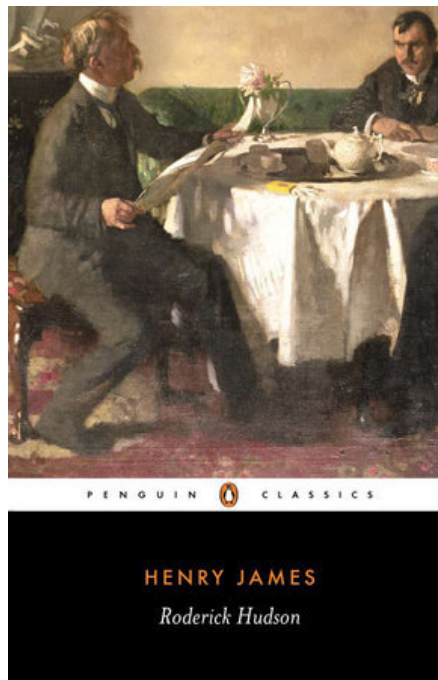




Roderick Hudson

Henry James , Geoffrey Moore (Editor) , Patricia Crick (Contributor)

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Roderick Hudson Henry James , Geoffrey Moore (Editor) , Patricia Crick (Contributor)

This is his first full-length novel and executed with such blazing, confident, thirty-one-year-old talent that even if he had produced nothing else, his fame would have been assured.

Roderick Hudson, egotistical, beautiful and an exceptionally gifted sculptor, but poor, is taken from New England to Rome by Rowland Mallet, a rich man of fine appreciative sensibilities, who intends to give Roderick the scope to develop his genius. Together they seem like twins or lovers, opposing halves of what should have been an ideal whole. Subtext : blazing unspoken sexuality.

Roderick Hudson Details

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Author : Henry James , Geoffrey Moore (Editor) , Patricia Crick (Contributor)

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Download and Read Free Online Roderick Hudson Henry James , Geoffrey Moore (Editor) , Patricia Crick (Contributor)

From Reader Review Roderick Hudson for online ebook

Kalliope says

Reading this first novel by James soon after reading one of Wharton's latest novels has been somewhat fortuitous, but I was amused that if in *The Reef* the two main female characters could be understood as two possible selves for Edith Wharton, opposed, opposing and complementary, so it is the case in James's work.

Rowland Mallet and *Roderick Hudson*, the two "Ro-Ro" poles in the novel, invite the idea of James exploring a more complete being. The constant, altruistic and rational Ro-wland versus the reckless, egotist, and passionate (James calls this genius) Ro-derick, tempts the reader to see the author reflected on these antithetical images. But given James's self-effacing abilities, they come across less personally than in Wharton's and more as two concepts that intrigued the author. The artist and his relationship to life around him, to the two possible settings: the Old World with its culture impregnated with history and beauty but also corrupted, and the New World, full of promise, health, sturdiness but also boredom and provincialism. These became James's unresolved dilemmas throughout his life; with this novel we can see how he was already toying with them when he was young, at age thirty-two. And of course Art, the nature of genius and the sources, conditions and functioning of creativity.

On the subject of art, and more specifically on the art of sculpture, I had some difficulty in taking Roderick's artistic gift seriously, tied by my own prejudice in that I have little interest in late nineteenth century sculpture outside of Rodin and Degas. Uncannily, the sculptor in this novel foretells the real one that Henry James would meet, also in Rome, more than two decades after the publication of this novel, the considerably younger **Hendrik Christian Andersen (1873-1940)**. His sculptures have a terrible *pompier* air, and inevitably these kept coming up in my mind during my reading. (view spoiler)

Wharton was a more mature writer and her two halves have a more modern and less melodramatic resolution than those in James unripe novel. The foreboding was so clearly spelled out that it almost acts as an explicit spoiler - So Rowland continues in his constancy as if for ever, while Roderick, the white knight of art, ah! Roderick...

James, the alchemist of words, who first taught me the beauty of the English language, presents in this novel the beginnings of his laboratory in which through writing and fiction he will precipitate and amalgamate his chosen elements during the rest of his career.

For apart from the themes and obsessions, more concrete elements reappear in his work. A couple of examples are the Colosseum as the stage on which two spied figures act out their destinies, which reappears in *Daisy Miller*. And of course the astoundingly beautiful *Christina Light*, who toys lightly, as her name indicates, with Christianity -- and the Devil. At first a doll, she gains in depth and intrigue fascinating her own creator until he made her flourish fully in his *The Princess Casamassima*.

I am doing a rerun of James's novels; but as I have already read most of the major ones (this one was an exception) along a prolonged period of time and in a disorderly manner, I want to follow their chronological order. Christina has also bewitched me in her luminosity and I feel very tempted to continue with *Princess Casamassima*, but I will keep to my plan and follow James creativity rather than his plots or his characters.

Next is *The American*

Eric says

I thought it fitting that James commenced his 1909 preface to this novel, his first, with a disquisition on the difficulty of representation—the difficulty of establishing a selective system of observation that will enable an author “to give the image and the sense of certain things while keeping them subordinate to his plan, keeping them in relation to matters more immediate and apparent, to give all the sense, in a word, without all the substance or all the surface, and so to summarise and foreshorten, so to make values both rich and sharp”—because the eponymous character (from whose point of view, incidentally, the story is not told) resembles as, a subject, the heroine of the last James novel I read, while greatly, signally differing from her both in depth of treatment and in represented scale. Roderick Hudson and Miriam Rooth (the tragic muse of 'The Tragic Muse') are both possessed of stunning natural talent in their lines (sculpture his, declamatory drama hers) but begin the novels trapped floundering in backwaters far from the rigorous training and worldly influence required for their future, far-off fruition. Both are taken up by, and find appreciative benefaction from, connoisseurs of independent means, a theatre-going English diplomat in Miriam's case and an aesthetic American bachelor in Roderick's.

There the resemblance ends. Roderick is called a genius, quickly achieves vaguely described but plausible sculptural triumphs while resident amid the marmoreal glories gathered in Rome, and then, after being spurned by what I take to be the only recurring character in the James oeuvre (she rejects Roderick to marry the Prince of Casamissima), goes to pieces, makes a few tempestuous scenes, romantically vanishes into an Alpine storm, and (perhaps?) commits suicide by flinging himself from a precipice, during a intendedly—not to mention ironically—recuperative Swiss sojourn. Miriam unfolds more slowly, subtly: James devoted hundreds of pages and dozens of situations to depicting the growth of her talent, her gradual assimilation and supersession of diverse advisors and models, her ever-more conscious connection of aimless people-watching to professional character-building. When 'The Tragic Muse' concludes, or rather terminates, she has yet to reach her fullest expression.

I had mixed reactions to this perceived divergence. On one hand I was happy for the brisk pace of Roderick's development, and glad to have avoided another clunky *kunstlerroman* clotted with belabored explorations of yet one more dimension of a particular character's situation or plight. But I also thought the briskness too often bordered on the scanty. Roderick Hudson (1875) needs about 50 more pages; *The Tragic Muse* (1889), about 75 fewer. James admits in his preface that the narration of Roderick's breakdown (and, I would add, of his whole artistic development) is not given sufficient time—widely spaced and sufficiently elaborated scenes—to appear plausible, to appear the situation of a normal enough human collapsing under stress, and not a madmen already poised on the brink when the story starts. Roderick is on the whole a failure as a character, boring and quite unable to sustain interest.

This failure, coupled with James's constant and utterly unembarrassed use of eavesdropping and coincidental encounter to advance the plot (the worst I've ever come across, in any book), might have poisoned my interest but for the deftly-drawn subsidiary characters, and the awesome beauty of the prose. James shows that he can compose rounded, pompously lovely Augustan periods with the best of them—a century too late to compare as a contemporary of Johnson and Gibbon, but admirable all the more for that. I particularly I love this book for the freshness of its Italian impressions. Just listen:

"There are accidents of ruggedness in the upper portions of the Coliseum which offer a very fair imitation of the mighty excrescences in the face of an Alpine cliff. In those days a multitude of delicate flowers and sprays of wild herbage had found friendly soil in the hoary crevices, and they bloomed and nodded amid the antique masonry as naturally as if they were the boulders of a mountain."

"...some sunny empty grass-grown court lost in the heart of the labyrinthine pile."

"His studio was a large empty room with a vaulted ceiling, covered with vague dark traces of an old fresco which Rowland when he spent an hour with his friend used to stare at vainly for some surviving coherence of floating draperies and clasping arms."

The description of Roderick's corpse is also striking:

"He had fallen from a great height, but he was singularly little disfigured. The rain had spent its torrents upon him, and his clothes and hair were as wet as if billows of the ocean had flung him upon the strand. An attempt to move him would show some hideous fracture, some horrible physical dishonor, but what Rowland saw on first looking at him was only a strangely serene expression of life. The eyes were those of a dead man, but in a short time, when Rowland had closed them, the whole face seemed awake. The rain had washed away all blood; it was as if Violence, having done her work, had stolen away in shame. Roderick's face might have shamed her; it looked admirably handsome."

Paul Bryant says

Roderick Hudson, egotistical, beautiful, hot, and an exceptionally gifted sculptor,

but poor, is taken up by Rowland Mallet, a rich man of "fine appreciative sensibilities",

who is kind of totally in love with him and it's so kind of gay but cute, you know, and he gives him \$\$\$ and takes him to Italy.

Like you do!!!!

He wants Rod to *develop his talent* - I think we all know what THAT means.

Together Rowland & Rod they seem like twins or lovers, opposing halves of what should have been an ideal whole. You could call it Rowrod!

But:

He always seemed so polished, so perfect, you could almost ignore the chaos and pain living inside of him.

Henry James lights up every page with the intensest glow. His characters are so hot. Then : enter Christina Light, gorgeous and only 22. You know she had a total bikini bod, even though it's like 1880.

So she throws a bomb into their lives! Roderick is instantly smitten, and quizzes her about her previous amours:

"I have in my time dated a cheater, a thief, a repressed homosexual, a foot fetishist, and various men who just wanted a chance to meet my sister."

"Why's the foot fetishist so bad?"

"Always with the strappy high heels. My toes were killing me."

Later Christina has a dream about Roderick

"He's naked except for those soft ripped jeans, top button casually undone. Jeez, he looks so freaking hot. My subconscious is frantically fanning herself, and my inner goddess is swaying and writhing to some primal carnal rhythm."

And later still, things develop in interesting ways

He ate me like a man deprived, starved. He ate me like I was his favorite meal.

And Rowland was all

So anyway. to cut a long one short, for anyone entranced by **Gabriel's Inferno** or **Beautiful Disaster**, Henry James proves that adult romance was just as steamy back in the 1880s. Phew!

Issicratea says

I think I may have picked up Henry James from the wrong end. Apart from *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), most of what I have read or attempted of James (*The Wings of the Dove*, *The Golden Bowl*, *The Ambassadors*) was written at the very end of his novel-writing career, in the first years of the twentieth century. Although I know these works have often been considered James's finest, they have always left me rather cold, partly because of an aversion to his self-consciously hyperrefined (or hyperconvoluted) style, and partly for reasons E.M. Forster nailed in his phrase about how "most of human life has to disappear before he [James] can do us a novel."

James's first published novel, *Roderick Hudson* (1875), I found much more congenial, even appealing, despite the imperfections James himself noted within it when he wrote the preface to the New York edition of the novel in 1907 (included in the edition I read, and a fascinating piece of self-criticism.) I almost wonder

whether I liked the novel more because of its imperfections. (Forster again on James: “He seems to me our only perfect novelist, but alas it isn’t a very enthralling type of perfection.”)

Art and beauty are the themes of *Roderick Hudson*, in a proto-fin-de-siècle manner. The title character is a young New England sculptor, a cultural misfit in his original, Puritanical homeland, who briefly blazes in the *grande bellezza* of a wonderfully evoked Rome before succumbing to its decadent charms. He is paired with an older, wealthy mentor and patron, Rowland Mallet, who serves as the focalizer of the novel. Initially dazzled by Roderick’s genius and beauty—there’s a distinct homosocial undertow in the novel—Rowland is increasingly drawn into a moral morass as he sees his protégé hopelessly going to the bad under the influence of the willful beauty Christina Light.

As in James’s later novels, plot matters far less than theme, and the novel is most enjoyable as an extended, meandering meditation on artistic creation and the artistic temperament, on the relationship of aesthetics and morality, on ancient, corrupt-but-sublime Europe, and box-fresh, wet-behind-the-ears America, etc. It’s all done with what can be described—by Jamesian standards, certainly—as a positive lightness of touch. There are some engaging minor characters (I especially liked Christina Light’s poodle), and the settings and descriptive details are beautifully handled. I was smitten, in particular, by a description of Roderick in his studio during a brief moment of (deluded) erotic triumph, which anticipates the full-blown decadence of Gabriele D’Annunzio’s *Il piacere* (1889.)

The carpets and rugs had been removed, the floor of speckled concrete was bare and lightly sprinkled with water. Here and there, over it, certain strongly perfumed flowers had been scattered. Roderick was lying on his divan in a white dressing-gown, staring up at the frescoed ceiling. The room was deliciously cool, and filled with the moist, sweet odor of the circumjacent roses and violets He was smelling a large white rose, and he continued to present it to his nose. In the darkness of the room, he looked exceedingly pale, but his handsome eyes had an extraordinary brilliancy. He let them rest for some time on Rowland, lying there like a Buddhist in an intellectual swoon, whose perception should be slowly ebbing back to temporal matters.

All done using a perfectly normal English sentence structure—please note, late Henry James.

I was prompted to read this novel by Fionnuala’s witty review of the novel, themed around James’s allusions to Ariosto’s Orlando Furioso, which we see Roderick reading at one point. With this to the front of my mind as I was reading, I wondered whether James was using as a subtext Ariosto’s allegorical episode of the island of Alcina, where the hero Ruggiero is (willingly) imprisoned by the beautiful sorceress Alcina and plunged into a world of corrupting and potentially life-threatening pleasure. There’s a similar choice-between-reason-and-pleasure theme in *Roderick Hudson*; and the two are similarly incarnated in contrasting female figures—Christina Light in the pleasure corner, and Roderick’s cousin and fiancée, Mary Garland, in the corner of reason, combining the roles of Ariosto’s Bradamante, Melissa, and Logistilla, to predictably blurry effect.

Cheryl says

A rich man recognizes the talent in a small-town sculptor and takes him to Rome to study his art. But will the sculptor benefit from this trip? The story bogged down towards the end, and nothing new was really explored in this novel. I was exasperated, in different ways, by each of the characters in the story. OK, but not great.

Violet wells says

At a certain point I couldn't help wondering if Henry James hadn't used the two main characters in this novel to have a detailed and protracted argument with himself. Rowland might be seen as HJ in his social guise and Roderick a mischievous projection of his precocious genius. You could describe both characters as half baked. Roderick, somewhat of a romantic cliché, has the talent but no money; Rowland has the money but no talent. An alliance is formed. Rowland offers to become the young provincial sculptor's patron and take him to Rome. Before leaving Rowland meets Roderick's fiancé and falls in love with her. Roderick has the girl but doesn't really want her; Rowland doesn't have the girl but wants her. This isn't going to end up well!

At another point the character of Roderick appeared like an eerily prophetic portrait of Scott Fitzgerald, the man who has been gifted with genius but isn't responsible or strong enough to marshal it and who falls in love with a somewhat self-centred beauty queen who will inevitably provide further obstacles to his artistic ambition.

At times I felt there were things in this novel James probably wasn't conscious of putting in there. Emotionally Rowland lays down relentless laws for himself and strictly abides by them; James, as author, appears to sanction many of these laws. Rowland doesn't allow himself to feel anything that isn't self-effacingly chivalrous, that doesn't conform with social propriety. I couldn't help wondering to what extent James was aware of the darker illicit currents in Rowland's nature. He could have been a fantastic villain. Perhaps he was a fantastic villain. HJ never alludes to any such currents; he clearly admires Rowland more than he does Roderick. Rowland is a type that barely any longer exists in our century. The sixties probably put an end to his ilk. Someone who limits himself to nothing but rationally judicious thoughts and feelings; who never raises his voice. Probably the notion that HJ was a kind of celibate gay finds a lot of ammunition in his portrait of Rowland. His admiration for Roderick is a lot more convincing than his admiration for Roderick's girlfriend. His self-denial in relation to the girl perhaps more of a smokescreen than a noble rectitude of character.

At the same time it's a huge shame authors of modern romance fiction don't have an inner Rowland to curb the saccharine nonsense they write about romantic love.

For a first novel this is a hugely impressive achievement. It can be a bit long-winded with the sense of the same scene being played out several times but James' facility with stunning sentence writing gets him off the hook time and time again. He can make even a rather banal observation or idea sound the height of wisdom and eloquence with the beautiful highly mannered craftsmanship of his prose. It's been a treat to reacquaint myself with HJ and I'm looking forward to the next date.

The wonderful portrait of HJ by John Singer Sargent

Laurel Hicks says

If you have had trouble navigating the winding sentences of Henry James, try this, his first novel. It's normal! An excellent character study of the most rational of men and the most passionate, and the three women who loved one of them.

Laura says

Free download available at Project Gutenberg.

From BBC Radio 4:

Love Henry James: Roderick Hudson

adapted by Lavinia Murray

Rowland Mallet - a wealthy Bostonian bachelor becomes patron to a young sculptor, Roderick Hudson, and takes him from the US to Rome to study and develop his art. Their conflicting and complex relationship is heightened in the 'old world' as Rowland falls in love with Mary Garland, Roderick's fiancée, and Roderick becomes involved in a destructive relationship with the beautiful Christina Light.

Episode 2 of 2

Although engaged to Mary, in the US, Roderick has fallen head over heels for beautiful socialite Christina Light, and it's causing mayhem.

Roderick does all he can to steer him back to Mary, though he's in love with Mary himself. Obsession, love & desire intermingle as old and new worlds collide.

Produced and directed by Pauline Harris

Written in 1875 this was one of Henry James's early novels, his second.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08z8zvq>

4* Daisy Miller

3* Washington Square

4* The Ambassadors

4* The Turn of the Screw

4* The Wings of the Dove

4* The Portrait of a Lady

2* The Bostonians

2* The Real Thing

4* The Aspern Papers

3* What Maisie Knew

4* A Little Tour in France

3* The Madonna of the Future

2* Lady Barbarina and Other Tales

4* The Beast in the Jungle

3* The Jolly Corner

3* The Art of Fiction

3* Roderick Hudson

TR The Tragic Muse

TR The Pupil

TR The Other House

TR The Spoils of Poynton

TR The Princess Casamassima

TR Hawthorne

TR The Great Good Place

TR The Art of the Novel

TR The Middle Years

TR The Golden Bowl

TR Nona Vincent
TR Italian Hours
TR The Ivory Tower
TR Ghost Stories
TR The Outcry
TR Collected Travel Writings: The Continent

About Henry James:

3* The Real Henry James by Philip Horne
3* Henry James at Work by Theodora Bosanquet
TR Portraits from life by Ford Madox Ford
TR The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad by F.R. Leavis
TR The Realists: Eight Portraits: by C.P. Snow
TR A Private Life of Henry James: Two Women & His Art by Lyndall Gordon

Duffy Pratt says

It's embarrassing how long it's taking me to read some of these books. I blame the internet. It has made it way too easy to become distracted. Also, as the pursuit of entertainment has made it more difficult for me to navigate and enjoy "difficult" books, so now the availability of the web has escalated the process and I can see it killing my attention span.

I started this book on vacation last summer, and was quite enjoying it. I put it down briefly to read something else, and then simply never got back to it until sometime a week or two ago. There isn't much reason for this, but there it is.

It's not like this is a particularly hard book. It's about as easy going as James gets. In some ways, it seems to me to be similar to Daisy Miller. These early James' books, before he got totally infatuated with the idea of ambiguity and vagueness for its own sake, are very straightforward. This one was a little bit thin, but quite moving in its own way.

The basic idea is that a rich dilettante "discovers" a brilliant sculptor in a New England backwater. He agrees to finance the sculptor's education by moving with him to Rome, and financing his early work. At the same time, the dilettante falls in love with a woman who just happens also to get engaged to the sculptor, but who remains in New England.

The sculptor, for whom the book is named, is a narcissistic asshole. His sole redeeming quality seems to be that he is capable, sometimes, of great work. While in Europe, he falls into bad habits, and falls for the incomparable beautiful Christina Light (who becomes the Princess Cassamassima, and gets her own book in a sort of sequel.) From these circumstances, there grow a variety of circumstances that range from the poignant to the tragic, depending on your point of view. James tells the whole thing very well. The dilettante may be too good a person to be believable and Hudson's mother is pretty much a caricature. But even they are fairly well drawn. Christina's character is amazingly well done, and even as a narcissistic asshole, Hudson is fairly interesting.

On top of that, it's fairly nice, in a book by James, to have people talking about the topics that they are talking about, instead of talking around them. Or insisting on not saying anything while protesting that they have said too much. Also, there is none of the late style's penchant for throwing in slang in the middle of otherwise ponderous prose. I don't think the words "hang fire," for example, appear once in the book.

I haven't quite decided on a serious project for the rest of the year. I'm torn between one of three things: finishing James (I think I have 5-6 books unread); reading some of the books that I have been unable to finish over the years (Gravity's Rainbow, The Recognitions, you know, the light stuff); or actually finishing Finnegans Wake. I wonder if the internet would let me do that?

Cathy says

I read this book years ago for a college class. At the time, I was very depressed. This is not a good book to read if you are depressed. That was the genesis of my old review (at the end). I have different feelings about this book now.

This book was neither as good nor as bad as I recall. As usual, James does a spectacular job of painting the settings. He populates his world with different types of characters, namely Americans and Europeans, artists and non-artists.

I don't recall what was so depressing about this book to me last time I read it. Perhaps it is because I was an artist going through a turmoil, though nothing like Hudson's, and I thought it didn't bode well for me. If so, I totally missed James's message of redemption and lasting happiness for artists who manage to do what is sometimes very difficult, put art first.

I suppose I felt sympathetic to the title character before. This time, I did not. I am not sure whether James meant for readers to be particularly sympathetic to any of his characters. Hudson is exasperating. His enabler, Rowland, although much more staid and less emotion-driven, seems unable and unwilling to act. Even the moral idols of the book such as Mary Garland begin to look insipid by the end. The exception may be the artist Singleton, though he appears to be somewhat ignorant, perhaps even intentionally so.

Overall, the work seems more contrived than some of James's other works. The Puritan propriety of the time is not enough to explain some of the lack of communication. I wouldn't have minded feeling that this book was just as depressing as I remembered it was if the characters had been engaging enough to capture me, whether I liked them or not.

Old Review:

This book hit me like a punch in the stomach. It left me brooding for days. It was not a pleasant experience, and for that I must give it four stars because it was so effective for me.

Agnieszka says

Roderick Hudson is Henry James' first novel and as for the debut it's exceptionally successful. It is said that this novel is more accessible and easier to follow than his later works but I wish other authors in their bloom to have skill comparable to early Henry James. The novel is not only a record of culture and personalities clash, picture of the innocents abroad, puritan Americans in juxtaposition with corrupted Europeans- motives being his showpiece and hallmark, but also a history of confrontation of feelings with reason, art with pragmatism.

Roderick Hudson is beautiful but poor man. He's also incredibly talented though he does not realize it yet. By day - student of the law, after hours the homebred sculptor. One day by happy coincidence meets a rich connoisseur Rowland Mallet, the man who recognizes his genius and becomes his mentor. Both gentlemen go to Italy where the younger man by communing with artwork and architecture is to absorb the knowledge and improve his art. This is the starting point for *Roderick Hudson*.

For Henry James plot is secondary, the most important thing always plays the psychological portrait of its participants and dissection of their motivation. And in this novel we have plenty to observe and compare. To start with, let's take protagonists embodying artists, after all the novel concerns the clash of life and art too. On the one hand, the brilliant and gifted Roderick, on the other - perhaps not so dazzling, without spark of genius, but a hard-working and humble, Singleton. Master and craftsman, you will say. Agreed, but there where the first falls when his Muse abandons him, the second one, knowing his place and limitations, persistently tries.

As usual James offers to us deliciously rich and psychologically nuanced female portraits, from reckless and coquettish girls, dedicated, almost martyr women, through refined, demanding perpetual attention and tributes ladies to women announcing new times, independent and determined. Take a look at the figures of mothers. Here is Ms. Light locating her unfulfilled dreams and ambitions in Christina, trying to bend her to her will and, if it needs, even break. And Ms. Hudson, Roderick's over-protective mother, so blindly in love with her son that it almost suffocates him, unable to discern his flaws or defects. As a result Cristina's reluctance is all too well visible and Roderic's escape seemed to be only a matter of time, even if a generous and willing giver in Rowland's person wouldn't appear.

Here again the aforementioned Christina, femme fatale, the object of Roderick's sighs, the source of his inspiration and passion, but indirectly also the cause of his weakness and defeat is a contrast to a quiet, somewhat insipid Roderick's provincial fiancée, Mary Garland.

And finally, our two *R* men. Like two sides of the same coin. Chimeric and whimsical, selfish genius and tormented artist Roderick . And his noble protector, restrained and withdrawn Rowland, in the name of friendship and out of responsibility, after all it was him who pushed Roderick in big wide world, ready for a lot of sacrifices, and sometimes trying to act as his conscience as well. The creator and his work. In a sense Rowland is a creator too. But even if Rowland in imitation of Pigmalion created his Galatea then the act of creation somewhat got out of control.

Pj says

I think this was Henry James' first novel and is definitely a lot easier to read than his later work. A young artist trying to find his way in Italy.

Julie says

The Object of My Obsession

Certainly, among the young men of genius who, for so many ages, have gone up to Rome to test their powers, none ever made a fairer beginning than Roderick. He rode his two horses at once with extraordinary good fortune; he established the happiest modus vivendi betwixt work and play. He wrestled all day with a mountain of clay in his studio, and chattered half the night away in Roman drawing rooms. It all seemed part

of a kind of divine facility. He was passionately interested, he was feeling his powers; now that they had thoroughly kindled in the glowing aesthetic atmosphere of Rome, the ardent young fellow should be pardoned for believing that he never was to see the end of them.

So Roderick's story begins; and so it ends, "... not with a bang, but a whimper...". Henry James presages Roderick Hudson's downfall so early in the novel that one wonders, is there a point to continuing for 300 more pages? If one stops reading here, one will have the entire gist of the novel, and yet one will have lost the beauty in between. It would be the equivalent of taking a tour bus through Rome that stops at neither monument nor crossroad for more than 30 seconds; or opting for the more measured walkabout that takes you to the very hem of one of Bernini's sculptures.

But who is Roderick Hudson? Nothing but a parvenu to the artistic world. Rowland Mallett believes Roderick has real genius -- this based solely on Roderick's bronze statuette that Rowland sees in his cousin Cecilia's garden. On the strength of that statue, and a few brief meetings with Roderick, Rowland offers him the riches of the western world: he will be Roderick's patron, he suggests; he will offer him an opportunity to exercise his genius, unencumbered by the daily drudgery of having to earn a living. But Rowland, unwittingly or not, is in danger of acting as Pygmalion, for it seems that Rowland has more feeling for Roderick than he has appreciation for the latter's art.

(view spoiler)

It is a very merry dance that James leads for us.

Arguably, the best of the dance is the exploration of the art world in Italy, in the late 19th century, with James acting as our tour guide. The beauty is palpable: one can almost touch the ancient Roman marbles with James's descriptive passages; Rome and Florence jump to life in splendid relief.

And then, it comes to you: you're reading an autobiography -- perhaps something that should have been entitled, *the portrait of the artist as a young man* for all its poignant passages of self-discovery. The better parts of Rowland Mallett and Roderick Hudson are Henry James: a young man who often felt inadequate in the artistic world, Mallett embodies James's self-doubts; the tortured Hudson embodies James's passion for his art and his desire to go to (almost) any length for it. Layer upon layer of exquisite discovery unfolds as you mine the parallel truths between James, Mallett and Hudson.

Love -- human love -- seemed secondary to his true love, his art. And then it comes as a secondary revelation: these characters aren't lazily sketched at all; they act as the medium to deliver James's heart to the world. *Look at me*, he invites, without even a hint that we are looking at him.

So much to explore, and ponder, in this almost-perfect (first published) novel. Why not perfect? As James himself says, in a hundred ways, there is no such thing as perfection, even in art.

Shawn says

One of James's first novels, this isn't as carefully nuanced as some of his best, but it's got all the usual

furniture -- stifling social mores, Americans corrupted by Europe, elaborate hierarchies and elaborate prose. It's interesting to compare this to the *Ambassadors*, one of James' last novels. In situation and theme and circumstance, there's a lot of similarity there. But Roderick Hudson -- sometimes to its credit -- is not nearly so indirect and subtle as the *Ambassadors*, and sometimes people actually speak their minds. Also, the ending is great.

Captain Sir Roddy, R.N. (Ret.) says

While *Roderick Hudson* was Henry James's second published novel (*Watch and Ward* being the first and serialized in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1871), he always considered *Roderick Hudson* his "first novel". James also freely admitted that *Roderick Hudson* was his take on Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* (1860).

I went into this book with my eyes wide open and ended up loving it. This is early James and is completely accessible to any and all readers. It is, in my humble opinion, a bit of a Byronic--and an almost Gothic--tale that hits on several themes. First, there's the comparison and contrast between the Old World cultural values of Europe and the New World values of the American expatriate community. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, this novel felt very autobiographical in that both the eponymous 'Roderick Hudson' and the novel's other primary protagonist, 'Rowland Mallet', seem to represent the author at various times in his literary life. This novel really seemed to be the story of the battle--the constant tension--between the Artist and the Muse; and I have to really wonder if this really isn't Henry James pouring his heart and soul out upon every page.

We've all known artistic people like 'Roderick Hudson', and we care for 'em to the very best of our ability. Sadly though, artistic geniuses like them burn 'hot', and there's just not much that can be done; whether its a Kurt Cobain, a Jimi Hendrix, Amy Winehouse, Vincent Van Gogh, Egon Schiele, Lizzie Siddal, John Keats, or even a Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The candle burns hot, gutters, and then its out. *Roderick Hudson* is just such a story. Strange as it may sound, this novel pulsed and throbbed with passion and emotion like that found in the fiction of one of the Bronte sisters or even Mary Shelley.

For a 'first' novel--at least from James's perspective--this is an engaging and durable plot that completely hooks the reader. The novel also serves as a terrific travelogue as the protagonists travel throughout much of Europe highlighting the experiences of the American *nouveau riche* and brashness among the Old World European sensibilities. Who's right? Who's wrong? Well, you can gain some perspective on this question through reading about the experiences of Rowland Mallet and Roderick Hudson in this wonderful example of Henry James's early fiction. If you're just coming to the fiction of Henry James, *Roderick Hudson* is truly an excellent novel to start with.

Robin says

Underneath all those words, it's just a Harlequin Romance plot. But, oh, those words.

Fionnuala says

The main character of this book is not called Roderick.

No, the main character is called Rowland, and he is introduced to the reader in the very first line of the book. When I read that first line, I immediately thought of the eight century knight of Charlemagne's court who is the hero of the epic poem, 'Le Chanson de Roland'.

However, since the early chapters of this book are set in Northampton, Massachusetts in the late nineteenth century, I quickly forgot that thought.

When I reached page 188, where Rowland's sculptor friend Roderick is lying under a tree in a garden near Rome reading Ludovico Ariosto's 'Orlando Furioso', an Italian version of eight century Roland's adventures, I remembered my thought, and I had a further thought: That's peculiar. What is Henry James up to here?

The book so far had been about art and artists, and the balancing of temperament and talent, themes which have no obvious link with the sacking of Saracen cities by the knights of Charlemagne's court, whether in the French version or in the Italian.

So what hidden connection lay behind the choosing of Rowland's name and Roderick's reading material?

I love puzzles so I indulged in a little detective work.

The 'Chanson de Roland' is an example of the 'chivalric romance' genre in which noble knights engage in quests, often in the service of modest maidens, while always remaining at a respectful distance, however lovelorn they may be.

Now wait for it, there is a certain sense in which the main character in this Henry James book can be viewed as a noble knight. Rowland is constantly serving other people, and one of those people is Roderick's fiancée, the very modest Mary Garland whom Rowland patiently loves from a distance - a perfect example of unrequited love.

That's surely a link!

But on reflection, it's rather a slender link and it doesn't satisfy me.

In any case, Ariosto's version of the Roland story, 'Orlando Furioso' (which incidentally I read last year in a French translation entitled *Roland Furieux*), moves well beyond the courtly romance themes into far more fantastic territory.

How then to reconcile the extravagance of 'Orlando Furioso' with HJ's much more down-to-earth story?

A little more searching is clearly in order.

There is a large cast of knights in Ariosto's episodic poem, and in some of the episodes, the various knights tend to merge into one another. Sometimes the reader forgets which knight she's reading about, and in the case of their chivalric pursuits, the reader forgets which of them loves which lady.

Is it Orlando or Rinaldo who loves the modest maiden, we ask ourselves.

Or could it be Ruggiero or Rodomonte?

Being reminded of those several 'R' names caused me to wonder if the name Roderick might not be a version of one of them, so I did some more searching.

While none of the 'R' names are equivalents of Roderick, I found interesting parallels nevertheless.

Just as the names Ruggiero/Roger and Rinaldo/Reynold, are of German origin, so too is the name Roderick, and furthermore, it is closely associated with the Charlemagne reign; there was a famous Visigoth king called Rodrigo/Roderick who fought gallantly alongside Charlemagne's knights against the Saracens in the

eight century. The name Roderick comes from the words 'hrod' meaning fame and 'ric' meaning power.

So far so good.

Roderick Hudson, in HJ's story, is on the way to becoming a famous sculptor, and he wields a little bit of power over the art scene in Rome, and over some of the other characters. In addition, I discovered that the name Rodomonte means 'boastful and bragging' which fits with Roderick's character quite well; his temperament makes him inclined to be boastful about his own talent.

So our Roderick has more than a few things in common with Ariosto's knights.

But I feel there ought to be a more powerful parallel between HJ's book and Ariosto's. Hmm..

In Ariosto's epic poem, Orlando/Roland is driven crazy -'furioso'- by his passion for the elusive princess Angelica.

Have you guessed already?

Yes! Roderick is also infatuated with a Princess!

And she is quite elusive.

And Roderick goes a little crazy for a while too.

Though not quite as crazy as Orlando, it must be said.

Have a look at Gustave Doré's version of Orlando at his most furioso, roaming the mountains naked, dragging his poor starved horse behind him:

(view spoiler)

That's an episode that surely inspired Cervantes but it could never appear in a HJ novel, most of us would agree.

But, hold on.

Roderick actually takes to roaming the mountains during his crazy period.

Except he wears his normal clothes and there's no sign of a horse (I took a moment to imagine HJ asking himself if he should allow Roderick to shed a few garments and drag a horse about, but then I imagined him concluding that such a degree of passion wasn't absolutely necessary. Moderation even in craziness would be HJ's motto).

So, I've found some parallels and I'm in a fair way to being satisfied with the results of my quest.

There's one little niggle however.

The name Orlando is a version of Rowland, after all, not of Roderick.

HJ's Rowland would never conceive a passion for an elusive princess.

And he would never take to the hills, or at the very most, only to the low lying ones.

Unless he needed to rescue someone of course.

Good and noble Rowland.

So if HJ really had Ariosto's epic in mind - as it seems he might have had - what did he intend by naming his 'furioso' character Roderick instead of Rowland and his 'noble' character Rowland instead of Roderick?

Could it be that Roderick and Rowland are both Orlando Furioso, that Rowland embodies the noble part and Roderick the 'furioso' part?

This would fit with my experience of reading Ariosto where the various knights seemed to merge with one another so that I was never quite sure which of them carried out which deed or which loved which lady.

Could that be the answer to the puzzle? Could Rowland + Roderick = Roland Furieux?

I'll settle for that!

Justin Evans says

Very indirect plot spoilers here.

This is not-quite-James. It's slow to get started - not slow the way his other novels are slow, but sloooooooooooooow - with long descriptions of peoples' appearances that are neither interesting nor insightful etc etc... Chapter III through the first half of XI is great, but someone has seemingly replaced a Jamesian ending with one straight out of a gothic horror novel. The final few chapters are somehow both completely superfluous (page after page of 'the alps stood out against the sun-lit sky like lowering monsters') and insufficient (the characters sit around... and somehow, somehow, one of them decides that 'life is no longer worth living'.) They aren't direct quotes, James is too good a writer for that, but the sentiment is about right. That said, James got it right with his very next novel, and it stayed right more or less to the end of his life, and you get hints of that here. But only recommended for people who care about getting the early hints; otherwise, start with *The American*.

Sketchbook says

Max Beerbohm on James : "To read Henry James is like taking a long walk uphill with almost of a mind to turn back, until, when you look back and down, the country is magically expanded beneath your gaze, as you never saw it."

This, his 2d novel (1875), explores the double image of Rowland and Roderick - the first a rich connoisseur of art and whatnots (New England-based) who discovers a possibly talented artist, a beautiful, sensuous youth that he must mentor at all cost. R1 takes R2 to Europe -- Italy, to be precise. The love-starved Henry James is always about relationships and how conventionality (het or hs) imposes itself. And there's usually a stunning woman involved who also must make her choices. The subj here evokes Hawthorne's "The Marble Faun"; a meller by Alexander Dumas - "L'Affaire Clemenceau" - is further cited, along with Turgenev's mastery of character which James had studied.

There's also the Good Woman who has a "touch of the faintly acrid perfume of the New England temperament -- a hint of Puritan angularity." The players collide, of course, and the 2 Rs - I feel - represent the heart-tugging of James's own nature in this unstated love story. The meddlesome Rowland controls the story as he seeks to control Roderick. James, says Stephen Spender, is on the side of Rowland who does not participate in Life. Roderick is "a selfish brute," declared Beerbohm, "but he cast his spell. We, too, would have gladly sacrificed ourselves to his convenience." *Well, Max!*

Given the "plot," Roderick is killed off, accidentally or by suicide. The middle-aged Rowland is left Alone. That gorgeous dame, described by one critic as "the best thing in the book," reappears later in James as the Princess Casamassima. (A creation that delighted James). Leon Edel, a pompous academic, grazes the complexities herein, but Edel is today outdated w his misleading generalities.

Sex & art, the romantic & destructive impulses are front and center here. Certain particulars are up to your

own imaginaton.

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Ironically, in his late 50s James opened up about his love for sculptor Hendrik Andersen, 30 years younger, very aggressive, and, in his youth, a hottie. But Andersen, says A.L. Rowse, had "the American mania for mere size - colossal, unsaleable." James loathed his pretention. There's now an Andersen Museum in Rome. By god, *he was "calculating."* James would appreciate this 'museum' absurdity.

Teresa says

3.5

Serendipitously, my recent read of Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* seems to have been the perfect lead-in to this novel. I have no idea if the former inspired the latter, though I do know James was a reader of Hawthorne. (As I just checked something about James on Wikipedia, I, serendipitously, saw this: *During this early period in his career he was influenced by Hawthorne.*)

From the beginning with the eponymous character (Roderick) in opposition to his benefactor Rowland, I was reminded of the two male characters in the Hawthorne, opposites in personality, as are the two female characters of both novels. Not only do James' men have similar first names, but while reading a powerful scene between the two, I received a clear image of a man talking to himself--that is, of a man split in two, facing himself, arguing with himself.

As to the setting, it's easy to sense *The Marble Faun* in this—same time and place (though, James takes us a bit farther afield than Rome and Tuscany), same expatriate art community (an older artist says of Roderick: "...*he couldn't keep up the transcendental style...*," hmm), and both authors set a dramatic event in the Colosseum. At its end I immediately wondered if any of James' themes related to Hawthorne's and then it hit me: **guilt**. Not the collective, ancestral guilt of the "usual" Hawthorne; but an individual, deeply felt (even to

the point of irrationality) guilt of personal responsibility that exists in, and motivates, both works.

Even if it is inspired by the Hawthorne, this book is still completely James: who else would use a word such as *anfractuosities*? (This is James' first full-length novel and germs of his later works are easily seen in it.)

And with these words from the mouth of the elderly Italian cavalier, I have James to thank for helping me to understand the Hawthorne: "*Ah, dear sir, Rome is Rome still: a place where strange things happen!*"
