 96  
Venus de Milo 62-63, 66  
    in chocolate 66  
Versailles 234, 250-251, 255  
Vian, Boris 252-253, 256  
Viart, Dominique 167  
*la vieille France* 28, 242  
Viel, Tanguy 213  
Vietnam War 157-158, 181, 227, 263  
*vieux Paris* 30  
Vuillard, Eric 209
- Wagner, Richard 62  
the Wandering Jew 108  
war injuries  
    physical 99-100, 106, 116, 120-121, 123, 125  
    psychological 99, 101, 106, 121  
Waterloo 116  
Washington Square 79, 85-86  
von Weber, Carl Maria 62  
Wershoren, Carol 70  
West Coast 216-217, 219, 224, 234, 237, 239, 250-251, 254-255, 265, 274  
Wharton, Edith, and *The Custom of the Country* 4, 9, 68-94, 109-110, 177, 240-241, 260, 262, 267, 269, 272  
Whitman, Walt 222



- Wilde, Oscar 210, 217
- Willis, Nathaniel 13
- Wolff, Cynthia Griffin 70–71, 96
- Wolkenstein, Julia 19, 96, 231
- women
- American 68–94
  - beauty as an essential characteristic of 69, 74, 79
  - caricature of 64, 261–262
  - changing themselves for men 137–142, 248, 263, 267
  - as commodities 28, 33–34, 37, 41
  - as decoration 110
  - in *L'Ève future* 43
  - independence of 51
  - men's understanding of 43, 58, 61, 67, 87, 119–120, 140
  - the modern 59–62, 237–238
  - as products of artifice 61
  - replication of 51–52, 55–56
  - as weakness 72, 90, 95
- Wood, James 204
- working class 134, 273–274
- World War I 98–104, 106–107, 111–112, 117, 119, 121–122, 125
- exclusion from 102–103, 106, 117, 123
- World War II 104, 127, 132–135, 139, 148, 151, 153, 158, 177, 181, 200, 252, 264
- Wylie, Laurence 269
- xenophobia 227
- Yankees
- in the American Civil War 48
  - conquests 262
  - as perceived by the French 229
  - as racist 227
- Young, Philip 113
- Zola, Emile 29













