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Mirrored Surfaces: A Century of American Encounters with
the "real" France

by

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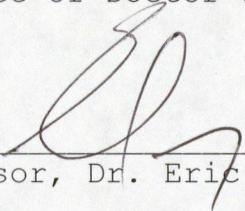
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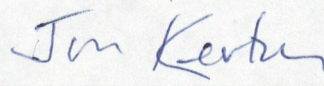
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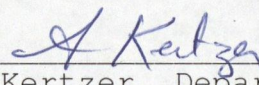
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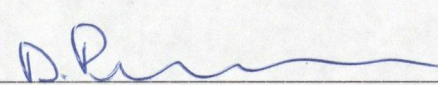
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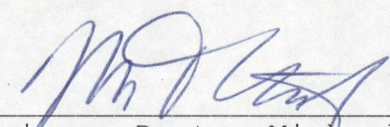
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ABSTRACT

"Mirrored Surfaces: A Century of American Encounters with the 'real' France" explores American expatriate writing and its relationship to France from the late nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century. Through a close analysis of Henry James's *The American* (1877) and *The Ambassadors* (1903), Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933) and *Paris France* (1940), Alice Kaplan's *French Lessons* (1993), and Adam Gopnik's *Paris to the Moon* (2000), I look at how these works deal with the notion of an "authentic" France. Aware that there is no such thing as an "authentic" France, James, Stein, Kaplan and Gopnik nonetheless constantly refer to "authentic" French moments. In fact, "authentic" French moments often turn out to be American moments, as the authors use France to explore American values and identities. Here again, however, the notion of an "authentic" America also turns out to be a construction. Such a situation could be explained by the failure of the "American dream" to fulfill American expectations and the failure of France as a substitute for this dream. This is something that was relevant to James's period and is still true in 2003.

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Introduction

Americans are proud of their democratic system. Equality is one of its key principles. In the middle of the nineteenth century, a Frenchman, Alexis de Tocqueville, sang the praises of American democracy. In his introduction to *Democracy in America*, Thomas Bender writes that the most important thing for Tocqueville is

the "spirit" of equality, the way in which men regard their social status. In democracy the paternalism and dependence characteristic of aristocracy is replaced by a sense of equality in social intercourse. Although Tocqueville was alert enough to note that the rich in America did not invite the poor to their homes, he also observed that when rich and poor did meet, say in the street, they met as equals and shook hands. (xviii-xix)

This distinction between the subtlety of class and the ideology of democracy is found in American expatriate writing about France. While many American writers celebrate democracy, there are others who (without rejecting it) feel a little restrained by this idea of "equality in social intercourse." American expatriate writers who went to France wished to distinguish themselves from their compatriots by acquiring French manners and culture.¹ From the late nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century, American Francophiles have reproduced through their French

immersion the rise of the middle class, what Thorstein Veblen coined the "leisure class." As he observed in 1899,

[the] growth of punctilious discrimination as to qualitative excellence in eating, drinking, etc., presently affects not only the manner of life, but also the training and intellectual activity of the gentleman of leisure. He is no longer simply the successful, aggressive male--the man of strength, resource and intrepidity. In order to avoid stultification, he must also cultivate his tastes.

(64)

For many American expatriate writers, going to France was a way for them to assert a "difference" or "individuality" that would not be recognized in their own country. Their wealthy status could only be validated through their adoption of French culture. In other words, as Americans who would have merely remained in America, they would just have been rich and successful, but by going to France they also become cultivated. Their knowledge of the French sets them apart from, if not above, their American counterparts.

What Thorstein Veblen also sees as the lower classes imitating or mimicking the upper classes could also apply to the American writer's relationship to France in that he or she attempts to perform "Frenchness" to a certain extent.

Just as the lower classes can only reproduce the attitudes of higher classes (there is always something that betrays their "original" background), Americans can only reproduce French manners and social graces. Americans in France are never totally "French." They always betray their Americanness.

Literary representations of an authentic France reflect this cultural reproduction of French values. Literary works about France, such as Henry James's *The American* (1877) and *The Ambassadors* (1903), Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933) and *Paris France* (1940), Alice Kaplan's *French Lessons* (1993), and Adam Gopnik's *Paris to the Moon* (2000), participate in this process of reproduction through their play with genre. With the exception of James's novels, all the works covered in "Mirrored Surfaces" claim to be non-fiction. These non-fictional works, however, often "pose" as parodies or rely heavily on fiction. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* "performs" to a certain extent the autobiographical genre, because it is more a biography of Stein. *Paris France* is a cross between the essay and the memoir. Kaplan's memoir and Gopnik's collection of essays abound with images of France that are more fictional than factual. There is a strange connection between James's novels about France and Stein's, Kaplan's, and Gopnik's more realistic genres about this country. Their play with genres

that are supposedly meant to represent the truth betray their view of an authentic France, i.e., something that does not really exist but is still worth pining for.

I will rely mostly on Jean Baudrillard's theory of the simulacra (reality disappears and what is left in its place is a world of images and simulated events) and Jonathan Culler's definition of the authentic as "always mediated" to explain James's, Stein's, Kaplan's and Gopnik's perception of France. Baudrillard's statement "it is reality itself that disappears utterly in the game of reality" (148) and Culler's "the authentic is a usage perceived as a sign of that usage" (159) both emphasize that reality or authenticity does not exist. In fact, Culler uses Baudrillard's theory of social objects to "frame" his own argument about tourism and cultural authenticity:

The notion of a usage become sign of itself might remain somewhat obscure . . . [were] it not for the exemplary case of tourism . . . The tourist is interested in everything as a sign of itself, an instance of a typical cultural practice: a Frenchman is an example of a Frenchman, a restaurant in the Quartier Latin is an example of a Latin Quarter restaurant, signifying "Latin Quarter Restaurantness." All over the world the unsung armies of semiotics, the tourists, are fanning out in

search of signs of Frenchness. . . tourists persist in regarding these objects and practices as cultural signs. They put into practice Jean Baudrillard's claim that an accurate theory of social objects must be based on signification rather than needs or use-value. (155)

Culler's take on Baudrillard's theory of social objects contextualizes the American expatriate writer's reading of France as "a sign of itself," as a cultural and artistic object that points towards its example. Thus, France is always perceived as an example (or reproduction) of France.

Baudrillard's "disappearance of reality" is illustrated through art: "And so art is everywhere, since artifice is at the very heart of reality...reality itself, entirely impregnated by an aesthetic which is inseparable from its own structure, has been confused with its own image" (151-152). His analysis of the ambiguous relationship between art and reality is particularly relevant to my own argument about the American writer's "framed" perception of an authentic France, as James, Stein, Kaplan and Gopnik relate France to painting or visual art. For James's characters, Christopher Newman of *The American* and Lambert Strether of *The Ambassadors*, visual metaphors allow them to delude themselves about the nature of their French experiences. Whereas Newman admires more the reproduction or "copy" of France than its "original,"

Strether brings this admiration to another level when he validates the imitation over the original. Thus, what appears to be Newman's admiration for something he knows is just a copy in *The American* gives way to Strether's validation of the copy as an original in *The Ambassadors*. Stein's mention of her close connection with painters (especially Picasso) in *The Autobiography*, as well as her reliance on Millet's *Man with the Hoe* to describe her "introduction" to France in *Paris France*, emphasize a certain detachment towards France. Stein only "sees" France through the eyes of "her" painters (mostly foreigners: "[n]aturally it was foreigners who did it there in France" *Paris France* 13). This representation of France is twice removed from the "original" (so to speak), because the painters who "framed" France (in France) for Stein were not French. It was a French painter (Millet) who introduced France to Stein when she was a child in America. This does not, however, give a more realistic account of France, because here again there is also more than one "layer" covering the "original." Stein's "encounter" with France (in America) via the *Man with the Hoe* is not just a visual experience through painting. It filters this painting through photography: "I had never really wanted a photograph of a picture before I saw Millet's Man With The Hoe" (6). Kaplan's detailed description of the city of Paris as an

impressionist painting as well as her cubist perception of the south of France suggest an experience of France which has more to do with the museum than with an actual stroll within the frame of the impressionist or cubist painting. Gopnik's *Paris to the Moon* takes its title from a nineteenth century engraving of the city of Paris. Needless to say that his collection of essays, which emphasize the *Paris au quotidien*, is metaphorically framed by the engraving.

Culler's exploration of the interchangeability between the sight of the authentic and its "markers" is exemplified through what he calls the "semiotics of tourism":

The proliferation of markers frames something as a sight for tourists. The existence of reproductions is what makes something an original, authentic, the real thing--the original of which the souvenirs, . . . are reproductions . . . But the semiotic process at work has a curious effect: the proliferation of markers or reproductions confers an authenticity upon what may at first seem egregiously inauthentic. (160)

Although James, Stein, Kaplan, and Gopnik would not consider themselves tourists because they all lived in France, they still reproduce the touristic habit of marking certain French sites as authentic which "at first seem egregiously inauthentic." The authors' heavy reliance on visual imagery

reflects this tendency to turn the inauthentic into the authentic. The "framing" of fantastical projections, i.e., preconceived images of France, as authentic French experiences are recurrent themes in their works. Be it artistic or touristic, the American experience of France is always "framed." James, Stein, Kaplan, and Gopnik are aware of this restriction, but still attempt to propose a French experience that would transcend the "frame." As a result, there are two types of "real" France in their works: what I categorize as "fantastical projections" (images derived from objects and artistic associations) and "daily experiences" (the actual process of living in France, of eating and drinking at the bistros, of interacting with your typical Frenchman or Frenchwoman, etc). For the authors covered in this study, one type of France (the daily experiences) is closer to the truth than the other because it is experienced directly rather than through objects or images. I argue that both are constructions because the daily experience is "filtered" through the authors' Americanization of their French surroundings.

Critical works on American expatriate writers in France tend to focus exclusively on the notion of place and space on the American writer's consciousness and on what Paris gives

the American. The nature of the French experience and its failure to fulfill the American expectation of an unbiased representation, have been overlooked. Gerald Kennedy's *Imagining Paris* and Donald Pizer's *American Expatriate Writing and the Paris Moment* explore how Paris as a "place" influences American writers. With his theory of place, Kennedy indicates "how exile in France affected the career of [American expatriate writers] and how Paris became for each a complex image of the possibilities of metamorphosis" (xiii). Pizer also takes up the American expatriate writer's response to place when he describes the Parisian effects on American creativity:

And because Paris to the expatriate writer is above all a state of mind--that is, a response to a place and its way of life by a consciousness--the form of expatriate writing tends toward the spatial . . . the representation of the discovery of a place is made equal in time and meaning with the discovery of a personal aesthetic, of a way of expressing oneself. (142-43)

Although I agree with Kennedy and Pizer that Paris allows Americans to experiment with literary forms as well as leading them towards paths of self-discovery, I am mostly interested in the other side of the coin, i.e., what the American gives Paris, because there is also a sense of

American rewriting of French culture and identity. The framing or marking of certain inauthentic sites as "authentic" is an example of this rewriting. This situation could be interpreted as equivalent (Paris gives Americans something and Americans give Paris something), but a close look at the American expatriate attitude toward Paris and France seems to suggest one major trend: an appropriation of French culture and values in order to rewrite them as American. In addition to investigating the two types of authentic France at play in their works, I will also analyze James's, Stein's, Kaplan's and Gopnik's re-creation of Paris as American.

Using Lacan's theory of the subject and the "Other," I will show how the expatriate writer attempts to see his or her American reflection through the multi-layered French surfaces. In order to understand better the relationship between *sujet et autre*, we also have to look at Lacan's three orders (Symbolic-Imaginary-Real). In his analysis of Lacan's orders, Malcolm Bowie writes that the Symbolic is "characterised by difference, disjunction and displacement [while] the [Imaginary] is a seeking for identity or resemblance" and that "[a]lthough the two orders are distinct and opposed, the Symbolic encroaches upon the Imaginary, organises it, and gives it direction; the false

fixities of the imaginary are exposed, and coerced into movement, by the signifying chain" (115). As for Lacan's Real, two divergent tendencies may be discerned:

First, the Real is that which is there, already there, and inaccessible to the subject . . . when we appear on the scene as subjects certain games have already been played, certain dice thrown . . . The way beyond this "laughable" Real is the uniquely human way offered by the Symbolic order: thanks to that order the dice may be thrown again. Secondly, however, the Real is given its structure by the human power to name. Neither of these conceptions is particularly original . . . They place a common stress upon the limits of the linguistic power: the Real is that which is radically extrinsic to the procession of signifiers. The Real may be structured--"created" even--by the subject for himself, but it cannot be named . . . It is the irremediable and intractable "outside" of language; the indefinitely receding goal towards which the signifying chain tends; the vanishing point of the Symbolic and Imaginary alike. As a result of this view, the Real comes close to meaning "the ineffable" or "the impossible" in Lacan's thought . . . [It serves] to remind Lacan's would-be omnipotent subject that his symbolic and imaginary

constructions take place in a world which exceeds him.

(116)

We could see the Symbolic-Imaginary-Real orders at play in James's, Stein's, Kaplan's and Gopnik's representation of France. Lacan's two divergent tendencies of the Real, the inaccessible "there" and its creation through "the human power to name," apply to the American expatriate writer's "authentic" France (something that really exists but always remains inaccessible, something that can be created but cannot be named). The "authentic" France exists "outside" of language, "outside" of the American language that is. More than just the literal meaning of language, I am referring to its metaphorical aspect (the American "procession of signifiers"). France can only exist outside the American signifying chain. Thus, American expatriate subjects are aware that their symbolic and imaginary constructions take place in a world that exceeds them. This could explain why these writers' use of the word "authentic" or "real" is problematic. In fact, the authors' ambiguous use of the word "authentic" is at the core of their perception and representation of France. James, Stein, Kaplan, and Gopnik often start by a complex use of this term (they take a certain distance from it), but they eventually revert to a naïve interpretation of it. When I refer to the "real" or

"authentic" France, it is difficult to avoid imitating the authors' ambiguous use of these terms (I also juxtapose a complex use of the terms with a more simplistic interpretation), because the whole concept of an "authentic" French experience is unclear for James, Stein, Kaplan, and Gopnik. My excessive use of the words "authentic" and "real" in the chapter on Stein mirrors this author's repetition of these terms. My ambiguous use of these terms (while at times I use quotation marks, sometimes I do not) also reflects Stein and Gopnik's playfulness with these words.

I look at how these writers "work around" the problem of an "authentic" France that is inaccessible. If there is no such thing as a "real" or "authentic" France for these writers, why are their works interspersed with descriptions of "authentic" French moments? Are they mocking themselves knowingly or are they contradicting themselves unconsciously? I suggest that it is unclear whether their contradictions are the effects of a conscious attempt to describe the failure of reporting accurately the "authentic" France or whether they arise from an excessive enthusiasm that pushes them to forget their initial rejection of the "authentic" France. Both cases indicate that even though James, Stein, Kaplan and Gopnik know that the "real" France does not exist, they still cannot prevent themselves from looking for it. The reason for such a

contradiction could be explained through the rejection of one's American "self" and the perpetual desire for the inaccessible French "other." Bowie writes that "[m]ore consistently than any other of Lacan's terms, 'the Other' refuses to yield a single sense; in each of its incarnations it is that which introduces 'lack' and 'gap' into the operations of the subject and which, in doing so, incapacitates the subject for selfhood" (117). By looking at the French surfaces, expatriate writers not only become aware of the impossibility to become French, but they also realize that they "lack" an American identity. This void in the American expatriate writers' "selfhood" prompts them to seek in the "Other" what they lack within themselves. Thus, the American subject is made and remade in his or her encounter with the "Other." Lacan admits that there is nothing new, however, about *l'Autre* because "c'est de l'Autre que le sujet reçoit même le message qu'il émet" (117). The French *Autre* is nothing more than a mirror for the American self. Through their encounters with the French *Autre*, James, Stein, Kaplan and Gopnik discover that their concept of America is as much a construction as their projection of France.

In my first chapter on James, I look at how his characters, Christopher Newman of *The American* and Lambert Strether of *The Ambassadors*, attempt to fill a void in their

American identity by acquiring French manners and culture. James features characters who go to France to avoid the mercantile aspect of America (often associated with superficial values) but the French "other" "refuses to yield" its life of old civilization and tradition. Instead of allowing Newman and Strether to feel included, the exclusion and isolation they experience lead them to reflect on the "lack" and "gap" into "the operations" of their American identity. My second chapter on Stein takes up this idea of the French "other" that "refuses to yield" its secrets to Americans. However, the main difference between the Jamesian characters and Stein's persona is that the latter does not even attempt to "belong." Knowing in advance that the French will not give her what she cannot find in America, i.e., tradition that will inspire her creativity, she will isolate herself from the French by creating a "background of unreality." The last two chapters on Kaplan and Gopnik look at how these two authors "use" certain aspects of the French "other" to improve their professional lives. For instance, Kaplan does not become a French professor at the Sorbonne, but she is a French professor at Duke. A similar situation applies to Gopnik's professional life, as he does not work for *Le Monde* or *Le Figaro*, but for *The New Yorker*. In both cases, the awareness of the impossibility to become French

pushes them to become the next best thing: American Francophiles.

"Mirrored Surfaces" analyzes a specific period in American expatriate writing about France. From the late nineteenth century to the late twentieth century, American representations of France can be characterized by an initial attempt to "gain something" culturally from direct exposure to the French "surfaces." However, what emerges from this cultural gain is a rewriting of France that would include America as its source. As a result, there is in the later works a strange interchangeability between the two nations as America becomes "French" and France becomes "American." Through their postmodernist stances, Kaplan and Gopnik re-write James's and Stein's modernist approaches towards France and America. Whereas modernism implies an objective distance from situations or events, postmodernism questions this objectivity. Richard Murphy writes that the postmodern

strategy of re-writing--denies any claims to objectivity either in the "original" (i.e. the text it re-writes), or in the new, parodic counter-discourses it creates. This produces a level of *self-reflexivity* (another vitally important characteristic of the postmodern), which constantly points to the arbitrariness of the

constructed world, yet does so simultaneously in a way as [Linda] Hutcheon says of postmodernism "that admits its own provisionality" (13) as well. In other words, [postmodernism] . . . not only reveals the inherent fictionality of all existing cosmologies, meta-languages and master-narratives, but most importantly insists upon the provisionality of its own claims to truth. (263)

Kaplan's and Gopnik's "strategy of re-writing" James's and Stein's description of the relationship between France and America denies the earlier claim to look at the two nations from a "neutral" perspective. Not only does this strategy refute the Jamesian and Steinian artistic detachment from France and America, but it also rejects its own "parodic counter-discourses," or its own version of the two nations. Thus, Kaplan's and Gopnik's visual metaphors about France and America imply a subjectivity that perpetually questions the accuracy of its representations.

My first two chapters look at how the line between "fantastical projections" and "daily experiences"--as well as between America and France--is often tampered with but never transgressed in *The American*, *The Ambassadors*, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, and *Paris France*. James and Stein suggest that the "Old France" exists, that it is "out there," but that it is inaccessible to the American gaze.

Ironically, the same thing applies to their concept of an "Old America." It is also "out there" and it also "hides" from the American gaze. Both Christopher Newman of *The American* and Lambert Strether of *The Ambassadors* entertain the idea of an original France and original America that elude them. The only France and America accessible to them are their reproductions, i.e., Newman's and Strether's "framing" of the two nations. In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Paris France*, Stein's persona also entertains the idea of an inaccessible France and America. This is why she "creates" a "background of unreality" for both nations:

After all, that is, everybody who writes is interested in living inside themselves in order to tell what is inside themselves. That is why writers have to have two countries, the one where they belong and the one in which they live really. The second one is romantic, it is separate from themselves, it is not real but it is really there. (*Paris France* 2)

Stein's two countries, the one where she belongs (America) and the one in which she really lives (France) are both "invented," because they are part of the "crucial" background for the American artist's inspiration. Stein's awkward use of "have to have" betrays the constructed aspect of both nations in her own writing, as the expression evokes some kind of

"forced" need rather than the natural process implied through just having two countries. The America and France "framed" by this background become the only available ones for her.

My third and fourth chapters explore how the Jamesian and Steinian modernist representation of France and America "survives" in Kaplan's and Gopnik's postmodern worlds. Kaplan and Gopnik question the metaphorical frontiers between "fantastical projections" and "daily experiences" as well as between France and America. Kaplan's perception of France encourages a reading of this country that is always enmeshed with multiple subjectivities. For instance, the narrative structure of her memoir, which is made up of overlapping layers, emphasizes that the learning of French is part of the same process as becoming acquainted with America. We could also see Gopnik's collection of essays from *The New Yorker* as "overlapping layers" because they all deal with a New Yorker Paris or a Parisian New York. In other words, New York mirrors Paris as Paris mirrors New York. His attempt to present *his* Paris through detailed accounts of daily interaction with French culture and society reveals that there is no such thing as a traditional France or America existing "out there," that the "Old France" and the "Old America" are always accessible to the American gaze, but they are also always distorted.

"Mirrored Surfaces" also looks at the four authors in terms of their "overlapping" influence on each other. My decision to choose James, Stein, Kaplan and Gopnik at the expense of other famous American expatriate writers, such as Ernest Hemingway and Francis Scott Fitzgerald, was not only motivated by their common use of the words "authentic" and "real," but also by the fact that they refer to each other (Stein refers to James, Kaplan to Stein, Gopnik to James). It seems impossible for American expatriate writers in France to avoid mentioning their position *vis à vis* their predecessors. There is always an attempt to "improve" a previous representation of France through a more realistic account of this country. I see James as the inaugurator or "grandfather" of this line of American expatriate writing about France. Stein recognizes James as her forerunner, even as a literary parent, but the biographical genres she chooses to explore France indicate a desire to go further (in terms of accurate representation) than James's fictional works about the same country. In fact, we could see differences in terms of realistic representation from the nineteenth-century romance, *The American*, to the early modernist *The Ambassadors* to the high modernist *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Paris France*. *The American* is a typical romance ("more picturesque, fantastic, adventurous, or heroic than

actuality" Abrams 260). Indeed, Christopher Newman's heroic pursuit of Claire de Cintr , his desperate need to marry, have more to do with adventure than with an actual situation. *The Ambassadors* moves closer to realist fiction by exploring modernist themes (modernism questions "the certainties that had supported traditional modes of social organization, religion, and morality, and also traditional ways of conceiving the human self" Abrams, 167). The questioning of Puritan morals is at the center of James's later novel. The American perception of Paris as corrupt is slightly readjusted to fit the actual situation, i.e., Paris is not more corrupt than any other city, it is only the American "bias" that makes it so. Stein's works push this quest for realism even further with her high modernist stance: "[t]he catastrophe of the [First World War] had shaken faith in the moral basis, coherence, and durability of Western civilization and raised doubts about the adequacy of traditional literary modes to represent the harsh and dissonant realities of the postwar world" (167). *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Paris France* are pure products of this postwar world. They are also very much set in the context of the Second World War. As a result, France is given an even more accurate picture through its connection with the reality of war.

Kaplan acknowledges Stein's role in the American expatriate writing scene by using an excerpt from *Paris France* that deals with different notions of the "real." This is a way for her to "readjust," so to speak, Stein's account of France. Kaplan's choice of the memoir to talk about her "French Lessons" represents a move from Stein's play with biographical genres (*The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is more a biography of Toklas or an autobiography of Stein). Even though Gopnik does not refer to Kaplan, his journalistic background as the Parisian correspondent for *The New Yorker* gives an even more factual account of France than the memoir. Like Kaplan who uses an excerpt from *Paris France*, Gopnik introduces *Paris to the Moon* with a quotation from James's *The Ambassadors* that also deals with different notions of the "real." Here again, there is an acknowledgement of an earlier representation of France and an attempt to "correct" its fictitiousness.

Notwithstanding the different approaches and the generational gap between these writers, I argue that France remains throughout their works "fictions," and that their attempts to "improve" the representation of their predecessors only reproduces a version and not a new description of an earlier picture of France. In fact, the works "mirror" one another.

Chapter One:

The American Reproduction of an Original France in Henry
James's *The American* and *The Ambassadors*

Henry James's ambivalent treatment of the relationship between Old Europe and the New American world in his two novels, *The American* (1877) and *The Ambassadors* (1903), has been the subject of numerous critical essays over the years. As early as 1950, Irving Howe's analysis of *The American* pointed out that the novel's considerable strength was "its firm sense of the cultural difference between America and Europe a sense to be improved upon but never made obsolete" (444).² Twelve years later, Leon Edel's assessment of the same novel also points towards this special relationship between America and Europe: "Henry for the first time revealed to the full the two genuinely original elements in his work that were to constitute his claim to renown during the first half of his writing life: his grasp of the contrasts in manners between America and Europe and his subtle vein of humor" (423).³ Like many Jamesian critics of this early period, Howe and Edel's observations about *The American* emphasize the international theme of James's novels. In this case, the international theme centers on Europe. Thus, the specific relationship between France and America often tends to be overlooked.⁴

Recent critics of James's international theme compensate for this earlier overlooking of his representation of France

by devoting whole books or articles to this specific subject. For instance, Edwin Sill Fussell's *The French Side of Henry James* seeks to correct the failure to get "at James's French side either in depth or detail" by showing how "this French business of James is in the text, by way of reference or representation, of persons and personages real or made up (...), of places real or made up (...) but mostly real, and mostly Paris"(x). Although Fussell's book covers thoroughly every French aspect of James's "French" novels, it describes rather than analyzes James's representation of France.⁵

Cheryl B. Torsney's article "Translation and Transubstantiation in *The American*" analyzes the use of French and English in the novel: "in *The American* 'things'--characters, material objects, ideologies, which represent imperial drives, class division, and sexual orientation--are both lost and found in translation"(40). Torsney's article paves the way to critical readings of the specific relationship between France and America in James's *The American* and *The Ambassadors*.

I want to look specifically at how James represents the distinctive nature of France for the American expatriate in his two "French" novels. France is represented in these novels not only as an exotic destination, but also as an

American possession. The choice of France rather than England fits better the American colonialist impulse to conquer and appropriate. Even though the cultural and historical ties between England and America would easily suggest an English setting for an American expatriate writer such as James, it is ironically those cultural and historical ties that prevent James from representing England as a colonial acquisition. The cultural domination of England over America at the end of the nineteenth century would make a representation of an inverted relationship between these two countries problematic, because many of the American natives "originated" from England (or if not, spoke the original language from England), and so the American colonialist impulse would have the effect of a boomerang. In other words, colonization is bound to fail if the foreign country to colonize is your ancestor's country. As there are no such ties between France and America (with the small exception of New Orleans), the choice of France as an American colony is easier to make. This country becomes the perfect place where Americans can indulge in their own culture, where American culture can be transplanted.

Foster Rhea Dulles describes Americans' first impression of Paris as "unlike anything they had ever experienced--

beautiful, colorful, lively . . . the 'longed-for Paris, gay Paris'" (74). But at the same time Dulles points out that the free and unrestrained atmosphere of Paris affected the American traveller's attitude towards other aspects of Parisian life; for example, "[m]any of them were shocked . . . by the casual disregard of the Sabbath" (75-76). Popular masked balls and a mania for gambling were other aspects of Parisian life that shocked Americans. We could see this ambivalent attitude towards Paris as an inversion of the historical pattern of the Old World colonizing the New, in that it is now a country from the Old World which becomes for the New an exotic place that both attracts and shocks through its different set of values and customs. One way to perceive this inverted relationship between France and America is through what Mary Louise Pratt defines as "contact": "A 'contact' perspective . . . treats the relations among colonizers and colonized. . . not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices" (7). Even though Pratt applies this contact perspective to the domination of Spain over South America, this perspective could also be applied to James's representation of the cultural domination of America over France. This Americanization of France

originates from an appropriation of French culture and a rewriting of this culture as American. However, this rewriting is more an ironic function of American point of view than an actual act of colonization.

I am interested in how France becomes in the process of American representation, not a geographical descriptor, but a part of the complex semiotic of the circuits of "otherness" required for national identity. My focus is not only on James's American construction of France as other, but also on his representation of France as a kind of American invention, one that has always been part of the American consciousness. What attracted (and still attracts) Americans to France is mostly, I would argue, the capacity to read the French "other" in ways that accommodate the American "familiar." In other words, the American fascination with France reveals ironically a fascination with America. Jean Baudrillard's theory of the "precession of simulacra," which affirms that it is with "[i]mperialism that present-day simulators try to make the real, all the real, coincide with their simulation models" (2), offers a way to understand James's use of cultural imperialism to make France coincide with his "simulation models" of what France is supposed to be. For

Baudrillard, the very definition of the real becomes "*that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction . . . [and] that which is always already reproduced*" (146).

Baudrillard rejects the idea of a cultural real as something entirely given and obvious, while promoting the idea of a cultural real that is always the effect of a construction or a reproduction. In his representation of France, James plays with this notion of a constructed "cultural real" as his characters' quest for an "original" France often betrays a need to "rewrite" or "reproduce" this country as American. The connotation of renewal implied through the names of the main protagonist of *The American*, Christopher Newman, and one of the central characters of *The Ambassadors*, Chad Newsome, is ironic because there is nothing new about these characters' search for experiences which reduplicate their Americanized notions of France.

With *The American* and *The Ambassadors*, James presents the ironic situation of Americans who go to France supposedly to indulge in a total cultural immersion but who end up rewriting this cultural immersion as an Americanization of French culture. His *Parisian Sketches*, which include his letters to the *New York Tribune* from 1875 to 1876, anticipate the ironic perspective of *The American* and *The Ambassadors*.

James's surprise at seeing so many French people in French places (instead of Americans) anticipates Christopher Newman and Lambert Strether's ironic perception of France:

It has seemed to me . . . that our compatriots are decidedly less numerous than usual, and that on a walk from the new Opera to the Palais Royal one really hears almost as much French as American. The explanation of the mystery, of course, is in the fact that people at home "feel poorer" but the American idiom is dear to Parisian ears, and the sorrows of Wall Street find an echo on the boulevards. (6)

When James writes that from "the new Opera to the Palais Royal one really hears almost as much French as American," we not only feel the irony of his tone, but also the colonizer's attitude towards an acquired territory. In fact, *The American* and *The Ambassadors* can be seen as a two-part colonizing process. In other words, *The Ambassadors* could be the successful sequel to the failed Americanization of France in *The American*. Christopher Newman's failure to Americanize France through his inability to change the values of an ancient French family, *les de Bellegarde*, is replaced with Lambert Strether's Americanized lamination of the French landscape and culture in *The Ambassadors*. This does not

necessarily mean a better understanding of Frenchness but rather a better understanding of what it takes to Americanize France.

The American

Newman's purpose in France is to forget temporarily about the American business world. He tells his compatriot, Tom Tristram, that for the moment he "longed for a new world" (24). A world where he could get "the biggest kind of entertainment . . . People, places, art, nature, everything! I want to see the tallest mountains, and the bluest lakes, and the finest pictures, and the handsomest churches, and the most celebrated men, and the most beautiful women" (25). This new world, however, leads back to America: "I have made over my hand to a friend; when I feel disposed, I can take up the cards again. I daresay that a twelvemonth hence the operation will be reversed. The pendulum will swing back again" (24). Thus, early in the novel, there is an American framing of France that gives the tone to the rest of the narrative. Notwithstanding his craving for an exotic French world, Newman has already planned his return to the States. One example of his attempt at Americanizing France is found

through his desperate efforts to change the values of an ancient French family, *les de Bellegarde*. Through his marriage to Claire, Newman envisions a future where the de Bellegardes could become more American by embracing his view of power and money.

The narrator's description of Christopher Newman's aesthetic experience in the Louvre at the very beginning of *The American* sets the tone to James's representation of France throughout the novel:

He had looked. . . not only at all the pictures, but at all the copies that were going forward around them, in the hands of those innumerable young women . . . who devote themselves, in France, to the propagation of masterpieces; and, if the truth must be told, he had often admired the copy much more than the original. (5)

The narrator's mention of Frenchwomen who devote themselves to the "propagation of masterpieces" betrays the ironic situation of an American who is introduced to a France already treated as a copy by its own countrywomen. Newman's admiration for the "copy much more than the original," which ultimately leads him to ask "*Combien?*" (8), also evokes the colonizing impulse to acquire cultural property even, ironically, the "simulacrum copy." This initial description

of Newman prompts readers to question the truth behind his perception of what constitutes "Frenchness."⁶ As a result, the narrative descriptions of his perceptions of scenery he considers "most characteristically Parisian" (19), such as the Café of the Palais Royal, become a little suspect: "[t]he place was filled with people, the fountains were spouting, a band was playing, . . . and buxom, white-capped nurses, seated along the benches, were offering to their infant charges the amplest facilities for nutrition" (18-19). If Newman admires a reproduction more than its original, his "characteristically Parisian" scenes are probably more of a projection of an ideal Paris than an accurate description of this city. The narrative structure plays with this ambiguity.

Even though the narrative seems to favor Newman's interpretation of his French surroundings over his compatriot Tom Tristram's Americanized Paris, which consists, among other things, of playing poker at the *Occidental* club with other Americans, a close reading of dialogue between the two characters undermines this impression. Replying to Newman's comment about the Louvre ("it seems to me that in your place I should have come here once a week" (18)), Tristram exclaims:

'Oh no, you wouldn't! . . . You think so, but you wouldn't have time. You would always mean to go, but you never would go . . . I don't know why I went in there to-day, I was strolling along rather hard up for amusement. I sort of noticed the Louvre as I passed, and I thought I would go in and see what was going on. But if I hadn't found you there I should have felt rather sold. Hang it, I don't care for pictures; I prefer the reality!' (18)

Newman's idealization of the French lifestyle as a world of simulacrum copies to sell is juxtaposed to Tristram's recognition of this idealization, i.e., "this is what the American who comes to France expects, but here is what really happens." Tristram's preference for the "reality" suggests an insightful view of the American expatriate experience in France. Another dialogue between the two compatriots about original pictures and their reproduction reflects Tristram's special insight:

"These," said Mr. Tristram, nodding at the Titians and Vandykes, "these, I suppose, are originals?" "I hope so," cried Newman. "I don't want a copy of a copy." "Ah," said Mr. Tristram, mysteriously, "you can never tell. They imitate, you know, so deucedly well. It's

like the jewellers, with their false stones. Go into the Palais Royal, there; you see 'Imitation' on half the windows. The law obliges them to stick it on, you know; but you can't tell the things apart." (16-17)

A metaphorical reading of this dialogue would suggest that their discussion about art could also apply to their perception of France. Newman's hope that the Titians and Vandykes are originals because he does not want "a copy of a copy," betrays his inability to tell what is exactly the "original" France or even its "simulacrum copy." Tristram, however, recognizes that there is an imitation of France which looks as authentic as the real one (if not more). What I mean by the real France is what French people recognize as "French" (which could be their own cultural construction) as opposed to what Americans recognize as "French." Tom Tristram, however, is a minor character who only appears occasionally throughout the novel. As a result, his insight is buried underneath Newman's ambiguous interpretation of a French experience. Nowhere is this interpretation more obvious than in his perception of the de Bellegarde family.

Like his ambiguous perception of paintings, Newman's impression of the de Bellegarde family is marked by deception. His introduction to this ancient French family

gives him a chance to test his knowledge of what constitutes a typical Frenchman or Frenchwoman. In fact, the notion of an "original" Frenchman or Frenchwoman is constantly juxtaposed to its reproduction. Like the ironic situation of Frenchwomen who perpetuate copies of original paintings to fool Americans, such as Newman, the French characters who are acquainted with the de Bellegarde also play with Newman's ignorance of what is most characteristically French by tampering with their identity. The French characters' weird perception of the de Bellegarde family as English contradicts Newman's claim of seeing them as a typical French family. For instance, his first impression of Valentin de Bellegarde as "the ideal Frenchman, the Frenchman of tradition and romance," (90) is checked later on in the narrative when another Frenchman, Monsieur Ledoux, describes Bellegarde as "the most charming Englishman he had ever known." This claim prompts Newman to ask: "'Do you call him an Englishman?'" Ledoux answers: "*C'est plus qu'un Anglais, c'est un Anglomane!*" (232). The dialogue between Ledoux and Newman is followed by this narrative comment: "Newman said soberly that he had never noticed it" (232).

The same Englishness is perceived in another French character, Claire de Cintr , who is Newman's potential wife

as well as Valentin de Bellegarde's sister. Here again, however, Newman does not "see" it. Madame de Cintré's Englishness is pointed out by another French character, young Madame de Bellegarde: "she talked a great deal, apparently with the design of convincing him that--if he would only see it--poor dear Claire was eccentric, eccentric in cold blood; she was an Anglaise, after all" (293). Apart from the fact that Claire and Valentin's mother has English blood and that their English servant, Mrs Bread, could also have been their real mother (there is a strange bond between her and their father), James leaves this French perception of Englishness--in--Frenchness mysteriously unexplained. It is as if he wants us to see similarities between the Frenchwomen of the Louvre who perpetuate copies of originals to fool Americans, and French characters such as Monsieur Ledoux and young Madame de Bellegarde, who perpetuate a constructed image of the de Bellegarde as English to fool American expatriates who come to France with constructed notions of "Frenchness." One such notion of "Frenchness" is Newman's Americanized conception of France. Newman does not see Valentin de Bellegarde and Claire de Cintré's "English" characteristics because he is too busy "reading" American signs in their Frenchness.

Even though Newman's purpose in coming to France is to leave behind the American world of business, he cannot help Americanizing his French surroundings. For instance, Madame de Cintré's face had to Newman's eye, "a range of expression as delightfully vast as the wind-streaked, cloud-flecked distance on a Western prairie" (117). The familiar "Western prairie" becomes the frame or lens of perception that allows for the imposition of an aesthetic standard on the "other." Another example of Newman's Americanization of Frenchness is found through his reading of Valentin de Bellegarde as a potential American businessman:

Newman's imagination began to glow with the idea of converting his bright, impracticable friend into a first-class man of business. He felt for the moment a sort of spiritual zeal, the zeal of the propagandist. Its ardour was in part the result of that general discomfort which the sight of all uninvested capital produced in him. (208)

Notwithstanding his earlier claim that Valentin is "the ideal Frenchman of tradition and romance," Newman also sees French tradition and romance as American "uninvested capital." This perception reveals a strange American appropriation of Frenchness. French tradition and romance can bring "big

bucks" if handled by Americans. Newman's "zeal of the propagandist" is not really affected by the French characters' attempt to fool him with constructed notions of France, because he is too absorbed with his repeated attempts to change the old-fashioned mentality of the de Bellegarde family. He tries to win Claire de Cintré's hand and the approval of her family by emphasizing his American qualities as well as his American money. Newman is convinced that he can "buy" the de Bellegarde family to the American cause. He is so convinced of his potential success that when the family refuses to change its values, he considers his French experience a failure. It is as if Newman, who came to France with the "needful premise that all Frenchmen are of a frothy and imponderable substance [and that] light materials may be beaten up into a most agreeable compound" (90), refuses to acknowledge that France can be anything but his own construction.

Cheryl B. Torsney links Newman's inability to impose his American values on his French surroundings to his failed attempts at translation. In her essay "Translation and Transubstantiation in *The American*," she describes this work as "an imperial fiction with a fiction of translation at its core, as a novel of disappointed cultural imperialism

resulting from a failure of translation" (41). This failure of translation is represented through Newman's inability to grasp "the Bellegardes' French, their English, their understanding of how language itself means" (43). Although I agree with Torsney that Newman cannot impose his values on France and that he lamentably fails in his colonizing attempts, there is nonetheless a subtle process of Americanizing France at work in the novel. This process is characterized by a total refusal to "give in" to French culture and a persistent belief in the superiority of the American way of life throughout the narrative. This process also leads the reader to consider the role of *The Ambassadors* as a successful sequel to *The American*.

Newman's experience in France may be a disaster on many levels, but his ideas about this country do not change. He possesses a note written by the Marquis de Bellegarde (the father of Claire and Valentin) in which he accuses his wife of killing him. By disclosing the note to the de Bellegarde family (they do not know about the existence of this note and its disclosure could tarnish the reputation of the family), Newman would get even with them for not letting him marry Claire. Instead of pursuing this option, he chooses to burn the incriminating note:

"It is most provoking," said Mrs Tristram, "to hear you talk of the 'charge' when the charge is burnt up. Is it quite consumed?" she asked, glancing at the fire.

Newman assured her that there was nothing left of it.

"Well then," she said, "I suppose there is no harm in saying that you probably did not make them so very uncomfortable. My impression would be that since, as you say, they defied you, it was because they believed that, after all; you would never really come to the point. . . You see they were right."

Newman instinctively turned to see if the little paper was in fact consumed; but there was nothing left of it.

(324-25)

Even though the burning of the note suggests Newman's change of mind about his whole French experience, the uncertainty of the ending gives an "unfinished business" quality to his French journey. Mrs Tristram, a compatriot, metaphorically incites Newman not to give up the fight of converting France to the American cause. And this is why we anticipate a sequel to *The American*.

The Ambassadors

The Ambassadors takes up this idea of an "unfinished business" by featuring an American character, Lambert Strether, who returns to France after disappointing experiences with this country: "Old ghosts of experiments came back to him, old drudgeries and delusions and disgusto . . . adventures, for the most part, of the sort qualified as lessons" (51). Apart from a direct reference to Strether's nostalgic perception of his younger self, which sets up one of the novel's major themes (how Paris symbolizes the sensual possibilities of youth for which Strether is now too old), the "[o]ld ghosts of experiments" and the lessons learned from them also allude, I would argue, to Strether's status as an improved version of Newman, who faced through his encounter with the de Bellegarde family what we could call as "delusions and disgusto." Through the lessons he learned, Christopher Newman becomes Lambert Strether, a man who avenges the wrongs of his predecessor by adopting a passive-aggressive attitude that proves to be the key to Americanize\colonize France. Newman's arrogance and oversimplification of his Parisian surroundings ("The complex Parisian world about him seemed a very simple affair; it was

an immense, amazing spectacle, but it neither inflamed his imagination nor irritated his curiosity" [29]) are not the way Americans can impose their values on France. With the passive-aggressive nature of Lambert Strether, James suggests a better way to Americanize France in *The Ambassadors*. Unlike Newman who lacks respect for France, Strether is almost afraid of this country. For instance, his perception of the atmosphere of the *Postes et Télégraphes* betrays a certain dreadful awe:

the little prompt Paris women . . . driving the dreadful needle-pointed public pen at the dreadful sand-strewn public table [are] implements that symbolized for Strether's too interpretive innocence something more sinister in morals, more fierce in the national life.

(292)

Underneath Strether's "too interpretive innocence," there is an attempt to replace the something more "sinister in morals, more fierce in [French] life" with the more reassuring American way of life. Newman's inability to distinguish between original pictures and their copies in *The American*, which reflects--as I have shown--his general misinterpretation of what constitutes Frenchness as well as his failure to Americanize France, gives way in *The*

Ambassadors to an American framing of the copy of France through Strether's different attitude towards this country.

Like Christopher Newman who confuses "copy" and "original," Lambert Strether of *The Ambassadors* also experiences a certain confusion between the "real" and its imitation. In Strether's case, however, there is not only an admiration of the reproduction over the original, but there is also a validation of the imitation over the original. Strether's perception of his French surroundings is marked by a quest for an original that always needs its reproduction to gain credibility. I want to look closely at the American framing of Frenchness in the novel through an analysis of his perception of landscape as well as in his reading of his compatriot, Chad Newsome.

Strether's perception of his French surroundings, as well as his reading of his compatriot, originate from an American memory of Frenchness, a memory of his first visit to France. Strether's reminiscence of his youthful pilgrimage to France is described through harvest imagery. The higher culture symbolized through this country has been planted in Strether's psyche but did not produce anything until his renewed contact with France:

Buried for long years in dark corners, at any rate, these few germs had sprouted again under forty-eight hours of Paris. The process of yesterday had really been the process of feeling the general stirred life of connections long since individually dropped (51).

Apart from representing the missed opportunities of Strether's initial French journey, i.e., the failed plans of coming back and cultivating this relation with a higher culture, the "process of feeling" the injuries of the past ("[i]t upset him a little, . . ., to find himself at last remembering on what current of association he had been floated so far" [53]) also represents Strether's reconstruction of his present French experience from a retrospective point of view: "He wasn't there to dip, to consume—he was there to reconstruct"(55). Even though in this particular instance the narrator describes the reconstruction of a "Chad of three or four years before"(56), this description also alludes, I suggest, to Strether's present reconstruction of France, a reconstruction which originates from an American nostalgia for Old France.

James's project in *The Ambassadors* is to present a relationship between new world America and old world France that inverts the traditional old world colonizing the new

world pattern. The relationship between Sarah Pocock (Chad Newsome's sister) and Madame de Vionnet (Newsome's French lover) illustrates such an inversion: "it came to Strether that of the two, at this moment, she was the one [Sarah Pocock] who most carried out the idea of a Countess" (201). Apart from representing the traditional American fascinated awe of France, James also introduces us to this novel idea of an American who needs to colonize France. Along with images of France as a great Empire ("[Strether] found himself making out, as a background of the occupant, some glory, some prosperity of the first Empire, some Napoleonic glamour, some dim lustre of the great legend" [129]), there are also images of France as the "new" colony of the old world. The representation of this ambivalent relationship between France and America is reflected through the conversations of Strether's fellow American expatriates, Miss Barrace and Little Bilham, whose crude comments on cannibals and savages suggest new ways of looking at France and America:

"Oh you, Mr Bilham," she replied as with an impatient rap on the glass, "you're not worth sixpence! You come over to convert the savages--for I know you verily did, I remember you--and the savages simply convert you."

"Not even!" the young man woefully confessed: "They've simply--the cannibals!--eaten me; converted me if you like, but converted me into food. I'm but the bleached bones of a Christian." (110)

This weird dialogue alludes to the process of Americanizing France. Both Miss Barrace and Little Bilham play with this notion of colonizers who come to "civilize" the French "savages" and "cannibals." The irony, of course, is that the country they wish to "civilize" is generally perceived as the bastion of civilization and that the "savages" are originally found in America, not France.

Strether goes abroad on a mission to rescue Chad Newsome from the evils of Paris and send him back to Woollett, Massachussets, where he could become a proper New England businessman. Strether's mission is illustrated through his comment to his friend, Miss Gostrey: "That's what I mean by his chance. If he misses it he comes in, as you say, for nothing. And to see that he doesn't miss it is, in a word, what I've come out for"(43). Apart from his specific mission of sending Chad back to America, Strether's mission in France can also be taken figuratively as a strictly ambassadorial mission. Mrs Newsome's choice of Strether as the American ambassador to France is not only to rescue her son from

Madame de Vionnet's scandalous influence--as an older married woman who wishes to get involved with a younger man, she symbolizes the lax morals and freedoms of old France compared to the Puritan restrictions of New England--but he is also charged to represent New England's outrage and horror at the many appeals of gay Paris:

It was a place of which, unmistakably, Chad was fond; wherefore, if he, Strether, should like it too much, what on earth, with such a bond, would become of either of them? . . . Was it at all possible, for instance, to like Paris enough without liking it too much? He luckily, however, hadn't promised Mrs Newsome not to like it at all. (53)

James uses Strether's ambivalent attitude towards France in order to present two American constructions of this country. Strether goes to France with the ambassadorial project of saving a Puritan American from the vices and temptations of France, but his initial construction of this country as the dangerous temptress gives way to another construction, an aesthetic susceptibility to the beauty and graciousness of France. Even though Strether thinks this susceptibility arises from seeing France for what it really is, his

emotional state actually arises from an American construction of the exotic other.

Strether's purpose in France is to report on Chad's behaviour, to witness the extent of his change, but he ends up experiencing for himself the effects of a French experience rather than reporting on his compatriot's attitude: "He had . . . his moments of wondering if he himself were not perhaps changed even as Chad was changed" (191). As the American ambassador to France, Strether's role is to be an official messenger of his native country, not a direct participant in the state of affairs between the two nations.⁷ In fact, Strether admires his compatriots, Miss Barrace and Little Bilham, for their passive and detached attitude towards France as well as their sophistication as *femme et homme du monde*: "He envied Miss Barrace, at any rate, her power of not being. She seemed, . . . to stand before life as before some full shop-window" (110). Little Bilham also voices this concern "of not being" in Paris: "'what do we achieve after all? We see about you and report--when we even go so far as reporting. But nothing's done.'" (110). When Miss Barrace later tells Strether not to be discouraged by Little Bilham's experience of "being eaten by the cannibals," she warns him of a possible colonizing

failure: "but you'll meanwhile have had your moments, *Il faut en avoir*. I always like to see you while you last"(110).

Strether's "moments" are found mostly on occasions when he remembers why he is in France in the first place: to negotiate Chad Newsome's release from the French "cannibals" and to bring him back to "civilized" America. His direct involvement with French life and culture, however, leads to an ambassadorial failure. Strether tells Chad that in his sister, Sarah Pocock, he will be meeting his "mother's representative--just as I shall. I feel like the outgoing ambassador, doing honor to his appointed successor"(184).

Even though Sarah Pocock's indifference to her French surroundings (she snubs Madame de Vionnet's offer to show her Paris: "Oh, you're too good; but I don't think I feel quite helpless. I have my brother--and these American friends. And then, you know, I've been to Paris. I *know* Paris" [198])

should make her more successful in her ambassadorial role than Strether, her mission of rescuing Chad also fails because it turns out that Chad does not need to be rescued after all. What if Newsome is in France because it reminds him specifically of America? Strether asks himself: "Was there in Chad, by chance, after all, deep down, a principle of aboriginal loyalty that had made him, for sentimental

ends, attach himself to elements, happily encountered, that would remind him most of the old air and the old soil?" (114) In this context, "the old air and the old soil" belong ironically to the new world, which reinforces the suggestion that *The Ambassadors* features an inversion of the traditional relationship between old world France and new world America. Apart from Chad Newsome, James's novel also portrays another American expatriate in France, Waymarsh, who sees the "new" French territory in terms of the "old" American soil.

Waymarsh's total indifference and neutrality towards his French surroundings make him the perfect ambassador. Miss Barrace's description of his general attitude towards France illustrates this situation:

I show him Paris, show him everything, and he never turns a hair. He's like the Indian chief one reads about, who, when he comes to Washington to see the Great Father, stands wrapped in his blanket and gives no sign. I might be the Great Father--from the way he takes everything. (111)

"Indian" imagery is used as an American tropology that accrues strangeness by its transposition to Paris. The imagery applies to an American's response to Paris: Waymarsh's lack of interest for his Parisian surroundings.

His comparison to an Indian chief, "who comes to Washington to see the Great Father," then, should be seen as ironic and ludicrous. "Washington" and the "Great Father" are American terms that are applied to a French context. Miss Barrace's analogy compares Washington to Paris and the Great Father, i.e., the American president, to the French government.

However, like Strether's application of the stories of "Francine and Musette" to his French experience ("They had proved, successfully, these impressions--all of Musette and Francine, but Musette and Francine vulgarized by the larger evolution of the type--irresistibly sharp" [55]), Miss Barrace's reference to the Indian chief in relation to an American is not one she would know first-hand; she read about it. Thus, even her perception of a supposedly "authentic" American experience is filtered through some book, just as Strether's perception of an "authentic" French experience originates from French books on his "American" shelf:

"Melancholy Mürger, with Francine and Musette and Rodolphe, at home, was, in the company of the tattered, one--if he was not in his single self two or three-- of the unbound, the paper-covered dozen on the shelf" (54). This "false" authenticity pushes American expatriates in France to reinvent both America and France.

French landscapes or scenes often appear to Strether as blurred concepts that need to be reconstructed or rewritten. A case in point is the narrator's description of his impression of Paris:

It hung before him this morning . . . like some huge iridescent object, a jewel brilliant and hard, in which parts were not to be discriminated nor differences comfortably marked. It twinkled and trembled and melted together, and what seemed all surface one moment seemed all depth the next. (53)

This impressionist perspective of moving from "surface" to "depth" suggests a treacherous visual experience. If this is how Paris appears to Strether, then, it is no surprise to have him "fill in the blank" of French historic sites, such as the garden of the Tuileries: "The palace was gone; Strether remembered the palace; and when he gazed into the irremediable void of its site the historic sense in him might have been freely at play . . . he filled out spaces with dim symbols of scenes" (48).

This ambiguous perception of Paris is not restricted to Strether's experience. It is a common feeling amongst Strether's fellow American expatriates, such as Miss Barrace.

Her conversation with Strether reveals the "spectacular" and unreal quality of their Parisian experience:

we all do here, run too much to mere eye. But how can it be helped? We're all looking at each other--and in the light of Paris one sees what things resemble. That's what the light of Paris seems always to show. It's the fault of the light of Paris--dear old light! ...

"Everything, every one shows" Miss Barrace went on. "But for what they really are?" Strether asked. "Oh, I like your Boston 'reallys'! But sometimes--yes." (111)

When Miss Barrace teases Strether for his insistence on the "real," she implies that his quest for authenticity is somewhat provincial because it originates from "small town America." Her comment that in the light of Paris "one sees what things resemble" gives a kind of Baudrillardian "simulacra feel" to the American expatriate experience in France. In other words, things are not really what they appear to be in Paris. They are only what they resemble, an ambiguous copy of the "real thing." Like Tom Tristram of *The American*, who warns Newman that there is an imitation of France which looks as authentic as the real one, Miss Barrace is a minor character whose special insight into the American expatriate experience in France contrasts the main

character's more naïve interpretation of his French surroundings. Miss Barrace points out to Strether his constructed version of France (a common habit for American expatriates), but at the same time she indulges in this construction "we all do here, run too much to mere eye. But how can it be helped?" The clash between the "Boston reallys" and the "Paris reallys" prompts Strether to rewrite or reinvent his French surroundings. In fact, this early description of Strether's perception of his surroundings gives the tone to his general attitude towards France. An attitude that finds its culmination in the Lambinet episode.

Towards the end of the story Strether visits a French rural town that reminds him of a "certain small Lambinet" (278) which he saw years ago at a Boston dealer's on Tremont Street. Unable to afford it at the time, the little Lambinet "abode with him as the picture he *would* have bought" (278). Strether dreams of the day when he will be able to impose his memory of the reproduction of the Lambinet on his French surroundings:

It would be a different thing, however, to see the remembered mixture resolved back into its elements—to assist at the restoration to nature of the whole faraway hour: the dusty day in Boston, the background of the

Fitchburg Depot, of the maroon-colored sanctum, the special green vision, the ridiculous price, the poplars, the willows, the rushes, the river, the sunny, silvery sky, the shady woody horizon. (278-79)

The narrator's use of the words "restoration to nature" is interestingly ambiguous in this context as it relates to the reconstruction theme found throughout the novel. Restoration implies a renewal of an original form--in other words, an original form that has been tampered with. Strether's American reconstruction of France is nothing more than an "alteration" of this country. A close look at the narrator's description of Strether's reaction when he gets off the train at an unnamed French town an hour away from Paris illustrates this point:

The oblong gilt frame disposed its enclosing lines; the poplars and willows, the reeds and river--a river of which he didn't know, and didn't want to know, the name--fell into a composition, full of felicity, within them . . . it was all there, in short--it was what he wanted: it was Tremont Street, it was France, it was Lambinet.

(279)

The "natural" French countryside reminds Strether of a French painting that reminds him in its turn of a "natural" Boston

scene. Ironically, the restoration/reconstruction of a French scenery originates from Boston. For instance, the scene surrounding the Boston dealer shop ("the poplars, the willows, . . . the river" mentioned in the quotation on page 30) where Strether first spotted the Lambinet becomes part of his memory of what the Lambinet features: "the poplars and willows, the reeds and river." This American rewriting of the French Lambinet is emphasized through Strether's refusal to know the name of the river, which suggests a larger refusal of anything that does not fit his idea of a reconstructed France. Moreover, his reconstitution of the French scenery also includes an American element. The Lambinet is no longer exclusively French. Its French origin is revisited to include the American "Tremont Street." In fact, the parallel structure of the syntax--i.e., the appositive found through "it was Tremont Street, it was France, it was Lambinet" suggests the laminating process of placing layer on layer: hence, the American "framing" of the French Lambinet. This American "framing" of France is not only about space or geography but also about time. Strether's nostalgia for a youth he has wasted also projects itself in the revival of the Lambinet. In its new rejuvenated form, the Lambinet reflects Strether's own rejuvenation: "he was there on some

chance of feeling the brush of the wing of the stray spirit of youth"(55). This revival also applies to another American expatriate, Chad Newsome.

Another example of Strether's Americanized lamination of Frenchness is found through his perception of his compatriot, Chad Newsome. Strether is in Paris to "fetch" Newsome and send him back to Woollett, Massachussets, because he is needed to run the family business. Newsome, however, is so changed that Strether does not believe in the success of his mission: "Chad had been made over. That was all; whatever it was, it was everything. Strether had never seen the thing so done before; it was perhaps a specialty of Paris"(82). For Strether, this "specialty of Paris" expresses itself through Chad's smoother features:

It had cleared his eyes and settled his color and polished his fine square teeth--the main ornament of his face; and at the same time that it had given him a form and a surface, almost a design, it had toned his voice, established his accent, encouraged his smile to more play and his other motions to less. He had formerly, with a great deal of action, expressed very little; and he now expressed whatever was necessary with almost none at all. It was as if, in short, he had really, copious

perhaps, but shapeless, been put into a firm mould and turned successfully out. (83-84)

Chad's French metamorphosis will lead Strether to want him to stay in Paris. In fact, Strether is nothing more than in awe of Chad's French features. He perceives it as a "phenomenon, an eminent case"(84). The irony behind the description of this supposedly French transformation is that Strether's admiration for what he considers to be the French version of Chad Newsome turns out to be an admiration for the old American Chad, because underneath his French polishing, Chad is more American than ever.

Even though Madame de Vionnet might have contributed in part to the *nouveau* Chad, what gives credibility to her "work" is Strether's American recognition of her French creation:

she had but made Chad what he was--so why could she think she had made him infinite? She had made him better, she had made him best, she had made him anything one would; but it came to our friend with supreme queerness that he was none the less only Chad. Strether had the sense that he, a little, had made him too; his high appreciation had, as it were, consecrated her work. (299)

Here again, we find an American framing of Frenchness. Chad's French transformation "originates" from America or, rather, the validity of what constitutes Frenchness must be decided by an American. Similar to his rewriting of the Lambinet, Strether's reconstruction of Chad "tampers" with his "original" form. The narrator asks of Strether: "Was he, on this question of Chad's improvement, fantastic and away from the truth? Did he live in a false world?, a world that had grown simply to suit him[?]" and does the whole thing represent "the alarm of the vain thing menaced by the touch of the real?" (192). These questions are left unanswered. Terms, such as "truth," "false world," and "touch of the real" become blurred concepts within this particular context of a reinvented France. For Strether, what stands for the truth and the real is a reconceptualization of the traditional relationship between America and France.

Strether's American rewriting of the Lambinet includes Chad Newsome and his French lover, Madame de Vionnet: "What he saw was exactly the right thing--a boat advancing round the bend and containing a man who held the paddles and a lady, at the stern, with a pink parasol. It was suddenly as if these figures, or something like them, had been wanted in the picture" (284). In Strether's rewriting of the Lambinet,

America ("the man who held the paddles") controls the destiny of France (the "lady, at the stern, with a pink parasol"). Even though the relationship between Chad and Madame de Vionnet, which stands for the relationship between modern American values and old French traditions, is initially perceived by Strether as a sign of the victory of French culture and civilization over American commercial interests, his reconstruction or rewriting of the Lambinet suggests the total opposite. The ending of the novel reinforces this claim when Chad discloses to Strether that "[a]dvertising scientifically worked [is] an art like another, and infinite like all the arts"(315). In his essay, "The Power of Advertising: Chad Newsome and the Meaning of Paris in *The Ambassadors*," William Greenslade points out the American nature of advertising:

The arts of publicity are undermining the language and values of appreciation associated with the heritage of European civilization, figured most directly in Madame de Vionnet. She "turns Chad out," forms him; but if Paris is his finishing school, his acquired finish the better fits him to service Woollett's monopolistic business empire. (100)

Greenslade's claim that Paris is Chad's "finishing school" and that his "acquired finish the better fits him to service Woollett's monopolistic business empire" evokes an American appropriation of French culture, which is also reflected in Chad's speech about the advertising business: "The right man must take hold. With the right man to work it, *c'est un monde*" (315). Chad's speech, which is essentially American ("with the right man to work it"), borrows French expressions "*c'est un monde*." The appropriation of a French expression to embellish the American language reveals the true nature of Chad's relationship to France. French culture does not so much change his cultural identity as polish his original one. It is as if Chad needed to go to France in order to reinforce his American identity. In fact, underneath his French polishing, Chad contributes in his own subtle way to the process of Americanizing France.

The intrusion of an American journal in Madame de Vionnet's old French parlour, which Strether recognizes as "a touch of Chad's own hand" (131), indicates that underneath Chad's recognition of Madame de Vionnet's cultural influence ("Of course I really never forget, night or day, what I owe her. I owe her everything" [313]), there is at the same time an attempt to Americanize this culture. When Strether mentions at the beginning of the novel to his American friend, Maria Gostrey, his contribution to the same journal

found in Madame de Vionnet's parlour, he calls it the Review: "'Woollett has a Review . . . which I, not at all magnificently, edit" (40). We have another example of an appropriation of a French word to valorize American content when a hundred pages later, this humble American journal is called "the great Revue": "What would Mrs. Newsome say to the circumstance that Chad's interested 'influence' kept her paper-knife in the Revue? The interested influence, at any rate, had, as we say, gone straight to the point--had in fact soon left it quite behind" (131). What is Chad's "interested influence" but an attempt to Americanize Madame de Vionnet's French surroundings? The American Revue intrudes into Madame de Vionnet's old Parisian house that evokes "the post-revolutionary period, the world [Strether] vaguely thought of as the world of Chateaubriand, of Mme de Staël, of the young Lamartine" (129). Besides the shift in name from the Review to the Revue, the cover of the journal also points towards other appropriations of Frenchness.

Like the French culture, which does not so much change as polish Chad's American identity, the American journal does not become French. For instance, Strether's name, which is on the cover of the Review and which he refers to as "my one presentable little scrap of an identity" (40), fits well the cover of the newly named Revue as his given name can also be pronounced *en français*, Lambert. Strether also "rewrites"

himself as more important in a Parisian setting. Whereas in Woollett he was "Lambert Strether because he was on the cover," in Paris he was "on the cover because he was Lambert Strether" (50). There is a similar rewriting process at work when Chad gives to his potential bride, Mamie Pocock, a present of Fromentin's "*Maîtres d'Autrefois*" with her name on the cover. The meaning of Fromentin's title, masters of the past, evokes the new cultural domination of America over France. The *Maîtres d'Autrefois* give way to the new American masters, such as Lambert Strether, Chad Newsome, Mamie Pocock, and the rest.

The intrusion of the American journal into Madame de Vionnet's old French parlour anticipates other American acquisitions. Strether's last look at her precious French belongings betrays an unconscious awareness of the upcoming American cultural domination over France:

No, he might never see them again--this was only too probably the last time; and he should certainly see nothing in the least degree like them. He should soon be going to where such things were not . . . He knew in advance he should look back on the perception actually sharpest with him as on the view of something old, old, old, the oldest thing he had ever personally touched.

(294)

Strether experiences a weird form of premature nostalgia. Even before the American cultural domination over France

actually occurs, he already pines for what used to be exclusively French, the "old, old, old, the oldest thing he had ever personally touched." The Americanization of France pushes Americans to idealize the pre-Americanized France. The main irony, of course, is that even what Americans consider as pre-Americanized France cannot help having an American origin. The American nostalgia of an old France is nothing but an American rewriting of what the old France is supposed to be. For instance, Strether's nostalgic perception of Madame de Vionnet's objects originates from a preconceived impression: "these things were at first as delicate as if they had been ghostly, and he was sure in a moment that, whatever he should find he had come for, it wouldn't be for an impression that had previously failed him" (294). Here again, the blurred appearance of "French" things allows Strether to reassert his initial impression of what France is supposed to be.

The Ambassadors "propels" the American expatriate experience into the modernist world. More realistic ways of approaching life are found through James's impressionist stance. For instance, Lambert Strether's surface/depth binary of his French observations is taken up by Stein in her two works about France: *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Paris France*. With its exploration of Millet's *Man with the*

Hoe, Stein's *Paris France* also indulges in impressionist perceptions. Both James's character and Stein use French paintings to "frame" their Americanness. Underneath the "surface" of the French painting, there is an American screaming to get out.

Chapter Two:

The American Creation of France as a Background of
Unreality in Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B.*
Toklas and Paris France

It is rather strange that [Gertrude Stein] was not then [at Radcliffe] all interested in the work of Henry James for whom she now has a very great admiration and whom she considers quite definitely as her forerunner, he being the only nineteenth century writer who being an american felt the method of the twentieth century (...) In the same way she contends that Henry James was the first person in literature to find the way to the literary methods of the twentieth century. But oddly enough in all of her formative period she did not read him and was not interested in him. But as she often says one is always naturally antagonistic to one's parents and sympathetic to one's grandparents. The parents are too close, they hamper you, one must be alone. So perhaps that is the reason why only very lately Gertrude Stein reads Henry James. (78)

Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*

Henry James and Gertrude Stein share amongst other affinities an expatriation to France and writing that challenges their readers. A close look at James's and Stein's Paris and France reinforces the "hereditary" tie between the two American expatriate writers. Notwithstanding the neglect of James's art during her formative years, Stein's unacknowledged recognition of his influence is found through her playful use of images of France. The link between the Jamesian parent, who initiated the long tradition of French images, and the Steinian child who perpetuates these images, can be better understood through their use of visual imagery. Stein's use of images to describe some of her French and Parisian experiences illustrates her own version of France:

I was about only ten years old when I saw the Man with the Hoe by Millet and that was a natural thing and a completely foreign thing because the fields were french fields and the hoe was a french hoe and the man was a french man and yet it was really the fields hoes and men and all three together... and so to me Paris was a natural thing. ("An American and France" 68-69)

Stein's emphasis on the composition of the painting does not prevent her from indulging in delusional beliefs about their genuineness: "the fields were french fields and the hoe was a french hoe and the man was a french man and yet it was really the fields hoes and men and all three together." Stein's description of her perception of Millet's *Man with the Hoe* evokes James's description of Lambert Strether's perception of the small Lambinet in *The Ambassadors*. The odd combination of the natural and the foreign recalls Strether's ambivalent experience of a French rural town. Straddling the line between fiction and reality, Strether's French experience is half enclosed by the picture frame of the Lambinet:

For this had been all day, at bottom, the spell of the picture--that it was essentially, more than anything else, a scene and a stage, that the very air of the play was in the rustle of the willows and the tone of the sky. The play and the characters had, without his

knowing it till now, peopled all his space for him, and it seemed somehow quite happy that they should offer themselves, in the conditions so supplied, with a kind of inevitability. It was as if the conditions made them not only inevitable, but so much more nearly natural and right as that they were at least easier, pleasanter, to put up with. (282)

James's use of the words "essentially" and "natural" is similar to Stein's use of the words "natural" and "really" in that they are all employed in a context that promotes a "constructed" or "framed" reality. In addition to serving as a background for Strether's French experience, the painting also takes on a theatrical quality as "the spell of the picture . . . was essentially, more than anything else, a scene and a stage." In fact, the French rural town serves as a setting for the "reenactment" of Strether's youth, because the town reminds him of his younger years when he discovered a Lambinet painting at a Boston dealer. Thus, Strether's perception of a French rural town only acquires an "essential" and "natural" aspect through his recollection of American experiences. Stein's natural Paris, which is procured through her perception of Millet's *Man with the Hoe*, and Strether's perception of the natural conditions offered

by the pictorial and theatrical quality of the French rural town represent one side of the American experience of France.

What characterizes the American expatriate writer's rendition of Paris and France is the constant attempt to correct earlier representations of this city by fellow American Francophiles. The Jamesian parent influences to a certain point the Steinian child, but the latter attempts to distinguish her self from the former by "correcting" his misperceptions. Generally speaking, there is an evolution from parent to child. In the case of a "literary" parent, the child takes on the legacy of the parent and is expected to take it into further realms. Stein's acknowledgment of James's genius goes along with a wish to distance herself from him. One specific example of this distance could be found through Stein's use of her own daily French and Parisian experiences (as opposed to James's use of fictional characters and their Parisian *routine*) to provide what she considers the literally real or unbiased France. Stein's description of her writing process in "Composition as Explanation" helps us to contextualize how she sees her France and how the previous generation saw it:

The only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen and what is seen depends upon

how everybody is doing everything. This makes the thing we are looking at very different and this makes what those who describe it make of it, it makes a composition, it confuses, it shows, it is, it looks, it likes it as it is, and this makes what is seen as it is seen. Nothing changes from generation to generation except the thing seen and that makes a composition.

(512)

Stein's claim that "the only thing different from one time to another is what is seen" implies that the French surfaces examined by the Jamesian characters "look" different from her own perception of the France "that is seen." James and Stein problematize the surface/depth binary in different ways. For example, Lambert Strether of *The Ambassadors* wants to believe that Paris hides something nasty beneath its beauty, even though he learns that Paris resists such Puritanical binaries. Stein's perception of the surface/depth binary of France goes further than Strether's attempt to deconstruct this opposition, because for her everything about France is there to be seen.

Even though it is possible to read Stein's perception of surfaces as an attempt to distance herself from James's superficial representation of France, a close look at their depiction of France suggests that, like Stein, James's

characters also pretend to know the authenticity of a French experience that lies "below the surface" of preconceived images of France. I want to suggest that, apart from providing us with what they recognize as constructed images of France, James and Stein also attempt to transcend these constructions by presenting a genuine Paris that avoids preconceived ideas of this city. In doing so, they present a "literal" reality. For instance, their description of daily Parisian experiences counters the artificial effects of their preconceived images of Paris. Both James's account of Strether's casual stroll in Paris and Alice B. Toklas's description of her and Gertrude Stein's Parisian walks convey a sense of reality that differs from the French images found elsewhere in Jamesian and Steinian texts. Authentic Parisian experiences, such as Strether's meditative walks, are interspersed throughout *The Ambassadors*:

[H]e came down the Rue de la Paix in the sun and, passing across the Tuileries and the river, indulged more than once--[...]--in a sudden pause before the bookstalls of the opposite quay. In the garden of the Tuileries he had lingered, on two or three spots, to look; it was as if the wonderful Paris spring had stayed him as he roamed. (47)

The Steinian universe of Parisian walks might not convey the same meditative atmosphere, but it still provides the reader with the author's perception of an authentic Paris: "Gertrude Stein adored heat and sunshine although she always says that Paris winter is an ideal climate. In those days it was always at noon that she preferred to walk. I, who have and had no fondness for a summer sun, often accompanied her" (*The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* 55).⁸ Like Stein, James distinguishes between framed perceptions of France and direct experiences. However, as I have argued in chapter one in relation to James's novels about France and as I argue now about Stein's literary works, what is represented as authentic French experiences also turn out to be constructions.

Authentic French experiences can also be read as constructed entities. In "The Semiotics of Tourism," Jonathan Culler argues that the tourist's experience of the "authentic" is always constructed:

The paradox, the dilemma of authenticity, is that to be experienced as authentic it must be marked as authentic, but when it is marked as authentic it is mediated, a sign of itself, and hence lacks the authenticity of what is truly unspoiled, untouched by mediating cultural

codes . . . The authentic sight requires markers, but
our notion of the authentic is the unmarked. (164)

Both *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Paris France* explore this dilemma of authenticity as daily French or Parisian experiences, which are marked as authentic, become mediated, "a sign of itself," through the framing of a cultural code. In this specific case, the cultural code is the American marking of authentic French sites or experiences. In *The Autobiography*, French experiences, such as Stein and Toklas's daily routine at the rue de Fleurus as well as their involvement in the Second World War, are filtered through an American perspective which somewhat undermines the authenticity of the experiences. In *Paris France*, Stein's analysis of how the Parisian background allows artists, like her self, to become geniuses is inextricably linked to America, as the Parisian background evokes her native land. I want to look specifically at Stein's depiction of a France that often reminds her of America. I suggest that, behind the marking of an authentic France, there is an exploration of authentic American values that can also be read as markers.

The connections between *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Paris France* have been overlooked. This situation could be explained by the popular success of *The*

Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas (Stein's only literary success) and the "essay-like" quality of *Paris France*. Notwithstanding their differences (the genre, the narrative perspective⁹), there are, however, important links to be made between Stein's two works. Both *The Autobiography* and *Paris France* explore the nature of authentic French and Parisian experiences. *The Autobiography* features Stein and Toklas's life in France, their daily experiences at the rue de Fleurus and Stein's own creative process and influence. *Paris France* features reflections and observations on French and Parisian issues ("PARIS, FRANCE IS exciting and peaceful" [1], "A frenchman always goes completely to pieces when his mother dies, he is fortunate if another woman has come into his life who is a mother to him" [27]). Both works expose Stein's two versions of a "real" France: the playful construction and the daily experience.

Stein's use of the word "real" in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Paris France* betrays a general ambivalence about how she perceives authenticity. One of the key sentences of *The Autobiography*, "[a] ll of which was literally true, like all of Gertrude Stein's literature" (202), reflects this ambivalence. The "[a] ll of which was literally true" refers to Ezra Pound's meeting with Gertrude Stein near the Luxembourg gardens and their ensuing

conversation: "but I do want to come to see you. I am so sorry, answered Gertrude Stein, but Miss Toklas has a bad tooth and beside we are busy picking wild flowers"(202). The reasons given for not being able to see Ezra Pound might be "literally true," but they also suggest an ulterior motive: Gertrude Stein "could not stand" Ezra Pound ("Gertrude Stein did not want to see Ezra again" [202]). Stein's manipulation of the truth is also found in *Paris France*. For instance, it is rather hard to grasp the meaning behind Stein's description of a "real" country: "[w]riters have to have two countries, the one where they belong and the one in which they live really. The second one is romantic, it is separate from themselves, it is not real but it is really there"(2). Just as the phrase "literally true" is used equivocally in *The Autobiography*, so the distinction between the country where the writers "belong" and the country "in which they live really," the one that "is not real but is really there," suggests a paradox that fits a certain purpose. In other words, the use of "really" fits the expatriate writers' "physical" experience of living in their adopted country, but does not apply to where they originate from (where they are "really" from).

The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas

Stein's use of the word "real" in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* betrays her ambivalent approach towards authenticity. While at times the word "real" is intended to be taken literally, "Gertrude Stein always says that she only has two real distractions, pictures and automobiles"(210), at other times its meaning is more complex:

She reads anything and everything and even now hates to be disturbed and above all however often she has read a book and however foolish the book may be no one must make fun of it or tell her how it goes on. It still as it always was real to her. (74-75)

The use of the pronoun "it" in "[i]t still as it always was real to her" reinforces the ambiguity of the "real." If we assume that Stein refers to the physical experience of reading a book, it is easy to conclude that the literal meaning of the word "real" is implied. The statement, however, could also allude to her perception of fiction. What precedes the statement, "however often she has read a book and however foolish the book may be no one must make fun of it or tell her how it goes on," implies a self-inflicted delusion about reality. Thus, the latter case suggests a more ambiguous reading of the word "real," a reading that betrays

a biased perspective of reality. Stein's ambivalent approach towards concepts of authenticity is also found through her representation of French or Parisian experiences. Even though Stein does not apply the word "real" to describe these experiences, we can still recognize two types of authentic France in *The Autobiography*: the playful identification with the French and the daily interaction with them.

Stein and Toklas's playful identification with the French is found through subtle references, such as the following narrative comment on the German sculptor Rönnebeck's perception of the famous couple: "He liked France and all French things and he was very fond of us" (101). The sentence structure gives the impression that Rönnebeck was fond of Stein and Toklas because they were French. Another example of their playful identification with the French is found through the description of how Toklas identifies with the plight of a French couple that lost their home during World War Two:

The little general and his wife came from the north of France and had lost their home and spoke of themselves as refugees. When later the big Bertha began to fire on Paris and one shell hit the Luxembourg gardens very near the rue de Fleurus, I must confess I began to cry and said I did not want to be a miserable refugee. (182)

On one hand, Toklas identifies with the situation of the couple in gender terms. For instance, Toklas refers earlier to Stein as a general, "[l]ater I often teased her, calling her a general"(16) and sees herself as the wife "[b]efore I decided to write this book my twenty-five years with Gertrude Stein, I had often said that I would write. The wives of geniuses I have sat with"(14). This playful identification with a heterosexual couple illustrates the whole concept of performing the "authentic."¹⁰ On the other hand, Toklas also identifies with the couple in national terms. If they lose their Parisian home, Stein and Toklas would also share the status of French refugees because of their playful identification with the French. In "Subjectivity and the Aesthetics of National Identity in Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*," Phoebe Stein Davis writes that

[N]ational essence can be captured or reflected by those who are not "produced" by that nation . . . not only can sheer "admiration" cause one to adopt a national identity, but also . . . one can adopt the national identity of a foreign country, an identity that is even more authentic than that of the people "born and bred" in that country. (31)

Davis's claim that the adoption of a foreign identity could be "more authentic than that of the people 'born and bred in that country'" does not really apply to Stein or other American expatriates unless the "even more authentic" suggests a playful exaggeration of French stereotypes. Like the playful exaggeration of gender stereotypes, which pushes "drag queens" to push the limits of female authenticity to such an extent that it ultimately becomes a parody of femininity, Toklas's exaggerated identification with the plight of the French couple pushes the limits of national authenticity to such an extent that it ultimately becomes a parody of Frenchness.

In her analysis of the binary between the "marked" self and the "unmarked" other, Peggy Phelan argues that

[o]ne term of the binary is marked with value; the other is unmarked. The male is marked with value; the female is unmarked, lacking measured value and meaning. Within this psycho-philosophical frame, cultural reproduction takes she who is unmarked and re-marks her rhetorically and imagistically, while he who is marked with value is left unremarked, in discursive paradigms and visual fields. He is the norm and therefore unremarkable; as the Other, it she whom he marks. (5)

If we apply this analysis of gender to Stein's and Toklas's perception of national identity, the one term marked with value becomes American/male and the unmarked other becomes France/female. Stein's cultural reproduction takes the unmarked France and re-marks "her." Thus, there is an inversion of the traditional binary as the "norm," i.e., the American self becomes unremarkable and the French other becomes remarkable. Notwithstanding the "erasure" of their American norm or self and their adoption of a foreign identity, America cannot be totally suppressed. The reason why Toklas identifies with the French couple is that it reminds her of an American situation. As both Toklas and Stein are already some kind of exiles by having left their American home behind, the additional status of potential French refugees brings them into further realms of cultural constructs.

Stein's description of French experiences also relies on cultural constructs. The daily routine at the rue de Fleurus and the effects of the war on French soil are used as a background for the exploration of American concepts. Authentic Parisian experiences are mostly centered on Stein and Toklas's life at the rue de Fleurus. Their home at 27 rue de Fleurus consisted of "a tiny pavillon of two stories with

four small rooms, a kitchen and a bath, and a very large atelier adjoining"(7). There was also Hélène who was one of those admirable *bonnes* in other words excellent maids of all work, good cooks thoroughly occupied with the welfare of their employers and of themselves, firmly convinced that everything purchasable was far too dear. . . She was a most excellent cook and she made a very good soufflé. (7)

This domesticity gives an authenticity to Stein and Toklas's Parisian experience. Like any other Parisian couple of the same social class, Stein and Toklas employ a *bonne à tout faire* who could make "a very good soufflé." This domesticity is typically French and could hardly be possible in America. This Parisian domesticity is reinforced by their weekly social events:

Little by little people began to come to the rue de Fleurus to see the Matisses and the Cézannes, Matisse brought people, everybody brought somebody, and they came at any time and it began to be a nuisance, and it was in this way that Saturday evenings began. (41)

Notwithstanding the fame of her guests, Stein's description of Saturday evenings at the rue de Fleurus betrays an annoyance ("it began to be a nuisance") at how her Parisian

home became a regular hangout for artists. The daily Parisian lifestyle takes on a routine aspect.

Other instances of real French experiences are found through Stein and Toklas's "role" during the war. Their decision to "get into the war" (168) through the American Fund for French Wounded represents another opportunity to taste first-hand the effects of an authentic French experience. Driving her little Ford, Stein (with Toklas as passenger)

began the habit . . . which we kept up all through the war of giving any soldier on the road a lift. We drove by day and we drove by night and in very lonely parts of France and we always stopped and gave a lift to any soldier, and never had we but the most pleasant experiences with these soldiers. (174)

The beginning of a habit emphasizes the daily reality of a war on French soil. Giving "any soldier on the road a lift" on a daily and nightly basis allows Stein and Toklas to go beyond preconceived images of Paris and France, such as Stein's childhood images of France experienced in San Francisco: "France was not daily it just came up again and again. It came up in such different books, Jules Verne and Alfred de Vigny and it came up in my mother's clothes and the gloves and the sealskin caps and muffs and the boxes they came in" (*Paris France* 3). In fact, objects are crucial in

Stein's construction of France and America and their relationality. They fill a void in Stein's own identification process. In his analysis of the role of objects in Henry James's works, Eric Savoy writes that

[a] Lacanian psychology of the rituals of collecting would assert that the antique object holds the status of the signifier, the elusive object-cause of the subject's desire that can never coincide with the signified. Collecting is a mode of fantasy that stages not the fulfillment or full satisfaction of desire, but rather the circuits of desire as such. . . . The compulsion of the subject to acquire things, then, partakes in a symbolic economy that acknowledges no closure: the occluded significance of the Lacanian thing can point only to other, related things in the subject's protracted quest for completeness, wholeness, integrity that coalesces over the void at the core of this economy. Lacan's entire theory of the Symbolic turns upon a fundamental opposition between the thing "and the impossible Thing that it attempts to signify" [Malcolm Bowie 54]. To consider the function of the antique object as "thing" in the culture of collecting--particularly in its more devout reaches--is to recognize that the thing, as a mode of the signifier, becomes what

Malcolm Bowie calls "a versatile topological space, a device for plotting and replotting the itineraries of Lacan's empty subject" [76] (269).

Stein's use of "antique" objects, such as her mother's clothes and books, refracts images of herself. Those items are signifiers, "elusive object-cause of the subject's desire that can never coincide with the signified." In other words, the elusiveness of the French objects can never coincide with what she is or what she wants. "The occluded significance" of Stein's French objects can only point to other "related things in the subject's protracted quest for completeness," i.e, American "things." The French books and clothing (even the boxes they came in) point to an American background, San Francisco. This American background (strangely devoid of American objects) points in its turn to french objects. This "back and forth" motion between France and America reveals the ambivalence at the core of Stein's identity. Neither totally American nor totally French (while she spent her American childhood amongst French objects and images, her adulthood in France was spent preserving her American culture, i.e, only reading, speaking, and writing English), Stein uses objects as a device for "plotting and replotting the itineraries" of her national identity. This way we could see how her identity is in perpetual construction.

Notwithstanding Stein's representation of daily French experiences, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* offers an American perspective that often counteracts their authenticity. The daily routine at the rue de Fleurus and the habit of giving soldiers a lift might give the impression of a direct involvement in French life, but Stein uses these French situations to explore American concepts. The Saturday evenings at the rue de Fleurus might procure a typical French environment (with Matisse who presents his "Matisses"), but this French background inspires Stein to create "her thousand page book" (6), *The Making of Americans*:

It was also at this time that Gertrude Stein got into the habit of writing at night. It was only after eleven o'clock that she could be sure that no one would knock at the studio door. She was at that time planning her long book, *The Making of Americans*, she was struggling with her sentences, those long sentences that had to be so exactly carried out. (41)

The "habit of writing at night" (started in Paris) allows Stein to explore her American identity. However, the title of her book, *The Making of Americans*, suggests the ambivalence about her perceptions of America that is very similar to the ambivalence about her perceptions of France.

The Making of Americans is a title that connotes both a true account as well as a constructed statement. Whereas the familiarity of Stein's subjects (the characters are based on her own family) gives an authentic aspect to the exploration of American values and concepts, the whole idea behind the "making of" Americans is to "create" or "construct" "American-ness."

Another element contributing to Stein's exploration of "American-ness" in France is her exclusive use of the English language:

When I [Toklas] first knew Gertrude Stein in Paris I was surprised never to see a french book on her table, although there were plenty of english ones, there were even no french newspapers. But do you never read French, I as well as many other people asked her. No, she replied, . . . there is for me only one language and that is english. One of the things that I have liked all these years is to be surrounded by people who know no english. It has left me more intensely alone with my eyes and my english. I do not know if it would have been possible to have english be so all in all to me otherwise. (70)

The English (American) language, which becomes in Paris "so all in all," acquires an authenticity that, ironically,

cannot be found in America. Within this context of cultural isolation, a true account of Paris can hardly take place. In fact, Stein's cultural isolation in France allows her to be "with America in a kind of way that if you only went to America you could not possibly be"(184). This comment follows a description of how Stein and Toklas met and befriended the "american boys"(184), the soldiers who worked with their French counterparts in the repair sheds of the railroad. These "american boys" are also called "doughboys": "[w]e did enjoy the life with these doughboys. I [Toklas] would like to tell nothing but doughboy stories"(184). References to "doughboys" suggest a lack of identity that is rectified through Stein's own special "kneading."

Gertrude Stein recreates the identity of the American soldiers she meets in France. Without ever giving us the original names of these "doughboys," she refers to them synecdochally as the states where they come from: "The next day she spent with California and Iowa in the garage, as she called the two soldiers who were detailed to fix up her car" (180). These names would never be used in America but in France they fit perfectly Stein's creative process: "It was at this time that Gertrude Stein conceived the idea of writing a history of the United States consisting of chapters wherein Iowa differs from Kansas, and wherein Kansas differs

from Nebraska etcetera"(180). Apart from playing with the "morphology" of the words, Stein also plays with American identities as she distinguishes between how an American perceives America in America and how the same American perceives America in France.

Stein gives the impression that the America experienced through Paris is a construction (she "conceived the idea" that American states differ from one another). Indeed, where does this idea of different states originate? Is it not obvious for an American that Nebraska is not like Kansas and that Kansas is not like Iowa? Stein's claim in *The Making of Americans* that she writes "for [herself] and strangers" (*The Autobiography*, 70) provides some answers to these questions. Stein does not write for the average American. She writes for herself, a longtime expatriate whose American experience is limited to a few states, and strangers, i.e., fellow American expatriates who have been estranged from their country for so long that their perceptions of America often become suspect. Stein does not know about Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska. This is why she imagines them as all alike originally and needs to work out for her self their difference. Thanks to the soldiers, who symbolize for Stein the blandness ("doughboys") of their native states, she is able to recreate these states as "original" and different.

The idea of recreating a different America in France is pursued in *Paris France*. Instead of privileging the personal over the analytical as in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein emphasizes the latter over the former in *Paris France*. Notwithstanding this reversal of approach, we find a similar exploration of France. Self-deluding beliefs in an authentic France reproduced through playful constructions are juxtaposed to literally authentic French experiences. Here again, as I have done with *The Autobiography*, I want to suggest that the recurrence of America in *Paris France* undermines the notion of a literally authentic France that would transcend playful constructions. Like *The Autobiography*, *Paris France* features a French or Parisian background that often encourages the exploration of American values.

Paris France

Critical works on *Paris France* have pointed out the exaggerated repetition of the word "really" as well as Stein's special definition of reality. Kemp Malone observes about Stein's use of words in *Paris France* that

the repetition is not merely in wording; the points the author makes she makes again and again, going, it would seem, on the principle that the oftener a thing is said the truer it becomes. She has her favorite adverbs too. The chief of these is *always*, which by my count occurs eighty-nine times, leaving its nearest rival *really* (sixty-three occurrences) far behind. (177)

If the exaggerated repetition of "always" and "really" gives credence to the principle that "the oftener a thing is said the truer it becomes," then Stein's use of the word "real" or "really" within the context of her perception of Paris and France implies that her initial perception of what Paris is about is a cultural construct that gradually becomes more authentic for her as the text progresses. Judith P. Saunders takes up this point when she discusses the two realities at work in *Paris France*:

The real world--the world outside the human imagination--exists only insofar as it is reflected and interpreted in the unreal world of human consciousness. Hence we have no choice but to conclude that the unreal is somehow more "real" than the real. In her carefully balanced contradictions, Stein does not ask us to choose one reality over another... Things are the way we think

they are, and thus our imaginative and intellectual constructs take on unarguable reality. (14)

If Stein's unreal world becomes "somehow more 'real' than the real," we could easily conclude that her "unreal" representation of Paris and France becomes at times more credible than the cultural reality surrounding her. Even though Saunders points out that "[i]n her carefully balanced contradictions, Stein does not ask us to choose one reality [one real France] over another," I think that without asking us to choose, Stein nonetheless attempts to show that one "real" France is more valid than the other: the cultural reality rather than "imaginative and intellectual constructs [that] take on unarguable reality."

Like Henry James's characters in *The Ambassadors* who allude to the "dear old light of Paris" (111), Gertrude Stein distinguishes between the Paris that Americans can see and the Paris that hides from the American gaze:

From 1900 to 1930, Paris did change a lot. They always told me that America changed but it really did not change as much as Paris did in those years that is the Paris that one can see, but then there is no remembering what it looked like before and even no remembering what it looks like now. (15)

Whereas the Paris "that [Americans] can see," the visible Paris that keeps changing all the time, is a cultural construct taking on "unarguable reality," the one that avoids the American gaze, the invisible Paris, possesses a cultural authenticity that is only accessible to Stein's expertise in French and Parisian matters. Stein's earliest recollections of Paris and France, which are characterized by shifting images, illustrate the notion of an authentic France derived from cultural constructs:

I was about twelve or thirteen years old, I had read Eugenie Grandet of Balzac, and I did have some feeling about what french country was like but The Man With The Hoe made it different, it made it ground not country, and France has been that to me ever since. (6)

From Balzac's "Eugenie Grandet" to Millet's "Man With The Hoe," Stein's perception of France possesses a kaleidoscopic quality. This France, which "has been that to [her] ever since," ironically changes again on the next page as its artistic quality is replaced by total oblivion: "All this was all the Paris France I really knew then and then for a very long time I forgot about Paris and about France"(7). This trend of shifting images continues towards the end of the narrative as the "Paris France" she "really knew then" gives way later on in her life to another "real" impression: "The

quays in Paris have never changed, that is to say they look different but the life that goes on there is always the same. It was only last year that I really got to know them"(102). Here again, the Parisian quays that Americans can see ("they look different," i.e., modern) contrast the invisible one (underneath this difference they "always [stay] the same," i.e., they still represent Old France). Notwithstanding this distinction, Stein's claim that she "really got to know" the quays last year suggests that, unlike most Americans who can only see their difference, she was able to see beyond this superficial gloss of difference into the core of the Parisian quays.

Stein's exploration of the Parisian background reveals the unchangeable Paris that is inaccessible to the American gaze:

The reason why all of us naturally began to live in France is because France has scientific methods, machines and electricity, but does not really believe that these things have anything to do with the real business of living. Life is tradition and human nature.

(8)

Paris might look different from what it used to be because it has "scientific methods, machines and electricity," but

underneath this apparent modernization tradition and human nature still prevail. The different Paris changes all the time through industrial progress:

After the war there was the Americanisation of France, automobiles which kept [French people] from staying at home, cocktails, the worry of spending money instead of saving it . . . and then the introduction of electric stoves and the necessity of not cooking too long, in short French cooking went out and there were very few houses practically none in Paris where cooking was considered an art. (52)

Even though Stein describes this apparent conversion to the modern American way of life, she also provides us with what is really going on underneath this Americanization. Americans might notice that "French cooking went out," but this is the only aspect of France they can see, the visible Paris. Stein is able to see beyond the visible Paris which gives the illusion that everything is changed from what it used to be by pointing out the unchangeable nature of *cuisine française*: "French cooking is traditional, they give up the past with difficulty in fact they never do give it up"(46). She admits that the French had ideas "that one is apt to think of as American and Oriental, roasted ducks with oranges, and stuffed turkeys with raspberries"(47), but their

appropriation is so effective that when they took something from the outside, like the Polish baba or the Austrian croissant, "they took it over completely so completely that it became French so completely French that no other nation questions it"(46). The repetition of "completely" evokes the exaggerated emphasis on the word "really" elsewhere in the text: "[r]eally not, french people really do not believe that anything is important except daily living"(8). Like her use of the word "really," Stein's repetition of "completely" connotes an authenticity that seems too exaggerated to be accurate. It is almost as if the repetition cancels the original meaning of the sentence and replaces it with the opposite, i.e, the appropriation does not become completely French. Thus, even the Paris that avoids the American gaze, i.e., the authentic one, cannot entirely escape false conceptions of its "true originality" as traditional French cooking was influenced by other nations. Stein's claim that French cooking appropriated so well the cooking from other nations that it became "completely French" finds a strange equivalent in the American attitude towards France. The Americanisation of France also involves some kind of appropriation process. Apart from "the introduction of electric stoves" and automobiles, the Americans also show their ascendancy over France by appropriating their way of

life as well as their history. The Paris that avoids the American gaze, the unchangeable tradition, is as Americanized as the visible Paris of electric stoves and automobiles.

Although Stein argues that the authentic France is provided through the "real business" of "tradition and human nature," there is also a delusional aspect to this so-called authenticity:

So Paris was the place that suited those of us that were to create the twentieth century art and literature (...)
Now this was very important because once again this made a background of unreality which was very necessary for anybody having to create the twentieth century. (12-13)

Stein's "those of us" refer "[n]aturally . . . [to] foreigners who did it there in France"(13), but the creation of the twentieth century art and literature is an "all-American thing" as it is Stein's American *atelier* on the rue de Fleurus that allowed Picasso, Juan Gris and other non-American artists to become the most important artists of the twentieth century. Ironically, the Parisian background that discloses to Stein the "real business" of "tradition and human nature" also serves as a "background of unreality" for herself and her non-American followers. Stein's paradoxical

perception of the Parisian background is reinforced when she writes:

So it begins to be reasonable that the twentieth century whose mechanics, whose crimes, whose standardisation began in America, needed the background of Paris, the place where tradition was so firm that they could look modern without being different, and where their acceptance of reality is so great that they could let any one have the emotion of unreality. (18)

American artists "needed the background of Paris" because the American background at the beginning of the twentieth century was too standardized and mechanical to inspire artistic creation. Unlike the American background that looks modern and *is* different (from its pre-modern days), the Parisian background looks modern but is *still* really traditional. Similarly, the French acceptance of reality that allows any American to "have the emotion of unreality" differs from the American rejection of reality and the need to seek a place where unreality could be explored. I suggest that this emotion of unreality does not have much to do with France but a lot with America. Stein and other American expatriates do not accept the reality at home, i.e., they reject industrialization, but a French setting permits them to indulge in a pre-industrialized America. My point is that

Stein's Parisian background of perpetual tradition and human nature originates from an American "reconceptualization" of this country. Ironically, the visible Americanisation of France (the scientific methods, machines and electricity) pushes Stein to reconceive the invisible France as a sort of pre-industrialized America where tradition and human nature would still prevail.

Notwithstanding Stein's exile to France in order to escape the industrialization and modernization of America, the presence of America in France is greatly felt. Apart from the obvious Americanisation of France that reminds Stein of her native land, the traditional France that never changes (the "real business" of "tradition and human nature") also reminds her of America. More specifically, it recalls the earlier days of a pre-industrialized or a pre-modern America. Thus, Stein's expertise in knowing what lies underneath the visible and Americanized version of France, i.e., the traditional France of human nature, is thwarted by her exploration of what must have been a pre-industrialized America. When she writes that "[t]hey always told me that America changed" (15), she admits her ignorance of an older America. They (the older American generation) told Stein that America is no longer what it used to be, that it lost its

"real business" of "tradition and human nature," but she refuses to acknowledge this fact ("but it really did not change as much as Paris did in those years that is the Paris that one can see" [15]). If America did not change as much as the Paris that one can see, i.e., the Americanized Paris of electric stoves and automobiles, then, not only is there a delusional aspect to Stein's perception of an authentic France, but there is also an illusory element to her perception of an authentic America.

Like the description of the American "doughboys" in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, which reflects Stein's disconnection with her native country through her attempt to rewrite the identity of the American soldiers she meets in France, the description of the Americanisation she encounters in *Paris France* also betrays her distant relationship with America through her attempt to explore American history. Having been an expatriate since childhood ("[s]o I was in Paris a year when I was four to five and then I was back in America" [2]), Stein's knowledge of America and France equally suffers from repeated absences that lead her to see France in America ("[a] little later in San Francisco there was more French" [2]) as well as America in France ("[a]fter the war there was the Americanisation of France" [52]). However, it is Stein's meeting with America in France that influences her

art. Similar to the role of the American soldiers in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, which serve as "blank paper" for Stein's "recreation" of America, the more general concept of the Americanisation of France in *Paris France* inspires Stein to conceive a "background of unreality" where she could recreate the America she has never known. The unknown America is a pre-industrialized country that would be evoked through the setting of Millet's *Man with the Hoe*:

When I managed to get a photograph of the picture and took it home my eldest brother looked at it and said what is it and I said it is Millet's Man With The Hoe.

It is a hell of a hoe said my eldest brother.

But that is the way french country is, it is ground like that and they work at it just that way with just that kind of a hoe. (7)

Apart from symbolizing a pre-industrialized America when machines were not yet invented, the hoe also reminds Stein of an American childhood marked by this particular painting (she was "about twelve or thirteen years old" [6] when she saw Millet's *Man with the Hoe* for the first time). This "background of unreality" mirrors a pre-industrialized America as well as an American childhood that is not "completely" American. Like Lambert Strether's perception of the small Lambinet in *The Ambassadors* (it is a French

painting reminding him of America), Stein's perception of Millet's *Man with the Hoe* not only evokes the constructed nature of the American perception of an authentic France, but it also suggests the artificiality of the American expatriate perception of an authentic America. Needing a Parisian "background of unreality" to explore her own constructed images of America, Stein creates for herself (so to speak) an America out of France. The idea of America originating from reproductions of France anticipates Alice Kaplan and Adam Gopnik's perception of the interchangeable nature of the two nations.

With *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Paris France*, Stein situates herself in a line of American expatriate writers whose perception of an authentic Paris and France is both constructed and genuine. Even though Henry James could be seen as the "grandfather" of this line, Stein could definitely be coined as the mother of them all, which would include such prestigious names as Ernest Hemingway (Stein and Toklas were god-mothers to his baby), and Francis Scott Fitzgerald. The new generation of American expatriate writers from the 1920s who have been directly influenced by their literary "godmother," Stein, gives way to other new generations of American expatriate writers who are still indebted to her. During the 1990s, two American Francophiles

related their love for Paris and France through literary genres that evoke both the essay-like quality of *Paris France* as well as the "biographical" nature of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Alice Kaplan's memoir, *French Lessons* (1993), and Adam Gopnik's collection of essays from *The New Yorker*, *Paris to the Moon* (2000), perpetuates James's and Stein's exploration of the American distinction between a falsely authentic France and a truly genuine one. Kaplan and Gopnik take the issue of the American conception of an authentic Paris and France into the realms of the postmodern world. They also use France to explore their own ambiguous American identity.

Chapter Three:
The Overlapping Layers of French and American Identities in
Alice Kaplan's *French Lessons*

After all, that is, everybody who writes is interested in living inside themselves in order to tell what is inside themselves. That is why writers have to have two countries, the one where they belong and the one in which they live really. The second one is romantic, it is separate from themselves, it is not real but it is really there.

Gertrude Stein, *Paris France* (1940)

Alice Kaplan's *French Lessons* is a memoir that looks back at her years spent in France. Like Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Paris France*, *French Lessons* explores what France represents for an American. Kaplan's account of her life in Bordeaux and Paris distinguishes between two types of France: the one derived from literary or artistic images and the one based on the daily routine or the *quotidien*. Even though the French *quotidien* would be closer to an authentic French experience than the imaginary one, Kaplan's memoir blurs the two in a postmodern fashion. As a result, both types of France become simultaneous constructions and realities. *French Lessons* also explores the American version of this "twisted" distinction. Kaplan's American childhood was spent dreaming about the France represented through the Madeline books and her graduate school years at Yale were spent focusing on French fascist writers. The daily American routine is something that must be created because it has never existed for Kaplan.

Thus, her America can also be divided into the "imaginary" and the "*quotidien*." Similar to the two types of France, the two types of America become simultaneous constructions and realities.

The excerpt from *Paris France* is one of two quotations Kaplan uses to introduce her memoir.¹¹ The choice of excerpt indicates how Stein's American expatriate legacy of France survives in Kaplan's own American expatriate world. Stein's French legacy is made up of constructed images and daily experiences. In *Paris France*, the constructed images of France derived from Stein's childhood memories ("France was not daily it just came up again and again . . . it came up in my mother's clothes and the gloves and the sealskin caps and muffs and the boxes they came in" [3]) are juxtaposed to her daily Parisian experiences at the rue de Fleurus:

We lived in the rue de Fleurus just a hundred year old quarter, a great many of us lived around there and on the boulevard Raspail which was not even cut through then and when it was cut through all the rats and animals came underneath our house and we had to have one of the vermin catchers of Paris come and clean us out.

Kaplan's memoir follows Stein's distinction between constructed images of France and daily French experiences to a certain extent. Kaplan's Bordeaux life is similar to Stein's life at the rue de Fleurus in that it also emphasizes the *quotidien*: "[t]here in Bordeaux is where my mouth and my eyes and my ears for France started to work. When I was fifteen and had my first conversation all in French, in Switzerland, it was a religious awakening. In Bordeaux it became regular, boring, real. *Quotidien*"(103). Apart from the real boredom of the French *quotidien*, Kaplan's description of her boardinghouse in Bordeaux also mentions rodents:

There was a dead rat the size of a German Shepherd puppy in the gutter in front of my boardinghouse the morning I began to read Céline's *Journey to the End of the Night*.

It was pitiful, with wet slick gray-brown fur that stuck together in clumps. (104)

The real boredom of the French *quotidien*, the ugly reality of rats, is juxtaposed to images that are equally real for Kaplan.¹² For instance, Kaplan's depiction of the south of France allows her to see herself as a French girl, "there underneath a palm tree . . . like Madeline in the Madeline books who lives in an orphanage with other girls and walks in a straight line"(31). Such constructed images of an ideal

France are "not real" but they are (paradoxically) "really there" for the American expatriate. This could explain why American expatriate writers "have to have" two types of authentic France, "the one where they belong" (the world of fantastical projections) and "the one in which they live really" (the world of daily experiences in France).

Notwithstanding Kaplan's acknowledgement of Stein's distinction between the two types of authentic France, at the same time she also attempts to transcend the "either/or" nature of Stein's theories by blurring the line between America and France.

Whereas Stein's distinction between the two types of authentic France suggests a modernist approach, the interchangeability of American and French characteristics in Kaplan's memoir reveals a more postmodernist stance. Betty Bergland's analysis of the difference between the postmodern and the modern subject could apply to Kaplan and Stein's representations of France:

a postmodern subject [is] a dynamic subject that changes over time, [and] is situated historically in the world and positioned in multiple discourses [rather than] an

essential individual, imagined to be coherent and unified, the originator of her own meaning. (134)

As I mention in the previous chapter, Stein sees France as changing over time ("[f]rom 1900 to 1930, Paris did change a lot. They always told me that America changed but it really did not change as much as Paris did in those years"), but the Paris that changes over time is "the Paris that one can see" (15). This implies that the Paris that one cannot see, i.e., the Paris that is inaccessible to the American gaze, does not change: "The quays in Paris have never changed, that is to say they look different but the life that goes on there is always the same"(102). In Stein's modernist representation of France, Paris is "coherent and unified" in that life "there is always the same." It is only the American gaze that distorts Paris and gives the illusion that it changes over time. Stein maintains this distinction between the illusion of a Paris that changes over time and the reality of a Paris that never changes throughout her narrative. For her part, Kaplan's postmodernist representation of France, which offers "multiple discourses" about this nation, is one that really attempts to present a France that "changes over time": "Not that France didn't change. France became more American every year, even as Americans longed more and more for the

traditions that France still had"(102). In Kaplan's representation of France and America, the two nations mirror each other. With a statement, such as "Americans longed more and more for the traditions they had lost that France still had," Kaplan implies that originally Americans and French people shared the same traditions and that the reason why France is so special for Americans is that it did not "grow up," "that it always remained the same."

Even though Kaplan intends to go further than Stein through her disclosure of France, her obsession with America undermines her representation of France. Kaplan's use of another quotation (this time inserted within her narrative) from Stein's *Paris France* ("It was not what France gave you but what it did not take away from you that was important" (140)) suggests a search for an authentic France that is really a cover for an exploration of American values. Postmodern approaches do not prevent biased or framed conceptions. Philip E. Simmons's description of the stereotypes and ideas derived from the postmodern historical novel could also apply to Kaplan's postmodern memoir:

In its complicity with a mass culture that entertains more than it informs and whose texts seem concerned more

with their own processes than with any reference to an extratextual "real world," the postmodern historical novel, according to Fredric Jameson, "can no longer set out to represent the historical past; it can only 'represent' our ideas and stereotypes about that past."

(2)

French Lessons could be seen as a memoir "whose text seem[s] concerned more with '[its] own processes than with any reference to an extratextual 'real world'" as Kaplan states that she has been "willing to overlook in French culture what [she] wouldn't accept in [her] own, for the privilege of living in translation"(140). We also have to keep in mind that Kaplan's memoir is told from the perspective of an American who is back in America and teaches French at Duke University. Her job as a French professor in America allows her to buy groceries and pays her American mortgage. As a result, this former American expatriate "can no longer set out to represent [her] historical [French] past; it can only 'represent' [her] ideas and stereotypes about that past." Kaplan's "privilege of living in translation" reminds us of the textual processes, of the gap between an original France and its representation. It also suggests a disparity between an original America and its representation.

Critical works that challenge the idea that *French Lessons* is exclusively about France emphasize Kaplan's exploration of anti-Semitism. For instance, Kimberly Freeman's "The Moral of My Story: Alice Kaplan's *French Lessons* and the Moralization of Autobiography" suggests that to perceive Kaplan's memoir only as the story of becoming a French teacher

is surprisingly reductive; it makes her memoir sound like a very personal and escapist, even solipsistic, affair. Underneath this story of learning French, however, is a larger story that is steeped in one of the most painful periods of the twentieth century--the Jewish Holocaust. This story provides her motivation to learn French, a desire which, in turn, becomes entangled in other histories: that of her teacher, Paul de Man; of the French fascist writers she decides to study; and, most of all, of her father, a Jewish lawyer who prosecuted Nazis at Nuremberg. (186)

The ambivalent role of teaching and learning within her memoir reflects power issues that are at the center of her narrative. For Kaplan, learning to become a French teacher is inextricably linked to teaching French fascist writers a lesson, i.e., to expose how their anti-Semitic views

undermine the validity of their argument. I would add to Freeman's reading of Kaplan's memoir that learning to become a French teacher is not only linked to an exploration of anti-Semitism in France, but also to a renewal of American ties that have long been forgotten. Underneath the personal and subjective account of French experiences, there is also an exploration of American values and identity. This is an issue that has been pointed out in book reviews but has not yet been taken up as a topic for a critical essay.¹³ This chapter examines the relationship between French and American identities and how France "teaches" Americans about themselves. What Kaplan learns about herself through France is that her American identity is as much a "construction" as her "Frenchness." Through a close look at Kaplan's representation of the interchangeable nature of the French "other" and the American "self," I want to suggest that the American appropriation of French culture as a way to revisit an older and unknown America hides another even less obvious "layer" of her memoir: the inaccessibility of an authentic America.

French Lessons displays how France becomes for an American the Old World colony of the new century: "[t] here was no inch of unknown territory; even the history of visits

to the town over the centuries had been recorded"(68). Kaplan's "no inch of unknown territory" might refer to earlier American expatriate writers, such as Henry James and Gertrude Stein, who have already "covered" the French "territory" for her. In using visual imagery derived from both impressionism and cubism, Kaplan appears to insert within her memoir two "familiar" ways of looking at the "surfaces" of France. At times, Kaplan seems to adopt the Jamesian way of looking at Paris in *The Ambassadors*.¹⁴ In her book, *Impressionism*, Phoebe Pool writes that impressionists "consider light and the exchange of coloured reflections as the unifying elements of a picture, instead of relying on the traditional method of construction based on drawing, outline or sharp contrasts of light and shade"(7). In *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*, T. J. Clark quotes from an article written in 1883 by Jules Laforque in which he describes the impressionist at work, a description that emphasizes the painter's perception of reality:

The Impressionist sees and renders nature as she is, which is to say solely by means of coloured vibrations. Neither drawing, nor light, nor modelling, nor perspective, nor chiaroscuro . . . these infantile

classifications all resolve in reality into coloured vibrations, and must be obtained on the canvas solely by coloured vibrations. (16)

At times, Kaplan seems to adopt the impressionist perspective as she sees Paris through "colored vibrations." Indeed, she relates her perception of Manet's *Olympia* in the Jeu de Paume to her perception of Paris:

The painting had a zillion different kinds of white in it, beige gray snow ivory. As soon as I began looking for all the different whites, the painting changed utterly. The picture itself dissolved, but the paint came alive and I could see the brush strokes, see that a person had been there, working, to make the illusion. Seeing the painting change like that before my eyes made me feel sharp-sighted; I felt I was getting to the substance of my vision, to the meaning of it. I attributed my new eyes . . . to the city of Paris, which seemed to be organized for looking. I had never been in a place where there was so much to observe: the benches, the wrought-iron balconies, the long cars that looked like bugs, the policemen with their huge caps, the food sold outdoors, bookstalls outside along the river.

Everywhere I went, there was a new tableau to take in.

(65)

The colored vibrations represented through the painting's constant change into "zillion different kinds of white" parallel the "zillion different kinds" of Paris, i.e., the Paris of "wrought-iron balconies," the Paris of "policemen with their huge caps," the Paris of "bookstalls outside along the river," and so on. These different impressions of Paris are like colored vibrations or reflections because they are transitory (everywhere Kaplan went in Paris, "there was a new tableau to take in"). Transitory scenes are also found through Kaplan's description of the French landscape:

Mrs. Vanderveer had all the train schedules mastered for our trip to the south of France. From the train window I watched the landscapes change, from the gray roofs of Paris to the blue slate roofs of the Loire and then the red roofs of the Midi. The land got craggier, hillier, like a painting by Cézanne: cubes of space overlapping.

(67)

The different impressions created by the "zillion different kinds" of Paris and the progressive change from "the gray roofs of Paris to the blue slate roofs of the Loire and then the red roofs of the Midi" could belong to the world of

fantastical projections because impressions or constructed images are "not real" for everybody but they are "really there" for Kaplan.

Notwithstanding Kaplan's indulgence in transitory scenes, there is also an attempt to reject this Jamesian France of impressions as she writes that she "ate the truth and light of impressionism in her soufflé"(65). Kaplan's "eating" of impressionism puts an end to other possible impressionist perceptions of France. She claims that a visual approach to France should be closer to a Steinian and cubist perception: "You had to think about France like a cubist, in overlapping layers"(68). In fact, Kaplan incorporates the Jamesian and Steinian visual approaches to her own perception of France when she focuses on "overlapping" images (a word she uses not only to describe the cubist layers, but also to describe impressionist "cubes of space overlapping"). The "overlapping layers" and "cubes of space overlapping" stand metaphorically for Kaplan's exploration of the overlapping nature of French and American identities as opposed to seeing the French "other" and American "self" as different "tableaux." This thematic approach is also reflected through the narrative structure. I suggest that, structurally, *French*

Lessons is made up of three overlapping themes. The first theme deals with learning French, the second one with French fascist writers and anti-Semitism, and the third one with America. All these themes overlap because they are all "glued" in a *collage* fashion to Kaplan's pictorial surface of France.

Kaplan's claim about painting, that she "knew how to tell the difference between a reproduction and an original" (60), does not prevent her from playing with the truth or the "real": "I've rewritten the story of my first research trip to France several times, with slightly different emphases and different 'morals'" (199). The different emphases and different morals are reflected through Kaplan's narrative structure. Commenting on Kaplan's theoretical and structural approach, Jeremy Popkin writes that her autobiographical essay

represents an attempt to incorporate some of the insights of deconstructionism into the writing of autobiography itself. The central role of language in the constitution of Kaplan's personal identity, the suggestion that there may be more than one "Alice Kaplan," the willingness to find some aspects of her

fascist subjects in herself, all reflect a blurring of boundaries between academic enterprise and personal self-understanding. In her challenge to de Man, Kaplan also seeks to work in the other direction, using autobiography to authorize a critique of deconstruction.

(238)

Not only do the "attempt to incorporate some of the insights of deconstructionism into the writing of autobiography itself" and "the suggestion that there may be more than one 'Alice Kaplan'" reflect "a blurring of boundaries between academic enterprise and personal self-understanding," but they also evoke a *collage* of overlapping layers as the theoretical and the personal become inextricably linked. Does the theoretical imply a reproduction of de Man's theories or does Kaplan twist its original meaning? Similar questions could be asked of Kaplan's use of the personal. Does it imply a reproduction of traditional clichés about France or does it give an original picture of Kaplan's French experiences? Notwithstanding Kaplan's distinction between an original concept or experience and its reproduction, she also suggests the interchangeable nature of both through her narrative structure.

Kaplan's perception of deconstruction and its own version of the "real" originates from a course she took as a graduate student at Yale. Taught by Paul de Man, "Introduction to Literary Theory" asked and tried to answer the big question "'[w] hat is deconstruction. . . .'"

'Deconstruction is when you figure out that a story or a poem is in the wrong--not because the author is lying, but because there is something inherently deceitful about language'" (149). Within this academic context, Kaplan learns how to think about authenticity ("there wasn't even a person there to be inauthentic--deconstruction was about keeping person-ness away" [148]) and language: "[a] figure of speech [such as metaphor and metonymy] is usually a substitute for the 'real' 'proper' meaning" (149). As a result, there are problems with "trying to represent reality" (150). The deconstructive critic has to show "why a metaphor is believable, and how it transforms what it describes" (155). Her dissertation on French fascist writers allowed her to apply these theories as "she was dying to show how screwed-up intellectuals could get about the truth" (160).

Wesley Morris describes Yale school critics and their rejection of the Lacanian Real:

Existentialism has undergone a shift in focus from its source in the 1940's; no longer concerned with the absurdity of the phenomenal world, this new Existentialism founds itself on the overzealous repression of reality . . . De Man is the ultimate deconstructor, able to find abysmal freeplay in any text whatsoever . . . de Man disestablishes ontological referentiality, and with it the authenticity of the author, in order to elevate rhetorical play to a position of authority-for-the-moment. (127)

Kaplan follows her professor's theories about the absence of any referentiality by emphasizing at times a France "sealed off from ordinary experience and authorial intention." This type of France comes up through what she considers as fantastical projections, i.e., the fantastical world of the Madeline books. However, the deconstructive idea of any absence of reality or authenticity was quite controversial in the 1980s and, as a result, there was great critical opposition to the Yale scholars. Caroline D. Eckhard writes that

[t]o convince ourselves that literary reality is only a fable is to assume a position that alienates us from our past, denies modern writers an audience, and undermines

the validity of any teaching of literature in our schools. It is also a position that is reduced to silence by its own logic and one that is questionable in its methods (if not in its motives). What do we gain if we deconstruct and lose our heritage thereby? We need instead to invert Nietzsche's phrase: fables (and poems and plays and literary works of all sorts) are realities. Some are good, some bad . . . but that does not make them any the less real. (320)

Kaplan also resists Paul de Man's deconstructive approach to authenticity by proving over and over again (as Eckhard argues) that we cannot transcend some realities. For instance, her attempt to present a France that can never be related to the "real world" (a France which is perpetually idealized) clashes with the unavoidable reality of home on French soil: "French isn't just a metaphor . . . [i]t buys my groceries and pays the mortgage" (216). Kaplan's ambivalent perception of deconstruction is also reflected through her claim that "you had to think about France like a cubist, in overlapping layers." This statement reflects an attempt to fill the void created by the "overzealous repression of reality." This would explain Kaplan's choice of words "you

had to think" (you had to conceive or create) as opposed to "we think" (a more genuine kind of perception).

The first structural layer of *French Lessons*, the learning of French, "deconstructs" Kaplan's French reality through an "overzealous repression" of her American identity. The void at the core of Kaplan's identity is filled with a series of performative acts:

When I hear myself called "Madame," I become the shopkeeper, the governess, the secretary, the schoolteacher, trained in body and voice to serve. I am a Parisian woman in a white smock, standing behind her pastries or her scarves or her fountain pens, patiently waiting for my customer to decide. (125)

Kaplan's performance of the different roles of the Parisian woman as "trained in body and voice to serve" recalls Gertrude Stein's performative "Frenchness." Drawing attention to their reproduction of French stereotypes, Stein and Kaplan acknowledge the *pastiche* quality of their representation. They include this parody within their daily interaction with the French. Kaplan's performative "Frenchness" suggests submission. However, she also says further down that when her American students call her "Madame," a strange authority

inhabits her as she becomes "part mother, part policeman, part dictionary"(125). Another example of her strange authority in a French situation is found in her ambivalent attitude towards a former French lover. The disappointment of not being French enough for him, of failing to perform the French part successfully ("What was the difference between his words and my words, his world and my world? When I said a French word, why wasn't it the same as when he said one? What could I do to make it be the same?" [87-88]), gives way to the pride of correcting his French mistakes: "After I had become a French professor, I wrote André, and he wrote back. . . There were a few spelling mistakes in his letter to me, the kind I'm hired to correct"(94). Like a true colonizer, Kaplan does not really want to become the "other"; she wants to control what the "other" should be.

Kaplan often uses food imagery to describe the power of her French persona. Even though she claims that "[i]t's unfair to complain that people in French language books are eating too much"(137), her memoir relies heavily on "eating" the French. With statements such as, "I ate French"(53) and "I can't imagine not having French. I think I would starve without it"(208), Kaplan implies that French inhabits her:

I could feel the French sticking in my throat, the new muscles in my mouth. I had my ear open, on the plane, for the sounds of anyone speaking French because those were my sounds now. I was full of French, it was holding me up, running through me, a voice in my head, a tickle in my ear. (70)

It is possible to read the above quotation as Kaplan's admission of being overpowered by French (it was holding her up and running through her), but I think that what stands out most from the description is the eating process which led to such a sensation. Kaplan had "to eat" French first before feeling overpowered by it. Thus, what prevails here is her control of the French through imagery that emphasizes assimilation. Notwithstanding the effects of such assimilation on her senses, the French remains "locked up" in Kaplan's body and, as a result, becomes powerless.

The second structural layer of Kaplan's memoir, the analysis of French fascist writers and anti-Semitism, represses her discomfort with the French fascist writers' racism. Like Kaplan's repression of her knowledge of not being French enough for the French through the creation of a persona, her awareness of Céline and Paul de Man's anti-

Semitism is also repressed. Notwithstanding her discovery of de Man's writing that "if French Jewish novelists were sent to a Jewish colony, the literary life of Europe wouldn't suffer"(167), Kaplan's long article on his wartime journalism attempts not to take sides: "I said I didn't want to condemn or moralize, merely to describe"(169). Kaplan is able to accomplish this "overzealous repression of reality" to a certain extent before admitting "that it was now difficult, if not impossible, to think about deconstruction without thinking about de Man's collaborationist past"(169). Kaplan's perception of de Man's work is similar to her approach to Céline's literature in that there is also a tension between repression of reality and the impossibility to do so.

More than the academic respect she felt for de Man, Kaplan's interest in Céline is characterized by a passionate love for his use of language:

What exquisite misery I felt! Disconnected, not belonging, desiring every house, imagining every happy scene behind every stone wall, taking in the lewd empty glances, given and received. Céline could express it all in a sentence through the sound of his words as much as their meaning. When I read him I luxuriated in despair, dark thoughts, and a commitment to eternal exile. (106)

Céline's use of words in *Rigadoon* evokes such an aura of authenticity that Kaplan feels she is "right there . . . waiting for a bomb to drop on [her] head"(109). Moreover, she feels as if she is hearing the author's voice: "I light a match in the dark with his words; I see the flash of moonlight on three scared people and a cat scrambling in the dark, breathing hard, listening for each other"(109). Those authentic feelings, however, arise from Kaplan's imagination. When she finally heard Céline's voice on a tape recorder, the reality did not correspond to the fantastical projection:

[W]hat I had imagined from passages like this one from *Rigadoon* was a lilting poet. His "real" spoken voice was raspy and croaking, broken.

How could somebody so bitter, so broken, make light and magic and music on the page? If he could transform his hideous voice into music, think of what I could do.

(109)

Kaplan's use of quotation marks for the word "real" brings up the ambivalence of truth and reality within her memoir. The use of quotation marks implies that one "real" is closer to the truth than the other. In other words, the reality of his spoken voice is more "real" than the reality evoked through his beautiful prose. Notwithstanding her knowledge of

Céline's social and political views ("The same writer who, in *Journey to the End of the Night*, wrote elegies to society's marginal characters . . . came under the grip of a mad anti-Semitism in the 1930s, claiming his writing style was the expression of his pure French blood, his 'native rhythm'" [106]), Kaplan claims that Céline made her want to write. The reason why Céline made Kaplan want to write is that he made her aware of the possibility of transforming her "American-ness" into some kind of "Frenchness" ("if he could transform his hideous voice into music, think of what I could do"). Kaplan's research on Céline's influence on American writers ties in with a larger research: France's influence on America.

A close look at the possible power structure represented through the narrative "layers" of *French Lessons* reveals the ignoring of a French reality through a series of performative acts and the emphasis on a beautiful superficial France at the expense of the ugliness hiding underneath. This power structure reflects Kaplan's thematic control of her subject matter, i.e., her focus on imagination rather than reality. This is what she brings forward in her text. However, underneath this exploration of the American construction of

France, there is more than an evasion of the real France: she represses her knowledge of American cultural imperialism over France. The repression, however, extends further as the narrative structure also suggests the interdependence between the top or foremost layer (learning French) and the bottom or most hidden layer (learning about one's American self). This interdependence might refer to the historical relationship between France and America. There used to be a French empire in North America at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Although French colonization did not extend to the whole American territory (it was only restricted to a few states), it did leave its mark on the American subconscious. For instance, Kaplan makes a *rapprochement* between Americans and North Africans in terms of their former status as French colonies: "Oddly enough we had a lot in common, the students who had come to France after decolonization and the Americans who had come to France to get themselves some culture"(185). Notwithstanding the validity of Kaplan's claim about "deculturized" Americans going to France to get some culture, it would also be accurate to see this cultural exile as an unconscious attempt to Americanize France or as a reversal of the former relationship between the two nations.

No matter how much Kaplan displays her love for the traditional France ("To be in French, you fold your stiff white shirts cuffs over your tight sweater cuffs; you cross your 7's") American references are never far behind "you can even say 'hamburger' and 'hot dog' and 'Coca Cola' with a French accent"(180). While she seems to fall for old French traditions, the new Americanized France always seems to cast its shadow over them. Kaplan's long friendship with a French family, the Veaux, reflects this ambivalence. Dinners at the Veaux used to be traditionally French. In fact, her first dinner reminded her

of those endless meals you read about in language classes--a first course of foie gras and a second course of rabbit and french fries and a salad and a cheese course and a fancy store-bought dessert. Bottles of wine with dust still on them from the cave tucked under the pharmacy, the kind with sediment in the bottom and a ten-layered taste you can study. (95)

Reality turns into fantasy as "the endless meals [one] read[s] about in French language classes" are experienced first-hand by our narrator. However, the Americanization of French cuisine eventually spoils Kaplan's enjoyment of these endless meals: "when Papillon got too old, even the

obligatory Saturday lunch at his house ended. Meals shrank. Sometimes dinner was salmon spread on packaged toast, or a piece of cheese from the glass cheese cage"(103). In fact, the tradition of endless meals is "trotted out" by French people only "out of respect for the visiting Francophiles . . . Florence made a crusted fish or her endive in béchamel and a tart" and François "brought just the right wine from the inexhaustible cellar"(103). The aging of Papillon reflects the wearing out of traditional French cuisine and the advent of a more modern and American way of cooking. Notwithstanding the fact that Kaplan seems to deplore the Americanization of her friends' eating ritual, she also admits the appeal of American food in certain situations. For instance, in the cafeteria at the *hypermarché*, an Americanized version of a typically French meal, veal, becomes exquisite: "The food was Woolworth's only worse, frozen veal covered in Cheese Whiz and pizza sauce. I ate with relish, this dish I would have rejected at home but which in France was exotic"(102-03). The two contradictory perceptions of French cuisine, the modern Americanized and the traditional French, suggest a strange interchangeability between American and French cuisine as Kaplan describes a reversible effect between American and French attitudes towards cooking:

In the seventies, as the American middle class abandoned their soup cans and frozen food for lengthy recipes à la Julia Child, Micheline was moving in the opposite direction. Around the time that wine became weekly, if not daily, in American middle-class families, it disappeared from Micheline's lunch table altogether Around the time that instant mashed potato flakes and TV dinners became an embarrassment in bourgeois .

Minneapolis, they appeared in bourgeois Bordeaux. (102)

Not only does the ease with which this cultural exchange takes place illustrate both American appropriation and imperialism (Americans "borrow" French cuisine while imposing their own cuisine on the French), but it also brings up the constructed nature of American and French characteristics or identities.

Underneath Kaplan's acknowledgement of her inability to become French, there is also a recognition that it is equally impossible to embody the essence of "American-ness": "[i]t's not as if there's a straightforward American self lurking under a devious French one, waiting to come out and be authentic. That's nostalgia--or fiction" (216). The straightforward American self" and the "devious French

[self]" are basically one and the same in that they both originate from nostalgia or fiction. Kaplan's portrayal of a Yale graduate classmate, William Golden/Guillaume Doré, who is the son of an American businessman and of an ex-mannequin from Paris, illustrates the constructed nature of both French and American identities:

William had two distinct personae. A French *moi*, exceedingly fastidious, clean of diction, light of step. We used to call him, in translation, Guillaume Doré . . . his French self was neat to a fault . . . Cardigans, flannel pants, the left hand posed in the air to mark a particular stage in Cartesian dialectic. William's other was American *me*, "Bill," who slouched, knew baseball statistics from the sixties, listened to reggae, drank from cans at the graduate student bar, ate beer nuts, and played poker. (147-48)

Kaplan's juxtaposition of Guillaume Doré's "French *moi*" and "French self" to Bill Golden's "American *me*" and American "other" reflects her desire to blur the line between American and French identities as the American "self" becomes the "other" and the French "other" becomes the "self." These composite identities are found within the same individual. There might be a clear preference for William's French side

but Kaplan's wish to have Guillaume (France) does not prevent her from thinking she would be better off having the relationship with Bill (America): "I would have been better off having the relationship with Bill . . . Bill liked me. But it was Guillaume Doré I wanted and Guillaume Doré I got" (148). This idea of being better off with America seems to be buried underneath the glamour of France. What Kaplan might be saying through the dual personality of William Golden/Guillaume Doré is that the latter is only Bill Golden's creation. Without the "all-American" Bill Golden, the French Guillaume Doré would not exist. Even though this could be read as the American creation of France, Kaplan's description of Guillaume/Bill's two "distinct personae," the French self "neat to a fault" and the American Bill "who slouched," suggests that France is not America's only creation. There is also the American creation of America.

For Kaplan, American and French identities are performances trying to reproduce an original that never existed in the first place. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity could apply to Kaplan's exploration of "national" performativity:

Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. (141)

The constructed character of national identity, which only appears to be substantial, allows Kaplan to shift from the performative accomplishment of "Frenchness" to its American counterpart. An example of how the social audience is fooled by her performative act can be found when Kaplan describes how her personification of the French "deceives" a man from Colorado ("[w]e were sitting at the French student restaurant together and I was peeling my pear so carefully, he said, he didn't know I was American" [92]). It seems like the social audience needs to be ignorant of the "other" for the act to succeed. When Kaplan imitates French manners at a French party, this particular mundane social audience reacts differently:

I was invited to a chateau and I wore my best dress, ready to discuss literature. I got there and my French hosts greeted me in sneakers. They were growing Silver Queen corn in their backyard, and they wanted a fourth

of tennis. Of all the Americans in my group the one they liked best was the freckled jock who could hardly speak French and went everywhere on his ten-speed bike. I was waiting to be rewarded for my good French, but he got all the attention. He was having fun playing the American mascot, while I was doing all the hard work of learning their language and what I thought were their social customs. I would have been ready to pose as the Marlboro Man to get the kind of attention he got from the French. But I had veered off in the other direction; I was trying to be French. Besides, I knew his ploy wouldn't work for me: a girl can't be a Marlboro Man.

(91-92)

Despite Kaplan's display of her knowledge of the French language and social customs, she fails to impress her hosts. In fact, Kaplan is not the only one performing as she makes it quite clear that her compatriot, "the freckled jock who could hardly speak French and went everywhere on his ten-speed bike" was also "having fun playing the American mascot." Her admission that she "would have been ready to pose as the Marlboro Man to get the kind of attention he got from the French," but that she could not ("a girl can't be a Marlboro Man") does not only bring up gender issues. The

Marlboro Man is as much an American construction of America (her use of the word "pose" is very telling) as Kaplan's best dress and readiness to discuss literature is an American construction of what France should be about. Thus, posing as a French polished intellectual or posing as the uncultivated Marlboro Man would be two national constructions for Kaplan. The setting of the French chateau is similar to the setting of a play where the two "American mascots," the Francophile American and the "American" American identities clash, collapse, and reveal to the mundane social audience the artificial nature of each. Faced with two American acts, the French audience falls for the construction of America, i.e., the freckled jock who could hardly speak French. Kaplan's admission that she might have misinterpreted French social customs suggests her awareness of this constructed France that originates from the Madeline books. Her French hosts prompt her to realize the dated or archaic nature of her French expectations as well as the absence of a true American identity.

Like Gertrude Stein's childhood memories of France ("It came up first in such different books, Jules Verne and Alfred de Vigny" [3]), Alice Kaplan's early recollections of France

are derived from literary references, such as the Madeline books:

My mother got the idea that she would take us to live in the South of France. She had a specific city in mind, Montpellier. What was my image of France, then? I imagined a house where we would be together near the water, the way we were together in the summers on Wildhurst Road. My mother said there would be palm trees and warmth in Montpellier (. . . .) Oh sunny France, I can see myself there underneath a palm tree. I will be a French girl, like Madeline in the Madeline books who lives in an orphanage with other girls and walks in a straight line and gets a visit from Miss Clavel when she goes into the hospital with appendicitis. (31)

The interchangeability of France and America originates from Kaplan's childhood. The way she imagined France ("I imagined a house where we would be together near the water") is based on a so-called American reality ("the way we were together in the summers on Widhurst Road"). When she first visits France, Kaplan carries with her images of this country derived from the Madeline books. Even though she knows that these images of France are imaginary, they acquire a certain authenticity for the American expatriate writer. They are authentic

through their evocation of a long lost American childhood that was never fully Americanized. By this I mean that Kaplan's childhood, which was spent dreaming about France rather than merely living her American background, is bound to resurface as a French "other" and not an American "self." By growing up to emulate the inaccessible Frenchness, Kaplan has learned to ignore the surrounding American reality. As a result, not only is she trying to reproduce an inaccessibly authentic France, but she is also pining for an inaccessibly authentic America. In fact, she is caught between a constructed France, a France derived from literary images, and a constructed America, an America revisited through French literary references. Thus, her identity is somewhere in between America and France, somewhere in between an America that tries to be French and a France trying to be American.

Another influential book about France that came across young Alice Kaplan's path was Mauger's *Cours de langue et de civilisation française à l'usage des étrangers* ("a series of blue books put out by the Alliance Française, the worldwide organization that promotes French language and civilization" [137]). The Mauger book taught her how to recognize the minor

details of French rooms: "the Henri IV dining room set, the *traversin* pillow across the bed"(137). At the same time, however, she recognizes that these items as well as "the places where the food is sold . . . places I have been . . . the butcher shops where the rabbits hang with their fur and the sausages look like necklaces" are "disappearing now, of course"(137). Kaplan might be nostalgic about the France represented in the Mauger book but matter of factly recognizes the Americanization taking place in France. Kaplan's ambivalent feelings towards antiquated France and the new Americanized one culminates in this passage from her memoir that deals with Mauger's representation of France:

Time enough for the France they inhabit to be gone:
 Mauger's grammar looks as dated to me now as those
 fifties Robert Doisneau photographs, where the Frenchmen
 wear berets and frayed overcoats in their postwar
 leanness. It's a France as old as pissoirs and
 segregated-sex lycées and women just getting the vote.
 France before Les Halles was torn down. France without a
 single fast food, France still hungry. (138)

Even though this passage seems to contradict Kaplan's desire throughout her memoir for a France that would reproduce exactly "those fifties Robert Doisneau photographs," it also

reveals her knowledge of how her experience in France does not always correspond to what she read as a child. The France as "old as pissoirs and segregated-sex lycées" (a France "still hungry") is juxtaposed to a France invaded by fast foods (a France "overfed" by modern American concepts and values). Those "[devious] fifties Robert Doisneau photographs" also offered young Alice Kaplan "a place to hide"(216) from the reality of her American childhood or her American past. As she points out, however, it is not as if there is an authentic American self lurking under a devious French one. Thus, the Robert Doisneau photographs not only reflect her own constructed images of France, but they also mirror similar images of her native country.

Like the Robert Doisneau photographs that offered Kaplan a "place to hide" from any kind of American "originality" (in both senses of the term, creativity and primary reference), French landmarks or icons also bring up the "reproduction" aspect of their American counterparts. Kaplan's watching of Kennedy's funeral on television as a child was very influential in terms of her initial conception of American and French identities:

I learned from Kennedy's funeral that Washington was designed on the model of Paris. The Champs Elysées was a

grand boulevard that ran between the Arc de Triomphe and the Place de la Concorde; Pennsylvania Avenue ran between the White House and Capitol Hill. (32)

Within this context, American landmarks are not originally "American," they are reproductions of French models. Kaplan, however, reverses (within this same context) the American reproduction-French model dichotomy by presenting Charles de Gaulle, the president of France, as a "reproduction" of Abraham Lincoln: "[De Gaulle] wore a hat that reminded me of Abraham Lincoln's stovepipe hat, only shorter. Instead of a band all around it there was a visor in front that stuck out in line with his enormous nose"(32). De Gaulle's attendance of Kennedy's funeral on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington reveals the constructed nature of both American and French identities as Kaplan quotes the newscaster's speculation of de Gaulle's feelings: "'How familiar this funeral procession must feel to the French leader; yet how different in mood'" (33). The "familiar" and the "different" are attributes which also characterize Kaplan's perception of both French and American identities. A similar juxtaposition of the "familiar" and the "different" is at play in Adam Gopnik's collection of essays, *Paris to the Moon*. His perception of a traditional France, which originates from his American

childhood, often clashes with his other perception of an Americanized France originating from his expatriate experience as an adult.

The title of Kaplan's memoir, *French Lessons*, is similar to Gopnik's *Paris to the Moon* in that both titles evoke an interest in France. Although the word "lessons" is in itself not very extraordinary (in fact, it almost sounds tedious), its juxtaposition with the word "French" gives it an "exotic" connotation. Taking French lessons suggests more than learning grammar and vocabulary; it implies lessons on how to eat, on how to explore your senses ("life in France without sex was inconceivable to [Kaplan]" [89]). Thus, the title, *French Lessons*, metaphorically suggests the possibility of being "transported" somewhere else. Gopnik's title, *Paris to the Moon*, is taken from a nineteenth-century engraving that shows a train on its way from the Right Bank of Paris to the moon. The image casts its spell on Gopnik because it represents two romances that had made him and his family wanting to leave New York and come to Paris:

One was the old nineteenth-century vision of Paris as the *naturally* modern place, the place where the future was going to happen as surely as it would happen in New

York . . . But the image represented another, more intense association, and that is the idea that there is, for some Americans anyway, a direct path between the sublunary city and a celestial state. Americans, Henry James wrote, "are too apt to think that Paris is the celestial city," and even if we don't quite think that, some of us do think of it as the place where tickets are sold for the train to get you there. (4)

The futuristic and celestial appeal of Paris allows Americans, such as Henry James and Adam Gopnik, to avoid the harshness of American technology and progress. Even though Paris is a place "where the future was going to happen as surely as it would happen in New York," the main difference between Paris and New York is that while you feel the effects of the future in New York, you do not realize that the future is happening when you are in Paris. Notwithstanding the ignoring of an American future and the acquiring of a "celestial state" that would supposedly provide perpetual content, Gopnik's *Paris to the Moon* often indulges in nostalgic pinings for an old and unknown America. Thus, like Kaplan's deceptive title (*French Lessons* are more than learning French, they also teach Americans about themselves), Gopnik's title misleads the reader into believing that his

collection of essays is strictly about Paris and the celestial state it procures. The narrative "layers" we find in Kaplan's *French Lessons* also apply to a certain extent to Gopnik's structure; underneath the exploration of the American fascination for Paris and France, there is a common quest for a long lost American identity. As I have shown with Kaplan, I will demonstrate how for Gopnik the notion of an authentic America is as constructed as the notion of an authentic France.

Chapter Four:

Adam Gopnik's *Paris to the Moon*: "This book about Paris is
actually about New York"

"I dare say, moreover," she pursued with an interested gravity, "that I do, that we all do here, run too much to mere eye. But how can it be helped? We're all looking at each other--and in the light of Paris one sees what things resemble. That's what the light of Paris seems always to show. It's the fault of the light of Paris--dear old light!"

"Dear Old Paris!" little Bilham echoed.

"Everything, everyone shows," Miss Barrace went on.

"But for what they really are?" Strether asked.

"Oh, I like your Boston 'reallys'! But sometimes--yes."

Henry James, *The Ambassadors*

This excerpt from *The Ambassadors* (1903) prefaces the *New Yorker* correspondent Adam Gopnik's collection of essays, *Paris to the Moon* (2000). Through Strether and Miss Barrace's playful conversation about Paris, James emphasizes the complex nature of the American perception of Paris and France. James problematizes the question of a "real" and "authentic" Paris by preventing his characters from "seeing" it. Strether and Miss Barrace are aware of this light of Paris that could disclose how things "really are," but at the same time they also know they can only discern through this same light "what things resemble." The inaccessibility of a real Paris can be better understood through Lacan's theory of the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary.

Malcolm Bowie writes that the Lacanian Symbolic "is characterized by difference, disjunction and displacement,"

while its Imaginary counterpart "is a seeking for identity or resemblance" (115). As for the Lacanian Real, it

is the irremediable and intractable "outside" of language; the indefinitely receding goal towards which the signifying chain tends; the vanishing point of the Symbolic and Imaginary alike. As a result of this view, the Real comes close to meaning "the ineffable" or "the impossible" in Lacan's thought. (116)

Lacan's understanding of the Real as something that disturbs the Symbolic order (because it can never be represented) applies perfectly to James's use of "real" and "really" in *The Ambassadors*. For James, the real Paris is both a cultural construction as well as an authentic experience. The tense relation between these two versions of the real Paris can be found through Miss Barrace and Strether's respective ways of seeing and thinking. When Miss Barrace mocks Strether's insistence that things must show for what they really are, i.e., appearances should be transparent ("Oh, I like your Boston 'reallys'!"), she suggests that appearances are not just a disguise of the real: rather, they are part of the real and the experiences of the real. In Miss Barrace's view of the real Paris, the line between cultural constructions and authentic experiences is often blurred. This ambiguous

perception of a real Paris anticipates Lacan's own ambiguous version of the Real as something that designates not only literal reality, but also the more metaphorically traumatic real. The complexity of James's real Paris, the play between the literal real and the metaphorical one, is also found in Gopnik's *Paris to the Moon*.

Like Miss Barrace, Little Bilham and Lambert Strether, Gopnik is aware of the impossibility of accessing or even representing the Real Paris:

The light of Paris still shows Americans things as they are (if not as they *really* are) by showing us how things can look different in a different light, but the light it shows them with now is more mysterious and singular, a kind of moral moonlight, a little bit harder to see by. (12)

This statement, which appears in Gopnik's introduction, marks both his distance from and his attachment to the Jamesian characters' perception of Paris. Notwithstanding the fact that on the eve of a new millennium the light of Paris still shows "how things can look different in a different light," the light it shows them in now is "more mysterious and singular," "a little bit harder to see by." In other words,

the American perception of Paris is as ambiguous to Gopnik's late twentieth century expatriate experience as it was to James's characters at the beginning of the same century, but the layers wrapping such a perception become much harder to unravel now because everything is filtered through a postmodern reinterpretation of the past.

Gopnik's postmodern representation of Paris and France conforms to the genre of *The New Yorker* essay, which sees itself and is seen as a cultural reference. Earl Rovit describes the early influence of *The New Yorker*, *Time*, and *Reader's Digest* on American tastes and opinions:

Their success is to have become the market-oriented substitute for the defunct Genteel Tradition . . . In the forefront of the "information revolution," they have significantly influenced radio and television journalism and abetted the gigantic electronic changes in marketing, finance, politics, and nearly every other phase of public life that our society is experiencing.

(551)

What often contributed (and still contributes) to the success of these magazines is the "superstar" status of its editors and journalists. In the case of *The New Yorker*, E. B. White, Katharine White, Harold Ross, and Edmund Wilson all helped to

set the tone to this magazine as a cultural, social, and political *avant-garde*. Like his predecessor Janet Flanner, who was also a correspondent in Paris for the magazine in the 1920s and 1930s, Gopnik presents an exciting and exotic Paris meant to draw the attention of potential American visitors and the more "daily life" Paris that would interest American expatriates.

Gopnik's perception of Paris relies heavily on the postmodern climate of the new millennium through its juxtaposition of literary genres and historical periods. Both autobiography and essay, *Paris to the Moon* attempts to cover all the angles of an American expatriate experience in late twentieth century Paris:

Paris, which in the first five years of the century seemed the capital of modern life, spent the last five years on the sidelines, brooding on what happened. Our son's first five years, and the modern century's last five, five years to the end of the millennium and five to grade one in New York, a small subject and a large one, juxtaposed. (14)

James's novel would have represented the first five years of the century when Paris "seemed the capital of modern life," and would have exerted its cultural ascendancy over America

and the world. Gopnik's essays not only reflect how Paris "spent the last five years on the sidelines" watching America taking over as the capital of modern life, but also show paradoxically, how this image of an earlier Paris that was, so to speak, on "top of the world" still persists within the mind of a 1995 American expatriate.¹⁵ Typical of the moral preoccupation of postmodern discourse, Gopnik readjusts traditional American responses to Paris. In order to better understand what I mean by "morally correct" postmodern discourse, I want to turn to John J. Su's analysis of the role of moral obligation in the postmodern novel:

[p]ostmodern ethics places a great burden upon individuals. The imperatives of place must be verified internally, not simply accepted as the necessary duty of a role. This position of *being* obligated to place, while living with the suspicion that its obligations demand excessive priority, defines the moral life of the postmodern self as interminably haunting. (607)

If we apply Su's analysis of the postmodern novel to *The New Yorker* correspondent's non-fictional narrative, the "moral life" of Gopnik's "postmodern self" helps us to understand his claim that the late twentieth century light of Paris is "more mysterious and singular, a kind of moral

moonlight, a little bit harder to see by"(12). Gopnik's "great burden" is to "verify" how Paris has been described over the years. His "obligations" are to set the record straight. In other words, the light of Paris reminds Gopnik of his moral obligation to question earlier representations of Paris. With such ambiguous and paradoxical statements as, "[i]t is not an old or antiquated Paris that we love, but the persistent, modern material Paris, carrying on in a time of postmodern immateriality," or "[w]e love Paris not out of 'nostalgia' but because we love the look of light on things, as opposed to the look of light *from things*"(16-17), Gopnik offers a revisionist look at earlier American representations of France, which still persist on the eve of a new millenium.

Gopnik's claim that he, his wife, and young son "weren't Francophiles because we didn't know anything about France, and still don't"(9) reflects the apologetic tone that often accompanies his arguments. Even though he pretends ignorance, Gopnik still presents throughout *Paris to the Moon* in-depth analyses that prove (or "perform" an expertise) that he knows pretty much everything there is to know about postmodern France and its relationship to its old or antiquated self. Not only is he able to analyze this specific relationship, he is also able to contextualize it within a larger framework of

American perceptions of France. When he writes "[i]t is not an old or antiquated Paris that we love, but the persistent, modern material Paris," Gopnik refers not only to American expatriates of his own generation, but also to earlier generations of American expatriates, such as the "lost generation" of Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway, who all deluded themselves (knowingly) into believing that they love "the dear Old Paris" when, in fact, they have always loved the "modern material Paris," the powerful Paris which used to be the capital of modern life early in the twentieth century. The "old or antiquated" Paris is an American invention that conceals the actual American perception of Paris, i.e., their love for the modern and material aspect of this city. The modern and material Paris of the early twentieth century is the Paris that reminds Americans most of their homeland because it features a "beautiful commonplace civilization" of "cafés, brasseries, parks, lemons on trays, dappled light on bourgeois boulevards"(17), a civilization that has always been reproduced in upper-class America. Similarly, Gopnik points out that what American expatriates have always considered to be a nostalgic love of Paris procured through the "look of light *from* things" or through established representations, is

another delusion, because what American expatriates really love is the "look of light on things," or what they can see for themselves.¹⁶

Like the Jamesian characters who metaphorically blame the light of Paris for their inability to see things for what "they really are" and content themselves with believing in "what things resemble," Gopnik's collection of essays also displays an awareness of the constructed perceptions of Paris which wrap around authentic Parisian experiences: "Paris is open to anyone, but what is open isn't entirely Paris. It is another, simulacra Paris, which wraps around the real one and is there to be looked at, to be seen"(266). Gopnik's distinction between the simulacra Paris and the real one alludes to Jean Baudrillard, the inventor of the theory of the "simulacra," who "famously insisted that 'reality' had disappeared and that all that was left in its place was a world of media images and simulated events"(42). For Baudrillard, what replaces reality is its imitation or reproduction.¹⁷ This imitated real is found in the excerpt from *The Ambassadors* when Miss Barrace refers to the "Boston 'reallys,'" or what the Americans consider falsely to be an "authentic" Paris.¹⁸ In *Paris to the Moon*, the imitated real is used by Gopnik in a playful manner to describe his own

distorted perceptions of *la ville lumière*: "[w]e all see our Paris as true, because it is"(16). Gopnik's statement comes a paragraph after he claims that he is aware "that [his] Paris, which began as a cardboard construction wearing a cape and a kepi, in many respects remains one, an invention, a Bizarro New York" (16).

Notwithstanding his awareness of an invented Paris which blocks the view of the authentic one (it seems like this authentic Paris does not and cannot even exist within representation), Gopnik attempts, nonetheless, to present the real Paris of daily experiences. His true Paris, "because it is", which originates from the remembered images of his childhood (the book adaptation of Albert Lamorisse's *The Red Balloon* and the *Madeline* books) is juxtaposed with his daily Parisian experiences as a husband and a father: "[m]y real life in Paris, as in New York, was spent with a few people, and, really, only with two, Martha and Luke"(17). When applied to his everyday life in Paris, the word "real" or "true" is intended literally. When applied to the constructed Paris which originates from his childhood and still pursues him on the eve of a new millenium ("I don't go on a bus in Paris without still expecting my balloon to be barred and the authority figure who oversees it is still a cardboard

policeman in a cape" [17]), the same two words are meant to be taken in the Baudrillardian sense of imitation or reproduction of reality. By opening his collection with an excerpt from *The Ambassadors* that emphasizes the Baudrillardian sense of the "real," Gopnik implies that James's representation of Paris does not explore what this city "really is." Gopnik's choice of excerpt from James's novel fits well his overall project of "correcting" traditional representations of Paris, because the excerpt alludes to what Paris "resembles." It becomes clear throughout *Paris to the Moon* that Gopnik wants to go further than James by offering the Paris missing from Little Bilham's, Miss Barrace's and Lambert Strether's conversation about ambiguous perceptions of this city. Even though Gopnik insinuates that his own late twentieth century take on Paris is closer to the truth than James's early twentieth century representation of this city, I want to suggest that there are key passages in *The Ambassadors* that are very similar to Gopnik's description of authentic Parisian experiences.

Like Gopnik's representation of authentic rituals of French daily life, James also depicts scenes that emphasize the authenticity of Strether's daily Parisian experiences. Examples of these authentic moments are found in both *The*

Ambassadors and *Paris to the Moon* through Strether and Gopnik's responses to Parisian restaurants. James's depiction of Strether's enjoyment of the simple pleasures of dining out with his friend, Madame de Vionnet, is similar to Gopnik's own dining moments with his family. What Gopnik acknowledges as his "real life in Paris"(17), the typical Parisian restaurant which allows him to enjoy authentic moments ("I believe in Le Soufflé, on a Saturday afternoon in December, in the back room, with Luke sleeping in his *poussette*, and the old couple across the neighboring banquette, who had been coming for forty years, there with their small blind dog" [18]) is also found in *The Ambassadors*. When James describes Strether's reaction to the dinner with his friend, the emphasis is on how his main character reaches deep and genuine feelings:

they eventually seated themselves, on either side of a small table, at a window adjusted to the busy quay and the shining, barge-burdened Seine; where, for an hour, in the matter of letting himself go, of diving deep, Strether was to feel that he had touched bottom. . . How could he wish it to be lucid for others, for any one, that he, for the hour, saw reasons enough in the mere way the bright, clean, ordered waterside life came in at

the open window?--the mere way Mme. de Vionnet, opposite him over their intensely white table-linen, their *omelettes aux tomates*, their bottle of straw-colored Chablis, thanked him for everything. (158)

The authenticity of the scene, the "intense" *omelettes aux tomates* and the bottle of straw-colored Chablis, which allow Strether to go to "the bottom" of his feelings, differs from the artificial quality of another scene, in a French rural town, where each element reminds Strether of a reproduction of an original painting, "a certain small Lambinet that had charmed him, long years before, at a Boston dealer's" (278). Ultimately, the French countryside reminds Strether of a French painting that reminds him in its turn of a Boston landscape.¹⁹ Thus, like Gopnik, James distinguishes between framed perceptions and authentic experiences. However, as I argued in chapter one in relation to James's novel, in Gopnik's collection of essays, what is perceived as authentic Parisian experiences also turn out to be constructions.

This chapter interrogates Gopnik's representation of an authentic Paris. Through a specific analysis of two essays, "The Crisis in French Cooking" and "Alice in Paris," I will show how Gopnik sets himself up as the one who knows the real

and authentic Paris as opposed to others' perceptions of Paris. Even as he performs an expertise undermined through self-deprecating comments, he is aware of the impossibility of an American perception of France that would avoid being pretentious or arrogant. Thus, Gopnik's representation of a real and authentic Paris is characterized by an odd mixture of arrogance ("[w]e all see our Paris as true, because it is" [16]) and ignorance ("[w]e weren't Francophiles because we didn't know anything about France, and still don't" [9]). Still, in both "The Crisis in French Cooking" and "Alice in Paris" Gopnik's perception of Paris is, amongst other perceptions of this city, the one closer to the truth. Whereas "The Crisis in French Cooking" juxtaposes Gopnik's theories about French cooking to the arguments of French experts (Eugenio Donato and Jean-Philippe Derenne) on the same subject, "Alice in Paris" juxtaposes the detailed description of Gopnik's cooking of an authentic French meal with the American chef Alice Waters's idealistic conception of a French restaurant. In both cases, Gopnik suggests that he is indebted to the expertise of others by making his ideas or presence more discreet. However, like the excerpt from *The Ambassadors* to recommend his own theories about Paris, the ideas of Eugenio Donato, Jean-Philippe Derenne, and Alice

Waters inspire Gopnik to come up with the most important argument. In "The Crisis in French Cooking," the inferiority of Donato and Derenne's arguments is illustrated through the *New Yorker* correspondent's use of the word "real" in its literal sense of authenticity, as well as his straightforward language to explain his particular take on the problems of *cuisine française* as opposed to his metaphorical and abstract descriptions of Donato's and Derenne's ideas. In "Alice in Paris," Gopnik's "treatment" of Alice Waters's conception of a French restaurant is similar to his take on the French experts in that he first seems to give precedence to Waters's ideas over his own. In this particular case, however, he not only juxtaposes his valid theories to the California chef's idealistic concepts, but he also offers his concrete experience of cooking an authentic *gigot de sept heures* as the real alternative to Waters's visions of a utopian French restaurant. Notwithstanding Gopnik's subtle emphasis on the predominance of his real experiences over the fantastical, abstract and unrealistic ideas of Donato, Derenne, and Waters, the *New Yorker* correspondent's authentic France and Paris are often rewritten as American. Behind Gopnik's representation of a real France that would avoid the constructions of his fellow American expatriates or the

abstract ideas of French experts, there is also paradoxically an attempt to seek an older America in France. A close look at two other essays, "The Winter Circus, Christmas Journal 1" and "The Rookie," reveals that authentic French experiences often remind Gopnik of a long lost America, the America of his 1960s Pennsylvanian childhood as well as the America of the early twentieth century.

"The Crisis in French Cooking"

In this essay, Gopnik deplores the dethroning of French cooking as the supreme standard and cultural achievement of the culinary world and attempts to explain this situation. That first meal in Paris, which was "for a long time one of the few completely reliable pleasures for an American in Europe"(148), becomes harder to come by. Worse, more and more French people are rejecting "all real French cooking"(149), e.g. a *blanquette de veau* or a *gigot d'agneau*, for the banal Americanized *steaks-frites*. Gopnik's use of the word "real" to describe authentic French cuisine establishes his arguments. In fact, a few lines down from his brief description of "real French cooking," he also uses the word "real" to introduce his point that, unlike the French who

worry about the collapse of the high and low end of their cuisine, "[t]o an outsider the real *crise* [in French cooking] lies in the middle"(149). Whereas the high and low French cuisine refers to "the old pyramid of French food, in which the base of plain dishes shared by the population pointed upward to the higher reaches of the *grande cuisine*"(148), the middle end of French cuisine applies to the "ordinary corner bistro"(149), which "reproduces" itself in every part of the world. The "outsiders" who come to Paris for the first time and eat their first Parisian meal at an ordinary corner bistro might enjoy their meal but can always compare it to similar meals from American corner bistros. Gopnik's reference to "real French cooking" and "real *crise*" is part of an overall argument that emphasizes his authentic perception of France.

Even though he would "still rather eat in Paris than anywhere else in the world"(150), Gopnik nonetheless admits that "[e]ven the most ardent Paris lover. . . may now find himself. . . feeling a slight pang for that Cuban-Vietnamese-California grill on Amsterdam Avenue or wondering whether he might, just possibly, enjoy the New Sardinian Cooking, as featured that week on the cover of *New York*"(150). Gopnik relates his disaffection for French cooking to a more general

problem touching French inventiveness. Here again, he uses the word "real" in its literal sense of authenticity to frame his argument:

[A]fter several months of painstaking, tie-staining research, I think that the real problem lies in the French genius for laying the intellectual foundation for a revolution that takes place somewhere else. With movies (Méliès and the Lumière brothers invented the form and then couldn't build the industry), with airplanes, and now even with cooking, France has again and again made the first breakthrough and then got stalled. All the elements of the new cooking, as it exists today in America and London--the openness to new techniques, the suspicion of the overelaborate, the love of surprising juxtapositions--were invented in Paris long before they emigrated to London and New York and Berkeley. But in France they never coalesced into something entirely new. (151)

Expressing a colonizing attitude that reminds one of Gertrude Stein's theories about America and France in *Paris France*, Gopnik's personal definition of the real French problem emphasizes the power of America over France.²⁰ The French "first breakthrough" often needs American help to become

important. The "openness to new techniques, the suspicion of the overelaborate, the love of surprising juxtapositions" might be original French attitudes but they only "coalesced into something entirely new" through the American appropriation and popularization of these ideas. The content of Gopnik's theory reflects his own "treatment" of the French experts he refers to in this essay. In incorporating the original ideas of others in his own arguments, Gopnik applies to the structure of his own essay his claim that "the real problem lies in the French genius for laying the intellectual foundation for a revolution that takes place somewhere else." The fascinating and fantastical ideas of the literary critic, Eugenio Donato, as well as the encyclopaedic quality of Jean-Philippe Derenne's books about French cuisine lay the "intellectual foundation" for a "revolutionary" argument that takes place in Gopnik's American mind.

After exposing his views on the "real" French problem, Gopnik switches to Eugenio Donato's theories about French food and cooking. Unlike Gopnik's points, which are expressed for the most part in non-figurative language, Donato's ideas are expressed more figuratively.²¹ Whereas Gopnik presents his theory in words that convey concrete ideas and specific

references ("real problem," "Méliès and the Lumière brothers"), his description of Donato's theory relies more on abstract concepts. In fact, Gopnik frames the French educated Armenian-Italian's theories as "weirdly philosophical" (152), a statement that slightly undermines the validity of Donato's ideas:

[h]is favorite subject was French food, and his favorite theory was that "French cooking" was foreign to France, not something that had percolated up from the old pot-au-feu but something that had been invented by fanatics at the top, as a series of powerful "metaphors"--ideas about France and Frenchness--that had then moved downward to organize the menus and, retrospectively, colonize the past [. . . .] The invention of the French restaurant, Eugenio believed, depended largely on what every assistant professor would now call an "essentialized" idea of France. One proof of this was that if the best French restaurants tended to be in Paris, the most "typical" ones tended to be in New York. (153)

This bizarre description of French cooking could allude to the American colonization of the French past or the reversal of the former relationship between France as colonizer and

America as its colony. The colonizing Americans are now dictating what France is supposed to be, whereas the colonized France has nothing to say about it. Of course, this American colonization of France is ironic, because it requires that France be constructed in America as the touchstone of fashion (of the *comme il faut*). The power structure referred to in the passage suggests that the original French cooking or the "old pot-au-feu" has been appropriated and rewritten as "foreign" by fanatics at the top".²²

Although Donato's theory is similar to Gopnik's in that they both emphasize the American colonization and appropriation of the French past, I want to suggest that even the different use of punctuation emphasizes that one is closer to the truth than the other. When Gopnik offers his straightforward explanation of the real French problem, he does not use quotation marks. When he describes Donato's theories about the same subject, however, some words are framed by quotation marks ("French cooking," "metaphors," "essentialized," "typical"). The quotation marks framing these words serve a purpose that is similar to the quotation marks around Baudrillard's "real." Like the "real," which does not connote authenticity but an imitation of it, "French

cooking," "metaphors," "essentialized," and "typical" are not meant to be taken literally. For instance, "French cooking" does not signify authentic French cooking but something "foreign to France" and the "metaphors" about France and Frenchness do not really stand for figures of speech but for the more "literal" ideas. As for "essentialized" and "typical," these are words which come even closer to the Baudrillardian "real," because their literal meaning also suggests authenticity. Here again, however, the "essentialized" idea of France does not stand for the essence of what constitutes this country. Rather, it is a reinvention of what constitutes this essence. Similarly, the most "typical" French restaurants are not the most distinctively or characteristically French. They are the restaurants that best give an illusion of French cuisine. This could explain why we find them in New York rather than Paris.

Even though Donato's theory about French cooking is often interesting, it is also at the same time very ambiguous. Gopnik's use of quotation marks to frame some of Donato's concepts reinforces this complexity. Even when Gopnik directly quotes Donato, the literary critic sounds like a textbook: "'We have landed in the moment when the metaphors begin to devour themselves, the moment of

rhetorical self-annihilation'"(154). Right after, Gopnik
 "translates" for us: "This meant that the food had become so
 rich as to be practically inedible." Donato's metaphors,
 which "devour themselves" and lead to the "moment of
 rhetorical self-annihilation," reflect the postmodern
 disappearance of tradition. Niklas Luhmann describes one
 meaning of postmodernity as the loss of the binding force of
 tradition:

History grows older and older. It disappears in its
 past. It consumes itself . . . History may have
 determined the present state of the system, but the
 result is typically dissatisfaction, need for revolution
 [. . .] or at least reform, and in any case, a preference
 for difference. (176-77)

This meaning of postmodernity as a history that consumes
 itself helps to explain Donato's emphasis on the retroactive
 colonization of the French past as a kind of reform or
 revolution. His ideas suggest a general dissatisfaction with
 the present state of French cooking and a need to rewrite its
 history.

In explaining the French expert's abstract ideas and
 complex theories, Gopnik not only acknowledges Donato's
 brilliance (he was a scholar and professor who spoke five

languages), but he also acts himself as the professor who vulgarizes or simplifies complicated theories for his students/readers. Donato's ideas might be brilliant but they only refer to constructions or imitations of France. These constructions (the "essentialized" idea of France, the "French cooking" foreign to France) contrast Gopnik's search for the authentic France, his exposition of the real French problem. Unlike the complexity of Donato's ideas, Gopnik's views and arguments appear much simpler, but his "less complicated" theory yields a representation of France that is closer to reality. His use of the word "real" in its literal sense of authenticity to frame his own argument supports this claim. Gopnik juxtaposes his ideas of the real French problem, which emphasizes a more realistic view of what France is all about, to Donato's bizarre and fantastical explanations of a "French cooking" that is "foreign to France," which suggests in its turn the image of an appropriated and imitated France. This juxtaposition is reproduced differently in Gopnik's "treatment" of another French expert's ideas. In dealing with Jean-Philippe Derenne's book, *L'Amateur de Cuisine*, Gopnik does not use the word "real" or "authentic." His perception of the French author's manners, however, suggests an authentic reading of a

French reality. The relationship between Gopnik and Derenne's ideas is characterized by a reading of the French expert's attitude that inspires Gopnik to see what is really going on in France.

Towards the end of "The Crisis in French Cooking," Gopnik mentions that apart from "the missing grill, the resurgent nationalism, and the educational trap"(162), there is another reason for the "lull in French cooking"(162). By switching to Derenne's book in the next sentence, Gopnik suggests that the French author will provide this "deeper reason": "A new book, *L'Amateur de Cuisine*, by an unknown author, Jean-Philippe Derenne, which was published last year, offers an anatomy of French cooking—an effort to organize the materials, forms, and manners of the subject in a systematic way"(162). Like the phrase introducing Donato's theories ("weirdly philosophical"), the words "unknown author" slightly undermine the validity of Derenne's ideas. This might explain why the rest of the paragraph, which describes Derenne's book, does not allude to a "deeper reason." For instance, Gopnik describes *L'Amateur de Cuisine* as an attempt "to create a whole taxonomy of cooking based not on folk tradition or cosmopolitan recipes but on an analysis of plants and animals and the chemistry of what

happens when you apply different kinds of heat and cold to them before you eat them"(162). The next two paragraphs keep up the description, as there is a shift from the book to the author's life. Then Gopnik (who met Derenne) quotes the French author on his book and on the second volume "he's just started" about the rejected cuisine--"[a]bout everything the world throws out [. . .] [s]hells and guts and leaves"(163). These descriptions of Derenne's life and projects still do not provide the "deeper reason for the lull in French cooking." Strangely enough, it is not Derenne's book or conversations that give the answer but "the way he talks," or the manner in which he expresses himself.

When Derenne tells Gopnik about the religious aspect of food and cooking ("[rejected cuisine] is religious too, because religion depends on being able to find the holy in the ordinary . . . [i]t's putting together things banal in themselves which nonetheless become transformed into something transcendent"(163)), it is not so much *what* he says than *how* he says it that strikes the *New Yorker* correspondent:

There was something surprising about Derenne's talk, an expansive, open, embracing ardor that a hundred years ago would have seemed more American than French. It

seems possible that the different fates of the new cooking in France and America are a sign of a new relation between the two places. (164)

It is Gopnik's reading of Derenne's "expansive, open, embracing ardor that a hundred years ago would have seemed more American than French" that finally inspires him to come up with the deeper reason for the lull in French cooking: the new relation between America and France. Derenne is useful to Gopnik's analysis for his evocation of the change from the relationship between nineteenth-century America and France to this "new relation" between the two nations. On one hand, Derenne's attitude reminds Gopnik of Henry James's fascination with Old World France for "the extreme self-consciousness that comes with power, the way that power could be seen to shimmer through manners--the way that what you wore or how you stood . . . spelled out your place in a complicated and potent social hierarchy"(164). Within this context of blurred identities, the democratic nature of Derenne's "expansive" and "embracing ardor" would symbolize the late nineteenth century relationship between America and France, a relationship characterized by the democratic American fascination with the French "potent social hierarchy." On the other hand, the democratic nature of

Derenne's "expansive" and "embracing ardor" also evokes the new power dynamics between France and America at the end of the twentieth century. The "new relation" between America and France is characterized not so much by a reversal of attributes but by an equalizing process: "[n]ow that that power has passed into American (. . .) hands, the trappings of power that come from extreme self-consciousness are ours too" (164). Just like the "potent social hierarchy" which is now found in both America and France, Derenne's "democratic" qualities "that a hundred years ago would have seemed more American than French" are attributes now shared by both nations. In fact, within the parameters of American control, France is "allowed" to keep a certain status. It still shows signs of a "potent social hierarchy" but it fails to impress Gopnik who lives at a time when America often surpasses France through its use of "food as anxious social theater" (164).

Gopnik's reading of Derenne's talk can be seen as another example of an authentic French experience. It is not the reading of the book that enlightens Gopnik about the true state of affairs between America and France. Rather, it is his actual encounter with a Frenchman that inspires him to see what is really going on between the two nations. Gopnik

goes through a similar experience when he meets fellow Americans in Paris. Their unrealistic perception of France contrasts the authenticity of his daily Parisian experiences. "Alice in Paris" introduces American Francophiles whose expertise of Frenchness and France seems to undermine Gopnik's own. However, this is only a sham because Gopnik juxtaposes his authentic experience of cooking and "ruining" a *gigot de sept heures* to Antoine Jacobsohn and Alice Waters's idealistic and radical conceptions of French food and cooking.

"Alice in Paris"

With "Alice in Paris," Gopnik introduces Alice Waters, the California chef and founder of the Berkeley restaurant, *Chez Panisse*. She is invited to open a restaurant at the Louvre by Mme. Hélène David-Weill, "the *très grande dame* who is the director of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs there" (240). She is also accompanied by the New Jersey vegetable scholar, Antoine Jacobsohn. Their approach to French food and cooking shows an odd mixture of expertise and idealization. Gopnik writes that Antoine "has been known to give his

friends an idealized poster of the twenty-four cultivated radishes--some lost, some extant--of the Île-de-France, and he has written beautifully, not to say longingly, of the lost monstrous spinach of Viroflay and the flat onions of Vertus" (241). These images of "lost vegetables," which are immortalized through posters and writing, evoke a certain connoisseurship of France that is inextricably linked to a detailed (if not perfectionist) representation of its attributes. For instance, Jacobsohn does not only "discover" the spinach of Viroflay and the onions of Vertus, but he also depicts their respective "monstrosity" and flatness. In fact, there is a surrealist feeling to these representations of extinct vegetables that seem to come back with a new artificial life. There is also a resolve to revive the lost produce through science. Deploring the standardization of what the average Paris greengrocer sells, Jacobsohn is quoted as saying: "'So many radishes gone; the artichokes of Paris, almost gone; the turnips of Vaugirard, gone. There's a variety of beans that one reads about all the time in nineteenth-century texts. But gone! We've kept some seedlings of the plants in the museum, and they could be revived'" (242). Here, we have the utopian attitude of an American Francophile who deplores the standardized Americanization of

French vegetable markets and will attempt to "revive" the "lost species" in his "laboratory." This scientific or organic restoration of original French vegetables is also Alice Waters's mission in Paris.

The California chef shares Antoine Jacobsohn's passion for organic growing. To Jacobsohn's mention of reviving a variety of beans that no longer exists, Waters replies unequivocally "'[w]e'll plant them in the Tuileries'" (242). The vegetable scholar laments the "loss" of another French product, the nineteenth-century white figs of Argenteuil. Here again, Waters envisions their restoration: "'Oh, we have to have them,' Alice said, her eyes moist with emotion. 'The white figs of Argenteuil! We'll grow them again. It can be done, you know.'" (245). Gopnik's description of her reaction reinforces even more this "Alice in Wonderland" feeling:

We had been wandering through the airplane hangars and were standing among towers of carrots and leeks, mountains of *haricots verts*. She looked upward and, Pucelle-like, seemed to be seeing before her--in a vision, as though they were already tangible, edible--the white figs of Argenteuil: an improbable Berkeley Joan, imagining her France restored to glory. (245)

Alice Waters as a modern American version of Joan of Arc who will lead the French against the standardization of its food and produce? It is indeed "improbable" because while she (like Antoine Jacobsohn) might fight against the standardization of French cooking, her restoration of a glorious French cuisine through her projected restaurant sounds too disconnected from reality to be taken seriously. For instance, she imagines the restaurant as a "platform, an exhibit, a classroom, a conservatory, a laboratory, and a garden" (247). It is a place where French cuisine can be preserved and reinvented at the same time. In fact, Alice's restaurant is like a museum where extinct pieces of tradition are kept artificially alive. Gopnik's analogy between Alice Waters and Joan of Arc suggests that he admires intensely the idealistic notions of the California chef, but recognizes at the same time that she is going to be "sacrificed," "burned at the stakes," so to speak, for her beliefs. Like the French peasant girl who was inspired by voices of saints and became a national heroine when she led the French armies against the English, the American Alice Waters inspires French chefs against the Americanization and standardization of their cooking. However, also like the medieval heroine who is tried

and condemned for heresy, the twentieth-century chef ultimately pays the price for "her vision"(239).

Apart from impressing Gopnik, who calls her "the high priestess of the American generation"(251), Alice Waters's innovative ideas about French cooking also impress French food and wine experts. They put her on a pedestal. For instance, the Parisian chef, Michel Courtalzac, keeps a photograph of her in the window of his restaurant, and Aubert de Villaine, who is the codirector of the greatest wine estate in France, speaks of her in hushed tones as one "'of *les vigiles en haut*, the watchman in the crow's nest, seeing far ahead'"(243). In both cases, she is perceived as a spiritual leader or almost like a white missionary who is welcomed by the natives as a saviour. In fact, the photograph in the window and the *vigiles en haut* illustrate the godlike power of this American guru over her French disciples. Her discourse is full of patronizing remarks. For instance, the restaurant she imagines "'is a way of repaying that debt to France, of Americans taking the best of ourselves, instead of the worst of ourselves, to help recall the French to their own best traditions, a way that my generation can repay the debt we owe to France'"(249-250). Ironically, Alice Waters and the members of her generation "help recall the French to

their own best traditions" through their appropriation and reinvention of *cuisine française*. Her idealistic concept of a French restaurant might be her way of repaying her debt to France, but her criticism of French markets does not help her cause.

In a postscript to "Alice in Paris," Gopnik writes that after Alice Waters left Paris, *Le Figaro* published an interview with her in which she criticizes the Rungis wholesale food market (that replaced Les Halles 29 years ago). According to Gopnik, the headline of the piece, "THE MARKETS IN PARIS ARE SHOCKING!" had the effect of "a Japanese baseball manager who, after a trip to Yankee Stadium, is quoted in a headline saying, 'You call that a ballpark?'" (252). Gopnik goes on to say that "Alice Waters is learning that the real France is an inscrutable, hypersensitive place" (252). This statement confirms Gopnik's general attitude towards Waters's ideas, i.e., they are way too idealistic and do not correspond to what really goes on in France. He even mentions that Waters is acutely aware that people might see "something hypocritical or unreal about a woman who presides over an expensive restaurant preaching against commercial culture" (248). The real France might be inaccessible to the California chef, but it lets in the *New Yorker* correspondent

who sets himself up as the one who is able to scrutinize this "real France." Gopnik's overall project in *Paris to the Moon*, which is to emphasize the reality of his France as opposed to the constructed France of others, is found again through the juxtaposition of his authentic experiences to the idealistic conceptions of his compatriots.

While Waters and Jacobsohn are busy theorizing and imagining, Gopnik is busy cooking an authentic French dinner for Waters and other friends. He juxtaposes his take on Roy Andries de Groot's *The Auberge of the Flowering Hearth* to Waters's own take on the same book. The conversation he has with Alice Waters about the existence of a certain auberge discovered in de Groot's cookbook echoes the conversation between Strether and Miss Barrace's evasiveness about the real Paris:

Did that perfect auberge really exist? I asked.

"Well, no, not really. Not exactly," she said in a tone that sounded like "not at all." "I mean, yes, it didn't, not like that." She thought for a moment. "Of course, it existed for him. It still exists for us, in the minds of the people around this table. Maybe that's where the ideal restaurant always will be." (252)

Whereas Gopnik's question recalls Strether asking if everything shows in Paris "for what they really are," Alice Waters's ambivalent speech recalls Miss Barrace's playful reply to Strether "Oh, I like your Boston 'reallys'! But sometimes--yes." On one hand, Gopnik identifies with Strether's naïve persona in his dealings with someone like Miss Barrace who is in the know about what Paris is about. On the other hand, his playful identification with Strether can also be seen in terms of the fool who knows more than he is willing to show, the one who has experienced the real France, unlike Miss Barrace and Alice Waters who only appear to possess a superior knowledge of what really constitutes France. Like his "treatment" of the French experts in "The Crisis in French Cooking," Gopnik's handling of Waters's idealistic notions (the fact he names the essay after her) gives the impression that she is the focus of the essay, but the one who is really "stealing the show" is Gopnik himself.

Gopnik juxtaposes his own physical and real France, encountered directly as a husband and father, to Alice Waters's idealistic France symbolized through her imaginary restaurant. The description of Waters's visions about French cooking is interspersed with Gopnik's narration of his actual cooking of a *gigot de sept heures*. Even though the *gigot*

turns out looking like a "third baseman's mitt . . . with interesting hints of Naugahyde, kapok, and old suede bomber jacket" and that "everyone pushed it around politely on the plate"(251), Gopnik discusses at length his preparation of the lamb. The difficulties of the task, the constant incidents that interrupt his cooking, are all scrupulously narrated. For instance, on the day of the dinner, Kenneth Starr's report on Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky "had just appeared"(250) and friends from New York were faxing him the four hundred pages while he was busy cooking. On top of this, he needs to leave his *gigot* untended because he has to pick up his son unexpectedly from school: "I was trying to adjust the heat on the lamb when the phone rang, from Luke's school. Once again, as he often had since the term began, he had refused to take a nap, and the school wanted me to bring him home"(250). Unlike Waters's idealistic and visionary France ("For Alice, the idea of making the millennial restaurant in France is a way of closing a romantic circle" [249]), Gopnik's France relies on daily experiences. His "ruining of the lamb" might make him look like an idiot in front of the California chef, but at least he lives in an actual French world, not in a visionary projection of his own. The fact that he fails in his attempt to cook an authentic French meal reinforces even

more the authenticity of his experience as an American expatriate in Paris. There would be something odd about an American in Paris who could make a perfect *gigot*. In the late twentieth century that witnesses "so many vanishing things in French cooking"(252), it would be nearly impossible:

In the late-modern world, where we get all the pleasure we can as soon as we can get it and on any terms we can, and none of us wants to take a nap, for fear of missing some pleasure we might otherwise have had--in a world like that, as I say, there may just be no place left for the seven-hour *gigot*. (252)

His failure to cook an authentic French meal is, ironically, the precondition of his "success" as an American expatriate who cannot reproduce the "authentic" France because of the Americanization of his French surroundings (there is a greater reliance on microwaves and fast food than conventional ovens and traditional cooking), but who can still experience it through his belief in constructed or framed representations of a "real" France that no longer exists.

Notwithstanding his attempt to present a France that transcends the usual American tendency to idealize and

reinvent this country, Gopnik often cannot help "rewriting" his real French experiences as American. For example, the narration of his cooking of a *gigot de sept heures* is scattered with American references. Having offered to cook an authentic French dinner for Alice Waters, Gopnik compares this situation to a man who "in an insane moment invited Michael Jordan over to play a little one-on-one" (244). The constant interruptions of his cooking of the *gigot* read like the scenario of a Hollywood movie as Gopnik felt

a lot like Ray Liotta spinning in the last reel of *Goodfellas*, when he's cooking veal for his crippled brother, and the police helicopter is circling overhead, and he and the mule who's carrying the cocaine have to go and get her lucky hat. (250)

This "translation" of an authentic French experience into American "folklore" occurs throughout *Paris to the Moon*. Over and over again, Gopnik betrays a tendency to Americanize what he acknowledges as authentic French experiences. In fact, his representation of France often justifies an American analogy or metaphor. As I mention earlier, the outcome of the lamb resembles a third baseman's mitt, but not any third baseman's mitt, "Buddy Bell's glove, circa 1978" (251). Even the effect of Alice Waters's comments about the Rungis market in Paris

does not escape an American analogy as Gopnik once again uses baseball imagery (the Japanese baseball manager who visits the Yankee stadium) to describe an event that takes place in France. Gopnik's constant Americanization of his supposedly authentic French experiences leads us to look at the reasons behind this tendency. His mention of the reproduction of an ideal America to express Waters's belief "that only through refined sensual pleasure can you re-create an ideal America" (251) suggests that behind Gopnik's quest for a real France that would avoid the constructions of his fellow Americans, there might also be paradoxically an attempt to "re-create an ideal America" in France. A look at specific passages from two other essays, "The Winter Circus, Christmas Journal 1" and "The Rookie," reveals that authentic French experiences often remind Gopnik of a long lost America.

Even though "The Winter Circus" vividly juxtaposes the American globalization of CNN to the carousel of the Luxembourg Gardens (to show how the old or antiquated French carousel persists within a postmodern culture of American globalization), it is easy to overlook other important and subtle aspects of Gopnik's narrative. One of them shows how France often becomes a place where the *New Yorker*

correspondent can indulge in memories of a lost America. Gopnik maintains that it is possible to experience some real French moments within an American globalized world that invades the French airwaves: "A 49ers-Dolphins game was in progress. There it was, truly, the same familiar ribbon of information and entertainment that girdles the world now--literally, (really, truly, literally) encircling the atmosphere"(38). Once again, Gopnik emphasizes his literal use of the word "real" or "true." This postmodern American globalization, which "really encircles the atmosphere" is as authentic as, the real French moments spent at the Luxembourg Gardens with his son: "Luke, at least, has found a home, shelter from the electronic rain and global weather. He lives in the Luxembourg Gardens. We go there nearly every day, even in the chill November days among the fallen leaves"(38). Real French moments also include frequent visits to the toy store and the taxidermists' supply house:

On nice days, when we don't have time to go all the way to the gardens, Luke and I go to the musical horse outside the *Oiseau de Paradis* . . . a toy store on the boulevard Saint-Germain . . . On rainy days we go to Deyrolle on the rue du Bac . . . It is, I suppose, a

taxidermists' supply house and a supplier too of education charts. (40)

Apart from these daily pleasures, Gopnik's real French experiences are also made up "of hundreds of small things that you will arrive at only by trial and error," and that "the real flavor of life will be determined, shaped by these things" (46). Gopnik's emphasis on this "real French flavor" does not prevent him, however, from also seeking authentic American flavors. His avowed quest for the "real flavor of life" in France overshadows a subtle tendency found throughout *Paris to the Moon*: the quest for an older America in France. The nostalgic idea of an old America in France, which would not interfere with the technological and industrial progress taking place in his native country, is often stronger than the quest for Henry James's Old France.

In *America II*, Richard Louv writes that "Americanism, contend some sociologists, is an operative religious faith. If Americanism is a religion, then nostalgia is its liturgy" (5). Moreover, nostalgia is "the painful desire to return home" (6). Nostalgia for the American past is often found in *Paris to the Moon*. When Gopnik looks at France, not only does he try to capture the memories of earlier French experiences ("[w]hen I lived here [France] with my family, in the early

seventies, there was nothing I liked more than walking up the boulevard Beaumarchais to the Cirque d'Hiver" [44]), but he also sees his long lost American identity, his Pennsylvanian childhood. For example, the old-fashioned architecture of the taxidermists' supply house on the rue du Bac, which he describes as "one of the great surrealist sites of Paris . . . at street level, there is the old-fashioned kind of come-hither wraparound window entrance, so that you enter a deep-set door between two vitrines"(40), reminds Gopnik of "the architecture of every South Street shoe store in [his] childhood"(40). Buying shoes for his son in France, Gopnik misses not the late twentieth century American shoe stores, but "the shoe salesmen of [his] childhood, [his] own uncles among them"(205). Notwithstanding his claim that the older France differs from an older America ("[w]hat an old place France is, the attic bursting with old caned chairs and zinc bars and peeling dressers and varnished settees. The feeling is totally different from an antiques fair in America; this is the attic of a civilization" [46-47]), the fact that he does not expand on what constitutes the American antiques fair (as opposed to the French one) insinuates that the difference is not as wide as he implies. Apart from seeing an

older America in an older France, Gopnik also sees aspects of Old America in late twentieth century France.

Gopnik is fascinated and attracted by the Bazar de l'Hôtel de Ville (a department store he refers to in "A Tale of Two Cafés" as "BHV--the strange Sears, Roebuck of Paris" [80]) on the rue de Rivoli. It has "become [his] home" (50) where themes from the *Looney Tunes* and *Entertainment Tonight* serve as musical background. The reason why he and his family have become "hypnotized [and] bewitched" (51) by the French department store is that it possesses "a mixture of confidence, arrogance, and an American-style straightforwardness, with the odd difference that here the customer is always, entirely wrong" (51). However, of course, the American customer is exempted from this rule. Gopnik might have gotten a moralizing speech for his return of the newly bought defective toaster, but the manager let him "have a new one anyway" (51). The American personality of the French department store is not the only reason why Gopnik is attracted to BHV. It also reminds him of early 1960s America:

BHV, in its current form, seems to have been invented by a Frenchman who visited an E.J. Korvette's in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, sometime in the early 1960s and, maddened with love, decided to reproduce it down to the

least detail. There's the same smell of popcorn, the same cheery help, the same discount appliances stretching as far as the eye can see. (50)

This example of a modern ("current form") Americanized France that evokes an early 1960s New Jersey setting allows Americans, such as the Gopniks, to feel as if they were in an older America, a pre-postmodern America that would not interfere with the technological and industrial progress that takes place in present day United States. The preservation of an old America in France, however, clashes with the postmodern Americanization of France. Within the same BHV department store that reproduces the early 1960s New Jersey atmosphere, there is also a taste of 2000 American globalization. Twenty years ago, the great American department store potlatch was unknown, but

[a]ll that's changed beyond recognition now. That central ritual of bountiful capitalism, the department store Christmas, is in late but absurdly full bloom here, and with an American flavor so pronounced that it hardly seems American anymore, just part of an international style. (57)

His claim that the French department store Christmas has "an American flavor so pronounced that it hardly seems American

anymore, just part of an international style" could be read as a criticism of a postmodern and globalized America that has lost the specific Americanness of the early 1960s New Jersey department store with its "smell of popcorn." The ambivalence of the store as it symbolizes simultaneously early 1960s and late twentieth century America reflects Gopnik's general ambivalence towards France throughout *Paris to the Moon*, as it is often represented simultaneously as a constructed image and an authentic experience. The interchangeable nature of Gopnik's France, a France that is both "American" and "French," does not really surprise because he writes in his introduction that his "writing about Paris is very much like [his] writing about New York in the first five years [he] lived there" and that "this book about Paris is *actually* about New York"(16).

"The Rookie" features a strange reversal of situation as the cardboard *gendarme* that enthroned in Gopnik's West Philadelphia bedroom when he was a child gives way in a Parisian bedroom to a photograph of an American ballpark, as Gopnik hangs over his son's bed a picture of the New York Polo Grounds in 1908:

It shows a hundred or so fans lining up on Coogan's Bluff, overlooking the ballpark . . . backs turned and heads bowed as they stare down at the field. Every single one of the men (there are no women) is wearing a derby; the kids are wearing cloth caps. One kid and an elderly gent have got up on a barrel, and five men in suits and hats are standing, precarious but dignified, on a plank that slopes down from it. (202-203)

These images evoke for Gopnik an older America, Henry James's America. In fact, the 1908 photograph is contemporary with the 1903 publication of *The Ambassadors*. James's novel about France would have been published at a time when America was "alive" with scenes such as this one about "the fans lining up on Coogan's Bluff, overlooking the ballpark." James's obsession for France, however, would have overshadowed or overlooked such a scene, just as Gopnik's obsession for France when he was a child would have relegated to the margins what was going on in 1960s America. Instead of growing up surrounded with bedroom posters of baseball stars from the 1960s, Gopnik "developed" under the scrutiny of "a life-size cardboard three-dimensional cutout of a Parisian policeman" (4-5) whom he called Pierre. In a way, Gopnik's nostalgia for 1908 America might symbolize a general

nostalgia for an America that he has never cared to notice up until the last five years of the century.

Conclusion

What emerges from James's, Stein's, Kaplan's and Gopnik's representation of France is nostalgia, i.e., "the painful desire to return home" (Richard Louv 6). The painful desire to return to America suggests that France failed to meet American expectations. Although the nostalgic pining for home is not at the forefront of their narratives, the writers' constant references to America indicate that France is often used as *faire-valoir* for the exploration of American values. The reason why these writers left America for France was to experience something they could not "get" in America: an older civilization. Moreover, the French tradition of art and culture allows for a freedom of expression that would enable American writers to "really" experience the past. The American emphasis on modernity and superficial values discourages the pursuit of "authenticity." The moral laxity that has always been associated with France pushes James (through his characters), Stein, Kaplan, and Gopnik to believe that this nation could allow them to be whomever they want (something that could not happen in a morally restrictive America). This is what they think when they leave for France, but they soon find out that France is more complex. France, which initially represents the ultimate "authentic" experience because it is not burdened with moral taboos, turns out to be exclusionary. American expatriates

are never totally included in French circles. They are never "French enough" for the French. They are always aware of the fact that they are performing "Frenchness." This cultural rejection leads them to reflect on and eventually return to America. Diane Johnson, who wrote *Le Divorce* (a novel published in 1997 about two American women in Paris), sums up perfectly the nature of the relationship between the two nations, a relationship characterized by an American jealousy for France. France represents what Americans would like to be: "Depuis longtemps, les Américains entretiennent une sorte de jalousie qu'ils ont peine à reconnaître vis-à-vis des Français. Je crois qu'en un sens, pour eux, les Français représentent ce qu'ils voudraient être" (*La Presse*, Saturday August 23, 2003). Americans would like to share the social and cultural freedom of French people, but they are only allowed to look from a distance. The initial belief in an all-permissive France gives way to the realization that this country also follows certain rules and that not everybody can be French. This is the great paradox of the American expatriate situation in France: America's "Puritan" mentality of exclusion (if you refuse to follow the rules of proper moral values) is replaced by another form of exclusion, France's refusal to consider Americans as their own. This

could explain the mirror effect of seeing so much of themselves through the "Other."

Notes

¹ Many works, such as Foster Rhea Dulles's *Americans Abroad* (1964) and William W. Stowe's *Going Abroad: European Travel in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (1994), have dealt with the American search for "taste" through an expatriation to France. They also mention other reasons for the American attraction towards this country. Through its carefree lifestyle, France offered an escape from a restrictive Puritan society, from "the conventional patterns prescribed by hometown and family standards" (Stowe 5).

² Howe views this cultural difference as a conflict between European and American civilization: "[*The American*] is one of the earliest efforts by an American novelist to represent the American who, because of the country's geographical and cultural isolation, is taken to be radically different from Europeans" (442).

³ Edel's analysis of James's grasp of the contrasts in manners between America and Europe also emphasizes the conflict between the two "civilizations," but he sees some compromise between the moral and noble Europeans and the innocent and ignorant Americans: "Even though he sketched an innocent Western Barbarian, he shows us also the candor of his innocence and the courage of his ignorance. The central irony of the book is that Newman has not been corrupted by his gold; he is still one of 'nature's noblemen' and he can, in the end, be as moral and therefore as noble as the old corrupt Europeans" (420).

⁴ When not using France as a synecdoche for Europe, early Jamesian critics who discuss the appeal of France for Americans in James's two novels do not go beyond the general clichés about this country and its Parisian center. For instance, F.O. Matthiessen claims that in *The Ambassadors* James expressed "the mood that had been phrased by Longfellow's brother-in-law Tom Appleton 'All good Americans, when they die, go to Paris'" and that this city was for his main character, Lambert Strether, "the symbol of liberation from every starved inadequate background into life" (43). Albert E. Stone Jr. takes up this thread when he writes in his analysis of the same novel that "Paris is so central a feature of awakening" and that "[t]his fact reflects the author's personal experience as well as his acceptance of the folk tales about what happens to Americans in Paris" (5).

⁵ Examples of Fussell's descriptions can be found through his elaborate lists of French words in James's novels. His final remarks on "who speaks what" in *The Ambassadors* betray Fussell's awareness of his reliance on lists and his reader's tedious task of going through them: "And so we have, for those with a grain of patience left for yet one more word list" (206).

⁶ Much has been written on the subject of Newman's perceptions. Most critics see him as the typical American who betrays a certain innocence towards his surroundings by misreading situations. However, I agree with John Carlos Rowe's suggestion that Newman's innocence is far more complicated than appears at first glance:

As much as James's narrative depends upon the interplay between what *we* are allowed to see and Newman's much more limited, subjective views and opinions, we still understand Newman to be considerably more penetrating in his psychological judgments than the conventional Jamesian naïf. ... In fact, James gives Newman a sort of uncanny prescience that often seems a function of his intuitive understanding of other characters... To be sure, Newman commits many errors in judging others and misses much of what goes on around him, but he is hardly the "great Western Barbarian" that Mrs. Tristram dubs him. (72-73)

⁷ Sharon Cameron's *Thinking in Henry James* and Merle E. Williams's *Henry James and the Philosophical Novel: Being and Seeing* deal with Strether's ambivalent role as participant and observer. Both Cameron and Williams use Husserl's phenomenological approach as a critical framework to analyze to what extent the Jamesian character, as artist is conscious of his involvement in the work of art represented through the novel. Rather than looking at the extent of Strether's involvement in the creative process of the story, I am more interested in his involvement in the cultural process of the story, i.e., to what extent he is conscious of the Americanization of France taking place in the story as well as his own contribution to this process.

⁸ Here, we have a good example of the confusing nature of the narrative voice in *The Autobiography*. Stein and Toklas's voices are intertwined in such a way that it is difficult to distinguish one from the other. The first-person narrator is the autobiographical subject, Alice B. Toklas, but the author of the autobiography is Gertrude Stein. Carolyn Barros recognizes that "the Gertrude Stein of the *Autobiography* is clearly a plural subject... We may even see the Alice narrator as the postmodern self of Gertrude Stein, only available in the voice of the 'other'" (201). Georgia Johnston writes that "Toklas proceeds in spatial terms to record Stein's life through multiple perspectivism, collectivity, and fragmentation" (594). Both critics insinuate that the first-

person narrator can also be Stein. For the purposes of this project, I present Toklas and Stein as sharing the same voice. Thus, when I quote from Toklas, I see her as being Stein.

⁹ We could argue that the narrative perspective is pretty much the same as both *The Autobiography* and *Paris France* use the first-person narrator, but one is *meant* to be from Toklas's point of view while the other is *meant* to be from Stein's perspective.

¹⁰ This performance of gender reality brings to mind Judith Butler's point about subversive bodily acts in *Gender Trouble*:

That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality. (141)

Unlike Butler's argument that there is no essential or original sex and gender, I think that Toklas and Stein believed in an original heterosexual model that could nonetheless be reproduced as something else, i.e., lesbian, and that this lesbian reproduction of the heterosexual model would acquire for them some form of authenticity.

¹¹ The other one is from Linda Orr's *A Certain X*: "she could no longer find words/for common things/and uncommon emotions, /she maintained, were best left/in the original."

¹² Kaplan and Stein's mention of rats suggests another side of Paris, the gutters, which are often overlooked in American representations of France, with the notable exception of James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* and Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*. Although Stein and Kaplan's description of their *vies quotidiennes* in France could be seen as literally authentic (the occurrence of rats in neighborhoods and houses is, alas, too common to be a fantastical projection), even daily experiences cannot entirely escape biased representations. Whereas the rat could indicate an authentic household experience, it could also symbolize a more general construction of France, the underbelly of Paris. This underground Paris of debauchery is as constructed as the idealistic notion of an old traditional France of cooking and artistic creation.

¹³ Examples of book reviews that would mention Kaplan's American subtheme are found in the jacket of the paperback edition from 1994. For instance, Arthur Golhammer's review in the *Washington Post Book World* mentions how "*French Lessons* is the story of [Kaplan's] cultural odyssey, a brave attempt to articulate the compulsions that drove her to embrace foreignness in order to become truly herself.... Told in a "staccato Midwestern style," her story of becoming French is arrestingly all-American."

¹⁴ The Jamesian impressionist representation of Paris manifests itself through Lambert Strether's perception of two types of Paris, the beautiful one that hides its opposite.

¹⁵ When I mention that *The Ambassadors* symbolizes for Gopnik the first five years of the century, I refer to both the publication year, 1903, and the Paris depicted in the novel that is a blend of late 19th and early 20th century.

¹⁶ "The look of light *from* things" or "the world reduced to images radiating from screens" (17) might also be an allusion to the constructed nature of the representation of Paris in Hollywood movies, such as *Gigi* and *An American in Paris*.

¹⁷ In *Simulations*, Baudrillard writes that the very definition of the real becomes "*that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction... [and] that which is always already reproduced*" (146).

¹⁸ The "dear old light" of Paris stands for a particular culture of the visual as Miss Barrace's teasing comment on Strether's question "but for what they really are?" makes fun of the American and Puritan insistence on the link between clarity of vision and the urgency of moral judgment. Strether's version of "really" brings up the question of how do we know the virtuous from the immoral, when everything looks beautiful, glamorous, and sophisticated.

¹⁹ This particular passage is explored further in chapter one.

²⁰ In *Paris France*, Stein writes that "it begins to be reasonable that the twentieth century whose mechanics, whose crimes, whose standardisation began in America, needed the background of Paris, the place where tradition was so firm that they could look modern without being different" (18).

²¹ This abstraction could also be explained by the fact that Donato died in 1983.

²² The names of M.F.K. Fisher and Julia Childs obviously come to mind. Later on in the essay, Gopnik refers to recent American cooks "who have followed in Alice Waters's pathmaking footsteps at Chez Panisse, in Berkeley" as "the generation whom a lot of people think of as the children of M.F.K. Fisher" (157).

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