

# The Cross-Cultural Aspects of the Aesthetic Movement: The Encounter between British and American Writers

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## I. Introduction

The Aesthetic movement that flourished in Britain in the late nineteenth century was introduced to American people mainly through literature and paintings. When Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) visited the United States for his American lecture tour on Aestheticism in 1882, the audience was attracted to as well as puzzled by Wilde's appearance. While his outrageous clothes drew attention as new art movements, they were also met with mixed receptions. Some worried about his effects on American people, while others were enthusiastic about imitating him. As shown in these complicated reactions, American people found themselves both agreeing and disagreeing with the Aestheticism that Wilde brought them from Europe. Considering their controversial attitudes, this Aestheticism involved the taste with which Americans felt familiar as well as shocking images.

This paper discusses the cross-cultural aspects of the Aesthetic movement, which was regarded as British in origin. To clarify this, the influence of American writers over British aesthetes, particularly Oscar Wilde, will be examined, and how the aesthetic subject was adopted in Henry James' works will be crystalized. As the history of the encounter between British and American writers shows, the Aestheticism accepted by both countries has been nurtured. The interactive exchange between the two countries has influenced the American and British Aesthetic movements since before the independence of the United States from Britain in 1776.

## II. America's Declaration of Intellectual Independence

Americans were regarded as the "Western pilgrims," carrying with them "the great mass of arts, sciences, vigor and industry which began long since in the east" for a long time as a French American writer Michel Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur (1735–1813) declared in *Letters from an American Farmer* in 1782. However, some American poets gradually found that there were problems, as European forms did not quite suit "the need to write a new nation with new experience, a new science and a new politics on a new continent" (Ruland and Bradbury 73). Washington Irving (1783–1859) also revealed the issue of American native literature in *Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayton, Gent* in 1819, while also recognizing the great attraction that British Romantic writers such as George Gordon Byron (1788–1824) and Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822) had for him.

Around the Civil War (1861–65), the United States appreciated a unique American culture that was distinguished from that of the British. It is true that some critics have questioned whether the American Renaissance actually exists since F. O. Matthiessen (1902–50) referred to it in his well-known work *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* in 1941. Yet, at that time, the nationalists were surely calling for a literature of their own in addition to political independence. This voice was realized in the address entitled "The American Scholar," delivered by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82) at Harvard College in 1837. This speech was referred to as the declaration of independence of American intellectual life by Oliver Wendell Holmes (Cheever 80). Emerson encouraged the audience, consisting of American scholars, and eagerly insisted that they had "listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe," and their day of dependence, their long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, was drawing to a close.

Walt Whitman (1819–92) is one of the poets who was greatly influenced by Emerson's encouragement. When Whitman sent copies of his *Leaves of Grass* to Emerson, he expressed his joy: "I was simmering, simmering, simmering; Emerson brought me to the boil" (*Reminiscences of Walt Whitman* 523). It is Whitman's achievements that attracted Pre-Raphaelite admiration. Jonathan Freedman was convinced of Whitman's influence on the formation of the British Aesthetic movements (*Pursuit of Beauty* 386). It is notable that

American people were not only the recipients of the movements but also the contributors who played a significant role in the development of British Aestheticism.

### III. Influence of American Renaissance over British Aestheticism

In 1855, Whitman published his collection of poems, *Leaves of Grass*, in which he employed free verses and epic poems. Although the work aroused criticism as it was considered obscene, an advocate of transcendentalism, Ralph Waldo Emerson, praised it highly in a letter to Whitman of 21 July 1855 as follows:

I am not blind to the worth of the wonderful gift of "Leaves of Grass." I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed. I am very happy in reading it, as great power makes us happy. It meets the demand I am always making of what seemed the sterile and stingy nature, as if too much handiwork, or too much lymph in the temperament, were making our western wits fat and mean.

I give you joy of your free and brave thought. I have great joy in it. I find incomparable things said incomparably well, as they must be. I find the courage of treatment which so delights us, and which large perception only can inspire.

I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere, for such a start. I rubbed my eyes a little, to see if this sunbeam were no illusion; but the solid sense of the book is a sober certainty. It has the best merits, namely, of fortifying and encouraging.

I did not know until I last night saw the book advertised in a newspaper that I could trust the name as real and available for a post-office. I wish to see my benefactor, and have felt much like striking my tasks and visiting New York to pay you my respects. (The Whitman Archive)

Since Emerson's letter was printed in the *New York Tribune* in October and in an appendix to the 1865 edition of *Leaves of Grass*—it was revised multiple times until Whitman's death—the book gradually found acceptance among

New England men who agreed with Emerson's theory.

Regarding its reception in England, there were two key patrons: William Michael Rossetti, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's brother, who was a writer and critic, and Anne Gilchrist (1828–85), Alexander Gilchrist's widow, who completed her husband's *Life of William Blake* after his death with the Rossetti brothers. According to Jerome Loving, W. M. Rossetti perceived *Leaves of Grass* to be a kind of classic work, similar to works by William Shakespeare and Dante Alighieri (317). Rossetti experienced empathy with Whitman's works, for the Pre-Raphaelites also often sought subject matter in classic themes. In 1869, he introduced Whitman's poetry to Anne Gilchrist, who was greatly intrigued; she first read Rossetti's own expurgated *Poems by Walt Whitman* (1868) and then the 1867 edition of *Leaves of Grass*.

Since Rossetti thought Gilchrist's letters to him on Whitman's works were profoundly impressive, he recommended that she give them to the public and helped her publish them as "A Woman's Estimate of Walt Whitman" in *The Radical* (1870). In the preface to the article, Rossetti stated:

This found expression in some letters which she addressed to me at the time, and which contain (I affirm it without misgiving, and I hope not without some title to form an opinion) about the fullest, farthest-reading, and most eloquent appreciation of Whitman yet put into writing, and certainly the most valuable, whether or not I or other readers find cause for critical dissent at an item here and there.

He went on to say that "this is the expression of what *a woman* sees in Whitman's poems,—woman who has read and thought much, and whom to know is to respect and esteem in every relation, whether of character, intellect, or culture." It is evident that Rossetti sincerely wanted to make Whitman widely known "for the benefit of English, and more especially of American readers" from not only a male perspective but also female viewpoints. For this reason, he compiled a British edition of Whitman's poems in 1886 following his own expurgated 1868 edition—*Poems by Walt Whitman*—and sold them by subscription. Gilchrist became acquainted with Whitman through Rossetti, and they corresponded, resulting in her moving to the United States with three of

her children in 1876. Over two years, in her dwelling in Philadelphia, Gilchrist and Whitman enjoyed intellectually stimulating discussions about literature, art, science, and politics. Even after she left Philadelphia for England, the amicable relations between the two continued for the rest of their lives.

The Pre-Raphaelites were also greatly influenced by Whitman. Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Christina Rossetti, siblings of William Michael Rossetti, read Whitman's works and became acquainted with him through William. As Freedman claimed, a number of the Pre-Raphaelites expressed admiration for Whitman's achievements (386). Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909) was known as one of the English Aesthetes who was inspired by Whitman. Initially, he praised Whitman, and compared him to William Blake in his *William Blake* (1868); however, his admiration eventually turned into an attack. Interestingly, "the finest poems of Swinburne . . . owe a heavily debt to the imagery and rhythms of Walt Whitman" (Freedman 386). Whitman had a great impact on the Pre-Raphaelites and Aesthetes in England.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, the American lecturer, poet, essayist, and leading exponent of New England Transcendentalism, was one of the "representative men" in the nineteenth century in literature, religion, ideology, philosophy, and other fields. His first book, *Nature*, which is still widely read among thinkers, authors, and researchers all over the world, appeared in 1836, the same year the Transcendental Club was established. Subsequently, the book was issued in London. *Essays*, including the notable essay "Self-Reliance," was published in 1841 and was favorably received in London and Paris. It was Richard Monckton Milnes, first Baron Houghton of Great Houghton (1809–1885), who made Emerson known in England. He was an English poet, politician, and well-known patron of writers; he secured a pension for Tennyson and was an early champion of Algernon Swinburne. In the *London and Westminster Review* (March 1840)—later the *Westminster Review*—he introduced Emerson in a review called "Emerson's Discourses" (186–201). Since the prominent writer wrote a lengthy article about an American author, although his attitude toward Emerson was mixed and mentioned both Emerson's forte and foible, it drew an unexpected response from readers. Emerson's works were read throughout the country.

Under the pseudonym January Searle, George Searle Philipps (1816–

1889), a journalist and writer, published *Emerson, His Life and Writings* (1855), which appeared as the first monograph of Emerson and which was not written by an American but an English person. What is remarkable is that it was more than twenty-five years prior to Emerson's death. In his work, Phillips describes how Emerson's essays were initially received in England as follows:

Thomas Carlyle introduced them to the English public, in a characteristic preface, in the year 1840 (I think); and they gained immediate popularity. Many subsequent editions were pirated on all sides, and sold at one shilling a copy. It is impossible to estimate the effect these essays produced on the minds of the young and thoughtful in England. There was a freshness and beauty about them absolutely fascinating; and for a long time it was customary to swear not "by him who sleeps in Philae," the solemnest oath of the Egyptians, but by him who lives at Concord. (31–32)

This reveals that in his early days, Emerson exerted a favorable influence upon English readers. He maintained friendly relations with Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881); they continued writing to each other until Carlyle's death. Carlyle owed his publication in the U.S. to Emerson, who acted as his agent. They had a mutual influence on one another, although Carlyle's impact on Emerson is generally considered to be more powerful.

John Ruskin (1819–1900), a critic, social reformer, and author, is another significant figure who is ranked alongside Emerson. When his student pointed out the similarity between them, he admitted it, yet defended himself against it in an appendix to *Modern Painters*, as follows:

Some time after I had written the concluding chapter of this work, the interesting and powerful poems of Emerson were brought under my notice by one of the members of my class at the Working Men's College. There is much in some of these poems so like parts of the chapter in question, even in turn of expression, that though I do not usually care to justify myself from the charge of plagiarism, I felt that a few words were necessary in this instance. (Ruskin 427; vol. 5)

This crystallizes the fact that Ruskin was subjected to the influence of Emer-

son. Ruskin admired him in their early stages, and their admiration was mutual until it turned into antagonism. Their first meeting at Oxford in 1873 resulted in disagreement, as shown in the following:

“Ruskin wrote: ‘Emerson came to my rooms a day or two ago. I found his mind a total blank on matters of art, and had a fearful sense of the whole being of him as a gentle cloud—intangible.’” “Emerson said: ‘I had seen Ruskin at Oxford, and had been charmed by his manner in the lecture-room, but in talking with him at his room I found myself wholly out of sympathy with Ruskin’s views of life and the world. I wonder such a genius can be possessed by so black a devil. I cannot pardon him for a despondency so deep. It is detestable in a man of such powers, in a poet, a seer such as he has been. Children are right with their everlasting hope. Timon is always inevitably wrong.’” (Ruskin 183; vol. 38)

As stated above, the relationship between them was complex; nevertheless, Ruskin and Emerson shared their ideas with certain similarities.

Matthew Arnold (1828–88) was a notable poet and critic who testified to the influence of Emerson. Freedman took Arnold as an example of the “Emerson mania” that was “among the young men at Oxford” and “found Emerson’s reformulations of orthodox Protestantism” (388). Arnold delivered lectures on Emerson in 1883 and 1884 in the U.S., emphasizing “the influence that the American had had on his early thinking” (388). Emerson was a key person in the English literary world as well as an important figure of late nineteenth century for American culture.

Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849) was a novelist, poet, and critic whose effect on Pre-Raphaelites, especially Dante Gabriel Rossetti, was remarkable. His poem “The Raven” acquired a reputation as soon as it appeared in *Evening Miller* in January 1845, and it was published as an anthology in November. Poe won renown not only in the United States but all over Europe. Rossetti inverted Poe’s idea in his single most important literary work, “Blessed Damozel” (1846–70, 1871–81), which was rewritten and revised many times. He explained to Hall Caine (1853–1931), his companion, a novelist and critic: “I saw...that Poe had done the utmost it was possible to do with the grief of the lover on earth, and so I determined to reverse the conditions, and give

utterance to the yearning of the loved one in heaven" (284). In addition to literary work, inspired by Poe's vision, Rossetti produced several drawings for "The Raven" and two of Poe's other works: "The Sleeper" (1841) and "Ulalume" (1847). Through these works, his artistic style changed to become "linear and sharply articulated" (McGann). "That Poe should have been the occasion for this artistic change is both interesting and somewhat remarkable, for Poe is a key figure in the development of DGR's literary style as well" (McGann). This means that Poe infused new ideas into Rossetti's works, both literary and visual.

Robert Browning (1812–89), one of the greatest Victorian poets, also evaluated Poe's poems highly. His intended wife, Elizabeth Barrett Barrett (1806–61), referred to Browning and explained the British people's enthusiasm for "The Raven," in a letter to Poe in April 1846:

Your "Raven" has produced a sensation, a "fit horror," here in England. Some of my friends are taken by the fear of it and some by the music. I hear of persons haunted by the "Nevermore," and one acquaintance of mine who has the misfortune of possessing a "bust of Pallas" never can bear to look at it in the twilight. I think you will like to be told our great poet, Mr. Browning, the author of "Paracelsus," and the "Bells and Pomegranates," was struck much by the rhythm of that poem. (E. A. Poe Society)

This shows how Poe interested people in England. In the 1870s, the publication of *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe* (1874–75), edited by English biographer and editor John Henry Ingram (1842–1916), found an occasion of Poe's reappraisal in Europe as his reputation was distorted by the memoir of Rufus Wilmot Griswold (1815–57), an American anthologist, editor, and critic who was charge of Poe's posthumous writings. At that time, Poe's literary works were popular among English writers: Sir Edmund Gosse (1849–1928), Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909), Alfred Tennyson (1809–92), Joseph Conrad (1857–1924), Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930), and Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) (Miyanaga 524–25). Poe's unique works were well considered in Britain.



#### IV. Oscar Wilde's American Tour and Influence of American Renaissance

On 24 December 1881, Oscar Wilde left England for the United States and arrived in the Port of New York on 2 January 1882. When Wilde appeared wearing a green fur-trimmed ulster, a hat made from the same fabric as his coat, a large collared shirt with a sky-blue tie, and patent-leather shoes, a number of reporters who were eagerly looking forward to his arrival were astonished by his appearance. Before Wilde's arrival in both Britain and the United States, his American tour had attracted people's attention. Although Wilde had to face a barrage of questions from the press, he replied diplomatically. His interviews were in several of the New York papers. Wilde's famous line—"I have nothing to declare, except my genius"—was apparently spoken when he passed through New York customs, yet this should not be asserted as a fact. According to Sturgis, "There is, sadly, no evidence that Wilde told the New York customs officer . . . one of the most repeated of Wilde's sayings" (201).

Wilde's American tour was organized by the young impresario Richard D'Oyly Carte (1844–1901), who built the luxurious Savoy Theatre in London to present Gilbert and Sullivan's operas and promoted *Patience* in New York, which ended in success. Carte's plan was that if Wilde gave lectures on his idea of the aesthetic as "the apostle of Aestheticism," the play would reach more audiences, for "just as *Patience* had stimulated American interest in Wilde, so Wilde might stimulate American interest in *Patience*" (Sturgis 192). On 9 January 1882, he began his tour in New York with the lecture, "The English Renaissance of Art," and visited almost every city in the United States and some in Canada. The tour was extended for six months until October, as the lectures were largely successful. Since some people considered Wilde to be a fresh poet, Reginald Bunthorne in *Patience*, which was a satire aimed at aesthetes, was intrigued by Wilde's attire and epigram rather than his lectures. However, the sophisticated attended his lecture to listen to his talk. Hamilton described Wilde's style as follows:

Long melodious sentences, seldom involved, always clear, unfolded his meaning as graceful curves reveal a beauty figure. A vocabulary as wide as Swinburne's and well-nigh as musical, modelled on that rich and flower-

ing prose, which is as marvellous as Swinburne's verse—how could such a style be dull? Yet it was never obscure. Always the first clear principle of chaste English, simplicity, and the careful attribute of clean thought, exactness, characterised his style...he certainly does not lack fluency, width, and felicity of style. (157)

It could be said that he was well worth not only seeing but also listening to as an aesthete. This is why Wilde's American tour found considerable success.

During the tour, Wilde called on Walt Whitman twice at his brick-built house in Comden. The first visit was on 18 January 1882. The sixty-year-old "old rough" (as Whitman called himself) and the eager young aesthete had a happy meeting and an earnest talk about poetry, arts, and people. Wilde told of "how his mother had read to him from Whitman's work, and how he had taken Whitman's books with him on his Oxford 'rambles'" (Sturgis 215). Actually, Lady Wilde had purchased Whitman's poem in 1868. When Wilde revisited Whitman on 10 May, their relationship became more complex. At the parting, they embraced each other, and Wilde boasted, "I have the kiss of Walt Whitman still on my lips" (Sturgis 253).

While he was in Canada, Wilde expressed his opinion in an interview that appeared in the Halifax *Morning Herald* of 10 October 1882 as follows: "Poe was the greatest American poet, and that Walt Whitman, if not a poet is a man who sounds a strong note, perhaps neither prose nor poetry, but something of his own that is grand, original and unique" (qtd. Hamilton 167). It is clear that Whitman's influence on Wilde was enormous, as he had been acquiring a close acquaintance with his literary hero's works since his youth.

Concerning the impact of Edgar Allan Poe, "The Raven" was highly important to Wilde. Like Poe, Wilde believed that words' "musical value" was greater than their "intellectual value." His poem "The Sphinx," which took almost twenty years to complete, is dominated by strange and sonorous words similar to Poe's "The Raven" (Sturgis 282). Bristow points out the elaborate prosody of "The Sphinx", which features complex internal rhymes, echoes "The Raven" (83).

"Boston Aestheticism Versus Oscar Wilde," a cartoon in which Wilde offers a sunflower to an old Bostonian lady, appeared in the New York *Daily Graph-*

ic on 19 January 1882, with a caption stating “[T]he Old Lady of Beacon Hill—‘No, Sir. Shoddy New York may receive you with open arms but we have an Aestheticism of our own.’” As the satire cartoon suggests, Bostonians actually had their own sophisticated culture: Aestheticism. As Freedman noted, “Americans had long devoted themselves to their cultural improvement with an assiduousness that surpassed that of the British” (386). This means that American Aestheticism existed before Wilde came to the United States. He took it for granted that he introduced and brought Aestheticism to America despite having been influenced by American writers such as Emerson, Whitman, and Poe since his adolescence. It could be said that Wilde’s idea of Aestheticism was partly attributed to American writers.

## V. British Aestheticism for American Writers

The attitudes of Henry James (1843–1916) represent contemporary Americans’ response to the British Aesthetic movements. His reaction to Aestheticism was ambiguous. These ambivalent attitudes were expressed in his novels, in which he paid much attention to the Europe of artistic innovation as well as the Europe of the past. He cast a cynical eye over Europe’s civilization, which he felt preyed on American’s innocence, but James’s view on the radical Bohemian movement of art for its own sake in London instead reflects his positive attitude. His writings, such as reviews, appeared to be more negative. James, for example, called Walter Pater “faint, pale, embarrassed, exquisite” (*Letters* 492). More than anything, his dislike for Oscar Wilde was often indicated in his comparison of playwrights. James gave up writing plays after his *Guy Domville* was replaced by Wilde’s *Importance of Being Earnest* at Saint James Theatre in 1895, about which he expressed dissatisfaction. However, James’s enigmatic response to aesthetic Europe can be seen in his writing as an American writer compared with Oscar Wilde.

James has frequently been contrasted with Wilde by critics. Both were regarded as rivals, novelists, critics, and playwrights in Victorian London. Still, it cannot be dismissed that James had an American background, unlike Wilde. As Wendy Graham pointed out in *Henry James and British Aestheticism*, it is true that James’s aesthetic convictions were shaped by John Ruskin (1819–1900), one of the most important and influential intellectuals in England

during the Victoria era, to whom James was introduced in 1869 by Charles Eliot Norton (1827–1908), a Ruskinian American scholar (266). In addition, James made his “choice” to leave the United States for Europe in 1876, when most Americans appreciated new technologies such as telephones and typewriters. James discussed the difficulty of being a writer as an American. It is well known that he counted “the absent things in American life,” such as literature, novels, museums, and pictures (*Hawthorne* 44). This reflection led him to settle in London as he declared, “My choice is the Old Word—my choice, my need, my life” (*Complete Notebooks* 214). However, this choice does not indicate his rejection of his American heritage. A letter to his brother William James (1842–1910), who expounded on American pragmatism and had a considerable influence over him, shows James’s sense of belonging:

I aspire to write in such a way that it would be impossible to the outsider to say whether I am at a given moment an American writing about England or an Englishman writing about America (dealing as I do with both countries), and so far from being ashamed of such an ambiguity I should be exceedingly proud of it, for it would be highly civilized. (244; *Letters* vol. 3)

James recognized his own style as a “cosmopolitan” writer formed by American culture rather than the average Briton of culture.

James initially showed belittling attitudes toward the works of Pre-Raphaelite painters. His response is associated with scandals among the Oxford aesthetes in the 1860s and 70s. In 1866, Swinburne published *Poems and Ballads*, sensational poems in which he wrote about many taboo topics in the Victorian era, such as homosexuality and sadomasochism. In 1873, Simeon Solomon, whose paintings were favored by the Pre-Raphaelites, was arrested for sodomy. In the same year, Walter Pater published *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, which is known as the “golden book” of the British Aesthetic movement, as expressed by Wilde. Although this book focused on Italian Renaissance art, it was perceived as a challenge by Solomon’s friend Pater against Victorian conventional codes of morality and sexuality. In 1875, James suggested that their pictures always seemed as if “they needed to have a learned

sonnet, of an explanatory sort, affixed to the frame" (*Essays on Art and Drama* 69). James claimed that Burne-Jones's works were not paintings, but something painted "with a pen." It has also been frequently cited that James charged Swinburne: "What we have called the absence of the moral sense of the writer of these essays is, however their most disagreeable feature" (*Literary Criticism* 1282).

However, it cannot be concluded that James disparaged British Aestheticism. In "The Picture Season in London" (1877), James even praised the works of the Pre-Raphaelite, describing them as follows:

[O]ne of culture, of reflection, of intellectual luxury, of aesthetic refinement, of people who look at the world and at life not directly, as it were, and in all its accidental reality but in the reflection and ornamental portrait of it furnished by art itself in other manifestations; finished by literature, by poetry, by history by erudition. (*Essays on Art and Drama* 257)

James' negative view of European Aestheticism was not only focused on the gross deviations that triggered a commotion in British society. He also felt alienation there as an American. James described British society as an association of "dreary, ill-favored men, with local conversations and dirty hands" (*Letters* 217). However, he later confessed that he did not attend Pater's funeral because he seemed to "have no place" in the "compact Oxfordism of it all" (*Letters* 483; vol. 3).

His attitude changed gradually. James even tried to defend the critics' charges against the Pre-Raphaelites in the 80s. He wrote a review of *The Tree of Forgiveness* in 1882 to reconstruct the unfair estimation of Burne-Jones's *Phyllis and Demophoon*, stating that "the subject was difficult" and "Mr. Burne-Jones has had to content himself with making it lovely" so that it seemed unnatural and was unfortunately misunderstood (*Essays on Art and Drama* 346). James feared the influence of a series of scandals of the British aesthetes, but he appreciated their significant innovations in art. He shared his view on Aestheticism with them, as shown in his writings. For example, in *The Ambassadors* (1903), the protagonist Lambert Strether declares that "to live all

you can” is the same words as the protagonist in Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), who says, “Live! Live the wonderful life that is in you. Let nothing be lost upon you.”

As long as the expression was energetic and full of liveliness, Aestheticism was agreeable for James. However, when art suggested a decadent and corrupt air, he saw it as unfavorable and harmful to others. James used this contrast as the art of fiction. In *The Portrait of a Lady* (1880–81), Gilbert Osmond and Madame Merle represent Europeans, who are well versed and knowledgeable about art but show their evil sides, while the heroine Isabel Archer, representing Americans, is emphasized as honest and innocent. However, this comparison is not overly explicit, for both Osmond and Merle are American by birth, and Isabel finally personifies her dignity through her experience in Europe. While contrasting the European and American cultures, James ultimately shows the rich complexities. He finds beauty as the innocence of America meets the experience of Europe, and as the aesthetic is nurtured in Europe.

## VI. Conclusion

When Oscar Wilde visited the United States for his lectures, both European and American people thought that the Aesthetic movement in England was introduced to the American people. However, British Aestheticism was influenced by the fruit of the American Renaissance. This paper has shed light on the American point of view about the Aesthetic movement, which has been described with a focus on the British impact on American culture. The impact of Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Edgar Allan Poe is immense, though neither American writers nor British aesthetes clearly realized the Americans’ significant role in the progress of Aestheticism. British Aestheticism is an intellectual ferment of thoughts that can be traced back retrospectively to the American Renaissance. Considering that the American Renaissance was also achieved through struggling with European knowledge and traditions, the circulation has been improved by chance encounters between the countries.

These cross-cultural aspects of the Aesthetic movement are expressed in the

novels of Henry James, the American–British writer. As he was fascinated by its profound complexities, full of both experience and innocence, British Aestheticism was not born out of British culture. The encounters between British and American writers have been developing it since before America’s independence from Britain. This standpoint also suggests the influence of other contributors, such as Native Americans and other immigrants in the United States, which will be the next subject to be discussed.

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