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INTRODUCTION

Ferdâ Asya

It is only in seeing other countries, in studying their customs, reading their books, associating with their inhabitants, that one can situate one’s own country in the history of civilization.

Edith Wharton, “Memories of Bourget Overseas”

In her tribute to French novelist and critic Paul Bourget (1852–1935), Edith Wharton (1862–1937) praises her late friend’s objectivity and openness of mind and relates his intellectual independence and cultural astuteness on issues calling for political insight and personal sensitivity to his vast erudition about other countries and their people. Bourget’s internationalism impelled Wharton to formulate the general statement in the epigraph, published in La Revue Hebdomadaire on June 21, 1936 asserting that a true comprehension of one’s own country entails a transcultural perspective, which one is able to acquire by living in other countries and developing an affinity with their people, customs, and literatures. Such an experience inculcates in one an impartial critical perspicacity with which one can determine the level of progress and degree of refinement of one’s country in the universal social and cultural spectrum. Having traveled extensively mostly in Europe from a young age and lived in France nearly all her adult life, in 1936, Wharton knew the truthfulness of her assertion. It was her novel The Age of Innocence (1920) that fetched the Pulitzer Prize in 1921. Certainly, the critical skill with which this writer discerned and displayed the vices and virtues of Old New York in her fiction was honed by her expatriate life and it rendered her work superlative in presenting the wholesome atmosphere of American life and manners.

For many decades, Wharton’s edict has been verified in countless volumes of expatriate memoirs, autobiographies, and letters, and a large body of literary criticism exists about the lives and works of the writers who left America for Paris, especially in the 1920s and the

Nonetheless, the exodus began much earlier and American writers went to other cities around the world. Disappointingly, however, only a small number of critical works about these writers, encompassing the periods before 1920 and after 1960, comes to mind, such as *Expatriates and Patriots: American Artists, Scholars, and Writers in Europe* (1968) by Ernest Earnest. This study focuses on the significance of the expatriate experience for the evolution of American culture and European culture as well as the literary careers of writers, artists, and intellectuals between 1783 and 1929. Harold T. McCarthy, in *The Expatriate Perspective: American Novelists and the Idea of America* (1974), provides biographical and historical contexts for the accomplishments in Europe and America of eleven male American expatriate writers, from Cooper to Baldwin, to show that these writers’ experiences overseas shaped a revised vision of the American self
that they expressed imaginatively in their works. Malcolm Bradbury’s *Dangerous Pilgrimages: Transatlantic Mythologies and the Novel* (1995) analyzes the history of political, social, and literary relations between America and Europe from the early nineteenth century to the 1960s. Studying writers such as François-René de Chateaubriand, James Fenimore Cooper, Washington Irving, Charles Dickens, Gertrude Stein, D. H. Lawrence, Edmund Wilson, and Evelyn Waugh, this critic illustrates how the myths that these writers had formed about each other’s country shaped their literary classics. In *Improvised Europeans: American Literary Expatriates and the Siege of London* (1998), Alex Zwerdling evaluates the lives, works, expatriate experiences, and attitudes toward America of Henry Adams, Henry James, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot.

Although these critical studies offer valuable insights into the lives and works of American writers in Europe, none of them brings together essays that specifically emphasize the significance of the intellectual independence that the expatriate writers used as a lens to view their native country and host countries objectively in an extensive span of time. Edith Wharton, the quintessential American expatriate writer in Paris at the turn of the twentieth century, in her tribute to Paul Bourget, a French writer of the same period, well traveled in Europe and the United States, detects intellectual independence arguably as the most notable attribute that expatriate writers can have in common. The quality that Wharton attributes to Bourget aptly represents one of the remarkable traits of her own life and work. Her fiction, nearly all written in France and almost always set in America, depicts with an unerring accuracy and acuteness the past and present American condition, predicament, perseverance, promise, and destiny. Her position abroad undeniably granted Wharton the ironic detachment she utilized as a strategic observation tower from which she disentangled realistically and objectively the web of personal and social relationships in her native country. The essays in *American Writers in Europe: 1850 to the Present* unfold progressively in an extended period of time the enactment of intellectual independence in the literary works not only of writers who are well known but also of writers who are seldom included in critical studies of expatriate literature.

From the early travelers of the nineteenth century, through the boisterous expatriates of the 1920s and the 1930s and serious adventurers of the 1950s and the 1960s, to the current sojourners, who stay in Europe only a part of the year, American writers, after their experiences in Europe, have possibly arrived at a common end, even
if no shared reason or purpose might have prompted their departure. Some set out in quest of fabulous stories to bring back; others took flight in need of freedom from sexual repression, political oppression, financial depression, personal inhibition, social pressure, racial discrimination or prohibition; some others left in search of peace, stability, or tradition; many others looked for comfort, pleasure, or fun; more than a few took the trip for emotional, spiritual, or intellectual growth, though not many felt forced to flee. The art that has resulted from these writers’ experiences abroad seldom portrays parallel lifestyles or similar images, but it often reflects a unanimous assessment of the limiting aspects of American life from which they escaped. Their vision, which is a mélange of a critical sense instilled in them in America and a view trained in European social, cultural, and political structures, fatefully sets them apart from their compatriots who have never been expatriates and reveals the uniqueness of their critical position labeled as intellectual independence.

This volume begins with the discussion of the literary works of American writers in Europe in 1850, as it was at about this time in literary history that the intuitive sense of freedom of American writers, coupled with their feeling of liberation from European influences, resulted in the intellectual independence with which they created the literary tradition known as American expatriate literature. Undeniably, Americans traveled to other parts of the world as well as Europe prior to this year, and a considerable body of writing ensued from these travels. According to Mary Suzanne Schriber, by 1900, Americans traveling to different parts of the world “published some 1762 books of travel: 323 before 1850, followed by a remarkable crescendo to 1439, from 1850 to 1900 in the wake of the steam palace” (149). Be that as it may, Americans had a propensity to be more articulate about their experiences in Europe than in other foreign lands, as they found European habits and values closer to themselves. Even so, albeit significant for initiating interest in readers about European cities and smoothing the way of their successors’ passage to Europe, a great majority of early nineteenth-century travel writers were fairly unsuccessful in portraying impartial scenes of Europe to their readers. As Jeffrey Alan Melton would agree, on the one hand, in their tales, travel writers felt responsible to present to American readers truthful descriptions of established traditions and innovative accomplishments of European populations; on the other hand, wary of losing readership, these writers were compelled to paint exaggerated pictures of the political corruption and religious oppression of European governments and religious institutions. Even though
travel writing created a false sense of political and moral superiority of America in the nineteenth-century readers and fell short of the level of objectivity that would be displayed in the work of the next generation of writers, it did well in offering the readers the concept of America as a separate nation from Europe. For the present-day readers, some of these travelogues serve as a valuable source of information about the social and intellectual leanings of both the writers and readers and, as Melton posits, “how they viewed Europe and, in turn, how they imagined themselves” (211). For the most part, self-reflection seems to stand out as the most prominent legacy handed down by the travel writers to their successors, as apparently it was from this feature of travel writing that the expatriate writers derived their intellectual independence, a valuable attribute esteemed in Bourget by Wharton.

The beginning year of the chapters in this volume, 1850, was a significant date for resonances between America and Europe. Around this time, transatlantic voyages began to occur more than ever before, primarily because of the increasing exchange of trade between the two continents. The Great Exhibition of 1851 in London, which displayed the Crystal Palace, attracted a great number of businessmen as well as tourists from America. As trade relations developed, American businessmen were accompanied by their families in transatlantic journeys for lengthy residences in Europe. Earlier visits concentrated in Britain, but increasingly Americans visited Scotland, France, Italy, and Germany. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the number of sailing ships and traveling Americans increased and transatlantic travel no longer occurred as the privilege of the wealthy. In the second half of the nineteenth century, travel writing maintained its popularity and gained more credibility with writers such as Mark Twain who balanced the negative and positive aspects of both worlds with more lucidity in such momentous works as *Innocents Abroad; or, The New Pilgrim’s Progress* (1869). He showed appreciation of the New World for its economic growth and political harmony as much as he satirized the Old World for its decadence and conceit. At about this time, the New World with its fresh spirit of democracy became a source of interest to Europeans. Malcolm Bradbury affirms: “From the 1850s on, the great bogey, ‘Americanization,’ or in other words technical modernization, was already a matter of concern in Europe” (5). In the travel literature produced in America after 1850, the themes more recurrently revolved around social and cultural issues than economic, political, and religious concerns of Europe. Definitely by the second-half of the nineteenth century, readers became aware of the
distinction between the Old World and the New World categorized respectively as the past and present, tradition and progress, conservatism and liberalism, monarchy and democracy. Consequently, through these opposing impulses America recognized its national identity. As William Merrill Decker posits, from the mid-1800s to the present, in the work of American writers from Henry James to Arthur Phillips, the elements of travel writing still persist and the distinction between Europe and America will increasingly prevail:

Although Americans in Europe will continue to perpetuate a nostalgia for the nineteenth-century Grand Tour and the fabled bohemia of the Paris expatriates, the real Europe offers something quite different: consolidating economies, resurgent and militant ethnicities, a burgeoning Islamic community, a neo-fascist fringe, and strange appropriations of American pop culture. It is this many-sided, post-postmodern, defamiliarized Europe that the new travel writing will have to address. (143)

The writers under discussion in this volume follow one another in a period of more than a century and a half. During this period, they have lived in an eventful world. They have survived wars, civil wars, and ethnic wars. They have endured the knowledge of the Holocaust and other genocides. They have observed political regimes form, crumble, and reform. They have gone through periods of colonialism, nationalism, postnationalism, and globalization. They have seen populations alter with immigration and multiculturalism. They have been liberated by sexual revolution, feminism, and gender equality. They have been cured by psychoanalysis. They have felt the effects of the economic boom of the 1920s, the depression of the 1930s, the economic recovery of the 1960s, and the financial crisis of the new millennium. They have advanced from carriages to automobiles for transportation and from steam ships to jet planes for crossing the Atlantic. They have moved from corresponding by letter, telegram, and telex to communicating by mobile telephone, e-mail, and text messages. They have surfed the Internet. They have handwritten, typed, and word processed their literary works. They have created and romped through such literary movements as modernism and postmodernism. During the time span of this volume, some of the writers have witnessed one century turn into another.

The chapters in this volume delineate the influence of some of these events on the evolution of the American writers’ expatriate vision created in Europe and the impact that their work has left on the literary histories of America and Europe. As one of the objectives of the
volume is to comprise writers, who have been rarely integrated in the critical studies of American writers in Europe, it is inescapable to omit some deserving American writers who have lived in Europe during this particular period. Owing to this objective, however, the writers in the volume reveal less renowned but more intriguing aspects of the American expatriate life in Europe than those that customarily anthologized expatriate writers reflect in their work. It is also the purpose of this volume to bring to light the intellectual independence, from its emergence, through its evolution, to its present form, for it is this quality that endowed the expatriate writers with an objective critical outlook to scrutinize Europe and America. The extended period, 1850 to the present, is essential for the volume to serve this purpose and be eligible to comparing the independent outlook of the writers in literary works created, for instance, at the turn of the twentieth century to those written at the turn of the twenty-first century. To this end, the chapters are organized with respect to an, albeit jagged, historical chronology rather than the genres in which the literary works were written.

Marking the transition from travel writing to early expatriate writing, in “The Search for Legitimacy in Nathaniel Parker Willis’s Paul Fane,” Udo Nattermann implements Michel Foucault’s concepts of domination and exploitation and the rhetoric of gossip to explore the ideology of power and authority in Nathaniel Parker Willis’s semiautobiographical novel, Paul Fane; or, Parts of a Life Else Untold, published in 1856, reminiscing the author’s sojourn in Italy. Nattermann states that, by creating skepticism about the principles of power and failing his hero’s efforts to prove that he is a member of the natural aristocracy, Willis undermines the prevailing objective of asserting American national superiority.

Recounting the familial and legal conditions that forced E. D. E. N. Southworth to spend three years (1859–1862) away from the United States, in “‘God permits the tares to grow with the wheat’: E. D. E. N. Southworth in Great Britain, 1859–1862,” Ann Beebe uncovers the subtexts of the three novels, The Fatal Marriage (The Doom of Deville), Laura Etheridge (Rose Elmer or The Bridal Eve), and Eudora (Allworth Abbey or The False Princess), that the writer published in England. Beebe shows that the concealed plots of these novels reveal that Southworth gained a detached perspective in England that allowed her to deepen her insight into the political developments in the United States and enhance her professional career.

Focusing on the two decades (1889–1910) of Gertrude Atherton’s life in England and Germany, in “Gertrude Atherton’s Europe: Portal
or Looking Glass?” Windy Counsell Petrie argues that Atherton’s novels, *American Wives and English Husbands*, *Ancestors*, and *Tower of Ivory*, demonstrate that women can develop genuine “self-determination” owing to “naive American audacity” and actualize it through European experiences. Petrie posits that, by creating a striking contrast to the female fictional characters of Wharton and James, Atherton’s heroines offer a new perspective on American expatriatism and theories of racial and female identities in the early twentieth century.

In “The London Making of a Modernist: John Cournos in Babel,” Marilyn Schwinn Smith follows the Russian American novelist, journalist, translator John Cournos’s career in his almost twenty years in England (1912–1931). Schwinn Smith reads *Babel*, the final novel of Cournos’s trilogy, through William Boelhower’s theory of ethnic trilogy, Gregory Castle’s perspective of modernist bildungsroman, and Sean Latham’s framework of roman à clef to delineate that Cournos’s novel contributed to the modernist text’s liberation from the constraints of the nineteenth-century novel. Schwinn Smith explains that Cournos was able to experiment with modernism through his affinity with the English literary tradition, which was going through a major transformation at the time he arrived in England. Cournos’s understanding of modernist art in England enabled him to achieve perfection in his writing on his return to the United States.

By looking closely at Edith Wharton’s later career in France, in “Toward a Brighter Vision of ‘American Ways and Their Meaning’: Edith Wharton and the Americanization of Europe After the First World War,” Jenny Glennon analyzes, in Wharton’s two novels of the 1920s, *The Glimpses of the Moon* and *The Children*, the writer’s interest in the American foreign policy and economic expansion. Glennon also examines the ways in which critics have exaggerated the distance that appears between the writer and the United States in her final two novels of the 1930s, *The Gods Arrive* and *The Buccaneers*, that in fact support American liberalism and innovation.

Comparing the political standpoints of two American writers in France, in “American Writers in Paris Exploring the ‘Unknown’ in Their Own Time: Edith Wharton’s *In Morocco* and Diane Johnson’s *Lulu in Marrakech*,” Ferdâ Asya claims that Wharton’s sympathy during and after the First World War with the colonial expansion of France, depicted in her travelogue *In Morocco*, and Johnson’s uncertainty about the foreign policy of the United States after the 9/11 events, disclosed in her novel *Lulu in Marrakech*, ought to be evaluated by each writer’s social status as an individual and intellectual position as a writer in her own historical time.
In “‘Homeland strangeness’: American Poets in Spain, 1936–1939,” Robin Vogelzang contends that American poets, Muriel Rukeyser, Langston Hughes, and Edwin Rolfe, claimed Spain as a political homeland during the Civil War of 1936–1939 and “deconstructed the very idea of what it meant to be an American abroad.” Vogelzang demonstrates that, in identifying with an international antifascist community, the poets altered the meanings of “home” and “exile.” Their Spanish Civil War verses formed a transatlantic dialogue that continued after the war was over. Furthermore, using long-range transmissions, these poets carried on their conversation through the worldwide media connections.

In “Fulbright Poems: Locating Europe and America in the Cold War,” Diederik Oostdijk discusses some of the poems written by Adrienne Rich in England (1952–1953), Richard Wilbur in Italy (1954), and John Ashbery in France (1955–1965), where they traveled as recipients of fellowships available to American poets after the Second World War. The poems, known as Fulbright poems in which the poets described their travels, have been deemed insignificant by some critics. With close readings of some of these poems, Oostdijk maintains that Fulbright poems are in effect intriguing in the way that they indicate the poets’ attempts to show Europe as a means to express their new perspective of America as a world power. Oostdijk states that, above all, these poets were concerned about America’s imperialist policy.

Providing a background of the Beats’s stay in Paris (1957–1963) at the Beat Hotel, considered as one of the symbols of Paris’s bohemian creativity, in “Allen Ginsberg and the Beats in Literary Paris, or Apollinaire through the Door of Ginsberg’s Mind,” Richard Swope offers a close reading of Ginsberg’s poem, “At Apollinaire’s Grave,” in which Ginsberg as a young poet immerses himself in the European avant-garde tradition and the unique literary practices of the eccentric poets that he finds in Paris. Swope suggests that not only is Ginsberg recalling a literary past in his poem, but also calling Apollinaire into the present and integrating this poet’s radical views in his poetic vision.

In “Almost French: Food, Class, and Gender in the American Expatriate Memoir,” Malin Lidström Brock discerns the hidden links among food, class, and gender in Harriet Welty Rochefort’s two memoirs, French Toast: An American in Paris Celebrates the Maddening Mysteries of the French and French Fried: The Culinary Capers of an American in Paris, and in Suzy Gershman’s memoir, C’est La Vie: An American Woman Begins a New Life in Paris and—Voila!—Becomes Almost French. Lidström Brock perceives that the authors’ descriptions
of their new lives in France with references to French cuisine render them liberated, individualistic, and acceptable to an American female readership. Despite the existence of a conservative class structure and traditional gender roles in France, in these memoirs, references to food and Frenchwomen inspire American women to regard their relationship to food as “a self-defining and sensual experience.”

The essays in this study show that from the mid-1800s to the early 2000s, as the knowledge of the populations of the countries on both sides of the Atlantic about cultural, social, historical, and political lives of one another gained depth and breadth, the task of the American writer in Europe has turned from passively observing and merely reporting into actively experiencing and independently criticizing as much as the host as that of the native country’s life. It is the knowledge about and active involvement in the life of Europe that has given the American writers the intellectual independence with which they still continue understanding, contemplating, reflecting, and recounting the agreements and disagreements, accords and discords, parallels and clashes of relations between the diversified populations of Europe and those of their own country. In turn, it is the intellectual independence that fosters the cultural awareness and fastens the social and political ties between America and Europe.

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