During the peak of his contemporary popularity, F. Scott Fitzgerald lived abroad—mostly in France—for five years and eight months, much of that time pursuing a frenzied social life that impeded his literary work. His European travels included lengthy stays from May 1924 through the end of 1926 and then from March 1929 through September 1931, as well as a five-month sojourn in mid-1928. On foreign shores he experienced misery and elation: his wife Zelda’s romance with French aviator Edouard Jozan; completion, publication, and celebration of his third novel, *The Great Gatsby* (1925); new friendships with Ernest Hemingway and with Gerald and Sara Murphy; innumerable alcoholic binges and embarrassments; false starts on a fourth novel and increasing self-doubts; domestic rivalry and acrimony; Zelda’s first nervous breakdown and treatment; his hotel life and fugitive magazine fiction. Only after returning to the US did Fitzgerald publish *Tender is the Night* (1934), a work that despite its flaws plumbs the paradoxes of desire more profoundly than did *Gatsby*. Understandably, *Tender* has preoccupied scholars and biographers seeking insight into the author’s life abroad, for its thinly veiled treatment of the Fitzgeralnds’ domestic calamities, set against the crazy violence of post-war Europe, reveals much about the author’s own identification with expatriate culture. But the many short stories set at least partly in Europe likewise merit closer attention, less for their biographical connections than for their representations of the American migration to Europe after World War I.¹

Fitzgerald’s years abroad of course figure in a broader interpretive paradigm, popularized by Malcolm Cowley and elaborated by a host of modern critical studies beginning with George Wickes.² This model of expatriate life celebrates “exile” (a term of contested applicability) as the enabling adventure that provided both the fictional raw material and the displacement essential to a Modernist point of view. Yet as Caren Kaplan insists, “all displacements are not the same” (Kaplan, *Questions of Travel*, 2). Distinguishing exile from expatriation, immigration, travel, and tourism, she comments

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¹ J. GERALD KENNEDY

Fitzgerald’s expatriate years and the European stories

During the peak of his contemporary popularity, F. Scott Fitzgerald lived abroad—mostly in France—for five years and eight months, much of that time pursuing a frenzied social life that impeded his literary work. His European travels included lengthy stays from May 1924 through the end of 1926 and then from March 1929 through September 1931, as well as a five-month sojourn in mid-1928. On foreign shores he experienced misery and elation: his wife Zelda’s romance with French aviator Edouard Jozan; completion, publication, and celebration of his third novel, *The Great Gatsby* (1925); new friendships with Ernest Hemingway and with Gerald and Sara Murphy; innumerable alcoholic binges and embarrassments; false starts on a fourth novel and increasing self-doubts; domestic rivalry and acrimony; Zelda’s first nervous breakdown and treatment; his hotel life and fugitive magazine fiction. Only after returning to the US did Fitzgerald publish *Tender is the Night* (1934), a work that despite its flaws plumbs the paradoxes of desire more profoundly than did *Gatsby*. Understandably, *Tender* has preoccupied scholars and biographers seeking insight into the author’s life abroad, for its thinly veiled treatment of the Fitzgeralnds’ domestic calamities, set against the crazy violence of post-war Europe, reveals much about the author’s own identification with expatriate culture. But the many short stories set at least partly in Europe likewise merit closer attention, less for their biographical connections than for their representations of the American migration to Europe after World War I.¹

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that “Euro-American middle-class expatriates adopted the attributes of exile as an ideology of artistic production” (28, my emphasis). Kaplan adds that their “imperative of displacement” privileged distance as “the best perspective on a subject” (36). Most provocatively, she claims that the “voluntary homelessness” of expatriates such as Cowley, Hemingway, and Fitzgerald indicates their “lack of commitment” to social or political causes: “More and more like voyeurs of the decadent and exotic, the expatriates see ‘others’ and ‘otherness’ but do not yet divine their roles as actors in the production of the world they believe they are simply observing” (47). Revising Cowley’s observation that the expatriates had a “spectatorial” relationship to post-war Europe, Kaplan accuses Fitzgerald and his cohorts of being politically unconscious, disengaged from the socioeconomic realities playing out around them. Their experience abroad brought this group “not to a fuller understanding of the histories and particularities of the places they have traveled through,” Kaplan writes, “but to a will to power that consolidates nationalist identities and confirms a repressive hierarchy of values” (49). But does a careful reading of relevant texts – the short stories about “Europe” – sustain this harsh indictment?

The European stories fall into three distinct phases: a trio of pieces from 1925, infused with romantic optimism; ten stories, mostly about loss and disillusionment, appearing between 1929 and 1932; and two muted, nostalgic narratives written after his final return to the United States. Reading these pieces together, as a complete, virtual sequence rather than as scattered tales interposed (as in Matthew J. Bruccoli’s superb collection, The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald) between “Jacob’s Ladder,” “The Last of the Belles,” and the Basil and Josephine stories, we witness the emergence of a larger, composite narrative of displacement and cultural encounter that delineates national identity as it critiques American naiveté and excess. Between the earlier and later European stories we observe a notable shift from exuberant nationalism toward a more tolerant cosmopolitanism, as well as an intensifying awareness of expatriation’s irreversible consequences.

Fitzgerald’s September 1924 essay, “How to Live on Practically Nothing a Year,” provides a benchmark for his changing consciousness. Composed shortly after going abroad – and conceived for a Saturday Evening Post audience assumed to share his ethnic and class biases – the article describes in comic terms the author’s rocky adjustment to life in France. Acknowledging the economic basis of the expatriate movement, Fitzgerald portrays a couple (implicitly, the Fitzgeral ds) going “off to the Riviera to economize” (AA, 100–1). Yet the motivation is more complex: the radical difference in living costs, created partly by favorable exchange rates, enabled many displaced Americans to live abroad like “a sort of royalty” (as Charlie
Wales remarks in “Babylon Revisited”), realizing not just a better way of life but often an altogether different class status than they would have known in the United States. Explaining the couple’s motives Fitzgerald writes: “We were going to the Old World to find a new rhythm for our lives, with a true conviction that we had left our old selves behind forever – and with a capital of just over seven thousand dollars” (AA, 102). For years “the poorest boy in a rich boy’s school,” Fitzgerald squandered his income on Long Island “extravagance and clamor” and embarked for Europe precisely to join the upper class – a gratification he betrays when describing the couple’s “cool clean villa,” an estate replete with a gardener who calls the American writer “milord” (113).

This craving for upper-class or aristocratic status manifests itself elsewhere in “How to Live.” Fitzgerald condescends to the French, who – whether taxi-drivers or real estate agents – are stereotypically portrayed as conniving, money-hungry types. When a porter bashes a cab driver over the head to settle the question of where the Fitzgeralds will lodge, the writer tosses “several nickels – or rather francs – over the prostrate carbuncular man” (AA, 103). The largesse signifies both Fitzgerald’s class difference from the driver and his casual attitude toward French money, which he later likens to “gold-colored hat checks” (114). The French language seems likewise meaningless, and Fitzgerald ridicules speakers of French as well as his own inexact franglais. In one ludicrous scene he commands a doorman to speak French rather than English, before observing to his young daughter: “His French strikes me as very bad” (102). The episode suggests that multiplied wealth and newly elevated class status entitle American expatriates to mock French functionaries openly. This ruling-caste pretension acquires racial connotations when Fitzgerald describes himself and his wife “lounging on a sandy beach in France,” burned to a “deep chocolate brown” so dark that they appear to be “of Egyptian origin; but closer inspection showed that their faces had an Aryan cast” (113). These fortunate folk occupy a privileged place on a restricted beach, attended, we are told, by African waiters who deliver drinks and occasionally “chase away the children of the poor” (113). Fitzgerald’s glowing image of racial dominance – tanned “Aryan” Americans served by a Senegalese waiter “with an accent from well below the Mason-Dixon line” (114) – speaks volumes about both the assumed readership of the Post and the relative lack of racial and ethnic sensitivity marking Fitzgerald’s early expatriate writing.

Yet the essay is not devoid of self-critical insight. Fitzgerald denounces other Americans for their avoidance of “French life” while satirizing the Fitzgeralds’ own resistance to the foreign. While they munch deviled ham
Fitzgerald’s expatriate years

from Illinois and read the *New York Times*, they consider themselves “absolutely French” (113). Giving the issue of cultural contact a further twist, the author insists that the Fitzgeralds have become “cultured Europeans”: “The secret is that they had entered fully into the life of the Old World” (114). But they do so by patronizing “quaint” restaurants not in the guidebooks and paying whopping sums for their meals. After a summer on the Riviera, their original seven thousand dollars has disappeared, but the author and his wife have no regrets; insulated from poverty and freed from all labor except writing, the American expatriate can retain a leisure-class status, secure in his superiority to a native population that exists but to serve him.

But “How to Live” also portrays the Riviera as a place of potential unrest. “The whole world has come here to forget or to rejoice,” Fitzgerald writes, “to hide its face or have its fling, to build white palaces out of the spoils of oppression or to write the books which sometimes batter those palaces down” (104). Though the observation implies proletarian sympathy, Fitzgerald (as in *Tender is the Night*) betrays his empathy for aristocratic Russian exiles living in France. In marked contrast to middle-class American expatriates, whose elective displacement sometimes enables them to penetrate the upper class, the enforced exile of the Russians reduces them from dukes and czars to domestic workers. Fitzgerald could denounce fugitives from Bolshevism as builders of “white palaces” from “the spoils of oppression”; but he typically did not, instead romanticizing their fall from grandeur and implicitly revealing what Renato Rosaldo calls “imperialist nostalgia” (Kaplan, *Questions of Travel*, 22).

This romanticizing impulse soon produced “Love in the Night” (November 1924), Fitzgerald’s earliest effort to adjust his narrative trajectories to the European scene – and his first magazine story after completing *Gatsby*. His young protagonist, Val Rostoff, is the offspring of a Russian Prince and an American woman whose father (Morris Hasylton) helped finance the Chicago World’s Fair of 1892. The Rostoffs own one of those “white palaces” – a villa in Cannes purchased with “American gold” – and the narrative hinges on Val’s romantic encounter one April evening with a nameless American girl aboard a yacht in the harbor. But the girl goes away, and the heartsick hero falls into the maw of history, returning to Russia just in time for the 1917 revolution. After his parents have been executed “to atone for the blunders of the Romanoffs,” the young man quits the Imperial army and returns to Cannes, where he becomes a taxi-driver. After war, revolution, and several years of poverty have “conspired against his expectant heart” (*Short Stories*, 312, 313), Val prepares to flee the city in shame after learning of the return of a certain American yacht. But at the story’s turning point, Fitzgerald notes a significant shift. Although Val had, on first meeting the
American girl, insisted adamantly upon his Russian identity (307, 309), the prospect of seeing her again stirs his American instincts:

The blood of Morris Hasylton began to throb a little in Val’s temples and made him remember something he had never before cared to remember – that Morris Hasylton, who had built his daughter a palace in St. Petersburg, had also started from nothing at all.

Simultaneously another emotion possessed him, less strange, less dynamic but equally American – the emotion of curiosity. (315)

At the American consulate, his query about the yacht produces a swift reunion with his first love, whom he subsequently marries.

Unique among Fitzgerald’s European stories for its narration from the subject position of a European exile, “Love in the Night” nevertheless insists on the dual nationality of Val Rostoff in order to comment on national and ethnic differences. Val’s Russian origins enhance his romantic imagination, for among the three nationalities who use the Riviera as an expatriate “pleasure ground,” Fitzgerald theorizes that although the English are “too practical” and the Americans have “no tradition of romantic conduct,” the Russians are “a people as gallant as the Latins, and rich besides” (303). Val’s father, Prince Paul Rostoff, has sumptuous tastes and philandering habits, and his son at seventeen regards Cannes as a “privileged paradise” where because he is “rich and young” with aristocratic blood, he anticipates a “unique and incomparable” encounter with “a lovely unknown girl” (303). Val’s mother conversely represents the prim and proper American: she storms “hysterically” at evidence of the Prince’s infidelities, refuses to let her son kiss her because he has been “handling money,” and always speaks with a “faint irony” when referring to “the land of her nativity” (303–4). As if to deny her humble origins, her early years over a butcher shop in Chicago, she teaches her son to “look down on Americans,” but – Fitzgerald notes significantly – “she hadn’t succeeded in making him dislike them” (305). Thus Val falls in love with the American girl and five years later responds explicitly as an American to the opportunity of seeing her again.

In the closing paragraphs, however, Fitzgerald reinscribes the hero’s cultural otherness by invoking the danger of international marriages. According to home-grown wisdom, unions between Americans and foreigners “always turn out badly” (316). But in his early, optimistic phase, Fitzgerald cites this cynical “American tradition” to refute it: at story’s end, the Russian émigré Val owns a taxi fleet in New York and revisits Cannes each April with his American wife. In this youthful fairytale, affluence presumably resolves cross-cultural differences. While the coda hails an international marriage that has turned out well, the happy ending nevertheless requires us to forget
the marriage of Val’s parents, which did not. International romance and marriage, a theme inherited from Henry James, would recur in Fitzgerald’s later European stories as an important test of cultural relations and differences, with the frequent failure of cross-cultural relationships suggesting (as it does so often in James) incompatible national sensibilities.

But the psychosocial reality of cultural displacement could also affect liaisons between Americans abroad. Like James, Fitzgerald seemed particularly intrigued by encounters between Europeanized Americans and less sophisticated American travelers, and two stories in 1925 explored that potential pairing. Although the author probably had “Not in the Guidebook” (February 1925) in mind when in April 1925 he alluded to the “horrible junk” he had lately written, the story nevertheless depicts an unusual expatriate romance (*Life in Letters*, 101). Heroine Milly Cooley, an American of Czech and Rumanian descent, travels to France to economize with her husband Jim, a shell-shocked, decorated war hero. But abandoned by her dissipated spouse, she arrives in Paris alone, only to be rescued from French hoodlums by Bill Driscoll, a war veteran and tour guide who has amassed a “swelling packet of American bonds” (*Price*, 167) living by his wits in France. Fluent in French and well informed about French culture, he has for two years operated a tour bus bearing the legend: “WILLIAM DRISCOLL: He shows you things not in the guidebook” (167). In fact, Driscoll proves a savvy entrepreneur engaged in the post-war touristic commodification of France; aboard his “rubberneck wagon,” Milly is soon “whirled through fifteen centuries of Paris” (170), entertained by his patter. Yet Driscoll shows himself to be “unusually level-headed” (169), an admirable fellow who cares for Milly without exploiting her vulnerability. And he is modest: while escorting a group that includes Milly to the battlefield at Château-Thierry, he recollects the fighting and jokes that he wasn’t shot because he was “shaking so much they couldn’t aim at [him]” (175). Yet when Milly insists on contrasting Driscoll’s panic with her estranged husband’s supposed courage, Driscoll admits his modest “professional lie” and tells the truth: he had been wounded the night before the battle, capturing a copy of German orders that a sneak thief later stole from him. Incredibly, Milly recognizes in these very details the story of her husband’s spurious valor and instantly discerns the true hero from the false one. The following spring, after Driscoll and Milly are married, they embark on their honeymoon in the tour bus, filling its vacant seats with pedestrians picked up along the “poplar-lined roads of France” (176) – a charming image of their acculturation. In a story marred by shifts in point of view and by the colossal coincidence of the intercepted German orders, Fitzgerald portrays a resourceful expatriate thriving in France because he knows things not in the guidebook – and
because he invests his income in American bonds and his love in an American woman.

Likewise marred by plot contrivances, “A Penny Spent” (July 1925) focuses on the relationship between a rich American girl and a profligate American expatriate, Corcoran, who was born and raised at the Brix Grill (identified in manuscript as the Paris Ritz).4 Having wasted a half-million dollars because “a childhood and youth in Europe with a wildly indulgent mother had somehow robbed him of all sense of value or proportion” (Bits, 117), Corcoran takes a position as cicerone to Hallie Bushmill, the daughter of an American millionaire. The young man’s cultural competence includes the ability to “speak most languages” (115), to correct the historical slips of a Belgian guide (118), and to orchestrate dazzling social events that bring Hallie in contact with titled Europeans. In giving Corcoran his delicate assignment, Mr. Bushmill has set strict fiscal limits to help him recover a commonsense American regard for money and value, and for a time Corcoran practices a Franklinesque frugality as he arranges visits to Brussels and Waterloo aboard a tour bus. Fitzgerald distinguishes here between the long-term expatriate and the tourist: a European native who has never done vulgar “sight-seeing,” Corcoran must study histories and guidebooks so that he can regale Hallie and her mother with touristic information. Although he already knows Europe “like a book” (116), as the place of his birth and residence, he has no sense of its otherness as a cultural commodity to be approached in a “rubber-neck wagon” (118). But when Hallie becomes bored with monuments and battlefields, he demonstrates his European connections by arranging a country-club luncheon with “Prince Abrisini, Countess Perimont and Major Sir Reynolds Fitz-Hugh, the British attaché” (122). Abandoning his guidebooks, Corcoran rents a lodge and introduces Hallie to more European aristocrats, reverting to his free-spending ways to entertain the girl and expand her cultural horizons.

His eagerness to help Hallie spread her wings in Europe contrasts with the paternalism of Claude Nosby, the obnoxious American to whom Hallie is “practically engaged” (120). Upon his arrival in Europe, Nosby finds Hallie “less docile and less responsive” than before and worries that Corcoran has infected her with “nonsense” that will make it harder to take her back to the factory town and “the little circle where she had grown up” (129). Hallie responds eagerly to the expansive cosmopolitan life that Corcoran represents, and on the Isle of Capri (where the Fitzgeralds stayed in February 1925), she finally escapes Nosby’s presence long enough to profess her love for Corcoran, who redeems his spendthrift reputation in Italy when he saves Hallie from a gang of criminals bent on robbery and kidnapping. Conscious of threats posed by the Mafia and the Black Hand, Corcoran spots a car full of
pursuing banditti and confounds them by throwing money away – literally, by scattering English banknotes across the landscape. Having recorded the serial numbers to prevent the bills from being exchanged for lire, the clever Corcoran saves Mr. Bushmill’s capital as well as his daughter. The young hero succeeds both by using his knowledge of Europe and by casting off the expatriate insouciance that deprived him of “all sense of value or proportion.” He negotiates cultural difference in a way that affirms both American values and Continental sophistication. As in the two earlier stories, Fitzgerald portrays Europe as a scene of romance; a touristic exploration of cultural differences helps to cement the attachment between the cosmopolitan male and a less worldly American female. At this early juncture, despite domestic tension after Zelda’s 1924 dalliance with Jozan, the author still idealized life abroad as a glittering transcultural adventure that led inevitably to a romantic ending.

During those years the Fitzhgeralds lived principally in Paris, near the Arc de Triomphe, and on the Riviera, within the social orbit of the Murphys; they spent one winter in Rome and part of another in the Pyrenees, where Zelda received treatment for colitis. Upon their return to the United States in late 1926, though, Fitzgerald abandoned the international theme in his short fiction for almost four years, mainly because the American scene recaptured his attention and because he was channeling expatriate story lines into a novel set in France. During this era he worked in Hollywood and published “The Rich Boy” as well as a series of slick coming-of-age stories about a young midwesterner named Basil Duke Lee. Income from the Basil stories in fact financed Fitzgerald’s third trip abroad, a five-month visit to France in 1928 that he undertook to complete his novel-in-progress about a glamorous expatriate couple. The Fitzgeralds rented an apartment on the rue de Vaugirard opposite the Jardin du Luxembourg, and Zelda plunged maniacally into ballet lessons with Madame Egorova. If Fitzgerald made little headway that summer in his major project, he did meet James Joyce at a dinner party (and offered to leap from a window in homage); but the visit yielded no new stories featuring foreign themes or transatlantic contrasts. When he returned the following spring, however, for what would be his last, harrowing sojourn in Europe, he began almost immediately to mine the related subjects of international relationships and expatriate social life. Between May 1929 and April 1931 he wrote ten new stories about Americans abroad, and although the earliest follows the romantic scripting of the 1925 stories, the narratives composed thereafter focus more typically on the complications of European courtships and marriages and often expose the decadent, self-indulgent behavior of the American leisure class. Especially in the seven stories written after Zelda’s 1930 breakdown, Fitzgerald appears
increasingly mindful of the boorishness and blindness that accompanied inflated expatriate wealth.

Following a transitional piece (“The Rough Crossing”) about jealousy and marital conflict aboard a ship bound for Europe, “Majesty” (May 1929) offers another romanticized treatment of international courtship and marriage. As her family name portends, the American beauty Emily Castleton longs for aristocratic connections, and after leaving her fiancé, Brevoort Blair, at the altar, she returns to Europe (where she had earlier led an “artistic” life) and drops out of sight. Her name soon appears, however, in a newspaper account linking her with a “dissipated ne’er-do-well” (Short Stories, 473) of “obscure nationality” (474) named “Tutu” Petrocobesco. Although he calls himself a prince, Petrocobesco has been expelled from Paris by the French police, and believing Emily to be “mixed up with a deported adventurer in disgraceful scandal” (474), her father asks Brevoort (now married to Emily’s cousin Olive) to rescue her from ruin. In a plot transparently lifted from James’s The Ambassadors, Brevoort and Olive track Emily to Hungary and thence to “Tutu’s native country” (478), a tiny, run-down province called Czjeck-Hansa, where the “peasant party” controlling the new republic agrees to let Petrocobesco claim the title of king if he will become ceremonial head of state. Emily has consented to marry Tutu, we learn, on condition that he “insisted on being king instead of prince” (479) – for she yearns to be a queen. Initially appalled by the “crazy life” (478) Emily is leading abroad, Olive watches at the end in rapt admiration as her cousin rides through the streets of London in a royal carriage: “There was about the scene the glamour shed always by the old empire of half the world, by her ships and ceremonies, her pomps and symbols” (480). This is “imperialist nostalgia” with a vengeance; Emily fulfills her notion of the American Dream by marrying European nobility, thereby escaping the ambiguities of the American social classes and securing regal status. Although Fitzgerald elsewhere manifests ethnic derision of non-Anglo Europeans (as witness the West Egg guests in The Great Gatsby) and here portrays Czjeck-Hansa as a place of “filthy streets” and “tumble-down” houses (475), Emily nevertheless weds “a fat little fellow with an attractive leer and a quenchless thirst” (474) precisely to insert herself into the scene of “glamour.” Although Brevoort remarks that “it’s all so silly,” Olive’s final, “helpless adoration” (480) of the London spectacle seems to validate Emily’s quest while ignoring questions about the heroine’s anti-democratic craving for nobility.5

A more richly nuanced exploration of cultural difference figures in “The Swimmers” (July–August 1929), which develops an ambiguous theory of American identity in the context of an expatriate’s struggle to contend with an unfaithful French wife and to reaffirm his own threatened manhood. The
story begins in Paris, where for eight years American Henry Clay Marston has been living because “the questions which [his] life propounded could be answered only in France” (Short Stories, 496), and it ends with Marston sailing from America back to Europe (presumably to France). Fitzgerald never fully clarifies the “questions” that attach the hero so obstinately to France, though he notes that Marston’s apartment on the rue Monsieur was “the sort of thing [he] could not have afforded in America” (496). Elsewhere he suggests that Marston had adapted himself to life abroad by “substituting for the moral confusion of his own country, the tradition, the wisdom, the sophistication of France” (502). Marston’s curious need for France is in fact deeper than his attachment to his wife Choupette, whom he discovers in flagrante delicto with another man at the beginning of the story. He subsequently brings her to Virginia, presumably to deliver her from temptation and to restore his masculinity by taking a lucrative reassignment, for (as he tells his wife) “American men are incomplete without money” (501). Indeed, several comments in “The Swimmers” comprise a virtual critique of American culture: when first offered the opportunity to return to Richmond at double his Paris salary, the unenthusiastic Marston can barely refrain from “stating his frank opinion upon existence at home” (496), and he later is said to believe that “America is superficial and full of silly fads” (502). Choupette calls the droves of American tourists in France “parasites such as Europe has not known in a hundred years” (499), and Marston himself regards Americans as “restless and with shallow roots,” a people eager to forget “history and the past” (506). Mr. Wiese, the millionaire with whom Choupette becomes involved in Virginia, declares about the United States, “Money made this country, built its great and glorious cities” (508), thus producing a vulgar conflation of patriotism and materialism.

Yet playing to a Saturday Evening Post audience possibly dubious about the expatriate author’s own loyalties, Fitzgerald delivers in closing a resonant nationalistic pronouncement:

The best of America was the best of the world . . . France was a land, England was a people, but America, having about it still that quality of the idea, was harder to utter – it was the graves at Shiloh and the tired, drawn, nervous faces of its great men, and the country boys dying in the Argonne for a phrase that was empty before their bodies withered. It was a willingness of the heart. (512)

Watching from the deck of the Majestic as the American landscape recedes in the distance, the now-divorced Marston repents his earlier unpatriotic views: “All his old feeling that America was a bizarre accident, a sort of historical sport, had gone forever” (512). Not by accident he is reunited aboard ship with a comely young Virginian, “that perfect type of American girl” (499)
who four years earlier in France had taught him how to swim and thus restored his masculine self-assurance. But the romantic ending obscures an unsettling question: why, after this change of heart, after coming to regard America as a “generous mother” (511), is Marston nevertheless returning to Europe and an expatriate existence? As a Virginian of the sort “prouder of being Virginians than Americans” (498), why is he leaving Richmond – presumably – to resume his life in a city associated, in the story’s first two paragraphs, with gasoline exhaust and death: “black horror” (495)? In the final analysis Marston’s resumption of displacement implies an inability to go home again, to readjust to American culture. Such is the risk of living long years abroad, for as sculptor William Wetmore Story once observed, “a man always pays, in one way or another, for expatriation, for detachment from his plain primary heritage.” By 1929 Fitzgerald recognized the force of that truth, and “The Swimmers” marks an effort to grapple with its unsettling implications.

But the converse dilemma lies in the difficulty of adapting fully to an alien culture. In his first story completed after the stock market crash, Fitzgerald fashioned a study of dissolution titled “Two Wrongs” (October–November 1929) that in one section depicts expatriate recklessness provoked by cultural difference. It was the first of several narratives written over a two-year period that worked variations on the motif of expatriate debauchery in Europe, often associated with marital strife and what Fitzgerald elsewhere called “emotional bankruptcy.” The story follows the troubled romance of Emmy Pinker, an aspiring actress from South Carolina, and Bill McChesney, a hard-drinking New York stage producer with a nasty temper. Emmy’s sympathy for Bill when he brawls with an actor precipitates their marriage; yet after two flops on Broadway, when Bill goes to London with the pregnant Emmy to reestablish his theatrical prowess, he succumbs there to the lure of drink and the seductive appeal of European nobility. Socializing with “a lot of dukes and ladies” he proclaims at a bar that he would like to become “the Marquis of McChesney” (Short Stories, 520). Despite Emmy’s reminder that he is imbibing too much, Bill seems driven by an inchoate (and unexamined) Irish-American need to force his way into English high society, and when Lady Sybil Combrinck, his patroness, excludes him from her guest list, Bill crashes the event – despite his lack of evening wear – to claim a place among the social elite. Promptly ejected, the producer seeks solace at a cabaret and returns home sodden, only to learn that his wife has just delivered a still-born child – an emblem of their doomed marriage. “I’m done with you,” she tells her foul-smelling husband at the hospital (525). Upon their return to the United States, Emmy (like Zelda) takes up ballet and becomes self-reliant, while the suddenly dependent, chain-smoking Bill
develops tuberculosis. The story’s conclusion finds Emmy accepting an offer to dance with a New York ballet company rather than accompany her spouse to a Colorado sanitarium. She flourishes ostensibly because she has American “character,” while the reprobate Bill heads West “for a definite finish” (530), having been ruined less by lung disease than by a costly London debauch.

The riotous living of monied expatriates receives lighter treatment in “The Bridal Party” (May 1930), the first work Fitzgerald completed after Zelda’s nervous breakdown in April 1930. Set entirely in Paris, the story depicts precious little cultural interaction in this expatriate “contact zone,” to borrow Mary Louise Pratt’s term. Fitzgerald includes several references to Right Bank locales and even a prophetic image of the German Graf Zeppelin, “shining and glorious, [a] symbol of escape and destruction” (Short Stories, 562), gliding over the rue de Castiglione. But his all-American plot turns rather on Michael Curly’s struggle to accept the Paris marriage of his former sweetheart, Caroline Dandy, to a go-getter named Hamilton Rutherford. Fitzgerald brackets the wedding, captured by “motion-picture machines” (573), between spectacles of expatriate ostentation: festivities include a prenuptial champagne dinner at Chez Victor, a bachelor dinner at the Ritz bar, and a wedding reception and breakfast at the Hôtel George-Cinq. Apart from brief dealings with functionaries, however, the invitees seem oblivious to France or the French; they are too preoccupied with self-indulgent social rituals. Money and investment form the conversational leitmotif, and we learn that Rutherford has made a fortune selling his seat on the stock exchange just prior to the crash.

A bit like Fitzgerald before his literary success, the Irish-American Curly has never had money, and when he arrives at Chez Victor wearing an old dinner coat he encounters people who were “rich and at home in their richness with one another.” In his alienation, he sees them as “too weary to be exhilarated by any ordinary stimulant,” because for weeks (since the crash) they have been quaffing cocktails, wines, brandies, beer, and whiskey “like some gigantic cocktail in a nightmare” (565). Curly seems on the surface an appealing figure: he retains fond memories of American places where he has romanced Caroline, and he mocks the blatant male chauvinism of Rutherford. Yet when a concierge, delivering news of his grandfather’s death, consoles Curly by murmuring “Too bad – too bad,” the young protagonist crassly retorts, “Not too bad... It means that I come into a quarter of a million dollars” (563). The wealth enables him to buy new social attire, and in a transformation straight out of Gogol’s “The Overcoat,” the hero takes on a different attitude: “Michael was surprised to find what a difference his new dinner coat, his new silk hat, his new, proud linen made in his estimate...
of himself; he felt less resentment toward all these people for being so rich and assured. For the first time since he had left college he felt rich and assured himself” (569). Here as elsewhere Fitzgerald draws a fine line between envy of and contempt for wealth. Curly’s sudden affluence fires the dream of winning back Caroline’s love, but when she reaffirms her desire to marry Rutherford – after learning that he has lost “almost every cent” (572) in bad investments – Fitzgerald undercuts the assumption that money is her motive. We see Curly suffering through the nuptials and anaesthetizing himself later with champagne and then “much more champagne” (575) before realizing that he is “cured” (576) of his yearning for Rutherford’s bride. Whether Fitzgerald wants us to regard Curly finally as a sympathetic romantic hero or, more likely, a silly, shallow fellow (last seen at the reception “trying to remember which one of the bridesmaids he had made a date to dine with” [576]) seems the interpretive crux of this ambiguous treatment of expatriate social life.14

In two better-known stories of European self-ruin, Fitzgerald sharpened his critique to suggest that American expatriates, released from the ethical constraints of their own culture and possessed of wealth multiplied by foreign exchange, inhabited an unreal cultural space conducive to exploitation and personal dissolution. Yet he refused to ascribe the undoing of his Americans abroad to some corrupting influence in European life; indeed, his protagonists often seem dismissive of foreign culture, oblivious to the reality that they are guests, transients in a place not their own. By virtue of their economic clout, his expatriates occupy a fantastic sphere that is (like the international pier in “The Rough Crossing”) neither here nor there. In this space they assume a privileged status, narcissistically pursuing pleasure while regarding Europeans as inferiors to be commanded and European places as touristic sites to be exhausted and abandoned. Fitzgerald personifies this mentality in “One Trip Abroad” (August 1930) through Mr. and Mrs. Miles, the older American couple whom Nelson and Nicole Kelly first meet aboard a tourist bus in Algeria. Mrs. Miles glibly opines: “Every place is the same...The only thing that matters is who’s there. New scenery is fine for half an hour, but after that, you want your own kind to see. That’s why some places have a certain vogue and then...the people move on somewhere else. The place itself never really matters” (Short Stories, 580). Unable to comprehend cultural meanings attached to localities, Mrs. Miles regards “scenery” as an irrelevant backdrop to the essential rituals of expatriate social life. “Bored with themselves” and “somewhat worn away inside by fifteen years of a particular set in Paris” (578), the Mileses entertain the illusion that they are pursuing “the real customs and manners of the country” (581) as they wait for a troupe of pubescent Arab girls called the “Ouled Nails” to dance
naked before affluent tourists. The spectacle implicitly reifies the social and economic disparity between the ungarbed girls (dancing to raise dowries) and the well-attired, well-heeled Anglo-American audience. With characteristic snobbery, the Mileses refuse to regard their Algerian excursion as touristic; Mr. Miles declares, “I don’t consider myself a tourist. A tourist is someone who gets up early and goes to cathedrals and talks about scenery” (579). In their boredom, class and ethnic elitism, and indifference to their exploitation of native people, the Mileses typify the mindless decadence Fitzgerald had by this time come to associate with the American expatriate colony.

The implied corruption of the Mileses anticipates the dramatic disintegration of the Kellys, who figure as working sketches for Dick and Nicole Diver. As John Kuehl has pointed out, “One Trip Abroad” unites many key motifs scattered among the so-called Tender is the Night “cluster stories.” But while the story’s relationship to the novel has been capably elucidated by Kuehl and others, its representation of cultural difference and expatriate profligacy warrants closer attention. The experience of the Kellys epitomizes the process of European self-ruin, and as Fitzgerald takes pains to note in the final section of the story, their travels define a course that is both moral and geographical. Drifting from North Africa to Italy to the Riviera and thence to Paris before fleeing to Switzerland, “a country where very few things begin, but many things end” (594), the Kellys complete a journey that strips them of youth, health, and hope. We see them initially as a dazzling young couple, virtual honeymooners, who have decided to go abroad after Nelson has inherited a half-million dollars. Yet in each of the places where they mix with the expatriate crowd – now and again spotting another couple who seem their exact counterparts – they become involved in conflicts that mark stages of deterioration. These conflicts all involve reactions to cultural difference: they quarrel in Algeria over the propriety of watching the Ouled Nails; they become bibulous, irritable, and bored in Sorrento, where Nelson gets into an outrageous clash with a reserved British couple; Nelson’s affair in Monte Carlo with “an exquisite young French woman” (586) provokes an insane outburst from Nicole (to which her spouse retaliates abusively); in Paris the Kellys befriend Austrian Count Chiki Sarolai to gain access to “the ancient noblesse” (592) but find themselves robbed of jewels and ruined financially by a European confidence man.

Early in the story a self-confessed “sponger” named Oscar Dane had warned Nicole about the corrupt, international set with whom they have been socializing: “Do you call that crowd of drunks you run with amusing people? Why, they’re not even very swell. They’re so hard that they’ve shifted down through Europe like nails in a sack of wheat, till they stick out of it a little into the Mediterranean Sea” (585). Repeatedly the Kellys vow
to avoid the moneyed expatriate group, but in a foreign place the need for social connection proves irresistible: “The first crowd they had known was largely American, salted with Europeans; the second was largely European, peppered with Americans.” In Paris, where they yearn to penetrate some “ultimate milieu” (590) defined by status, wealth, genius, and power, the Kellys fall victim to their own social striving. The seemingly romantic image of the canal-boat party – which they have unwittingly financed – captures the utter unreality of the cultural sphere inhabited by the expatriate set: “The boat was hung with fragile lanterns, which blended with the pastels of the bridges and the reflected stars in the dark Seine, like a child’s dream out of the Arabian Nights” (592). Occupying a space that is neither American nor French, the artificial paradise of “those who sought pleasure over the face of Europe” (594), the Kellys at last become alienated from themselves – a point Fitzgerald dramatizes in the shocking final encounter with their un-named doubles. In Switzerland (where the author would keep vigil near his hospitalized wife) Nicole asks Nelson the overwhelming question, “Why did we lose peace and love and health, one after the other?” (596). Their effort to elide cultural difference by exploiting economic advantage – to spend their way into international high society – appears to explain much of their self-inflicted misery.

Fitzgerald articulates the unreality of expatriate experience most brilliantly, of course, in “Babylon Revisited” (December 1930), his often-anthologized story of European self-ruin. The author was then living in a Lausanne hotel, monitoring Zelda’s condition and visiting daughter Scottie (under the care of a French nanny in Paris), while resisting suggestions by his sister-in-law Rosalind that Scottie live with her in Brussels. When Fitzgerald’s hero, Charlie Wales, returns to Paris seeking custody of his daughter Honoria, he necessarily confronts the memory of the “crazy years” (Short Stories, 629) when sudden, unearned wealth – the result of getting “lucky in the market” (626) – allowed Americans to behave as if they ruled the city. Charlie’s remembrance of that fantastic boom period alternately evokes nostalgia and disgust: “We were a sort of royalty, almost infallible, with a sort of magic around us,” he recollects (619). At his first stop, the Ritz bar, he comes to the jolting realization, however, that “it was not an American bar any more – he felt polite in it, and not as if he owned it.” With the stock market crash, the onset of hard times in the United States, and the decline of European tourism, the Ritz (like other expatriate haunts) has “gone back into France,” resuming its place in indigenous culture (616). When he revisits Montmartre, the scene of so much expatriate revelry, Charlie similarly finds a “local, colloquial French crowd” in the rue Blanche. With clearer eyes he now sees the insidious function of Zelli’s and other night spots – that of
Fitzgerald’s expatriate years

consuming the expatriate consumer: “The Café of Hell still yawned—even devoured, as he watched, the meager contents of a tourist bus.” Buoyed by economic good fortune, Charlie and other expatriates of the twenties failed to recognize the consequences of their wastefulness. For them, the unreality of money created a fantastic sphere of European profligacy; Charlie recalls the reckless spending of French cash, converted (by the mid-twenties) at twenty-five francs to the dollar: “thousand-franc notes [were] given to an orchestra for playing a single number, hundred franc notes tossed to a doorman for calling a cab” (620). In its ultimate fantastic deployment, American expatriate wealth denied not just the fact of cultural difference but the reality of the natural order: “The snow of twenty-nine wasn’t real snow. If you didn’t want it to be snow, you just paid some money” (633).

Upon his return to Paris, Charlie feels strangely alienated from the city, as if losing the sense of ownership has somehow exposed just how little he understands about it. With chagrin he realizes that “he had never eaten at a really cheap restaurant in Paris... For some odd reason he wished that he had” (618). He knows the gathering spots of the expatriate crowd but not the places important to the French; when he visits his sister-in-law and her husband, he never mentions the Eglise St. Sulpice, which looms before all residences on the rue Palatine. He speaks (English) to waiters and taxi-drivers but seems otherwise oblivious to the French denizens of Paris. Summing up the result of his heedlessness Charlie observes poignantly, “I spoiled this city for myself.” By inhabiting the unreal space of expatriate self-indulgence, he has in effect missed the city and French culture altogether, losing in the process not simply the rich experience of cultural and linguistic otherness but (more to the point) his wife, his marriage, and his daughter: “Everything was gone and I was gone” (618). While he was commanding, ordering, consuming—“throwing away money” (626) to sustain a sense of magical dominance over a city that existed (it seemed) only to entertain him and gratify his needs—Charlie in fact corrupted himself, and his recurrent attraction to the Ritz bar places in question the completeness of his rehabilitation. Whether he can recover from self-ruin and reclaim his daughter (and the honor she represents) remains an open question in “Babylon Revisited,” for the intrusion of two drunken friends, “sudden ghosts out of the past” (622), just when he seems about to regain custody of Honoria, spoils Charlie’s bid for respectability. He must live with his remorse a while longer, pondering the “nightmare” of “utter irresponsibility” (629) that in retrospect accurately defines the expatriate dream world.16

Fitzgerald’s darkest treatment of European excess unfolds, however, in “A New Leaf” (April 1931), which depicts the infatuation of American tourist Julia Ross with Dick Ragland, a longtime expatriate with “the worst
reputation of any American in Paris” (Short Stories, 635). Julia’s admirer, Phil Hoffman, warns her about Ragland’s drunken pranks, but Julia succumbs to his charm and remarkably handsome visage. To explain why he drinks so much, Ragland recalls his service in the Great War and subsequent boredom; when he went abroad to study at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, we learn, “something happened to him” (637) – he drank excessively, quarreled with friends, and became involved in a case of vehicular homicide. Fitzgerald suggests that away from the restraining influences of American life (family, community, ethics), Ragland has become a pitiful alcoholic, morally adrift. When he arrives for a lunch date looking unkempt, his face fixed in a disgusting sneer, Julia writes him off, at least temporarily. She falls for him again, however, on the ocean liner bound for the United States, and back in New York his “misdemeanors” in Paris assume “a far-off unreality” (643). But Ragland at last proves disloyal to Julia, and en route to London he shockingly commits suicide at sea. Ruined by expatriate dissolution, Ragland (another Dick Diver prototype) proves incapable of returning to his native land and adjusting to workaday, middle-class life. By casting himself into the Atlantic, he acknowledges his inability to respond to Julia’s last plea: “Change, change, Dick – change” (646). The story marks one of Fitzgerald’s most searing (and patently self-critical) treatments of the irreversible effects of prolonged exile.

About another tale of European debauchery, the inferior “Flight and Pursuit” (April 1931), less needs to be said. In this rewriting of the girl-that-got-away plot, millionaire Sidney Lahaye makes amends to Caroline Corcoran (whom he once jilted), by secretly arranging for her to travel around Europe as the companion of Helen O’Connor, a worldly expatriate. Caroline’s holiday lasts three dizzying years: “Its most enduring impression was a phantasmagoria of the names of places and people – of Biarritz, of Mme de Colmar, of Deauville, of the Comte de Berme, of Cannes, of the Derehiemers, of Paris and the Château de Madrid. They lived the life of casinos and hotels so as assiduously reported in the Paris American papers” (Price, 315). The project to cheer up Caroline goes awry, though, when she becomes dissipated, “directionless,” and “increasingly restless”; for her “no potion was too strong or any evening too late” (315). She threatens suicide (recalling the fate of Ragland) and in Locarno coughs up blood, revealing that she has (like Bill McChesney) contracted tuberculosis. A remorseful Sidney places Caroline in a sanitarium at Montana Vermala – where the younger son of Gerald and Sara Murphy was then being treated – and though the heroine recovers her health, she still mistrusts men. But news that Sidney has survived a plane crash in the Black Sea arouses her tenderness and inspires a passionate telegram. Marred by plot contrivances, the story portrays the experience of
expatriate self-ruin from a female perspective but adds little to our understanding of cosmopolitan social relations or cultural difference.

In two other stories from his last trip abroad, however, Fitzgerald showed keener insight into the operation of national, class, and ethnic prejudices in international expatriate circles. To be sure, he still retained certain prejudices, and in “Echoes of the Jazz Age” (1931), his retrospective essay on the Roaring Twenties, he caricatures an Italian-American bound for Europe and a “fat Jewess, inlaid with diamonds,” associating them with the “fantastic neanderthals...traveling in luxury in 1928 and 1929, who, in the distortion of their new condition, had the human value of Pekinese, bivalves, cretins, goats” (Crack-Up, 20–1). But despite this reflexive ethnic innuendo (and one might psychoanalyze the Irish-American Fitzgerald’s chronic need to identify himself as “white” by dishing up such remarks), there is evidence elsewhere that by the early thirties the author was developing greater sensitivity to bigotry. In “The Hotel Child” (November 1930), for example, he develops a scathing treatment of the decadence and snobbery associated with members of the European nobility ensconced in a Swiss hotel. The story is all the more intriguing because Fitzgerald’s heroine, Fifi Schwartz, is a ravishing Jewess who shows maturity beyond her eighteen years in dealing with an aristocratic masher (Marquis Bopes Kinkallow), a suave thief (Count Borowki), and a condescending inebriate (Lady Capps-Karr), all the while supervising her sottish brother and comforting her worried mother. As Barry Gross and Eric Fretz point out, Fitzgerald’s representation – during an era of mounting anti-Semitism – of “an ‘other’ who resists the dominant order” marks a noteworthy move. Although Fifi is initially enthralled (like Emily Castleton of “Majesty”) with the idea of marrying a European nobleman in order to live “fully and adventurously” (Short Stories, 610), and although the Count pursues his wealthy “American dream girl” (601), the heroine finally recognizes Borowki as a scheming parasite and exposes his larceny.

But a more interesting problem inheres in Fifi’s relationship to her own ethnicity. Gross and Fretz aptly comment that Fifi strives at the outset to make herself a fully assimilated member of an international social scene. Fitzgerald depicts her at her birthday party walking sensuously across a room, “followed by a whole platoon of young men of all possible nationalities and crosses” (600), and he later remarks that she felt no “insufficiency” (604) within the expatriate community. Even though Fifi prefers Europe to the United States, where “everybody is so bigoted” (605), a tacit anti-Semitism nevertheless pervades the Swiss hotel. Long inured to bigotry, Mrs. Schwartz ignores the whispering: “It was a matter of effortless indifference to her what was said by the groups around the room” (599). Fifi’s rival and Anglo-American counterpart, Miss Howard, is said to have “taken
pains not to make Miss Schwartz’s acquaintance.” Heading to London for the social season, Miss Howard and the Taylors (who will present her) are “very Europeanized Americans” who “could hardly be said to belong to any nation at all,” but they nonetheless consider that “Fifi was as much of a gratuitous outrage as a new stripe in the flag” (600). Fitzgerald here alludes to the bigotry, fueled by the great Eastern European ethnic influx into the US after 1880, and the “Anglo-Saxon panic” that, as Alex Zwerdling has shown, inspired the 1921 Johnson Bill and other legislation to put new restrictions on immigration (Improvised Europeans, 54–5). Perhaps the most ominous practitioner of covert bigotry is the German-named assistant hotel manager, Mr. Weicker, who wants to appease his aristocratic clientele by expelling the Schwartzes. His hostility toward Fifi and his determination to cast her as a scapegoat produce the late comic scene in which he refuses to believe that Borowki’s companion (and apparent accomplice) is Miss Howard: “A wave of horror swept over Mr. Weicker. Again he craned his head forward, as if by the intensity of his astonishment he could convert her into Fifi” (Short Stories, 613–14). Whether he dislikes the Schwartzes because they are American, or Jewish, or because Fifi provokes sexual excitement is a nice question, and Fitzgerald eschews analysis while hinting unmistakably at Weicker’s prejudice. Here an emerging political consciousness foregrounds class and ethnic tensions in a cosmopolitan expatriate milieu; tacitly Fitzgerald shows sympathy for the outsider and valorizes respect for cultural difference.

Even more stunning in its critique of benighted attitudes, “Indecision” (January–February 1931) prefigures the stereotype of the “Ugly American.” Although Ruth Prigozy consigns this piece to a handful of Depression-era stories “so trivial as to demand nothing but wonder that they managed to find their way into print,” “Indecision” nevertheless figures importantly in a reconsideration of cultural difference in Fitzgerald, because despite its palpable silliness, it presents with unusual candor the racist and sexist arrogance of a white American male who patently features himself God’s gift to women. The multicultural setting – a Swiss ski resort teeming with international types – gives the protagonist, Tommy McLane, ample opportunity to flaunt his contempt for different ethnicities. A native (like Fitzgerald) of Minnesota, McLane has dropped down from Paris – where he is assistant manager at an American bank – to cruise “one of the gayest places in Switzerland with the idea that if he had nothing else to think of for ten days he might fall in love” (Price, 293). Fancying himself “analytical and cagy” (293), McLane instead proves confused, fearful, and dim-witted: fatuously he narrows down his romantic prospects from a dozen “girls and women” to a half-dozen to two: “He had actually written all this down on a blotter as if
he were in his office in the Place Vendôme, added and subtracted them, listed points” (294). Parodically prefiguring the dilemma of Dick Diver, McLane finds himself caught between a twenty-five-year-old divorcée, Emily, and an eighteen-year-old Southern innocent, Rosemary.

Torn between two lovers but unable to recognize himself as a fool, McLane vacillates throughout the story, invariably fantasizing about the one woman while he is with the other. Along the way he becomes especially jealous of attentions to his white “angel,” Rosemary, by certain darker-skinned rivals. After she dances with a Greek, “a young Levantine whom he disliked,” he advises her: “Tell that Spic to go count his piasters and I’ll talk turkey with you” (294). He chides her for dancing with “gigolo numbers from Cairo” and urges her to address the Greek as “greasy” rather than “honey” (294). When McLane likens his rival’s dancing style to “stilling the waves,” he adds an incongruous anti-Semitic inflection to a rant that conflates several ethnicities. Suspecting that Rosemary’s Louisiana origins dispose her to dark-skinned men, he inquires: “I suppose the boys are all Spics down in New Orleans?” (295). Later he becomes indignant at Rosemary’s socializing with a guitar-playing Spaniard, Count de Caros Moros; when he sees the Andalusian slip his arm around Rosemary during a winter ride, the sight is “horrible,” and McLane briefly wants to “jerk Caros Moros to his feet and pull him from the sleigh” (299). The next day McLane telephones Rosemary, apparently to chastise her for being ethnically indiscriminate, for his unfinished taunt implicitly accuses her of acting “black”: “‘Are you sorry you were so terrible to me last night, baby?’ he demanded. ‘No real pickaninny would –’” (301).

The nadir of McLane’s racism and sexism comes, however, during a moment of insecurity in which he wonders about his attractiveness to Rosemary and Emily:

Yesterday he had been sure of these two, holding them in the hollow of his hand. As he dressed for dinner he realized that he wanted them both. It was an outrage that he couldn’t have them both. Wouldn’t a girl rather have half of him than all of Harry Whitby, or a whole Spic with a jar of pomade thrown in? Life was so badly arranged – better no women at all than only one woman. (300)

This interior monologue makes plain the pathetic immaturity and ultimate fear of emotional commitment that generate McLane’s romantic “indecision,” as well as suggesting that his virulent racism operates, like his blatant sexism, to prop up a fragile ego haunted by justifiable worries about his own vacuity. As an expatriate banker and bon vivant, McLane epitomizes a crass, American insensitivity to cultural and ethnic otherness; from the moment he arrives among the “alien mountains” at the “Dent de Something,” attired
in a “convictlike uniform” and confused by words uttered “in some strange language,” we see him as a prisoner of his own ignorance and narcissism (292–3). Among the thoughtless Americans who flaunt their wealth, bigotry, and insouciance in Fitzgerald’s short fiction, Tommy McLane is in a class by himself. As one of the last stories written before the Fitzgeralds’ somber return from Europe in September 1931, “Indecision” reveals, in its ironic treatment of the protagonist, the author’s development of a critical perspective on the politics and ethics of transculturation. Juxtaposed against the crudities of “How to Live on Practically Nothing a Year,” the story reveals just how much Fitzgerald had matured as a cultural observer since 1924.

Two late expatriate pieces, composed in the United States long after the author’s return, add little to the critique of cultural difference but place his years abroad in a poignant personal perspective. Already estranged by mental illness, the Fitzgeralds had lived apart in 1930–1 while Zelda’s protracted hospitalization at Nyon and Scott’s rootless existence in Swiss hotels enforced a physical separation. Matthew J. Bruccoli notes that during this epoch Fitzgerald “began sleeping with other women,” possibly to refute Zelda’s imputation of homosexuality (Bruccoli, Some Sort of Epic Grandeur, 311). When the couple returned to the United States, they tried to resume a semblance of marriage while both translated their wild, ultimately woeful expatriate years into novels. During her second collapse, Zelda completed Save Me the Waltz in early 1932 at the Henry Phipps Psychiatric Clinic of the Johns Hopkins University, and Fitzgerald – complaining of stolen material and indiscreet disclosures – warily supervised her revisions as he toiled to complete Tender is the Night. Yet after a precarious reconciliation, they drifted further apart, Zelda into suicidal derangement (and hospitalization at the Sheppard and Enoch Pratt Hospital) and Scott into alcoholic escapism.

By the time he wrote “The Intimate Strangers” (February–March 1935), Fitzgerald was rusticking in North Carolina, seeking a respite from symptoms of tuberculosis. Based ostensibly on the unconventional marriage of his friends Nora and Lefty Flynn, the story nevertheless incorporates thematic vestiges of Fitzgerald’s years in Europe. In the details of Sara’s marriage to the Marquis de la Guillet de la Guimpé, we discover again the American social desire for European, aristocratic status. But unlike the plot of “Majesty,” Sara’s dream of glamor on the rue du Bac culminates in the despair that impels her early, one-week fling with Killian, the exuberant American to whom she later confesses that she has never loved the Marquis. Even after the death of her husband (a veteran of the Great War), she finds herself pressured to
sustain a French sense of family honor by rejecting the “wild man from nowhere” (Price, 622) with whom she wants to return to her native land. If this story is the “poorest” of Fitzgerald’s Depression-era narratives, as Prigozy maintains, “The Intimate Strangers” still evokes the chaotic war era and its aftermath and suggests that despite their passion, Sara and Killian will remain “strangers” scarred by previous relationships (Bryer, Short Stories: New Approaches, 115). Revealing that Killian still mourns his first wife, Fitzgerald perhaps acknowledges his own marital bereavement, and by naming Sara’s first husband “Eduard” he implicitly attributes the Fitzgeralds’ domestic discord to Zelda’s infatuation a decade earlier with Edouard Jozan. In a narrative about finding, losing, and recapturing love, Fitzgerald apparently sought to bury a tormenting expatriate episode by reexcavating it, but the effort did not succeed.

Six months later, the memory of Zelda’s amour patently inspired “Image on the Heart” (September 1935). Set entirely in France, the story limns the romantic dilemma of Tudy, a nineteen-year-old American widow whose year in Provence has been financed by Tom, a family friend who first pities her, then proposes marriage. When he arrives in France to make Tudy his bride, Tom discovers that she has been spending time with Lt. Riccard, an “impetuous and fiery” (Price, 667) naval aviator. After Riccard displays his ardor with an aerial daredevil stunt, Tom sends Tudy away until their nuptials. From Paris she writes revealingly about Franco-American differences: “They [the French] have a life they never take us into. They plan their lives so differently. But our American lives are so strange that we can never figure things out ahead” (671). Whatever Tudy may be intimating about her ambivalence, Fitzgerald’s allusion to an inscrutable French privacy seems to acknowledge his obsession with Zelda’s affair and its ultimate role in the unraveling of the Fitzgeralds’ marriage. Surely the publication of Save Me the Waltz, with its luminous portrayal of “Lieutenant Jacques Chevre-Feuille of the French Aviation,” had helped to excite his retrospective jealousy. There Zelda had boldly depicted Alabama Knight’s sexual attraction to the Frenchman, as well as her disregard for her husband’s feelings: “He [Jacques] was bronze and smelled of the sand and sun; she felt him naked underneath the starched linen. She didn’t think of David. She hoped he hadn’t seen; she didn’t care. She felt as if she would like to be kissing Jacques Chevre-Feuille on the top of the Arc de Triomphe” (Zelda Fitzgerald, Collected Writings, 86). Fitzgerald’s rewriting of the romance in Tender is the Night indeed has the French mercenary Tommy Barban finally winning Nicole Diver away from her American husband, but in “Image on the Heart,” Tom and Tudy exchange wedding vows despite the bride’s “air of confusion” (Price, 675). As Tom later learns, Tudy
had on the eve of her marriage spent several intimate hours with Riccard on the train from Paris. Faced with Tudy’s reluctant offer of annulment, Tom must make a hard choice: “He had to decide now not upon what was the truth, for that he would never know for certain, but upon the question as to whether he could now and forever put the matter out of his mind, or whether it would haunt their marriage like a ghost” (677). In the story’s happy ending, Tom vows not to give up Tudy and never to reproach her, even though he will also never know the “unfathomable” (678) thought in the depths of her heart. Yet the story bears witness to a contrary reality: Fitzgerald’s inability to put the Jozan affair out of his mind or to resist the implicit reproach of his fictional reenactments (from *Gatsby* onward) of female inconstancy. Precisely because the Riviera episode “haunt[ed] their marriage like a ghost,” the author recurrently projected in his fiction scenes of romantic rivalry and domestic mistrust.

Fitzgerald returned to the subject of expatriate life on two occasions in 1940: in a never-completed story called “News of Paris – Fifteen Years Ago” and in a filmscript based on “Babylon Revisited.” In both works the foreign scene figures as little more than a superficial backdrop; with the world at war, half of France under German occupation, and Fitzgerald living in Hollywood, the Paris of the twenties seemed remote and nearly unimaginable. Yet in April 1940 he wrote to Zelda, “I have grown to hate California and would give my life for three years in France” (*Life in Letters*, 442). Badly in need of health and replenishment, already writing about his career in the past tense, Fitzgerald shared Archibald MacLeish’s nostalgia: “I am sick for home for the red roofs and the olives,/ And the foreign words and the smell of the sea fall.” In his nearly six years in Europe, Fitzgerald had despite adversity produced a body of short fiction that relentlessly exposes the revealing conflicts and practices of Americans abroad. Beyond timeworn clichés about the “Lost Generation,” Fitzgerald’s stories about Americans abroad focus persistently on the encounter with difference that defined expatriation. They explore such problems as the nationalist ethos of Americans in Europe, their class-conscious relations with other displaced Americans, their contact as foreigners with “foreign” peoples and languages, and their adaptation (or lack thereof) to different cultures. From our present-day vantage point, they also challenge preconceptions about Fitzgerald’s abilities as a political observer and reveal a changing social consciousness. Far from indifferent to “socioeconomic realities,” Fitzgerald in fact produced a literature often sharply critical of reckless, moneyed expatriates and their disdain for foreign peoples and practices. In such stories as “One Trip Abroad” and “Indecision,” he openly satirized the delusions of Americans embodying a “repressive hierarchy of values” (to recall Kaplan’s charge) and thereby
Fitzgerald's expatriate years
deconstructed the assumed superiority of the Baedeker-wielding expatriate
to deliver transcultural insights not to be found in any guidebook.

NOTES
1 This list does not include two additional stories, “The Rough Crossing” and “The Rubber Check,” both of which contain very brief European scenes.
5 Alice Hall Petry nevertheless insists: “The element of open mockery in the jaded-but-plucky Emily and her king, the pudgy milquetoast ruler of a vest-pocket Balkan principality, hardly sound like a heartfelt toast to the American girl.” See Fitzgerald's Craft of Short Fiction: The Collected Stories 1920–1935, 186.
7 The patriotic coda was quite possibly inspired by Archibald MacLeish's 1929 poem “American Letter” to Fitzgerald's expatriate friend, Gerald Murphy, which suggests that America is an “idea” rather than a place: “America is neither a land nor a people./A word's shape it is, a wind's sweep.” See Archibald MacLeish, Collected Poems, 1917–52, p. 64.
10 Fitzgerald used the phrase as the title of his 1931 story about Josephine Perry, the rich girl based upon his own collegiate sweetheart, Ginevra King.
11 Scott Donaldson notes that “Two Wrongs” illustrates the “transference of vitality” seen in Tender is the Night but rightly exposes the unbelievability of Bill's late saintliness in “‘Two Wrongs,' or One Wrong Too Many,” in New Essays on F. Scott Fitzgerald's Neglected Stories, ed. Bryer, 167, 173.
12 Casting the abusive, self-destructive McChesney finally as a victim of his wife's ambition, Fitzgerald was of course rewriting the story of his own careerism and Zelda's decision two months earlier to decline a position in the San Carlo Opera Ballet Company of Naples. He portrays McChesney's craving for aristocratic connections as a debasing impulse - thus countering the fantasy of “Majesty” - yet couches the story's main conflict more in domestic than cultural terms, for he
then faced the complications of his own alcoholism and Zelda’s frenzied competitiveness.

13 See Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation, pp. 6–7.


