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10-1-2010

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Published version. *The Henry James Review*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Fall 2010): 218-231. [Permalink](#). © 2010
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Henry James Rides Again

By Sarah Wadsworth, *Marquette University*

“—*is Henry James green as well as pink?*”

—Timothy Morton, “Queer Ecology”

In August 1867, the concluding installment of “Poor Richard” appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* alongside poems, articles, and fiction by some of the most illustrious authors and critics of the day: the eighth installment of Oliver Wendell Holmes’s *The Guardian Angel*, Thomas Wentworth Higginson’s “Up the Edisto” (from *Army Life in a Black Regiment*), a review, with samples, of Longfellow’s translation of the *Divine Comedy*, and E. P. Whipple on the “Growth, Limitations, and Tolerations of Shakespeare’s Genius.” Yet in the midst of this array of familiar names appeared one piece conspicuous in the table of contents for the absence of attributed authorship. Positioned between “The Old Story,” a poem by Alice Cary, and Bayard Taylor’s “The Little Land of Appenzell,” “A Week’s Riding” features a young American man who falls in love with the daughter of an English yeoman and tries to win her love, and her hand, by riding her horse to victory in a county race. The Englishwoman is a maiden of “elastic strength”; she is tall, “crowned with a golden glory of hair” ([Bartlett] 204), and possesses “perfect horsemanship” (208): as a friend tells the young American, “If you want to see a woman ride, see her,—it’s absolute perfection” (203). Intriguingly, this “real horse story” (201) anticipates the international theme with which James would achieve his greatest fame—but with an ironic Yankee twist. For at the end of “A Week’s Riding” the English equestrienne rejects her American suitor on the basis of his superior class: the American is a gentleman and she a farmer’s daughter, and so, she concludes, they could not be happy for long.

If James paid any more than passing notice to “A Week’s Riding” there is no record of it. Nevertheless, for readers of James the story and its anonymous author hold much of interest. For the writer—Alice Bartlett—would become a favorite companion in equestrian adventures during James’s residence in Rome half a dozen

years later and a close friend whom he would frequently meet over the course of the subsequent five years.¹ “A Week’s Riding” was not the sole literary effort of Alice Bartlett. In fact, she wrote travel sketches, journalistic pieces, and poetry and apparently worked on—and perhaps even completed—“a thrilling tale” (Alcott and Alcott 50). It is surprising, then, that James’s letters seem to make no reference to these literary pursuits. Nor does he refer to her as a writer—although he does identify her as an avid reader of Tasso (in the original Italian), informing William: “I lately formed a contract with Miss Bartlett to come twice a week and read *Tasso* with her (delicious stuff!)” (CL2 257). He also regarded her as a valued reader of his own writing. Following the publication of *The American*, James wrote to Alice via their mutual painter-friend Lizzie Boott:

Generous, admirable, sublime you are, both of you, & I kiss the hem of your garments: that, namely, of Miss Bartlett’s riding-habit, & of your (Miss Boott’s) painting-blouse. Such readers are worth having—readers who really care what one does & who pay one the divine compliment of taking things hard [referring to their “noble displeasure over the conclusion” of the novel (90)]. I will dedicate my next novel to both of you under the emblem [drawn in text of letter] of a mahl-stick [for painting] & a riding-whip intertwined. I feel, indeed, as if I had been rapped about the head with each of these instruments; but, as I say, the pleasure & honor were greater than the pain . . . I salute you both to the earth, & adore you completely. (LL 91)

Possibly, Bartlett concealed her literary aspirations from James—although her disclosure to other friends suggests otherwise. Perhaps James did not take her literary efforts seriously, or perhaps the common ground of authorship and of the *Atlantic* paled in comparison to the absorbing thrill of their shared passion for horseback riding (probably lifelong for Bartlett, intense but less enduring for James). For if James was silent on the subject of Bartlett’s *writing*, he was positively effusive on the subject of her *riding*. In this article, I take a close look at James’s travel sketch “Roman Rides” in order to explore further his connection to Bartlett and to a circle of American women riders with whom he eagerly consorted.² My reading of “Roman Rides” in this context suggests that there is good reason to believe that Bartlett profoundly influenced James, albeit in oblique, unacknowledged, and sometimes belated ways.

In several respects “Roman Rides” is something of an anomaly in James’s body of writing. The sketch departs from the very “indoor” orientation of much of James’s work and provides an unconstrained “outside” view from a writer best known for mapping interior landscapes, whether of the mind or of the elegant hotels and stately residences his characters typically inhabit. Here, James leaves behind the modern built environment and its treacherous web of social codes and man-made obstacles. Alternatively, “Roman Rides” presents a portrait of the artist as equestrian, galloping into a sublime landscape where Emersonian unities intersect with Jamesian dualities.

If the equestrian James, poised in tall boots astride a galloping steed, riding crop in hand, seems incongruous, it may be helpful to exorcise the image of the portly middle-aged James erusticated at Lamb House and replace it with an image of “Henry James, Jr.,” or “Harry,” at 29: a youthful writer still known chiefly for his sketches,

tales, and book reviews, slim, fit, and with a relative abundance of slightly wavy dark hair and a wide yet insular circle of gregarious American friends living in or visiting the Eternal City. The convergence of James, Bartlett, her flat-mate Alice Mason Sumner, Sarah Butler Wister, Lizzie Boott, and Ellen Tucker Emerson (and her father) in Rome during the winter and spring of 1873 sets the stage for what I would like to suggest is a textual response to the storied scenery of the Roman Campagna that is unmistakably American and, more specifically, New England Transcendentalist. Moreover, I argue, this apparently fleeting “transcendentalist” response unexpectedly resurfaces, in transmuted form, in the complex subjectivities of the late, modern James.³

“I write, in mid-April,” announces James in “Roman Rides,” and “At the moment at which I write . . . all the ledges and cornices are wreathed with flaming poppies, nodding there as if they knew so well what faded greys and yellows are an offset to their scarlet” (*IH* 142). A few months earlier, in January 1873, James had taken up horseback riding, partly in connection with a friendship he had cemented with Bartlett, an energetic and adventurous Bostonian. Bartlett was an experienced traveler. On one of her junkets, she had been the companion of the Alcott sisters on their year-long European tour following the publication of *Little Women*. By all accounts, Bartlett was extremely lively, athletic, and winsome. Louisa and May Alcott adored her and considered her “a *perfect lady*” (Alcott and Alcott 26)—“so sensible & happy & queer” (Alcott 253), according to Louisa—and their letters from abroad are replete with illustrations of Bartlett’s verve, independence, resourcefulness, generosity, and sometimes boisterous sense of humor. In one memorable episode, for example, Louisa reported: “Alice is very funny and has just grabbed May, and cut off a bit of her hair. A. is the strongest and she whacks May round like a doll, ‘for exercise therapy’ she says” (Alcott and Alcott 47). Of Alice, May revealed, “I have never before met a person of her age, who proved so highly cultivated, refined, well educated, and always interesting. The Nation comes regularly to her . . .” (67). Louisa, who praised her as “clever, but no saint” (149), enjoyed Bartlett’s unconventional hospitality. From Vevey, she wrote: “A’s room opens into ours, and we roam to and fro, have parties in dressing sacks, smoke cigarettes, eat fruit, drink our private wine, and carouse in a truly festive manner” (185). Although the vignette may seem more gentlemanly than ladylike, Bartlett could also appear as flounced and feminine as the exquisitely attired Daisy Miller. As Louisa remarked, “Alice can be very fascinating if she likes, and when she wears white with little bows and gems bedropped here and there, the effect is quite captivating, though she is not pretty” (79).

A contributor to *Animal World* (published by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), as well as to the *Atlantic*, Bartlett was devoted to animals. In Brittany with the Alcott sisters in the spring of 1870, she had kept “a gay little bird to enliven [the] parlor—a sort of sparrow, gray with a red head and a lively song” (Alcott and Alcott 19), and in Rome with Alice Mason Sumner during the winter of 1872, she had adopted a stray dog, upon whom she and the other Alice doted extravagantly. About horses, she was both avid and fastidious. A skilled horsewoman who rode frequently while traveling with the Alcotts, Bartlett loved to gallop and took riding lessons in Vevey in order to “learn to leap and be ready to hunt on the Campagna when at Rome” (Alcott and Alcott 228). Bartlett was extremely particular about her mounts. “The Roman horse is strong and heavy-paced and lazy; but he can be made to go,” she advised readers of her sketch “Our Apartment.” “I hate such horses, and

was almost in despair, when I discovered a restless young animal of foreign extraction; and any one can do the like by a little seeking," she encouraged: "Do not rest until you find something that does not thump. For Roman riding is far too good to be spoiled" (667). Ellen Emerson, who borrowed one of Alice's horses (she and the other Alice kept three) for a ride on the Campagna around this time, duly credited the excellent training of her mount in a letter to her mother:

The horse was a constant wonder to me. So were the other horses. There seemed to be no limit to their powers of galloping. They seemed to think, "The longer and harder the better," so away we went over the daisies creating such a gale by our speed that I was surprised. My hat was tied on with every possible precaution or it would have flown. . . . The horse that I rode was hers, minded the slightest movement of the hand (so the great torment of riding was removed) and had learned to trot at one sign and canter at another, so it was all pure pleasure to ride. (2: 62)

Like the English heroine of "A Week's Riding," Bartlett was "a very tall slim girl, light and pale . . . elegant and lady-like," according to Ellen Emerson (22).⁴ Unlike her heroine, she was also a self-proclaimed "Yankee of Yankees" (Bartlett, "Pros and Cons" 438). Upon meeting one another for the first time, aboard a steamer bound from Nice to Genoa, Bartlett and Ellen became fast friends. As Ellen recounted in a letter home:

In a few minutes she had offered her services. In a few hours we talked so fast that Father was really worried lest I should lose scenery. By afternoon we sat together on a chest and became great friends. By sunset Father was begging her to change her plans and stay with us. And this morning we parted with first names, and by severe control just managed not to swear eternal friendship. (22)

Writing from Rome ten days later, Ellen Emerson reported, "Father likes to have her show us round better than anybody else" (28). To Ellen, she was "one delightful companion and real, sober friend among a host of transient acquaintances" (76); moreover, she was a "comfort among women" during their stay in Rome, just as "Harry James was our comfort among men" (64). To his brother William, James described her as "superior & very natural," confiding, "I feel very much as if she were a boy—an excellent fellow," although he also considered her "limited by a kind of characteristic American want of culture" (*CL2* 255). Echoing his chummy, defeminized characterization of Bartlett, James later confessed to Lizzie Boott: "I esteem her rather a good fellow than a lovely woman. I couldn't love her" (*LL* 90 n. 1). He did, nevertheless, enjoy her humorous observations and could not resist relaying to William one of Bartlett's anecdotes about the Emersons:

Apropos of E[merison], Miss Bartlett told me a good story, lately, about Ellen, she travelled with them on the steamer last autumn, from Nice to Genoa, & was compelled by some imposition of one of the functionaries, to remonstrate vigorously,—in the presence of the E.'s. When it was over—"the thing itself is small," she said to Ellen, "but I do hate injustice."

Ellen—"I don't know that I have ever known injustice. Father, have we ever known injustice?" (CL2 266)⁵

For the most part, however, James's references to "that mighty maiden" (qtd. in Edel 147) extol her exceptional equestrian skills and her comeliness on horseback—qualities similarly praised in the writings of others who knew her well.

Three and a half years earlier, James had written to William, "The Campagna is something tremendous—but it can only be seen on horseback" (CL1 222). On February 1, 1873, a little more than a month after he returned to Rome, James wrote to his father that the previous week he had "at last [made] a beginning with a scheme that [he] had much at heart in coming to Rome" (CL2 204).⁶ Confessing that "the thought of it indeed was the thing which really uprooted me in Paris," he went on to explain that he had taken "a delicious two hour's ride on the Campagna & can now believe all the ravings of the people who ride here." With evident self-satisfaction James reported: "I can stick on a horse better than I supposed & have a very tolerable seat." The ride was "an immense pleasure," he declared, "and has brightened my outlook on existence." The following week, in a letter to his sister, Alice, he referred to this first ride as "a revelation of bliss" (210).

During the period of "Roman Rides," Bartlett, who would soon become a neighbor of James, shared an apartment in the Via della Croce, near the Piazza di Spagna, with Alice Mason Sumner, who had recently separated, scandalously, from her husband, Senator Charles Sumner. That March James decided to rent a horse for a month, perhaps upon the recommendation of Bartlett, who, in her travel sketch "Our Apartment," helpfully advised, "You can get a first rate one [saddle horse] for three hundred francs a month, a good one for two hundred and fifty, or you can take your chance at ten francs an afternoon" (667). On March 4 James described to his father "a famous ride with Mrs. Sumner & Mr Miss Bartlett; both admirable horsewomen, especially Miss B., & both very handsome in the saddle." Although their aggressive riding had left him temporarily "incapacitated by—to speak plainly—a *boil*," he recalled the excursion enthusiastically: "We went far away into the rolling meadows, where the shaggy-vested shepherds feed their flocks & had a series of magnificent gallops, of which I acquitted myself *à mon honneur*. But," he added, "for me & my infirmities, they ride at rather a tiring rate . . ." (CL2 227). To Grace Norton, he wrote of his rides on the Campagna: "I see indescribable things . . . it's all as solemnly beautiful, & strange & still as you remember it" (234). By the end of the month, James was able to boast to his mother of jumping four ditches with great serenity and being complimented for his "close seat" ("But the merit was less mine" he modestly conceded, "than that of my delightful little horse, who is a brave jumper") (CL2 242). To top it off, he announced, "I am now in the position of a creature with *five* women *offering* to ride with him: Mrs Sumner, Mrs. W[ister].. Mrs Boit, Miss Bartlett & Lizzie B[oott]." Of all these women, however, it was Alice Bartlett whose equestrian skill most inspired James. In early March, when Emerson was visiting Rome with daughter Ellen ("back from the Nile, serene & urbane & rejuvenated by his adventures" [233], James reported to Grace Norton), James made a point of recommending an excursion on horseback to see Alice ride. As Ellen explained to her mother, the ride (described previously) "was by far the grandest I ever arrived at . . . I saw Alice ride and considered it worth while to see her, as Harry James said"

(Emerson 2: 62). As in “A Week’s Riding,” when the American protagonist is told, “If you want to see a woman ride, see her,—it’s absolute perfection,” Bartlett’s reputation for flawless riding preceded her.

In “Roman Rides,” which James composed during this period, he describes “the deep delight of knowing the Campagna” (*IH* 139). For James, riding on the Campagna is an excursion through time as well as through space. It is a journey that opens a vista onto “a double life.” He explains:

To dwell in a city which, much as you grumble at it, is after all very fairly a modern city; with crowds and shops and theatres and cafés and balls and receptions and dinner-parties, and all the modern confusion of social pleasures and pains; to have at your door the good and evil of it all; and yet to be able in half an hour to gallop away and leave it a hundred miles, a hundred years, behind, and to look at the tufted broom glowing on a lonely tower-top in the still blue air, and the pale pink asphodels trembling none the less for the stillness, and the shaggy-legged shepherds leaning on their sticks in motionless brotherhood with the heaps of ruin, and the scrambling goats and staggering little kids treading out wild desert smells from the top of hollow-sounding mounds; and then to come back through one of the great gates and a couple of hours later find yourself in the “world,” dressed, introduced, entertained, inquiring, talking about “Middlemarch” to a young English lady or listening to Neapolitan songs from a gentleman in a very low-cut shirt—all this is to lead in a manner a double life and to gather from the hurrying hours more impressions than a mind of modest capacity quite knows how to dispose of. (140–41)

Many years later in “The Private Life” (1892), James would conceive of the writer’s life with a similar image of doubleness, as the author is fractured into a public figure who circulates in society and a private “alternate identity,” or “other self” (*FC* 217), sequestered in his room. The image in “Roman Rides” is similar—yet it is also opposed to the doubleness of Clare Vawdrey in “The Private Life.” For in “Roman Rides,” the glimpse we have is not into the isolated, fragmented life of the *writer*, detached from the outside world, observing life but not living it. Instead James peers into the intimate, companionable solitude of the *rider*, a retreat that is equally nourishing to the outer life and the inner life. In contrast to “The Private Life,” in which Vawdrey’s “duplication of character” is only *perceived* as constituting “a wealth,” “a resource for life” (*FC* 218), here “the double life” signals the integration and synthesis of parts rather than their separation. It is a holistic, as well as a wholesome, flight.

“It is a pleasure that doubles one’s horizon,” James explains in “Roman Rides,” “and one can scarcely say whether it enlarges or limits one’s impression of the city proper” (*IH* 140). The effect of the experience is to make one “wonder, with an irrepressible contraction of the heart, when again you shall feel yourself bounding over the flower-smothered turf, or pass from one framed picture to another beside the open arches of the crumbling aqueducts” (140). James elaborates on the ambiguity:

You look back at the City so often from some grassy hill-top—hugely compact within its walls, with St. Peter’s overtopping all things and yet

seeming small, and the vast girdle of marsh and meadow receding on all sides to the mountains and the sea—that you come to remember it at last as hardly more than a respectable parenthesis in a great sweep of generalisation. Within the walls, on the other hand, you think of your intended ride as the most romantic of all your possibilities; of the Campagna generally as an illimitable experience. One's rides certainly give Rome an inordinate scope for the reflective—by which I suppose I mean after all the æsthetic and the “esoteric”—life. (140)

Here, James uses the idea of doubling to mean something different from the earlier usage of “a double life.” Whether it is ultimately an integrative or a fragmenting experience, to have a double life suggests division, twinning, splitting into two. It is for this reason that Vawdrey's double life is ultimately just as limiting as the half life of Lord Mellifont, who exists, apparently, only in the presence of others. Doubling one's horizon, on the other hand, suggests twice as much, multiplication rather than division into halves: it is expansion, increase, extension. The city's proportions may have an ambiguous relationship to this new expansiveness—does the city grow, or does it shrink, from this new vantage point?—but the important point for James is that it opens the way to the reflective, or “esoteric,” life.

A bit further on, James enlarges on this entry into the “æsthetic” life, as he reflects on the experience of “seeing great classic lines of landscape, of watching them dispose themselves into pictures so full of ‘style’ that you can think of no painter who deserves to have you admit that they suggest him” (*IH* 148). Later, however, James does name him, as he blends together images of art and of the Roman landscape to which riding horseback gives him intimate and dynamic access:

Soracte, be it January or May, rises from its blue horizon like an island from the sea and with an elegance of contour which no mood of the year can deepen or diminish. You know it well; you have seen it often in the mellow backgrounds of Claude; and it has such an irresistibly classic, academic air that while you look at it you begin to take your saddle for a faded old arm-chair in a palace gallery. A month's rides in different directions will show you a dozen prime Claudes. After I had seen them all I went piously to the Doria gallery to refresh my memory of its two famous specimens and to enjoy to the utmost their delightful air of reference to something that had become a part of my personal experience. Delightful it certainly is to feel the common element in one's own sensibility and those of a genius whom that element has helped to great things. Claude must have haunted the very places of one's personal preference and adjusted their divine undulations to his splendid scheme of romance, his view of the poetry of life. (*IH* 149)

James offers an image of complete synthesis between art and nature, a synthesis neatly encapsulated in the phrase “the poetry of life.” A unity exists between the artist of the past and the perceiver of the present as well as between “the common element” of one's personal experience and the “divine undulations” of place that the artist perfectly adjusts to create “great things.” Far from revealing a separation of art and

life, as such later tales as “The Private Life” and “The Birthplace” (1903) suggest, here, again, the process bespeaks the kind of integration and transcendent unity effected by a Poet of the Emersonian order.

Despite James’s insistence on the reflective, esoteric life in “Roman Rides,” ironically, these equestrian excursions allow the “life of the mind” (*IH* 143) to recede and physical sensation to take precedence. It is not cognition or deliberate cogitation that James stresses, but, rather, above all, the deep sense of connectedness that results from the combination of movement through, vision into, and passive reflection on the landscape and scenery. Even as the past is connected to the present through the continuity of the physical place, so the self is connected to others and to something larger than itself in a kind of communion of sensation:

your sensation rarely begins and ends with itself; it reverberates—it recalls, commemorates, resuscitates something else. At least half the merit of everything you enjoy must be that it suits you absolutely; but the larger half here is generally that it has suited some one else and that you can never flatter yourself you have discovered it. (149–50)

This time James’s image of doubling is neither a division nor a twofold expansion. Instead it is a still greater increase: with the triple repetition of the prefix “re” (a particle indicating, of itself, repetition) and the pairing of the phrases “at least half” and “the larger half,” James suggests that the whole is in fact larger than the two unequal “halves.” And, in this case, the excess results from a profound sense of connectedness with other times and other people. Prior discovery in no way diminishes the experience; rather, the “sensation” is magnified and intensified by the precedence of ghostly (i.e., spiritualized) others.

In “Roman Rides,” James describes riding on the Campagna as an experience of transcendence, with its “divine undulations” and “adjust[ment]” of inward and outward senses. This is not far removed from the profound transcendental unity that Emerson had experienced as he felt the currents of the Universal Being circulating through him and became “a transparent eye-ball,” “part or particle of God” (10). James, speaking through an unspecified (male) friend on the pleasures of these Roman rides, writes: “under such a sky, in such an air, over acres of daisied turf, a long, long gallop is certainly a supersubtle joy. The elastic bound of your horse is the poetry of motion; and if you are so happy as to add to it not the prose of companionship riding comes almost to affect you as a spiritual exercise” (142). To the artist’s view of “the poetry of life” is added the equine’s capacity for “the poetry of motion.” In “Our Apartment,” Alice Bartlett had rhapsodized of riding on the Campagna: “It is a dream, a new sensation, to Americans who have kept to the road all their lives. You go through a gate, or jump over a fence if you prefer, and then—It is galloping into space on turf” (667). James, with similar diction, evokes “the strong sense of wandering over boundless space” (*IH* 148), an experience that is “so persuasively divine” that it invites the “contemplative measure”:

Springtime in Rome is an immensely poetic affair; but you must stand often far out in the ancient waste, between grass and sky, to measure its deep, full, steadily accelerated rhythm. . . . The Roman air, however, is not

a tonic medicine, and it seldom suffers exercise to be all exhilarating. It has always seemed to me indeed part of the charm of the latter that your keenest consciousness is haunted with a vague languor. Occasionally when the sirocco blows that sensation becomes strange and exquisite. Then, under the grey sky, before the dim distances which the south-wind mostly brings with it, you seem to ride forth into a world from which all hope has departed and in which, in spite of the flowers that make your horse's footfalls soundless, nothing is left save some queer probability that your imagination is unable to measure, but from which it hardly shrinks. This quality in the Roman element may now and then "relax" you almost to ecstasy. . . . (148–49)

The concurrence of mental states that are customarily opposed—the "vague languor" that "relax[es]" and the "keen consciousness" quickening to near-"ecstasy"—once again recalls a uniquely Jamesian "double consciousness." Thirty years later, James would write of Lambert Strether, in *The Ambassadors* (1903), that he was "burdened . . . with the oddity of a double consciousness. There was detachment in his zeal and curiosity in his indifference" (56). In "Roman Rides" James conveys a similarly paradoxical juxtaposition of insouciance and intensity. In a turn reminiscent of Bartlett's "a dream, a new sensation" and of Emerson's epiphanic movement, he remarks that "Every wayside mark of manners, of history, every stamp of the past in the country about Rome, touches my sense to a thrill, and I may thus exaggerate the appeal of very common things" (*IH* 147). Ecstasy, joy, thrill, sensation—this is hardly the James of sitting rooms, galleries, and urbane conversation, of interior spaces and psychological nuance. Rather, it is the James of Boston and Cambridge, of Newport and New Hampshire. Even the diction is fresh.

Describing the corkwoods of Monte Mario ("tenderly loved of all equestrians"), where he rode with Lizzie Boott, James directly alludes to the northern New Hampshire woods, where eight years earlier he had vacationed with Minnie Temple and Wendell Holmes:⁷

Among them is strewn a lovely wilderness of flowers and shrubs, and the whole place has such a charming woodland air, that, casting about me the other day for a compliment, I declared that it reminded me of New Hampshire. My compliment had a double edge, and I had no sooner uttered it than I smiled—or sighed—to perceive in all the indiscriminated botany about me the wealth of detail, the idle elegance and grace of Italy alone, the natural stamp of the land which has the singular privilege of making one love her unsanctified beauty all but as well as those features of one's own country toward which nature's small allowance doubles that of one's own affection. (*IH* 150–51)

Here, too, the repeated images of doubleness—"double-edged compliment," "doubles that of one's own affection"—recall later, more renowned instances of doubling in James's oeuvre. The comparison of the Italian corkwoods to the New Hampshire woods, with its Old World / New World juxtaposition, brings to mind "The Jolly Corner" (1908), in which Spencer Brydon returns to America and encounters a ghostly

(and rather ghastly) alternative version of himself—his American double (*ET*). As in “The Private Life,” the image in “The Jolly Corner” is one of a fractured, even mutilated, self, two halves of the same person that can only exist in binary opposition. In “Roman Rides” the juxtaposition of Old World and New functions quite differently. Once again, consciousness is enhanced rather than diminished. The self is connected to and enlarged by “the natural stamp of the land”—just as earlier “the stamp of the past” had led him to “exaggerate the appeal of very common things.” Nature and the self are united here through an intimate emotional bond, as the rider / writer realizes his dual ties to the landscape of the present (Italy) and of his personal past (New Hampshire), to universal art and nature and to his own native land. Again, we glimpse not only the American James, but, more precisely, the elusive yet undeniable New England James, cultivated in the rarified atmosphere of Emersonian Transcendentalism.⁸

In “Our Apartment,” Bartlett had concluded her description of riding on the Campagna with “it is so futile to attempt to describe [it], that I leave it as it stands” (667). The experience is ineffable: words fail. In the end, like Bartlett, James (seldom at a loss for words) similarly concludes that words are inadequate to recapture the varied impressions, sensations, and reflections he experiences during his Roman rides: “when my sense reverts to the lingering impressions of so blest a time, it seems a fool’s errand to have attempted to express them, and a waste of words to do more than recommend the reader to go citywards at twilight of the end of March, making for Porta Cavalleggieri, and note what he sees” (*IH* 147). This inexpressibility differs from the silences, gaps, and omissions that exist elsewhere in James’s writing: the deliberate reticence that protects secrets and preserves privacy, which is, as Peter Rawlings has shown, an often sinister or ominous withholding of words. As in Bartlett’s elliptical reference to her Roman rides, this is a silence of mirth and humor: “For reasons apparent or otherwise,” James confesses, “these things amuse me beyond expression” (*IH* 147). The experience of riding horseback in open countryside and of immersing himself in the rural landscape of the past and present—an experience facilitated by his equine and equestrian companions (particularly Miss Bartlett)—seems to have prompted the uncharacteristically exuberant expression of a quasi-Transcendental James that, ironically, looks ahead to the “late,” modern James.

For even as “Roman Rides” “recalls, commemorates, resuscitates” Transcendentalism and the New England past, the sensations recorded in “Roman Rides” also reverberate through James’s late fiction, as my references to “The Jolly Corner,” “The Private Life,” and *The Ambassadors* suggest. Nowhere, perhaps, do these echoes ring more resoundingly than in “The Great Good Place” (1900), for it is in this story that images of doubleness resurface, ultimately to be reconciled in an expression of profound completion. At the beginning of the tale, we find George Dane, a successful writer, one of the “victims of the modern madness” (304), suffering from “the dreadful fatal too much” (305)—“it [life] was a thing of meshes” (288) in which he is caught. Standing at the window of his room, which is overcrowded with letters, newspapers, journals, periodicals of all sorts, and heaps of books, Dane gazes out at the rain-washed world and “faintly gasped at the energy of nature” (288). He reflects on the previous night, when the rainfall had soothed him, mercifully: “washing the window in a steady flood, it had seemed the right thing, the retarding interrupting thing, the thing that, if it would only last, might clear the ground by floating out to a

boundless sea the innumerable objects among which his feet stumbled and strayed” (288–89). Leaving his writing in the middle of a phrase “and his papers lying quite as for the flood to bear them away in its rush” (289), he turns out the lamp and retires for the night. In the morning, unsurprisingly, he finds the room just as he left it, including “the bare bones of the sentence—and not all of those” so that “the single thing borne away and that he could never recover was the missing half that might have paired with it and begotten a figure.” The incompleteness and failure of language James conveys through the interrupted phrase and its “missing half” will soon be remedied through the offices of Dane’s “substitute in the world” (298), a young, little noticed writer who takes Dane’s place at his desk while Dane’s “inner self” recuperates at “the great good place.”

James’s descriptions of this scene of soul-recovery and “new consciousness” (293) subtly evoke the Italy of his early Italian sketches. Dane, who has “a fond sense of the south” (308), observes, in this monastery-like setting, “a high dry loggia, such as he a little pretended to himself he had, in the Italy of old days, seen in old cities, old convents, old villas” (294). In addition, “the paradise of his own room” reminds him of “some old Italian picture, some Carpaccio or some early Tuscan” (305). It is here that “the inner life” reawakens. And although life at the great good place centers around walks, conversations with various Brothers, and relaxing in the garden and library, the tale echoes “Roman Rides” in its depiction of this delightful refuge as a place apart from “the ‘world,’” its engagement with the ineffable (“the wordless fact itself” [304]), its hints of “divine undulations” and “spiritual exercise” (“the vision and the faculty divine” [302]), the “embrace” (306) of pure friendship (“there’s love in it too” [310]), and the revelatory “bliss” of a “supersubtle joy” (Dane: “I’ve been so happy!” [312]). Most crucially, however, as in “Roman Rides,” James conjures forth images of doubling not to convey duplicity, division, or depletion but rather to express a magnification of feeling and an expansiveness of vision. In the library of the great good place, for example, where the spirit is “refreshed and reconsecrated,” Dane “enjoyed . . ., of all the rare strange moments, those that were at once most quickened and most caught—moments in which every apprehension counted double and every act of the mind was a lover’s embrace” (310, 306). Then, too, Dane experiences a kind of double vision when he recognizes that, among the Brothers, “the friend was always new and yet at the same time—it was amusing, not disturbing—suggested the possibility that he might be but an old one altered” (307). This doubleness of identity plays out in the perfect equilibrium achieved between Dane and his “benefactor,” between the good Brother and the Br(others) who succeed him, and, upon Dane’s waking, in the confusion of identity between the good Brother and his servant, Brown. In the end, the double images converge into a single vision as Dane internalizes “the great good place,” and the two voices of the young man and the good Brother coalesce. James concludes the story with a unifying image of freedom, difference, and twofold expansiveness: “It was all queer, but all pleasant and all distinct, so distinct that the last words in his ear—the same from both quarters—appeared the effect of a single voice. Dane rose and looked about his room, which seemed disencumbered, different, twice as large. It *was* all right” (313). In “The Art of Fiction,” James writes, “It appears to me that no one can ever have made a seriously artistic attempt without becoming conscious of an immense increase—a kind of revelation—of freedom” (*EL* 59). In “The Great Good Place,” as in “Roman Rides,” doubleness signals precisely

that revelatory excess of freedom that is encapsulated in the moments that are “at once most quickened and most caught” (*ET* 306).

Following his first Roman ride, at the end of January 1873, James had written to his father: “It has been my dream that a couple of month’s riding may supply me with a valuable sort of exercise—to say nothing of its intrinsic delights (and its extrinsic—such as gallops with Miss Alice Bartlett)—prove in short a physical, intellectual & moral education. . . . If it is really the peculiar pleasure I imagine it to be, it ought to do great things for one—& one ought to do great things in consequence, to prove one’s right to it” (*CL2* 204). In April, when he had given up his rented saddle-horse and the Roman spring began to melt into summer, James summed up the experience to William:

My riding has put me in the way of supremely enjoying it [the Roman weather] & of course has doubled the horizon of Rome. Physically, I doubt that it will ever do wonders for me; but morally & intellectually, it is wondrous good. Life here (after one has known it) would be very tame without it and to try it is to make it an essential. Like every thing that is worth doing, riding well is difficult; but I have learned to sit a well-disposed horse decently enough—the Campagna, with its great stretches of turf, its slopes and holes and ditches, being a capital place to learn acquire vigilance & firmness. (257)

In letters to Sarah Wister, James wrote dismissively of his “[attempt] to turn a few phrases on Roman rides,” characterizing the piece as “rather a humbug” (288) and “rather high-falutin,” averring, “You will see—I had to make up for small riding by big writing” (*HJL* 399). Yet in a more serious tone, James went on to defend the “big writing” of “Roman Rides.” “Unless one’s vision can lend something to a thing,” he concluded, “there’s small reason in proceeding to proclaim one has seen it.”⁹ In his article on “Henry James’s Transcendental Imagination,” George Sebouhian states that “Emerson defines the transcendentalist as the idealist, the solitary, an observer to whom the world is not a distant fact, but an intimate event involving his own consciousness” (214). The visionary cast of “Roman Rides” suggests that the younger James experienced the world in precisely this fashion—as “an intimate event involving his own consciousness”—and this way of encountering the world intimately, rather than as “a distant fact,” was vastly facilitated by the conjunction of human, animal, eternal countryside, and ancient built landscape to which the art of equitation gave him unrivaled access. Nearly fifty years ago Leon Edel speculated that it was Alice Bartlett who, on a ride through the Campagna three years after “Roman Rides,” provided James with the anecdote that became the “germ” of “Daisy Miller.”¹⁰ More salient, I hope, is the proposition that Alice Bartlett offered the “late”-flowering “germ” of “Roman Rides,” itself embryonic yet still in a fashion “fertilizing” the author’s “second growth”—a “germ” that sprang not from words or tales but from an intimate affinity for the wordless, the ineffable, limitless physical and metaphysical “thrill” of “galloping over turf through space.”

NOTES

¹Although “A Week’s Riding” was published anonymously, the author was later identified as “Alice Bartlett” in the *Atlantic Index*. Alice Amelia Bartlett (b. 21 December 1844) is described in the genealogical reference *The Greenwood Family of Norwich, England, in America* as: “lived for some years

in Rome; [and] wrote for the *Atlantic Monthly*" (Greenwood 143–44). The trail of references to Bartlett in the combined correspondence of Henry James, Louisa May Alcott, and Ellen Tucker Emerson leaves no doubt that the Alice Bartlett who accompanied Louisa and May Alcott to Europe was the same Alice Bartlett who became well acquainted with James in Rome. As I have argued elsewhere, the writings of Bartlett and James intersect provocatively in their respective treatments of the American girl abroad (see Wadsworth, "What Daisy Knew"). For further biographical details, see Edel (147) and Shealy (xxx–xxxi). I gratefully acknowledge John Jentz, of Marquette's Raynor Memorial Libraries, for locating the citation to "A Week's Riding." I also wish to acknowledge Susan Hopwood, also of Raynor Libraries, for her invaluable insistence in my ongoing pursuit of Alice Bartlett.

²"Roman Rides" was published the following August in *Atlantic Monthly* and later reprinted in *Transatlantic Sketches* (1875), *Foreign Parts* (1883), and *Italian Hours* (1909). See MacDonald for a comprehensive reading of James's Italian sketches.

³In making this argument, I am aware of certain parallels with other critics who have traced the ways in which James's later works re-vision his early influences and experiences. Most recently, Brooks has argued that "James's year in Paris [in 1876] seems to be all about missing things on the spot—but somehow storing them away for later retrieval and reinterpretation" (28). More directly relevant to my article are Sebouhian, who examines "James's growing sympathy for Emerson and things transcendental throughout his life" (214), and Rovit's "James and Emerson: The Lesson of the Master," which explores "James's spiritual indebtedness . . . to Ralph Waldo Emerson, the master whom he failed to acknowledge until very late in his career" (434–35). Writing of James's return to Concord in *The American Scene*, Rovit comments: "James seems to be confessing in his own impenetrably ironic way, that his own belated fall from the innocence of a divided self was a fall with an Emersonian 'drop,' and his rise in the great surge of mature creativity that swept him into his finest work was the redemption of the Emersonian promise" (440).

⁴For photos and sketches of Bartlett, see Alcott and Alcott (xxxii, 59, 74, 99, 100, 117, 259).

⁵Bartlett's anecdote offers an amusing illustration of an Emersonian quality James would examine in his review of *The Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson* a full decade later. In this review, James famously wrote, "His optimism makes us wonder at times where he discovered the errors that it would seem well to set right, and what there was in his view of the world on which the spirit of criticism could feed. He had a high and noble conception of good, without having, as it would appear, a definite conception of evil" (EL 243). Similarly, in his review of James Elliot Cabot's memoir of Emerson, he remarked that "the evil and sin of the world" comprised "a side of life as to which Emerson's eyes were thickly bandaged . . . he had no great sense of wrong . . . no sense of the dark, the foul, the base" (269).

⁶Maves notes: "On December 18, 1872, James left Paris to winter in Rome, where he arrived, after a three year absence, on the 23rd. He remained until June 1873, and was later to think of these days as among the happiest in his life" (33).

⁷On "the idyllic summer of 1865" (Gordon, figure caption, n.p.), see Gordon (67–74).

⁸As Gordon remarks, "Whether he read or liked Emerson doesn't matter. For Emerson shaped him, as his father shaped him. Their radical fervour was what the James household lived and breathed" (133). Of "Harry" James in Rome, Ellen Tucker Emerson wrote: "He was a comfort [to her father] because he was a friend both in himself and by inheritance—the best kind of a friend . . . so that he could be to Father a sort of son, and much more because he had a real mind and was sincere and good, so that when he spoke it cheered you instead of tiring you to listen" (2: 64).

⁹James's defense of "Roman Rides" is borne out by his later revisions to the piece, which tend to heighten what he referred to as "big writing." James's description of riding on the Campagna as "a supersubtle joy" (IH 142) replaced the earlier phrase "the gentlest, the most refined of pleasures" (RR 191), for example; and in the process of revision James also promoted these Roman rides from "an intellectual pursuit" (191) to almost "a spiritual exercise" (IH 142). Similarly, the original *Atlantic Monthly* version ends with the anticlimactic "I have wished only to say a word for one's rides,—to suggest that they give one, not only exercise, but memories" (RR 198), while the version in *Italian Hours* concludes: "It sounds like nothing, but the force behind it and the frame round it, the setting, the air, the chord struck, make it a hundred wonderful things" (151).

¹⁰See Wadsworth (*Company* 155–59) for a dissenting view.

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