

【연구논문】

## Reunion of the United States and Europe: Henry James' Earlier Novels

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In the domain of culture, the United States was largely dependent upon Europe in its earlier years. Its political independence did not mean cultural independence as well. It proclaimed that it had its own artists, writers, and thinkers as much as it had its own political leaders, but the claim was a pretense. No matter how great American cultural leaders might have seemed on the local stage, they were in essence creatures of European culture. Their originality lay largely in their efforts to adapt old ideas to the new environment. New England Puritanism, the American Enlightenment, and the American romantic movement, all had aspects of originality, but the very concepts were from somewhere else. With the emergence of pragmatism, however, the United States finally achieved the sort of a distinctive indigenous thought which Emerson had called for in the 1830s. Ideas largely originated in the United States soon came to influence Europeans and subsequently Asians as well.

At the same time that pragmatic thinkers were developing

distinctive ideas at home, artists and writers were going into exile abroad. Unable to mature on their native soil and forced to suffer strict and narrow moral and artistic prohibitions, they sought what they needed in Europe. Among the artists and writers drawn to Europe, one of the most important was Henry James, Jr. He made the United States unavoidable in any discussions about literature, introducing the novel as theater and then the novel of consciousness, and pioneering modern theories of fiction. As T. S., Eliot points out, the works of Henry James form a “complete whole.” Thus, ideally, one must deal with all of them, as Eliot claims, in order to grasp both “the fundamental identity of spirit” and “the gradual development.”<sup>1)</sup> But James’ life-long concern with the dialectic between the qualities of Europe and those of the United States is quite clearly discernable in his earlier works. Thus, as a point of departure to understand James, and through him the American cultural and intellectual milieu at the time, this paper examines James’ four novels which deal with the transatlantic situation: *Roderick Hudson* (1876), *The American* (1877), *The Europeans* (1878), and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). It argues that James conceives the relationship between Europe and the United States in a complicated and ambiguous way, and that the theme of “fortunate fall,” as suggested by his father Henry James, Sr., helps explain the dialectic between so-called American innocence and European sophistication.

*Roderick Hudson* is James’ first novel to explicitly contrast Europe with the United States. The theme of the book is most clearly stated

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1) Quoted from Dorothea Krook, *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1962), 1-2.

when Rowland Mallet, Roderick's patron, looks at Roderick's statue of a youth drinking from a vessel:

"Tell me this," said Rowland; "Did you mean anything particular by your young Waterdrinker? Does he represent an idea? Is he a pointed symbol?"

Hudson raised his eyebrows and gently stroked his hair.

"Why, he's a youth you know; he's innocence, he's health, he's strength, he's curiosity. Yes, he's a lot of grand things."

"And is the cup also a symbol?"

"The cup is knowledge, pleasure, experience. Anything of that kind!"<sup>2)</sup>

The boy, with his innocence and curiosity, stands for the United States in need of European experience and knowledge.

In the novel, the United States is represented above all as the land without art. It can produce artists like Roderick, and those with a natural taste for the arts like Mary Garland, Roderick's fiancée. But they must go to Europe to study and to feed their taste. James parodies the United States, whose environment is too barren and crude for sensitive and imaginative artists to grow and mature. When he first meets Rowland, Roderick suggests his idea of a native art:

It's a wretched business ... this virtual quarrel of ours with our own country, this everlasting impatience that so many of us feel to get out of it. Can there be no battle then and is one's only safety in flight? ... [I] didn't see why we shouldn't produce the greatest works in the world. We were the biggest people, and we ought to have the biggest conceptions. The biggest conceptions, of course, would bring forth in time the biggest performances.

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2) Henry James, *Roderick Hudson* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), 26-27.

We had only to be true to ourselves, to pitch in and not be afraid, to fling imitation overboard and fix our eyes upon our National Individuality.

Roderick declares, in his patriotism, that “there’s a career for a man, and I have twenty minds to embrace it on the spot—to be the typical, original, aboriginal American artist!”<sup>3)</sup> The parody becomes obvious, when Roderick immediately forgets his plea for native art at the first offer of Rome by Rowland and follows him there.

The common American taste for art is represented by Mr. Striker and Mrs. Hudson. The antique sculpture is for Mr. Striker, “an image of a pagan deity, with considerable dirt sticking to it, and no arms, no pose, and no clothing.”<sup>4)</sup> Mrs. Hudson, like other good people of Northampton, Massachusetts, where Jonathan Edwards preached approximately a century and a half ago, has “a holy horror of a profession which consists exclusively, as she supposes, in making figures of people divested of all clothing. Sculpture, to her mind, is an insidious form of immorality.”<sup>5)</sup> With a Puritan tradition of the seriousness of labor still alive, the arts are condemned not only as immoral but as idle. Objecting to Roderick’s plans and hopes, Mr. Striker contrasts himself with Roderick: “I suppose you’re … very enlightened, very cultivated, quite up to mark in the fine arts, and all that sort of thing. I’m a plain practical old boy, content to follow an honorable profession in a free country. I didn’t go to any part of Europe to learn my business. … I’m a self-made man, every inch of me!”<sup>6)</sup> Even Mary, with her keen natural taste, takes sides with Mr.

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3) Ibid., 32-33.

4) Ibid., 59.

5) Ibid., 29.

Striker, as far as morality is concerned. In response to Rowland's remark that "in Europe the burden and the obloquy of idleness are less heavy than here," Mary says, "In that surely we are better than Europe."<sup>7)</sup>

In Rome, Roderick finds "the sufficient negation of his native scene." Rome represents age, and the weight of tradition, which bears upon the present. It is the place for "those spirits ... with a deep relish for the element of accumulation in the human picture and for the infinite superpositions of history."<sup>8)</sup> The accumulated weight of history is present in its art. As Rowland says, Saint Peter's "is not all of [Rome], but it is a large part of it." In Rome, he continues, pictures, ruins, statues, beggars, monks are "impregnated with life; they're the results of an immemorial, a complex and accumulated, civilization."<sup>9)</sup>

The old and complex civilization has a profound effect on the American mind. As Mary meditates,

I used to think ... that if any trouble came to me I should bear it like a stoic. But that was at home, where things don't speak to us of enjoyment as they do here. Here it's such a mixture; one doesn't know what to choose, what to believe. Beauty stands there—beauty such as this night and this place and all this sad strange summer have been so full of—and it penetrates to one's soul and lodges there and keeps saying that man wasn't made ... to struggle so much and miss so much, but to ask of life as a matter of course some beauty and some charm. This place has destroyed any scrap of consistency that I ever possessed, but even if I must myself say something

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6) *Ibid.*, 62-63.

7) *Ibid.*, 74.

8) *Ibid.*, 92.

9) *Ibid.*, 334.

sinful I love it!<sup>10)</sup>

Whereas Europe helps Mary to expand and enlighten her mind, it also contributes to bringing about Roderick's degeneration and death. He is disintegrated specifically by Christina Light, but through her by Europe itself. Beautiful and corrupt, Christina is associated with Europe itself. Despite her part-American ancestry, it is Europe, Rowland says, that has made her what she is. Her affair with Roderick has the dimension of a moral encounter between Europe and the United States, since Roderick, with his indigenous name of Hudson, his innocence, and curiosity, represents the United States as much as Christina stands for Europe.

Since Roderick's disintegration is largely caused by his extreme disappointment at the loss of Christina, it can be said that he is victimized by Christina, and in extension, American innocence is corrupted by European sophistication. There is an element of validity in this reading. Christina is evoked several times as having a kind of evil effect. Rowland feels that "she was unsafe; that she was a complex, willful, passionate creature who might easily draw down a too confiding spirit into some strange underworld of unworthy sacrifice, not unfurnished with traces of others of the lost."<sup>11)</sup> Later in the novel Christina herself tells Rowland: "You remember I told you that I was in part the world's and the devil's." Roderick at the end declares himself "damned," and tells his mother that he has "gone utterly to the devil!" "If I hadn't come to Rome," he cries, "I

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10) *Ibid.*, 456-507.

11) *Ibid.*, 186.

shouldn't have fallen."<sup>12)</sup>

But in James' conception, the relationship between the United States and Europe, between innocence and experience, is more complicated than this. In his preface to the novel for the New York Edition, James himself comments on the problem. Christina as the sole agent of Roderick's disintegration, James says, "fails to commend itself to our sense of truth and proportion" in the novel.<sup>13)</sup> Roderick's fall "from a great height"<sup>14)</sup> is not only the result of Christina's corrupting effect, but also that of his own moral defects. For James innocence is not merely a virtue to be celebrated; it has a destructive side as well. Although Roderick is innocent, in that he is ignorant of the European past, he is not morally innocent at all. Roderick separates the aesthetic from the moral. He insists on an absolute freedom as an artist, and places himself in no real relation to others. In short, as Rowland argues in his final scene with Roderick, he is an egotist:

"It's a perpetual sacrifice then to live with a remorseless egotist!"

"I'm a remorseless egotist?" Roderick returned.

"Did it never occur to you?"

"An egotist to whom you have made perpetual sacrifice?" ...

"You're selfish," said Rowland; "You think only of yourself and believe only in your own history. You regard other people only as they play into your own hands. You've always been very frank about it, and the thing seemed so mixed up with the nature of your genius and the very breath of your life that often one was willing to take the evil with the good and to be thankful that,

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12) *Ibid.*, 492, 424.

13) *Ibid.*, xv.

14) *Ibid.*, 523.

considering your great talent, you were no worse. But if one was to believe in you as I've done one was to pay a tax on one's faith!" ...

"I've been eager, grasping, obstinate, vain, ungrateful, indifferent, cruel?"

"I've accused you mentally of all these things—with the particular exception of vanity."<sup>15)</sup>

After this conversation, in a disturbed state of mind, Roderick falls into the Alpine ravine. His fall is thus partly caused by his egotism, the reverse side of innocence, which keeps him from attaining maturity through experience. Despite his fall, however, Roderick is not disfigured and remains beautiful. His beauty in death suggests the beauty that he might have brought into the world through his innocence, if it had succeeded in its confrontation with the world.

In *The American*, James more explicitly contrasts American innocence and European sophistication. The obvious theme of the novel is the attempt by a rather innocent American businessman to marry a woman from an impoverished French aristocratic family only to discover the complexity and ugliness of the old society. Christopher Newman, with his symbolic name, is represented as the prototypical American. He has "the flat jaw and the firm, dry neck which are frequent in the American type."<sup>16)</sup> Newman is also a self-made American. Benjamin Franklin is alluded to several times in the book: "If he [Newman] did not, like Dr. Franklin in Philadelphia, march along the street munching a penny loaf it was only because he had not the penny loaf necessary to the performance."<sup>17)</sup> Starting from

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15) Ibid., 508.

16) Henry James, *The American* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), 3.

17) Ibid., 27.



nothing, Newman thus out-Franklins Franklin. He has risen to the top of the financial world through his enterprise during the post-Civil War decade. He has made a large enough “pile” of money to enable him to retire from his business and to see Europe.

Newman clearly knows why he comes to Europe. “I’ve come to see Europe,” he says, “to get the best out of it I can. I want to see all the great things and do what the best people do.”<sup>18)</sup> He believes that “Europe was made for him and not he for Europe. ... The world, to his sense, was a great bazaar where one might stroll about and purchase handsome things; but he was no more conscious, individually, of social pressure than he admitted the claim of the obligatory purchase.”<sup>19)</sup> Thus he views life in terms of money, will, and possession. Although shrewd and practical, he does not have a sophisticated view of things.

Newman is ignorant of the arts and has little taste. The aesthetic question baffles him and gives him a headache. But he makes no pretence and admits that he knows nothing about art. Newman has quite a relaxed view of life and art:

To expand ... to the full compass of any such experience as was held to stir men’s blood represented his nearest approach to a high principle. He had always hated to hurry to catch railroad-trains, and yet had always caught them; and just so an undue solicitude for the right side [culture] seemed a sort of silly dawdling at the station, a proceeding properly confined to women, foreigners and invalids. All this properly confined to women, foreigners and invalids. All this admitted, Newman enjoyed his journey,

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18) *Ibid.*, 29.

19) *Ibid.*, 87.

when once he had fairly entered the current, as intimately as if he had kept a diary of raptures.<sup>20)</sup>

The culture of Europe has its effect upon Newman. After his summer of seeing the museums and the cathedrals, James notes, “He had done what he wanted; he had given his mind a chance to ‘improve,’ if it would. He fondly believed it had improved a good deal.” He comes to feel something of the artistic tradition of Europe: “It had come back to him simply that what he had been looking at all summer was a very rich and bristling world, and that it had not all been made by men ‘live’ in his old mean sense.”<sup>21)</sup>

However, Newman’s genius lies in his acquisitiveness rather than in his capacity for aesthetic appreciation, whether the object in question is Clare de Cintre or the art in the Louvre. In his attempt to enter the French aristocratic society, his acquisitiveness is most evident: “To make it perfect, as I see it, there must be a lovely being perched on the pile like some shining statue crowning some high monument. She must be as good as she’s beautiful and as clever as she’s good. ... I want, in a word, the best article in the market.”<sup>22)</sup>

His inability to appreciate the European tradition is sharply betrayed in the debate between Valentin and him about Valentin’s decision to fight the duel. Newman calls the duel “a wretched theatrical affair.” Valentin answers that “it’s our only resource at given moments, and I hold it a good thing. Quite apart from the merit of the cause in which a meeting may take place, it strikes a

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20) *Ibid.*, 87-88.

21) *Ibid.*, 100, 102.

22) *Ibid.*, 49.

romantic note that seems to me in this age of vile prose greatly to recommend it. It's a remnant of a higher-tempered time; one ought to cling to it." Newman retorts: "I don't know what you mean by a higher-tempered time. ... Because your great-grandfather liked to prance, is that any reason for you, who have got beyond it?"<sup>23)</sup> Newman's dry logic against Valentin's complex sense of honor seems to represent the American attitude of obtuseness towards Europe.

The Bellegardes represent European wickedness and avidity. They destroy Claire's chances of happiness by tying her, out of greed, to the old Comte de Cintre and then driving her to the convent. When Newman is satisfied with his marriage to Claire in his first meeting with the Bellegardes, they treat him with haughtiness. But here their avidity is most vividly revealed:

"Will you then just let me alone with my chance?"

"You don't know what you ask. I'm a very proud and meddling old person." [Madame de Bellegarde rejoins.]

"Well, I'm very rich," he returned with a world of desperate intention.

She fixed her eyes on the floor, and he thought it probable she was weighing the reasons in favour of resenting his so calculated directness. But at last looking up, "How rich?" She simply articulated.<sup>24)</sup>

The duchess, Madame d'Outreville, provides another example of moral depravity. Newman visits her in order to expose the Bellegardes' sin. She notices his intentions but does not give him a chance to talk about the matter. Newman realizes that he has nothing to tell her:

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23) *Ibid.*, 359.

24) *Ibid.*, 197.

Wherein would it profit him to denounce the Bellegardes to her for traitors and the Marquis into the bargain for a murderer? ... What in the world had he been thinking of when he fancied Madame d'Outreville could help him, and that it would conduce to his comfort to make her think ill of the Bellegardes? What did her opinion of the Bellegardes matter to him? It was only a shade more important than the opinion the Bellegardes entertained of herself.<sup>25)</sup>

Since the Bellegardes are incredibly vicious, Newman gets the “sense of being a good fellow wronged.”<sup>26)</sup> In the denial of his admittance to French society, however, Newman is not simply a victim. He possesses flaws that can almost justify the Bellegardes’ refusal to accept him. He is acquisitive in the manner of the American businessman, and is guilty of treating people as things. Throughout his courtship, he behaves as if he were purchasing an article on the market. This commercial crudeness makes Newman unsympathetic as a passionate lover. In addition, his final defeat stems from his ignorance, or innocence, of the inheritance of Europe, artistic or social, and his unwillingness to understand it. There is then in *The American* a hint of a fortunate fall theme, although not fully developed. The Bellegarde at least teach Newman that he cannot buy everything he wants. In this light, his renunciation confronted with the “pale, dead, discoloured wall”<sup>27)</sup> of French society, is not so much a moral victory of American innocence against European corruption as the fear of an innocent towards a complex and ugly world.

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25) Ibid., 507.

26) Ibid., 528.

27) Ibid., 532.

In *The Europeans*, James turns to the European in the American scene in order to further explore the international contrast. In the novel, Europeans are not represented as evil, but only refined and self-seeking, while Americans are not particularly moral, but just simple and stiff. James even admits that American virtue has its ridiculous side. The principal representative of European life is the Baroness Eugenia. Her visit with her brother, Felix Young, to her relatives, the Wentworths, in New England includes an element of opportunism. Speaking of the Wentworths before she meets them, Eugenia asks her brother: “Do you suppose if I had not known they were rich I would ever have come?” She also says that she has come to New England “to make her fortune.”<sup>28)</sup> When she meets her relatives, Mr. Wentworth says that it is natural they should know each other since they are near relatives. Eugenia disingenuously replies that “there comes a moment in life when one reverts, irresistibly, to one’s natural ties—to one’s natural affections.”<sup>29)</sup>

But Eugenia is not simply a designing woman. James suggests that she possesses inner complexity. Nothing she says, James notes, is “wholly true,” but it is not “wholly untrue,” either.<sup>30)</sup> Although her appeal to natural affections does not sound genuinely candid, she at several times yields to sincere emotion and natural affection:

“I came to look—to try—to ask,” she said. “It seems to me I have done well. I am very tired; I want to rest.” There were tears in her eyes. The

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28) Henry James, *The Europeans*, in *The American Novels and Stories of Henry James*, ed. F. O. Matthiessen, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), 43-44.

29) *Ibid.*, 61.

30) *Ibid.*, 71.

luminous interior, the gentle, tranquil people, the simple serious life—the sense of these things pressed upon her with an overmastering force, and she felt herself yielding to one of the most genuine emotions she had ever known. “I should like to stay here,” she said. “Pray take me in.”<sup>31)</sup>

She tries to manipulate wealthy Robert Acton into marriage, but later she realizes that she is also in love with him.

Mr. Acton is “the man of the world” in the Wentworth circle.<sup>32)</sup> Although recognizing Acton’s fastidiousness and priggishness, Eugenia thinks that his love of honesty might suit her well: “One could trust him, at any rate, round all the corners of the world; and withal, he was not absolutely simple, which would have been excess; he was only relatively simple, which was quite enough for the Baroness.” But Eugenia does not understand that Acton is proud of his simplicity, like the Wentworths. When Acton invites her to meet his mother, Eugenia overdoes things by following the European fashion:

“I have heard a great deal about you,” she said, softly, to the Baroness.

“From your son, eh?” Eugenia asked. “He has talked to me immensely of you. Oh he talks of you as you would like,” the Baroness declared; “as such a son *must* talk of such a mother!”

Mrs. Acton sat gazing ... Robert Acton was gazing too, in vivid consciousness that he had barely mentioned his mother to their brilliant guest. ... The Baroness turned her smile toward him, and she instantly felt that she had been observed to be fibbing.

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31) Ibid., 65.

32) Ibid., 87.

Eugenia feels that she has struck a false note. “Who were these people,” she wonders, “to whom such fibbing was not pleasing?”<sup>33)</sup>

In the end, Acton uses Eugenia’s lies as a means of avoiding the marriage. But his appeal to morality is, as F. W. Dupee points out, an excuse for “avoiding entanglement which his egoism, his prudence, and his attachment to his mother render embarrassing.”<sup>34)</sup> His initial interest in Eugenia is egotistic. His flirtation with her is to prove to his group that he alone can attract a cultivated European. Eugenia also recognizes at the end that she cannot be acceptable to Acton, and thus to New England. She discovers that “her power, in the American air, seemed to have lost its prehensible attributes.” Like Newman in front of the wall of the convent, Eugenia finds “the smooth wall of rock was insurmountable.”<sup>35)</sup>

In the marriage between Felix and Gertrude Wentworth, James seems to suggest a possibility of transcending cultural differences between two continents. Felix knows how to enjoy life, and Gertrude comes to share this knowledge. Felix teaches Gertrude the value of natural egotism: “You always put things on those grounds; you will never say anything for yourself. You are all so afraid, here, of being selfish. I don’t think you know how … Let me show you!”<sup>36)</sup> After this conversation, Gertrude confronts Mr. Brand, the Wentworths’ lay minister:

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33) Ibid., 96.

34) F. W. Dupee, *Henry James* (New York: William Sloane, 1951), 104.

35) James, *The Europeans*, 129.

36) Ibid., 108.

“I am trying for once to be natural!” cried Gertrude passionately. “I have been pretending, all my life; I have been dishonest; It is you that have made me so!” Mr. Brand stood gazing at her, and she went on, “Why shouldn’t I be frivolous, if I want? One has a right to be frivolous, if it’s one’s nature. No, I don’t care for the great questions. I care for pleasure—for amusement.”<sup>37)</sup>

In the world of *The Europeans*, self-assertion is blessed. But Felix and Gertrude cannot find a permanent home. Though they periodically return to Boston after their marriage, they do not remain there, and James does not say where they go. As F. R. Leavis suggests, James may be “feeling towards an ideal possibility that is neither Europe or America.”<sup>38)</sup>

In *The Portrait of a Lady*, James shows a process in which innocence, through its experience in the world, attains maturity. Isabel Archer is a young, intelligent, and charming American girl. She is very fond of her freedom and independence, and has an ardent desire to develop her mind and sensibilities. The initial opportunity to realize her desire is provided by her aunt, Mrs. Touchett, an energetic, cosmopolitan, expatriate American, when she carries Isabel from her provincial town of Albany, New York, to London. Mrs. Touchett’s son, Ralph, who instantly falls in love with Isabel, makes her rich that she shall be free to experience the world. He wants “to put wind in her sails” to see her “going before the breeze.”<sup>39)</sup>

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37) Ibid., 110.

38) F. R. Leavis, “The Novel as Dramatic Poem III: The Europeans,” *Scrutiny* XV (Summer 1948), 209.

39) Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1907) Vol. I, 262.



In the process of enlarging and enriching her experience of life, Isabel turns down proposals from Lord Warburton, a wealthy British aristocrat, and Caspar Goodwood, a solid, successful American businessman. Marriage to them, Isabel reasons, seems likely to restrict her perceptions and inhibit the growth of her consciousness. Although well-bred, sincere, and honest, Warburton appears to Isabel too simple-hearted. Isabel admires the integrity, practical intelligence, and resolute will of her American suitor, but Goodwood does not fit into “her idea of a delightful person.” “His jaw was too square and set and his figure too straight and stiff,” Isabel meditates, “these things suggested a want of easy consonance with the deeper rhythms of life.” Besides, he “showed his appetites and designs too simply and artlessly; when one was alone with him he talked too much about the same subject, and when other people were present he talked too little about anything.”<sup>40)</sup>

Isabel finds Gilbert Osmond a man who satisfies the requirements of her imagination. In her eyes, he does not show, like Caspar, his appetites and designs tactlessly. He is, like Warburton, well-bred, decent and kind. Moreover, he is, like Ralph, intelligent, witty, and good-natured. Isabel is enchanted by Osmond:

Isabel thought him interesting—she came back to that; she liked so to think of him. She had carried away an image from her visit to his hill-top which her subsequent knowledge of him did nothing to efface and which put on for her a particular harmony with other supposed and divined things, histories within histories: the image of a quiet, grown terrace above the sweet Val d’Arno and holding by the hand a little girl whose bell-like

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40) *Ibid.*, 165-66.

clearness gave a new grace to childhood. The picture had no flourishes, but she liked its lowness of tone and the atmosphere of summer twilight that pervaded it.<sup>41)</sup>

Isabel comes more and more to love him, and against the wishes of her family and friends, marries him.

But Osmond turns out to be not the “delightful person” Isabel thought she was marrying. He is morally coarse, cold-hearted and appallingly egotistical. “Under all his culture, his cleverness, his amenity, under his good nature, his facility, his knowledge of life,” Isabel realizes, “his egotism lay hidden like a serpent in a bank of flowers.”<sup>42)</sup> Before the marriage, Osmond “pointed out to her so much of the baseness and shabbiness of life, opened her eyes so wide to the stupidity, the depravity, the ignorance of mankind, that she had been properly impressed with the infinite vulgarity of things and of the virtue of keeping one’s self unspotted by it.” He also talked about “his renunciation, his indifference, the ease with which he dispensed with the usual aids to success; and all this ... seemed to her admirable. She ... thought it a grand indifference, an exquisite independence.” Now, Isabel discovers that “indifference was really the last of his qualities; she had never seen any one who thought so much of others. ... He was unable to live without [society]. ... He had looked at it out of his window even when he appeared to be most detached from it.” Isabel recognizes that Osmond’s sophisticated worldliness helps him to despise the world but that at the same time

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41) Ibid., 399.

42) James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, Vol. II, 196.

he submits and conforms to the standards of the world. The implication of his snobbery, Isabel discovers, is “a sovereign contempt for every one but some three or four exalted people whom he envied, and for everything in the world but half a dozen ideas of his own.”<sup>43</sup>) It is her recognition of Osmond’s coldness, egotism, and base worldliness that constitutes the betrayal which is the center of the novel.

But in an ultimate sense, Osmond’s wickedness has little bearing upon Isabel’s responsibility. After all, as she maintains, she chose him. Isabel thus is not an innocent and helpless victim of a prepared trap. Her downfall is more complex than that. She is partly responsible for the disaster that overtakes her. Osmond is also deceived, although in a very subtle way. Obviously, his motive for marrying Isabel includes her fortune. But Osmond is not merely a fortune hunter. He marries her, because he genuinely loves her. In response to the disapproval of his engagement with Isabel by her relatives, Osmond says:

I won’t pretend I’m sorry you’re rich. I delight in everything that’s yours—whether it be money or virtue. Money’s a horrid thing to follow, but a charming thing to meet. ... My dear girl, I can’t tell you how life seems to stretch there before us—what a long summer afternoon awaits us. It’s the latter half of an Italian day—with a golden haze, and the shadows just lengthening, and that divine delicacy in the light, the air, the landscape, which I have loved all my life and which you love to-day. Upon my honour, I don’t see why we shouldn’t get on. We’ve got what we like—to say nothing of having each other. We’ve the faculty of admiration and

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43) *Ibid.*, 197-98.

several capital convictions. We're not stupid, we're not mean, we're not under bonds to any kind of ignorance or dreariness. You're remarkably fresh, and I'm remarkably well-seasoned.<sup>44)</sup>

Here, Osmond's feeling is strong and genuine. He likes Isabel and has high expectation of their life together.

But there is one thing in Isabel that Osmond does not like. Isabel has too many ideas. Before their marriage, Osmond believes he can cope with what he sees as her flaw. He says to Madame Merle about his intention:

"I like her very much. She's all you described her, and into the bargain capable, I feel, of great devotion. She has only one fault."

"What's that?"

"Too many ideas."

"I warned you she was clever."

"Fortunately they're very bad ones." said Osmond.

"Why is that fortunate?"

"*Dame*, if they must be sacrificed!"<sup>45)</sup>

But Osmond is mistaken. Isabel finds it impossible not to express her opinions about the degenerate morals of the fashionable Roman society. Osmond cannot bear her criticism, because he identifies himself with the values of that society. He consequently hates Isabel. Isabel comes to see it:

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44) *Ibid.*, 80-81.

45) James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, Vol. I, 412.

It was her scorn of his assumptions, it was this that made him draw himself up. He had plenty of contempt, and it was proper his wife should be as well furnished; but that she should turn the hot light of her disdain upon his own conception of things—this was a danger he had not allowed for. He believed he should have regulated her emotions before she came to it; and Isabel could easily imagine how his ears had scorched on his discovering he had been too confident. When one had a wife who gave one that sensation there was nothing left but to hate her.<sup>46)</sup>

Isabel realizes that she is responsible for Osmond's self-deception about her:

For if she had not deceived him in intention she understood how completely she must have done so in fact. She had effaced herself when he first knew her; she had made herself small, pretending there was less of her than there really was. It was because she had been under the extraordinary charm that he, on his side, had taken pains to put forth. ... She lost herself in infinite dismay when she thought of the magnitude of *his* deception. It was a wonder perhaps, in view of this, that he didn't hate her more. ... She had known she had too many ideas; she had more even than he had supposed, many more than she had expressed to him when he had asked her to marry him. Yes, she *had* been hypocritical; she had liked him so much.<sup>47)</sup>

Whatever is her reason to deceive, it is in this realization of her deception that she finds "something transcendent and absolute," when Osmond declares that "I think we should accept the consequences of our actions."<sup>48)</sup> And at the end of the novel, Isabel accepts the moral responsibility for her choice. Through her fall, she reaches maturity.

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46) James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, Vol. II, 201.

47) *Ibid.*, 191-95.

48) *Ibid.*, 356.

Running through James' earlier works is a fundamental opposition between innocence and worldliness. James' innocent American characters enter the unknown European society and find it elegant, cultivated, but morally degenerate. In their confrontation with the world, they have to fall. As Henry James, Sr. suggested in a different context, "in order to enter the ranks of manhood, the individual (however fair) had to *fall*, had to pass beyond childhood in an encounter with 'Evil,' had to mature by virtue of the destruction of his own egotism."<sup>49</sup>) The fall is essentially fortunate, because it produces wisdom and maturity, which make innocence undesirable. For James, then, innocence is not identified with virtue, but it might be selfish, priggish, and even destructive. Thus James' protagonists do not always succeed in attaining maturity in their fall. Roderick suffers a physical death, and Newman withdraws in his fear of collision with the world. Gertrude and Isabel attain maturity to face up to the world. What makes James intriguing is, then, his refusal to simplify the opposition between innocence and worldliness, between good and evil, between the United States and Europe, and his ability to show the intricate relationship between the two.

In 1888, James wrote to his brother William James: "For myself, at any rate, I am deadly weary of the whole 'international' state of mind—so that I *ache*, at times, with fatigue at the way it is constantly forced upon me as a sort of virtue or obligation." By this time, James clearly seemed to come to terms with his American birth and his European environment. He found both deficient. The United

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49) R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955), 55.

States fed on the illusion that it was innocent and free, and Europe was imprisoned in its culture and had lost its creative capability. He did not have “the least hesitation,” James wrote in the same letter, “in saying that I aspire to write in such a way that it would be impossible to an outsider to say whether I am at a given moment an American writing about England, or an Englishman writing about America.”<sup>50)</sup> He was located in the middle ground from which he could have a vantage point to observe Europe and the United States both from inside out and outside in. He used his personal circumstances to develop themes and art forms that came to shape the consciousness of twentieth century literature. He was not ashamed about the cultural ambiguity; rather he relished examining it. He prefigured the transatlantic perspective which would prevail in the cultural interactions between the United States and Europe from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century on.

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50) Qtd. from Edwin T. Bowden, *The Themes of Henry James* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), 53.

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**Abstract**

**Reunion of the United States and Europe:  
Henry James' Earlier Novels**

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James' life-long concern with the dialectic between the qualities of Europe and those of the United States is quite clearly discernable in his earlier works. As a point of departure to understand James, and through him the American cultural and intellectual milieu at the time, this paper examines James' four novels which deal with the transatlantic situation: *Roderick Hudson* (1876), *The American* (1877), *The Europeans* (1878), and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). It argues that James conceives the relationship between Europe and the United States in a complicated and ambiguous way, and that the theme of "fortunate fall," as suggested by his father Henry James, Sr., helps explain the dialectic between so-called American innocence and European sophistication.

**Key Words**

Henry James, Jr., transatlantic theme, fortunate fall