

Nationality as Intersectional Storytelling: Inventing the *Parisienne*

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Abstract

Nationality traditionally is one of imagology's key terms. In this article, I propose an intersectional understanding of this category, conceiving nationality as an interdependent dynamic. I thus conclude it to be always internally constructed by notions of gender, sexuality, race, class, religion, age, ability, and other identity categories. This complex and multi-layered construct, I argue, is formed narratively. To exemplify this, I analyse practices of stereotyping in Honoré de Balzac's *Illusions perdues* (1843) and Henry James's *The American* (1877) which construct the so-called *Parisienne* as a synecdoche for nineteenth-century France.

Keywords

nationality – intersectionality – Parisienne – Honoré de Balzac – Henry James

1 Becoming a *Parisienne*

In his essay *La Parisienne*, published in 1893, the French journalist Arsène Houssaye claims that a trade minister once said: “If the Parisienne did not already exist, she would have to be invented” (1893, 9).¹ This curious statement implies, most notably, two things: Firstly, that there seems to be a link between the French economy and Parisian women. And secondly, that being a Parisienne signifies something else or rather something *more* than just being a woman who lives in Paris.

And indeed, a close look at the French media of Houssaye's time reveals that he has a point. Advice literature of that time explains to women how to behave

1 My translation. Original quote: “Un ministre de commerce a dit ce beau mot: ‘Si la Parisienne n’existait pas, il faudrait l’inventer.’”

if they want to appear like a true Parisienne, fashion magazines tell them what to wear and how to wear it as a Parisienne, and department store posters advertise where a Parisienne might do her shopping.² These print media were aimed at women who lived in France and other Western European countries or in the US, but for the most part they were targeted at women who *already lived in Paris*. So what exactly is the difference between a Parisian woman and a *Parisienne*?³

In the aforementioned essay, Houssaye elaborates on the topic of becoming a Parisienne by stating: “It’s the first time a little girl wears a dress that you can say: ‘There’s a Parisienne.’ One can also be born a Parisienne at one’s first passion and on one’s first trip to Paris, because it is the country of metamorphoses and transfigurations” (1893, 5).⁴ It is somewhat telling that Houssaye designates Paris a country rather than a city. He intends to elevate Paris and to create the notion of a place that is vast, multifarious, and, above all, self-sufficient. The author thereby emphasizes centralistic discourses that have differentiated Paris from the rest of France for more than 100 years.⁵ This opposition is consistent with that of *centre* and *periphery* as it is analysed within imagological studies in different spatiotemporal contexts. “The relationship between centre and periphery,” as Joep Leerssen stresses, “is not a spatial one, but one of power and prestige” (2007, 279). These narratives accordingly subsume the whole of France, apart from its capital, under the derogatory term *province*. Different regions, cities, towns, and villages thus become one homogeneous and retrogressive space whereas Paris emerges as a modern and “dynamic centre” (Leerssen 2007, 280). The life- and, more importantly, identity-changing trip to Paris Houssaye mentions is a popular topos that aligns well with these discourses. Paris is thereby unified as well and becomes a place with a specific kind of agency—a space that changes the people in it. Consequently, change of place is equated with personal change.

2 See for example Jules Chéret’s posters for the ready-made clothing store “À la Parisienne” or the “How to” guides on behaving like a Parisienne in the lifestyle magazine *Femina*.

3 I elaborate more on the themes and approaches of this essay in my doctoral thesis: “*Voilà une Parisienne!* Stereotypisierungen als verflochtene Erzählungen” (En: “*Voilà une Parisienne!* Stereotypings as Entangled Narratives”; not yet published).

4 My translation. Original quote: “C’est à sa première robe qu’on peut dire d’une petite fille: ‘Voilà une Parisienne.’ On peut encore naître Parisienne à sa première passion et à son premier voyage à Paris, car là est le pays des métamorphoses et des transfigurations.”

5 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for example, writes about fashion and the Parisienne as early as 1761: “Fashion dominates provincial women but the Parisienne dominates fashion [...]” ([1761] 1967, 190). My translation. Original quote: “La mode domine les provinciales ; mais les Parisiennes dominent la mode [...]”

A popular figure of literary history who takes this particular journey is Honoré de Balzac's Mme. de Bargeton. Marie-Louise Anaïs de Bargeton is a character in Balzac's opus magnum, *La Comédie humaine* (1830–1856). In the novel *Lost Illusions* (orig. *Illusions perdues*, publ. in three parts from 1837, in its entirety in 1843), she and her young lover Lucien de Rubempré move from Angoulême to the French capital. In Paris the two are faced with different gender- and class-specific challenges and the pressure to adapt to their new surroundings. Being *provincial*, they both quickly realize, will not suffice anymore. In a neologism characteristic of Balzac's texts, Mme. de Bargeton recognizes a "nécessité de se désangoulêmer" (Balzac [1843] 1983, 137) which approximately translates to a "necessity of rubbing off Angouleme" (Balzac 2016, n.p.). The evaluative contrast between city and country, or rather everything that is Paris and everything that is not (be it villages or (smaller) cities) in France), which Balzac reproduces, is a harsh one.

On a textual level, this is first and foremost achieved through comparisons. Thus, at her first entry into Parisian society Mme. de Bargeton is compared to the attending Parisiennes. The contrast that is created is particularly effective in that the focalization during this scene lies with Lucien—in other words, the woman's lover, who comes from the so-called province as well, evaluates her appearance. The gaze is very import in this scene (and similar ones throughout the novel) and allows for the female figure to only exist in the assessment of the hetero-cis male observer:

There were fair Parisiennes in fresh and elegant toilettes all about him; Mme. de Bargeton's costume, tolerably ambitious though it was, looked dowdy by comparison; the material, like the fashion and the color, was out of date. That way of arranging her hair, so bewitching in Angouleme, looked frightfully ugly here among the daintily devised coiffures which he saw in every direction.

BALZAC 2016, n.p.⁶

Lucien's critical observation is immediately followed by a remark of the heterodiegetic narrator, who, also judging sharply, confirms Lucien's impression and simultaneously generalizes it. Thereby, individual observation becomes stereotyping:

6 Original quote: "Le voisinage de plusieurs jolies Parisiennes, si élégamment, si fraîchement mises, lui fit remarquer la vieillerie de la toilette de madame de Bargeton, quoiqu'elle fût passablement ambitieuse: ni les étoffes, ni les façons, ni les couleurs n'étaient de mode. La coiffure qui le séduisait tant à Angoulême lui parut d'un goût affreux, comparée aux délicates inventions par lesquelles se recommandait chaque femme" (Balzac [1843] 1983, 140).

In the provinces comparison and choice are out of the question; when a face has grown familiar it comes to possess a certain beauty that is taken for granted. But transport the pretty woman of the provinces to Paris, and no one takes the slightest notice of her; her prettiness is of the comparative degree illustrated by the saying that among the blind the one-eyed are kings.

BALZAC 2016, n.p.⁷

By having the confirmation of Lucien's assessment expressed by a heterodiegetic narrator, who is positioned outside of the action and thus appears to be neutral in his judgement, the statement acquires an epistemic content that transcends the story.

In direct comparison with the fashionable Parisiennes, Mme. de Bargeton cannot (yet) compete—and compete she must because the novel constantly sets its characters, and especially the female figures and their appearances, up against each other. In Mme. de Bargeton's eyes, Lucien disqualifies himself as well when she compares him to the elegant Baron du Châtelet and the narrator remarks how the “disenchantment” (ibid.)⁸ of the two is sparked by Paris. Paris, it seems, lends people a clear perspective and sense of judgement.

On the way to the opera the next day, the comparison is resumed. Lucien encounters yet again a number of Parisiennes of whom the text offers no description apart from them being referred to as “divinely dressed and divinely fair” (Balzac 2016, n.p.).⁹ Mme. de Bargeton, Lucien concludes, “compared with these queens, [...] looked like an old woman” (ibid.).¹⁰ At the opera, Lucien compares Mme. de Bargeton to her cousin, again a real (and aristocratic) Parisienne: “[...] the brilliancy of the Parisienne brought out all the defects in her country cousin so clearly by contrast [...]” (ibid.).¹¹ Finally, the novel states that now at last Lucien is able to see the *true* Mme. de Bargeton (“as she really was,” ibid.), the way she is seen by all the other people in Paris: “[...] a tall, lean, withered woman, with a pimpled face and faded complexion; angular, stiff, affected in her manner; pompous and provincial in her speech; and, above all

7 Original quote: “Transportée à Paris, une femme qui passe pour jolie en province, n’obtient pas la moindre attention, car elle n’est belle que par l’application du proverbe: *Dans le royaume des aveugles, les borgnes sont rois*” (Balzac [1843] 1983, 140).

8 Original quote: “désenchantement” (Balzac [1843] 1983, 140).

9 Original quote: “divinement mises et divinement belles” (Balzac [1843] 1983, 145).

10 Original quote: “comparée à ces souveraines, se dessina comme une vieille femme” (Balzac [1843] 1983, 145).

11 Original quote: “[...] la brillante Parisienne faisait si bien ressortir les imperfections de la femme de province [...]” (Balzac [1843] 1983, 147).

these things, dowdily dressed" (ibid.).¹² He feels "ashamed to have fallen in love with this cuttle-fish bone" (ibid.).¹³ and decides to leave her—this, of course, being the ultimate punishment in a society that regards heterosexual marriage as an essential objective and women as the passive party in its attainment.

But a change is already taking place in Mme. de Bargeton. Lucien's judgement, which was initially confirmed and thus legitimized by the narrator in the aforementioned passages, is already subtly invalidated elsewhere in the second part of the novel. In order to create suspense for its readers and to portray its characters, the novel employs changes of narrative viewpoint and focalization. One thing that Lucien does not see and cannot see because his provincial origin still limits his perspective is that Mme. de Bargeton's *metamorphosis*¹⁴ has already begun. In this respect, the readers of the novel know more than Lucien because it is indicated to them at a very early stage that Mme. de Bargeton's first appearances in Parisian high society were intended to be learning opportunities for her. Mme. d'Espard, cousin of Mme. de Bargeton, had made it her business to teach her inexperienced relative how to behave fashionably. Just one day after her opera visit, Mme. de Bargeton overtakes Lucien (figuratively and literally: in a carriage) and, transformed into an elegant Parisienne, leaves him behind. Once again filtered through Lucien's perception, Mme. de Bargeton is depicted as unrecognizable:

All the colors of her toilette had been carefully subordinated to her complexion; her dress was delicious, her hair gracefully and becomingly arranged, her hat, in exquisite taste, was remarkable even beside Mme. d'Espard, that leader of fashion. [...] She had adopted her cousin's gestures and tricks of manner [...]. She had modeled herself on Mme. d'Espard without mimicking her; the Marquise had found a cousin worthy of her [...].

IBID.¹⁵

12 Original quote: "[...] une femme grande, sèche, couperosée, fanée, plus que rousse, anguleuse, guindée, précieuse, prétentieuse, provinciale dans son parler, mal arrangée surtout!" (Balzac [1843] 1983, 147).

13 Original quote: "honteux d'avoir aimé cet os de seiche" (Balzac [1843] 1983, 147).

14 See Balzac [1843] 1983, 160. While Balzac's novel describes Mme. de Bargeton's evolution as a "métamorphose," the English translation by Ellen Marriage, which I am referring to, uses different wording.

15 Original quote: "[...] les couleurs de sa toilette étaient choisies de manière à faire valoir son teint; sa robe était délicieuse; ses cheveux arrangés gracieusement lui seyaient bien, et son chapeau d'un goût exquis était remarquable à côté de celui de madame d'Espard, qui commandait à la mode. [...] Elle avait pris les gestes et les façons de sa cousine [...] Enfin elle s'était faite semblable à madame d'Espard sans la singer; elle était la digne cousine de la marquise [...]" (Balzac [1843] 1983, 159).

The impression is once more confirmed and reinforced by the narrator's comments, which directly follow Lucien's observations.

This *becoming a Parisienne* is told as a narrative of progress in Balzac's novel. It has become evident that living in Paris is not the same as being a Parisienne. Being a Parisienne rather is something that can (and should) be learned. The story stereotypes the Parisienne as a figure that revolves around appearance, fashion, taste, and a certain habitus. All of them are connotated very positively and set apart from a negative counterimage: the so-called *Provinciale*, who has none of these things, is thus inferior in every way, and consequently runs the risk of being expelled from Parisian high society. But how is it possible that it takes Mme. de Bargeton only two days to achieve a transformation that is made to look all-encompassing when beforehand she was declared not only to be lacking in manners, speech, and taste but also shamed because of her body and age? This question requires a closer look at the novel and points to the intersectional nature of stereotypes.

2 Intersectionality as a Perspective within Imagological Studies

The concept of intersectionality received its initial impulses from critical race theory and Black feminism in the 1970s, mainly in the United States. In the meantime, it has become a central element of gender studies worldwide.¹⁶ The basis of intersectionality is the conviction that systems of power and dominance are interwoven in highly complex ways. Therefore, the main idea of an intersectional analysis is to focus on the simultaneous workings of inequality and discrimination. The term *intersectionality* was coined by the law professor and critical race scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in her essay "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" (1989) which deals with the multiple discriminations of Black women on the grounds of sexism and racism within the US legal system. In her essay, the author illustrates the interlinkages of these processes by means of the, now famous, metaphor of the crossroad, which visualizes the various streets as forms of discrimination:

Consider an analogy for traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happened in an intersection, it can be caused by cars travelling from any number of

¹⁶ For a concise overview of intersectional theory, see Hill Collins and Bilge (2016); Walgenbach (2012).

directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination.

CRENSHAW 1989, 149

As is the case with all visualizations, this is necessarily a simplification of the matter for the sake of providing orientation and, thus, facilitating discourse. After all, in order to *intersect* at a specific moment, categories like gender or race, of course, must have been separate before that moment. Other approaches that have further explored the concept of intersectionality emphasize the instability of gender, race, class, and similar dimensions of power. Researchers like Evelyn Nakano Glenn (2002), Leslie McCall (2005), Gabriele Dietze, or Lann Hornscheidt (cf. Dietze et al. 2012) reject the idea of stable categories, defining them instead as context-specific and internally structured by one another.

This idea provides a new perspective on Balzac's character Mme. de Bargeton and her sudden transformation. In the novel, France is divided into Paris and Not-Paris, the so-called province—the latter being the negative counter-image that constructs Paris as the superior norm. Both of these images are personified and clearly gendered, which is a common strategy that has been described by scholars engaging in gender studies for a long time in different contexts.¹⁷ Once in Paris, both Lucien and Mme. de Bargeton need to adapt to the norm. Since the novel presents a hegemonic hetero-cis male perspective, Mme. de Bargeton is, for the most part, scrutinized for her appearance and behaviour and judged rather harshly. However, in the end, she is the one whose change is realized quicker and more efficiently than that of her male counterpart. This has nothing to do with a questioning of gender roles. It has to do with the way class is narrated in the novel. Gender, race, class, sexuality, and age are entangled narratively through the story. It is only because Lucien and Mme. de Bargeton are cisgendered, white, aristocratic, heterosexual, and relatively young that they gain access to that image of elegant and superior Paris, to Parisian high society, in the first place. Mme. de Bargeton is “already” thirty-six years old when they arrive and is looked down upon because of it (“old woman,” “withered,” “faded”). But Lucien has a disadvantage of his own that clearly outweighs Mme. de Bargeton's age: he is only partly aristocratic. What is more, it is his mother who was noble, not his father. When Mme. de Bargeton's

17 See for example Silke Wenk's works on allegories of different nations that present a form of immobilized femininity which, in turn, represents a secure nation (cf. Wenk 1996, 2000).

cousin is made aware of the fact, she determines Lucien's fate: "The young man looks like a shopman in his Sunday suit; evidently he is neither wealthy nor noble; he has a fine head, but he seems to me to be very silly; he has no idea what to do, and has nothing to say for himself; in fact, he has no breeding" (Balzac 2016, n.p.).¹⁸ It is this last point, uttered as a kind of bottom line, that proves to be the decisive factor. About Mme. de Bargeton, however, her cousin concludes: "If Mme. de Bargeton needed polish, on the other hand she possessed the native haughtiness of good birth, and that indescribable something which may be called 'pedigree'" (ibid.).¹⁹ Class is clearly biologized in the novel ("no breeding," "good birth," "pedigree" (which is called "race" in the French original)) and thus becomes unchanging and inescapable. Balzac stresses the superiority of aristocracy by setting his story during the Second Restoration, thereby choosing a political context different from the time of the novel's publication: a time when aristocracy still retained powers over the bourgeoisie. It is, thus, the interlinkage of gender and class that leads to Lucien's failure, while it opens a role for Mme. de Bargeton that is depicted as synonymous with Parisian superiority: that of the Parisienne.

By their very nature, stereotypes are intersectional dynamics. They are a means of constructing social groups and producing knowledge about them. In most cases, practices of stereotyping attempt this via normalization and naturalization. They create identity and belonging but also, inevitably, exclusion and discrimination. A concept of intersectionality can be very useful in understanding and deconstructing these processes.²⁰ It has been rightfully pointed out by the editors of this volume (cf. Edtstadler, Folie, and Zocco 2022, from 31) and by other scholars in the field like Joep Leerssen (2016) that intersectionality can provide a valuable perspective for imagological research. Ethnotypes or national stereotypes, as Leerssen stresses, "always work in conjunction with other frames, especially gender, age and class" (ibid., 26).²¹ My own research employs a concept of intersectionality that builds on two approaches: (1) the general instability of categories, and (2) the interdependency of these categories. When applied to imagology's central concept, nationality, this means assuming an idea of nationality that is necessarily open, unstable, and always

18 Original quote: "Cette mise de boutiquier endimanché prouve que ce garçon n'est ni riche ni gentilhomme ; sa figure est belle, mais il me paraît fort sot, il ne sait ni se tenir ni parler ; enfin il n'est pas élevé" (Balzac [1843] 1983, 157).

19 Original quote: "Si madame de Bargeton manquait d'usage, elle avait la hauteur native d'une femme noble et ce *je ne sais quoi* que l'on peut nommer la *race*" (Balzac [1843] 1983, 148).

20 This fact is underlined by the multifarious contributions of this section (cf. the articles by Martina Thiele (chap. 13), Karin Andersson (chap. 15), and Ivana Drmić (chap. 16)).

21 On the methodology of a gender-based imagology see for example Bock (2013).

already interwoven with gender, race, class, age, sexuality, ability, religion, and other categories. As a performative concept, nationality constantly has to be reproduced in different temporal, spatial, and media-specific settings. This highly complex and multi-layered construct is as much about producing a form of national identity as it is about exclusion and discrimination of identities that are not construed as part of this definition. An intersectional understanding of nationality provides a range of questions for an imagological analysis. Above all, it draws attention to the ways that stereotypes of a certain nation differ in various texts rather than to the way they are similar. If we assume that nationality always contains notions of gender, ability, or age, imagology needs to unwrap and to expose these entanglements. This can be achieved by close readings that focus on *how* a national stereotype is narrated—what spaces are assigned to it, for example, how it is perceived by others, and if and when focalization lies with that stereotyped figure. Furthermore, an intersectional perspective draws our attention to elements of nationalized stereotypes that are made to appear self-evident—like the whiteness²² and heterosexuality of the Parisienne.

The Parisienne has become a national stereotype in the course of the nineteenth century, repeatedly constructing the French capital as a synecdoche for France as a whole. Like Balzac's Mme. de Bargeton, those female characters are always cisgendered, heterosexual, white, able-bodied, and young, or middle-aged. Since the Parisienne represents a nationalized norm, her class changes in the course of the nineteenth century from nobility to bourgeoisie, along with political power shifts in the country. Another literary text that engages in these practices of stereotyping is Henry James's *The American* (1877).²³

22 Here, imagology can profit from critical whiteness studies which do not analyse whiteness as an actual skin colour but rather as a racialized normative construction (see e.g. Hill 1997). This perspective can be helpful in deconstructing practices of stereotyping that render whiteness invisible, thus reproducing it as the norm that does not have to be marked.

23 In my analyses I avoid the concepts of hetero- and auto-images. Even though it would be possible to describe Balzac's Parisienne as an auto-image while describing the Parisienne in James's novel as a hetero-image, I think this categorization would create the notion of two stable diametrical figures and thus inherently limit the possibilities for my analysis. My aim is rather to compare and contrast practices of stereotyping in different media, which shifts the analytical focus to the (literary) strategies and ways of narrating a stereotype. Additionally, it leaves room to account for ambivalences, changes, and variations within different stereotyping. I agree with Joep Leerssen who states: "What is an auto-image and what a hetero-image is not the stable polarity that it was once thought to be" (2016, 21).

3 Nationality as Intersectional Storytelling

The American is primarily set in Paris, which is thus (re)produced as a nucleus of European cultural history.²⁴ In James's novel, Europe becomes a homogeneous, self-reliant entity with a privileged history and culture—being a white, heteronormative, binary, abled culture that knows no more than two classes: nobility and bourgeoisie. The story's first chapter takes place at the Louvre: a topical place linked to cultural knowledge, art, and distinction. More precisely, the story's starting point is the Salon Carré, where the Salon exhibition of the Académie des Beaux-Arts had been taking place since the beginning of the eighteenth century—virtually the heart of the Louvre at the time the novel is set.

Here, the readers are introduced to the novel's good-natured but rather naive protagonist, the US-American Christopher Newman. After a brief description of Newman's feeble attempts to grasp the artworks of the Louvre, the heterodiegetic narrator humorously characterizes him as a stereotypical American:

An observer with anything of an eye for national types would have had no difficulty in determining the local origin of this undeveloped connoisseur, and indeed such an observer might have felt a certain humorous relish of the almost ideal completeness with which he filled out the national mould. The gentleman [...] was a powerful specimen of an American.

JAMES [1877] 1978, 17

What is noticeable about this description is not only the humorous but also biologicistic tone of the passage, which allows for an implicit comparison with descriptions and classifications of animal species (“a powerful specimen”). At the same time, a kind of connoisseurship is created that reinforces the association with nature observation: the trained spectator will easily be able to assign Newman to a particular nation or “local origin” (ibid.). One might ask oneself at this point whether the humorous tone in which Newman is described and classified by the text ironizes national stereotyping. A close reading makes it clear, however, that the novel merely produces an aesthetic (and hierarchical) distance between the readers and the protagonist, which is supposed to make him the object of ridicule. By essentializing the character's origin and subjecting his perception of the world to national barriers, the stereotypes reproduced by the text are much rather reinforced.

24 The Europe of Henry James's novels is a limited, topical Europe: the novels are set, above all, in Western Europe and there, almost exclusively, in Great Britain, France, and Italy.

Returning to the *histoire*, subsequently, it is Newman who is observing: he is watching a woman copying a painting by Murillo. The copy (and thus the talent of the woman) is quickly devalued by the narrator, who refers to her work simply as a “squinting Madonna” (James [1877] 1978, 19). Gazes and their inherent power structures are of considerable importance in this chapter—just as they were in Balzac’s novel. The nameless copyist initially exists solely through Newman’s gaze and through the narrator’s comments. While Newman was described extensively, the readers only learn about the copyist that she is a “young lady” with a “boyish coiffure” (ibid.). While Newman observes the copyist, the story makes it clear that she is aware of it: “As the little copyist proceeded with her work, she sent every now and then a responsive glance toward her admirer” (ibid.). Noticeably, the female figure is constantly talked about in a diminutive form (“little copyist,” “boyish coiffure”). While the protagonist’s gaze is direct and relaxed (“staring at [...] in profound enjoyment” (ibid., 17), “he admires” (ibid., 19)), hers is swift and hectic (“restless glance” (ibid.)). What follows is a kind of dance-like performance during which the copyist displays her body in order to maintain the protagonist’s gaze:

The cultivation of the fine arts appeared to necessitate, to her mind, a great deal of byplay, a great standing off with folded arms and head drooping from side to side, stroking of a dimpled chin with a dimpled hand, sighing and frowning and patting of the foot, fumbling in disordered tresses for wandering hair-pins. These performances were accompanied by a restless glance, which lingered longer than elsewhere upon the gentleman we have described.

IBID.

Her performance ultimately is successful. Newman approaches the woman (“At last he rose abruptly [...]” (ibid.)) and addresses her with a sudden and contextless “Combien?” (ibid.).²⁵ This first verbal communication between the story’s characters not only reveals Newman’s lack of French language skills and manners. Since his “Combien?” directly follows the woman’s bodily display, it refers not only to her painting but also, on another level, to herself. The artist, having consciously hinted at it, recognizes the double meaning of Newman’s statement but decides to bypass it.²⁶ Still, Newman’s behaviour in the Salon Carré (and subsequently in the further course of the novel) reveals

25 Meaning “How much?” in English.

26 “The artist stared a moment, gave a little pout, shrugged her shoulders [...]” (James [1877] 1978, 19).

the capitalist consumerist logic²⁷ that evidently shapes his perception of the world and is in line with negative stereotypes of US-Americans during the nineteenth century. The aesthetic enjoyment of art, as was made clear right from the beginning of the story, does not appeal to him. Instead, he strives to consume art as a commodity, to own it, and to take it home with him.

After the bumpy start, a communication unfolds between Newman and the copyist, in the course of which the protagonist buys her painting (which is repeatedly marked by the narrator as inferior in quality). Furthermore, he will order eight more of her paintings in the course of the story. The dialogue between Newman and the Parisian woman, who is called Noémie Nioche, is as clumsy as its beginning, though. Both of them only partially master the language of the other and yet Noémie Nioche retains control from the onset. Once again, the readers know more than the main character; they know that the copyist continues to cleverly play her role, while Newman remains unsuspecting. At one point, the narrator remarks on her behaviour: "The young lady's aptitude for playing a part at short notice was remarkable" (James [1877] 1978, 20), while Newman reflects only a few moments later: "[...] it gratified him to think that she was so honest. Beauty, talent, virtue; she combined everything!" (ibid.)

By the end of their first meeting, Noémie Nioche has not only persuaded the protagonist to purchase her (rather bad and also unfinished) painting. She has also arranged for Newman to take French lessons with her father, despite him not being a teacher and not being confident about the idea at all. For both, she relentlessly negotiates exorbitant prices. When she has successfully managed everything, Noémie Nioche takes her belongings and leaves Christopher Newman behind in the Salon Carré. The chapter ends with the following sentence: "The young lady gathered her shawl about her like a perfect Parisienne, and it was with the smile of a Parisienne that she took leave of her patron" (James [1877] 1978, 25). The effect of this statement is that of a conclusion or even a kind of punch line. Noémie Nioche has been successful in her act and she has simultaneously assigned the roles in this chamber play: Parisienne and wealthy, naive, and uncultivated American.

In this first chapter of the novel, the two characters are diametrically constructed: *New World* versus *Old World*; naive, good-natured, financially independent, and uncultivated versus clever, manipulative, financially dependent, and cultivated; cis male versus cis female. Both characters constitute each other and, following the dominant Western concept of gender, remain

27 For an analysis of this consumer logic displayed by Newman, see Kovács (2006, 62–67).

mutually dependent. Interestingly, Noémie Nioche is not named a Parisienne but is merely compared to one (even though she is, of course, from Paris). In this chapter, the stereotype of the Parisienne is not (solely) employed to characterize a female figure but, above all, to characterize the city and its atmosphere. The first chapter of James's novel acts as a kind of prologue in that it establishes its setting by presenting a personification of it. Noémie Nioche was a Parisienne in her actions, which were very clearly evaluated by the heterodiegetic narrator. Everything she is, is Paris. In that way, the chapter foreshadows the rest of the novel's plot that has Newman constantly fail because he misjudges Paris and its inhabitants.

Noticeably, the novel retains the French term *Parisienne* rather than translate it. Thereby, it explicitly calls up the stereotype—a stereotype that is known to the novel's implicit reader as a specific representation of bourgeois, white, able-bodied, heterosexual, cisgendered femininity that is clearly linked to a particular concept of Paris. Interestingly, the naming of the Parisienne coincides with the first time that fashion and performing in/with fashion are mentioned in the text. But the point here is not to understand what it means exactly to put on a shawl “like a perfect Parisienne” (ibid.) or what smiling like one looks like—that remains for the readers to be imagined. The chapter is about setting up two intersectional stereotypes against one another. Furthermore, it is about the narrative production and essentialization of the nation as an active agent that generates clearly identifiable people. In *The American*, topoi, clichés, and stereotypes are exaggerated in a way that makes the novel seem like a parody of those constructs. At the same time, though, the story does not provide its characters with a way out of these fixed structures. The protagonist and the majority of the other characters are doomed to fail because of them. It is only Noémie Nioche, the representation of a manipulative, artificial Paris, who succeeds in the end.

4 Conclusion

In James's novel, the Parisienne represents and produces France as a nation. Moreover, the stereotype acts as a representation of Europe as a whole, a counterimage to that of America. This idea of nationality or national identity, though, is not a stable one. It only ever appears to be because national stereotypes provide linear narratives, which seek to achieve coherence, chronology, and causality. Imagology, as Joep Leerssen has put it, is about “deconstructing the discourse of national and ethnic essentialism” (2016, 13). An intersectional perspective can be helpful in achieving just that: it focuses our attention on the

narrative interlinkages of gender, race, class, sexuality, age, ability, and other identity categories that are (re)produced through stereotypes like that of the Parisienne. An intersectional perspective increases awareness for the specific entanglements that are created by literary texts. In Balzac's *Lost Illusions*, for example, Mme. de Bargeton's gender, race, class, sexuality, and ability are tantamount to an idea of a modern, elegant, superior Paris. However, an analysis of the novel reveals class to be the decisive category, which ultimately decides the fate of both protagonists.²⁸ This is not the case for later literary representations of the Parisienne. Henry James's *Noémie Nioche* retains the elegant, fashionable superiority of Balzac's Parisienne. But her age and class have changed. In accordance with political shifts in the country, the Parisienne of the second half of the nineteenth century is always a bourgeois woman. Again, both the character's age and class are pivotal for that first encounter between consumerist, hetero-cis male America and artificial, hetero-cis female France. Stereotypes like that of the Parisienne have no fixed outline or structure. Their stability depends on perpetual repetition. A comparative analysis of different literary texts (and, possibly, other media) reveals the references, the demarcations, the emphases, the ruptures, and ambivalences that mark these dissimilar iterations.

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28 The nobility of Mme. de Bargeton is, of course, always already interwoven with her gender, sexuality, race, ability, etc.

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