HENRY JAMES AND THE INTERNATIONAL THEME TODAY

Henry James, the master of the international story, defined its subject as « a conflict of manners; a general theme dealing for the most part with the bewilderment of the American, of either sex and of almost any age, in presence of the 'European order' »[1]. From Washington Irving's *The Sketch Book* in 1820 to William Styron's *Set This House on Fire* in 1960 the story of the American in Europe has had a long and honorable history. Yet Americans had hardly begun to develop the form when Alexis de Tocqueville came to the United States in 1831 and prophesied that some day both the Old World and the New would face a common future ambiguously full of promise and menace. It is worth reflecting on the past and prospects of the international novel in the light of this prediction.

From its earliest tentative beginnings « bewilderment » has been the keynote of the international theme. Washington Irving, « half venturing, half shrinking, surprised at his own good fortune, and wondering at his own temerity », confessed in the last paragraph of *The Sketch Book* to an uneasy solicitude for his English audience, a pious respect which deprived him of « that ease and confidence which are necessary to successful exertion ». When his *persona*, Geoffrey Crayon, Gent., steps upon the ground of his forefathers, he feels that he is « a stranger in the land ». So also Herman Melville's young

1. JAMES, *The Art of the Novel, Critical Prefaces*, intro. R. P. BLACKMUR, New York, Scribner's, 1934, p. 132.

sailor in *Redburn* is disconcerted to find that his father's guide-book to Liverpool is obselete and irrelevant to his son's staggering discovery of poverty and vice in foreign ports, just as innocent Hilda in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* succumbs to « heart-sickness » in Rome at discovering « that dismal certainty of the existence of evil in the world ». Bewilderment could even be, as Fenimore Cooper dramatized it in *Home As Found,* the shock of good Americans returning from Italy to find that their native country appears more bigoted, commercial, snobbish, and philistine than they had remembered it in the glow of their patriotic republicanism.

The promise of the international story is that bewilderment can lead to an enrichment of consciousness. In our early writers this development is only incompletely suggested. In *Redburn* it seems to be more the voice of the author than of the narrator, a genteel boy with a sunday-school morality, when he says: « We are blind to the real sights of this world, deaf to its voice, and dead to its death ». Experience has educated his eyes and his sympathies at least to the extente that on his return voyage with a horde of suffering immigrants his pastoral vision of the shore is qualified by the grim fever-flag that the quarantine officer flies on Staten Island. But Redburn is still very much of a schoolboy for all his experience. Similarly, the Effinghams of Cooper's novel never really succeed in integrating their quasi-aristocratic standards of taste and decorum with their republican political principles. They are too withdrawn, too disdainful, and too fastidious to be accepted as leaders in Templeton, New York, and the heroine can only find a suitable partner for marriage in a man who turns out to be her cousin. It is as if the insights garnered in Europe were a family heirloom as insecurely held as the Point on Lake Otsego which the townspeople have taken over for their own use during the family's absence. Even in *The Marble Faun* the American artists, Hilda and Kenyon, are not basically changed. Hilda's « severity of innocence » is softened by sorrow and its burden lightened by confession in the alien church of St. Peter's, but she remains impervious in her righteousness to

the dark truths which Hawthorne suggests are intimated by the crime of passion committed by the Europeans, Donatello and Miriam. Kenyon has ceased to be « a man of marble » and learned to love Hilda. He can even propose to Hilda that sin and sorrow are « merely an element of human education », but when she remains adamant against the heresy, Kenyon hastens to insist that he « never did believe it ». When the homeward bound Americans last meet Miriam in the Pantheon, she raises her hands in a gesture of benediction but « those extended hands, even while they blessed, seemed to repel, as if Miriam stood on the other side of a fathomless abyss, and warned them from its verge ». Only Donatello is changed; the transformation of the Americans is finally muffled.

Hawthorne's muting of the effect of Europe on his Americans was poetically just. In his essay on his predecessor James suggested that it would take the tragedy of the Civil War to make the world seem to the American « a more complicated place than it had hitherto seemed, the future more treacherous, success more difficult ». It was a lesson that his own art was eloquently to teach. Neither Cooper, Melville, nor Hawthorne had sufficient European experience or artistic inclination towards the novel of manners to exploit to the full the possibilities of the international theme. Cooper was more interested in home as found than in Europe as discovered, and his European novels were safely set in historical periods antedating America. Melville's English orphan, Harry Bolton, is as unconvincing a character in *Redburn* as his author's melodramatic sketch of the gilded vice of London, which he had not actually seen. Hawthorne's Rome, in its historical complexity and artistic abundance, is magnificently *there* on his pages, but his Europeans are deliberately drawn from artistic legend and romantic convention — the Arcadian faun-like Donatello of noble Italian ancestry, the Anglo-Italian-Jewish Miriam, a « Dark Lady » associated with Guido Reni's « Beatrice Cenci », Sodoma's « Judith », and William Wetmore Story's « Cleopatra ». None of these early writers were themselves deeply fascinated with the American response to Europe as a central subject. Irving's

fiction invented American folklore from European examples, as in « Rip Van Winkle » and « The Headless Horseman ». Cooper found his artistic fulfillment in the great saga of Natty Bumppo; Melville found his in the metaphor of the sea voyage; and Hawthorne was at his best in exploring the Puritan past as a resource for the « romance ».

It was left to Henry James to bring to the international theme a cosmopolitan experience and a technical craft deeper than that of anyone (including Howells) who preceded him. He chose to live abroad because he could find in « the denser, richer, warmer European spectacle » that « accumulation of history and custom » — that « complexity of manners and types » — which formed « a fund of suggestion for a novelist ». The hero of his first story « Travelling Companions » (1870) transcends his romantic attitudinizing by his ability to respond to the Roman Campagna with « a mingled sense of exaltation and dread ». This Jamesian vision undermines the smug complacency implicit in the American conviction that the New World was unambiguously the land of hope, freedom, and progress. To go across the Atlantic was to discover that going backwards in time was to become aware of both exaltation and dread and to find that some values had been lost in that forward movement of history of which America seemed to be the vanguard. Above all, it was to reasess experience itself.

The dialectic which James developed out of the encounter of the American with the European scene was symbolized in a piece of sculpture discussed in his second novel, *Roderick Hudson*. It is the figure of a young man drinking water from a cup. The narrator asks its maker if it is a symbol of anything in particular. The sculptor replies:

> ... « Why he's youth, you know; he's innocence, he's health, he's strength, he's curiosity. Yes, he's a lot of grand things ».
>
> « And the cup is also a symbol? »
>
> « The cup is knowledge, pleasure, experience. Anything of that kind ».
>
> « Then he's drinking very deep », said Rowland.

Hudson gave an approving nod. « Well, poor wretch, you wouldn't have him die of thirst, would you? »[2].

James's Americans, like Hudson himself, seek their experience on European ground. The experience is often a disenchantment because James knew that part of the « complex fate » of being an American was the need to fight against « a superstitious valuation of Europe »[3]. To be forced to awake from a romantic dream of the Old World is the common fate of many of his characters — of the incorruptible Madame de Mauves, who marries into a thoroughly corruptible French family out of a deluded fascination with aristocratic pedigree; of the imaginative Isabel Archer, who is « ground in the very mill of the conventional » by a loveless marriage to a fake cosmopolitan; of the retired businessman, Christopher Newman, dazzled by the elaborate education af an Anglo-French beauty, « fashioned for exalted social needs », whose tribal loyalty to her family is stronger than her love for the American; and of the invalided heiress, Milly Theale, who is grossly deceived by English fortune-hunters.

James endures, however, because he never let his dialectic become a static contrast of opposites suitable for partisan polemics. He knew that America's « passionate pilgrims » had their counterparts in « passionless pilgrims » who were disposed to treat Europe like « a vast painted and gilded holiday toy, serving its purpose on the spot and for the time, but to be relinquished, sacrificed, broken and cast away, at the dawn of any other convenience ». If in certain contexts his Americans had « the grace of youth and innocence and freshness », in different contexts these qualities were the provincial limitations of those « almost incredibly *unaware of life* — as the European order expressed life »[4]. Both sides of James's international

2. *Roderick Hudson*, intro. LEON EDEL; Rev. ed., New York, Harper Torchbook, 1960, p. 36.
3. F. O. MATTHIESSEN, *ed.*, *The James Family* (New York: Knopf, 1947), p. 290.
4. *The Art of the Novel*, pp. 187, 189.

equation are ambiguous for he was always conscious of « the virtues that go with certain defects, and the defects that go with certain virtues ». For that reason his stories can never be used to settle an argument about the superiority of one side of the Atlantic over the other. « Being a cosmopolite is an accident », he said of himself soon after settling down in London, « but one must make the best of it »[5]. Making the best of it was maintaining a scrupulous objectivity.

No doubt, as Quentin Anderson has insisted in his *The American Henry James,* these stories still have power because American and European manners are often treated not for their own sake but rather as « a device for enforcing a point about our relation to ourselves ». But if they exploit social history for moral and psychological purposes in order to express an ideal of developed consciousness, it does not follow that « the actual plurality of pasts, the actual discontinuities, the sharp reminders of human limitation history contains, meant little to a man endlessly weaving a web of aesthetic and moral order »[6]. Certainly it is one of the most powerful meanings of the international theme as James developed it that the free spirit discovers in the Old World only at painful cost the necessity of learning to face the limits of life. The archetypical American, Christopher Newman, is precisely defined by his « democratic assumption of every one's right to lead an easy life » and his sense of the world as « a great bazaar, where one might stroll about and purchase handsome things . . . ». There is something of a judgment on him in his being forced to see the woman he longed to marry shut herself up for life in a Carmelite convent, the symbol of all those forces in the Old World which the New had proudly rejected. What Newman learns is that even the happy citizens of the brave New World are not immune to a failure and a sorrow that have no remedy. This discovery is just as important to the story's meaning as Newman's good-

5. *Portraits of Places;* Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1911, p. 75.
6. *The American Henry James;* New Brunswick, Rutger's University Press, 1957, pp. 23, 26.

natured refusal to take revenge. Similarly, Isabel Archer, in *The Portrait of a Lady*, wants to live out her dream of « the free exploration of life » but she is forced to take the « poisoned drink » of « the cup of experience » and find in resigned acceptance of her barren marriage the grandest response which she can make to her fate.

Knowledge, pleasure, experience — these phases of James's dialectic are not arbitrarily identified with Europe. The record of history, the abundance of art, and the social complexity are genuine characteristics of a world which has been shaped by forces antedating the formation of America. If Europe seems so often to be a school of limitation this American prejudice has its reasons. The power of aristocratic families, the importance of manners, the force of tradition, and the persistence of poverty — these aspects of European life are not at all mythical. The question which history now poses is whether or not the contrasts upon which James depended for his treatment of the international theme are increasingly obsolete.

In his travel essays James usually plays the role of the sentimental tourist, « the irresponsible stranger », who cultivates the pleasures of the picturesque Old World. He was too self-conscious, however, to ignore the trick of perspective upon which this point of view depends. « In the wonderful crooked, twisting, climbing, soaring, burrowing Genoese alleys », he exulted, « the traveller is really up to his neck in the old Italian sketchability »[7]. Yet the sight of the people «for ever moving to and fro or standing in their cavernous doorways and dusky, crowded shops, calling, chattering, laughing, lamenting, living their lives in the conversational Italian fashion », gave him a strong sense of « possible social pressure »[8]. The experience put the habitual stance of the tourist in a fresh light:

> A traveller is often moved to ask himself whether it has been worth while to leave his home — whatever his home may have

7. *Italian Hours;* New York, Grove Press, reprint of 1909 ed., p. 114.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

been — only to encounter new forms of human suffering, only to be reminded that toil and privation, hunger and sorrow and sordid effort, are the portion of the mass of mankind. To travel is, as it were, to go to the play, to attend a spectacle; and there is something heartless in stepping forth into foreign streets to feast on « character » when character consists simply of the slightly different costume in which labour and want present themselves [9].

James was comforted by the thought that « proof of extreme and constant destitution » in Italy seemed to be compensated for by the people's « enviable ability not to be depressed by circumstances », but he added the warning that « our observation in any foreing land is extremely superficial ». His remarks were not, fortunately, « addressed to the inhabitants themselves, who would be sure to exclaim upon the impudence of the fancy-picture » [10]. He had proof of his own indulgence of the tourist's fallacy in romanticizing the figure of a whistling Italian youth who turned out in fact to be « a brooding young radical and communist, filled with hatred of the present Italian government, raging with discontent and crude political passion, professing a ridiculous hope that Italy would soon have, as France had had, her ' '89 ', and declaring that he for his part would willingly lend a hand to chop off the heads of the king and the royal family ». This « unhappy, underfed, unemployed young man », whom James had taken for a symbol of « sensuous optimism », was « operatic only quite in spite of himself » [11]. These deflationary observations, however infrequent in his travel-essays, point to that heightened sensitivity to the American danger of making « a superstitious valuation of Europe » which finds such rich documentation in his international stories.

Like most travellers, James responded most eloquently to the historical and artistic record of the European past, but he did not lack an eye for the present — if only for its contrasting effect. The « promptest moral » of his revisiting of Italy in 1877

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 115-16.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

was « the accomplished schism between the old order and the new » [12]. The disparity was sad and cruel:

> That the people who but three hundred years ago had the best taste in the world should now have the worst; that having produced the noblest, loveliest, costliest works, they should now be given up to the manufacture of objects at once very ugly and paltry; that the race of which Michel Angelo and Raphael, Leonardo and Titian were characteristic should have no other title to distinction than third-rate *genre* pictures and catchpenny statues — all this is a frequent perplexity to the observer of actual Italian life. The flower of « great » art in these latter years ceased to bloom very powerfully anywhere; but nowhere does it seem so drooping and withered as in the shadow of the immortal embodiments of the old Italian genius [13].

Signs of the degradation of taste were everywhere — in his lodgings, the shops, the dress of the women, the decoration of cafes and railway-stations, and « the hopeless frivolity of everything that pretends to be a work of art ». Modern crudity seemed to have run riot over the relics of historic greatness.

James did not draw from this invidious contrast the usual invidious conclusion that the ignoble present was best ignored. The traveller, he counselled, should think of Italy, at least for a while, « as panting both for a future and for a balance at the bank; aspirations supposedly much at variance with the Byronic, the Ruskinian, the artistic, poetic, aesthetic manner of considering our eternally attaching peninsula ». After his first flood of irritation with the prosaic present, he could well imagine that « Young Italy, preoccupied with its economical and political future, must be heartily tired of being admired for its eyelashes and its pose ». Surely there was a limit to the Italian tolerance for the foreigner's « insufferable aesthetic patronage ». James did not pretend to like the face of the future, but it was worth respectful attention that historic Italy had itself been an ardently

12. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

mercantile country, and it might one day become « united and prosperous, but altogether scientific and commercial » [14]. It was important therefore to note small signs of the future: « There is a horse-car from the Porta del Popolo to the Ponte Molle, and the Tuscan shrines are fed with kerosene » [15].

Now that horse-cars and kerosene themselves are picturesque reminders of that more leisurely Europe of the nineteenth century which the contemporary traveller often sadly misses, it is time to ask if the international theme has not become played out, itself a relic of an earlier stage of American-European relationships. While James had a consuming nostalgia for « the golden air » of that Italy which Hawthorne had breathed before the Civil war, along with William Wetmore Story and the other American artists living in Rome and Florence, we can only feel nostalgia for James's pilgrimage in 1869 when he went reeling and moaning through the streets of Rome in « a fever of enjoyment », covering in five hours (without any breakfast) the Forum, St. Peter's, the Colosseum, the Campidoglio, the Castle of St. Angelo, and the Pantheon. Jet-fatigue if nothing else, has ruled out such heroism.

James himself had his doubts about the international theme when he wrote the prefaces for his New York Edition. « Their author, I am quite aware », he confessed, « would seem struck with no possibility of contrast in the human lot so great as that encountered as we turn back and forth between the distinctively American and the distinctively European outlook ». He was increasingly impressed, however, with « the multiplied symptoms among educated people, from wherever drawn, of a common intelligence and a social fusion tending to abridge old rigours of separation ». There was, to confound the novelist of manners, an increasing mixture of manners. Even his own late works, *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*, for all their involvement of American with Euro-

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 111-12.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

pean characters, did not, he felt, fall into the category of the international novel. They dealt instead with the idea of some « eventual sublime consensus of the educated » in which direction lay « the personal drama of the future » [16]. Today any such consensus would appear to lie in places where James was not equipped to explore—perhaps among physical scientists and among radical youth who share a common mistrust of established powers and historic ideologies. At the same time the established order on both sides of the Atlantic would seem to illustrate an even greater abridgement of « old rigours of separation » than anything James experienced.

Sociologists on both sides of the Atlantic are busy trying to describe a New Europe. In the winter of 1964 *Daedalus*, the Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, devoted an entire issue to this portrait. The results shatter the old familiar image beyond recognition. In Europe from 1940 to 1943 some thirty million people were transplanted, to be followed after the war by the uprooting of twenty-five million more. In Italy since the war a million and a half people per year change their towns of residence [17]. The fastest growing class on the continent is the new middle class of the service sector of the economy, such as civil servants, tax officials, and bank clerks. The school is replacing the family as a ticket to the corridors of power, and one out of three sons of manual workers now rise to nonmanual occupations in all those European countries where mobility studies have been made. There are, in fact, more children of working-class families in European parliaments than in the American Congress. A new system of values is spreading in Europe: the replacement of «cohesive feelings and groupings » by the modern ethos of ambition, work, and individual success [18]. *Ecco*, the New Europe.

16. *The Art of the Novel*, pp. 198, 202.

17. ALESSANDRO PIZZORNO, « The Individualistic Mobilization of Europe », *Daedalus*, 93 (Winter, 1964), 205, 208.

18. RALF DAHRENDORF, « Recent Changes in the Class Structure of European Societies », *ibid.*, pp. 240, 245, 254, 262.

On the American side of the international equation the old symbols no longer hold true. The national republic is too old and the guilt of power too evident to speak of an innocent New World. James himself was fascinated by the massive influx of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe which challenged what he called « the old sweet Anglo-Saxon spell » [19], and the most original voices in our literature today are likely to be Jewish. Bernard Malamud is even telling stories about Jewish passionate pilgrims abroad. As that « puritan » prudery which Henry Miller did his best to outrage from the perspective of Paris, it is sufficient to note that he himself returned to California and that his books are now on the racks in every drug-store from Portland, Maine, to Portland, Oregon. The independent American girl who lives in the pages of Howells and James may still be observed abroad, but it is a long way from *Daisy Miller* to *Lolita*.

Surely the bell has tolled for the polar view of the relationship between America and Europe. And yet . . . No traveller will think so. Even the sociologists remind us that in 1957 only 20% of the households in Italy owned a car, a washing machine and a refrigerator, those mass consumption items which are so common in America. (For workers the figure drops below 2%). From one-third to two-thirds of those who said that they would *like* to own them some day did not think that they ever would. « Around 1970 things will improve », according to the sociologist Alessandro Pizzorno, « but when the first men have landed on the moon or thereabout, almost half of the families in the richest countries in Europe will still not own an automobile. There would not be anything serious about this if it were not for the fact that the other half *will* own one, or more » [20]. The traveller from Los Angeles or New York City may recognize the quantity of traffic in Rome, but its quality will have a Sorelian anarchy which he has never

19. On James and the immigrants see my discussion in *The American Image of the Old World*, New York, Harper and Row, 1963, pp. 132-33.

20. « The Individualistic Mobilization of Europe », *Daedalus*, p. 218.

seen before. Banking will seem to be conducted by rules laid down by someone with the Florentine subtlety of Machiavelli. Television will be refreshingly quiet and oddly static. In the public schools the children will wear Victorian smocks and get Victorian cuffs on the head when they do not pay attention. The food and the service in the restaurants will still be as good as Howard Johnson's is bad. The church, he will find, is still the most glorious and central building in town. There will be differences, in short, even in the similarities themselves, in addition to many of the old familiar contrasts. In one day the traveller in Rome can eat in the Ghetto, surronded by Renaissance palaces, at a cafe called « Vecchia Roma » and have another meal in the very modern suburbs of *E.U.R.*, surrounded by dead-white fascist architecture, at a cafe called « Vecchia America » where the head-waiter wears a badge and a six-gun. Incredibly, the food will be good at both.

The New Europe and the Old World, strangely mixed, will compel the traveller to flail about in search of new categories to comprehend what is happening around him. It is not that Cooper, Melville, Hawthorne, and James will seem to be entirely irrelevant. The puzzling fact is that they will seem both relevant and irrelevant at the same time. Our categories of description for America and Europe are too convenient and too invidious. Technocratic America, cultured Europe; American missionary diplomacy, European *realpolitik;* American nervousness, European contentment — these are still favorite European terms. The favored American formulas are equally self-congratulatory: American pragmatism, European rigidity; American hope, European despair; American individualism, European bureacracy. And there is never any difficulty in finding evidence to support these facile comparisons. If we emphasize instead the historical changes which have flattened out familiar differences, we are still tempted to describe them as the Americanization of Europe, or vice-versa. Even the conception of an Atlantic Community, which found favor in the days of Truman and Acheson, is flawed by its origin in the strategic needs of a temporary alliance against an immediate Soviet

threat and failed to take into account the persistent differences among the Atlantic powers in their necessities and their perspectives. The relationship between America and Europe seems to be subject to this law: if we assume disparity, history will soon impress us with signs of parity; if we assume parity, history will soon rebuke us with signs of the persistence of disparity.

It is impossible in this dialogue within the Atlantic world to find a neutral platform outside of the actuality of being American or European. But a reasonable approximation to objectivity can be found in the reinforcing prophecies of Alexis de Tocqueville, a Frenchman who appreciated America, and Henry James, an American who apreciated Europe. Together they illuminate our social future and its consequences for the international novel. Tocqueville's vision was suggested by America only in part. In many respects the United States seemed to him to have built-in safeguards against the dangers which he considered to be implicit in the modern world of greatly increased social equality. « I wished to set out the general tendencies of democratic societies of which no complete example yet exists », he wrote John Stuart Mill [21]. If both sides of the Atlantic now seem to provide evidence for Tocqueville's fears, as well as his hopes, it is not because America is Europe's Future but because neither America nor Europe have yet found stable solutions to the demanding problems inherent in the task of establishing freedom and equality within a humane civilization.

The new world of modern times, Tocqueville predicted, would face four main dangers: the « virtuous materialism » of avid consumers; the withdrawn, privatized « individualism » of those who preferred their family and friends to the responsibilities of public affairs; the conformist thinking of those who feared to challenge the « tyranny of the majority »; and the demoralizing tutelage of a paternalistic centralized administration. In such a world men would tend to regard « every new

21. M. C. M. Simpson, ed., *Memoirs, Letters, and Remains of Alexis de Tocqueville;* London, Macmillan, 1861, II, 62.

theory as a peril, every innovation as an irksome toil, every social improvement as a stepping-stone to revolution, and so refuse to move altogether for fear of being moved too far »[22]. It is worth emphasizing that Tocqueville did not seek to solve the problems of the future by recommending a facile synthesis between the best features of aristocratic Europe and democratic America. He aimed instead at the goal of elaborating « a new science of politics for a new world ». He wished to arm Europeans and Americans alike with a « salutary fear » which keeps « watch and ward for freedom ».

This convergence of America and Europe on the problems which Tocqueville foresaw does not, however, invalidate the international theme as a resource for fiction. It requires instead the originality to discover new categories for interpreting it. James was shocked by the coming of the First World War to reconsider the validity of his own artistic purpose: « The subject-matter of one's own effort », he wrote Hugh Walpole in 1915, « has become *itself* utterly treacherous and false — its relation to reality utterly given away and smashed. Reality is a world that was to be capable of *this* . . . »[23]. But the Master of Lamb House in *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), had himself dramatized the effect of « society's not knowing, but only guessing and suspecting and trying to ignore, what 'goes on' irreconcilably, subversively, beneath the vast smug surface »[24]. Furthermore, before the war he had already anticipated the dramatic possibilities inherent in the waning of the old contrast between aristocratic and artistic Europe, on the one hand, and democratic and provincial America, on the other. This familiar polarity was, he felt, too much like saying that there were differences between « fishes and fowls ». The new international novel would have a far more subtle subject. « We may strike lights by opposing order to order », he pointed out

22. See *Democracy in America*, II, Book 3, Chap. 21.
23. PERCY LUBBOCK, ed., *The Letters of Henry James;* London, Macmillan, 1920, II, 462.
24. *The Art of the Novel*, pp. 77-78.

in his preface to *The Spoils of Poynton*, « one sort to another sort; for in that case we get the correspondences and equivalents that make differences mean something; we get the interest and the tension of disparity where a certain parity may have been in question »[25].

Now that we have reached the point on both sides of the Atlantic where we can say that a *certain* parity is in question, we need novelists who can find their subject in « the interest and the tension of *disparity* » which will continue to qualify our common fate. Sociologists as prescient as Tocqueville may foretell that condition in general terms, but only novelists as perceptive as James can show us in particular how both the parity *and* the disparity of our lives influence the individual meaning of freedom and limitation, of the pursuit of happiness and the acceptance of sorrow. Viewed in this light, the international theme can be, in James's phrase, « the personal drama of the future » for the novelist of manners.

Certainly the new international novel could illuminate our condition; but would it also represent an artistic gain? It would be easy to argue that the most vital tradition of American writing has been in the direction of the exploration of inner consciousness, of what William James called « the subliminal self ». By that standard the novel of manners may seem peripheral and superficial. It is true, as Tocqueville prophesied, that poets living in democratic times would « search below the external surface which is palpable to the senses in order to read the inner soul » and so devote themselves to « scrutiny of the hidden depths in the immaterial nature of man ». The results have been much like what he predicted: « immense and incoherent imagery, with exaggerated descriptions and strange creations », that « sometimes make us regret the world of reality »[26]. The promise of the international theme, as *Redburn*, *The Marble Faun*, and James's stories proved, is that it may bring the novel into the world without loss of that sense

25. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
26. *Democracy in America*, II, Chaps. 17 and 18.

of the self which has given American writing its peculiar power from *Walden* to *Herzog*. If philosophy begins in wonder, the international story begins in bewilderment. The current mixture of parity and disparity in the European order provides a foil for consciousness in the rich possibilities, for both comedy and tragedy, of the bewildering shocks that can engender that exploration of personal and national identity which the classic American writers have traditionally claimed as their native territory.

Rome, Florence, Venice, Paris, London — these cities as they live symbolically in James's fiction are proof that his treatment of the international theme has a close kinship with Hawthorne's definition of the « romance » as « a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other »[27]. Today, for the American abroad, the myth of the Old World and the actuality of the New Europe seem strangely interpenetrated, a neutral territory still in the frontier stage of imaginative exploration.

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27. See « The Custom House », intro. *The Scarlet Letter*. For James's romantic image of Italy in his travel essays and his symbolic treatment of Italy in his ficton see UMBERTO MARIANI, « L'esperienza italiana di Henry James », *Studi Americani*, 6 (1960), 221-53.