

THE NOVEL AS DRAMATIC POEM (III):

‘THE EUROPEANS’

I HAVE before in these pages recorded the conviction that *The Europeans* is a masterpiece—one that, like *Hard Times*, has gone without recognition because of its virtues as a work of art: it is wholly and intensely significant, and the accepted ideas about ‘the novel’ induce blindness towards such virtues. *The Europeans* is ‘slight’—that seems to have been the general verdict (William James’s concurrence in which the author took especially hard). And it is true that Henry James’s touch in what must be admitted to be a short novel is light, and that the mode belongs decidedly to comedy. But that is not to say that a light touch cannot be sure or comedy profound, or that a serious burden cannot be conveyed in two hundred pages. The liveliness, which ought surely to have been found attractive, lends itself to illustration, but the stress must fall on the closeness with which the interest is organized: I have called *The Europeans* a ‘moral fable’ because a serious intention expresses itself in so firm and clear an economy of organization, and the representative significance of every element in the book is so insistent.

What we have, in fact, is a comparative inquiry, enacted in dramatic and poetic terms, into the criteria of civilization, and the possibilities—a kind of inquiry that issues out of a radical bent of preoccupation engendered in James by his peculiar life and history. He is peculiarly qualified to give us the interplay of different traditions, and, his being a profoundly serious mind, the upshot of the interplay as he presents it transcends the vindication of one side against the other, or the mere setting forth of the for and against on both sides in a comedy of implicit mutual criticism. The informing spirit of the drama is positive and constructive: James is unmistakably feeling towards an ideal possibility that is neither Europe nor America.

At the opening of the book it might appear that New England was to be the subject as well as the scene—unsophisticated and provincial New England presented through the surprised eyes of the visiting European cousins, whose experience of a riper world was to provide a critical irony, sometimes more and sometimes less indulgent. But it becomes immediately apparent that the criticism is not going to preclude a good deal of strongly positive appreciation. It becomes further apparent, in due course, that we have to make a radical distinction between the two Europeans—that they stand for different things: they have, in their symbolic capacities, different—even conflicting—values.

Felix, who of the pair is, in speech and attitude, very much the less critical and the more appreciative of New England, actually constitutes, by his dramatic and poetic part in the fable, by far the more damaging criticism. The note of his report, when he comes back to his sister in the hotel at Boston from his visit, 'among the meadows and woods', to the home of the Wentworths ('he had found that the big unguarded door stood open with the trustfulness of the golden age'), is enchantment:

"Is it handsome—is it elegant?" asked the Baroness. Felix looked at her a moment, smiling. "It's very clean! No splendours, no gilding, no troops of servants; rather straight-backed chairs. But you might eat off the floors, and you can sit down on the stairs".

"That must be a privilege. And the inhabitants are straight-backed too, of course".

"My dear sister!" cried Felix, "the inhabitants are charming".

"In what style?"

"In a style of their own. How shall I describe it? It's primitive; it's patriarchal; it's the *ton* of the golden age".

"And have they nothing golden but their *ton*? Are there no symptoms of wealth?"

"I should say there was wealth without symptoms. A plain homely way of life; nothing for show, and very little for—what shall I call it?—for the senses; but a great *aisance*, and a lot of money, out of sight, that comes forward very quietly for subscriptions to institutions, for repairing tenements, for paying doctor's bills; perhaps even for portioning daughters".

But, pressed by Eugenia, Felix has to admit that the inhabitants are not gay:

"They are sober; they are even severe. They are of a pensive cast; they take things hard. I think there is something the matter with them; they have some melancholy memory or some depressing expectation. It's not the epicurean temperament".

It is Gertrude, the younger daughter, who, as her case becomes plain to us, turns this perception of Felix's into a strong criticism of the Puritan ethos. She is 'restless', she is difficult and unsettled—that, in the family, is her recognized character; and there is an agreement to assume that she will marry Mr. Brand, who, earnest young Unitarian minister and professional representative of the cult of duty and responsibility, 'understands' her and will be a steadying influence. On the bright spring morning on which Felix calls and finds her alone to receive him in the Wentworth home, she has with characteristic 'oddity' first sent her sister Charlotte off, puzzled, to church without her, and then declined to follow with Mr. Brand, who has called expressly to take her. Putting down a volume of

The Arabian Nights, she goes to the door, and beholds, as it seems to her, 'the Prince Camaralzaman standing before her'. She gives Felix, with a glass of wine, the slice of cake that Charlotte had indicated as a proper refreshment to be offered to Mr. Brand. The *tête-a-tête* with Felix contrasts amusingly and significantly with those in which, earlier in the same chapter, Mr. Brand and, before that, Charlotte was the other party.

The advent of Felix is decisive. Gertrude (who 'had never seen a play in her life') now knows beyond question that she will never marry Mr. Brand; and she can henceforth be fully explicit, at any rate with herself, in associating her refusal of the family prescription for her restlessness with her rejection of the Wentworth moral habit. 'Why do they try and make me feel guilty?' she asks. And, her 'difficult temperament' being in question:

' "Why do you call it difficult? It might have been easy, if you had allowed it. You wouldn't let me be natural. I don't know what you wanted to make of me. Mr. Brand was the worst".

Charlotte at last took hold of her sister. She laid her two hands upon Gertrude's arm. "He cares so much for you", she almost whispered.

Gertrude looked at her an instant; then kissed her. "No, he does not", she said'.

Felix Young's quite unbellicose triumph is complete. He not only marries Gertrude and takes her off with him out of the moral climate where she can never thrive. His presence acts as a general solvent of the constrictions and self-deceptions that go with the too habitually braced and anxious conscience. Charlotte is made to feel that, if she constantly watches Mr. Brand, it isn't purely out of concern for his success with Gertrude, and Mr. Brand to feel that it wouldn't be unpleasant to him, or unsuitable, if Charlotte really were (as Felix suggests she is) interested in him on her own account. Owing, in fact, to Felix, Charlotte and Mr. Brand find their happiness in one another.

There is no mystery about Felix Young's representative value: it is given in his name. He stands for the opposite of the puritanic temperament and attitude to life. One must hasten to add that, if his face 'was not at all serious, yet it inspired the liveliest confidence', and rightly; for the happy nature that he expresses with such irresistible spontaneity is also good. 'He was so bright and handsome and talkative that it was impossible not to think well of him; and yet it seemed as if there was something almost impudent, almost vicious—or as if there ought to be—in a young man being at once so joyous and so positive'. This is Mr. Wentworth's point of view. As he registers, Felix, for all his happy vivacity, is no lightweight; he is in fact morally irresistible: 'It is to be observed that while Felix was not at all a serious young man there was somehow more of him—he had more weight and volume and resonance—than a number of young men who were distinctly serious'.—Not being afraid or distrustful of life, and being at the same time very

intelligent, he has profited by a wide and varied experience: he is mature in valuation, and in understanding of human nature.

I have said that his representative value is plain. That is, there can be no doubt about the qualities he stands for. But there may be some question about the sense in which he may be said to represent Europe. What he bodies forth is an ideal possibility cherished in James's imagination. If, as he says, he is a Bohemian, he is without the Bohemian vices. He shows that there may be a person of radical responsibility who has at the same time all the virtues of the artistic temperament (for that is what his being an artist means—"The world", he says, "will never hear of me"). 'It is beside the matter to say that he had a good conscience; for the best conscience is a sort of self-reproach, and this young man's brilliantly healthy nature spent itself in objective good intentions which were ignorant of any test save exactness in hitting their mark'.

In justification for making him a European James would no doubt have urged that an American without an experience of Europe couldn't have conceived the possibility. Felix implies a background in which it is not extravagantly original to postulate, and practise, an art of living—implies a mature civilization and a sophisticated social culture. He doesn't, any more than his sister, 'think of life as a discipline'; he is like her, not only disposed to enjoy, but qualified for refinement in enjoying, having cultivated the art. The contrast with the New England ethos is complete:

'This was not Mr. Wentworth's way of treating any human occurrence. The sudden irruption into the well-ordered consciousness of the Wentworths of an element not allowed for in its scheme of usual obligations, required a readjustment of that sense of responsibility which constituted its principal furniture. To consider an event, crudely and baldly, in the light of the pleasure it might bring them, was an intellectual exercise with which Felix Young's American cousins were almost wholly unacquainted, and which they scarcely supposed to be largely pursued in any section of human society. The arrival of Felix and his sister was a satisfaction, but it was a singularly joyless and inelastic satisfaction. It was an extension of duty, of the exercise of the more recondite virtues . . . '

The opportunities of comedy presented by the contrast in ethos are decidedly in James's line. He takes them with a master's hand. If one is to instance from so great a wealth, there is the conversation (Chapter VII) between Felix and Mr. Wentworth who, without having given a positive consent—having, in fact, expressed nothing but embarrassed unwillingness—finds himself sitting for his portrait. The talk turns upon the Wentworth son:

' "Clifford's situation is no laughing matter", said Mr. Wentworth. "It is very peculiar, as I suppose you have guessed".
"Ah, you mean his love-affair with his cousin?"

Mr. Wentworth stared, blushing a little. "I mean his absence from college. He has been suspended. We have decided not to speak of it unless we are asked".

"Suspended?" Felix repeated.

"He has been requested by the Harvard authorities to absent himself for six months. Meanwhile he is studying with Mr. Brand. We think Mr. Brand will help him; at least we hope so".

"What befell him at college?" Felix asked. "He was too fond of pleasure? Mr. Brand certainly will not teach him any of those secrets!"

"He was too fond of something of which he should not have been fond. I suppose it is considered a pleasure".

Felix gave his light laugh. "My dear uncle, is there any doubt about its being a pleasure? *C'est de son âge*, as they say in France".

"I should have said rather it was a vice of later life—of disappointed old age".

Felix glanced at his uncle with lifted eyebrows, and then, "Of what are you speaking?" he demanded, smiling.

"Of the situation in which Clifford was found".

"Ah, he was found—he was caught?"

"Necessarily, he was caught. He couldn't walk; he staggered".

"Oh", said Felix, "he drinks! I rather suspected that, from something I observed the first day I came here. I quite agree with you that it is a low taste. It is not a vice for a gentleman. He ought to give it up".

Felix prescribes the influence of a clever and charming woman, and indicates Eugenia:

"With Clifford", the young man pursued, "Eugenia will simply be enough of a coquette to be a little ironical. That's what he needs. So you recommend him to be nice with her, you know. The suggestion will come best from you".

"Do I understand", asked the old man, "that I am to suggest to my son to make a—a profession of—of affection to Madame Münster?"

"Yes, yes—a profession!" cried Felix sympathetically.

"But, as I understand it, Madame Münster is a married woman".

"Ah", said Felix, smiling, "of course she can't marry him. But she will do what she can".

Mr. Wentworth sat for some time with his eyes on the floor; at last he got up. "I don't think", he said, "that I can undertake to recommend to my son any such course". And without meeting Felix's surprised glance he broke off his sitting, which was not resumed for a fortnight.

The comedy involves, it will be seen, the difference of manners and social conventions as well as of radical ethos—Felix is a

European. But his sister Eugenia, Baroness Münster, morganatic wife of the younger brother of the reigning prince of Silberstadt-Schreckenstein, is much more positively and representatively Europe. Her name and titles proclaim plainly enough what she stands for: a hierarchical order, and a social system at once feudal and sophisticated, involving the conventions of 'birth', status and precedence, and associating rank and title with power and material advantage. There is a suggestion of a weight of history lying oppressively on an undemocratic present.

The Baroness might be expected to find a lack of sophistication and of form in the social life of New England, and she does. This makes her tribute the more significant. The girls, she admits, are perfect ladies; 'it was impossible to be more of a lady than Charlotte Wentworth, in spite of her little village air'—though '“as for thinking them the best company in the world”', said the Baroness, "that is another thing . . .". In the strength of the first impression, before she has had time to be bored, she pays, embodiment of worldliness that she is, an even more significant tribute:

'There were tears in her eyes. The luminous interior, the gentle tranquil people, the simple, serious life—the sense of these things pressed upon her with an overmastering force, and she felt herself yielding to one of the most genuine emotions she had ever known. "I should like to stay here", she said. "Pray take me in" '.

And she recognizes, appreciatively, that the unworldliness of the Wentworths ('the Wentworth household seemed to her very perfect of its kind—wonderfully peaceful and unspotted; pervaded by a sort of dove-coloured freshness that had all the quietude and benevolence of what she deemed to be Quakerism') is founded upon a degree of material abundance for which, in certain matters of detail, one might have looked in vain at the little court of Silberstadt-Schreckenstein'. But the most significant tribute of all is the magnitude of her defeat as she feels it—for that is her part in the fable: to suffer, in contrast with her brother, defeat, complete and unambiguous.

She has come to America with a view to making a good marriage (her morganatic status in Silberstadt-Schreckenstein being both unsatisfactory and terminable). She finds someone eminently eligible in a cousin of the Wentworths, Robert Acton, 'the man of the world of the family'. He is, by her standards too, a man of the world, and he has 'quintupled a fortune already considerable'. We are told, significantly, that 'his national consciousness has been complicated by a residence in foreign lands', and that he 'yet disliked to hear Americans abused'. He has a consciousness, then, that is central to the fable, and his valuations have a peculiar authority. He is strongly attracted by the Baroness: 'He was in love with her now', we are in due course told, ' . . . and the only question with him was whether he could trust her'.

His final judgment is adverse, and its significance for us is

defined with the greatest delicacy and precision. Being Robert Acton's, it is not a New England judgment, and for that reason has its force as an endorsement of New England. There is nothing narrow, provincial or inexperienced about Acton's morality; he still goes on admiring and being attracted after the point at which he can say: 'She is a woman who will lie'. What he admires are the qualities Gertrude also, we are significantly told, admires her for. They are the qualities of the refined social civilization of which she is the representative. Those qualities involve, essentially, a very different code from that voiced with appropriate simplicity by Charlotte: 'There can surely be no good reason for telling an untruth'. For the Baroness things cannot be as simple as that. 'There were several ways of understanding her', we are told—the occasion being something she has said to her brother, concerning which she herself is 'wondering in what manner he really understood her': 'there was what she said, and there was what she meant, and there was something between the two that was neither'. The essential difference between the codes is brought out dramatically when she is detected in an inaccuracy that is for her simply a piece of normal social behaviour—something she does easily and naturally with a grace that constitutes her charm.

'The Baroness turned her smile toward him, and she instantly felt she had been observed to be fibbing. She had struck a false note. But who were these people to whom such fibbing was not pleasing? If they were annoyed, the Baroness was equally so'.

Significantly, it is Robert Acton whom she sees to be judging her here. The fib concerns him and his mother: 'He has talked to me immensely of you'. Where they touch his mother he finds such insincerities indeed displeasing—and the fib is a peculiarly inappropriate one, though the inappropriateness isn't apparent to the Baroness's kind of percipience. Much later in the drama 'he felt a downright need to tell her that he admired her and that she struck him as a very superior woman'. He reflects that 'she had conformed to the angular conditions of New England life, and she had had the tact and pluck to carry it off'.

The 'angularity' predicated here is angularity by the Baroness's criteria—criteria partly endorsed, no doubt, by Robert, 'the man of the world of the family'. But something that is unequivocally to be judged as 'angularity' by us gets a good deal of salience in the fable. We have it in the extreme form of provincial crudity in the scene (Chapter XI) leading up immediately to that of the Baroness's final discomfiture: it is enacted by the two gentlemen who have driven over from Boston in a buggy.

'One of them, indeed, said nothing to her; he only sat and watched, with intense gravity, and leaned forward solemnly, presenting his ear (a very large one), as if he were deaf, whenever she dropped an observation. He had evidently been impressed with the idea of her misfortunes and reverses; he never

smiled. His companion adopted a lighter, easier style; sat as near as possible to Madame Münster; attempted to draw her out, and proposed every few moments a new topic of conversation'.

We have it too, in the same scene, in Clifford Wentworth's exhibition of himself as decidedly not a finished man of the world. The effect is to emphasize the significance of the Baroness's defeat: in spite of the attendant 'angularity', better the New England on which she has failed so utterly to impose herself than the Europe she represents—an upshot endorsed, in his mature decision, by Robert Acton, a qualified judge along the whole scale of values.

But this head of 'angularity' must not be dismissed so simply; it covers some important discriminations that are delicately established for us. We can concur easily in the Baroness's verdict that 'Clifford, really, was crude'. But the 'pretty manners' she is proposing to teach him when she passes it engage her whole European code. And we must keep that positive code well in sight even when James himself may reasonably be taken to be making, dramatically, a critical note about the lack of form and of forms in this American social life. Here we have the Baroness's first appearance at the Wentworths':

'They were all standing round his sister, as if they were expecting her to acquit herself of the exhibition of some peculiar faculty, some brilliant talent. Their attitude seemed to imply that she was a kind of conversational mountebank, attired, intellectually, in gauze and spangles. This attitude gave a certain ironical force to Madame Münster's next words. "Now this is your circle", she said to her uncle. "This is your *salon*. These are your regular habitués, eh? I am so glad to see you all together".'

"Oh", said Mr. Wentworth, "they are always dropping in and out. You must do the same" '.

This, we may feel, is unmistakably a point scored against 'angularity'. Yet it is significant that the criticism (if we are to take it as such) associates very intimately with that made by the Baroness herself, when she says to Acton: 'in this country, you know, the relations of young people are so extraordinary that one is quite at sea. They are not engaged when you would quite say they ought to be'. And this, we feel, is not something we have to take as simply a point scored against New England. To set against the Baroness's criticism we have the appreciative note with which her brother, registering the same social characteristics, takes stock of the recognition that 'he had never before found himself in contact so unrestricted with young unmarried ladies':

'He had known, fortunately, many virtuous gentlewomen, but, it now appeared to him that in his relations with them (especially when they were unmarried), he had been looking at pictures under glass. He perceived at present what a nuisance

the glass had been—how it perverted and interfered, how it caught the reflexion of other objects and kept you walking from side to side'.

It is here that we have to consider Robert's sister, Lizzie Acton, and her value in the scheme of the fable. The Baroness marks her at the introductory meeting with the family as 'very much more [than the Wentworth daughters] what we have been accustomed to think of as the American type'. And we are told later that the Baroness 'disliked this little American girl': 'Lizzie struck her as positive and explicit almost to pertness; and the idea of combining the apparent incongruities of a taste for housework and the wearing of fresh, Parisian-looking dresses suggested the possession of a dangerous energy'. Such a 'little girl', even if extremely pretty, should have been insignificant, but somehow Lizzie unmistakably isn't. It avails the Baroness nothing to reflect that American girls have no manners; she has to pay Lizzie the tribute of dislike and a strong sense of irritation. The ground is, 'not an aspiration on the girl's part to rivalry, but a kind of laughing, childishly-mocking indifference to the results of comparison'. This is what the Baroness cannot forgive. It insinuates doubt into the 'feeling of almost illimitable power' given her by 'the sense . . . that the good people about her had, as regards her remarkable self, no standard of comparison at all'. And in fact it is to be the irony of her defeat that she should have to see this as a matter of the helplessness of her advantages in the face of people who, having 'no standard', fail to recognize them:

'If she could have done something at the moment, on the spot, she would have stepped upon a European steamer and turned her back, with a kind of rapture, upon that profoundly mortifying failure, her visit to her American relations. It is not exactly apparent why she should have termed this enterprise a failure, inasmuch as she had been treated with the highest distinction for which allowance had been made in American institutions. Her irritation came, at bottom, from the sense, which, always present, had suddenly grown acute, that the social soil on this big, vague continent was somehow not adapted for growing those plants whose fragrance she especially inclined to inhale, and by which she liked to see herself surrounded—a species of vegetation for which she carried a collection of seedlings, as we may say, in her pocket. She found her chief happiness in the sense of exerting a certain power and making a certain impression and now she felt the annoyance of a rather wearied swimmer who, on nearing shore to land, finds a smooth straight wall of rock when he had counted upon a clean firm beach. Her power, in the American air, seemed to have lost its prehensile attributes; the smooth wall of rock was insurmountable'.

That is the account Madame Münster gives herself. But it is not for nothing that her sense of utter defeat, at the bitterest moment,

should be focussed upon Lizzie Acton, who, for us, represents something quite other than any mere lack, limitation or barrenness in America. In the scene of Madame Münster's final discomfiture, when she already knows that Robert Acton has decided against her, the cruellest blow comes when she is told, to her utter surprise, that Clifford is to marry Lizzie—Clifford whom, acting on the principle that 'a prudent archer has always a second bowstring', she had been, with confident and complacent unawareness, favouring with her charm. This disconcerting shock is what the formlessness of New England manners had been preparing for her.

'Formlessness', quite clearly, is not to be our own summing-up. Lizzie Acton belongs to this society, and there is a good deal else about it too that, reflecting on our response to James's art, we find ourselves recognizing for positive valuation. The 'formlessness' beyond question comprises some angularity, but, in sum, it affects us as an admirable naturalness. We see that James largely approves of the social order that enables young men and girls to mix with such innocent freedom—for it is, for all its informality, an order, embodying a number of positive values: he associates freedom with a habit of sincerity and mutual respect in personal relations though he notes also a timidly helpless lack of responsibility towards the young on the part of the senior world.

But perhaps it would be better not to refer, in this way, to James himself. When we elicit judgments and valuations from the fable—which is perfectly dramatic and perfectly a work of art—we don't think of them as coming from the author. It is a drawback of the present kind of commentary that it tends in some ways to slight this quality of art, this creative perfection; it doesn't suggest the concrete richness and self-sufficiency of the drama, or the poetic subtlety of the means by which the discriminations are established. No instancing can convey the variety and flexibility of these means; one illustration must suffice to suggest the delicacy and precision that characterize them everywhere. The Wentworths, after the Baroness's introductory call, are discussing how she is to be accommodated:

"'She will be very comfortable here'", said Charlotte, with something of a housewife's pride. "She can have the large north-east room. And the French bedstead", Charlotte added, with a constant sense of the lady's foreignness.

"She will not like it", said Gertrude, "not even if you pin little tidies all over the chairs".

"Why not, dear?" asked Charlotte, perceiving a touch of irony here, but not resenting it.

Gertrude had left her chair; she was walking about the room; her stiff silk dress, which she had put on in honour of the Baroness, made a sound upon the carpet. "I don't know", she replied. "She will want something more—more private".

"If she wants to be private she can stay in her room", Lizzie Acton remarked.

Gertrude paused in her walk, looking at her. "That would

not be pleasant", she answered. "She wants privacy and pleasure together".

Robert Acton began to laugh again. "My dear cousin, what a picture!"

Charlotte had fixed her serious eyes upon her sister; she wondered whence she had suddenly derived these strange notions. Mr. Wentworth also observed his younger daughter.

"I don't know what her manner of life may have been", he said; "but she certainly never can have enjoyed a more refined and salubrious home".

Gertrude stood there looking at them all. "She is the wife of a Prince", she said.

"We are all princes here", said Mr. Wentworth; "and I don't know of any palace in this neighbourhood that is to let" .

What we have to notice here is how the attitude towards Mr. Wentworth shifts as we pass from his first observation to his retort, and in shifting makes one of James's essential discriminations. Both utterances have a distinctively American note. The earlier one illustrates James's debt to the Dickens of *Martin Chuzzlewit*. When a wooden house 'eighty years old' is thus exalted we can't mistake the intention; we know that we are to feel an ironical amusement at a characteristic American complacency characteristically expressed, and that the nicely chosen adjectives, 'refined' and 'salubrious', register a critical irony induced in the observer by certain elements of the native ethos, the speaker being unironically solemn. But the retort is quite another matter: it exemplifies a characteristic American humour that reminds us of Mark Twain—the critical irony has changed direction. We perceive that Mr. Wentworth at this point has his creator's backing, and, opposed as he is here to the Baroness, stands for an American democracy that James offers with conviction (his art tells us—and it is that alone we are reporting on) as an American superiority. James's right to count on a responsiveness that will qualify the reader to take such signals duly has been established by the sensitive precision, the closeness of organization combined with flexibility, of the art everywhere.

The 'democracy' that James endorses gets its definition in the whole dramatic poem. He may be said to be engaged in defining it when he is dealing, in the ways discussed above, with the aspects of New England society that strike the Baroness as provincial crudity and formlessness; for what he approves of in the manners and social habits of the Wentworths and Actons clearly belongs to the spirit of 'We are all princes here'. With this spirit he would like to associate (and the association is effected by his art) the Wentworth virtues of sincerity and moral refinement—virtues ideally, his art implies, separable from the restrictive aspects of Puritanism. And he also values very highly, among the qualities that go with the Puritan heritage, that steady underlying seriousness which is defined by contrast when the Baroness, in her last interview with Mrs. Acton, shrinks from the matter-of-factness

with which that old gentlewoman refers to her own imminent end ('The Baroness hated to be reminded of death'). This seriousness, it is implied, has its essential part in the ethos of the ideal civilization.

The respects in which, for all its indispensable virtues, James finds New England lacking are suggested by the symbolic parlour into which Felix, calling for the first time, is led by Gertrude: it is 'a high, clean, rather empty-looking room'. (Imagery of this poetic kind, arising with inevitable naturalness in the presentment of the drama, plays a great part in the definition of theme and attitude). The Baroness, accommodated by Mr. Wentworth with a smaller house across the way for her own occupation, tries to relieve the emptiness—'the little white house was pitifully bare'—by disposing shawls and other draperies (she 'had brought with her to the New World a copious provision of costumes') over the chairs and sofas and mantel-shelves and by hanging curtains: the symbolism needs no explaining. But even the Baroness herself, as she gets ready to depart, sees them as vulgar irrelevancies: '*Bonté divine*, what rubbish! I feel like a strolling actress; these are my properties'.

It is not the Baroness, but her brother Felix, who represents the important things for lack of which James's New England has to figure as 'rather empty-looking'. And this is the point at which to complete with a corrective addition the account given earlier of his significance as an artist. It is true that he is not a Roderick Hudson; he is not Creative Genius—he stands for an attitude towards life and for the un-Puritanic 'Bohemian' virtues. But he stands too for a conception of art and of its function in a civilized community—that function of which the Wentworths (Gertrude had never seen a play) are so sadly unaware. *The Europeans*, in fact, is closely related in theme and pre-occupation to the novel called after Roderick Hudson—James's first, which, as I have suggested earlier in these pages, is less essentially a study of creative genius than its title implies.

What this account of *The Europeans* hasn't suggested is the extraordinarily dramatic quality of the book. I use the word 'dramatic' here in its most obvious sense: *The Europeans* could be very readily adapted for performance. The dialogue—and the action never departs far from dialogue—is all admirable 'theatre', and the whole is done in scenes and situations that seem asking to be staged. The whole, too, in its astonishing economy, is managed with the art of a master dramatist. That culminating twelfth chapter, in which the various constituents of the comedy of personal relations are brought together in a *dénouement*, rivals the admired and comparable things of Shakespeare and Molière.

In the theatre, of course, a large part of the subtler and essential imagery and symbolism by means of which the profounder pre-occupations are engaged would be lost. All the same, much of the symbolism is obvious enough in its naturalness and felicity. To the instances already mentioned I will add that of the three houses: the Wentworths', the Actons' and that occupied by the Baroness, each expressing its occupants. The Baroness's is embellished with

her 'curtains, cushions and gimcracks', and has the studio improvised by Felix attached. The Actons' differs from the Wentworths' in being just such a one as the Baroness would have liked to possess: it is the appropriate dwelling of a cultivated and wealthy man who knows the larger world and who—a point for the reader's appreciation if not for the Baroness's—has yet decided to remain an American.

Rich as *The Europeans* is in symbolic and poetic interest, deep and close as is its organization as fable and dramatic poem, it can still be read straightforwardly as novel of manners and social comedy. This may help to explain why its distinction has escaped notice. Jane Austen's novels are known as novels of manners, and, high as her conventional reputation stands, the qualities that make her a great artist have commonly been ignored. Her name comes up naturally and properly here. For in *The Europeans* it is pretty clearly from Jane Austen that James descends; what he offers is a development in the line of *Emma* and *Persuasion*.

F. R. LEAVIS.

CORRESPONDENCE

Gentlemen,

I am most reluctant to trespass again on your valuable space, but the last paragraph of Mr. Davies' letter calls for a further explanation.

The title poem of the *Farewell and Welcome* volume contains a number of fossils from other poems published and unpublished. Lines 17-21 of *Fulfilment is not in Waiting* were written in 1939; certain lines of *Distance has Magic* appeared in a poem written in the autumn of 1939 and published in *Seven* some time in 1940; lines 1-10 of *Freedom lies in Acceptance* were written in the autumn of 1941. The whole section *Distance has Magic* was finished in its final form in the spring of 1941; I believe that Dr. Leavis received a copy of it in the summer of 1941¹ and it was published in the Swedish periodical *Ars* in 1941.

I have preferred to regard *Farewell and Welcome* as a single poem in five sections (the sub-title, 'A sequence of poems', given in *Scrutiny* for Summer 1942 was not authorized by me), and as the whole poem was not finished until June-July 1942, I thought it unnecessary to clutter up a short prefatory note with the details given above.

The *Scrutiny* version of the poem was slightly altered in the 1945 edition and again in *Selected Poems*.

Yours faithfully,

RONALD BOTTRALL.

PALAZZO BORGHESE, ROME.
3rd June, 1948.

¹I have no record, so cannot volunteer corroboration.—F.R.L.