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THE LIMITS OF FREEDOM AND CONVENTION IN HENRY JAMES

The first Europeans who arrived in North America found a vast expanse of exuberant, untamed nature bearing no visible traces of ancient cultures to elucidate its past. The virginal continent was immediately taken for another Garden of Eden, and its newly formed community was quick to shed its former European identity and focus solely on the progress and the future of their paradise on Earth.

But it is no easy task to live without a past, and in their eagerness to ground their Utopia on firm foundations, the Americans were quick to build themselves a respectable heritage by venerating all kinds of trivial facts about the first settlers, colonial governors, Indians, revolutionary heroes, and particularly Civil War heroes. A great emphasis was put on the simple, the ideological and on a symbolic reading of the nature so strenously conquered. With the new political freedom and its consequent artistic freedom, came a flourishing of the arts.

New wealth calls for new loyalties, and the first born Americans rapidly assimilated their novel culture and tried to "educate" their immigrant parents in the concepts of freedom and democracy which were being taught to them in the schools of the new nation. As Henry Steele Commager appropriately concludes, North American patriotism turned out to be a literary creation, and by 1865 the image Americans had of their past had all been created by poets and story tellers who had sang the legends of this "brave new world."[1]

Exactly because of the way it came to be, American nationalism tended to become rather artificial and ostentatious, leading American audiences to accept and praise any author, regardless of quality, as long as he was an American acclaiming the natural beauties of his homeland. This magnification of the frontier tradition, important as it undeniably is, rendered a fragmentary and misleading image of American Literature since it tended to be isolationist. It failed to touch on a problem that has permanently worried every American artist from the nineteenth century to the present - this very isolation from European tradition and the nature of his connection with it, for all Europe constituted the real American past, anyway.

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This tradition is responsible for misconceptions such as the one which tends to regard Henry James as a European rather than an American writer. Actually, James occupies a place among the four most representative American writers with Cooper, Melville and Hawthorne. They all worried about the dangers and deficiencies of their country, and were very critical of American society at the same time they pondered about the possibilities they believed it possessed; reflections which produced the best art ever composed in the United States. They form part of the American tradition not only out of close relation to each other, but also out of a shared concern with their native land in a way European novelists rarely are with theirs. They felt the immense possibilities of creative achievements were intimately tied to the new patterns of life forming in America; their bitter criticism, cynical disillusion and occasional optimism for a country they loved gave origin to the finest genre it has ever produced, the American novel, the genre where American artists found the freest medium for their critical awareness of an evolving nation.

The examination of American relations to Europe at first consisted of merely contrasting the New World innocence against the Old World corruption. Important American figures such as Thomas Jefferson never ceased to be shocked by European manners and morals. For many generations it was belived that American youths, sent to Europe for an education, learned only dissipation, were introduced to all kinds of vices, and having tasted luxury, developed a contempt for their country's simplicity and democratic treatment of rich and poor alike. These are the common themes of a number of works as varied as **The Marble Faun**, **Daisy Miller**, **The Innocents Abroad** and **The Sun Also Rises**. **Innocents Abroad** satirizes the worries of many Americans who went to Europe, often to stay, with a feeling of returning to their "old home" and an eagerness for art, culture and good manners ridiculously exaggerated.

It is an established concept that good art usually does not spring from rootlessness. Thus, when referring to James, we should remember that despite his long life abroad, he was able to keep in touch with the values which were the essential product of the new world. His preference to live in Europe, his funpoking at Americans in Europe and at home, the punishment of his American heroines, all came to pass for a dislike of the United States. In reality it was more a desire to correct the absurdities and encourage the fineness he perceived. Constance Rourke reminds us of James' Americaness. She points out that when he was a small boy he frequented Barnum's and saw many Yankee farces. **The American Cousin** achieved success when James was fifteen years old, a a time when the streets of New York were alive with stories of adventures in California. London magazines were common reading in his home, as were the visits of Thackeray. James was constantly traveling to Europe with his family and this knowledge of society on both sides of the Atlantic gave him the ability to analyse them well.[2]

James' schooling was much interrupted by his family's travels, but the fault was supplied with much reading and a scrutiny of life. Among the books which he read in his childhood with great effect on his imagination were, according to his

autobiography, The Scarlet Letter and The House of the Seven Gables.[3] It is generarly recognized that Hawthorne had an important influence in James' artistic development which was not vague or confined to some of his tales and novels; it was a strong contribution to the casting of his critical conscience. James' life overlapped that of Hawthorne's for twenty years and what they had in common was a concern for problems essentialy American. James saw Hawthorne as his greatest predecessor to approach their native tradition with a moral preoccupation; Hawthorne literally gave James a tradition and taught him how to use New England artistically. James' romances have that Hawthornian quality of showing life with a touch of the marvellous.

But unlike Hawthorne, Cooper and other earlier writers, James preferred to abandon the retrospective analysis of his fresh tradition and approached the living characters of the contemporary scene with great success. James' favorite mode of fiction in the sixties and seventies was the realistic novel with its convincing picture of the society of the time. He thought Hawthorne's passion for the symbolic and allegorical modes a limitation. His preferences were for Balzac and Thackeray, and he points them out as touchstones of the art of the novel in his time.[4]

Like Hawthorne before him, James lamented the difficulties the romancer felt in America. In an essay about William Dean Howells he declared: "He reminds us of how much [illegible] native grown imaginative effort is a matter of details, of fine shades, of pale colors, a making of small things do great service. Civilization with us is monotonous, [illegible] in the way of contrasts, of salient points, of chiaroscuro, we have to take what we can get. We have to look for these things in fields where a less devoted glance would see little more than an arid blank, and, at the last, we manage to find them."[5] His alternative was to take his characters to Europe, giving them an opportunity of being more conspicuously American than they would otherwise have been. The juxtaposition was an effective means of revealing the American type and presenting it more sharply. James' international stories were, ironicaly, a powerful device for giving definition and prominence to American manners.

The simple and at the same time aggressive stress of James' constant engagement in the problem of the national type is in the very title of his novel The American, for who has ever heard of a significant piece of literature entitled The Englishman, or Le Français? The plot justifies the title by presenting the most obviously recognizable king of American character as its central figure and by showing how he is betrayed by a sinister French aristocratic family. Chistopher Newman, the innocent American, and the Bellegardes can be called "representatives" of American and European culture, stereotypes personifying certain set notions about the two places.

Christopher Newman emerges as the archetypal American; he is named after Christopher Columbus, the discoverer, he is a new breed of man who comes to rediscover Europe in an ironic reversal of history. The story opens on the perfect European setting, the Louvre, which gives our American "an aesthetic headache."

Newman is seen confortably settled on an ottoman, "with his head thrown back and his legs outstreched, staring at Murillo's beautiful moon-borne Madona in profund enjoyment of his posture."[6]

From the very beginning the opposition between the commercial society which produced a Newman and the leisurely cultivated European society is clearly outlined under the light tone of a seemingly naive narrator: "His physiognomy would have sufficiently indicated that he was a shrewd and capable fellow, and in truth he had often sat up all night over a bristling bundle of accounts and heard the cock crow without a yawn. But Rapheal, Titan and Rubens were a new kind of arithmetic, and they inspired our friend, for the first time in his life, with a vague self-mistrust."[7] At a loss in the world of European art, he will be equally at a loss in the social complexities of Europe. The comment is a foresight that the borgeois Noémie Nioche and the aristocratic Bellegardes will be equally beyond his simple "arithmetic."

It is worthwhile to follow the description of Newman's initial presentation for some of its precious details: "An observer, with anything of an eye for national types, would have no difficulty in determining the local origin of this underdeveloped connoisseur, and indeed, such an observer might have felt a certain humorous relish of the almost completeness with which he filled out the national mould. The gentleman on the divan was a powerful specimen of an American."[8] Newman is decribed as muscular tall, healthy, and it is said he had never smoked. It is almost impossible to resist the Jamesiam passion for detail: "He had a very well-formed head, with a shapely, symmetrical balance of the frontal and occipital development, and a good deal of straight, rather dry hair. His complexion was brown and his nose had a bold, well-marked arch. His eye was of a clear, cold grey, and save for a rather abundant moustache, he was clean-shaved. He had the flat jaw and the sinewy neck which are frequent in the American type."[9] The physical details are particularly intesesting because they are said to reflect "that typical vagueness which is not vacuity, that blankness which is not simplicity, that look of being committed to nothing in particular, of standing in an attitude of general hospitality to the chances of life, of being very much at one's own disposal,"[10] the very characteristics which will cause his disillusion with Europe.

More specific than the general expression of his face, Newman's eye seems to be very eloquent concerning his national type, for "though it was by no means the glowing orb of a hero of romance, you could find in it almost anything you looked for. Frigid and yet friendly, frank and yet cautious, shrewd, and yet credulous, positive yet sceptical, confident yet shy, extremely intelligent and extremely good-humored, there was something vaguely defiant in its concessions and something profoundly reassuring in its reserve."[11] The genuinely American, Franklin-like story which he tells Mr. Tristam in chapter two, a riches-to-rags legend, is the adequate complement of such a mock-heroic description: "He had known what is was to have utterly exhausted his credit, to be unable to raise a dollar, and to find himself at nightfall in a strange city without a penny to mitigate its

strangeness. It was under these circumstances that he made his entrance into San Francisco, the scene, subsequently, of his happiest strokes of fortune. If he 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."[12] R.P. Blackmur's comment on this Jamensian joke is that by depriving him of the loaf, the author made Newman a purer breed of man than Franklin.[13]

There is a frank note of acquisitiveness in his character, defined by the first word we hear him saying, "combien?", by means of which he tries to make his French understandable to Mademoiselle Nioche with the intent of buying hes copies. There is also something very attractive in the simple candour with which Newman expresses his values. He declares he wants to listen to music, to buy paintings, and to marry as well as he can. He regards the "acquisition" of the perfect wife as a sort of crowning of his financial success, the best "investment" on the best kind of "property" one can hold. While his worldliness would be fatal to many a character, in Newman it is redeemed by all sorts of virtues: his moral and physical toughness, his honesty, his capacity for generosity and even some tenderness.

In considering his marriage into the French aristocracy feasible, Newman reveals an uninstructed American optimism and his ignorance of the social complexity of Europe. Mr. and Mrs. Tristam represent a different degree of social naivité in the American culture. Despite their long stay in Europe, they are too innocent of European social stratification, as well. And Mrs. Tristam's promotion of Newman's allegience with the Bellegardes is typical of the American expatriate woman who thinks she masters the French complexity of values. This lady has the practical function of bringing together the opposites, but she also represents the hibrid outlook of the Europeanized American similar to that of Winterbourne in Daisy Miller.

If on one side Newman's exaggerated Americanness is emphasized, the touch of local color provided by the Bellegardes is done with an equally heavy hand. There is fine irony in the description of the mansion and how it impresses the pragmatical Newman: "it looks as if wicked things had been done in it and might be done again."[14] It is American innocence divining European treachery. The house is always decribed as having an omnous air about it, as being "grey and silent," the facade is "impassive." Newman's first impression that it looks like a convent is suggestive of Claire's future destiny; "the dark, dusted, painted portal" is suggestive of moral foulness, lack of freshness and vitality and at the same time implies that it presents a false veneer of civilization which covers misdeeds.[15] The windows are perpetually closed, speaking of the insularity of the aristocracy and of Claire's imprisionment in it. It is in a dark room where only two candles are lit that he sees Claire for the first time and he thinks this no fit way for rich people to live. Later, Newman tells Mrs. Tristam that the residence is "like something out of a play...," once more stressing the artificial bookishness of American experience of evil. Mrs. Tristam, in her pretended European mastery replies that "they have a still darker house in the country," where, the reader learns later on, the real and sinister skeleton in the Bellegardes' closet is kept. Both Newman and Mrs. Tristam come from a culture where no gap separates appearance from reality and they are totally inefficient at the reading of symbolic language.

When Newman starts frequenting the Bellegardes two sets of historical, political, cultural and religious values clash sonorously. The juxtaposition of American and French morals and manners are neatly presented throught the whole book, though. The Nioches' exploitation of Newman echoes his later betrayal by the Bellegardes; Noèmiè's flirtations and her father's accommodation to it are only the lighter side of French moral hypocrisy which will acquire significant proportions when the viciousness of the aristocrats is fully revealed and thoroughly discredits European nobility. Urbain de Bellegarde's pro-Bourbon political sentiments and the formalism of the Old World are sharply contrasted to Newman's relaxed and casual behavior. The ball which celebrates Newman's engagement to Claire stresses the elegant formality and the complexity of social manner of the French aristocracy where the untitled Newman is introduced to "three dukes, three counts and a baron." The party becomes the means of contrasting American openness and spontaneity with the French ritualistic artificiality. When Newman parades his prospective mother-in-law in his arm, she takes great offense in this show of American vulgarity. European elegance cannot bear the humiliation of an allegiance with American plebeianism, no matter how tempting the wealth of its representative. Newman then talks to the obese Duchess, and her ridiculous and ridiculing legend about Newman's fortune illustrates the mutual incomprehension between Americans and Europeans. Newman is about to realize that he is thought bizarre by the people he sees as strange. He also suspects he is being shown as an "exhibition" and asks himself: "Am I behaving like a damned fool? Am I stepping around like a terrier on his hind legs?"[16] The difference in the idiom used by the two opposite parts powerfully stresses their differences. Nevertheless, Newman is rendered incapable of analysing the scene critically and goes home feeling confident and exhilarated.

Valentin de Bellegarde's life of idleness and dissipation is another European "tradition" Newman's pragmatism cannot conform to. On chapter VII, Valentin tells Newman he is the first man he has ever envied, and not for his brains, or his height, or even his money. "You make me fell as if I had missed something," he says, "What is it?" Newman's answer is at one time serious and jocose: "It's the proud consciousness of honest toil - of having manufactured a few wash-tubs."[17] Valentin's duel is another peculiarity of European ancient and decadent culture which shocks the young and fresh product of American culture. Newman flatly dismisses Valentin's decision to fight in a complete failure to understand his complex sense of honor: "I don't know what you mean by a higher-tempered time. Because your great-grandfather was an ass, is that any reason why you should be?"[18] And here we once more have a constrast in the idioms spoken by the two man, Valentin's being an invocation of poetry while Newman's language is crude and business like.

Claire and Valentin, despite incarnating the "good Europeans," come from a

tradition as incompatible with that which has shaped Newman as that of their less honorable compatriots. Claire's delicacy and beauty are symbols of the same aristocratic womanhood that commands utter submission to the wishes of her mother. Madame de Cintré's refuge in a convent shows only that she is incapable of escaping her dilemma. She wants to flee from the European order that enslaves her, but she does it by entering a world that, though thoroughly shunt off from it, is one of its creations. Newman, who is not particularly religious, had not minded Claire's Catholicism, but watching his intended turn into a nun crushes him because it is absolutely beyond anything his reasonable but pragmatic nature will ever grasp. Mr. Babcock, the American Unitarian minister, stands for the New England Puritan who seeks to enlarge his mind with European culture but ends up miserable because he cannot flex his stern consciousness enough to enjoy the peasures of European life. He tells Newman that "Life and Art are extremely serious."[19] He makes an attempt to infuse Newman with a little of his spiritual starch, but Newman's somewhat loose nature does not allow for any stiffening.

The problem with the novel is the overstatement of the Belegardes' corruptness; the melodrama becomes too long after Newman's disappointment and Mrs. Bread's narrative is very tedious. Christopher Newman as the American millionaire any reader would wish to be, and Claire de Cintré as the last Catholic daughter of an old-fashioned "régime" every reader would want to marry, are perfectly likeable, but lack a realistic treament. Even Newman's last act of magnanimity, once in possession of the terrible secret of the Bellegardes, is an American quality rather overplayed.

Between **The American**, written in Paris and London during 1876 and 1877 and **The Portrait of a Lady**, his first major novel, James published **Daisy Miller** and **The Europeans** in 1878 and **An International Episode** in 1879 and in all three the theme of cultural juxtaposition is dominant. In **The American** Newman's belief that there is nothing wealth and enterprise cannot accomplish, his distorted ambition to marry an aristocrat show him that his faith in the power of money was a mere illusion. His high hopes and then his defeat illustrate the limits of excessive optimism of an innocent American face to face with more complex European social and moral forces. Newman is the innocent American doomed in Europe. There is a notable evolution from the rigor of this cultural constrast in Daisy who is a victim of Roman fever - a clear symbol of European hostily - yet, she is not afflicted with European villains. The forces against her are those of Winterbourne's insensibility and the snobbishnes of the American colony in Rome.

There is also a change in tone: **The American** is full of witticisms while **The Europeans** is more subdued. James had moved to a different time and place; he now pictures the quiet family life of a conservative Boston household. The seriousnes of the Wentworths'way of life is not as boldly constrasted with that of "the Europeans" Felix and Eugenia. The adjustment of their gaiety and free behavior to the inwardness and sobriety of their hostess is well balanced. In fact, there are not even any "pure" Europeans for Felix and Eugenia are descemdendants of a Europeanized American, a sister to Mr. Wentworth.

Having watched the bewilderments and difficulties of the Americans who tried to find their way into European territories saturated with culture and tradition, the reader is now facing a contrasting vision: two quintessential European types react to the comparatively empty spaces of Boston in the 1840s.. Their surprise is counterpoised to the impact they have on the local Puritanism.

The novelette opens on a dull scene with snow falling over a narrow graveyard outside. Inside Eugenia reveals her restlessness by pacing back and forth impatiently. She repeatedly looks at herself in the mirror, checks her hair and her dress. The naked simplicity of their hotel room is contrasted to her dark, oriental sensuality. Eugenia, whose name means wellborn, has several identities: she is also the Baroness Munster, joined in morganatic marriage to a Prince with whom she does not live. She is not simple; she has many sides which arouse suspicions among these Puritans who fell better if dealing with monochromatic characters.

The visible scenery seems a gloomy indicator of Eugenia's possibilities of finding herself a place in such a colorless, plain environment. In contrast with the sophistication of the two brothers, the Wentworth's dwelling is white, still and clean, "lighter inside than outside," and, as Felix describes it, "the interior has nothing to show, but a great aisance, and a lot of money, out of sight."[20] Felix declares he had never seen anything so pastoral; it reminds him of "the golden age."

There is plain satire in this New England which seems sealed of from the rest of the world. The Wentworths are innocent of words such as "bohemian" and "philistine," while the girls confess to Felix they had never been complimented on their looks before. Charlotte and Gertrude are rather plain and intellectually ascetic; they are all pale, particularly Mr. Wentworth, who is also old and stiff. In contrast, the two Europeans are associated with art and artifice: Felix has been a wandering musican and actor; Eugenia is married to a prince and has a taste for the exotic. As a result we see an assumed opposition reversed -here the New World is hoary with age while the Old World is represented by the gaiety of Felix Young.

Eugenia seeks admission to the Puritan world, but she is a threat to their orderly, quiet morals; she is the very incarnation of European duplicity and immorality. Mr. Wentworth is unable to see her as part of his household, but she is not able to picture herself in it either, so a compromisse is reached: the brothers are going to be lodged in a cottage a little distance from their cousin's house instead of in it. Foreigners should be kept at bay by a polite hospitality without assimilation.

The reason why the contrast between the Europeans and the Americans does not come out so sharply is because Gertrude shows that New Englanders are not wholly destitute of complexity. She seems to be as restless as Eugenia, she has the same taste for colorful clothing and Felix surprises her reading **The Arabian Nights** on a Sunday when her dutiful sister and her father are in church. Gertrude

embodies the central paradox of the book when she reveals that this supposedly simple and homely type of girl has been pretending all her life. The "amoral" Europeans are thought to be the double-dealers. Nevertheless, the puritanic community presented here has been imposing on Gertrude a set of dihonest attitudes, for they will not allow her to be natural and spontaneous. James could be saying that by rejecting Eugenia, the Americans are denying art in the interest of a pure and radical integrity which may involve a falsification of the self as destructive as the artifices of the Baroness. Considering that James preferred to live in Europe, we may also venture to say that the expelling of this mature, sophisticated woman is to be seen as damaging and limiting to the American consciousness. This fact is stressed by the scene in which Felix is asking for Gertrude's hand and has to explain to her father that she "has been asleep and I have awakened her."[21]

Robert Acton seems to be "the man of the world" in this New England setting; the one who has transcended the limitations and prejudices of the Puritan mind. After all, he has travelled to the Orient, and his house is decorated with good furniture and fine art. Once more the residence reflects the character of the owner since Acton's house is described as "a mixture of the homely and the liberal;" he has managed to bring art into the confines of a clean, sunlit New England abode. It certainly implies that he is endowed with some kind of sensibility to the imagination which he manages to keep under the proper New England perspecive. Robert Acton seems to be relaxed, tolerant, the only American capable of appreciating Eugenia. But under close scrutiny he is not entirely emancipated, he is tied to an invalid mother who is a devotee of Emerson. He offers Eugenia what he thinks is "a natural relationship," that is he wishes to become her lover and invites her to follow him to distant Newport or Niagara because he does not dare begin an illicit relationship in the prescints of paradise. Once more the American way is unexpectedly reversed, conventional, artificial.

There is also a certain inertia in Acton comparable to that of Winterbourne: he is presented with hands in his pockets and leaning against things in several significant passages in the book; he is constantly described as "on his guard" and "vigilant." He observes Eugenia with a curious, dispassionate attitude and she is said to have become "an intellecual fascination" to him. His attraction to her is forever being checked by his compulsion for order.

Eugenia is far from admirable. Despite her personal charm and refined European manners, one cannot forget she is a schemer; she tries to manipulate the well-to-do Acton into marriage. Later she recognizes she has fallen in love with him and she undergoes a fall in the paradisical rural New England. Her fall is her conceit, not unlike Newman's, which leads her to think she can impose her European taste and standards on the New Englanders. The passage in which Acton is lying under a tree and she approaches, pretending she is not looking for him, is very expressive: "I came this way to look at your garden. But I must go," she says. She has been forced to recognize that the European assumption about American naivité is not absolutely valid. Defeated, she has to return to Europe. The irony is accented at the

very end when the reader is told that "after his mother's death, Acton has married a very nice young girl."[22] This description immediately brings to mind the image of Lizzie, Acton's sister, whom Eugenia disliked. She had found the girl too positive and explicit and the possessor of "dangerous energy." Eugenia finaly decides the young lady lacks "nuance" and is no match for her, an opinion her brother clearly does not share in his choice of a wife.

Mr. Brand, the Unitarian Reverend, is a counterpart of Mr. Babcock from **The American** and as impermeable to art and sensibility, although his final great show of magnanimity is as artificial as Newman's.

The Europeans contains a more subtle study of the contrast between American and European types from which James' affection for his native country is not lacking. His sympathetic treatment of New England is evident, as is his picture of the archetypal Newman. But his New England does not escape being drawn as provincial in its failure to accept some of the European stylishness. James falls into melodrama one more time and performs an exaggerated number of hasty weddings towards the end, complete with many glimpses of happy thereafters.

Both **The Americans** and **The Europeans** are international novels where an outsider is brought face to face with his or her inability to enter the world they have proposed to conquer, due to his or her failure to speak the local language or perform adequately without breaking the local rules. The bleak wall of the convent into which Newman stares at the end of **The American** has a counterpart in the imaginary rock wall Eugenia declares herself unable to surpass. If the answer is not on either side of the Atlantic, James seems to be suggesting that neither the American or the European type are thoroughly good or evil, experienced or naive, and he mocks stereotyping on both sides. He is in fact deploring, in his humorous way, that New England, that Americans in general, are too provincial and Europeans too conventional. To James, an understanding of arts is indispensable for the liberation of nature and the expression of the self and, moreover, it need not be the privilege of any race or country, but an individual achievement.

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NOTES

[1]Henry Steele Commager, "The Search for a Usable Past," in **The Search for a Usable Past and Other Essays in Historiography** (New York: Alfred A. Knpf, 1967), p.25.

[2]Constance Rourke, American Humour, A Study of the National Character (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1931), p. 188.

[3]Henry James, "A Small Boy," in Autobiography, ed. Frederick W. Duppe (New York: Criterion Books, 1956), p. 46.

[4]Letters of Henry James, ed. Percy Lubbock (New York: Scribner and Sons, 1920), I, 72.

[5]Henry James, Literary Reviews and Essays on American, English and French Literature, ed. Albert Mordell (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1957), p. 214.

[6]Henry James, The American (New York: Penguin Books, 1983 rpt), p. 33. My italics.

[7]The American, p.34.

[8]Ibid., p.35.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid. p. 53.

[13]R.P. Blackmur, Studies in Henry James, ed. Veronica A. Makowsky (New York: New Directions, 1983), p. 176.

[14]The American, p. 62.

[15]Ibid., p. 79.

[16]Ibid., p. 281.

[17]Ibid., p. 142.

[18]Ibid., p. 309.

[19]Ibid., p. 111.

[20]Henry James, The Europeans (London: MacMillan and Co., 1878), pp. 34-5.

[21]Ibid., p. 187.

[22]Ibid., p. 176.

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A PARALLEL BETWEEN *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY* AND *THE RISE OF SILAS LAPHAM*

It might seem strange at first sight the attempt to make a parallel between Henry James's The Portrait of a Lady_and William Dean Howells's The Rise of Silas Lapham. Our intention in trying to make the comparison between the two works was not to reach a conclusion as which one of the books was better. What has called our attention, besides the fact of the publication of the books having been separated by a short period of time, was the presence of some similar aspects and themes in them.

First of all, we noticed that both main characters, Isabel Archer and Silas Lapham, show a very similar development and, in the end, both achieve something through the sacrifice of something else. There are other characters in the two books who also show some points of contact with one another. The use of the new house as a symbol of Lapham's material rise can be paralleled with the use James makes of the houses which appear in his work as representative of the development of the drama. They are both novels of manners and, finally, wealth and marriage are subjects raised in both works, facts which also allowed us to establish some points of contact between them.

As a method for the achievement of our intention, we decided to begin with the analysis of each one of the books separately, in order to have anidea of the whole of each novel. This analysis, though, does not aim to be complete and definitive, but being mainly centered in the observation of the points stated above, in order to establish, in a final section, the contact between the two works.

The Portrait of a Lady

According to Arnold Kettle, "The Portrait of a Lady is a novel about destiny. Or, to use concept rather more in tone with the language of the book itself, it is a novel at it freedom."[1] Isabel Archer is a character presented from the beginning as someone who aspires to shape her destiny through her capacity of choice. She

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