Among world travellers throughout history, Henry James, the quintessential expatriate writer, is a special case, though not because of the distances he covered or the places he saw. These were the usual points of interest which made up the obligatory itinerary of the Grand Tour, which had become an institution among most cultivated Anglo-Saxons of the time since the late seventeenth century (Brilli 14). It was instead the emotional intensity he brought to all that he encountered during his travels that made him a unique case.

His tourism took the form of an interior adventure, an experience involving all the senses which gradually came to map the geography of his soul. Somewhere between involvement and detachment, rapture and fear, there emerged a sense of the interior journey, a peregrinatio animae which was to accompany his travels in the real world.

Born to a privileged and highly cultivated American family, James was a pioneer in the American re-discovery of Europe and pursuit of culture. His father, Henry James senior, refused any involvement in the family business, in open rebellion with the Protestant work ethic of his father, an Irish immigrant whose accumulated fortune allowed his son to devote his life to study and travel. He encouraged his family to maintain a studious detachment from the vulgar demands of an age given over to commerce. He was an intellectual and something of a philosopher, whose wide circle of friends—American artists, painters and sculptors, a well-travelled élite—included figures such as Jasper Francis Cropsey, John Kenset,
Christopher Pearse Cranch, Joseph Mozier and Hiram Powers, the Yankee Canova.²

The elder Henry James’s unconventional views found an outlet in the peripatetic education of his children. He was a confirmed cosmopolitan and deliberately set out to make his children citizens of the world. Travelling was undertaken to establish the foundations for their education, and was seen as essential for the full development of their personalities. This was not mere entertainment or intellectual stimulation, but a spiritual demand that would prove a decisive influence on their entire existence.

Given his upbringing which provided multiple cultural perspectives, it is hardly surprising that James should have found the experience of travel most compelling. He indefatigably explored the “international theme”, often introducing the fine moral consciousness of the American into the rich cultural atmosphere of Europe, thus dramatizing the confrontation of the provincial American groping his way through a European social landscape dense with moral ambiguities, saturated in history, manners, and sophistication.

In March 1871 James published “A Passionate Pilgrim” which three years later gave its title to his first volume of collected stories. This first-person narrative, recounted by a Jamesian character visiting England, tells the story of an American who wants to re-establish his English heritage, represented by an estate to which he holds only a tenuous claim. This short story is of particular importance, for it shows James moving well beyond “travelogue”, as he examines the effects of tradition-saturated England on an impressionable young American who comes to visit the home of his ancestors. The narrator starts by referring to England as a place which he had seen “in books, in visions, in dreams, in Dickens, in Smollett, in Boswell” (Novels 336). The struggle between anticipatory dream and unavoidable, often contradictory knowledge—and the shock that can ensue—was often examined and dramatized by James.

In the preface to the New York edition, many years later, James emphasized the extraordinary role that the European experience had played in his life:

I had as far as I could remember carried in my side, buried and unextracted, the head of one of those well-directed shafts from the European quiver to which, of old, tender American flesh was more helplessly and bleedingly exposed, I think, than today: the nostalgic cup had been applied to my lips even before I was con-
scious of it -- I had been hurried off to London and to Paris immediately after my birth, and then and there, I was ever to feel, that poison had entered my veins (Autobiography 195).

This passage contains a wealth of important references. The title itself, “A Passionate Pilgrim”, reveals that travel was not to be regarded as simple journey, but as a dramatic religious experience, a virtual pilgrimage. This term generally means travel in a foreign land with a religious aim, culminating in a visit to a sacred place endowed with supernatural powers where divine assistance is more readily obtained. The custom of pilgrimage and its rites and rituals is found in many religions and primitive cults and always possesses an initiatory quality.

A pilgrim is an initiand, entering into a new, deeper level of existence than he has known in his accustomed milieu. Homologous with the ordeals of tribal initiation are the trials, tribulations, and even temptations of the pilgrim’s way. At the end the pilgrim, like the novice, is exposed to powerful religious sacra (shrines, images, liturgies, curative waters... and so on) the beneficial effect of which depends upon the zeal and pertinacity of his quest. (Turner and Turner 8)

The final goal of a pilgrimage is generally a place endowed with a special spiritual magnetism, or seen as the historic manifestation of sanctity. Hellenic Greece (Delphi), the late medieval Catholic world (Mont-Saint Michel), Islam (Mecca), and Israel (Jerusalem) all share the same conception of pilgrimage: cult locations situated in closely-guarded places, often provided with obstacles reached only by means of carefully prescribed itineraries and attended by highly ritualized instructions. These places are expected to provide something for the pilgrim, generally salvation, in this world or another, and transformation at the end of a pre-determined quest, whatever the goal.

James’s pilgrimage too took place in a foreign land. His Mecca, his Delphi, his locus sacer, was Europe. For James, an inveterate traveller since infancy, his early exposure to the Old World served not only to entertain and educate: it was an intense, highly charged experience, which brought with it dramatic initiatory powers. To that end, this “passionate pilgrim” revived medieval terminology to emphasize the quasi-religious aspect of his encounter with Europe.

It is indeed hardly accidental that he keenly felt the pull of the pilgrimage metaphor and its associated images such as temple, shrine, and
revelation. Reviewing William Dean Howells’s *Italian Journeys* in 1868, James wrote that Howells’s journeys “conduct him to shrines worn by the feet—to say nothing of the knees—of thousands of pilgrims, no small number of whom, in these later days, have imparted their impressions to the world” (*Literary* 476).

Many years later he was still exploring this conception in *The American Scene*, the book about his own land and his own people written after twenty years’ absence from the United States. Summing up the role that Europe had played in his life, he wrote:

> it was Europe that had, in very ancient days, held out to the yearning young American some likelihood of impressions more numerous and various and of a higher intensity than those he might gather on the native scene... This had led, in the event, to his settling to live for long years in the very precincts, as it were of the temple. (*American* 365)

Pilgrimage, the idea of man as a wayfarer, as a wanderer between two worlds, is a *topos* often viewed as a uniquely human condition. By definition it involves movement both *from* and *towards* something. The enigma of the Sphinx involves man and his need to walk which defines every phase in his existence: from the child crawling on all fours, to the man at the height of his powers walking on his two legs, to the old man, walking with the help of a cane. Man must go forth, move ahead, in some way, even if he can only crawl. Christians see life as *a status viatoris*. Only monks and nuns seem to step outside this rule of human existence, for their monasteries keep them tied to *a stabilitas loci*, a refuge from the dangers and seductions of travel (Cardini 9).

The Latin word *peregrinari* means to set out on a journey, without, however, any specific reference to goal or destination. The *peregrinus*, or the traveller, also indicated a foreigner, while the verb *peregrinari* expresses the idea of experiencing that exterior alien space which in ancient cultures lay just beyond the protected walls of the city. The idea of peregrinus therefore, implies also that of *alienus*, and *alienatio.*

James left his country to come to Europe, to taste that civilisation he had long dreamed of but whose culture he never felt he could completely master. In James the choice of exile responded to deep existential motivations, involving a whole series of renunciations, and a corresponding sense of permanent loss, solitude and alienation. In a way he was “a double
exile, a foreigner whose home was in a foreign land” (Mulvey 212). In a letter from Paris to his brother William in 1872 James wrote:

I enjoy very much in a sort of chronic way which has every now and then a deeper throb, the sense of being in a denser civilisation than our own. Life at home has the compensation that there you are a part of the civilisation, such as it is, whereas here you are outside of it. (Letters I: 313)

This concept of physical as well as metaphorical mobility, which is the very essence of travel, is ingrained in the idea of the United States, starting from the early pioneers who obeyed the urge to begin anew, in virgin space and virgin time. It is an essential component of the social myth of a new beginning, of America as an Eden or a promised land, which in the nineteenth century was conceived as the foundation of a classless society in a new land which stimulated the values of productivity, initiative and expansion.

Mobility is, in its turn, related to America’s vast, measureless stretches of land which for writers as different as Melville and Whitman could become a celebration of space. This gravitation towards empty space is frequently named as intrinsic in the construction of the American identity. The poet Charles Olson starts his book on Melville with an emphatic announcement: “I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America, from Folsom cave to now. I spell it large because it comes large here. Large, and without mercy” (11).

The term pilgrimage, therefore, on the one hand refers to uprootedness, here understood as a desire for renewal and as such able to stimulate radical change in attitudes; on the other it evokes America’s restlessness and its intolerance of confines. Early on James “wanted to belong to the world of art, in the sense in which one can belong to something that has few boundaries” (Kaplan 35). This is also the reason behind his embrace of Europe, and his commitment to living abroad, which was one of the most important decisions in his life. In December 1876, at the age of thirty-seven, he made his choice and decided to settle in London.

Stifled by Puritanism and painfully aware of the cultural shortcomings of his country, Europe certainly represented spiritual and intellectual salvation to James. He saw Europe as the repository of qualities not found at home and as the sensitive American traveller’s land of reward and opportunity. Much of its appeal derived from antiquity alone—Europe’s
recorded history and traditions contrasted sharply with a country in which “a large juvenility is stamped upon the face of things” (Literary 327), as James memorably said.

However, behind the election of an expatriate life lay more personal issues involving his own homosexuality. Europe became James’s chosen homeland, not least because it offered a solution to his lack of interest in marrying -- something which would have been less tolerated in rigid, conventional America. As well as providing intellectual and physical rehabilitation — James from childhood onwards cherished a frail, submissive self-image — Europe protected him from the ultimate proof of masculinity—the institution of marriage. As he wrote to Grace Norton:

At any rate, I shall never marry; I regard that now an established fact, and on the whole a very respectable one; I am both happy enough and miserable enough, as it is, and don’t wish to add to either side of the account. Singleness consorts much better with my whole view of existence (of my own and of that of the human race), my habits, occupations, prospects, tastes, means, situation 'in Europe', and absence of desire to have children—fond as I am of the infant race. (Letters III: 54)

Significantly, expatriation and celibacy are deliberately related to one another. In 1881, with the advantage of several years retrospective, James wrote that he took London “as an artist and as a bachelor; as one who has the passion of observation and whose business is the study of human life” (Notebooks 28). As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick pointed out, “to refuse sexual choice, in a society where sexual choice for men is both compulsory and always self-contradictory, seems, at least for educated men” to posit the figure of “the self-centered and at the same time self-marginalizing bachelor” (193).

James, as well as other late Victorian writers, popularized the social type of the bachelor. For some men, this role simplified options while at the same time “desexualized the question of male sexual choice” (Sedgwick 188). In the works of these writers, the bachelor became once again the “representative man”.

Even “the obscure hurt” he often referred to, a mysterious accident which befall him at the outset of the Civil War in fairly innocuous circumstances, shows and yet hides desire for a different sexual preference—James’s homoeroticism. The injury, which according to his biographers, was probably a minor sacroiliac lesion that did not prevent him from phys-
ical activity, such as sailing and horseback riding, actually proved a blessing in that it barred him from enlisting in the army and provided an excuse for his celibacy. This mysterious injury, which James may have used to confuse his readers, is extremely revealing, as it alludes to a maimed sexuality which would disqualify one from membership in a rigorously heterosexual society.

In the preface to “The Passionate Pilgrim”, Europe was a quiver full of arrows that buried themselves deep in tender American flesh and drew blood. The cluster of visceral metaphors linked to the idea of bleeding refers to the ambivalence implicit in his conception of Europe, alluding to the vulnerability of the young American confronting the Old World. There is an implicit allusion here to Saint Sebastian pierced by arrows, who in traditional iconography was used by painters and sculptors as a pretext for the sensual portrayal of the struggling male nude.

James, however, immediately moves to a different set of metaphors.

the nostalgic cup had been applied to my lips even before I was conscious of it -- I had been hurried off to London and to Paris immediately after my birth, and then and there, I was ever to feel, that poison had entered my veins. (Autobiography 195)

That wound, and that blood drawn by the European quiver, is transformed into a cup of wine—a metaphor he often resorted to, in order to indicate the all-consuming nature of experience—a cup to be drunk to the full. Not even a year old, James experienced a rebirth—“I had been hurried off to London and to Paris immediately after my birth” (Autobiography 195). Now that wine, with a revealing oxymoron, became a poison which intoxicated, and could not be resisted: “I had sipped the poison... and was to feel it to that end the most salutary cup” (Autobiography 50).

At the same time, James emphasized that this is not a simple movement from one place to another, an uprooting from familiar places, but actual nostalgia. It is a νόστος, a return, as implied by the Greek etymology, the longed-for return to the place left behind, to retrieve one’s past, one’s history, one’s roots, and finally one’s deepest personal identity.

The notion of James as being enslaved from earliest childhood by a nostalgia for Europe is well established. This then, was the primary motive for his own passionate pilgrimage—a restless need to increase the scope
of his awareness. A secondary motive was his rejection of what he regarded as the poor landscape of the American cultural scene to seek out the richer panorama of European civilization. This dissatisfaction was acknowledged time and time again throughout his life. In his social analysis contained in his biography of Hawthorne published in 1879, James announced his view that “the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep”. James, who at that time was twenty-eight, was very eager not only to make his name as a novelist, but to return to Europe and “immerse himself in the almost inexhaustible wealth of material which Europe offered” (Tanner 64).

A famous passage laments the shortcomings with a virtual inventory of all those elements lacking in America that are necessary for a novelist:

one might enumerate the items of high civilisation, as it exists in other countries, which are absent from the texture of American life until it should become a wonder to know what was left. No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no church, no clergy, no army, no diplomatic service, no country gentleman, no palaces, no castles, nor manors, nor old country-houses, no parsonages, no thatched cottages, nor ivied ruins; nor cathedrals, nor abbeys, nor little Norman churches; no great Universities, nor public schools - no Oxford, nor Eton, nor Harrow; no literature, no novels, no museums, no pictures, no political society, no sporting class - no Epsom nor Ascot! (Hawthorne, 43)

James felt that America provided no such soil, no such machinery. As he saw it, Americans devoted to business the energies which Europeans were still devoting to the world of ideas, perceptions and beauty. This passage thus affords an invaluable insight into the mind of James at the very moment when he was about to embark on a career in Europe for, as Tanner observes, “in every one of his re-definitions of Hawthorne, James is making, indirectly or implicitly, a further essay in self-definition” (65).

His later use of a metaphor taken from a legal lexicon—“In my thirteenth year, re-exposure was decreed”—emphasizes the sacred solemnity of his trip to Europe. It seems as if a superior power, and not a simple paternal decision had “restored [him] to air already breathed and to a harmony already disclosed”.

In 1855 James took another European pilgrimage which impressed him even more. These were the years of his discovery of European art and culture, whose overwhelming attraction he would never again be able to
resist. His evocation of his stay in Paris suggests the importance it had in his aesthetic education. James’s artistic Mecca was, of course, the Louvre, which marked a turning point in James’s development. He felt in retrospect that his visits there had been “educative, formative, fertilising, in a degree to which no other ‘intellectual experience’ our youth was to know could pretend to rival” (Autobiography 197).

It is no coincidence that the revelation of art took place on foreign land. The Galerie d’Apollon, the oldest part of the Louvre, set the scene for an initiation which was to function as an actual rebirth (Vanon Alliata, Giardino 18-20):

This comes to saying that in those beginnings I felt myself most happily cross that bridge over to Style constituted by the wonderous Galerie d’Apollon, drawn for me as a long but assured initiation and seeming to form with its supreme coved ceiling and inordinately shining parquet a prodigious tube or tunnel through which I inhaled little by little ... a general sense of glory. The glory meant ever so many things at once, not only beauty and art and supreme design, but history and fame and power, the world in fine raised to the richest and noblest expression (Autobiography 196).

It was at the Louvre that James saw for the first time Delacroix, one of the painters he most admired, for in him intellect and emotion, realism and idealism, the two terms that romanticism establishes as opposites, live together in a harmonious synthesis. Here James’s experience of the East—an experience derived exclusively from painting—perfectly illustrates his conception of travel and creativity. In his appreciative essay, while lamenting the fact that Delacroix “never went to Italy”, and did not think it “necessary to cross the Alps and enlighten his eyes with the supreme examples of the art he so robustly practised”, James mentions his visit to Morocco where:

he gathered in few weeks those impressions of Eastern life which during the rest of his career were so frequently reflected in his work. He continued all his life to paint the east, and one might easily have supposed he had lived there, or that he had often returned to Africa. (Painter’s 188)

A testimony to his heartfelt identification with the Oriental world is Femmes d’Algiers, whose subject was suggested by a visit to a harem, a
painting which made a lasting impression on James. Delacroix’s Orientalism indeed was very different from the archeological version of the Neo-Classicists, from “the elaborate orientalism” of Fromentin, Chassériau, Marihat by which “we are deluged”, and whose aim was a pedantically correct representation of costumes. It was not even that of Ingres, who had turned to eastern themes for stylistic purposes only.

Delacroix’s painting, “ce petit poème d’interieur, plein de repose et de silence”, as Baudelaire called it (94-95) is a realistic scene, faithful to the sketch done on the spot. The women are represented in indolent repose. There is no hint of narrative in the scene. The wealth of details, the precious clothing, the jewels, the perfumed atmosphere with its drowsy hookah-fumes, the warm, golden unifying light that washes over the women absorbed in their voluptuous melancholy, are the result of highly attentive observation.

few pictures strike us containing more of the essence of the matter than the best eastern subjects of Delacroix. Several other painters may have done more justice to draperies and pottery, to palm-trees and minarets; but no one else has touched us with the feeling of the Mahometan world—as anyone will admit who vividly recalls those admirable things placed in the museum of the—the Femmes d’Algiers. (Painter’s 188)

As early as “A Passionate Pilgrim”, James becomes increasingly insistent on this concept of the Old World as a site for the disclosure of harmonies and epiphanies—a place to be approached with reverence and love.

The term epiphany (from the Greek εἰπόφαινο, I appear; hence manifestation), primarily denotes the festival which commemorates the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles as represented by the Magi. More generally, it was used even before Christ to denote the visible manifestation of a deity or of a superhuman being in the world. Epiphany is defined as a special, brief sort of experience, the fleeting moment of mythic perception when the mystery of life breaks through our perception of reality.

This term, however, implies both the idea of vision and disclosure which always coincides with the manifestation of some truth, the discovery and the description of what was kept hidden. As Starobinski observes:

la métaphore du voile soulevé est l’espression figure d’une théorie réaliste de la connaissance: c’est l’image dont se sert l’optimisme naïf qui prétend voir le vrai
visage derrière les masques, saisir enfin la ‘chose en soi’, rencontrer l’étre et la substance dissimulés sous le paraître et l’accident. (92-93)

James wrote that “beyond the Atlantic”, he was able to taste “the fruit of the tree of knowledge”. Here he clearly identifies Europe with knowledge. In addition, through his explicit evocation of the Biblical myth of Adam, he not only establishes a connection between transgression and knowledge, but defines knowledge itself as transgressive.

The experience of travel, therefore, is not only a spatial concept, but also represents the conquering of frontiers imposed by tradition, time and social conventions. It is knowledge, as exemplified by Ulysses’s journey beyond the pillars of Hercules, which marked the confines of the known world.

It is telling that his first explicit reference to his life was his travelling in Europe when he was less than a year old. Europe then, was his first experience—and a highly visual one. James always maintained that his earliest memory was of a living picture: the beautiful view of Place Vendôme when he was only two:

I was to communicate to my parents later on that as a baby in long clothes, seated opposite to them in a carriage and on the lap of another person, I had been impressed with the view, framed by the clear window of the vehicle as we passed, of a great stately square surrounded with high-roofed houses and having in its centre a tall and glorious column. (Autobiography 32-33)

Travelling, then, coincided with the act of observing. As for Whitman, Thoreau and Emerson, who placed an unusual stress on their visual relationship with nature, sight was for James the predominant faculty. In particular, Emerson’s celebrated formulation in the opening pages of Nature—“I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all” (Emerson 10)—seems to anticipate James and many later American writers.

Significantly James’ central figures are indeed all great watchers and observers, thereby excluded from participation in the world they survey... like their author, their visual alertness and acuity is in part a symptom of their alienation” (Tanner 31).

The pleasure of seeing, then, came before any other sensation. James did not just look at the Old World, he drank it in, totally absorbed in both
the smallest detail as well as the overwhelming whole. The intensity of the pleasure he derived from looking was almost an erotic experience, significantly described as “the lust of the eyes”, an expression he frequently used (Tintner 1-6).

The act of observing seems so erotically invested that it may be viewed in relation to James’s homoerotic feelings which have often been ignored by his scholars.8 The solitude and unhappiness derived from his pent-up homosexuality which revealed itself only late in life and in highly idealized forms (as witness his passionate letters to Hendrik Anderson),9 his secretive nature, and finally the distress with which he viewed the social developments which were publicly dramatized by the Oscar Wilde trials, point to a sublimation of the erotic drive in the act of looking. As Tanner remarks: “All his libidinal energy seems to have gone into the eye—and the pen” (65).

Early on he began to refine his natural tendency towards contemplation and observation, remarking: “the only form of riot or revel ever known . . would be that of the visiting mind” (Autobiography 16). Even as a boy, he had the gaze of a flâneur, a flâneur both detached and involved: “Pedestrian gaping having been in childhood. . . my sole and single form of athletics” (Autobiography 13).

Reading and admiring works of art increased his desire for Europe, preparing the terrain for the aesthetic pleasures of the Old World. Thus for James the first concept of pilgrimage was one of dreams and imagination. His enchantment with Europe was initially obtained from illustrated books, particularly Topffer’s Voyages en zigzag, an account of a trip to Italy through rural Switzerland—“before the railways and the ‘rush’, before the monster hotels, the desecrated summits, the vulgarized valleys, the circular tours, the perforating tubes, the funiculars, the hordes, the horrors” (Autobiography 165-166).

Of Italy, whose name was “already sweet . . for all its dimness” there was “pictorial testimony at home. . . from the ample canvas of Mr. Cole, ‘the American Turner’, which “covered half a side of our front parlour”:

I could always lose myself as soon as look. It depicted Florence from one of the neighbouring hills. . . with her domes and towers and old walls . . which I was ruefully to miss on coming to know and love the place in after years (Autobiography 153).10
There is here a successful matching of images stored in the memory (from reading, listening to traveller’s tales, and viewing paintings) with scenes as they are encountered. A visual experience only achieves value and meaning when it is confirmed by his preconceived image: “The ‘original’ becomes itself when the viewer perceives that it suits its representation” (MacCannell 48). The implication is that “only when it comes within the purview of the properly appreciative witness does the site attain its full aesthetic value and the realization of its essence” (Buzard 196).

In 1868 James set out on a new journey which was to prove the most important of his life. Unaccompanied by his parents, he travelled in England, France and Italy for a year, at a time in which the Grand Tour was still very much in vogue. The novelty of finding himself outside his protective family accounted for a greater responsiveness, a new-found ability to step out from behind the defence mechanisms which had muted the intensity of his encounter with the new.

James left ample testimony of that memorable trip throughout his work. Even in the early short stories, often the mere transcription of his impressions of travel, psychological implications of travel emerge—a series of connections between actual and imaginary travel, a whole framework of anticipations where childhood recollections, opinions and prejudices coalesce.

In his early short story “At Isella”, which is essentially a travel account “disguised as fiction and directed at an American audience, most of whom had never visited Europe” (Kaplan 130), James writes:

The valley lifts and narrows and darkens into the scenic mountain-pass of the fancy. I was haunted as I walked by an old steel plate in a French book that I used to look as a child, lying on my stomach on the parlour-floor. Under it was written ‘Saint Gotthard’. I remember distinctly the cold, grey mood which this picture used to generate; the same tone of feeling is produced by the actual scene. (Tales 105)

Even more than England, Switzerland is portrayed as essentially rural. The landscape is seen in terms of colour through the mediation of painting:

I had watched the tumbling Reuss, blue from the melting pinnacles which now the blue of the heaven, come rushing and swirling beneath those quaintly-timbered bridges, vaulted with mystical painting in the manner of Holbein. (Tales 102)
James crossed the Alps in a coach just before the opening of the Saint Gothard tunnel. His approach to Italy was slow, rendered slower by the sharp turns, along the road which opens into cliffs and precipices. An uncomfortable mode of travel certainly, but one which permitted the close observer James to fully enjoy the variations of climate and, more importantly, intensify pleasure by postponing it: "There was something so delightful in the mere protracted, suspended sense of approach, that it seemed a pity to bring it to so abrupt a close" (Tales 105).

All he could think of were intimations of approaching the land of his artistic dreams: "I am not ashamed to say how soon I began to look out for premonitions of Italy" (Tales 103). Later he wrote:

The Italian slope of the Simplon road commands a range of scenery wholly different from the Swiss. The latter winds like a thread through the blue immensity; the former bores its way beneath crag and cliff, through gorge and mountain crevice. But though its channel narrows and darkens, Italy nears and nears none the less. You suspect it first in — what shall I say? — the growing warmth of the air, a fancied elegance of leaf and twig; a little while yet, and they will curl and wanton to your heart's content. (Tales 110)

When he finally reached Italy, his response was one of unconditional admiration and total fulfilment. All his imagined preconceptions were magnificently confirmed by what he found in Italy.

Intimations of Europe pre-dated his actual physical encounter — it was precisely these earlier conceptions that made his responses so emotionally charged. Before his departure, James had possessed a sense of anticipation that was to elicit reactions of pure and simple fulfilment, absolute confirmation of his prefigurations of Europe.

His cultural background intensified the discovery of Europe and protected him from alienation. Because of his independent mental pre-conception, his encounter with the Old World could become a true moment of epiphany, a way to discover reality, and a way to define it thorough discourse. In fact, rather than confirmation, James’ encounter with Europe was an actual epiphany, a vision with all its potential for disclosure and the revelation of a world seen as a distillation of beauty and pure aesthetic emotion.

James had undertaken his passionate pilgrimage by following a deliberate itinerary, attended by rites and rituals. It is clear that he viewed travel not as the mere crossing of physical space, but as recognition of his own inner self, and the exploration of his own geography of the soul.
* This is the revised version of a paper I read at the conference "La porta d'oriente. Viaggi e poesia. Oriental Gateway. Voyage and Poetry" which took place at the University of Venice, Ca' Foscari, in November 1999.

1 See also Hibbert.

2 See Soria.

3 "He spoke of English and European life as a kind of medium in which the writer could not only become immersed but by which he could be sustained, buoyed up and borne along" (Mulvey 212).

4 "The concept of via, viator, the related ones of peregrinus, peregrinatio, and of alienus, alienatio on the one hand, and of ordo, ordinare, on the other, are quite essential ingredients of early Christian and Medieval thought and life". Ladner has shown how the conception of the wayfarer in a strange world, who is also a pilgrim towards a divine order, was never quite lost and can be traced in modern times, “from Chaucer and Bosch to Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress, to Gorkij’s A Night Lodging, and beyond” (Ladner 256-257).

5 See Vanon Alliata “Caravan” 30.

6 “Sickness also provided James with the excuse to go abroad. Europe was his personal space and had long been associated in American minds with recuperation from the stresses of the old world, the spas of Germany or the ruins of the Mediterranean fostering health for the unhealthy” (Cannon 35).

7 James had apparently sprained his back. The surgeon found “no physical condition to explain what was for Henry Junior ‘the less and less bearable affliction’…. Henry, though, had good reasons for feeling the pain acutely. His was a useful backache, one that he made good use of in ways that were ultimately healthy. It was a limited, economical response to immediate problems. He had a difficult, elusively oppressive father, whom he loved and from whom he needed to free himself; his father had lost a leg in the flames of a fire, an accident that transformed Henry James’s senior life, that had given him both a wound and a spiritual mission… [The accident] enabled him both to identify with and, to separate from his father. He, too, had a wound” (Kaplan 55-56).

8 “The image of James as a repressed, asexual author living only for the world of the mind – so much encouraged by the late Leon Edel and others – finally is revealed to have been an academic absurdity fuelled by historical fancy” (Bradley xi).
Late in life, when James was famous, he was often a good friend and mentor to young artists. Among his protégés were Edith Wharton and Hendrick Anderson. Both were young artists, and among James’s closest friends. “There are many similarities in the letters to them, and the advice he gives both recipients is the same: courage and patience... But there is a dimension of feeling in James’s letter to Anderson that is absent from the letter to Wharton” (Bradley 3-4). Rosella Mamoli Zorzi has recently edited a previously unpublished collection of 58 letters to Anderson which throws new light on James’s close relationship with the young sculptor. There emerges not only James’s passionate involvement with his friend, but other crucial issues such as the nature of inspiration and art. See James, *Amato*.

Thomas Cole (1801-1848), the founder of the Hudson River School of landscape painting, was the most distinguished American landscape painter of the first half of the 19th century. In New York he found patrons for the landscapes he painted on trips up the Hudson river valley and into the Catskill Mountains. From 1829 to 1832, Cole travelled and painted in Europe, where he was particularly impressed by the English painters Turner and John Martin and by romantic ruins of ancient Rome. The painting James refers to is “View of Florence from San Miniato”, one of Cole’s idealized Italianate compositions.


