

A Note on *Cousin Cinderella* and *Roderick Hudson*

Misao Dean

Cousin Cinderella (1908) is one of Sara Jeannette Duncan's most conspicuously "Jamesian" novels. The plot is an "international" one in which two Canadians visit London in an attempt to establish some kind of relationship with Old World culture. Thomas Tausky notes a further similarity in the "fine, even Jamesian"¹ characterisation of the heroine, Mary Trent. But *Cousin Cinderella* is not simply a general recreation of a Jamesian context; several points establish the relationship of *Cousin Cinderella* to a specific novel by Henry James: *Roderick Hudson* (1876). Duncan uses the points of reference provided by *Roderick Hudson* to delineate the differences between the U.S. and Canada, and their relationships to European culture.

The plot of *Cousin Cinderella* resembles that of *Roderick Hudson*, with some important differences. In James's novel, a philanthropist offers a young American sculptor a chance to visit Europe. Once there, Roderick Hudson falls in love with a young woman who seems to him to embody the influence of European culture, and he abandons the American fiancée who followed him to Europe. After the collapse of his romance, Hudson dies in an incident which may be accident or suicide. In *Cousin Cinderella*, a young Canadian and his sister are sent to see something of England as part of their education—and also to show the Old Country what the Colonies can produce. Graham Trent falls in love with a woman whose person and circumstances seem to symbolise both the past greatness and the present impoverishment of Europe. But in *Cousin Cinderella* the collapse of the Canadian romance with Europe does not signal the death of the hero; Graham's sister, Mary, falls in love with the British Lord Doleford, and their subsequent engagement signals a new kind of union between the New World and the Old.

¹ Thomas Tausky, *Sara Jeannette Duncan, Novelist of Empire* (Port Credit, Ontario: P.D. Meaney, 1980) 138.

In both novels, the main male characters represent aspects of their home nationalities: the male protagonists are named for important river systems at home, Hudson and Trent. In both novels, the hero endures a painful romance, which has a major influence on his life, and that attachment is intimately bound up with his interest in European culture. James' heroine, Mary Garland, shares her first name with Duncan's narrator, Mary Trent. In both *Roderick Hudson* and *Cousin Cinderella*, the Mary characters stand in quiet opposition to the hero's romance with Europe.

The Mary characters are also linked in more subtle ways. In both novels the "finishing" of their education is discussed in similar terms. Rowland Mallet suggests that Mary Garland return to the United States to "finish" her character: "If America has made you thus far, why not let America finish you?"² Mary Trent recalls her father's similar reaction to her desire to be "finished" abroad:

There was a time when I wanted enormously to be finished in New York, but father said no, I wasn't an American—and now I am just as glad. It is simpler to be a natural product and to finish where you begin, I think.³

The Marys are associated with the simpler moral choices of their home societies, and they struggle to maintain a New World moral perspective, while the male characters are seduced by the cultural riches of Europe.

Duncan was surely aware of the resemblances between her novel and *Roderick Hudson*. She was an avid reader of James and compares her heroine, Mamie Wick, to Daisy Miller in the first pages of *An American Girl in London* (1891). She reviewed works by James in her role as a journalist. She sent a copy of *His Honor, and a Lady* to James, and she received a critical appraisal from the "master" in return. Contemporary reviewers often refer to James in their comments on Duncan's work.

If the resemblances between *Cousin Cinderella* and *Roderick Hudson* are intentional, then they bear upon one of the important themes of the novel—the difference between the American and the Canadian experience of Europe. Both Roderick Hudson and Graham Trent partially devalue their own culture and their own gifts in their emulation of European values;

² Henry James, *Roderick Hudson* (1908; rpt. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980) 356.

³ Sara Jeannette Duncan, *Cousin Cinderella* (New York: Grosset, 1908) 2-3.

they act as colonials in the heart of empire. When Europe rejects the American, he has nothing to fall back on because he has deprived himself of his own strengths. But in *Cousin Cinderella* Europe learns from Canada, for when Barbara Pavisay rejects Graham Trent she does so, in effect, for his own good. The representatives of England realize that the kind of union between Canada and the Empire that would require Canadians to give up their own strengths is false. But the union between Canada and England may still take place through the genuine love of Mary Trent and Barbara's brother, Peter Doleford. The Pavisay family fortunes are saved by the Trent money, but without the loss of Trent independence and initiative. Mary Trent, who has struggled to maintain the perspective of Minnebiac ("a small town in Ontario with the accent on the 'bi'") offers Lord Doleford the chance to utilize the gifts of his British heritage in the backwoods of Canada. Their union underlines the message of the novel—that the Empire must be held together by sentiment rather than by submission.

Queen's University