

Preface

Henry James stands as a prominent American literary figure whose works represent a profound observation of the transformative power of international encounters. The international theme is the central element that weaves through the Master's narratives and the romantic moments that he constructs are a testament to the nineteenth-century Euro-American exchanges.

The pages that follow embark on an exploration of the complexities of the international theme in his short fiction, frequently overlooked by critics when compared to his much more famous novels. This book draws upon the rich tapestry of my doctoral dissertation. It directly incorporates the ideas, research and perspectives explored in my Ph.D. thesis, serving as a tangible manifestation of the academic groundwork laid during my doctoral studies.

This book is designed to resonate with a diverse public, encompassing both scholars and enthusiasts alike. For academics and readers engaged in the nuanced discourse surrounding James's works, this text contributes to the ongoing critical dialogue, offering perspectives and insights that augment the existing body of scholarship. Simultaneously, the narrative is crafted to be accessible and engaging for students and general literature enthusiasts too. Its exploration of international encounters, particularly relevant in our contemporary global context, extends an invitation to those interested in the intricate

dynamics of the 19th century and the echoes of transatlantic experiences and international love affairs—a pertinent theme in our increasingly interconnected world.

In essence, this book seeks to bridge the gap between specialized discourse and broader literary interests, making the enriching world of Henry James and the complexities of the 19th century accessible to a wide and varied audience.

Embarking on this endeavor has been a profoundly complex journey, one that would not have been possible without the invaluable support of Professor Rodica Mihăilă and Professor Roxana Oltean. Their guidance and extremely insightful advice have been pivotal in shaping the trajectory of this work and their engagement in the process has been instrumental in elevating the quality and depth of this endeavor. I express my sincere gratitude for their mentorship and influence and their overall contribution to this academic journey.

As it has already been mentioned the present book is derived from my doctoral dissertation, therefore certain sections have been previously published in varying formats or in their entirety elsewhere.

The subchapter “Identity on Board: Crossing the Atlantic in ‘The Pension Beaurepas’ and ‘The Point of View’” was published in a slightly different format in 2015 in *Contested Identities: Literary Negotiations over Space and Time*, the subchapter “The Image of the Janus-faced Other in Henry James’s ‘A Bundle of Letters’” was published under the title “The Image of the Other in Henry James’s ‘A Bundle of Letters’” in 2012 in *Language and Literature: Europeans Landmarks of Identity*, a much shorter and less complex

version of the subchapter “‘A Study’ of American Expatriates in Europe in ‘Daisy Miller: A Study’ and ‘The Siege of London’” was published under the title “American Expatriates in Europe in ‘Daisy Miller: A Study’ and ‘The Siege of London’” in 2013 in *Cuadernos de Literatura Inglesa y Norteamericana* and a significantly less intricate excerpt of the last chapter was published under the title “Constructions of National Identity: Henry James’s ‘Lady Barbarina’” in 2011 in *Cultural Texts and Contexts in the English Speaking World*.

Introduction

In a letter to William Dean Howells dated March 1877 Henry James offers a concise account of his approach to the romantic relationships in his texts: “I suspect it is the tragedies in life that arrest my attention more than the other things and say more to my imagination” (*Henry James Letters* vol. II 105). Although the brevity of this quote prevents it from capturing the sheer complexity of James’s work, it is nevertheless testament to the pervasiveness of ill-fated love affairs in his fiction.

In fact, (failed) courtship and marriage are central to most of the plots that James constructed throughout his extensive career as a writer. Yet, if James’s early texts, gathered in the first volumes of *The Complete Tales* and product of his apprenticeship years, focus exclusively on the romantic relationships between his characters, he subsequently complicates these love affairs by framing them within transatlantic scenarios which lie at the basis of the international theme of his work. The significance of this theme is evidenced by the Preface to volume XIV of the New York Edition (more specifically, the preface to “Lady Barberina”), in which James remarks that

The mixture of manners was in fine to loom large and constantly larger all round; it was to be a matter, plainly, about which the future would have much to say. Nothing appeals to me more, I confess, [...]

than the finer – if indeed thereby the less easily formulated – group of the conquests of civilisation, 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*, if one will – in the dauntless fusions to come – is the personal drama of the future (Preface to vol. XIV ix- x).

It is exactly James's preoccupation with these "dauntless fusions," particularly his encapsulation of this hybridity in a series of love affairs, that this dissertation discusses. The purpose of the present endeavor is to conflate two objects of Jamesian criticism in an attempt at illuminating the text against the backdrop of the Euro-American negotiations typical of the nineteenth century and the crystallization of global concerns which they indicate.

Specifically, this paper represents a departure from critical currents which focus either on the marriage theme or on the novelist's best-known subject, the international theme, thus disconnecting two issues which considered together might in fact guide the reader towards a better understanding of James's work. In other words, the purpose of the present analysis is to interpret through the New World-Old World dichotomy the romantic relationships in James's prose. Whereas his work is often read by critics in terms of James's Americanness or, on the contrary, un-Americanness, this study argues that his texts propose a world fusion by way of the marital bond. The marriage union is allegorically framed as a condensation of "old rigours of separation," more precisely as a