

The European Capitals of American Literature

"The American who becomes a second-rate Englishman, or Frenchman," wrote Theodore Roosevelt, "is a silly and undesirable citizen." Roosevelt (and many others) were incensed that so many American writers chose to live in Europe and, it was assumed, reject their native land. But far from turning their backs on their own country, authors like Henry James and Edith Wharton and later T. S. Eliot and Ernest Hemingway used that transatlantic distance—as Alex Zwerdling shows—to create a new kind of American literature, one strangely in keeping with America's emerging role as an international power.

by Alex Zwerdling

America has no literary capital. Its great writers have come from every region and often spent their adult lives in locales hardly known as cultural meccas—Oxford, Mississippi, or Amherst, Massachusetts, or Milledgeville, Georgia—rather than in centers such as Boston and New York. For some, this is a cause for rejoicing. The richness of American literature can be traced in part to its diverse regional roots and to the meticulous observation and loving attention of writers who have put such unlikely places on the map. Today when words like *diversity* and *multiculturalism* have become positive slogans, there is no reason to regret the absence of a metropolitan center, a city that attracts (but also pro-

cesses) every ambitious talent.

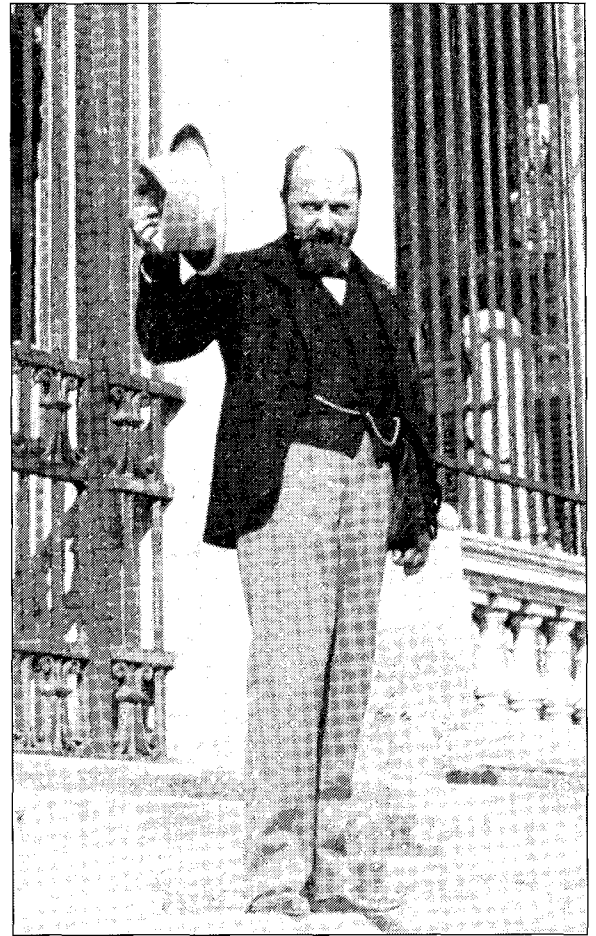
It was not ever thus. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, some of America's greatest writers fled their own country, in part at least to get away from what they saw as its provincialism. For the literary expatriates of that time—Henry James, Edith Wharton, Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and dozens of lesser lights—the escape route led to London or Paris, two cities that were clearly the cultural capitals of their civilizations.

Pound insisted that a country only becomes a nation when "it has achieved within itself a city to which all roads lead, and from which there goes out an authority"—by which he meant a standard of judgment that was not merely local or pa-

rochial. The United States around 1900 was only a "province that has sent one or two notable artists to the Eastern capital." And that "Eastern capital" was, for Pound, not New York but "the double city of London and Paris." Only there could the new American voices be tested against the standard of the Western literary tradition from Homer to the present day, only there could the genuinely innovative artist be distinguished from the many imitators. For Pound and other expatriates, the literary Olympics were held in the two great European cultural capitals, and it was in those cities alone that ambitious American writers might find their real peers and would have to compete.

They came in great numbers, beginning with Henry James in 1875 and continuing through the middle of the next century. Probably as much of the great American fiction and poetry of that era was written abroad as on native soil. Many of the country's best writers felt that their own country was hostile or indifferent to their work, particularly if it was critical of American institutions and values. Tocqueville had warned in *Democracy in America* that "the theory of equality applied to brains" would force the American thinker "to sprinkle incense over his fellow citizens." Americans were thin-skinned and defensive about their country and did not take kindly to internal criticism. William Dean Howells had encouraged his fellow writers to concentrate on the "more smiling aspects" of American life or suffer the consequences. And as late as 1930, Sinclair Lewis, the first American to win the Nobel Prize in literature, confessed to his Stockholm audience that a serious writer in his country was oppressed "by the feeling that what he creates does not matter," and that "he has no institution, no group, to which he can turn for inspiration, whose criticism he can accept and whose praise will be precious to him."

The alternative was to get out, to find a nation less dominated by materialism, Puritanism, and the pressure to conform. A large, ancient, sophisticated metropolis like Paris or London not only offered the double stimulus of a great artistic tradition and



Henry James, age 56 in Rome, doffs his hat as though sending salutations from Europe.

a vital, complex contemporary life but also a precious lack of censoriousness. As the novelist Edith Wharton put it, the hypocrisy produced by her country's Puritan heritage "has done more than anything else to retard real civilization in America."

Of the two cities, Paris was clearly the less censorious. Puritanism, after all, had been an English export. The Paris of the American literary expatriates who spent years of their lives there—Wharton, Stein, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Djuna Barnes, Henry Miller, Richard Wright, James Baldwin—was attractive largely because of its live-and-let-live attitude toward what a more judgmental culture would not tolerate. In the years when America was busily enacting a constitutional amendment prohibiting the consumption of alcohol,

Paris became synonymous with personal liberation.

There a lesbian like Stein or Barnes or Natalie Barney or Sylvia Beach could live her life without interference or disapproval. Those determined to "commit fornication and adultery," as one amused American in Paris put it, were delighted by "the perfect nonchalance with which the *patron* of a hotel would register a couple as Monsieur and Mademoiselle So-and-So." Gertrude Stein thought it a mark of civilization that the French government routinely sent allowances for soldiers in the trenches to their wives or, if they were not married, to their mistresses. And the large number of black literary expatriates could breathe freely in a city that, in the words of the *New Yorker's* Paris correspondent Janet Flanner, "has never drawn a color line."

The sense of liberation this atmosphere produced was personal, but it also powerfully affected what these writers felt they might write. They could ignore the sense of moral outrage that dominated the American response to sexually explicit work. Paris was the city in which Joyce's *Ulysses* was finally published in 1922—the novel that for more than a decade thereafter had to be smuggled through U.S. customs by American tourists or in batches across the Canadian border (in an arrangement planned by Hemingway). The first chapters of that work, brought out in the United States by Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap in their *Little Review*, were seized by the U.S. Post Office; further attempts led to the editors' trial for publishing obscene material and nearly broke them financially. In 1924 they moved the magazine to Paris.

Two years later Hemingway published his novel *The Sun Also Rises*, and his mother wrote him from America that she considered it "one of the filthiest books of the year." He replied in anger that he was sure the promiscuous behavior of his characters was "no more unpleasant than the real inner lives of some of our best Oak Park families." In Paris he might forget the hypocrisy that dominated

the culture of his native land. And it was during his expatriate years that the more cautious Scott Fitzgerald could conceive of writing a book—*Tender Is the Night* (1934)—whose heroine had been seduced by her father.

Djuna Barnes's first novel, *Ryder* (1928)—which she thought of as the female *Tom Jones*—could only be published in New York after she reluctantly agreed to delete passages and pictures that offended her American editor. Barnes responded by writing a scathing preface informing her readers that the text had been mutilated and indicating the deletions with asterisks. Better to move to Paris, where publication was not subject to such surveillance. Her next book, *Ladies' Almanack* (1929), was published there and included recognizable portraits of Natalie Barney's lesbian salon. There were no serious repercussions.

After World War I, Paris became, as one literary memoirist put it, "above all, the good address . . . the one grand display window for international talent." Hundreds of aspiring writers booked their passage, convinced that their unrecognized talent might blaze up in the City of Light. And even if nothing better came of it, you could sit on the terrace of the Dôme, the Select, the Dingo, the Closerie de Lilas, and catch a glimpse of one of the gods—Picasso, or Joyce, or Hemingway, or Pound (who had moved to Paris from London in 1920). You could pass the time at Shakespeare and Company, the English-language bookshop founded by Sylvia Beach, and try to look like a published author. You could hope that one of the prestigious little magazines—*Broom*, *This Quarter*, *transition*, *Secession*, the *Transatlantic Review*—would accept a poem, or a story and so make you a player. Wasn't Hemingway's first book, the volume of stories called *in our time*, published in a tiny edition of 300 copies by an obscure expatriate press before he was "discovered" by Scribner's and made famous by *The Sun Also Rises*?

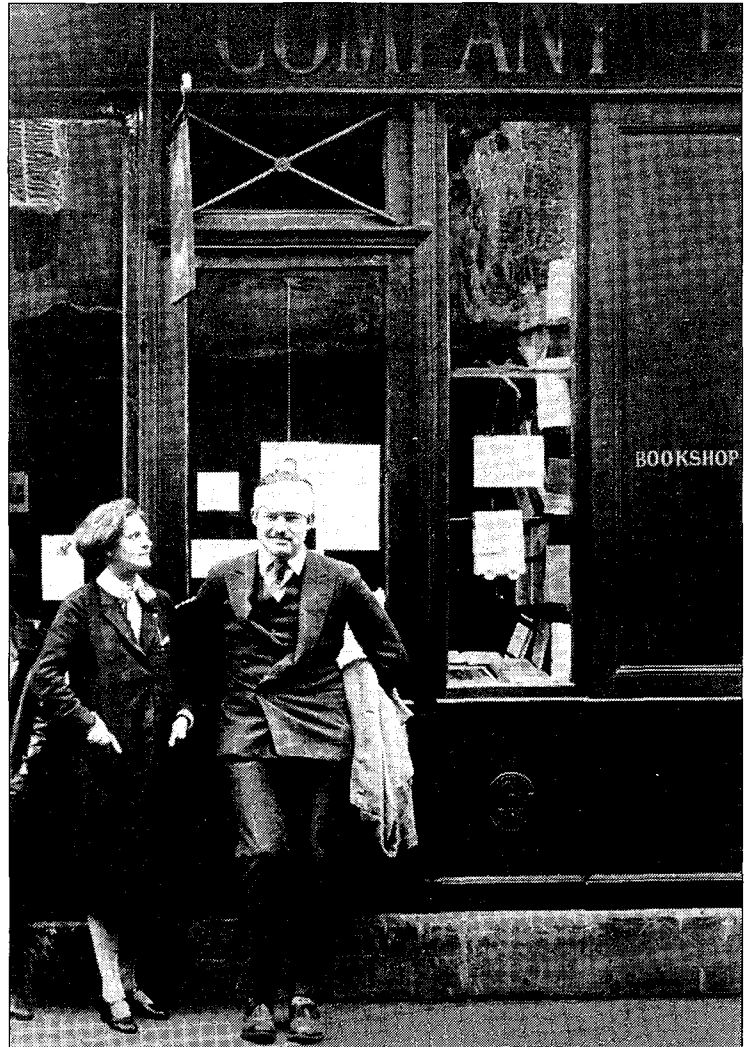
Such fragile hopes sustained many a bo-

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hemian-in-training out of love with his or her country. And it was possible to carry on the fiction of being a writer much longer there than one could at home, encouraged by the presence of so many co-conspirators in the community of the disaffected. Almost as significantly, for Americans during the

1924. A three-course meal including wine and coffee might come to 30 cents. In addition, Parisians were as uncensorious toward an artist's poverty as they were toward other American "sins." "Poverty here is decent and honorable," Pound wrote. "In America it lays one open to insults on

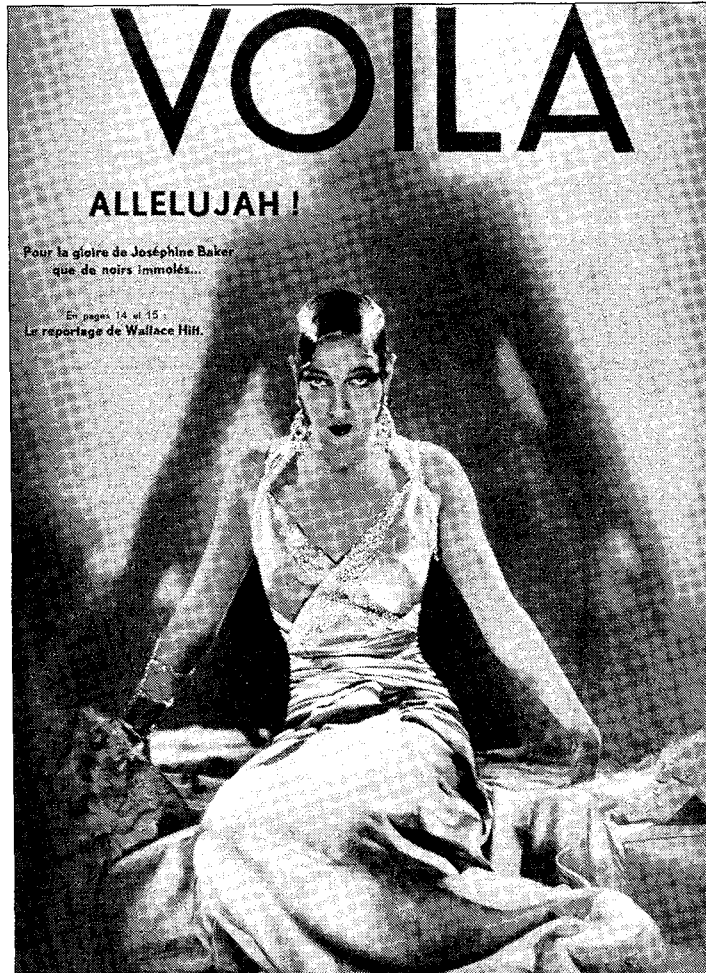
The American colony in Paris had its capital—Sylvia Beach's bookshop, Shakespeare and Company. Beach is shown here in 1928, outside her bookstore with favorite customer and author Ernest Hemingway.



1920s living in Paris was extraordinarily cheap. The exchange rate was so favorable that money would go twice as far as in the United States. Pound wrote to one correspondent who was thinking of coming that the studio apartment he had rented in 1921 for \$30 a month was down to \$15 by

all sides."

The party could not last. The Depression ended it. By the 1930s, as Malcolm Cowley recalls in *Exile's Return*, "the whole tide of middle-class migration turned backward over the Atlantic." Hemingway and Fitzgerald came home to the United States, the



VOILA

ALLELUJAH!

Pour la gloire de Joséphine Baker
que de noirs immolés...

En pages 14 et 15
Le reportage de Wallace Hill.

The American entertainer Josephine Baker became a phenomenon in Paris, which to many suggested that France was a more tolerant society, both racially and morally. Ernest Hemingway described his first meeting with "the most exciting woman I ever met":

Tall, coffee skin, ebony eyes, legs of paradise, a smile to end all smiles. Very hot night but she was wearing a coat of black fur, her breasts handling the fur like it was silk. She turned her eyes on me . . . I introduced myself and asked her name. "Josephine Baker," she said. We danced nonstop for the rest of the night. She never took off her coat. Wasn't until the joint closed she told me she had nothing on underneath.

restless Pound moved on to Italy, and the camp followers pulled up stakes. Although Stein never dreamed of leaving France and Henry Miller had just arrived, the vogue of the Paris expatriates was over.

Their roots had been shallowly sunk in French soil in any case. When a friend

warned Hemingway that "if we are going to stay here it means really we have to become Frenchmen," he replied with a shrug, "Who would want to stay?" The bohemian life was nomadic. "I hate a room without an open suitcase in it," Zelda Fitzgerald said, "it seems so permanent." Most of the expatriates in Paris never secured entry into French literary culture. The American colony was large enough to be self-sufficient and self-contained. And despite their change of residence, the Americans remained recognizable representatives of their country, even patriotic in their way. Sylvia Beach boasted that she had the largest American flag in Paris, which she draped over the bookcases during parties at her shop both to protect and advertise her merchandise.

Stein made a point of reading virtually nothing in French. She subscribed to Mudie's Library for English books and to Shakespeare and Company, and she used her French expatriation to be "all alone with English and myself," to refashion the language in a kind of linguistic solitude, and to write what she called that "essentially American book," *The Making of Americans* (1925). Even Wharton, who had closer ties to the French literary world, had used her distance from America to follow James's trenchant ad-

vice—"Do New York!"—in novels such as *The House of Mirth* (1905) and *The Age of Innocence* (1920), in which she inspected the mores of her native land with the cool detachment of an anthropologist.

This indifference to or exclusion from French literary life, however, struck other

American expatriate writers as the essential problem in choosing Paris. Henry James had spent his first year abroad in the French capital, and though he came to know some of the leading writers resident there—Turgenev, Flaubert, Zola, and Daudet among them—he soon understood that he had made a mistake: “I remember how Paris had, in a hundred ways, come to weary and displease me; I couldn’t get out of the detestable *American Paris*,” he wrote in his journals. “I saw, moreover, that I should be an eternal outsider.” What was the point of leaving your country behind only to reconstitute it on a foreign shore? And how could a writer eager to think of himself as contributing to (and subtly revising) the venerable tradition of European culture be content to remain outside? After a year James impulsively packed his bags and moved to London, of which he was to write: “It is not a pleasant place; it is not agreeable, or cheerful, or easy, or exempt from reproach. It is only magnificent.”

Nearly four decades later, T. S. Eliot tried the same experiment, with similar results. Though he mastered the French language well enough to write some poems in it, and though poets like Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Laforgue had a profound influence on his work, he too finally felt excluded from the culture’s vital center. And the hectic atmosphere of Paris life seemed to him to conspire against his vocation. “The chief danger about Paris,” he wrote to an American who was thinking of settling there, “is that it is such a strong stimulus, and like most stimulants incites to rushing about and produces a pleasant illusion of mental activity rather than the solid results of hard work.”

Paris was the place American writers went to *escape from* something—chiefly the confining atmosphere of their own country. London was the city they chose when their motive was to *find* something not readily available in the United States: a reliable if small group of serious readers and noncommercial publishers grouped together in one place, a cosmopolitan culture open to exceptional outsiders no matter what their country, a densely populated setting in which every neighborhood and nearly every street sum-

moned up something from the great literary heritage they wanted to call their own. The cities appealed to two different kinds of expatriate temperament. Those who were attracted to Paris were much more restless, anarchic spirits. What they wanted above all was to be left alone, not to be interfered with, and Paris’s essential indifference to them was a blessing. They were not joiners, not minding how distinguished the club was that excluded them. This is why they did not mind having so little contact with the indigenous literary life of the metropolis. Even when they settled in for the duration, they seemed permanently adrift. And we have seen how easily they could pack up and move on. The characters in their novels reflect this tendency: There is no telling where the human atoms that come together in *The Sun Also Rises* or *Tender Is the Night* or Barnes’s *Nightwood* or Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer* will turn up next. Nor do they greatly care. The important thing is not to be bound.

By contrast, the Anglophiles treasured the settled nature and institutional life of London. James and Eliot (and Pound in his London years) were much more interested in order and boundaries. As reverent literary pilgrims, they were attracted to Europe as a cultural shrine. They were deeply interested in the past and eager to link their own lives (and work) to the most venerable traditions. James deliberately suppressed most of his early, pre-expatriate short stories and called his first published book *A Passionate Pilgrim, and Other Tales* (1875). And in Eliot’s most famous essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1917), he insisted that we stop using the adjective “traditional” as “a phrase of censure” and argued that a serious writer must think of the collective “mind of Europe [as] much more important than his private mind.”

James did not really feel comfortable in London until he had been elected to one of its oldest and most exclusive clubs, the Reform, at which point he made up his mind to stay: “*J’y suis, j’y reste*—for ever and a day.” To his brother William he wrote, “I have submitted myself without reserve to that Londonizing process.” James treated entry into existing institutions not as a

threat to autonomy but as a precious opportunity for growth. He was delighted that everyone he met “represents something—has, in some degree or other, an historical identity.” He had no fear of being defined by something outside himself.

Similarly, Eliot was eager to merge his individual life with the ancient institutions that still dominated Britain during his young manhood. His decision to become a British subject and his announcement that

his views were “classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion” startled his American readers, not only because of the apparent rejection of his national roots but because of the atavism they revealed. A phrase like “the dead hand of the past” would have made no sense to him. London attracted him precisely because there the past seemed as alive as—perhaps more alive than—the present.

It is easy to see why such ambitious Americans with the right credentials—highly educated, traveled, upper-class, and preferably with Anglo-Saxon roots—had no trouble gaining entry into London’s highest social and intellectual circles. Henry Adams had managed it in the 1860s, when his father had served as Lincoln’s minister to the Court of St. James. And five years after his 1876 arrival, James wrote, “I came to London as a complete stranger, and today I know much too many people.” The social calendars of both Adams and James, with their packed record of luncheons and teas and dinners and country weekends, is exhausting merely to contemplate, but it supplied an alert intelligence such as James’s with the rich raw material of his art. His aim was to write about both Europeans and Americans from a cosmopolitan perspective that would free him (and the reader) from the constricting provincial attitudes of each. In this he succeeded better than any writer before or since.

Eliot seemed to have mastered the same art. To a later generation of American writers, like Malcolm Cowley’s, his achievement was to have produced “poems in which we could not find a line that betrayed immaturity, awkwardness, provincialism or platitude. Might a Midwestern boy become a flawless poet?—this was a question with which we could not fail to be preoccupied.” “Provincial” was indeed one of the most damning words in Eliot’s and Pound’s vocabulary. “The metropolis,” Pound wrote, “is that



T. S. Eliot, standing here outside Faber and Gwyer publishing company, became plus anglais que les anglais—a fact which exasperated some Englishmen. The society hostess Lady Ottoline Morrell noted of Eliot: “He never moves his lips but speaks in an even and monotonous voice . . . He is obviously very ignorant of England and imagines that it is essential to be highly polite and conventional and decorous, and meticulous.”

which accepts all gifts and all heights of excellence, usually the excellence that is *tabu* in its own village."

Eliot's and Pound's attitudes implied that expatriates must enter the cultural mainstream rather than form little villages abroad of their own kind. And here London proved to be vastly more welcoming than Paris. Like Paris, it had its literary meeting grounds—Harold Monroe's Poetry Bookstore, Elkin Mathews' shop on Vigo Street—and its coterie journals such as the *English Review*, *The New Age*, and the *Egoist*, the last edited by Pound, who boasted that a number of periodicals in London were "largely in the control of writers." The literary community these institutions fostered was genuinely transnational, not exclusively expatriate. Americans in London profited from the fact of the common language and the assumption by educated Englishmen like Matthew Arnold and his successors that American literature, whatever its flaws, was inevitably a branch of English literature. Though the British could be avuncular, the relationship was familial.

The turn of the century was a particularly fortuitous time for an American to transplant himself to British soil. Never before in the troubled history of the two nations—which had fought two wars and narrowly avoided a third—had diplomatic relations been more cordial. As Britain's imperial power declined and its European rivals, Germany and Russia, became more powerful threats to its security, the country's leaders realized that they would need a reliable ally. What more plausible candidate than their "American cousins" across the water, now well on the way to becoming the richest and most productive nation on Earth? And as the United States moved rapidly toward the role of world power, the model of the British Empire seemed the most plausible one to imitate. The quarrels of the past were largely forgotten or forgiven on both sides, and a new chapter in Anglo-American relations began. Two incidents illustrate this new accord. In 1898, as a tribute to America's victory over Spain in Cuba and the Philippines and its emergence as a world power, Independence Day was officially celebrated throughout Britain, and there were serious

proposals that the Fourth of July should henceforth become an Anglo-American rather than merely American holiday. And in 1901, the White House flag flew at half-staff on the occasion of Queen Victoria's death, an unprecedented tribute to a foreign sovereign.

The American literary expatriates who settled in London benefited from these changes even if these writers were essentially apolitical. Though they felt deeply alienated from their country, they could hardly help embodying the new national mood of self-confidence. For all their feeling of displacement at home, James, Eliot, and Pound (and Henry Adams before them) reflected America's ascendancy and Britain's decline. Their interpretive authority is striking: Adams's *de haut en bas* tone, James's assured use of national stereotypes, the magisterial dogmatism of Eliot's literary essays, Pound's ABCs for the benighted. Manifest Destiny could claim high culture as well as territory and could cross the Atlantic. So Howells in 1902 proposed that American expatriate writers "may be the vanguard of the great army of adventurers destined to overrun the earth from these shores, and exploit all foreign countries to our advantage." Americans were the true cosmopolites who could, as James put it, "pick and choose and assimilate and . . . claim our property wherever we find it."

The aggressive thrust of such pronouncements was masked by the pervasive Anglo-Saxon loyalty of the American literary expatriates who chose London. For these writers, the fact of a shared Anglo-Saxon identity was crucial. They wrote at a moment when a flood of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, nearly a million a year, was transforming the traditionally "Nordic" United States into a polyglot country which the old colonial stock found alien and threatening. This crisis produced an Anglo-Saxon backlash, given extremist voice in alarmist works like Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916) and Lothrop Stoddart's *The Rising Tide of Color* (1920). It generated the successful movement to restrict European immigration by country of origin, led to the founding of nativist societies like the Daughters of the American Revolution, and

encouraged the fastidious withdrawal of many of the northeastern patriciate to Europe or to its own secure borders.

In *The American Scene* (1907), James's account of his first visit to America in two decades, he describes the foreigners taking over Boston Common as "gross aliens to a man . . . in serene and triumphant possession." The swarming Jewish settlement on the Lower East Side made him "gasp with a sense of isolation." The links between such sentiments and Eliot's and Pound's well-known anti-Semitic passages are not accidental. Pound felt himself "racially alien to the mass of the population." Eliot—for whom America until about 1830 "was a family extension" and whose mother presided over the St. Louis chapter of the Colonial Dames—saw no place for himself in this *new* New World.

To such displaced colonists monocultural Britain, whose population remained over 99 percent native-born, seemed more like the America of 1830 than modern America did. Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote in 1887 that a New Englander would "feel more as if he were among his own people in London than in one of our seaboard cities." James saw England and America "as a big Anglo-Saxon total, destined to such an amount of melting together" that their separate identities would fuse—a very different melting pot from the one that was bubbling away at home.

Is it any wonder that such racial loyalties made these renegade Americans welcome in London? The English success of the American expatriates who settled there was prodigious and may have helped shift the cultural balance between the two countries. Far from remaining outsiders ghettoized in an American enclave, they rapidly entered the mainstream of British literary culture and helped reshape it. England awarded James its highest honor, the Order of Merit. The influential British critic F. R. Leavis called James's *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Bostonians* "the two most brilliant novels in the language." Eliot wrote his mother when he was only 30 that "I have more *influence* on English letters than any other American has ever had, unless it be Henry James." And Pound declared that

"all developments in English verse since 1910 are due almost wholly to Americans." It is striking that the volume surveying the early modern period in the Pelican Guide to English Literature should be called *From James to Eliot*.

London was ripe for such a takeover at the turn of the century by the small band of expatriates who settled there. Its native tradition was showing signs of age, and the new voices that came to dominate its cultural life were almost all from elsewhere—Joseph Conrad from Poland; Joyce, Yeats, and Shaw from Ireland; Katherine Mansfield from New Zealand; James, Pound, and Eliot from America. Pound wrote to his stay-at-home friend William Carlos Williams that "London, deah old Lundon, is the place for poesy," and advised him, "If you have saved any pennies during your stay in Nueva York, you'd better come across and broaden your mind."

Pound's meteoric rise to literary prominence between his arrival in 1908 at the age of 23 and his departure for Paris 12 years later illustrates the impact a brash, energetic, intellectually adventurous foreigner could have on the receptive world of the London literary establishment. Within a year he was praised and welcomed by "the greatest living poet," William Butler Yeats. A short while later he was acting as Yeats's secretary and collaborator, and Yeats credited Pound with moving his own poetry out of the 19th century and into the 20th. Pound became the impresario of the modernist movement, helping other great writers of his own generation—Joyce, Eliot, Robert Frost, D. H. Lawrence, and others—achieve recognition. In 1909, when they were both only 24, Lawrence was excitedly describing Pound in a letter as "a well-known American poet" who "knows W B Yeats and all the Swells."

What made "The Siege of London," as James titled one of his stories, possible? Why did a venerable culture allow these upstarts from the former colonies to colonize them? The answer lies in the Americans' peculiar combination of reverence and brashness and in their implicit promise to revitalize a culture that was beginning to fear its own moribund tendencies. *Make It New*, the slogan-title of one of Pound's

many manifestos, is not as radical as it sounds, since the "It" referred to is the European literary tradition. He was a resurrection artist, promising "to resuscitate the dead art/Of poetry." In his poem "Sestina: Altaforte" he makes the 12th-century Troubadour poet Bertran de Born speak in a racy modern idiom, and asks the reader, "Judge ye! Have I dug him up again?"

James and Eliot offered a similar promise to fuse old and new, tradition and the fresh current of energy coming from abroad. James's early works were welcomed in England because they seemed to offer a guide to the perplexed reader seeking to understand these new young masters of the world. Some English reviewers treated him as though he were either a native informant or an ethnographer bringing vital information to the baffled Briton.

Eliot's literary revolution, for all its disruptive tendencies, offered similar reassurance once his strange idiom had been mastered. *The Waste Land* (1922) is one of the most innovative poems in the language, and it made very little sense to its first audience. But as its bewildering range of reference became familiar, the European reader came to see that this American was paying the older world a tremendous compliment. Here was an artfully woven tapestry of allusions to the whole gamut of European culture. In the section called "The Fire Sermon," for instance, there are references to the Old Testament, Sappho, Sophocles, Ovid, St. Augustine, the medieval Grail legends, Dante, Spenser, Marvell, Shakespeare, Goldsmith, and Wagner, as well as to Buddha and Australian popular song. What is conspicuous by its absence is any reference at all to American literature, both here and in the rest of the poem. Perhaps the torch had not after all passed to a new continent. Perhaps the expatriates had come to be of service rather than to displace the British from cultural primacy.

Eliot worked hard to create such reassurance, and in the long run he was much more successful in doing so than his original sponsor, Ezra Pound. He was suave and patient where Pound was noisy and self-advertising. He mastered the subtle balancing act of deference and assertion that governed London's literary life. In

playing possum he managed to accomplish a great deal without calling attention to himself. While he was still in his thirties he became the founding editor of the most prestigious literary review in the country, *The Criterion*, funded by an aristocratic patron, Lady Rothermere, with whom he knew he had to deal "tactfully not truculently." In the next decade he took over as poetry editor of Faber's publishing house and rapidly made the imprint of that firm the guarantor of quality in verse. To become a "Faber poet" was an entrance ticket to Parnassus. And in these decades, his own critical essays, never written in the heated style of Pound's manifestos but in the circumspect, authoritative language of a highly compressed reasoned discourse, sank deep into the consciousness of serious readers and were virtually treated as holy writ. He had become the arbiter of literary London.

Such triumphs did not come without a price. To become a permanent expatriate, whether in Paris or in London, inevitably meant losing touch with one's own people, and all the consequences this entailed: personal isolation, an increasingly uncertain sense of audience, ignorance of the ways in which the America of one's distant memories was being transformed by the forces of contemporary life, the loss of the vital, ever-changing colloquial language as it diverged from standard English.

The careers of the lifelong expatriates, successful as they were, all show evidence of loss as well as gain. Gertrude Stein's major works remained unpublished or else circulated in minuscule editions until her deliberately commercial *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), published when she was nearly 60, finally made her famous. Before that she could only say, ruefully, "I write for myself and strangers," and there were precious few of the latter. James steadily lost his hold on the audience of his early fiction, so that by the time the monumental New York Edition of his works was published in the first decade of the 20th century, the number of purchasers was pitifully small. The great novels of his last years baffled most of his previously loyal readers. They seemed to be written in a language that had lost its links to living speech, whether English or American. And James

suffered from the sense that in leaving his country behind on the eve of great changes, he had perhaps made a catastrophic mistake. "Profit, be warned, by my awful example of exile and ignorance," he exhorted Wharton in 1902, begging her to focus on the "*American Subject* . . . the immediate, the real, the ours, the yours, the novelist's that it waits for."

For Eliot and James, however, expatriation really meant attempted repatriation. Both gave up their American citizenship and became British subjects, thus proving that a genuinely cosmopolitan identity was more elusive than they had originally anticipated. One had to choose, and the choice always involved some strain. To a birthright Englishman, their impersonation of a Briton often seemed comic. "Eliot is coming to lunch, in his four-piece suit," Virginia Woolf quipped on one occasion. And of James's novels with an English setting, she asked, "Could anyone believe that [they] were written by a man who had grown up in the society which he describes?" For all their dazzling success in their adopted country, both writers remained irredeemably alien.

But the saddest story was Pound's. His restless pilgrimage took him from London to Paris to Italy, where his estrangement from his native country led him to broadcast anti-American propaganda for Mussolini during World War II and, after the war, brought him to trial for treason. The magnum opus on which he spent the last decades of his life, *The Cantos*, was written in the face of his despair of finding any audience at all, and it was only the unquestionable brilliance of some of its sections that made a few individual readers train themselves to follow Pound's quirky, essentially private imagination into whatever terrain it chose to explore—European, American, Asian. He became the sole citizen of his invented country, increasingly unwanted, isolated, marginal, railing against America and the benighted everywhere and, finally, against himself, "As a

lone ant from a broken ant-hill/from the wreckage of Europe."

To leave the security of the known and familiar was a perilous undertaking, increasing the serious writer's inescapable solitude. But despite the misgivings voiced by each of the expatriates at some point in their careers, what they gained outweighed what they lost. Whether they chose Paris or London, whether they stayed or moved on or moved back, the experience of uprooting themselves from the world that had fashioned them gave them an invaluable interpretive distance, which they used to challenge the provincialism of a young country and make it see itself in relation to the larger world in which it had become a dominant power. In the long run, their problems in finding sympathetic readers have evaporated because the global reach of their imaginations has come to seem indispensable. And here Pound's final tribute to James can serve as a justification for other American expatriate writers. James's "great labour, this labour of translation, of making America intelligible, of making it possible for individuals to meet across national borders," Pound wrote, meant a lifetime devoted to "trying to make two continents understand each other . . . [James] has put America on the map."

The America Pound was describing is not only a particular place but a condition of mind—sophisticated, confident, experienced rather than innocent, global rather than narrowly national. The expatriate consciousness made the American writer a plausible representative of the country as it became an international power, more than a century after its founding. The literary expatriates have been attacked as betrayers of their native land by outraged patriots from Theodore Roosevelt to William Carlos Williams. And it was certainly essential for the health of American literature that not every writer of distinction made their choice. But for all their alienation, the artists who settled in Europe were stretching the minds of their countrymen. They were helping turn Americans into citizens of the world.