



Title	Henry James and the China Trade
Author(s)	Johnson, KA
Citation	Modern Fiction Studies (MFS), 2014, v. 60, p. 677-710
Issued Date	2014
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/10722/216474
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HENRY JAMES AND THE CHINA TRADE

Kendall Johnson

I am sorry, in opening this family picture gallery, to turn in this way from my first and most imposing portrait to the wall: but they are all to be works of my own brush, not done by the fashionable painters or photographers of those old days; and no living image of Russell Sturgis is in my possession. But I can give him a name, in lieu of a portrait, and will call him and his generation the Great Merchants: a type that in America has since been replaced by that of great business men or millionaires, building up their fortunes at home; whereas it was part of the romance and tragedy of those Great Merchants that they amassed their fortunes abroad, in a poetic blue-water phase of commercial development that passed away with them, and made their careers and virtues impossible for their children.

—George Santayana, *Persons and Places: The Background of My Life*

Long considered for his transatlantic senses of cultural distinctiveness, Henry James is not usually read as having much to do with China or transpacific commerce. However, his fiction shows a sustained awareness of the early nineteenth-century China trade in its effect on the visual and cultural landscape of New England where the first American millionaires settled after amassing fortunes in a world system of commerce. In the footsteps of early national

millionaires John Jacob Astor, Stephen Girard, "Colonel" Thomas Handasyd Perkins, and John Perkins Cushing, young American men of internationally networked merchant families sojourned to Canton (contemporary Guangzhou) with private trading firms such as the Perkins and Company and Russell and Company to earn their competence, enough money to live comfortably as a gentleman. This essay charts James's significant and underappreciated engagement with the cultural legacy of the China trade, beginning with a positive depiction in the novel *The Europeans: A Sketch* and moving to the foreboding allusions in his late writing when he had grown more circumspect about the moral implications of extreme wealth, the abstracted terms of finance capital, and the effects of global enterprise on putatively local culture. This later-phase writing includes *The Golden Bowl*, the travel essay "The Sense of Newport," which appeared first in *Harper's Monthly* and subsequently as a chapter of *The American Scene*, and his unfinished novel *The Ivory Tower*.

Beyond topical motifs and incidental biographical allusions, references to the China trade resonate in James's intensely visual literary style through which he verbally sketches social landscapes that convey an aura of national culture. As he became mystified by the degrees of abstraction by which twentieth-century global speculation was generating wealth, he began to distrust his personal sense of a national past. The resulting gardens with misplaced ivory towers and outlandish pagodas convey this unease as they confuse the scales of geographical space and historical time at the heart of his relational understanding of the United States in cyclically progressive Western culture. His unfinished novel *The Ivory Tower* centers on two American fortunes with histories corrupt enough to threaten the potential for personal and national romance as the novel's setting transposes a richly manicured Newport landscape onto a desolate and melancholic terrain that evokes the devastation of the Opium Wars (1839–42; 1856–60), the violence of the Taiping Rebellion (1850–64), and the nationalist revolution of 1911 that ended the Qing dynasty in the years prior to the Great War.

American Local Color and the China Trade

China trade of the early nineteenth century finances the transatlantic romances of *The Europeans: A Sketch*. Set in the 1840s, the novel plots the American return of the siblings Eugenia and Felix to visit their uncle, Mr. Wentworth, and his children, Gertrude, Charlotte, and Clifford, who live in a suburb of Boston. Years before, Eugenia and Felix's mother (Mr. Wentworth's half sister) married a European thereby precipitating an estrangement that the novel dramatizes for

its cultural legacy. Like her mother, Eugenia married a German prince and now finds herself stranded in a disappointing morganatic marriage, ruminating on whether to sign an annulment from the temporary refuge of her uncle's New England cottage. Meanwhile, her spry younger brother Felix busily sketches the New England around him as he falls in love with his cousin Gertrude. He wins the approval of his skeptical uncle and of Mr. Brand, an austere minister and family friend who had himself been wooing Gertrude. Mr. Brand lands on his feet when he eventually marries Gertrude's sister Charlotte. The story ends less happily for Eugenia. She initially takes a calculated interest in Robert Acton, whom Felix sums up to her: "He will have his way with you. He is man of the world; he has been to China" (50). Acton, a maternal cousin of Gertrude and Charlotte, lives with his invalid mother and younger sister Lizzie, who eventually marries her cousin Clifford. Acton nearly falls in love with Eugenia but never trusts her enough to woo her wholeheartedly. His worldly experience enables him to detect her jaded half-truths and to buffer himself emotionally from any enduring heartache. Sometime after Eugenia's return to Europe, Acton marries "a particularly nice young girl" assumedly from Massachusetts (281).

As the romantic encounters between the American and European cousins unfold, Felix and the narrator conjure scenes from 1840s New England in which symbols of the East are ubiquitous elements of tasteful fashion and home decor.¹ The narrator reports that the Wentworths' home displays "half a dozen of those small cylindrical stools in green and blue porcelain, which suggest . . . Eastern trade"—porcelain chinoiserie that punctuates the Wentworth's otherwise plain style of quiet luxury (24). Eastern styles straddle the divisions of familial estrangement and the putative types of European and American; Eugenia is impressed by the Eastern motifs in her cousins' home and she travels equipped with her own set of silk finery. These elements of style suffuse the romantic aspirations of both Europeans and Americans; for example, Gertrude and Felix first come face-to-face when she glances up from *Arabian Nights* in a daze and mistakes him momentarily for the Prince Camaralzaman (33). Felix also dreams of the East, pursuing his illustrative romance with the New England landscape as he falls in love with Gertrude.

The East serves as an aesthetic filter for characters' perspectives on both sides of the transatlantic divide. The novel's subtitle, *A Sketch*, emphasizes the visual mode of cultural adumbration that emanates from the novel's romance of place. Felix favorably compares the "local color" of the "little Puritan metropolis" to the "ancient customs and picturesque cities" of Europe where he had been raised (20). In drawing out this comparison between Europe and America

he notes that in "coming to the West we [he and Eugenia] seem to have gone to the East" (16). To him it seems that the New England "sky touches the house-tops . . . just like Cairo; and the red and blue sign-boards patched over the face of everything remind one of Mahometan decoration" (16). By having the characters' share from different perspectives a similar grammar of "the East," James does more than emphasize the putative connections between American and European viewpoints or the irony of American transplants (Eugenia and Felix) typifying Europeans.

The East crosses these categories because in the early nineteenth century a global system of China trade generated transatlantic wealth and cultural capital of which James was well aware. As a vestige of this commerce, the character Robert Acton looks back from the 1840s to the particularly lucrative decade of the 1830s. This was a time before the United States was an industrial peer of England and when trade with the East built fortunes on both sides of the Atlantic. As Sara Blair, John Carlos Rowe, Wai Chee Dimock, Stuart Burrows and others have shown, the "spectacle of an emerging American imperialism" afforded what James called a "drama of great interest" (Burrows 96). The Eastern references in his writing generally conform to the orientalist pattern in what Edward Said outlines as the cultural premise of imperialism and its westward course.² But as John Esperjesi notes, "the literary culture of New England was hardly unaware of the region's debts to Asian and Pacific spaces" and there is considerable historical nuance in James's emphasis on China as the focus of complex commercial traffic that is not reducible to broad categorical oppositions of East versus West (30).

In introducing Acton, James specifies Canton as the place where he has spent years and made a "fortune—or rather . . . quintupled a fortune" (98). The southern port city of China had for centuries been a headquarters of sea trade with China and the source of valuable tea and silk.³ To reach Canton Western traders sailed the world's oceans to the Portuguese-controlled enclave of Macao, about seventy miles southeast of Canton on the Pearl River. At Macao Western ships hired pilots, negotiators, and translators while securing the proper permits to proceed up the Pearl River through a series of checkpoints and past landmark pagodas to arrive at the island of Whampoa and, a bit further on, to Canton. In the 1750s the Qing emperor restricted China's trade by quarantining Western traders to rented warehouses or factories outside the walls of Canton and setting up restrictions designed to insure that foreigners would pay for the desired tea with silver. For most of the eighteenth century, the conditions of the Canton System worked to extract a significantly disproportionate amount of silver from European monopoly companies and private traders.

By the 1830s when Robert Acton would have showed up in Canton, opium had dramatically tipped the balance of silver in the China trade to the advantage of England (Wakeman 178). The reversal of fortunes had begun in the closing decade of the eighteenth century when the BEIC (British East India Company) began selling into China large amounts of opium from colonial Bengal to establish a very lucrative triangle of trade between India, Canton, and London. Although the Qing government had outlawed the trade of opium in the early eighteenth century, the BEIC auctioned the drug to private traders in Bengal. Brokerage operations and inland smuggling networks sprouted up along the Chinese coast, primarily near Macao at Lintin Island. A global system of accounting based in London underwrote the ensuing trade with Canton's Chinese merchant organizations, many of which appreciated the relative durability and liquidity of opium from one trading season to the next. Banks such as Baring Brothers provided lines of credit by underwriting interest-bearing bills from India that sent opium to Canton for tea and silver. Greater amounts of actual specie now remained in England, free to collateralize other parallel investments.⁴

In the mid-1830s the imperial commissioner, Lin Zexu (林則徐), attempted to enforce the Qing Emperor's long-standing prohibition on the opium trade in Guangdong. He closed the factories at Canton, confiscating and destroying British stockpiles of opium.⁵ England stepped in to defend her crown subjects, massing a naval fleet in the region as American traders such as Russell and Company raked in profits by continuing to move freight. In the ensuing war Britain's heavily armed, steam-powered ships destroyed Chinese ships, forts, and checkpoints from Macao to Canton along the Pearl River. The Treaty of Nanjing (1842) spelled the end of the Canton System by opening up four more treaty ports and imposing harsh indemnity that earned for the proceedings the description "unequal treaty." The British policies also provided a blueprint for the United States in fashioning its own Pacific brand of gunboat diplomacy leading in 1844 to the first treaty between China and the United States (the Treaty of Wangxia). In 1853 Commodore Mathew C. Perry led an expedition to open up Japan for so-called free trade, headquartering his East India Squadron in south China.⁶ As a result of the defeat, the Qing dynasty suffered a dramatic blow to its reputation among the Chinese population. The ensuing Taiping Rebellion shook the foundations of imperial governance and claimed the lives of some twenty million people.⁷ In the civil war of 1911, the Qing Dynasty faced its final opposition in the Wuchang Uprising that ended two millennia of imperial rule with the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912.⁸

Robert Acton personifies the young American China trader who would have quintupled a fortune in the 1830s before the First Opium War. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, Thomas Handasyd Perkins, his brothers James and Samuel Perkins, and nephew John Perkins Cushing operated Perkins and Company, which built immense fortunes, a significant proportion of which depended on trafficking opium. One of their innovations was to reach around British-controlled India to Smyrna (Turkey) to find a source.⁹ Opium traffic was also a staple of the aforementioned very successful Russell and Company (with which Perkins and Company merged). In the 1830s Perkin's nephews Robert Bennet Forbes and John Murray Forbes each took turns directing the company and coordinating smuggling networks centering on the opium depot at Lintin Island.¹⁰ James maintained friendships with the heirs of "Great Merchants" (to whom Santayana refers in this essay's epigraph) who had made their fortunes in China with Russell and Company, particularly the Sturgis brothers Howard and Julian, sons of Russell Sturgis, Jr. He was another grandnephew of Colonel Thomas Handasyd Perkins and became a partner in Russell and Company and in the 1850s a member and eventually partner of London's Baring Brothers (State Street Trust Company).

The first wife of Russell Sturgis died in Macao in 1839. His third wife was Julia Overing Boit, whose brother was the painter Edward Darley Boit. John Singer Sargent thus immortalized Boit's young daughters (and Russell Sturgis's nieces) in the painting *Daughters of Edward Darley Boit*. The gigantic Japanese porcelain urns that tower over the children are a commercial vestige of what Santayana calls the "Great Merchants" in the epigraph to this essay. Their unpictured mother is Mary Louisa Cushing Boit, the daughter of John Perkins Cushing, the first nephew of Colonel Perkins to make a fortune in China. The youngest girl looking out at the viewer is Julia Overing Boit, who was named after her aunt and became an artist.

Speculating biographically, Robert Acton bears remarkable resemblance to Colonel Perkins's nephew John Murray Forbes (and John Perkins Cushing's cousin). John Murray is pictured at age nineteen in a miniature portrait by the Macao-based British painter George Chinnery (fig. 2). Forbes definitely made a fortune in Canton. *"Our First Men": A Calendar of Wealth, Fashion and Gentility* estimated it in 1846 at \$200,000, very impressive if adjusted to today's dollars. At seventeen years of age he joined his older brother Robert Bennet Forbes at the headquarters of opium traffic on Lintin Island before making his way to Canton where he was a fabulous success as the youngest clerk in the history of Russell and Company.¹¹ After returning to the United States in 1837, he coordinated the firm's international credit line in London through Baring Brothers to facilitate



"THE HALL OF THE FOUR CHILDREN."—From the painting by John S. Sargent.

tertaining little annual exhibition of the "Mirlitons," in the Place Vendôme. With the exquisite modelling of its face (no one better than Mr. Sargent understands the beauty that resides in exceeding fineness), this head remains in my mind as a masterly rendering of the look of experience—such experience as may be attributed to a woman slightly faded and eminently sensitive and distinguished. Subject and treatment in this valuable piece are of an equal interest, and in the latter there is an element of positive sympathy which is not always in a high degree the sign of Mr. Sargent's work.

What shall I say of the remarkable canvas which, on the occasion of the Salon of 1884, brought the critics about our ar-

tist's ears, the already celebrated portrait of "Madame G."? It is an experiment of a highly original kind, and the painter has had in the case, in regard to what Mr. Ruskin would call the "rightness" of his attempt, the courage of his opinion. A beauty of beauties, according to Parisian fame, the lady stands upright beside a table on which her right arm rests, with her body almost fronting the spectator, and her face in complete profile. She wears an entirely sleeveless dress of black satin, against which her admirable left arm detaches itself; the line of her harmonious profile has a sharpness which Mr. Sargent does not always seek, and the crescent of Diana, an ornament in diamonds, rests on her exquisite head. This

Figure 1. "'The Hall of the Four Children'—From the Painting by John S. Sargent." Henry James, "John S. Sargent," 1887.

the international investments stretching from Europe to South Asia and China. He also invested considerably in the Western railroad development through the 1850s and during the Civil War was tasked with purchasing ships for the US Navy. A staunch abolitionist (unlike his three uncles James, Samuel, and T. H. Perkins), he coordinated enlistment for the 54th and 55th black regiments of Massachusetts in which James's two younger brothers served.

As for settling down, Forbes purchased the island of Naushon off the coast of Massachusetts, married a presumably nice New England girl, and for the rest of his life enjoyed prominence among New England's social elite. He was a member of the Saturday Club along with Ralph Waldo Emerson, Louis Agassiz, James Russell Lowell, Nathaniel Hawthorne and other luminaries. Emerson's daughter Edith married Forbes's son William Hathaway. When in 1899 Emerson's son Edward Waldo Emerson eulogized John Murray Forbes in the *Atlantic Monthly*, he began with Forbes making his fortune in the China trade and then celebrated Forbes's westward accomplishments as the prime investor in the "great Chicago, Burlington and Quincy" rail system, "with its seven thousand miles of well-laid road, a perfect equipment and organization, connecting the great Indian-corn country with the markets of the world" (Emerson 386). A close friend of Fanny Kemble, Forbes brought her *Scenes of Georgia Plantation* to Harper's for publication in 1863 (Forbes, J. M. 2: 51–52). Recall that it was Kemble who famously gave to her dear friend Henry James the kernel for the story of *Washington Square* (1880). James perhaps hints at these connections in Acton's physical resemblance to Forbes—Felix describes him to Eugenia as "less than forty; he has a baldish head; he says witty things. . . ." (50)—and in placing a copy of Emerson's *Essays* on a chair beside Acton's invalid mother in a scene when Eugenia visits her.

In the novel Acton memorializes his days in Canton with the ebony pagodas and ivory cabinets that he has brought back with him to Massachusetts. Susan Stewart describes the motivation for collection in ways that resonate: "The collection represents a hermetic world: to have a representative collection is to have the minimum and complete number of elements necessary for an autonomous world—a world which is both full and singular, which has banished repetition and achieved authority" (152). With this in mind, consider the authorizing and harmonizing effects of Acton's collecting practice: "And then [Acton] possessed the most delightful *chinoiseries*—trophies of his sojourn in the Celestial Empire: pagodas of ebony and cabinets of ivory; sculptured monsters, grinning and leering on chimney-pieces, in front of beautifully-figured hand-screens; porcelain dinner-sets, gleaming behind the glass doors of mahogany buffets; large screens,



Figure 2. "J. M. Forbes from a Miniature by [George] Chinnery about 1832." Frontispiece to *Letters and Recollections of John Murray Forbes*, 1899.

in the corners, covered with tense silk and embroidered with mandarins and dragons" (*Europeans* 131). In decorating his home Acton seems to control the meaning of his China experience by recreating a miniature Chinese world out of curios that he has selected, purchased, and transported from China to arrange in his home outside Boston. On the level of economic life, he seems to have managed a smooth relay of China-trading capital into his New England estate. On the novel's level of cultural aesthetics his trophies provide contrapuntal points of exotic reference to the sustained expression of authentic American locality. Acton certainly impresses Eugenia who describes his home as having "a mixture of the homely and the liberal, and though it was almost a museum, the large, little-used rooms were

as fresh and clean as a well-kept diary." James adds: "Lizzie Acton told [Eugenia] that she dusted all the pagodas and other curiosities every day with her own hands" (131). In Acton's home, the collection is the global supplement of local New England type. Maintaining the collection, his sister Lizzie stands in for the nice girl whom he will eventually marry to complete the picture of a happy family sustained by investment strategies that reach to China. There seems no trace of exploitation, alienated labor, or geographical incongruity as the collection harmonizes the styles and landscapes of East and West to express a distinctively American culture that the European characters in turn appreciate.

Other novels allude to China and the East, but none have *The Europeans's* degree of specificity to Canton. In *Portrait of a Lady*, Osmond spins his web for Isabel by goading her to enjoy her inherited fortune for the freedom it affords to travel, suggesting that she come back to him only after her adventures are over. When her imagination leaps to Japan, he replies by averring that he "would give [his] little finger to go to Japan"; he continues: it is "one of the countries I want most to see. Can't you believe that, with my taste for old lacquer?" (358). She ends up taking a "little pilgrimage East" (374), spending three months in Greece, Turkey, and Egypt with Madame Merle. In *The Tragic Muse*, Nick Dormer senses the well-financed sophistication of Julia Dallow in her "very elegant little tea-house" (175) with "bits of quaint china on the shelves" (176). And in *Spoils of Poynton*, the narrator describes the widowed Mrs. Gereth for whom: "Things' were of course the sum of the world" and "the sum of the world was rare French furniture and Oriental china" (49). These collections of Eastern objects reflect the characters' aspirations, power and social status. In the later phase of his career James again refers to the China trade but to contrary and foreboding effect.

The Outlandish Pagoda of Maggie's Garden of Lié

One of the largest and most ominous Eastern signs in James's work is the pagoda occupying "the very centre of the garden of [Maggie Verver's] life" (3). It appears in the first book of volume 2 of *The Golden Bowl* when Maggie begins to suspect that the marital arrangements that she and her father have engineered in order to stay close to one another are actually cloaking an affair between their spouses, her husband (an Italian prince) and her stepmother Charlotte (her former friend). The narrator figures Maggie's intimation of infidelity as if she were suddenly noticing something in the "very centre of the garden" of her life, "rear[ing] itself there like some strange, tall tower

of ivory, or perhaps rather some wonderful, beautiful but outlandish pagoda, a structure plated with hard, bright porcelain, coloured and figured and adorned, at the overhanging eaves with silver bells that tinkled, ever so charmingly, when stirred by chance airs" (3). As she puzzles out its significance, readers wonder whether she will ever again feel at home with her marriage or in England.

Over the past century, this pagoda has attracted a lot of attention from literary scholars but not for its historical associations. As Adeline Tintner summarizes in *The Museum World of Henry James*, critics often consider it "an elaborate figure of speech typical of the 'symbolic imagery' of the late James, building up an imaginary structure in Maggie's mind to convey the abnormality of her predicament" (171).¹² But a conversation between Maggie and her father Adam Verver, himself an American millionaire and masterful collector of art, suggests the opium trade as a historical context for understanding the pagoda as a metaphor of alienation, perhaps an echo of the porcelain vases that tower over the girls in Sargent's painting. As Maggie begins to suspect that their marriages are deeply flawed, her seemingly unsuspecting father wonders aloud about the morality of their leisured lives. He admits that "there's something haunting—as if it were a bit uncanny—in such a consciousness of our general comfort and privilege" (92). He goes on to analogize their situation to "sitting about on divans, with pigtails, smoking opium and seeing visions," but feeling as if the police might break in to their "opium den" and "give us a shake" (92). He continues by confiding his satisfaction in not only having taken care of Maggie but also in putting his wife Charlotte "so at her ease" (93). In light of the ongoing affair between his wife and his daughter's husband, we might agree that his sense of satisfaction has enraptured him and "curled up as the biggest of the blue fumes . . . of the opium" (93).

Verver's reach to opium smoking works as a metaphor on at least two levels. As a seemingly fanciful figuration of Verver and Maggie's leisure, it suggests that in order to feel normal in their everyday lives the Ververs must overlook the great incongruity of their security in relation to those who have relatively nothing; to contemplate the discrepancies makes Verver feel haunted and uncanny, as though he is smoking opium. But, in a dramatically ironic sense, the opium smoking alludes to a specific economic context out of which American millionaires generated great "comfort and privilege" for themselves. In this vein Amy Ling speculates that Maggie's pagoda was based on widely available descriptions of the Porcelain Pagoda of Nanking [南京陶塔; pinyin: *Nánjīng Táotǎ*], built during the Ming Dynasty of the fifteenth century and destroyed during the Taiping Rebellion in 1856. French Jesuits and Dutch emissaries first reported on it in the

sixteenth century and its reputation grew until it was popularized as one of the iconic original Seven Wonders of the World. After its destruction during the rebellion, the Pagoda of Nanking frequently appeared in American and British periodicals. Ling even identifies a specific article that might have inspired James when it appeared in *The English Illustrated Magazine* (June 1888), where his fiction appeared later in the year.¹³ Figure 3 is a retrospective model of Nanjing's pagoda crafted by boys living in the Jesuit Chinese Orphanage at Zi-ka-wei, today a part of Shanghai. The picture appears in D. J. Kavanagh's small book called *The Pagoda*, which outlines the tower's general history in light of the extensive display of them as miniatures at the San Francisco World Fair of 1915. In a broad historical overview, Kavanagh summarizes that pagodas initially served religious purposes in India and he traces their first appearance in China to the year 65 AD when the Emperor Ming-Ti (during the earlier Han Dynasty) invited the Hindu Bonzes (monks) from India to China in order to introduce Buddhism.¹⁴ Kavanagh's concise sketch is not authoritative but indicates that pagodas have for millennia spanned vast geographical distances in scales of time and contexts of religious faith that exceed the relatively shorter historical ranges implied by Western cycles of *translatio imperii et studii*.

Although the exact meanings of pagodas are ambiguous, a series of them served as landmarks for European and American traders beginning in the sixteenth century as Chinese pilots guided ships up the Pearl River to Canton.¹⁵ Reverend David Abeel was one of the first two US missionaries to China, arriving in Canton in 1830, the same year as seventeen-year-old John Murray Forbes. He was one of many writers to describe his journey up the Pearl River from Macao to the island of Whampoa (just outside of Canton) as the progression from one pagoda to another. In his *Journal of a Residence in China, and the Neighboring Countries, from 1829-1833* Abeel writes:

The distance between [the island of] Whampoa and Canton is about twelve miles. . . . For some time after we started, the light of day disclosed every remarkable object, on land and water. Among the former are large pagodas, towering in the air, and darkened and mouldering with age. Two of them are situated on small eminences, "high places," compared with the surrounding country, and stand forth with commanding prominence. They are nine stories in height, of an octagonal form, with doors or niches on each side of every story, and gradually diminishing in circumference to the top. Their sides and summits are partially covered with shrubs and herbage, springing from beds of earth, which it must have required ages to collect, and consolidate. (59)



Figure 3. "The Famous Porcelain Pagoda of Nanking, Also Called the Pagoda of Gratitude. 329 feet in height." D. J. Kavanagh, S. J., 1915.

In an echo of Abeel fifty years later, figure 4, from the front page of *Harper's Weekly*, displays one of these Pearl River pagodas as a moldering ruin two decades after the Second Opium War (1856–60). Contrary to the caption's assertion, this pagoda is not the "oldest in the world" although it might seem so if one focuses solely on the area of the Pearl River Delta. For *Harper's Magazine*, China is a desolate landscape of a stagnant empire whose inhabitants are too indolent or weak to tend the land. In a forlorn and melancholic landscape scene, the monumental ruin blends into an encroaching wilderness that shadows the inscrutable inhabitants. The inset (upper left) of the imperial palace in Beijing indicates that the focal point for diplomatic standoffs between China and the West had shifted to the north and away from the southern city of Canton. Perhaps readers of *Harper's Magazine* read in this ruined pagoda not only the fall of the Middle Kingdom but also the countervailing rise of the United States.

On an aesthetic level of landscape description, Maggie's pagoda has much to tell us about how James understood the state of culture



Figure 4. "The city gateway, and the great pagoda, the oldest in the world," Views in Canton, China—From Photograph. Cover of *Harper's Weekly, A Journal of Civilization* 22 Sept. 1883.

in relation to such global systems of capital formation as the China trade. The narrator directs our attention to the global terms of scenic composition by describing Maggie's pagoda as outlandish ("some wonderful, beautiful but outlandish pagoda"), an adjective loaded with contradictory suggestions; on the one hand, to the extent that the pagoda seems outlandish, it reinforces the locative or geographical premise of national exceptionalism: this Eastern "outlandish pagoda" or "strange, tall tower of ivory" does not belong here. How did it get here? Why is it here? On the other hand, this outlandishness is itself a trope that reoccurs in landscape debates over the centuries as

China, India, Asia, and "the East" inspired exotic scenarios serving to establish a sense of "here" and "there" for England and eventually the United States in the westward course of empire. The pagodas may seem outlandish but hold their places in the landscape to suggest a broader, imperial reach across the global in relation to the genius loci of national culture.

As I consider in *Henry James and the Visual*, James cultivated the dynamic relational sensibilities of the picturesque to explore the concepts of race and national culture.¹⁶ After American and European commercial traders described pagodas on their way to Canton along the Pearl River, landscape architects in England and the US experimented with pagodas as features of British and American gardens and estates. Early theorists had mused on the appropriateness of such transposition and asked whether the innovative combinations warranted aesthetic respect. Interestingly, the early and influential landscape theorist William Chambers was a China trader who promoted the positive, enlivening influence of Chinese styles on British gardening. In *The Museum World of Henry James* Tintner speculates that Maggie's pagoda even refers to the ten-story pagoda standing in the Royal Gardens at Kew, built in 1760 and designed by Chambers, who was a Scotsman born in Sweden to a father successful in international trade. As a young man, Chambers twice sailed with the Swedish East India Company and spent time in Canton earning his competency, first in 1744 and again in 1748. During his months of residence in Canton, he made sketches that informed his subsequent influential publications, including *Designs of Chinese Buildings, Furniture, Dresses Machines and Utensils, Engraved by the Best Hands, From the Originals Drawn in China by Mr. Chambers, Architect, member of the Imperial Academy of Arts at Florence, To Which is Annexed, A Description of their Temples, Houses, Gardens, &c.*

In *The Genius of Place: The English Landscape Garden 1620–1820*, John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis provide an overview of the late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century aesthetic controversies regarding Chinese gardening.¹⁷ Chambers's 1757 essay exhibits a few key themes that would develop in subsequent debates over the wit and taste of the picturesque, debates that eventually influenced James. Chambers proposes that assessment of landscape scenes ought to consider geographical propriety, transpositional compatibility, and the potential for acclimatizing the scene's foreign specimens to the home environment. Using his visits to Canton as a foundation of firsthand experiential authority, Chambers contributed judgments to the British Imperial Academy of Arts on the harmonizing principles of Chinese garden arrangements and highlighted the connection between China and England in the global context of debates about how

to prepare the grounds of England to represent its imperial span. In the nineteenth-century United States, returning China traders such as John Perkins Cushing, William S. Wetmore, and William Henry King (the latter two of which were both of Newport) looked to landscape architect Andrew Jackson Downing to design their estates.

In their respective visualizations of cultural aura in landscape scenes, *The Golden Bowl* and *The Europeans* figure the China trade very differently. Acton's pagodas and ivory towers complement his authority over life and experience as he shapes his New England home. Maggie's pagoda is a warning that the authority she assumed in assembling her household is like an opium dream out of which at any moment she may be shaken. As she struggles to apprehend the pagoda that towers much higher than Sargent's vases, readers wonder if she will suffer the fate of fellow American girls Daisy Miller and Milly Theale who withered and expired in unforgivingly foreign social milieus. For readers, the pagoda effectively externalizes Maggie's own sense of outlandishness as a feeling of alienation creeps over her. By the novel's conclusion Maggie and her father seem to regain a mastery over the objects (and spouses) they have collected and now rearrange in a more manageable transatlantic distribution on either side of the Atlantic. In *The American Scene* and *The Ivory Tower* pagodas and ivory towers recur as a central metaphor in narrative rumination on the relationship between culture and finance capital in a period after the China Trade of the Great Merchants had died out—rumination in which James loses the thread of cultural romance and his sense of the nation's moral consciousness in the void of finance capital.

Newport's White Elephants, Ivory Towers, and the Cultural Void of Finance Capital

A. L. Coburn's photograph of Newport's Cliff Walk is the frontispiece to James's unfinished novel *The Ivory Tower*. Edited by Percy Lubbock, it appeared a year after James's death as volume twenty-five in Charles Scribner's and Sons New York Edition. Coburn's photo (fig. 5) presents a deserted shoreline where land and sea are in constant, agitating contact; from a geological perspective that exceeds human history, the rocky landscape of Cliff Walk is malleable, shaped by the perpetual and ancient agitation of the globe's vast oceans. Assuming a scale of time compatible with human history, one might say the same for the cultural sediments of Newport. Its architecture, local sensibilities, and unique charms do not exist by dint of isolation but result from centuries of agitating traffic spanning the world's oceans,

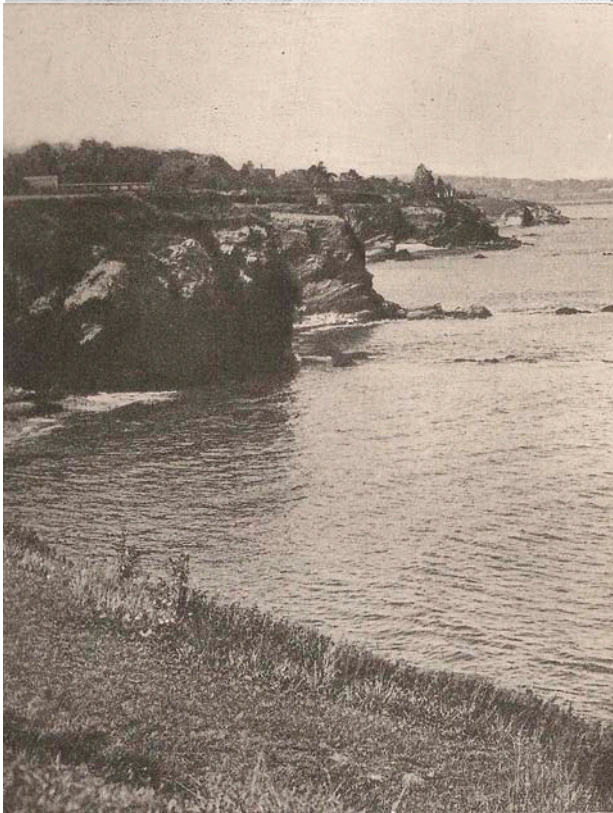


Figure 5. Frontispiece to *The Ivory Tower*. A. L. Coburn, 1917.

connecting Newport to the Caribbean, Africa, and Europe as well as to the Pearl River Delta of southern China and the cities of Macao and Canton. In the article "Newport—Historical and Social Traveler" *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* conveyed this global sense, describing Newport as "wooden and homely; a town of the old school. But its streets are historically famous, and from its docks sailed ships to India and the Southern seas—ships that circumnavigated the globe" (291).

Before *The Ivory Tower*, James used Newport as a setting in *The American Scene* to think in visual terms about the global commercial context of national culture. After twenty years abroad and having completed his novel *The Golden Bowl*, James returned to write a series of articles for *Harper's Monthly Magazine* recording his impressions. "The Sense of Newport" presents the reader with a densely visual style as the narrator struggles with a sense of scale in

visualizing the cultural scene. James's approach to cultural identity had always been relational. He pokes fun at those who took literally the three elements of race, moment (historical period), and milieu by which Hippolyte Taine had formulated Englishness in *A History of English Literature* (1863–64). However, when contemplating the speculative financial network at play in the twentieth-century United States he finds himself incapable of gauging relations between people and places in the face of economic dimensions that imply for him a vastness of space that disrupts the sequential historical premise of empire's westward course and a unique sense of place for the romance of American culture.

On a biographical level, we might use Coburn's frontispiece in figure 5 to evoke James's life in Newport as a teenager before the Civil War when he and his brother William befriended Thomas Sergeant Perry and John LaFarge in the studio of the painter William Morris Hunt. Edward Waldo Emerson reflects that when Hunt returned to the United States in 1855, he "was married, and made his pleasant year-round house in Newport among agreeable neighbors, especially Henry James, Sr., and his young family" (467). Hunt's new wife was Louisa Dumaresq Perkins of Boston, the granddaughter of Colonel Thomas H. Perkins and thus indirect cousins to John Cushing Perkins and John Murray Forbes (Knowlton 30–31). John Murray Forbes writes of riding through Florida with Hunt in 1873 (2: 177). Newport was also the birthplace of Thomas Sergeant Perry's granduncle Commodore Matthew C. Perry, memorialized in Newport by a statue in Touro Park. Commodore Perry followed up naval victories in the War on Mexico with the 1853 expedition to open Japan to foreign trade. The expedition was a prime exercise in gunboat diplomacy, mirroring the British tactics in the First Opium War (1839–42). Perry in fact headquartered his mission in Macao and Hong Kong, assembling his East Indian Squadron of battleships in south China and Shanghai before proceeding to Japan to deliver the ultimatums. As for the social circles of Newport, John LaFarge married Thomas Sergeant Perry's older sister Margaret Mason (the grandniece of Commodore Matthew Perry). In the 1860s Edward Darley Boit and his wife Mary Louisa relocated to Newport.

In "The Sense of Newport," it is perhaps to this core of a "fond pedestrian minority" (211) and "the small fond minority" (214) to whom the narrator looks as a way of orienting himself. These "cosmopolites" had lived and traveled in Europe to form a "critical habit" of thinking that thrived by sacrificing to the "ivory idol whose name is leisure" the potential to accumulate more wealth (222). In the essay, the narrator grows uneasy when he walks the landscape in search of a sense of leisure and "settled possession" of these "comparatively

few people" but instead finds that their aura has been superseded by another set who worship at the "black ebony god" of business. These are Newport's developers and real-estate speculators who have built up Newport's landscape into an impressive display of wealth. His visit turns into "blank days in which the margin has been consumed" as he contemplates houses built to take up more than their share of space on the landscape, and then left vacant, awaiting a tenant or buyer (221). By the "margin," James refers both to a literal space around a house in a well-designed estate plan and also to the figurative point from which an observer can establish cultural perspective in appreciation of a landscape scene.

Most disruptive to the narrative quest of appreciating Newport's unique cultural spirit is the absence of people. In conventional picturesque logic the human element would implicitly inspire the houses and sustain cultural charm in the general composition. However, these vast and expensive houses are only husks or shells of speculative real estate investment, culturally hollow at their centers and dubious on levels both financial and aesthetic. Sitting outlandishly on the Newport landscape, James likens them to "white elephants," a metaphor invoking Siam (contemporary Thailand) to register a sense of alienation (224). The popularized phrase "white elephant" originates in the strategy of giving a gift that is sacred and yet so expensive to maintain as to bankrupt the recipient.¹⁸ In Newport, the white elephants seem to eclipse any sense of a gift-relation between sender and receiver. In and of themselves they are "monuments of pecuniary power" (212), "so oddly out of proportion to the scale of nature and space" (211) and unsettling the unifying perspective of landscape composition. They overcrowd and overload the small fond minority, challenging James's very ability to remember the cultural past that relates to a sense of place (224). It is important to clarify that the problem here is not just greed; William Henry King's mansion "Kingscote" and William S. Wetmore's "Chateau-sur-Mer"—"large and expensive," "palatial," and "visible bank accounts"—had been features of James's earlier idealized Newport landscape (Downs 26). What surprises in James's essay is how the opposition between the contented and the greedy fades into a disconcerting blankness that defies characterization altogether and anticipates the sublime voids that sustain concentrated capital in James's unfinished novel *The Ivory Tower*. What to do with a life that continues after having accumulated such a pile of capital? Did the ivory tower of leisure that he remembers from his younger years in Newport simply vanish? More disconcerting to James, maybe it never existed.

Written in the long shadows cast by the white elephants of *The American Scene*, *The Ivory Tower* is an antiromance to *The Europeans*.

The novels share a similar transatlantic matrix of familial tension. At the center of the reunification in *The Ivory Tower* are two fortunes that eventually baffle James as they do his main character on levels mathematical, visual, aesthetic, and moral. The baffled protagonist is a thirty-year-old man named Graham "Gray" Fielder who reunites in Newport with his rich, dying uncle Betterman after years of separation. Gray's mother is Betterman's half sister. She weathered her half brother's disapproval for the love of a suitor whose early death stranded her in Europe as a young widowed mother. Instead of returning in shame, she remarried and stayed abroad. At the age of fourteen, her son, young Gray, faces an ultimatum: either stay in Europe with his mother and stepfather or go to the United States to enjoy the privileges of Betterman's immense wealth. Gray decides to stay with his mother, fortified by timely advice from a slightly older, sixteen-year-old friend named Rosanna Gaw. In Europe he receives a culturally rich, multilingual education, but, in typical James fashion, this leaves him knowing next to nothing about making or managing money.

Years later, Rosanna manages a reunion between Gray and his uncle Betterman. By supporting Gray's adolescent inclination to stay with his mother, she had hoped to protect him from her father's "awful game of grab" (35) on which her own privilege depends: as she reflects "we [she and her mother] were rich ourselves, though we rather hated that too, and there was no romance for us in being so stuffed up" (34). Afterwards she has second thoughts. By discouraging Gray's return to the United States, did she deprive him of a gentleman's competence? In the intervening years on different sides of the Atlantic, the two fall out of touch, but they remember each other warmly. On his return, Gray admires the aplomb with which Rosanna anticipates the prospect of her own vast inheritance.

The novel opens with Rosanna walking over to Betterman's Newport estate one morning for an update on Gray's arrival. When she arrives at the "foolish face" of Betterman's elephant of a mansion, she finds her elderly father Abel Gaw already there, roaming the grounds and brooding (2). She and her father both take moments to stare into the vast ocean—"the fair prospect, the great sea spaces"—in emotional terms that are difficult to discern (3). As Rosanna later sums up, he will die much wealthier than his estranged friend Betterman, but he has had to do things that were "mostly very awful" to win the "20 millions" and there have had terrible consequences for him. She divulges to Betterman the "ugly truth" that "the effect has been to dry up his life" (141), leaving him a bitter husk of a man who sinks deeper and deeper into a solipsistic brooding over the "sublimities of arithmetic" (6–7). When Gray arrives in Newport, Mr. Betterman's

health suddenly improves. Conversely, Gaw's declines precipitously. Soon both men are dead. Betterman leaves Gray a large inheritance, the origin of which remains vague and disconcerting. Rosanna inherits the even vaster and similarly shady fortune amassed by her father.

In a final act before death, Rosanna's father writes a letter to the returning Gray and gives it to his daughter to deliver. She presents it during a warm reunion, one-on-one with Gray in her father's Newport drawing room. Curiously, Gray refuses to read it. Intrigued, Rosanna offers him something in which to keep the letter. The setting of their conversation is significant as the Gaws' Newport drawing room, like Robert Acton's, is decorated with several "objects of expensive negligibility" collected from the other side of the world and brought with them from their New York residence (142). Rosanna offers a "box in Japanese lacquer" and dismisses outright a cigar case as "a preposterous piece of furniture" (146). As she weighs the options with Gray, she smokes and flares open and shut a "great fan" hanging "by a long fine chain from her girdle" in a "motion seeming to relieve her" (146). Gray then notices on a shelf "a builded white-walled thing," fashioned in ivory of "some eastern, probably some Indian, patience" (147). Fascinated, Gray takes it down and remarks: "There it was waiting for you. Isn't it an ivory tower, and doesn't living in an ivory tower just mean the most distinguished retirement?" (147). He jokes with Rosanna that although he does not want to settle in one just yet, he would not mind ending up in one; in the meantime, he embraces the tower as "a retreat for the mystery" of what Mr. Gaw has written to him. Into one of the tower's drawers he places Gaw's letter and locks it away. We never learn the content of Gaw's letter. Does he encourage Gray to marry his daughter, or divulge dark secrets about the Betterman and Gaw fortunes, or both? As Rowe notes in *The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James*, Gray's act of locking Gaw's letter in the ivory tower is full of sexual puns that wittily juxtapose questions of virginity, marriage, and finance, densely interweaving the roles of masculinity and femininity in this unfinished antiromance (4–8). The letter's contents remain an especial mystery because James stopped working on the book in August 1914. According to Lubbock, with the outbreak of the Great War, James felt that he "could no longer work upon fiction supposed to represent contemporary or recent life" (v).¹⁹ In extensive notes that Lubbock includes in the Scribner's edition James imagines the newly rich Gray falling prey to a rather villainous fortune hunting duo of Horton Vint and Cissy Foy. Vint is an old boarding-school friend whom Gray naively enlists to supervise the fund. Cissy Foy is an attractive but conniving American girl who conspires with him.

As readers we are put into a position of interpreting the ambiguity of the ivory tower's relation to the letter that is locked inside of

it. Gray seems to fear the legacy bequeathed to him in terms more serious than Adam Verver who finds in his "consciousness of [his] general comfort and privilege," "something haunting—as if it were a bit uncanny" (92). If one were to speculate on possible ignoble origins to Gaw's and Betterman's nineteenth-century wealth, there are of course various possibilities that include war profiteering; the transatlantic slave trade, of which Newport was a northern financial hub; and land speculation, dispossession, and resource extraction that depended on federal and state programs of removal and allotment that devastated the native peoples of America. However, what seems more disconcerting to James in the twentieth century is the ambiguity of immense wealth in the history of interrelated global markets in slave trading, opium dealing, and land dispossession. For a blueprint of such a global field, we can look again to the Perkins brothers of Russell and Company. Their Boston-based commercial enterprises were always local and global. The Perkins brothers integrated slave trading, western land speculation, and Eastern opium trading in their international business strategy. In the *Memoir of Thomas Handasyd Perkins* edited by his son-in-law Thomas Cary, we learn that Perkins joined his elder brother James to support the family's successful trading company in "St. Domingo" (9) (Saint-Domingue, Haiti) in the late 1780s. As a primer to the slave-trading venture, Perkins spent a few months on the South Carolina plantation of Mr. Thomas Ferguson whose rice plantations were maintained by "upwards of eight hundred slaves" (10). When the climate in Haiti did not agree with Perkins he set out for Canton. He was among the first Americans to reach Dutch-controlled Batavia (contemporary Jakarta, Indonesia) in July of 1789. After the 1792 revolution in Haiti, he and his brother redirected most of their capital and attention east to Canton and eventually to the opium trade. Perkins also invested in the first United States railway line, the Granite Railway Company, which connected the quarries in Quincy to the sea and extended eventually to New Orleans (223). After estimating the Thomas H. Perkins fortune at a truly immense \$2,000,000, *"Our First Men"* summarized the career of the Perkins brothers thusly: "James Perkins in early life was a merchant in St. Domingo, but was driven away by a revolt of the slaves.—He returned to Boston, and in conjunction with his brother [Thomas H.], acquired a very large fortune in the trade to China and the Northwest Coast" (36). Perkin's nephew John Murray Forbes, who was a stalwart abolitionist, used a sizable part of his Canton fortune to fund the westward expansion of the railway in the railroad companies of "Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy" (2: 138) and "Michigan Central Railroad." (2: 160).²⁰

As with Maggie's pagoda, literary scholarship rarely considers the ivory tower for its potential historical implications and instead highlights the structural importance of its ambiguity in relation to James's aesthetic project. For example, Leon Edel contrasts the pagoda of *The Golden Bowl* with the ivory tower of *The Ivory Tower* in this way:

The central symbol of the novel is the ivory tower, an object d'art in which [Gray] Fielder chooses to place an unread document left him by Gaw, the Betterman's rival. . . . The ivory tower is represented as "the most distinguished retreat"—from commerce, from sex, from all the turbulence and passion of this world. In his own way, Fielder is suggesting that the American values—the accumulation of money—are not his values; the ivory tower, or Europe, was perhaps the only way to escape the curse and guilt of wealth. In a sense therefore *The Ivory Tower* is not the pagoda of *The Golden Bowl*. The pagoda was a symbol of innocence and escape from reality; the ivory tower was a symbol of conscious withdrawal from reality looked in the face. (2: 771)²¹

In supposing the "curse and guilt of wealth," Edel here overlooks India and China entirely. He also misses the novel's dramatic irony of Gray seeing the tower and Europe as an "escape" and "conscious withdrawal" from American reality. More recently Rowe writes:

Whereas the titular "Golden Bowl," that flawed wedding gift purchased by Amerigo . . . serves as the primary symbolic reference for relations in the novel, especially significant because of its biblical source, the "ivory tower" suggests symbolism of flawed relations and finally "bad art", like some touristy gewgaw purchased from a Chinese vendor in British Hong Kong. In these respects, James appears to follow the "West is Best" thesis. ("Nationalism" 253)

Rowe stretches the geographical context for the pagoda in mentioning Hong Kong but merely to suggest "bad art" that forecloses consideration of such a "gewgaw" as having something historically substantive to do with India, China, and the instrumentalization of opium as a commercial weapon. In a similar vein, Wendy Graham reads the novel as reflecting on the incapacity of language to represent life and to facilitate communication in a world dominated by a monetary logic of incessant cross reference. She surmises that the ivory tower has the effect of "wildly expanding the associative field through contiguous terms and arch substitutions" that accumulate to "suspend reference"

altogether (72). So, as we watch Rosanna and Gray ponder where to put the letter before locking it away, the novel playfully "reproduces chains of signification ending in mere gesture towards 'content.' The writing undermines the signifier-referent convention through a radical piling on of attributes, such that the reader hardly knows whom or what is the focus of signification" (72). In following James into this *mise en abyme* of cross-references, readers lose a sense of character and thereby realize that Newport's "reputed millionaires" socialize through a "collective delusion" that mistakes the envelop for "material wealth" (69). However, within James's mode of landscape description, the ivory tower is more than just a wild allusion as it folds Eastern geographies of the China trade onto Newport.

James begins the story with metaphors of pagodas and ships that superimpose not only the ocean onto the land but also a dusty, dark, and devastated Pearl River landscape onto the manicured lawns of Newport. When in the opening scene Rosanna walks over to Betterman's estate, "a structure smothered in architectural ornament," she wears a flowing "tea-gown" and holds a parasol that the narrator compares to a palanquin and a pagoda (1-2). Rosanna becomes a ship with its sails full of wind but proceeding at a moderate pace as it up a river. James writes:

So, making no other preparation than to open a vast pale-green parasol, a portable pavilion from which there fluttered fringes, frills and ribbons that made it resemble the roof of some Burmese palanquin or perhaps even pagoda, she took her way while these accessories fluttered in the August air, the morning freshness, and the soft sea-light. Her other draperies, white and voluminous, yielded to the mild breeze in the manner of those of a ship held back from speed yet with its canvas expanded; they conformed to their usual law of suggestion that the large loose ponderous girl, mistress as she might have been of the most expensive modern aids to the constitution of a "figure," lived, as they said about her, in wrappers and tea-gowns. (1-2)

After Rosanna finds her father at Betterman's estate and gets word of Gray's imminent arrival, the first chapter closes with the Gaws "sailing" (18) back across the lawns to their own rented estate. James again figures Rosanna as a large ship guiding the smaller ship of her embittered father. Both Rosanna and her father seem habituated to staring into "the fair prospect, the great sea spaces" (3), but Rosanna has second thoughts about Gray. Will he lose his moral compass and capacity for romance in the treacherous waters of Newport's fortune hunters? For Rosanna, the entire atmosphere seems saturated with

avarice so that "the big bright picture of the villas, the palaces, the lawns and luxuries in her eyes" ring with "something like a chink of money itself in the murmur of the breezy little waves at the foot of the cliff" (23). She may be "hand[ing] him over to complications and relations" (23) that he will never figure out.

Gray's attempt to factor through these "complications and relations" leads him to fixate on the ivory tower as a sort of retreat. But we are told not to trust his judgment. The potential for dramatic irony is reinforced by the tower's miniaturized form in relation to the sublimity of Gray's inherited fortune. Both Gray and the author James are mystified by the mathematical extent and cultural implication of concentrated millions. As James describes Gray's predicament in the notes to the novel: "The real, the overwhelming sense of his adventure was much less in the fact that he [Gray] could lisp in dollars, as it were, and see the dollars come, than in those vast vague quantities, those spreading tracts, of his own consciousness itself on which his kinsman's prodigious perversity had imposed, as for his exploration, the aspect of a boundless capital" (240). The terms of Gray's moral crisis are difficult to separate from his utter ignorance of how and why such "boundless capital" moves, circulates, and accumulates. The lisping "s" suggests a whimsical trail to the fortune's mathematical sublimity, emphasizing the difference between what James refers to in his notes as "an oldfashioned private fortune" on which many of his earlier plots hinge (for example, *The American*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Europeans*, and so on), and the "enormous extent" of fortunes enabled by "American financial conditions" that involve a "speculative measure" (292). James seems even more befuddled than the narrator of the *American Scene* as he reflects on the challenge of facing the

enormous difficulty of pretending to show various things here [in the novel] as with a business vision, in my total absence of business initiation; so that of course my idea has been from the first not to show them with a business vision, but in some other way altogether; this takes much threshing out, but it is the very basis of the matter, the core of the subject, and I shall worry it through with patience. (293)

The novel's metaphors of pagodas and ivory towers register his lack of "business vision" and advance James's goal of signifying the aesthetic, cultural, and social significance of fortunes that he does not understand. To convey his character Gray's lack of "business vision," James compares him to a self-consciously ignorant and insecure "proprietor of a garden" (241). As this awkward proprietor hopes to

learn to maintain the grounds and create a pleasing scene, he

walk[s] about with his gardener and [tries] to combine, in presence of abounding plants and the vast range of luxuriant nature, an ascertainment of names and properties and processes with a dissimulation, for decent appearance, of the positive side of his cockneyism. By no imagination of a state of mind so unfurnished would the gardener ever have been visited; such gaping seams in the garment of knowledge must affect him at the worst as mere proprietary languor, the offhandness of repletion; and no effective circumvention of traditional takings for granted could late-born curiosity therefore achieve. (241–42)

We might say that this passage conveys through terms of landscape description and at levels of character (Gray), narrator, and author (James) what it feels like to lack business vision when considering legacies of American capital derived from a global network of transnational finance. The fact that Gray fixates on the ivory tower in the ensuing scenes suggests that he, unlike the debonair Robert Acton of *The Europeans* or the figuratively opium-dreaming Adam Verver of *The Golden Bowl*, struggles to orient himself in relation to the social history of the fortune. The narrator provides another pictorial analogy for Gray's disorientation that echoes the narrator of *The American Scene's* feeling of being crowded out by white elephants:

It was not so much the wonder of there being in various New York institutions strange deposits of money, to amounts that, like familiar mountain masses, appeared to begin at the blue horizon and, sloping up and up toward him, grew bigger and bigger, the nearer he or they got, till they fairly overhung him with their purple power to meet whatever drafts upon them he should make. . . . (239–40)

Both Gray and the narrator of *The American Scene* seem literally pushed around by the features of a landscape that Acton or Forbes would survey in a controlling vision that directs the "purple power" of extensive capital westward into railroads or land speculation. For Gray, the "blue horizon" is not a space into which he extends an imperializing westward reach of manifest destiny across the continent and into the Pacific in the footsteps of Commodore Matthew Perry. Gray's scene becomes uncanny and phantasmagoric as its structural elements shift in the bullying "purple power" of mountain masses that loom from the background and overhang the foreground to disrupt a single organizing point of perspective on the scene. The unfinished novel is James's frustrated attempt to find cultural inspiration in the

abstracting networks of finance capital whose ebbs and flows perplex for the extensiveness of their transnational reach, intense velocity of exchange, ambiguity of reference, and volatility of worth. In this dense ambiguity of speculative financial signification Gray struggles to establish his position and perspective as the man (suitor, husband, father, millionaire) on the scene.

The ivory tower in *The Ivory Tower* is not a stable point of exotic reference in the picturesque order of rising American empire. It is not a symbol of sacrificing business opportunity for leisured contentment. And it is not a distinguished European retreat from American business. Rather, the tower is a historically evocative envelope for a letter with a message from the past that Gray fears reading. The tower again dominates the scene as Gray tries to convince the sly and calculating Vint to oversee his inheritance and relieve him of what he feels to be his obligation to understand the social significance of his uncle's fortune. After locking the letter inside the tower, Gray takes it to the mansion bequeathed to him by his uncle. Gray avers that by supervising the fund Vint will relieve him of a great burden; he explains: you will "insure my life, my moral consciousness" (218). The unscrupulous Vint probably cannot believe his luck when his long lost schoolmate approaches him to manage his millions. He teases Gray by suggestively joking that his new fortune will give him an "immense façade" (206) with which to impress women. Gray protests that he "[declines] to *have* a façade" and points to Rosanna as an epitome of someone who is seemingly unphased by inheriting her father's fortune. Vint ridicules Gray's characterization, asserting that Rosanna's putative disdain for her wealth is the grandest façade of all—in fact her "loathing" of the fortune "gives her a frontage as wide as the Capitol at Washington" (209).

Like Acton of *The Europeans*, Gray seems to pursue the logic of collection in the concerted attention that he pays to the ivory tower. Gray however comes off as awkward, reduced in his social abilities to a masturbatory solipsism that Vint notices, reinforces, and tries to exploit to his advantage. While talking with Vint, Gray stares at, strokes, and caresses the ivory tower as if trying to conjure out of it the confidence to control, direct, and extend his uncle's capital in the world. During their conversation, Gray literally "[moves] his hands, laying them as in finer fondness to either smoothly-plated side of the tall repository, against which a finger or two caressingly rubbed" (218). The description then continues in a manner that is odd and suggestive: "His back turned therefore to Horton [Vint], [Gray] was divided between the growth of his response to him and that of this more sensible beauty" (218). Gray idealizes Vint from their days at boarding school but does not seem particularly attracted to him

physically or particularly inhibited in expressing affection and desire. Given the earlier scene in which Gray and Rosanna slide the key into the tower, it is more likely that Gray is anxious about the ramifications of pursuing her. As Gray caresses the ivory tower and gauges his growing response to the mystery of the letter inside, he struggles with a sense of responsibility for how the fortune was generated.

Vint presses Gray to prove that he is sincere in requesting management of the fund. He conjures a desolate Eastern landscape over which Rosanna exercises whimsical but total control and teases Gray by recasting the tower as a comfortable prison, "the sort of thing she [Rosanna] would like to thrust you away into; which I hope, however, is far from the case" (215). He characterizes Rosanna as a collector of multiple towers and men: "Does she then keep ivory towers, a choice assortment? . . . in the sense of having a row of them ready for occupation, and with tenants to match perchable in each and signaling along the line from summit to summit?" (215). Vint pictures Gray perched in one, calling down to him as the "guard at your door in the dust and comparative darkness" and himself (Vint) as looking up to the parapet at Gray who floats "up in the blue" (216). Vint continues: "Don't I, 'gad, take the thing straight over from you—all of it you've been trying to convey to me here!—when I see you, up in the blue, behind your parapet, just gracefully lean over and call down to where I mount guard at your door in the dust and comparative darkness?" (216). Vint thus paints himself as making the great sacrifice to protect Gray's "moral consciousness." Extending the banter he images Rosanna further down the river in another tower: "you give me exactly, you see, the formula of that young lady herself; perched aloft in an ivory tower is what she is, and I'll be hanged if this isn't a hint to you to mount, yourself, into just another; under some provocation, I fancy her pleading, as she has in her own case taken for sufficient" (215). Ingenuously sustaining the gender ambivalence of Gray's sense of moral accountability, Vint uses the ivory tower to make Gray see himself as transcending the world with the blue sky above him, looking down to Vint who handles the dust and darkness below in an Eastern landscape overseen by Rosanna.

In the transformation of the ivory tower from a collectible in Acton's home, to Maggie's symbol of alienation, to a lost symbol of leisure in *The American Scene*, and finally into Gray's compromised formation of a delightful prison, we can sense that James was revising his own impressions about the legacies of the China trade. By 1914 the "poetic blue-water phase of commercial development" (Santayana 59) of Acton's early nineteenth-century Canton were long over. As Gaw and Betterman die, James suggests that the romance of this

early period was actually a tragedy with consequences continuing to unfold in the twentieth century. As far as I can tell, James does not explicitly engage in his fiction the subsequent turmoil affecting China in the second half of the nineteenth century, including the Second Opium War, the Taiping Rebellion, and the Boxer Rebellion (1898), all leading to the revolutionary end of the Qing dynasty and the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912. It is probable that James was aware of these events. His lifelong friend John Hay was the US Secretary of State to President McKinley and President Roosevelt, and the architect of the Open Door (1900) policy toward China.

The China trade is nevertheless a fascinating point of reference as he faces the abstract quality of global networks sustaining financial capital beyond the frames of national history or culture. He refuses to develop a "business vision" on speculative finance or to trace the layers of metaphoric substitution that enable the dynamic shape-shifting of abstracted value in its myriad commodity forms. For James, such global networks of abstraction not only powerfully concentrate wealth but also challenge the sequential, westward trajectory of national romance. In the wake of what Santayana calls "the Great Merchants," James sees no world garden in which a superintending hand arbitrates resource distribution toward something like equilibrium among the nations. Reflecting on the implications of speculative finance for conventional historical courses of western romance, we might turn to Giovanni Arrighi's *The Long Twentieth Century: Money Power and the Origin of Our Times* and its long range perspective on capital accumulation and dispersal. Using a unit of historical time of the *longue durée* (a period of centuries or more), Arrighi subsumes national romances in overlapping phases of ongoing capital formation, concentration, and dispersal.²² In this perspective, the empire or nation is not a central unit of analysis or *genius loci*, but rather a secondary concern in the rise, decline, and reorganization of capital flows. James does not sense romance in the "American financial conditions" (292) that generated "the aspect of a boundless capital" (240). Looking across the English Channel in 1914 he strands Gray in Newport, facing the sublime arithmetic of finance capital, baffled by an inherited white elephant, and handling obsessively an ivory tower that contains a letter that he fears to read for what it tells about his fortune's relation to the "awful game of grab" (34).

Notes

1. For the power of China to inspire the imaginations of Americans in the first half of the nineteenth century, see Tchen's *New York before Chinatown* and Haddad's *Romance of China and America's First Adventure in China*.
2. Consider Said's general description of Orientalism: "Literary historians have further noted in all sorts of aesthetic writing and plastic portrayals that a trajectory of 'westering' . . . saw the Orient as ceding its historical pre-eminence and importance to the world spirit moving westwards from Asia and towards Europe" ("Orientalism Reconsidered" 215). See Adeline Tintner's essay "Henry James, Orientalist."
3. The historical work on the China trade, including United States involvement, is extensive. For an excellent overview, see Van Dyke's *The Canton Trade*.
4. See Haddad, *America's First Adventure* 77–78 for an explanation of a "bill on London" and the economic activity it enabled.
5. The scholarship on the Opium War is prodigious. Chang, Fay, and Wakeman offer complementary perspectives with different emphases.
6. For historical consideration of the symbiotic albeit competitive relationship between England and the United States in this period, see Fichter's *So Great a Proffit* and Van Dyke's essay, "Bookkeeping as a Window into Efficiencies of Early Modern Trade."
7. I take my account of the First Opium War leading to the Taiping Rebellion from Jonathan Spence; he estimates 20 million people lost their lives due to the rebellion.
8. The historiography on China at the turn of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth is vast. The works by Fairbank and Spence are among the most prominent references.
9. The memoirs of Thomas H. Perkins, Robert Bennet Forbes, and John Murray Forbes document their involvement in the opium trade. Also see the memoir of another Russell and Company man, William C. Hunter's *The "Fan Kwae" at Canton*. For an excellent account of the firm see Haddad, *America's First Adventure*.
10. For accounts of the involvement of US firms in the opium trade, see Stelle; Greenberg; Fairbank; Downs; and Haddad, *America's First Adventure*.
11. See John Murray Forbes, *Letters and Recollections*, vol. 1, pages 60–62 for a description of his arrival to the island of Lintin in the ship called *The Lintin*, captained by his brother Robert Bennett. Also see page 102 for Forbes giving advice to a subsequent Russell and Company ship captain on how to operate out of Lintin in the weeks leading up to the First Opium War.

12. Leon Edel reads the pagoda as an image of insulation from "certain truths of life within" the "charmed circle" of Maggie, Maggie's husband the Italian Prince, and her father (2: 534). Edel continues: "One can possess a pagoda, and it can be exquisite, yet in the end it is no substitute for life, for living; it remains an ornament in life" (538). Laurence B. Holland reads the pagoda as a symbol of the precarious compromises maintained in the novel's complementary marriages; the pagoda is "a figure for the pair of marriages which leave the four principal characters interlocked, publicly joined in what their startled acquaintances call the 'highest amiability' and privacy joined in what Maggie has just recognized as an unusual intimacy. . . ." Thus, "the pagoda suggests the complex social, psychological and sexual situation Maggie confronts" (336–37).
13. Ling mentions C. F. Gordon Cumming's "Pagodas, Aurioles, and Umbrellas" of June 1888, published in *The English Illustrated Magazine*.
14. Kavanagh cites E. H. Parker's *Studies in Chinese Religion* (1910). Also see Samuel Wells Williams. For an excellent overview of the history of Buddhism in China and Japan, see DuBois 15–36.
15. See Williams for a description of pagodas in Canton that provides further historical explanation of their origin and meaning.
16. See Johnson 1–25.
17. Also see A. O. Lovejoy for his speculation on the influence of Chinese gardening on the development of British landscape aesthetics. John Conron explores the US context of aesthetic adaptation in *The American Picturesque*.
18. David Abeel gives a firsthand account of white elephants in his *Journal of a Residence in China, and the Neighboring Countries, from 1829 to 1833*: "On Tuesday morning, we breakfasted with Mr. McDonnell, the only European merchant in Siam, in the absence of Mr. Hunter, and afterward went to the walls of the palace, to see the objects of curiosity there. Among a number of the largest elephants we ever saw, were the famed white ones of the king, supposed to be the habitations of former sovereigns, and kept with the greatest care. None but the most honored and virtuous are thought to be favored after the present existence, with such a rare and dignified residence. Their hue is far from being white; it approaches nearer the color of cream" (231).
19. James's essays in *Within the Rim and Other Essays 1914–15* and his interview with the *New York Times* on 21 March 1915 seem to corroborate Lubbock's opinion that James's deep disillusionment over the war affected adversely his ability to write fiction. See "Henry James's First Interview," in *Henry James on Culture: Collected Essays on Politics and the American Social Scene* 138–45.
20. Also see Larson.

21. For two other readings that synthesize the scholarly legacy relating to *The Ivory Tower*, see Cargill and Buitenhuis.
22. Arrighi gets the term *longue duree* from Ferdinand Braudel, who stands in for the influential historical philosophy of the Annales School and its influential *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*, founded in 1929.

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