

The Baggage They Carry: Study Abroad and the Construction of “Europe” in the American Mind

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I. Introduction

Western Europe has been constructed in the field of education abroad as a “traditional” location: in some sense or another that label is used to suggest that it has a kind of static or dormant significance. In reality, Western Europe is an enormously rich location for study abroad precisely because it is a fluid learning environment that contains and sustains multiple meanings and ambiguities. It is a location that has been represented and constructed by American culture in some key ways over time and what is represented is simultaneously true and untrue. Within that paradox resides a great learning opportunity.

The object of this discussion is to explore some of the ways in which Europe has been created and recreated in the American mind and to relate those constructs to the limitations, opportunities and dynamics that may be explored in education abroad. Those constructs represent in part the baggage that students bring with them. In what follows, the structure will recreate the experience of students coming to Europe. The essay explores the baggage they carry; engagement with the European environment and, finally, the process of return. In that structure, which mirrors the experience of the study abroad student, a partial but suggestive set of perspectives emerge that go further than defending the traditional and, instead, present a cogent set of rich realities that collectively create the case for Europe.

The contention underlying these arguments is not that students are necessarily aware of these antecedents (they are probably generally not) but rather that these versions of Europe are deeply embedded within the American mind in both popular and “high” culture. They are, consciously or not, part of the baggage that students carry. Few of us travel without some kind of baggage be it in the head or the hand.

It should also be recognised that Europe is not one single location but, of course, a loose amalgam of various national cultures. Co-existent with that diversity, however, is another concept: the notion of “Europe” as a

mythologized landscape, a poetic entirety, which is alternative, not analogous, to the USA. That Europe contains within in it a profound sense of difference in whatever form that difference is envisaged. It embodies what we might call a collective “other”: a landscape both real and imagined where alternatives to US identity are explored and experienced. Thus, Malcolm Cowley describing the American expatriates of the 1920s could assert that they “stood face to face, not with Germany alone, or France or Great Britain, but with ‘Europe’ that is, with the whole of Western European culture.”¹ Europe is, in that context, a set of diverse nations and, simultaneously, a single mythologized space within the American mind.

A fascination with Europe and a need to explore and re-explore its meanings has been a persistent thread throughout American literary history. The western European intellectual tradition is, indeed, at the heart of the curriculum of US universities. Not much has radically changed since Cowley asserted that in US higher education “we were being exhorted to enter that international republic of learning whose traditions are those of Athens, Florence, Paris, Berlin and Oxford.”² The first part of this essay will examine characteristics of Europe in the American mind through two metaphors: these are part of the baggage carried by students.

II. Baggage: The Magic Kingdom and the European Princess

Disney’s Magic Kingdom offers one mechanism for exploring what is persistent and consistent while the figure of the European princess, shaped by Henry James and wildly parodied by Henry Miller, offers a model for that which has been radically changed in the perception of Europe in the American mind.

Contained within the notion of a Kingdom of Magic is an idea of Europe as a world less real than America, a poetic device formed more by the imagination than by political, economic or geographical realities. The princess, in contrast, represents a view of Europe as socially complex and stratified in ways not found in America.

The Magic Kingdom

Disney’s Magic Kingdom is a version of Europe invented in the USA and, subsequently, ironically re-exported to Euro-Disney. It is a quasi-Romantic fiction: Europe as a landscape dreamed and invented in America, modelled out of Grimm’s fairy tales, populated by the princes and princesses of the imagination inhabiting romantic castles of dream.³ What the Magic Kingdom in France offers is an ideal metaphor for an aspect of Europe as it is shaped in

the American mind. The Sleeping Beauty Castle, at the heart of Disneyland Paris, is based upon a Bavarian castle commissioned by (“Mad King”) Ludwig II in the nineteenth century as homage to Richard Wagner. Thus, when Disney seeks to embody a notion of romance he draws upon a legendary version of Europe. This is precisely the landscape recognised by Sisley Huddleston as she comments on the version of Montparnasse created by the commentator Wambly Bald⁴: She argues that Bald’s Montparnasse “is worthy to be set beside Ruritania and Erewhon and Atlantis and Luputia and all the other legendary kingdoms and republics which are far more living than, say, America.”⁵

That mythic and timeless Europe persists in, for example, Bernard Malamud’s short story “The Lady of the Lake”. The American, Freeman (nothing coincidental in that name), goes to Europe “seeking romance.”⁶ As he observes the Italian lakes, he engages with this version of Europe as a kind of romantic dreamscape wherein the mysterious and the miraculous co-exist in both bewildering and potent possibilities:

By now the place was bathed in mist, and despite the thickening dark, Freeman recaptured the sense of awe and beauty he had felt on first beholding the islands. At the same time he recalled a sad memory of un-lived life, his own, of all that had slipped through his fingers. Amidst these thoughts he was startled by a movement in the garden by the water’s edge. It had momentarily seemed as though a statue had come to life, but Freeman quickly realized a woman was standing this side of a low marble wall, watching the water.⁷

This Europe is perceived through the filter of pervasive myth and potential magic transformations.

Embodied in the Magic Kingdom is a version of Europe that is romanticized and complex precisely because it draws upon a sense of continuity with the past: this is both true and, of course, untrue.

In a volume that may as well stand for any number of others, a group of young Americans record their perceptions of Europe as they engage in a version of the Grand Tour in the middle of the nineteenth century. The Rhine stands as a symbol of this version of Europe: a land of myth and magic:

This is no common every-day stream, but one whose name and renown have been associated with ten thousand pages of history, song, and legend. We have read of the Rhine, listened to its songs, drank its wines, dreamed of its craggy, castled banks, - and at last we found ourselves upon its waters, rushing down from their homes in Alpine steeps and

regions of eternal snow.⁸

This is no distance from the vision of Walt Disney as he recreated Neuschwanstein Castle in his version of the Magic Kingdom. It is reflected in this comment by Alex Small in 1930 as he describes the motives that drove (and drive) Americans (writers and students) to this European construct:

... the desire to be in the presence of monuments and ruins, the evidences of a rich past, evoking the ghosts of a long and stirring history. The American afflicted with romantic antiquarianism will be unhappy among skyscrapers.⁹

The Princess

That Magic Kingdom is not, however, the only way in which America has invented Europe. For the literary expatriate of the nineteenth century, from Washington Irving to Henry James, Europe was also associated with high culture. It contained the kinds of forms that were perceived to be missing in America of that century. The American infant, mannerless and crude, came to Europe in search of an idea of what it could mean to be culturally, socially, politically mature.

What the student continues to seek (and the study abroad industry continues to promote) is a form of cultural density perceived to be more complex and historically located than that available in the USA. Thus, at least in part, programmes in Italy emphasise the richness of Italian Art; programmes in England stress historical longevity of the host culture; in Spain the national identity as it evolves over centuries; in Ireland, the literary traditions and so on. The common thread is longevity of tradition. Thus, students visiting London are rarely directed towards the new areas of Docklands but are taught (not without some rationale) to divert their gaze backward to the past. This becomes, in some sense or another, a form of “pilgrimage”, a transformative ritual: “a long sojourn in France was almost a pilgrimage to Holy Land.”¹⁰

The notion that the USA is somehow a “new” country and, thus, in some sense or other impoverished historically and culturally oddly persists despite the fact that the USA has been, probably since around 1900, a great world power, and that politically the USA is an older nation than either Italy or Germany, let alone the Czech Republic, Serbia, etc., etc.

A persistent sense that Europe is a more complex environment is potent. The manner in which Maxwell Bodenheimer characterizes the difference between Paris and New York in 1929 still resonates (and how much more dramatically it might reverberate if, instead of New York, he had cited, for example, Dayton, Ohio or Trenton, New Jersey): “Paris is a city of paradoxes while New York is

a series of one-colored essences, as pre-arranged as the squares on a checkerboard. “¹¹

Within that construct a potential for transformation is located. However sceptical we may or may not be about the notion that “study abroad changed my life” we certainly recognise that Europe is perceived as a place where American students may remake and reform their identities. In that sense, they precisely re-enact the motivations that William Stowe identified in travellers and visitors in the nineteenth century:

Europe served as a stage for independent self-definition, for establishing personal relations with culture and society that did not necessarily fit the conventional patterns prescribed by hometown and family standards.¹²

Nevertheless, the significance of Europe is both unchanging and changed in the American imagination. In the nineteenth century, the American expatriate sought the kinds of social conventions and complexities felt to be absent in an unsophisticated native land. For the immediate post-World War I expatriate generation, the significances of Europe were inverted; anti-cultural, anti-conventional and libertarian possibilities were identified with the post-war ambience. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Europe represented relief from the stifling conventions prevalent in the America of Presidents Harding, Coolidge and Hoover. The American world was too constricted by social norms and normalcy: in Europe, particularly in Paris, it was possible to reinvent a liberated self beyond the bounds of bourgeois constraint.

The forces that attracted Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, Scott Fitzgerald, the Crosbys, Robert McAlmon, Malcolm Cowley and a host of others to Paris in the 1920s were (at least) two fold. One was certainly a US environment perceived as stifling. President Coolidge could assert that “After all, the chief business of the American people is business”¹³ and Henry Ford that “Machinery is the modern messiah.”¹⁴ This was not, as Peter Neagoe indicates in his 1932 introduction to an anthology of expatriate writing, an environment perceived as hospitable by creative individuals: “What the American young had to rebel against was the rule of industry through standardisation. A foe subtler than old age and the middle class but no less oppressive and invidious.”¹⁵

Of course no motives are ever single or simple. The exchange rate of the US dollar against the French Franc certainly made Paris an attractive environment in which the writer and traveler could live with rather limited amounts of money. In 1919 1 US dollar was worth 8 French francs; by 1922

13 French francs and, by 1926, 35 French francs. When the value of the US dollar collapsed in 1929, an exodus from France began.

The combined motives of an escape from perceived stifling conventions and financial benefits are precisely captured by Malcolm Cowley in his poem “Valuta”:

Following the dollar, ah, following the dollar I learned
Three fashions of eating with the knife, and ordered
Beer in four languages from a Hungarian waiter
While following the dollar eastward along
the 48th degree of north latitude –where it buys most, there
is the Fatherland—
following the dollar by gray Channel seas, by blue seas
in Italy, by Alpine lakes as blue as aniline blue, by
lakes as green as a bottle of green ink, with ink-
stained mountains rising on either hand:
I dipped my finger in the lake and wrote, *I shall never
Return, never, to my strange land*
my land where plains are daily stretched, where forests
burn in business hours daily, where yellow name-
less rivers run and where
cities stand daily on their heads to wave proud legs in
the air;
my land of cowboys, business men, of peddlers ped-
dling appliances to boil an egg three minutes ex-
actly three minutes, and one born every minute in
my land ¹⁶

This version of Europe is of a less-industrialised, less conformist construct: a place of freedom rather than conventional constraint. This is echoed in Ezra Pound’s characterisation of the USA as “a half savage country, out of date”. ¹⁷

Collectively, what emerges is Europe as a paradox: a land rich in dense social, historical and political structures and, simultaneously a place of liberation

from conventions and conventionality. It is, at the same time, a place of magic and myth, of transformation and intoxication. If this is a paradox, it is one that is part of the burden carried across the Atlantic in heavy baggage. Engagement within this location is, necessarily, complex and conditional, measured and partial, filtered through the lenses of perception.

III. Engagement: Irving, Twain, James, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Miller

Elements in the American perception of Europe persist. Europe is seen consistently in an ambiguous form, an uneasy amalgam of decadence and dream, a version of a kingdom made by magic. Economic or political reality tends to remain shadowy and insubstantial. Europe acts as an introspective device: a landscape where mental possibilities can be realised in concrete geographical shapes, a form of mystery that may be discovered or uncovered: a kind of objective correlative for aspects of the American imagination. That these realities accumulate around the experience of students in Europe is, of course, a partial insight: not all students are shaped by these images, nor are these images necessarily the governing aspect of a study abroad experience but they are part of the landscape of education abroad in Europe formed and reformed within the American imagination. They are both a restraint and an opportunity. They demonstrate to our students that what they experience has been experienced before. They are part of a persistent cultural history: part of what they experience is not unique to them but is shaped by a specific and partial version of history. As a minimum, these antecedents should be somewhere within the learning experience, implicitly or explicitly, of education abroad in Europe. They are after all an expression of what students, at some level or another, “know” about Europe even before they get on the plane.

What changes and what remains the same is an area for exploration. While historical factors impose change, other elements, not least mythic associations, evoke an unchanging Europe that persists in the American imagination over two centuries.

America is, of course, a land first dreamed by Europe: the Western land mass that assumed mythical and Edenic associations even before it was discovered. It is also, clearly, historically a nation built and populated by Europeans. The European origins of American culture are simultaneously employed and rejected in this cultural history. America’s political independence from Britain was a de-facto condition in 1776. Then began the long search for a native American literature and the attempt to define a native American voice. One name emerges early in this process. Washington Irving is one of the earliest important American writers of imaginative prose literature, and he

identified an impulse that is persistent and pervasive.

He perceived Europe ambiguously as containing the social complexity and the sense of a historical past that was felt to be absent in America. He also, however, hinted at the decadence and decay of Europe in the sheer length of that past experience. Most significantly, he isolated the mythic status of Europe - a sense that Europe belongs to the shapes of the past rather than to current realities. In the opening sections of *The Sketch Book*, published in 1819 and 1820, Irving compared Europe with America.

I visited parts of my own country; and had I been merely a lover of fine scenery, I should have felt little desire to seek elsewhere for its gratification for on no country have the charms of nature been more prodigally lavished. Her mighty lakes, like oceans of liquid silver; her mountains, with their bright aerial tints; her valleys teeming with wild fertility ... no, never need an American look beyond his own country for the sublime and beautiful of natural scenery.¹⁸

In this comment, Irving stresses the grandeur and fertility of America, its unspoilt beauty rich in natural resources. There is, though, something lacking and he defends his preoccupation with Europe in the following way:

But Europe held forth the charm of storied and poetical association. There were to be seen the masterpieces of art, the refinements of highly-cultivated society, the quaint peculiarities of ancient and local custom. My native country was full of youthful promise: Europe was rich in the accumulated treasures of age. Her very ruins told the history of times gone by, and every mouldering stone was a chronicle.¹⁹

Irving identifies a number of characteristics that became deeply, almost permanently, associated with Europe in the American imagination. Firstly, it is a landscape rich in art and poetic symbols; those elements on which, for Irving, literature seemed to depend. Secondly it contains complex social convention, a “highly-cultivated society” absent in America. However, his language reveals a basic ambiguity - the attraction of Europe is focused on “ruins”, “mouldering stone”, in contrast to the “youthful promise” of America. Irving’s comment contains envious admiration but also a sense that the future is American while Europe belongs essentially to the past. He expands this point as he describes the impulse that led him to explore France, Italy and England.

I longed to wander over the seas of renowned antiquity - to tread, as it

were, in the footsteps of antiquity - to loiter about the ruined castle - to meditate on the falling tower - to escape ... from the commonplace realities of the present, and to lose myself among the shadowy grandeurs of the past.²⁰

The activities are significant - to loiter, wander and meditate - in essence, to engage with Europe introspectively and to evoke poetic motifs rather than living reality. Irving's Europe, like Disney's Magic Kingdom, is focused on, and derived out of, romantic poetic symbols: the tower and the castle. It is more landscape of mind than concrete reality. Significantly, Irving served as an ambassador in Europe but that political reality is rarely expressed, let alone explored. Engagement with Europe is partial and selective.

America and Europe: Mark Twain and Henry James

Co-existing with the idea of Europe defined by Irving, is the national struggle for a native American art freed from European influence. This struggle is reflected in the essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson, extended and embodied in the poetry of Walt Whitman, triumphant in Melville's masterpiece *Moby Dick*, or, more precisely realised, in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*.

Huckleberry Finn is a native American novel using a variety of local southern dialects and owing little or nothing to European forms. It signals the emergence into maturity of an important sub-genre, fictions that employ local regional dialects. This is a form that is absolute in its Americanism: it is written in American and the language signals that national context as distinct from an English one.

Twain's key role in the creation of a perceptibly American literature freed from European dependency and from British English has, nevertheless, to be balanced against his engagement with Europe in terms that are substantially the same as those found in Irving. In *The Innocents Abroad*, Twain specifically contrasted Europe and America and used American innocence to satirise European behaviour. In the description of a visit to Venice, Twain's humour is, however, double-edged. It derives out of the innocence of the American visitor but also satirises the perversities of European social customs:

Very many of the young women are exceedingly pretty and dressed with rare good taste. We are gradually and laboriously learning the ill manners of staring them unflinchingly in the face - not because such conduct is agreeable to us, but because it is the custom of the country and they say the girls like it. We wish to learn all the curious, outlandish ways of all the different countries, so that we can "show off" and

astonish people when we get home.²¹

There is a clearly ironic perspective on European customs that are “curious” and “outlandish”.

Twain is, however, touched by the impulses that moved Washington Irving and generations of writers, students, visitors. As he satirises Italy, he still responds to that poetic, mythological and dream world that Irving perceived:

We have stood in the dim religious light of these hoary sanctuaries in the midst of long ranks of dusty monuments and effigies of the great dead of Venice, until we seemed drifting back, back, back, into the solemn past, and looking upon the scenes and mingling with the peoples of a remote antiquity. We have been in a half waking sort of dream all the time.²²

In short, Washington Irving and Mark Twain share certain attitudes to Europe. They perceive a Europe that is decadent and locked in the past, but also magical and unreal - belonging to a world of myth and dream, a landscape of mind. Twain and Irving reflect elements that are substantially unchanged in the American perception of Europe.

While that version of Europe persists, historical shifts lead to a number of changes that become apparent at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. This can be illustrated, in the first place, by reference to the career of Henry James. He spent most of his creative life in Europe, and, as he makes clear in the 1878 biography *Hawthorne*, his attitudes to Europe and America are consistent with those of Irving:

History, as yet, has left in the United States but so thin and impalpable a deposit that we very soon touch the hard substratum of nature; and nature herself, in the western world, has the peculiarity of seeming rather crude and immature.²³

He identifies a paucity of history, and defines a lack of social sophistication in America. Irving’s “highly-cultivated society” is not to be found even in James’s New England.

To English eyes the oldest and most honourable of the smaller American towns must seem in a manner primitive and rustic ... their social tone is not unnaturally inferred to bear the village stamp.²⁴

James sees in Europe historical depth and social complexity that is absent from the American landscape. This is a familiar version of the learning environment where opportunities to engage with a sense of the past are enhanced.

The experience of the American in Europe is explicitly developed in *The American* (1877). The American protagonist is socially naive, democratic in his attitude to society, and he exhibits a profound confidence in the future. Above all, he embodies a belief in the validity of the business ethic, and is, that most American of phenomenon, a self-made man. The American belongs to the future, Europe to the past.

The Europe created by James is, however, aristocratic and genteel. By the 1920s the image of Europe has undergone a transformation. A new generation of Americans pursues an alternative European experience. The change relates more to changes in the American condition rather than to any social or political alteration in Europe. Once again, Europe is, in fact, recreated and re-invented in the American mind. James associated the business ethic with optimistic and democratic attitudes in *The American*. Domestic changes in America and the impact of the First World War transformed, and indeed inverted, that association for the creative artist. After 1919, Presidents Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge responded to a national mood of post-war conservatism - the business ethic became associated with social conformity rather than with optimism and democracy. A generation of Americans returned from the war in Europe to find America pervaded by middle class, business dominated ethics - a small minded parochialism apparent in Harding's key word, "normalcy". Prohibition and the Sacco-Vanzetti affair precisely reflect the new American mood: provincial, conventional and suspicious of intellectual activity.

The generation of expatriates that includes Fitzgerald and Hemingway went to Europe because a very good exchange rate enabled them to live on very few dollars but the other motive was to escape that bourgeois, parochial America, to pursue intellectual freedom and the unconventional. Drinking, in the fiction of Fitzgerald and Hemingway, is a recurrent motif, and, in the age of Prohibition, it becomes a symbolic act of rejection: an act asserting freedom from values of American parochialism. That generation became involved in the Dada movement, then in surrealism. Largely forgotten figures like Robert McAlmon, Sylvia Beach, Charisse and Harold Crosby and many others published a whole range of experimental literary periodicals in Europe. Above all, that generation sought sexual, psychological and intellectual freedom - characteristics they associated with post-war Europe and absent from an America associated with industrialised, mechanistic conformity, what Harold Stearns called "enforced standardization" and characterised as "a spiritual

prison.”²⁵ The Italian-American poet, Emanuel Carnevali, who lived most of his life between America and Europe, offers a characteristic contrast:

I come from America where everything
Is bigger but less majestic;
Where there is no wine.
I arrived in the land of wine –
Wine for the soul.
Italy is a little family:
America is an orphan,
Independent and arrogant,
Crazy and sublime,
Without tradition to guide her,
Rushing headlong in a mad run which she calls progress.
Tremendously laborious America,
Builder of the mechanical cities.²⁶

The transformation is clear. James engages with a Europe that is characterised by social conventions, dense, pervasive and puzzling social complexity. Fitzgerald, Hemingway et al. see in Europe the absence of convention - a freedom not available to them in America. That generation did not seek the high civilization of Henry James, but pursued pleasures of fornication, alcohol and artistic freedom.

Henry Miller and ‘that son-of-a -bitch of a princess’ .

Henry Miller reflects this version of Europe in its most extreme manifestation in *Tropic of Cancer* (1934). The novel, narrated from Paris, embodies an anarchic contempt for conventional behaviour and an anarchic contempt for traditional forms of art:

This is not a book. This is libel, slander, defamation of character. This is not a book, in the ordinary sense of the word. No, this is a prolonged insult, a gob of spit in the face of Art, a kick in the pants to God, Man, Destiny, Time, Love, Beauty ...²⁷

Miller assaults traditional values and conventional sexual morality to parallel, and enforce, deviation from formal literary convention. Europe becomes the location for three related acts of rejection - sexual convention, literary tradition and social values are discarded.

She lay back with her legs apart and she let him fool around and fool around and then, just as he was climbing over her, just as he was going to slip it in, she informs him nonchalantly that she has a dose of clap. He rolled off her like a log. I heard him fumbling around in the kitchen for the black soap he used on special occasions, and in a few moments he was standing by my bed with a towel in his hands and saying - 'can you beat that? That son-of-a-bitch of a princess has the 'clap'!²⁸

If the *Magic Kingdom* expresses what persists in the American perception of Europe, the unfortunate princess (a distant relative of James's Princess Casamassima perhaps) offers a metaphor for what has radically altered. The European aristocrat, a recurrent figure in James's fiction, and an embodiment of historical continuity, becomes the source of venereal disease. In that figure the transformation of the meaning of Europe is clear. The discreet social and cultural complexities that permeate James's Europe are comically and wildly parodied. Europe becomes the location for a rejection of American values seen as conformist and repressive. Simultaneously, the ambiguity reflected in images of Europe as somehow decayed and decadent (as in Irving or Twain) is precisely realised and sustained in the image of 'the clap'.

This version of Europe frames a manifestation of liberation in a literary sense as well. Miller abandons narrative continuity, and his first person voice is impressionistic and promiscuous integrating surrealist dream sequences with a social-sexual comedy that stresses the rejection of American commercial and moral ethics.

It is now the fall of my second year in Paris. I was sent here for a reason I have not yet been able to fathom. I have no money, no resources, no hopes. I am the happiest man alive. A year ago, six months ago, I thought that I was an artist. I no longer think about it, I *am*. Everything that was literature has fallen from me. There are no more books to be written, thank God.²⁹

The protagonist is clearly the exact inversion of the Jamesian American, the self-made man. He is, in a sense, an un-made man. He rejects the

commercial ethic completely, reveals a profound, contented, aimlessness. The narrator in Paris, thus, achieves liberation from status, from sexual and literary convention. Europe is in Miller's version, the absence of forms and formalities: a landscape of liberation where American values can be discarded.

All this is clearly a long way away from Irving's version of high culture yet it is comparable in other ways. Henry Miller's Paris is alternative to American reality; it is perceived as less commonplace, in a sense, less real than America. Europe remains a projection of possibilities lacking in the native culture. For Washington Irving, those possibilities were cultural and social. For Henry Miller, they are anti-cultural, anti-social. For both, Europe operates as an introspective device: a way of realising alternative moralities in a concrete geographical location.³⁰ Europe is, in short, that place where transformation is possible, where identities may be shed and a new self, alternate to the American self, can be invented or discovered.

Certain aspects of the American representation of Europe reflect, inevitably, political and social changes in the USA. The unfortunately transformed figure of the princess offers a means of tracing those changes. In contrast, other modes of representation remain constant from the late eighteenth century until the present. These have existed alongside, and in juxtaposition with, the Europe that has been expressed through the notion of the Magic Kingdom.

All of this adds up to a set of rich paradoxes and suggests a field of potential, if conditional, engagement especially and uniquely complex. The notion that a person shaped by one cultural identity can enter another in a relatively unproblematic way is, for the most part, highly contentious. The conflicting set of contexts that coexist in the Europe invented in the American imagination demonstrates that, at best, engagement can be partial and particular. This is not a limitation but a profound opportunity. Within that form of nuanced intimacy, the student is offered a perspective on the "other" that is shaped by perceptions drawn from present and the past. Europe is not just geography: it is an amalgam of those things that have been perceived and re-perceived by generations of American explorers. If the point-of-view is necessarily distanced, as it was for Robert Sage as he looked down upon Paris at night, it is also the point from which illumination is possible and in which, in some sense, this enigmatic and secretive old world can be observed and read:

Thus it was that night long ago when he had first come to Paris and had climbed the maze of steps and narrow streets to the platform of bare earth that lay beneath the domes of Sacre Coeur. The night hung lightly over the city, its secret questioned by millions of incandescent pinpoints. Somewhere in that endless darkness were the Seine and the

domes and the factories and the spires and the homes of Paris, its joys, its sorrows, its pleasures, its vices... Somewhere below: and yet there was no noise, no movement, no odor – nothing but the sense of a stirring and a million pinpoint points that through their very distinctiveness were vague, Perhaps it was that night that he had first felt the touch of mystery that enveloped him.³¹

IV. Return: Going Home

Europe also persists as the location from which the American re-perceives his own country. In the search for Europe, in the movement across the Atlantic, the expatriate (traveller, student or writer) paradoxically discovers America more clearly. The structure of the expatriate novel typically ends in return, or in the evocation of the possibility of return, a movement back to an America re-perceived through transformed consciousness.

Tropic of Cancer lastly, and perhaps surprisingly, contains this conventional conclusion.

Suddenly it occurred to me that if I wanted I could go to America myself ... My thoughts drifted out, toward the sea, toward the other side where, taking a last look back, I had seen the skyscrapers fading out in a flurry of snowflakes ... I saw the whole city spread out, from Harlem to the Battery, the streets choked with ants, the elevated rushing by, the theaters emptying ... After everything had quietly sifted through my head a great peace came over me. Here ... lies a soil so saturated with the past that however far back the mind roams one can never detach it from human background. Christ, before my eyes there shimmered such a golden peace that only a neurotic could dream of turning his head away ... In the wonderful peace that fell over me it seemed as if I had climbed to the top of a high mountain; for a little while I would be able to look around me, to take in the meaning of the landscape.³²

Miller's language is revealing. America is perceived as frantic movement; Europe is quasi-romantic invention: a neo-stasis seen from the distant perspective of the mountain top. Despite the narrator's engagement with Europe as amoral and anti-cultural environment, his conception of "a soil so saturated with the past" is precisely consistent with Irving's version of Europe. Economic, social or political realities are excluded. America is the landscape of the "ants," whereas Miller's Europe is permeated with "a golden peace" more appropriate to dream than waking.

Miller's attitudes revealed here are substantially conventional. This pattern of perception is, for example, apparent in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*, published in 1860. In his introduction, Hawthorne describes his attitude to Italy in the third person.

Italy, as the site of his Romance, was chiefly valuable to him as affording a sort of poetic or fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon as they are, and needs be, in America.³³

This alternative poetic landscape is familiar enough. At the end of the novel, however, the central characters are united and they make a decision that reflects the way that America is refocused through the European experience.

And, now that life had so much human promise in it, they resolved to go back to their own land; because the years, after all, have a kind of emptiness, when we spend too many of them on a foreign shore. We defer the reality of life, in such cases, until a future moment, when we shall again breathe our native air.³⁴

In *The Marble Faun*, America is the environment where productive, social dimensions exist. In *Tropic of Cancer* American society is dehumanised as "choked with ants". While Hawthorne and Miller obviously have widely differing views of America and of capital and commerce, they share a sense of Europe as the place where reality is suspended: a world more akin to dream than reality.

The perspective is significant and suggests that engagement for these authors and for our students is always modified by a sense of America as an alternate reality. Over and over, as return is envisaged, Europe is observed not from intimate proximity but from distance. Thus, when Malcolm Cowley, like Henry Miller, explores the possibility of going home, it is not from the streets of Paris but is from an elevated distanced place:

Standing as it were on the Tour Eiffel, they looked westward across the wheatfields of Beauce and the rain-drenched little hills of Brittany, until somewhere in the mist they saw the country of their childhood, which should henceforth be the country of their art. American themes, like other themes, had exactly the dignity that talent could lend them.³⁵

This perspective reflects a sense of ambiguity and a limitation in intimacy that

characterizes engagement and disengagement with Europe, and reengagement with America. “Re-entry” is a process that, for many of these figures and for our students, is one that combines a sense of unease: there is a need to re-adjust to an America that is frequently reconstructed by distance; engagement with Europe is necessarily incomplete, partial and, almost inevitably, some kind of qualified failure. It is a stronger learning experience precisely because of that failure. We learn, not at the centre of ease and security, but in a vortex of unease and dislocation.

It is clear that an integral factor in the expatriate experience is, precisely, the capacity to envisage an image of America born out of, and modified by, European experience. This act of literary imagination, the re-perception of America, is a fundamental characteristic of expatriate experience and, simultaneously, a profound learning opportunity.

V. Conclusion

A fuller discussion of this topic would, clearly, need to examine the contribution of the expatriate to the evolution of literary modernism. T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound moved modernism out of the native American culture into the field of international artistic flux thus, creating, in some sense, the idea of Europe as a centre of cultural innovation. William Faulkner is, perhaps, the only profoundly modernistic innovator who is unambiguously American in tone and technique. Pound and Eliot shared Irving’s idea that Europe is the landscape of High Art, the source of cultural meaning. They thus moulded their versions of innovative art around European (and in Pound’s case Asian) forms.

I have intended to offer a more particular set of perspectives. There are factors in the American perception of Europe that have remained constant and that connect the work of writers as diverse as Henry Miller and Nathaniel Hawthorne. There was, however, a fundamental transformation in the images associated with Europe in the first decades of this century. This condition of change and simultaneous continuity inevitably impacts the meaning of Europe in the American mind. It shapes the experience of students and is part of the baggage they carry. It modifies and enriches their engagement with this landscape and informs the process of return.

In study abroad, we construct a notion of “abroad” as a place of potential enlightenment, in contrast sometimes to the USA (as if enlightenment were primarily due to location rather than introspection). The “Europe” identified here is a particularly dense, complex, paradoxical, intimate version of abroad. That intimacy is a consequence of what is “known” and what is known are these constructs: the landscape invented and re-invented by generations of

Americans as they imagined, explored and, inevitably, returned home.

The discussion reveals a set of ambiguities. Europe, seen through American eyes is changed and unchanging. It emerges as, at times, a landscape of fantasy - a world of myth and magic. In contradiction, it evokes images of concrete and high social civilization. Within a single consciousness, Mark Twain's, it is an amalgam of the awesome and the absurd. All at once it is the Magic Kingdom and it is High Art and it is cheap red wine.

Endnotes

¹ Malcolm Cowley, *Exiles Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s* ed. Donald Faulkner, (London: Penguin Books, 1994. p.84. First published 1934. This edition revised 1951.

² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³ "A generation of writers went out into the world like the children in Grimm's fairy tales who ran away from a cruel stepmother. They wandered for years in search of treasure and then came back like the grown children to dig for it at home." Cowley, *Ibid.*, p. 289.

⁴ Wambly Bald is a largely forgotten figure but he was a highly significant commentator on American expatriates in Paris. Between 1929 and 1933 he produced a weekly column "La Vie de Boheme" for the European edition of the Chicago Tribune which both commentated upon, and created, the myth of the "Left Bank". He was also "immortalised" as the priapic (or in Miller's cruder designation "cunt struck") Van Nostrand in Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* (1934). Bald's columns are collected in *On the Left Bank: 1929 - 1933 ed.* Benjamin Franklin V (Athens, Ohio and London: Ohio University Press, 1987).

⁵ Sisley Huddleston in a letter to the editor, *Chicago Tribune* (European edition). July 31st 1933, p. 4. Cited by Benjamin Franklin V in an introduction to Wambly Bald, *On the Left Bank: 1929 - 1933*, p. xxii.

⁶ Bernard Malamud, "The Lady of the Lake" in *The Magic Barrel and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p.95 (first published, 1958). "Freeman" is the name that the character adopts in Europe signalling his perceived difference from the constraining complexities

of Italian life. In that act, he asserts a sense of being an American, unencumbered by the kind of mysterious complexities that Malamud accumulates, not least through the Arthurian associations implied in the title. That declaration of independence is, of course, futile.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁸ Ed. John Overton Choules, *Young Americans Abroad: or, Vacation in Europe: Travels in England, France, Holland, Belgium, Prussia and Switzerland* (Boston: D. Lothrop and co. , 1874), pp. 259 – 260. First printed 1851.

⁹ *From The Left Bank Revisited: Selections from the Paris Tribune, 1917 – 1934*, ed. Hugh Ford (University Park and London: Pennsylvania University Press, 1972), p.55.

¹⁰ Cowley, p. 102.

¹¹ *The Left Bank Revisited.*, Maxwell Bodenheim, April 21st, 1929, p.163

¹² William Stowe, *Going Abroad: European Travel in Nineteenth Century American Culture* (Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 5.

¹³ From a speech by Calvin Coolidge, „The Press Under a Free Government“ which was given before the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Washington, D.C. on January 17, 1925. For a fuller description of the context of this speech see: http://www.calvin-coolidge.org/html/the_business_of_america_is_bus.

¹⁴ Interview in London, November 1929. For a full exposition of Ford’s views see *My Philosophy of Industry* (New York: Coward McCann, 1929).

¹⁵ Ed Peter Neagoe, *Americans Abroad: An Anthology* (The Hague Holland: The Service Press, 1932), p.x

¹⁶ Malcolm Cowley, *Blue Juniata: Poems* (New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1929), p.51.

¹⁷ “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley”, in *The Penguin Book of American Verse*, ed. Geoffrey Moore (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 285.

- ¹⁸ Washington Irving, *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.n.* (London: John Murray, 1849), p.10.
- ¹⁹ Irving, *The Sketch Book*, p.10
- ²⁰ Irving, *The Sketch Book*, pp. 10-11.
- ²¹ Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*, (Hartford: The American Publishing Company, 1869), p.233.
- ²² Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*, p.236.
- ²³ Henry James, *Hawthorne* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1967), p.31.
- ²⁴ James, *Hawthorne*, p.33
- ²⁵ Harold Stearns, "The Intellectual Life," in *Civilization in the United States: An Enquiry by Thirty Americans*, ed. Harold Stearns (London: Jonathan Cape, 1922), p.150
- ²⁶ Emanuel Carnevali, *The Autobiography of Emanuel Carnevali*, compiled and prefaced by Kay Boyle (New York: Horizon Press, 1967), from the poem "The Return," p.198
- ²⁷ Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p.2.
- ²⁸ Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*, p.234.
- ²⁹ Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*, p.1.
- ³⁰ Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* is arguably the best novel concerned with the post World War I expatriate experience. It encompasses many of the elements discussed here. Hemingway recreates the intellectual and social flux inherent in post-war society and enforces this through the expatriate condition -- an alienation that is geographical as well as intellectual and emotional.
- ³¹ Robert Sage, "Salvage from Limbo," in *Americans Abroad*, ed. Peter Neagoe, p. 373.

³² Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*, pp. 317 - 318.

³³ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun* (London: Everyman, 1910), p.xv.

³⁴ Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*, p.388.

³⁵ Cowley, *Exiles Return*, p.96.