Adeline R. Tintner, *The Museum World of Henry James.* Ann Arbor, Michigan: U.M.I. Research Press, Studies in Modern Literature, No. 56, 1986. 390 pp. 100 black and white plates. $44.95

Adeline Tintner's *The Museum World of Henry James* handsomely fills a hitherto conspicuous emptiness in the general understanding of her subject. With an admirable clarity and thoroughness, a positively encyclopedic persuasiveness, she has given us a long-awaited critical taxonomy of James's entire traffic with the arts popularly known as "fine": painting, sculpture, architecture, photography, collecting, bibelot-fancying and museum-making. Not content with scholarship's more prosaic tasks, she has traced not only the complex history of James's ideas about art, his evolving relations with particular artists, styles and genres, she has also provided as satisfactory an account as we are ever likely to have of how one art can enter and transform the very metaphorical fabric of another. To examine James's use of the fine arts in fiction is as absorbing, on its modest scale, as a study of the various metamorphoses of pre-Christian authors like Homer and Ovid in Renaissance and modern times. The distance—historical, moral, and psychological—between James and at least half the art he appropriates is, in essence and for literary purposes, not much less than that between Homer and the present. Anyone who thinks otherwise, who takes too much for granted the apparent ease with which James flourishes all those great images, objects and names, has one more excellent reason for reading this book.

Because she begins at the right place—James's extraordinary testimony in *A Small Boy and Others* of 1913 to the deep and lasting effect on his imagination of his first boyhood visit to the Apollo Gallery in the Louvre (of which more later)—she never loses sight of this distance. Nor does she scant some of the arbitrary assumptions made by James on the run, his deliberate misjudgements dictated by fashion, his periodically convulsive detachment from, and repudiation of, the fine arts as these reactions were prescribed by his thoroughly American sense of reality. She makes no unwarranted claims for his connoisseurship, nor does she set him up as an authority on art any more reliable, in the final reckoning, than such other Americans as Emerson, Hawthorne, Howells or Twain. James was vastly more *interesting* and better informed about the arts than any of the above. But his prime concern was always their value for himself, not their intrinsic self-guaranteed status in the world at large. What he unambiguously exalted in one place—as a sign and pledge of the "glory" of existence—he would handle ironically elsewhere, as a taunting reminder that life was often far from glorious.

It just happened that James's private discoveries were made *pari passu* with the growing endowment and institutionalizing of art and art appreciation among the people he most wanted to write about. Often he was ahead of the crowd, as in judgements of Watteau, Vermeer, Regnault, Delacroix, and others who entered his newspaper reviewing, his letters and his fiction. Other times he was careful to choose the paintings or statues that his readers were most likely to have seen or to hope eventually to see. On still other occasions he scrupulously disguised the art objects in question, thus providing a ripe opportunity for Miss Tintner's meticulous sleuthing. Unlike a Twain or Howells he had no good reason to distrust his own sensibility. But he did deeply distrust the sentimental cult of sensibility, any attempt to give it a fixed price in the moral marketplace.

For example, he was living in France in 1876 during the publication of Fromentin's *Les Maîtres d'autrefois*, a popular survey of paintings in the Salon Carré of the Louvre, and he reviewed it, unsigned, for the New York *Nation*. Then he borrowed Fromentin's impressions to create a starting point and background for Christopher Newman's initiation into Europe in the novel *The American*. The prototypical archaic self-made millionaire of his time, Newman is so overwhelmed