"Interrogation of the Past": Henry James and William Wetmore Story

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Though artists of many nations made the journey to Italy, to partake of "the great Roman background," as Henry James described it in his biography of Nathaniel Hawthorne, very few of them were at home there. Winckelmann and Raphael Mengs both penetrated the highest and homeliest circles of Italian life, but for most foreigners Italy was a vast museum or an imaginative home, *das Land, wo die Zitronen blühn*. Its unaccountable reality was a different matter, even for Goethe, a seemingly cosmopolitan man who nevertheless was not comfortable with Roman society and, while in Italy, consorted almost exclusively (with a few important exceptions) with other Germans. As he wrote to the duke in Weimar a few months after his arrival, interest in the living Rome (*das neue lebendige Rom*) would interfere with his imagination. Despite its suggestions of experience, the poem cycle *Roman Elegies*, begun in 1788, is mediated through art and literature (the triumvir of Catullus, Propertius, and Tibullus), while the connection between love and Rome was probably the result of his meeting with Christiane Vulpius shortly after his return to Weimar. *Italian Journey* (1813–17) mentions meals taken but no Italian food; in Rome Goethe ate at Caffè Greco (also known as Caffè Tedesco). *The Roman Carnival*, despite the beautiful hand-colored plates that accompanied its first publication in 1789, is written by someone who suffered rather than appreciated the event.

It was not principally the primitive nature of Italian domestic life or the byzantine political conditions that kept for-

eigners in their enclaves. Distance set in at the sight of the decay of antiquity so abundantly evident in Rome. Again, Goethe provides crucial testimony. Despite his eagerness to reach the eternal city, after one week there he was writing to friends in Weimar about the sad business of disinterring ancient Rome from the present: “One encounters traces of glory and of destruction that are beyond imagination.” Within a month, he was making plans to go to Naples, to enjoy nature and to allow his soul to recover from the “idea of so many sad ruins.” Rome, the indispensable site of antiquity (Winckelmann’s death testifies to the dangers of getting to Greece), did not match one’s imagination of it. The travel diaries of the German-Danish writer Friedericke Brun (1765–1835), who lived on and off in Italy from the 1790s until Napoleon’s troops placed Pius VII under virtual house arrest in 1808, portray how labored and willed was the recreation of antiquity for such visitors. (She also did not like the Roman Carnival.) Brun’s lovingly detailed accounts of encounters with works of art and archaeological remains in Rome owe much to the assistance of her mentor, the Danish archaeologist Georg Zoëga (1755–1809), who had lived in Rome since 1783. Weimar classicism was likewise a product of emotion recollected in tranquility. A century later, foreign artists kept arriving, the ruins were in worse shape, but, according to the German novelist and travel writer Fanny Lewald (1811–89), there were still inns preparing German food daily for reasonable prices.

Signs of incipient modernity, particularly in the natural sciences, were evident by the time Goethe went to Italy, and the encounter of artists and writers with the detritus of the ancient world underlined a growing sense of alienation of the present from the past. The French Revolution further signaled a break with even the recently known past. Nevertheless, an important strand of nineteenth-century German writing attempted to recuperate the classical past for the rapidly modernizing present. Germans were of course not the only people to be preoccupied with antiquity, but per-

haps in no other land was the classical inheritance felt to be such an essential component of the character of the civilized, educated portion of the population. Interestingly, the idea that America would be untouched by this preoccupation with appropriating the past for the present was expressed by Goethe in a late poem: "America, you're better off / than our continent, the old! / You've no ruined stuff / nor any basalt. / Neither futile remembrances / nor pointless strife / disturb you inwardly / in the quickness of life." Goethe was wrong on at least two counts, including about basalt. Italy was the destination of many American artists throughout the nineteenth century, especially sculptors, eager to take advantage of the skills of native carvers and abundant supplies of marble and to absorb the European artistic legacy in situ. As evidenced by America's civic and commercial monuments, their intention was not simply to retrieve but also to revive the classical sculptural tradition for the present.

The melding of classical and modern reached its culmination in the work of William Wetmore Story (1819–95) who, following such pioneers as Horatio Greenough, Thomas Crawford, and Hiram Powers, became the leading American sculptor in Italy. Born in Salem, Massachusetts, Story was a son of Associate Justice Joseph Story of the U.S. Supreme Court. Though he was educated at Harvard and went on to practice law for six years in Boston, writing many books and legal tracts in the process, he settled with his family in Rome in 1856, where he spent the rest of his life pursuing his calling as a sculptor. If he was not fabulously rich, he had sufficient funds to allow him and his family to occupy a twenty-four-room apartment in the Palazzo Barberini. In his lifetime, Story was best known for his portrait statues, the subjects of which were primarily drawn from history, literature, and mythology. His most famous work is undoubtedly the statue of the Egyptian queen Cleopatra, which features prominently as the major work of Nathaniel Hawthorne's sculptor protagonist in *The Marble Faun*, which appeared in 1860. Story's reputation as a sculptor was considerably height-

ened not only by that novel but also by the favorable reception of *Cleopatra* (and *The Libyan Sibyl*) at the International Exhibition of 1862 in London. In John Murray’s *Handbook of Rome and its Environs* (1864), Story was described as “an American, [who] now ranks among the eminent foreign sculptors at Rome.” His work evoked comparisons with Antonio Canova, Bertel Thorvaldsen, Hiram Powers, and John Gibson. According to the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s history of its sculpture collection, Story’s *Cleopatra* was the museum’s “notable American sculpture acquisition” in its first decade.

With the new century, however, the sculptor began to undergo a precipitous decline in reputation. It has been suggested that the two-volume biography of Story written by Henry James, which appeared in 1903, contributed to that decline. Though it is undeniable that dislike animates the biography, in truth James’ judgment seems rather to reflect the triumph of modernism in aesthetics. Characterized by its opposition to traditional art forms and to the aesthetic doctrines underlying such forms, modernism would consign the neoclassical idiom (of which Story was a leading exponent) to the historical dustbin of the superannuated. It is not surprising that James would devote so many words to disestablishing artistic progenitors. An earlier example in this line can be seen in his biography of Hawthorne, published in 1879, three years after James had settled in London, which would become his permanent home. It is difficult to sort out the huge amounts of left-handed praise from the genuine appreciation of Hawthorne’s gift, but James was clearly settling accounts with a literary forefather and declaring his artistic independence from past idioms.

Some insight into the rapidity with which the continuity of the Western cultural legacy fell into disfavor—at the moment before the breach with the past had become artistic dogma—can be gleaned from the views of Adolf Stahr, a German admirer of Story’s. Stahr (1805–76), husband of the above-mentioned Fanny Lewald, was a highly educated, lib-

eral intellectual who, as a classical philologist, first made his reputation with works on Aristotle, including an edition in 1836–38 of the *Politics*. His literary activity was prolific and wide-ranging, however, extending from a study of Shakespeare (1843) to a series of works on figures from the Roman imperial period (*Bilder aus dem Altherthum*, 1863–66), e.g., the emperor Tiberius, whom Stahr sought to clear of the crimes with which Tacitus had charged him. *Ein Winter in Rom*, a joint account written with his wife of their stay in Rome from November 1866 (almost a century to the day after Goethe's arrival) until May 1867, is particularly informative on the ancient sites and the progress of current excavations. An aesthete of the first order, he pulls out his Suetonius, for instance, when visiting the spot where Nero ended his life. What Hawthorne wrote in *The Marble Faun* about the reverence of a certain kind of visitor to Rome fits Adolf Stahr: "It is a vague sense of ponderous remembrances; a perception of such weight and density in a by-gone life, of which this spot was the centre, that the present moment is pressed down or crowded out, and our individual affairs and interests are but half as real, here, as elsewhere." It was just such anchoring in the classical tradition that probably drew Stahr to visit the Roman studios of sculptors working in the neoclassical idiom. And it was his perception of Story as a mediator between the classical and the modern that elicited his admiration. Stahr's impressions, recorded in *Ein Winter in Rom*, have never before been published in English.

adolf stahr and Fanny Lewald first met in Rome in 1845, the year that Story, still living and working in Boston as a lawyer, was commissioned to create a memorial to his father. Since the time of Winckelmann, Mengs, and Kauffmann, the German-speaking artistic community was the most prominent among the foreign contingents in Rome, and Fanny Lewald had many friends in 1845 in the German circle, including Ottilie von Goethe, Adele Schopenhauer, and the landscape painter Louis Gurlitt (1812–97), who would later

become her brother-in-law. That American sculptors are the only contemporary artists mentioned by name in *Ein Winter in Rom* (1869) suggests their prominence on the Stahrs’ return to the city in 1866, and Stahr’s estimation of Story’s work accords with the high reputation Story enjoyed at the time. Stahr was fully informed about the sculptor when he visited his studio. Besides having read Hawthorne’s novel, he was also familiar with some of Story’s own writings.

Stahr’s account of his first visit to Story’s studio in April 1867, headed “A Sculpture Studio in Rome: The American William Story,” begins with a description of several pages concerning the working environment generally and the stages in the sculptural production process in Italy. Interestingly, it follows Hawthorne’s description in *The Marble Faun* quite closely, and Stahr even ends this portion of his report by quoting in German from the novel, though not by name and simply referring to Hawthorne as “an ingenious [*geistreich*] American writer.” After this lengthy preface, Stahr mentions the prominence of Americans in Italy and then his particular interest in the studio in the via San Nicolo di Tolentino: he was curious to compare Story’s statue, received with such enthusiasm at the exhibition in London in 1862, with the woman evoked in his own study of the Egyptian queen, from 1862–63. His description of the effect on him of viewing *Cleopatra* is worth quoting at length:

> This was not one of the traditional feminine beauties, more or less voluptuous, which, for several centuries, so many painters and sculptors have seen fit to present to the world as the Egyptian queen—figures that could just as well represent anyone else as the lover of Caesar and Antony, the enchanting “snake of the Nile.” This was truly Cleopatra as the British poet had imagined her and the Greek Plutarch had sketched her, the flower of two worlds and nationalities that were wedded in Egyptian Hellenism, the charmer who had captivated the two greatest Roman heroes of their day and whose soaring ambition had waged battle for world dominion with the shrewdest of the shrewd. This was the authentic Cleopatra of history . . . Even the choice of moment was a highly fortunate

one. She is not represented at the height of her fortune, not as she once sailed up the Cydnus to besiege the conqueror of the Roman Republic, as the goddess of beauty. Nor is she shown on the throne of her ancestors, the Ptolemies, in the radiant splendor of her deified sovereignty in Alexandria. Instead we see her at the last stage of her downfall, on the threshold of her tragic final destiny, in the moment after her first and last meeting with the conqueror of her Antony, the conqueror of her capital and her kingdom: the sly, serpent-like, inexorable Octavian who is now the undisputed ruler of the world and of her fate, who has just deprived her of her last hope and who has left her only one course of action: to end her life worthy of herself and of her noble ancestors. (328–29)

He proceeds to describe the seated, seemingly careless posture of the queen, who supports her inclined head with her right hand, a posture that captures her spiritual exhaustion. Here and elsewhere, Stahr includes specifics of the treatment—the armchair with its lion-clawed feet, the "Isis-diadem," the sash, the sandal with its scarab span—but it is the statue's psychological effect that interests him. He addresses the exhaustion of the queen:

The garment, communicating the intensity of the confrontation that has just occurred, has slipped from the left shoulder. It has fallen to above the elbow, leaving the beauty of the breast fully exposed. The left arm hangs with exhausted casualness at the side of the voluptuous body, its lower half and the outspread fingers resting on the thigh of the left leg. Though remaining reserves of energy can be detected in the position and animation of the right arm, the left hand expresses the deepest, death-like exhaustion. One almost seems to discern a nervous twitching in those fingers resting so lightly on the thigh, the result of an exhaustion compounded of agitation and weariness, and which already pursues its half-unconscious game. (329)

All in all, Stahr finds this a compelling psychological portrait:

To return to the face, to its wonderful expression. The features, a mixture of Hellenic and Egyptian, which we have encountered before in the most noble sculptures of the marvelous land of the Nile,

allow no doubt as to the native land of the unfortunate ruler sitting before us. Alone with herself, completely abandoned, she is all that is left of the Ptolemaic kingdom of Egypt, the crown of the East. This is the impression she makes, one of which she is unconscious, turned aside as she is, sunk in herself. How distant from the present is that expression! How immeasurable the profusion of events, of deeds and of crimes, the remembrance of which passes through her soul in this moment! How emotionally bewildering the contrast between the sky-high passion and the titanic suffering, how terrible the contrast between the staggering height of power, the proud and intoxicating hopes for world conquest—and the abysmal depths of incomprehensible misery into which her sudden fall has catapulted her! All this, her entire life, rushes past in this moment . . . and the sense of being at the end of things, the awareness that nothing at all remains that makes life worth living, presses down with petrifying weight on her soul . . .

It is night in Cleopatra’s desolate breast, in the darkness of which only a single star emits any light: the decision to revenge herself on her conqueror by suicide, the firm resolve to deny him through her death the prize of his victory, the chief ornament of his triumphal procession.

This is what the artist has placed before us, a faithful reflection of the portrait that the Roman poet Horace, a contemporary of her fall, felt compelled to render. Though he was a favorite and a flatterer of her opponent and conqueror, he too was enthralled by the grandeur of her appearance and the sublimity of her downfall. (330–31)

Stahr admits there might be some deficiencies in the fan-like arrangement of the lower portion of the garment; nonetheless,

the master has fashioned with this Cleopatra a work that far surpasses the great majority of ordinary productions of the modern chisel. That he even dared to comprehend the historical figure, that he did not shrink from replacing the Hellenic ideal type with one with national features, is a significant step. Modern sculpture thereby conquers new terrain, so to speak. Greek sculpture did the same, by the way, in its own day, when the world conquests of the Macedonian Alexander made artists aware of the historically specific character. (331)

At this point Stahr evaluates Hawthorne—now called "a sage [*geistvoll*] compatriot of the artist"—and the description of *Cleopatra* in *The Marble Faun*, first observing that the novel is very faulty (*mangelhaft*) as poetry (*als Dichtung*) "but is nonetheless rich in sensible comments, observations, and descriptions of Italian nature and art" (332):

> The author most correctly emphasized the wonderful quiet that overflows the entire figure . . . [Stahr here adds a translation from the novel.] What he says about the twofold expression of her features is also true: the softness and tenderness that you imagine seeing on first glance are transformed into their opposite when you look closer. This creature does not have its parallel among her sex, and yet there is nothing the least unfeminine about her. A blend of the most antagonistic elements, mildness and severity, of pliancy and steel-like decisiveness, this is Cleopatra as Shakespeare's genius drew her: incalculable in good and evil, carried away by passion, terrible in her rage, and above all irresistible in the demonic power of her physical and intellectual charms. (332–33)

Stahr ends with this assessment of Story's *Cleopatra*: "It would be difficult for another artist to bring forth an image of this woman [*Weib*] that could surpass this historical-national ideal type" (333). What some of Story's contemporaries saw as "racial characterization" in the statue, the German Stahr regarded as an advancement on neoclassic portraiture.

Stahr had opportunities to meet with the artist (*einen Mann in der Blüthe männlichen Alters*), who was putting the finishing touches on a clay model of his newest work, *Delilah*. Casting his eye around the large rooms of Story's studio, Stahr noted "numerous other works of the artist, some in marble reproductions, some in plaster cast . . . approximately twenty" (333–34), including *The Libyan Sibyl*. Stahr seemed unaware of any allusions to slavery (and the Civil War) that had been part of Story's inspiration in creating that work but judged it as further evidence of Story's ability to mine the historical-national vein. In general, Stahr was less interested in the specific details of artistic handling

than in the “historic-national” subject matter, which he considered Story’s pathbreaking achievement in the field of sculpture:

> When viewing this *Cleopatra*, this *Libyan Sibyl*, this *Delilah*—and also a *Judith*, a *Saul*, and a *Medea* meditating her deed—one has the feeling, as one observer mentioned, that “new life and hope were being imparted to the future of the plastic art.” And most certainly an important circumstance is that this new, enlivening direction is coming from a son of the youngest culture people [*Kulturvolk*], a son of America, of which Goethe has said: “America, you’re better off / than our continent, the old!” (334–35)

In May of 1867, shortly before he left Rome, Stahr visited the studio of Story’s compatriot “Miß Hosmer, who is among the most distinguished sculptors of Rome” (356). What prompted Stahr’s interest in Harriet Goodhue Hosmer (1820–1908), the first American female sculptor to locate in Rome, is the funeral monument she created, the reclining figure of a young Englishwoman who died in Rome, in the church S. Andrea delle Fratte. He mentions that she had been a student of John Gibson and finds that the works in her studio “testified to the reputation the artist enjoys” (356). Of interest is that Stahr makes no mention of Harriet Hosmer’s short stature or of the singularity of a woman working in the traditionally male sculptural medium; his comments lack the dismissive attitude of Henry James, who described the American women working in Rome as the “white, marmorean flock.” Of course, Stahr may not have met Hosmer herself during his visit to her studio, but she was a well-known figure in the Roman artistic milieu. The writings of Stahr’s own wife were signs of new territory for women’s independence, but this was an area, like sculpture, in which Americans were seen as taking the lead, and Stahr’s estimation of her seems part of his favorable assessment of Americans.

Besides “Miß Hosmer,” Stahr mentions two other American women working in Rome, neither of whom, in his view,

William Wetmore Story

William Wetmore Story (1819–1895), *Cleopatra*. 1858; this carving, 1869. Marble, 55.5 x 33.5 x 51.5 in. (141 x 84.5 x 130.8 cm). Gift of John Taylor Johnston, 1888 (88.5a–d). Photo: Jerry L. Thompson. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, USA. Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY.

compares: "Miß Stephens" and "Miß Foly." The latter, of course, is Margaret Foley (ca. 1820–77), while the former must refer to Emma Stebbins (1815–82), whose most famous work, the neoclassical winged female figure *Angel of the Waters* (1868), is now (as of 1873) the central element of the Bethesda Fountain in Central Park in New York. Above all, however, it is William Wetmore Story who most impresses Stahr and to whom he returns at the end of this portion of *Ein Winter in Rom*. It is a great tribute: "The many-sided gift of this artist makes us think of the great artists of antiquity and of the sixteenth century. For Story is not only one of the first sculptors of the present, but besides that he is also a man of comprehensive historical knowledge, a talented musician, and a sensitive writer and poet" (357–58). In support of this claim, Stahr devotes the final three pages of his account to some of Story's writings, including *Roba di Roma* (1862). He quotes two poems by Story for the evidence they offer of what he had earlier referred to as his "artistic vocation." He translates one ("Phryne and Praxiteles"), while the other ("To Fortune") is left in the original English.

story's "many-sided gift," as well as a considerable discussion of his sculptures, including *Cleopatra* and *The Libyan Sybil*, are also recorded by Henry James in *William Wetmore Story and His Friends*, but James' judgment stands in stark contrast to Stahr's. Like Stahr, James felt that Story had created something new with his portrait statues, quite distinct from the sculptural tradition of previous generations, one that had been replete with "meagre maidens and matrons . . . blank, bereaved, disconsolate, as if deprived of their proper lachrymal urns or weeping willows" (2.78). But he defined Story's difference negatively: the "new note" derived not from "the aesthetic sense in general or the plastic in particular, but the sense of the romantic, the anecdotic, the supposedly historic, the explicitly pathetic" (2.76). Far from being pathbreaking or linked by its themes to the long

heritage of Western art, Story’s work catered to public taste, depending on subjects that were, “for the most part . . . already consecrated to the imagination—by history, poetry, legend,” which the sculptor then embellished “with all their signs and tokens, their features and enhancements” (2.77). James criticized “the artist’s fondness for the draped body and his too liberal use of drapery” (2.80). Though the documents at his disposal did not positively declare that Story was constrained by Victorian demands for decorum, James asserted that Story remained on the “safe side” (1.82) by avoiding nudes. This assertion is similar to something he wrote about Hawthorne in his discussion of *The Marble Faun*:

> The plastic sense was not strong in Hawthorne; there can be no better proof of it than his curious aversion to the representation of the nude in sculpture. This aversion was deep-seated; he constantly returns to it, exclaiming upon the incongruity of modern artists making naked figures . . . His jealousy of undressed images strikes the reader as a strange, vague, long-dormant heritage of his straight-laced Puritan ancestry. (*Hawthorne*, 161)

Leon Edel, James’ own biographer, has contended that it was Story’s lack of single-minded artistic seriousness that offended James. And indeed this is the judgment of Story that James renders:

> He was not with the last intensity a sculptor. Had he been this he would not . . . have been also with such intensity . . . so many other things; a man of ideas—of *other* ideas, of other curiosities. These were so numerous with him that they were active diversions, driving him into almost every sort of literary experiment and speculation. It was not that he failed to grasp the plastic, but much rather that he saw it everywhere . . . Add to this that he constantly overflowed, by spoken and by written talk, into an extremely various criticism, and we see that, if the approach to final form be through concentration, he was not concentrated. (2.83–84)

Earlier he writes: “Sculpture, poetry, music, friendship—

these were his fondest familiars, and it was a sacrifice to them all in one" (1.317).

James's dismissal, both of Story and his work, has much to do with the historical moment in which the two Americans encountered one other. James first met Story in November 1869, shortly after his own arrival in Rome. In a letter home, the twenty-six-year-old James described Story as "very civil and his statues very clever." This was the year in which *Ein Winter in Rom* appeared, two years after Adolf Stahr and Fanny Lewald departed Rome, when James caught the city, according to Edel, "at the last moment of its old splendor." Three decades later, in *William Wetmore Story and His Friends*, James recalls an instance of the "old splendor" on his arrival in 1869, as he "touch[ed] the sacred soil at the end of the old night-journey from Florence":

> I hurried out heedless of breakfast and open-mouthed only for visions; which promptitude was as promptly rewarded, on the adjacent edge of Via Condotti, by the brightest and strangest of all, the vista of the street suddenly cleared by mounted, galloping, hand-waving guards, and then, while every one uncovered and women dropped on their knees, jerking down their children, the great rumbling, black-horsed coach of the Pope, so capacious that the august personage within . . . could show from it as enshrined in the dim depths of a chapel. (1.109)

James seems to have arrived in the same spirit as Goethe (indeed, almost on the same day, October 30), his imagination ready to receive the revelations of antiquity, but, as Edel writes, he "would come to see Rome less ecstatically." His health was already in decline when he left for Naples in December, and he soon cut short his stay in Italy. When James next returned to Rome, only three years later, on December 23, 1872, many signs of the old order had been swept away: the French troops that had been supporting the pope against the Risorgimento had been diverted by the Franco-Prussian War; Italy had been united; and the secularization of schools and institutions was underway. Such large changes and small

ones in daily life were described by Fanny Lewald, who returned to Italy in 1877, after Adolf Stahr’s death. Besides a nearly one hundred-page account of Italy’s progress toward unification, her *Reisebriefe aus Deutschland, Italien und Frankreich* (1880) describes the mourning in Rome at the death of Victor Emmanuel in January 1878 and, the following month, of Pius IX, and speaks of the hopes prompted by the elevation of Leo XIII as pontiff. Equally interesting to Lewald are improvements in human life and habitation that show the creative hand of man, from bridges and roads in the Swiss Alps to hospitals and luxury stores.

Under the influence of such changes, it is hardly surprising that, on revisiting Story’s studio, James would speak of the “army of marble heroines” that reminded him of “Mrs. Jarley’s waxworks.” He wrote to Charles Eliot Norton of Story’s “*prosperous* pretension.” Three decades later, in *William Wetmore Story and His Friends*, the animus had solidified, but it was now symptomatic of an ascendant cultural temper, “modernism,” which had begun to manifest itself in the final decades of the nineteenth century and of which James was an early exemplar. Following on the disestablishment of the old social and political order, modernism indicates the lack of confidence in that order, especially in its artistic conventions. Henry James’ novel *The Ambassadors* is both a landmark of modernist literature and a portrait of the collapse of cultural assumptions. What Edel calls the novel’s “mobile angles of vision”—freedom from “the old tradition of the novel”—mirrors its protagonist’s release, amid the less inhibiting values of Europe, from the “moral and intellectual bondage” of Puritan New England.

That James would portray Europe as less restrictive is interesting since, at least in culture and politics, that was hardly the case in 1900. Nevertheless, reflecting material changes on the ground in Italy, the last quarter of the nineteenth century was a time of transition in institutional and aesthetic norms. Adolf Stahr, a political progressive, could hardly have been ignorant of modern tendencies; they were,

indeed, the subjects of his wife's novels. While his assessment of Story indicates how strongly Stahr was anchored in the pre-modern, classical artistic tradition, it also suggests a liberal belief that traditional forms could absorb the new psychological contents arising from the transformation of the social order. The past could not be copied wholesale, of course: speaking of "exhausted classical motifs and ideals," Stahr complains of the indistinguishable character of contemporary works of ideal sculpture, meaning the abstract, often nude figures after the antique that, for many of us, are so difficult to tell apart. Indeed, Stahr criticized Story's work in the ideal vein—in other words, the kinds of nudes that James criticized Story for avoiding—saying that "he does not succeed in venturing beyond what others have already done recently." It was Story's hybrid works, melding modern interest in psychology, a traditional medium, and inherited subject matter that, for Stahr, made Story a renewer of an exhausted Western sculptural tradition. In Stahr's own words, "modern sculpture thereby conquers new terrain."

In contrast, *William Wetmore Story and His Friends*, which appeared in the same year as *The Ambassadors*, indicates that there could be no such accommodation with the past. The breach is explicitly addressed in the opening pages of the biography, with James referring to the condition of the "modern" individual, "divided by a chasm from his progenitors" (1.10) and living with the knowledge that all the "discoveries" had already been made (1.12). The first chapter is suffused with the melancholy of the epigone, ruefully contemplating the good fortune of Story and his generation, of "the American pilgrim of that unadministered age" who had got to Europe, in particular Italy, "in time for the best parts of the feast" (1.8). There is envy of the earlier travelers—of "the artless seekers of knowledge, would-be haunters of the fountainhead" (1.9)—who "were not always on the way to some other [contact], snatching a mouthful between trains" (1.18).

Indeed, there was much to envy in Story's life. James was in possession of many documents, especially letters, and in-

stead of a straightforward biography, used these to render a rich portrait of an impressive lifetime filled with a profusion of personalities and events. The period of Story’s first Roman residence, from 1845, coincided with Italy’s early independence struggle, and the biography documents Story’s encounters with Mazzini and his friendship with Margaret Fuller, whose newspaper reporting provided eyewitness accounts of the revolutionary events and the short-lived Roman Republic of 1849. Story’s letters to James Russell Lowell report on the lectures he attended in Berlin in 1850 given by such eminences as Wilhelm von Humboldt, Otto Ranke, and Friedrich Savigny. After Story settled in Rome in 1856, much is recorded in the principals’ own words, such as Robert Browning’s letter concerning Elizabeth’s death, or Story’s anxieties concerning the imminent American Civil War when he was in London preparing for the exhibition of his statues. Still-living personalities like Longfellow, Mrs. Gaskell (writer of “admirable things which time has consecrated”), Bettina von Arnim, Alexis de Tocqueville, Walter Savage Landor, and Louis Napoleon dot the pages, and many spend time in the Piazza Barberini.

James, however, intent on conveying a portrait of a vanished age, constantly refers to these precursors as “wandering shades” or “ghosts.” Concerning Margaret Fuller, for instance: “Among the ghosts . . . of the little related, vanished world, none looks out at us more directly and wistfully” (1.99). The values of this age are also clearly superseded. Thus, on the success of Story’s statues in London, James refers to the “easier, simpler and less ‘evolved’” critical attitude of 1860. His tone is anthropological, that of a “contentedly cosmopolite” traveler regarding the sacred “simplicities” and charming “mistakes” (1.9) of the earlier, primitive visitors (the Brownings!) to Rome. If James’ reaction to Story in 1872 is evidence of the modernist mood that was coming into being, by 1903 it was fully articulated: a rejection of the values of the past and of any attempt to salvage them for the present. To read James’ reaction to Story is to realize how ever widen-

ing is the chasm between us moderns and post-moderns and the world of our forefathers, artistic or otherwise.

To return to Stahr, however, whose comments on Story remind us of the admiration that Europeans felt concerning the ability of American artists like William Wetmore Story and Harriet Hosmer to quickly learn from and to appropriate the artistic inheritance of the past for the purposes of the present. The perception that Americans were fortunate to be free from accepted ways of doing things, voiced in the poem by Goethe, turns out not to have been true at all.

notes

"Interrogation of the Past" is the title of the first chapter of Leon Edel's one-volume biography, *Henry James: A Life* (New York 1985). The quotation from Hawthorne's novel *The Marble Faun: or, The Romance of Monte Beni* is from the Penguin Classics paperback edition (New York 1990). The quotations from Henry James come from *Hawthorne* (London 1879) and *William Wetmore Story and His Friends* (New York, reprint of the two-volume 1903 edition). The other works from which I quote are *Ein Winter in Rom*, by Adolf Stahr and Fanny Lewald (Berlin 1869); *Reisebriefe aus Deutschland, Italien und Frankreich (1877, 1878)*, by Fanny Lewald (Berlin 1880). All translations from Stahr and Lewald are my own. The translation of Goethe's poem is by my colleague Arnd Bohm of Carleton University (Ottawa).

For further information on Adolf Stahr, see *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (Leipzig 1893), 35.403–6 (inc. bibl.); for Fanny Lewald, see 35.406–11, and *Neue Deutsche Biographie* (Munich 1985), 14.409–10. More on Fanny Lewald as a travel writer can be found in the chapter by me in *Great Women Travel Writers: From 1750 to the Present*, Alba Amoia and Bettina L. Knapp, eds. (New York 2005), 27–37.

Story created at least two (and perhaps four) versions of *Cleopatra*. The first (now in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; catalogue no. 78.3), completed in December

1860, is the one described by Hawthorne. Stahr saw a later version, though he had left Rome in 1867 and the one now in New York is signed and dated 1869 (Metropolitan Museum of Art; catalogue no. 88.5a). According to Julian Hawthorne, who saw the first version, Story and his father had discussed the gesture of the left hand: if the forefinger and thumb met, then the queen was still contemplating revenge; if separated, the relaxation of despair was indicated. Also, according to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art Online, “in the Metropolitan Museum’s figure Story gave the Egyptian queen a slightly more African physiognomy, perhaps to suggest an Eastern sensuality.”

After completing this essay, I came across a reference to the influence on George Eliot of Adolf Stahr’s art historical writing, in particular Stahr’s two-volume work *Torso: Kunst, Künstler und Kunstwerke der Alten* (Braunschweig 1854–55). See note 8 of Abigail S. Rischin, “Beside the Reclining Statue: Ekphrasis, Narrative, and Desire in *Middlemarch*,” *PMLA* 111 (1996), 1121–32.

According to the preface to the second edition of *Torso* (Braunschweig 1878; subtitled *Kunst, Künstler und Kunstwerke des griechischen und römischen Alterthums*), Stahr subsequently incorporated research from the period described in *Ein Winter in Rom*. Clearly he was enamored, if from a distance, with Cleopatra. His comments on her in *Torso* (2.301–3) complement those in *Ein Winter in Rom*.

Both in a PhD dissertation, “A Critical Reappraisal of the Career of William Wetmore Story (1819–1895): American Sculptor and Man of Letters” (Boston University 1985), and in several articles, Jan Seidler Ramirez has inaugurated a reassessment of William Wetmore Story. I am pleased to be able to add Adolf Stahr’s appreciation, which substantiates what Ramirez has written about Story, namely, that his work “had a powerful influence on contemporary viewers . . . for the original impulse it brought to neoclassical sculpture: a compelling interest in the motives of human personality.”