

ABSTRACT

KAYLA FORREST. *More Than a Moment: American Expatriate Writers in Paris from the Lost Generation to the Twenty-First Century.* (Under the direction of Professor Michael Grimwood.)

Americans have long held a romantic view of Paris, and though many visitors only appreciate the tourist destinations, the City of Light has influenced a variety of American expatriate writers in more concrete and profound ways. Using J. Gerald Kennedy's argument of the subjectivity of place and Donald Pizer's assumption that American expatriate writing constitutes a "moment" in literary history, I argue that Paris's effect on writers is reflected not merely in the Lost Generation community of the 1920s, but also in the experiences of contemporary writers. As a place, the city has attracted and inspired writers through its multi-faceted appeal, including a record of political competition between France and the United States; a rich heritage of art, history, and culture that Americans recognize as alluring and foreign; the alternative of Paris as a liberalized culture with a higher tolerance for the taboo than the conservative United States; and an effect on visitors that makes them feel that the city is foreign but also familiar. All of these factors, in addition to idiosyncratic reasons, have drawn American expatriate artists to the city, resulting in exilic communities of art and a large body of American expatriate literature. Though each writer sees Paris through their own subjective lens, they find that the city presents a brilliant kaleidoscope of subject matter, experiences, and thought-provoking questions that require digestion through the written word. By comparing Ernest Hemingway and David Sedaris who lived in Paris in the early twentieth and twenty-first centuries, respectively, I assert that the similarities between the two writers, as well as the comparable effects of Paris, on their work and the work of their contemporaries, is not only significant, but confirms Paris's importance as a magnetic locale for American expatriates, whose influence spans more than a moment in American literary history.