

Queering the Boundary: Henry James's Subversive Possibilities in *Roderick Hudson*

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Abstract

Since the 1990s sexuality has become the central matter in the study of Henry James. As a result of this new trend many critics have examined the same-sex desire in his texts, one of which is *Roderick Hudson*, James's nominal first novel. Despite this common approach it is problematic to seek homosexual dynamism in this text, for the dichotomy of heterosexual and homosexual, constructed during the late-Victorian period to force the disclosure and exclusion of anti-normative elements in society, is the very thing that is denied and is dissolved in *Roderick Hudson*.

As Michel Foucault theorizes, desire is regulated and controlled by the law of the nation; this reiterates and reinforces the hierarchical structure of society in the realm of sexuality. In James's novel, Rowland Mallet tries to dominate his protégé, Roderick Hudson. By exclusively "holding the gaze", or defining Roderick from his exclusive viewpoint, Rowland constructs Roderick as the object of his desire and thus the submissive being in their hierarchical relationship. Through this relationship Rowland tries to leave his bachelorhood behind and construct a concrete identity as a gentleman. In this process we can also see the importance of money in American ideology and how it was a defining characteristic of "proper" male citizens. Through Rowland's transformation, this text reveals a deforming and violent disposition throughout the process of establishing one's identity.

However, Roderick resists being controlled by his patron by rejecting the gaze that has been turned on him. As Foucault theorizes, the holder of the gaze occupies a privileged position over the one being watched, and the hierarchical relationship of the two is reinforced by this one-sided interaction. When Roderick resists his patron's gaze, therefore, it clearly indicates the rejection of their hierarchical relationship. Rowland's attempt to attain a concrete identity fails, which also indicates the negative tendency in this text against the regulation and order imposed by the law of the nation.

Roderick, who stands outside of the normative code, gives us a chance to recognize the compulsive structure of heterosexism, which requires an intelligible continuity of body and desire. Roderick's desire, disconnected from his body and oriented only towards aestheticism, places him outside of this heterosexism. Roderick can be best understood by examining this attitude toward aestheticism; while the connoisseur

Rowland stresses the artistic labor which maintains a continuity with society and capitalism, Roderick prefers pure art, which is incompatible with the interests of society. Roderick's aestheticism belongs to the territory of bliss; as Roland Barthes argues in *The Pleasure of the Text*, bliss is an experience disconnected from social entities and can even dissolve the consistency within a person that would otherwise allow that person to maintain a concrete identity. Jean-François Lyotard discusses a similar topic, using the Kantian idea of "the sublime." He argues that the sublime can show that which is "unpresentable," which in turn can cause political conflict that can unsettle and subvert the existing society and order. Viewed in this light, Roderick embodies the "anti-hero" who demonstrates the possibility of subversion.

Throughout his career, James doubted the existence of a concrete identity and incessantly suggested the possibility of another mode of being. The failure which Jamesian protagonists inevitably encounter indicates the denial of the existing order and an exploration of other possibilities. Although Foucault indicates the impossibility of escaping from power, James's text shows the permanent inclination to go against the strictures of power. Thus James indicates the possibility of a different mode of being outside the compulsion of identity.

1. Introduction

In the 1990s there was a dramatic critical change in the study of Henry James. The matter of sexuality, which had long been exempted from close scrutiny,¹ was at last taken up in the field of literary criticism. This new trend was begun by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her epoch-making book *Epistemology of the Closet*. In this book she analyses James's late short story, "The Beast in the Jungle" (1902) by using the notion of "homosexual panic," a reactionary anxiety by which men are excessively driven to repress their potential homosexuality. She suggests that what the protagonist John Marcher has feared and awaited throughout his life, which is symbolized by "the beast," might actually be his repressed homosexual desire (201). Her new reading changed the way the sexuality described in James's text and that of the author himself is interpreted. The absence of substantial sexual representations, as in "The Beast in the Jungle," and the celibacy of James started to be seen as the result of the social and ethical repression of homosexuality or, more importantly, as the negative representation of James's own homosexual desire.

After this drastic turn critics such as Hugh Stevens, Wendy Graham, Eric Savoy and Michael Moon began to examine in detail the homosexuality in James's texts.² Among others, *Roderick Hudson* (1875), James's "first-attempt at a novel"³ (36),⁴ drew their attention, as this text contains more evident representations of desire between men than in his later works. Some critics, specifically those engaged in gay studies,⁵ have focused on the relationship between Rowland Mallet, a wealthy leisured American man, and Roderick Hudson, a young sculptor of beauty and excessive passion.

To focus specifically on homoerotic representations in *Roderick Hudson*, however, entails one serious problem; it might lead to the over-simplification or ignorance of the more subtle and intricate issues concerning sexuality in this text. Eric Savoy indicates that gay studies often entails "the certainties of gay literary cultures" which might presuppose the existence of an essentialist homosexual being. On the other

hand the texts written by James have an elusive tendency which is often interpreted as his “ambiguity.” This ambiguity in James’s texts could be captured more adequately by queer theory, another approach to sexuality that emerged in the early 1990s. Explaining the difference between these two approaches, Savoy says, “[q]ueer’ ... cannot denote ‘gay,’ which remains a crucially self-affirmative political nomination. At the same time, however, ... it necessarily retains its essential origin in sexual nonconformity, in the realm of the perverse and the defiantly non-normative” (101). James’s texts, which often show deviation from both gender and sexual identities, can be well understood from the viewpoint of queer theory, which retains this “nonconformity” to ongoing norms.

“Homosexuality” is not an ahistorical notion but rather a product of late-Victorian society. As Hugh Stevens explains, the term “homosexuality” emerged around 1890 in writings on sexuality, ranging from medical, psychological, statistical, and ethical to political (12-14, 61). This term indicates deviant elements that should be eliminated from a modern society which had been intensifying its sexist and heterosexist tendencies. Thus, the term “homosexuality” is both firmly embedded in a historical context and, more importantly, is used to specify undesirable elements in society. Interestingly, *Roderick Hudson*, published in 1875, predated the emergence of the Victorian concept of “homosexuality.” Therefore, from the historical point of view this text could not be seen in terms of hetero/homosexuality dichotomy. The diversity and intricacy of the sexuality represented in this text cannot be fully captured simply by that term. Conversely, the notion of sexuality could be remapped through re-interpretation of this text.

The aim of this essay is to examine the representations of sexuality in *Roderick Hudson* and how sexuality informs the construction of identity. For this purpose, we focus on the power relationship between Rowland Mallet and Roderick Hudson. We especially take a look at the interaction between power and identity, that is, how power affects the construction and modification of identity through the institutionalized and “legitimate” discourse in society. This text shows one of the earliest examples of James’s textual engagement with sexuality and the analysis of it will lead us to look at James’s defiance against the presupposition of identity itself.

2. Nation and Sexuality

Michel Foucault, in the second volume of *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure*, indicates the “historical paradox” concerning male love in ancient Greece. “To this male love, and more precisely to this love of young boys and adolescents – a love that was later to be so severely condemned for such a long time – the Greeks granted a legitimacy, which we are fond of seeing as proof of the freedom they granted themselves in this domain.” But actually the reverse was the case; “it was in connection with this love ... that they spoke of the need to practice the strictest austerities” (245).

Foucault points out a number of regulations of sexuality which were imposed on men in ancient Greece. First he indicates that the Greeks did not value all kinds of male love equally; they privileged and paid special attention to the love between an adult male and a young boy. A respectable male relationship was not based upon equality between two men but upon “an age difference” or “a certain difference of status” (193). And the relations between adult males “were more apt to be an object of criticism and

irony” (194). A certain “ritualization” (196) was also regarded as necessary for the relationship between men and adolescents. They were expected to act according to the roles which were allotted to them, the elder as the suitor and the younger as the loved. There were ritualized acts such as courting, restraint and reward, which resemble later courtship rituals in the Middle Ages. Male love in ancient Greece was, thus, highly stylized, and there was less room for freedom than we might imagine. Foucault refers to the “isomorphism between sexual relations and social relations,” and indicates that sexual relations, as they are based on “opposed activity and passivity,” are always understood according to the schema of “the relationship between a superior and a subordinate” (215). He sees the reflection of “social rivalries and hierarchies” (215) in this stylization of sexual behavior. Thus, since the time of ancient Greece, sexuality has been inextricably bound to social and political structures which are accompanied by the oppositional schema and hierarchy.

It would be useful to apply this schema on sexuality in ancient Greece to the reading of *Roderick Hudson* when it comes to the desire represented in it. Undoubtedly, there could be observed desire directed by Rowland to Roderick, which allows this text to be seen as a herald of gay literature. However, what underlies this text is not the Victorian dichotomy of hetero/homosexuality but the inevitable intervention of social compulsions in cases where desire is translated into a certain type of sexuality on a social and physical level. Rowland’s desire for Roderick should not be considered deviant, as it actually rigorously attempts to follow the accepted social discipline. Their homoerotic relationship is not subversive in itself; and it only becomes subversive after the relationship starts to decay and the protagonist’s identity is put in jeopardy.

The erotic tone in Rowland’s description of Roderick has been pointed out by many critics. For example, in their first encounter, Roderick’s body is minutely and thoroughly observed by Rowland, who occupies the point of view of this text.

Hudson was a tall slender young fellow, with a singularly mobile and intelligent face. Rowland was struck at first only with its responsive vivacity, but in a short time he perceived it was remarkably handsome. The features were admirably chiselled [sic] and finished, and a frank smile played over them as gracefully as a breeze among flowers. The fault of the young man’s whole structure was an excessive want of breadth. The forehead, though it was high and rounded, was narrow; the jaw and the shoulders were narrow, and the result was an air of insufficient physical substance. (64)

Here, through Rowland’s marveling and eager eyes, Roderick is constructed as a mesmerizingly beautiful young fellow who is well qualified to be an object of desire. Furthermore, Rowland tends to de-masculinize Roderick by regarding him as not strong enough to be a proper adult man, as is shown in the description of his narrow physical features which signifies his immaturity and insufficiency. There are several more examples of such characterizations of Roderick denoting his insufficiency as a man; in the same scene Rowland describes his voice as “soft and not altogether masculine” (63), and then in the following scene he compares this young man to “some beautiful, supple, restless, bright-eyed animal” (69).

By emphasizing these unmasculine, feminine, and animalistic aspects, Roderick is forced into the inferior and subordinate position in the hierarchical relationship between these two men.

On the other hand, Rowland plays the role of a mature man, a proper citizen who possesses good common sense and watches, or supervises his protégé. Interestingly, his superior position is reinforced by two factors which strongly imbued the construction of identity in this period: money and the nation. As they leave their homeland and sail for Europe, Rowland orders “a dozen” statues from Roderick (71). This contract gives Roderick a proper reason to discard his life as a law student in Northampton and to join Rowland in his journey to Italy. On the other hand, however, it makes their relationship compulsory, involving a duty of labor and monetary interests. Money in this text carries a particular connotation as the symbol of American ideology. As Collin Meissner indicates, young James declares in his 1878 essay that Americans are “the only great people of the civilized world that is a pure democracy” and, moreover, are “the only great people that is exclusively commercial” (263). One of the singular features of America, which distinguishes this juvenile nation from the old European countries, is its lucid belief in money. Wendy Graham, in her detailed description of the James family and young Henry in the mid-nineteenth century, shows that he was strongly pressured by his father, Henry James Sr., to be a practical business man. She also argues that, despite his choice of a career in art, he did not deny the value of money, aiming to make his own fortune through his profession (52-58). Furthermore, the ability to make money had an immediate and unbreakable connection to one’s masculinity in this period. Martha Banta indicates that “[g]rowing up in the 1840s and 1850s, James learned early that being demonstrably ‘masculine’ in America was mainly associated with the making of money” (23). These historical and biographical facts show that James was by and large saturated with this American ideology concerning money, especially in this early stage of his career. He was never indifferent to money and what it signified. And Rowland, the actual protagonist of James’s first novel, fully absorbs and follows this ideology regarding money and masculinity in nineteenth-century America.

Rowland can be seen as the prototype of a Jamesian hero: a sensible, introspective and inactive bachelor. The bachelor is an important figure not only in James’s text but in the whole of nineteenth-century British and American literature. According to Sedgwick, the character known as the “bachelor” came into being in the mid-Victorian novels and plays by Thackeray and other novelists, and, replacing the Gothic hero in the early Victorian period, became a kind of representative figure of the time (188). Unlike the gentleman who occupied a responsible and respectable position in society, the bachelor was thought to be exempted from the duties which men were supposed to perform. At the same time, however, they were regarded as marginal and seen as dubious. Sedgwick points out that the question of sexuality plays a crucial role in the definition of a bachelor. In Victorian England, she indicates, men were forced to choose and denote their sexual orientation, or, more accurately, their not being “homosexual.” What forced them to make such coercive declarations were, first, the newly constructed taxonomy on sexuality which clearly distinguished “homosexual” from “heterosexual,” and, secondly, the ensuing homophobic climate strengthened by that classification. That was the condition under which “the bachelor” emerged; unlike other men, he refrained from explicitly making that “male sexual choice” (188), keeping his distance from social coercion in the sexual and marital domains. Because of such a refusal, however, he

was “marginalized” and “feminized,” deprived of superiority and masculinity, in “nineteenth-century bourgeois dichotomy” (189). The bachelor, who defied the imperative of society, inevitably had to stand on the threshold between masculinity and femininity.

Jamesian protagonists, especially in the later phase, are often criticized for their peripheral status and effeminate attitudes, which clearly show their “bachelorness.” In some early works, however, we can see a different inclination toward masculinity. As we have seen, in the early stage James was oriented toward attaining proper and steady manhood within the confines of American ideology. And his orientation is reflected in the characterization of Rowland. Rowland is in every respect a bachelor; he has no occupation, no wife or intention to marry, and enjoys his leisure. While maintaining his celibacy, however, he wants to be a proper citizen, a gentleman who performs his societal duties. So he attempts to bring back “certain valuable specimens” of art from Europe to his hometown, which he thinks “would be the work of a good citizen” (52). Thus, he tries to enter the domain of the gentleman. Rowland’s journey to Europe, therefore, can be viewed as his initiation into the sphere of proper masculinity.

3. The Subversion of Gaze

Having taken the young sculptor away from his mother and hometown, Rowland takes the responsibility of Roderick’s conduct and artistic success in Rome upon himself. So he begins to watch over Roderick’s behavior, trying to make him concentrate on his work without being distracted by any obstacle, mainly Christina Light, whom Roderick adores ever since his first meeting with her in Rome. Rowland’s new role as a supervisor accelerates the hierarchization of their relationship and, consequently, prohibits their reciprocal communication. In Rome Rowland comes to occupy a quasi-patriarchal position, while Roderick is treated like a prodigal son. As in the matter of sexuality, we can see here a dichotomy and unilateral structure in the patriarchy; the father or the patriarch holds the absolute power and all the other members in the family, including the son, are subordinate to him. Here their relationship is not reciprocal but directional. Rowland tries to guide Roderick to act properly, but their conversation only reveals the impossibility of mutual understanding between them.

Nevertheless [Rowland] saw no sufficient reason to forbear uttering the words he had had on his conscience from the beginning. ‘We must do what we can and be thankful,’ he said. ‘And let me assure you of this – that it won’t help you to become entangled with Miss Light.’

Roderick pressed his hand to his forehead with vehemence and then shook it in the air despairingly; a gesture that had become frequent with him since he came to Italy. ‘No, no, it’s no use; you don’t understand me! But I don’t blame you. You can’t!’ (191)

Their hierarchical relationship, however, comes to a halt due to the resistance of Roderick who persistently rejects his patron’s control. His defiant resistance is notable considering that this text was written in the late nineteenth century - the period when the class order had almost been completed. The first manifestation of Roderick’s disobedience is his rejection of his patron’s gaze. After spending a

successful six months together in Rome, Roderick asks Rowland if he should take a short trip alone for a change. Explaining his motive, Roderick says, “... I have a perpetual feeling that you are expecting something of me, that you are measuring my doings by a terrifically high standard. You are watching me; I don’t want to be watched!” (130).⁶ This remark reveals, first, that Roderick, who has always been objectified by the narrative, is quite conscious of the gaze directed to him, and second that he can make a verbal protest against that gaze. Roderick’s rejection of the gaze has a crucial meaning, since the gaze is closely related to power, as Foucault theorizes in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. To explain the correlation of gaze and power Foucault uses the example of a ‘panopticon’, a surveillance system designed by Jeremy Bentham. With a surveillance tower in the center and a circular building of prison cells around it, a ‘panopticon’ enables the guard to observe prisoners without being seen by them. The invisibility of the guard both secures his dominance and maintains prisoners’ perpetual psychological pressure from being watched, which makes inmates utterly docile to power. Thus, the one who watches the other occupies a privileged position in the power structure; and in cases where he monopolizes the gaze, his power is almost absolute. In Roderick’s case, however, his objection implicitly shows that he also watches Rowland and that he is not a mere object of supervision but can be an equal counterpart. Roderick’s resistance, or his rejection of being watched per se is a serious violation of the power structure. As a consequence, not only is their hierarchical relationship ruined but also Rowland’s identity as a superior person is destabilized and his attempt to be a gentleman by subordinating Roderick is thwarted.

By the time they leave Italy and reach the Alps, Rowland has almost lost all his supremacy as a supervisor and, moreover, is on the verge of losing himself. In Chapter 25 he at last experiences “a sudden collapse of his moral energy” (369), which can be thought of as his psychological crisis as an entity. This crisis, however, enables him to finally have reciprocal communication with Roderick. On their final meeting, which immediately follows his “collapse,” Rowland no longer gives directions from a patriarchal position but conveys his inner feelings to Roderick. Their conversation is held on the turfed hill of Lucerne, a setting which shows a precise contrast with the grassy hill in Connecticut in Chapter 2 in which the solid and exclusive bond between the two men was built by Rowland’s unilateral gaze. In the final scene Rowland confesses his love for the first time. When Roderick accuses Rowland of having shown no understanding of passion, he refutes this by saying:

‘You are incredibly ungrateful,’ he said. ‘You are talking arrogant nonsense. What do you know about my senses and my imagination? How do you know whether I have loved or suffered? If I have held my tongue and not troubled you with my complaints, you find it the most natural thing in the world to put an ignoble construction on my silence! I loved quite as well as you; indeed I think I may say rather better.’ (375)⁷

This confession opens their relationship to mutual interaction and allows unrestricted and reciprocal flows of emotion. However, it does not mean that they can attain a mutual understanding; on the contrary, the situation becomes more complicated and almost chaotic. In the first half of the text there is a consistency in the narrative because it is developed from the sole point of view of Rowland. Desire,

similarly, flows only from Rowland into his subordinates. In the latter part, however, it is a de-centralized world that comes into being and there each desire floats about in illogical and unexpected ways. Actually, in this scene Roderick talks about the desire of women, while the least attention has been paid to it from Rowland's point of view. Roderick discloses two things: first, that Christina is actually fond of Rowland, even though he has never noticed it and treated her as a dangerous and harmful woman, though pitying her wretched circumstances. Secondly, Roderick talks about Mary's desire; Rowland imagined that she would soon be released from her engagement and begin to love him. However, Roderick denies the possibility of it; he declares, "She idolizes me, and if she never were to see me again she would idolize my memory" (378). His words are proved right in the next chapter by his death and Mary's "loud tremendous cry" upon his body (388). Thus, it is revealed that the narrative of this story, or what Rowland has constructed from his perspective, is artificial and insubstantial. This disclosure can simultaneously indicate that the solid identity, which Rowland pursued in his journey, is also fictitious and constructed by eliminating all the obtrusive, undesirable or unfathomable elements which would exist outside of one's limited perception. Through his encounter with these new elements, Rowland descends from his superior position, which has both secured his privilege and detached him from the diversity and uncontrollability of desire. The short coda goes on to explain that Rowland, back in America, is again leading the life of a bachelor.

In both Foucault's ancient Greece and Victorian British and American society, sexuality is rigidly entwined with power. By restraining the elasticity of desire, power tries to preserve the hierarchical structure of society and the privilege of adult male citizens; the love of young boys in ancient Greece can be understood as one of the earliest examples of such control over desire. In *Roderick Hudson* Rowland tries to construct this hierarchical structure of sexuality by placing Roderick under his dominance. When he fails to subordinate Roderick, however, he loses not only his superiority over his protégé but also the identity as a gentleman which he tried to attain; this fact reveals that there is a complicity between power and identity and that for some people the failure to construct a superior position in the hierarchical relationship leads to their loss of identity. By this failure, however, a brand new form of relationship emerges. While on their first encounter Rowland casts a unilateral gaze at Roderick to construct the hierarchical relationship, now Roderick casts his gaze back, re-constructing their relationship in "his frank and radiant eye...as if each had ever been for both, unalterably, and both for each" (329).

4. Who is Roderick?

Who, then, is Roderick? What makes him radically and persistently rebel against the normative code which Rowland tries to impose? Apart from the fact that he is depicted only through Rowland's viewpoint, Roderick is a difficult character to understand. James himself refers to the "flaw" which he might have made in the creation of Roderick in the Preface to the New York Edition. "My mistake on Roderick's behalf – and not in the least of conception, but of composition and expression – is that, at the rate at which he falls to pieces, he seems to place himself beyond our understanding and our sympathy" (43). Here James is regretting that "the time –scheme" (42) of his downfall is not appropriate, that the story proceeds too fast to gain the sympathy of the readers. On the other hand, however, it is possible to detect the

confidence of the author in the basic concept of Roderick. Roderick seems to be quite a peculiar character among Jamesian heroes, while Rowland can be seen as the prototype of them. Certainly, there are many other characters who show resemblances to Rowland, such as John Marcher in “The Beast in the Jungle,” Lambert Strether in *The Ambassadors* and Spenser Brydon in “The Jolly Corner”; yet it is hard to find any equivalent successor to Roderick. Considering Roderick’s dismissal from the genealogy of Jamesian heroes it is interesting that the author shows certain sympathy to Roderick. Roderick can be seen as a character distinctive of the early phase of James and, then, the analysis of this character leads to explore peculiarities of early James. The most characteristic point of Roderick is his resistance to Rowland and the normative code that approves the patron’s dominance over his protégé. Then what made Roderick’s resistance possible? And despite his resolute attitude and the author’s sympathy why is his downfall inevitable?

Roderick's defiance can be examined through his desire and its interaction with power; while Rowland's desire is made to follow the normative hierarchical structure, that of Roderick shows quite the opposite tendency. From the moment he catches a glimpse of Christina in Rome, Roderick, charmed by her exquisite beauty, starts to follow her ardently and feverishly. In the heteronormative framework there would be no problem with Roderick’s behavior. This might be interpreted as a normal part of a young man’s courtship. On the contrary, however, Roderick’s conduct is quite against the norm of society because the organization of sexuality is severely regulated by the normative code in order to conserve the clarity and consistency of identity. This interaction among desire, body and identity is described by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*. She claims that, first, “identity” is supposed to be “self-identical, persisting through time as the same, unified and internally coherent.” To construct such an “intelligible” identity, then, it becomes necessary to “institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire.” In this process desire is necessarily posited under what is called heterosexual compulsion.

The heterosexualization of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between “feminine” and “masculine”, where these are understood as expressive attributes of “male” and “female”. The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of “identities” cannot “exist” – that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not “follow” from either sex or gender. (16-17)

Therefore, only the desire which keeps the continuity to one’s gender and is intelligible in relation to the cultural matrix regarding sexuality is allowed to exist under socially instituted regulation and imposition. Roderick’s desire for Christina, however, cannot be thought of as this “intelligible” one, for it is disconnected from his body and his gender identity as a male;⁸ it is solely based on his aesthetic orientation. Consequently, he ignores all the compulsion and necessity that accompany normative heterosexual desire.

The relationship of Roderick and Christina is obviously deviant from the normative code; it is first

shown during their initial encounter which takes place in an old garden in Rome. When Roderick finds a young girl, Christina, approaching him, he gives her “a confident smile”; and she “perceive[s] it and turn[s] her face full upon him, with a gaze intended apparently to enforce greater deference” (109). Her gaze, turned back to Roderick, nullifies the gender system in which men exclusively occupy the gaze, and reconstructs a wholly new relationship with Roderick who is “eagerly staring” back at her. Unlike in a normative gendered relationship, here both of them hold the gaze. Additionally, Roderick concentrates solely on the abstract beauty of Christina, as he describes her as “beauty itself” and “a phantasm, a vapour, an illusion” (110). There is a close affinity between his desire for Christina and his devotion to art, so that when Rowland accuses him of chasing her in Chapter 11, Roderick claims that his passion for Christina is indispensable to his work as an artist:

‘... You demand of us to be imaginative, and you deny us the things that feed the imagination. In labour we must be as passionate as the inspired sibyl; in life we must be mere machines. It won’t do! When you have got an artist to deal with, you must take him as he is, good and bad together. ...If you want a bird to sing, you must not cover up its cage. Shoot them, the poor devils, drown them, exterminate them, if you will, in the interest of public morality; it may be morality would gain – I dare say it would! But if you suffer them to live, let them live on their own terms and according to their own inexorable needs!’ (192)

Here Roderick shows not only the peculiar implication of art and desire within him but also his incomparable attitude toward aestheticism, which shows a distinct contrast to Rowland’s understanding of art. Rowland maintains the need for moderation and morality in artistic work; he regards the creation of art as a labor, or an activity which is continuous with capitalism and society. On the other hand Roderick claims the independence of art from any other conditions; he advocates the importance of “freedom,” which nurtures “imagination,” the very origin of the creation of art, even if it goes against the public interest.

Roderick’s defiance against society reminds us of a figure denoted in *The Pleasure of the Text* by Roland Barthes; here he introduces someone “who abolishes within himself all barriers, all exclusions, not by syncretism but by simple discard of that old specter: logical contradiction”, that is, “the reader of the text at the moment he takes his pleasure” (3). In this book Barthes distinguishes between two types of texts, the text of pleasure and that of bliss. He argues that while the text of pleasure “contents, fills, grants euphoria” and “comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a *comfortable* practice of reading,” the text of bliss “discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader’s historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, [and] brings to a crisis his relation with language” (14). The former experience can be associated with the attitude of Rowland who calls for the continuity between art and everyday life. And the latter, the text of bliss, resonates with Roderick’s insistence that art be independent from anything else. Barthes argues that the “site” of bliss, which is created by this reader who perceives the bliss, can present something which cannot be represented in the existing language system, something that is unpredictable and “impossible”

(5). Therefore this site can be the field where the status-quo is re-questioned and the ongoing system is destabilized.

This notion of bliss has a political meaning when it is associated with the notion of “the sublime,” as described by Jean-François Lyotard. In “An Answer to the Question, What Is the Postmodern?” he argues about the meaning of the sublime in both aesthetic and political terms. Based on Kantian ideas, Lyotard explains that the sublime is an emotion which brings both pleasure and pain at the same time when we are confronted with something too great or powerful. The pain is caused by our failure to perceive what is shown to us; we make our perception of things according to our “Idea of the world” (10), but when the object is beyond that given Idea, we fail to take it into our comprehension. This failure lets us know the limitation of our reason and brings pain to us. What causes the sublime emotion can be called “unpresentable” because it is impossible to perceive it or denote it with the existing language system. Lyotard finds an unsettling and subversive meaning in the notion of “unpresentable”; it can show “new possibilities” both in aesthetic and political spheres. He argues that the art of “the sublime” can resist the attempt of social and political unity, which aims to subordinate a diverse and inconsumable reality to “a transcendental illusion” (16) and make it possible to escape from the existing social system. Thus, aestheticism of bliss or the sublime can lead to political conflict to destabilize the existing order and to avoid or resist the total dominance of reality. Roderick is thought to be this “anti-hero” in Barthes’s words, who remains in the domain of “illogicality” and “incongruity” and heads for bliss, but is to be “cast out” from “our society” (6). Thus, he is expelled from the genealogy of Jamesian heroes. Still, Roderick’s defiance against power and identity is a permanent inclination in James’s texts, and we might be able to see echoes of him not in the heroes but in the heroines during James’s early phase, such as Daisy Miller in “Daisy Miller” and Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady*, who search for freedom for women, or the “unpresented” possibility.

5. Conclusion

The question of a concrete, serene, definitive identity is one of the main subjects James continuously dealt with throughout his career. What underpins his texts is an inclination for unstable and undecidable modes of being, which makes him and his texts evade the reduction of ambivalent elements which necessarily accompany the construction of identity. This inclination for undecidability can be recognized from his early stage and especially in *Roderick Hudson*. Rowland’s failure to be a gentleman shows the transition from an inclination for proper identity as an American citizen, which the author himself shared in his early stage, to that for nonconformity and ambiguity which pervaded James’s texts ever after. And the perpetual resistance of Roderick is one of the most distinctive representations of the author’s repulsive tendency against the normative code which is transmitted only vaguely and indirectly in his later works. Both of these examples show a certain denial of identity: Rowland shows it by his failure and Roderick by his resistance. Ross Posnock, in the analysis of *The American Scene*, indicates James’s “pointed skepticism about dividing lines,” “a skepticism of nothing less than our inordinately human compulsion to achieve identity” (“Affirming the Alien” 240, 225). Such denial of the ongoing norms problematizes

not only the existing matrix about gender and sexuality but the power structure itself which is behind any social regulation and imperatives.

James's text is a good starting point for the re-questioning of power structure in the modern era. Foucault says that power is everywhere: it positively optimizes the human body through disciplines and supervises people's lives and proliferation through regulatory controls, resulting in the thorough subjugation of human life. Therefore one has to take a pessimistic view of the possibility of escaping from power. In James's texts, however, there is an incessant repulsion by power and an inclination to escape from its control. This repulsion is often represented in the negative form, such as failure or rejection. Or it is shown as a total absence, just as nothing happened to John Marcher in "The Beast in the Jungle." Therefore, it is necessary to try to read something "unpresentable" when we read the texts of James. In *Roderick Hudson*, however, we can recognize the very early and rather visible image of that "unpresentable" in the rejection of hierarchical structure of sexuality and society. This rejection and defiance can be the foothold for the re-questioning of the status-quo and the challenge to the omnipotent regulation of power.

Notes

- 1 The New Critics in the 1940s established the critical prototype of Henry James, a highly aesthetic and literarily consecrated Master of novel, making him one of the representative figures of American literature "canon." Such a secure and fixed image of James is now the target of criticism and reconsideration. See Posnock, *The Trial of Curiosity* (81) and Savoy (105).
- 2 Stevens, *Henry James and Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998); Graham, *Henry James's Thwarted Love* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999); Savoy, 'Entre Chien et Loup: Henry James, Queer Theory, and the Biological Imperative' (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007: 100-125); and Moon, *A Small Boy and Others: Imitation and Initiation in American Culture from Henry James to Andy Warhol* (Durham: Duke UP, 1998).
- 3 Although James declares this in the Preface of the New York Edition, it is *Watch and Ward* (1870) that is actually his first novel, though this work can be regarded as a novella because of its length. Graham suggests that this ignorance to his earlier work might be the reflection of the importance the author put on the latter work (97).
- 4 James, *Roderick Hudson* (London: Penguin, 1986). There are several versions of this text, including the first serial version on *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1875, the revised version for the English edition in 1878, and the one with further revision for the New York Edition in 1907. In this article I cite the 1878 version.
- 5 One example is Robert Drake, who edited an anthology *The Gay Canon: Great Books Every Gay Man Should Read*.
- 6 This claim by Roderick was revised to a milder and more indirect expression in the New York Edition in 1907. James seems to have heeded the straight expression of desire or attachment between male characters when he made the revision. For further understanding, see Sedgwick, "Shame and Performativity: Henry James's New York Edition Prefaces."
- 7 Here the one whom Rowland intends as his beloved is Mary Garland, the fiancé of Roderick. Still the readers after Sedgwick would easily recognize another connotation in this remark which implies a homoerotic desire. However, in contrast to Chapter 2 which mainly shows men's exclusive relationships, this remark connotes more complicated

interaction of desire which entails both sexes.

- 8 Compared to the case of women, it is rare that the male gender is put into question, because the concept of male is thought to be “general” in an asymmetrical gender system. The question of the gender of Roderick is in itself a proof of his deviance in the gender system.

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