

Speed, Desire, and the Museum: *The Golden Bowl* as Art Romance

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“You Americans are almost incredibly romantic,” notes the Prince in an early conversation with Maggie Verver, his fiancée. She entirely agrees, proposing her father as a particularly egregious example:

“His relation to the things he cares for [. . .] is absolutely romantic. So is his whole life over here—it’s the most romantic thing I know.”

“You mean his idea for his native place?”

“Yes—the collection, the Museum with which he wishes to endow it, of which he thinks more, as you know, than of anything in the world. It’s the work of his life and the motive of everything he does.” [. . .]

“Has it been his motive in letting me have you?”

“Yes, my dear, positively—or in a manner. [. . .] You’re at any rate a part of his collection [. . .] one of the things that can only be got over here. You’re a rarity, an object of beauty, an object of price. [. . .] you belong to a class about which everything is known. You are what they call a *morceau de musée*.” (GB 9–10)

Adam Verver aspires to build what is described as “a museum of museums,” not simply an American institution that will belong among the very greatest museums of the world, but a museum composed of museums, of what is already accredited as museum-worthy. In this sense, the Prince is a museum piece in a number of ways, not least among them the fact that he is, quite openly, part of the collection the Ververs are assembling in their time in Europe. When Maggie has doubts about her husband, she goes to the archives of the British Museum, which houses a room dedicated to his family. When she calls him a *morceau de musée*, Maggie is identifying not only where the Prince is going, but where he comes from.

But this does not clarify why and in what sense Adam Verver's museum is so grandly *romantic*, nor how it is characteristic of a kind of national romanticism.

The Golden Bowl (1904) provides a double lesson in romance, instructing both characters and readers. The question for us is why this lesson needs to be taught from inside the museum. Narratives of art in the nineteenth century discovered a ready interchangeability between terms describing the individual's relation to art and terms used in fiction to describe human relations. James availed himself readily of this fruitful interchange, nowhere more so than in this novel, a text of the early twentieth century which rewards reading within the context of the nineteenth-century culture of art.

Romance

Nothing is more striking in the preface of *The American* than the sophisticated reformulation of what we may mean by romance. In this text, contemporary with *The Golden Bowl*, James insists that it is wrong to think we recognize the romantic by means of a range of standard narrative motifs expressive of great personal risk, "the idea of the facing of danger, the acceptance of great risks for the fascination, the very love, or their uncertainty, the joy of success if possible and of battle in any case" (AC 279). He cites a number of time-worn tropes which are associated with such risk taking—boats, or caravans, or tigers, or "historical characters," or ghosts, or forgers, or detectives, or beautiful wicked women, or pistols and knives—but only to dismiss them as insufficient.¹ In James's account danger is precisely the description of the real; what identifies romance is a fantasy of *safety*, "the dream of an intenser experience easily becomes rather some vision of a sublime security like that enjoyed on the flowery plains of heaven." *The Golden Bowl* demands that we consider the novel as a complex lesson in what James means by romance in that preface and in his late work generally.

Maggie evokes the association of romance with fantasies of adventure early in the novel when she describes her activities with her father, "We've been like a pair of pirates—positively stage pirates, the sort who wink at each other and say 'Ha-ha!'" (11). When her father is about to propose to Charlotte, a similar register of images is evoked and clearly identified as romantic:

He liked, in this preliminary stage, to feel that he should be able to "speak" and that he would; the word itself being romantic, pressing for him the spring of association with stories and plays where handsome and ardent young men in uniforms, tights, cloaks, high boots, had it, in soliloquies, ever on their lips. (155)

But Maggie engages the language of romance only to more fully demonstrate its inadequacy. Thus, the range of feelings of terror and disgust to which she refuses expression

figured nothing nearer to experience than a wild eastern caravan, looming into view with crude colours in the sun, fierce pipes in the air, high spears against the sky, a thrill, a natural joy to mingle with, but

turning off short before it reached her and plunging into other defiles. She saw at all events why horror itself had almost failed her; the horror that, foreshadowed in advance, would, by her thought, have made everything that was unaccustomed in her cry out with pain; [. . .] It was the first sharp falsity she had known in her life, to touch at all, or be touched by; it had met her like some bad-faced stranger surprised in one of the thick-carpeted corridors of a house of quiet on a Sunday afternoon; and yet, yes, amazingly, she had been able to look at terror and disgust only to know that she must put away from her the bitter-sweet of their freshness. (471)

To respond in “any of the immediate, inevitable, assuaging ways, the ways usually open to innocence outraged and generosity betrayed” is impossible to Maggie because it would threaten her real desire, which is for a peace as absolute as that sublime security James identified at the heart of romance (471). Maggie’s romance resides in the activities designed to manage the crisis.² The moment in which Maggie considers her options is vital as a recalibration of what it might mean to be romantic and of the possibilities opened up and foreclosed by such a new understanding. It takes place as Maggie studies her husband, father, and stepmother playing cards. The metaphor that comes to her mind is at once dramatic and openly self-referential: “they might have been figures rehearsing some play of which she herself was the author” (470).

Two parts of this central moment of the novel, what I am calling its lesson in romance, are worth some pause. If the image for the *impossibility* of self-gratifying, vulgar anger is typical of James’s use of melodrama (that thrilling eastern caravan), the figure for the sense of betrayal itself is more peculiar and evocative: this “first sharp falsity she had known in her life, to touch at all, or be touched by,” has a very characteristic shape and locale: “it had met her like some bad-faced stranger surprised in one of the thick-carpeted corridors of a house of quiet on a Sunday afternoon.” The description of the encounter with evil is remarkably close to several disturbing meetings in houses elsewhere in James’s oeuvre—in the dream of the Louvre, in *A Small Boy and Others* (1913) say, or in “The Jolly Corner” (1906). In those other instances an encounter with an uncanny return of *oneself* makes the meeting at once significant and disturbing. How can this moment seem at all similar to those others, unless there is something of a self-recognition in that ugly stranger who has surprised Maggie in her home—who has touched her or whom she has touched?

Speed

Speed has a surprisingly insistent presence in James’s texts dealing with museums—as remarkable in the precipitous ruin of Roderick Hudson in Rome as in the pursuit and counterpursuit that characterizes James’s dream of the Louvre. *The Golden Bowl*, though it gives the impression of stately, almost hieratic, development, is also surprisingly characterized by a remarkable amount of movement at key moments, movement of a particular sort. The *rush towards* is a crucial structural component of this carefully patterned novel. Consider that

oddly dynamic opening line: “The Prince had always liked his London, when it had come to him” (3). We meet Amerigo rushing through the town, as it in turn seems to move towards him. The narrator suggests that “the last idea that would just now have occurred to him in any connection was the idea of pursuit,” but that is precisely because he believes his pursuit is over, crowned with success: “He had been pursuing for six months as never in his life before” (4). Having signed the final papers in the pre-nuptial agreements required to cement his bond to Maggie Verver, the Prince keeps moving through the city, driven no longer by the goal of his ambitious courtship but by nervous energy.

The Prince’s energy brings him ultimately to the home of Fanny Assingham, where he learns, with the reader, that he is only half of a symmetrical motion that has been taking place in the city. Even as he has been rushing to his marriage and more recently through the city, his erstwhile lover, Charlotte Stant, has been hurrying over the ocean and through London to the Assingham home, the vertex at which their trajectories intersect.³ But, after all, the second clause of the sentence which opens the novel has already linked the past, incongruously, with the Prince’s motion: “The Prince had always liked his London, when it had come to him; he was one of the modern Romans who find by the Thames a more convincing image of the truth of the ancient state than any they have left by the Tiber” (3). The “liking” evinced by the Prince, the liking represented or provoked by the city “coming to him,” like so much other rushing and coming and liking in the novel, is to be understood as a function of reflection, of a recognized return of the past. More than a repeated structural pattern is at stake in the coincidence of this city, which comes to one so rapidly because it is a more compelling version of the city one has left behind, and the two lovers also rushing towards (or back to) each other as the novel opens. While it is evidently the force of desire that provokes both sides of the *rush towards*, the novel insists from the first on the constant interpenetration of history and desire. The returns of the past, which are both cultural-artistic and relational-passionate, are not parallel lines that run alongside each other and do not touch; they are the warp and woof of *The Golden Bowl*.

Fanny Assingham is acutely aware that what is at stake in the coming together of the Prince and Charlotte is a matter of time—of the past and speed. “How will it do, *how*?” She complains to her husband, “That anything of the past [. . .] should come back *now*? How will it do, how will it do?” (52). Fanny’s remarks are not about *timing* only, because the Prince is about to be married and this is no time for his erstwhile lover to appear; everything about the earlier relationship between the Prince and Charlotte is presented in temporal terms.

Amerigo’s response highlights the crisis of a return of the past, or, more accurately, of a recognition of a past that has never been fully evaded. At their meeting James develops the fact of Charlotte’s presence and its implications for the Prince: “It showed him everything—above all her presence in the world, so closely, so irretrievably contemporaneous with his own” (35). “Irretrievably contemporaneous” is a phrase suggestive of a wish to retrieve a moment when they did not share the same time, but that is a desire as impossible as any new beginning in this novel. The immediacy of her presence speaks not to a new

development, but to an old one. As he considers her charms Amerigo does not find anything he has not seen before: “There was but one way certainly for *him*—to interpret them in the sense of the already known” (35).

In the Prince’s response to Charlotte, the text emphasizes the quality of modulated distance and closeness:

She made no circumstance of thus coming upon him, save so far as the intelligence in her face could at any moment make a circumstance of almost anything. If when she moved off she looked like a huntress, she looked when she came nearer like his notion, perhaps not wholly correct, of a muse. (36)

This “coming upon” is like the unexpected “being met” in Maggie’s metaphorical encounter with the ugly-faced stranger. Amerigo is worried because the arrival of Charlotte imperils the aspirations for a new beginning which he understands himself to be affirming by his marriage: “This was like beginning something over, which was the last thing he wanted. The strength, the beauty of his actual position was in its being wholly a fresh start” (71). If the novel teaches a lesson in romance, it also instructs on the nature of beginnings. Like Fanny Assingham (who will later attempt to defend herself for her part in the deception by reference to “a past that I believed, with so much on top of it, solidly buried” [425]), the Prince is too simple in his wish for a new inception. The past comes to him in the shape of Charlotte, huntress at a distance, possible inspiration up close, but in either case, a figure for the impossibility of new beginnings.

The consummation of their desire comes on a rainy day that Charlotte has spent touring the sights of London—notably the British Museum. Her descent on the Prince in the late afternoon is one more return to the past. The metaphors James wields in describing the effect of her arrival on the Prince unmistakably demonstrate that the desire they share is the sensual form of such a return. Their physical embrace is preceded by an equally passionate entwining of temporalities in Amerigo’s consciousness:

The sense of the past revived for him nevertheless as it had not yet done: it made that other time somehow meet the future close, interlocking with it, before his watching eyes, as in a long embrace of arms and lips, and so handling and hustling the present that this poor quantity scarce retained substance enough, scarce remained sufficiently *there*, to be wounded or shocked. (218)

With the past claiming such intimacy with the present, taking such liberties, it is little wonder that Charlotte can identify his feelings along with her own: “It’s the charm, at any rate [. . .] of trying again the old feelings. They come back—they come back. Everything [. . .] comes back. Besides [. . .] you know for yourself” (219). By the time their bodies catch up with their minds and they embrace, the act has become a meeting of past and present with an earnest of the future. The blurring of temporal distinctions in the rekindled romance of Amerigo and

Charlotte is a narrative representation of the inescapable reflectivity of passion. The *rushing towards* each other which has been their trajectory in the first third of the novel culminates in an encounter which, in spite of being extraordinarily physical for James, is nevertheless described in insistently reflective terms:

[T]heir hands instinctively found their hands. [. . .] And so for a minute they stood together, as strongly held and as closely confronted as any hour of their easier past even had seen them. They were silent at first, only facing and faced, only grasping and grasped, only meeting and met. [. . .] Then of a sudden, through this tightened circle, as at the issue of a narrow strait into the sea beyond, everything broke up, broke down, gave way, melted and mingled. Their lips sought their lips, their pressure their response and their response their pressure; with a violence that had sighed itself the next moment to the longest and deepest of stillness they passionately sealed their pledge. (228–29)

James is purposefully and emphatically unclear in his pronouns, erasing the possibility of imagining a delay between proposition and recognition, between recognition and response. “Meeting and met,” along with all the other forms of verbs, removes any gap between agents in the speed of their encounter. The kaleidoscopic mirroring which is among his principal structural tools in the novel allows James to rewrite the (re-)encounter that characterizes the passion of Charlotte and the Prince several times, most elegantly perhaps at Matcham, the estate at which their indiscretion reaches its zenith: “She came toward him in silence, while he moved to meet her; the great scale of this particular front, at Matcham, multiplied thus, in the golden morning, the stages of their meeting and the successions of their consciousness” (263). The mirroring reduplication of consciousness and encounter is itself reflected not only in the magnificent scale of the mansion where it takes place, but in its very name; in “Matcham” James invents a near-palindrome with “match” at one end and (mis)match at the other. The word enacts the mirroring quality of passion in the novel, though, in both cases, the symmetry is marred by a flaw at its center.

Desire

If the *rush towards* of this novel is a refutation of new beginnings—the figure meeting one being always an emblem of one’s past and its desires—the question is how it is possible for Charlotte to surge out to Maggie at the moment in which Amerigo’s wife surveys her imminent domestic crisis? The answer, evidently, resides in the reflective nature of the two women, and of desire generally in the novel. While the insistent symmetries of the text, which are as manifold as the actual number of characters is small, are suggestive of mirroring, the fundamental issue reflected in the relationships of the novel is the passion of the past for the present. The pre-history of the novel is, after all, twofold: the romance of Charlotte and the Prince and the romance of Adam Verver (and his daughter) with art. Both pasts are present at all times in the engagement and marriage of the

Prince and Maggie. At the heart of these shapes of longing, however, resides the primal incestuous passion of Maggie and her father. The ugly stranger who meets her in her home is the shape of what she wants. Maggie and her father look at the other couple and see themselves, which is precisely the problem; the ugly face of their own passion needs to be rebuffed by a direct rush. The shock of the infidelity is not that of the never seen. The mirrored figure of their own incestuous desires is an ugly shape met suddenly in a quiet home.

While Maggie proposes and facilitates the marriage of her father to Charlotte as a way to feel that she has not abandoned him, the marriage does not replace their relationship so much as keep it together (154). James seems consciously to skirt vulgarity in his insistence on the passion behind Maggie's "intense devotion to her father" (40). He is, if possible, more emphatic on Charlotte's role as someone standing in for Maggie, for the abiding passion which, until Maggie's marriage, had always been a matter of fathers and daughters. In this novel, "He might have been her father" is a phrase suggestive of more than a difference in age (162).⁴

As Maggie herself says to her father: "It was as if you couldn't be in the market when you were married to *me*. Or rather as if I kept people off, innocently, by being married to you. Now that I'm married to someone else you're, as in consequence, married to nobody" (127). If the marriage of Charlotte and Adam is most evidently and insistently founded on a doubled incestuous desire—one which aims at satisfaction by either keeping Adam and Maggie together, or by giving Adam a Maggie-like replacement—Maggie's own relationship with the Prince is insistently incestuous in ways that return us firmly to the interplay of personal and cultural passion which exists in James's fiction as far back as "A Passionate Pilgrim" (1871). If her father is Adam, the first man and original name-giver, her husband is Amerigo, the second man who is nevertheless foundational, the belated name-giver to the America from which Adam's adopted city gets its name. For both father and daughter, Amerigo's name is part of what makes him such a prize acquisition; what is significant for James in that ancestry, however, is that Amerigo is no Columbus—in the style of Christopher Newman, say—precisely because he is never a new man. If the Prince is identified with the frustrated aspiration towards the new, his wife marries with an eye to the old. As the crisis develops she finds herself thinking back to the arrangement which she had set up—"by which, so strikingly, she had been able to marry without breaking, as she liked to put it, with her past" (300).

Subterranean memories

How *does* one tell a story about the encounter with culture? The nineteenth century offers various models, many of which have been lost to modern taste, but which were pervasive in their own day. If the more educated upper classes had at least a modicum of classical learning or affectation to inspire their experience of Europe, the emergent middle-class tourist could look back to a small but consistent and extremely effective tradition, including many of Byron's various alter egos, but most notably represented by Madame de Staël's *Corinne* (1807),

Letitia Landon's *Improvisatrice* (1824), and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856). Each of these texts had an immense readership for its story of a brilliant artist, generally half English and half foreign (that is, Italian), shaped by the visual arts as well as poetry, yet (with rare exceptions) generally fated to emotional misery. In *Roderick Hudson*, set in the 1860s, Roderick's mother and fiancée prepare for their trip to Rome by spending evenings reading *Corinne* in their Northampton home. Once in Europe they will find more sophisticated reading, but the longevity of de Staël's text should not be missed. (Gilbert Osmond's mother was "the American Corinne"). Writers throughout the century wove their texts out of threads found in their predecessors's romances, so that the representation of the encounter with the place of art was always an engagement with a prior authorial fantasy.⁵ The aspiration towards art is represented as a desire for the south and for its embodied avatar, a creature of mixed blood of astonishing ability in the poetic and plastic arts.⁶

The tradition was supported and developed by texts that were true classics of middle-class taste and culture, all making direct appeal to and use of the tropes of fantasy and romance hearkening back to Goethe's complex novel of development, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795–96), particularly to the character of Mignon, displaced figure of longing, creature of manifold incestuous urges, dancer, singer, daughter, and lover. Emblem at once of the promise and the weakness available in culture, Mignon is either silent or speaks in a medley of European languages. Wilhelm is her protector and a substitute father, but also the site of all of her desire that is not addressed to Italy. Her crises are precipitated by her witnessing of the consummation of his desires with other women.⁷

The romantic triangle of Charlotte, Amerigo, and Maggie is the direct aftereffect of two Italian adventures, Maggie's and Charlotte's, but it is also an inheritance of the nineteenth-century romance of art. Charlotte is the heir of such earlier Jamesian creations as Christina Light, that other scion of expatriate America in Italy, because they are both descendants of the many admired and destroyed women who stand for Europe and the troubling encounter with its culture throughout the century. Deracinated daughter of expatriate Americans, raised in Florence, possessed of great beauty and skill, but fated to lose the object of her love—the character of Charlotte owes as much to *Corinne* as to Landon's *Improvisatrice*. Or she is a return of Hawthorne's Miriam, a figure of profound beauty and ready talent unable to escape unnameable secrets and the consciousness of sin. Maggie, on the other hand, is a return of *Corinne*'s Julia—the pallid rival who wins the hand of Lord Nelvil—and more directly of Hilda in *The Marble Faun*.⁸ Closer to home, she as much descends from Mary Garland (certainly the similarity of women's names in *Roderick Hudson* and *The Golden Bowl* is no coincidence) as from Therese, the woman who wins the love of Wilhelm Meister and thereby provokes Mignon's death.

Charlotte's relation to Mignon, the original source of all these tragic women, is suggested not only by her gift of tongues, but by the special appeal of her mystery. We may read a hearkening back to that performing ancestress in the language of performer, of juggler even, that James adduces in an unlikely simile for her fluency:

difficult indeed as it might have been to disembroil in this young person *her* race-quality. Nothing in her definitely placed her; she was a rare, a special product. [. . .] It wasn't a question of her strange sense for tongues, with which she juggled as a conjurer at a show juggled with balls or hoops or lighted brands—it wasn't at least entirely that, [. . .] The point was that in this young woman it was a beauty in itself, and almost a mystery. (41)

Like Corinne, Charlotte is characterized by her ability to improvise magnificently in public: this facility is at once her strength and her taint of vulgar weakness. From her emergence on the stairway at a society function to her role as cultural tour guide in Verver's museum home in another, her gift for public performance goes from being her flaw to marking her tragedy. Her ability to maneuver around London with the same facility she had shown in Rome is thought of by the Prince as a mark of her "curious world-quality" (75). Indeed, it is the Prince who best recognizes the particular makeup of her qualities: "Blood? [. . .] You've that of every race!" (266).⁹

Like her manifold forebears, Charlotte stands for the possibility of an intimate relationship with the culture of Europe. She therefore is not only possessed of an intimate practical knowledge of world capitals, but she is, more strangely, characterized as ageless, particularly and paradoxically, in relation to Adam Verver, who in this regard stands for some complex return of the innocent American: "Oh, that isn't so," she contradicts him at his proposal: "It's I that am old. You *are* young" (161). This claim to antiquity she shares with Christina Light ("I am not young; I have never been young!" [347]) and ultimately Mignon ("How old are you?" "Nobody has counted" [54]).

I have tried to briefly indicate some of the wealth of antecedents for Maggie and especially Charlotte in nineteenth-century art romances. But it would be wrong to ignore the complex turns James gives to the tradition he inherited. If Charlotte's passion for the Prince is a gaudy reflection of that between Maggie Verver and her father, James has nevertheless not made his women precise antinomies. Indeed, the shadow of incest, of a profound, unsatisfiable longing for the father, allies not Charlotte but Maggie with Mignon. "Ah, to thrust such things on *us*, to do them here between us and with us, day after day, and in return, in return—! To do it to *him*—to him, to him!" (423). This is the outburst of Maggie at the moment of the novel's crisis, after she has discovered the secret of the bowl. It is a phrase that describes and enacts the central fact at the heart of the novel, the primal iteration in the kaleidoscopic mirror. What the near-incoherent play of pronoun and preposition amounts to is a cry of disgust at the fact thrust upon her of the sexual secret of her father and of its intersection with her own private life. It might be the voice of Mignon, forced to witness the sexual acts of the father she had determined to make into her own lover. In the constant mirroring of the story, the reference to earlier modes and models is loose and flexible, more interested in drawing out the necessary lines of passion, than in simple analogies. Maggie is the uncanny daughter who is also evidently an object of desire, whose passion and life are bound up fatally with her father's own—whose fate it is to witness and know and be hurt by the sexual secret of her father/lover—as it was Mignon's.

The Patron/The loneliness of picture galleries

The Golden Bowl is a novel about the effects of the unavoidable return of the past on our desires for the future. At the entry level of the novel stand two facts: Adam Verver's project of museum building and his passionate relation with his daughter:

in this museum of museums, a palace of art which was to show for compact as a Greek temple was compact, a receptacle of treasures sifted to positive sanctity, his spirit to-day almost altogether lived, making up, as he would have said, for lost time and haunting the portico in anticipation of the final rites. (107)

The place described is one of those fantasies of the perfect museum which cropped up throughout the nineteenth century, a *musée imaginaire* that is also a culmination of civilization. The novel is of course concerned throughout with what is genuine, what is "real," what is a worthy addition to a museum or collection. Adam Verver lives in his own fantasy-space of perfectly evaluated and collected work, the epitome of civilization. But what James terms "living" tallies strangely with the activities it involves, "haunting" and "anticipating final rites."

In James's treatment of the Louvre, in his autobiographical writings as well as in *The American*, the museum stands for an entire experience of Europe. The golden bowl which gives the novel its title is not only a figure for the beautiful but flawed shape of the relationships in the novel. The plot circles around the object because it represents the dilemma of what Pater called in *Marius*, "a world almost too opulent in what was old" (120). The initial entrance of the bowl into the novel is as a potential wedding gift for Maggie, an object almost impossible to locate because she already has everything. The shopkeeper indicates the function of the bowl as a potential relief from excess when, prior to bringing it out, he sweeps away the first baubles he has shown Charlotte and the Prince with the melancholy observation, "you've seen [. . .] too much." Maggie herself finds the bowl when, after a trip to the British Museum to cheer herself by inspecting the pedigree of her husband and as a further relief for her perturbed emotions, she sets out in search of a gift for her father's birthday. Her challenge is, of course, only greater than that of her fiancé and his lover, as her father is all the more possessed of things.

As the novel enters its climactic stage, the museal nature of the Verver's home, Fawns, becomes more pronounced. As an indication of the estrangement of all parties due to the diffused knowledge of the affair, in the midst of the objects they themselves assembled and in spite of their well-attested taste and sophistication, Maggie and her father come to take on both the earnest desire and the ignorance characteristic of tourists on the continent in James's earliest fiction:

So it was that in the house itself, where more of his waiting treasures than ever were provisionally ranged, she sometimes only looked at him—from end to end of the great gallery, the pride of the house, for instance—as if, in one of the halls of a museum, she had been an earnest young woman with a Baedeker and he a vague gentleman to whom even Baedekers were unknown. (*GB* 507)

If, like the Louvre, Fawns boasts a great gallery, in the family's growing alienation it also seems to offer a Salon Carré:

They learned fairly to live in the perfunctory; they remained in it as many hours of the day as might be; it took on finally the likeness of some spacious central chamber in a haunted house, a great overarched and overglazed rotunda where gaiety might reign, but the doors of which opened into sinister circular passages. Here they turned up for each other, as they said, with the blank faces that denied any uneasiness felt in the approach; there they closed numerous doors carefully behind them—all save the door that connected the place, as by a straight tented corridor, with the outer world. (509)

This murky period of uncertainty towards the end of the work, when every character is aware of a fundamental but unnameable disturbance in their arrangements, finds them most vividly sited in a museum. The characters *all* come to inhabit Adam's haunted museum of museums.

The shape of Charlotte's defeat is unforgettably determined in these pages, described in terms of silent screams and silken halters; but more all-encompassing is the presence of the museum in her destiny. A Corinne trivialized, she becomes a tour guide to her own home.

By the close of the novel, James has returned a deep human pathos to the heart of the museum, in part by recognizing the emblematic nature of the character-types he inherited from the nineteenth-century. The museum is no place of rest or safety. Ghosts inevitably linger in the hallways of an institution characterized by the dangerous mingling of the past and desire. As far back as the 1870s, in engaging Hawthorne's inescapable romances, James had declared that a quality of "factitiousness" would be the penalty incurred by the author attempting to write of a place "in which he has not a transmitted and inherited property" (*EL* 445). The achievement of James in his late work is to embrace the factitiousness of his disinherited state, or rather, the factitious inheritance of the nineteenth-century romance of art, while writing with the recognition that even the most inverisimilitudinous fictions may lodge passions which are often monstrous, always haunting.

NOTES

¹Brodhead has demonstrated the importance of James's concern with romance at the time of writing *The Golden Bowl* (186-96).

²We may compare the Prince's disappointed sense that among the people into which he has married, one never has to "wait with the dagger, or to prepare, insidiously, the cup. These were the services that, by all romantic traditions, were consecrated to affection quite as much as to hate" (230).

³Fanny herself serves as a foundational model for romance between the two continents, though one who herself doubts her own originality: "Mrs Assingham knew better, knew there had been no historic hour, from that of Pocahontas down, when some young Englishman hadn't precipitately believed and some American girl hadn't, with a few more gradations, availed herself to the full of her incapacity to doubt" (27). James's remarkable capsule account of the erotic relations of old world and new expresses in its briefest form the always irrecoverable origin along with the complex symmetry of desire which causes it and hides its source.

⁴"Ah, don't talk to me of other women!" Fanny now overtly panted. 'Do you call Mr Verver's perfectly natural interest in his daughter?—'"

“The greatest affection of which he is capable?—[. . .] I do distinctly—and in spite of my having done all I could think of to make him capable of a greater” (191). The unspoken hint of sexuality in Charlotte’s “all I could think of” along with the odd physicality of Fanny’s “overt” “panting” at the idea she herself has imagined are both typical of James’s more than suggestive treatment of the topic.

⁵The connections among these texts and their authors are manifold and usually open in this deeply literary tradition. de Staël, who was an important influence on Byron, cites Goethe repeatedly (*The Italian Journey* and Mignon’s song in particular) as an authority on Italy and the proper response to its beauty and events. That Letitia Landon’s sensational success, *The Improvisatrice* (1824) made a poem of the tale of genius and disappointment told in *Corinne* (1807) was not missed by her contemporaries—she was given the task of translating the poems for *Corinne*’s first English edition. Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* (1856) is a culmination and a challenge to the tradition. In shorter verse, poems featured in Felicia Hemans’s own *Records of Woman* (1828) such as “Properzia Rossi” and “The Last Song of Sappho” may stand as representative of quantities of heartbroken artist-women throughout the century, while her “Corinne at the Capitol” only emphasizes the (inter)textual character of this tradition (see Leighton and Reynolds). For the influence of de Staël in nineteenth-century American letters, see Mueller-Vollmer (141–58). For the tradition of response to *Corinne*, see Moers.

⁶Moers proposes that “The oddest thing about *Corinne* is that it is a guidebook to Italy just as much as it is a guidebook to the woman of genius” (200). This overlap between character and place, however, is more than eccentric; it is precisely central to the work and to its place in culture (after all, the title is *Corinne, or Italy*). On the much-studied topic of James and Europe, see Buzard; Giorcelli; Maves; Ross; Tuttleton and Lombardo; and Wegelin.

⁷My aim is not a study of direct influence, but it is worth noting that among James’s earliest published efforts we find a remarkable 1865 review of Carlyle’s translation of *Wilhelm Meister* (a text still in James’s library at his death (see Edel and Tintner). The most important recent treatment of the figure of Mignon is Steedman’s extraordinary *Strange Dislocations*. As her title indicates, Steedman identifies Mignon’s essential quality as her out-of-placedness, her “dislocation.”

⁸On the much-discussed topic of James and Hawthorne, see Babiiha and Brodhead (esp. 104–200).

⁹The Prince is particularly fascinated by this aspect of Charlotte. Her profound knowledge of Italian is a mark of more than simply her birth and upbringing: “Her account of the mystery didn’t suffice: her recall of her birth in Florence and Florentine childhood; her parents, from the great country, but themselves already of a corrupt generation, demoralised, falsified, polyglot well before her” (42).

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