Reading Thoreau's Journal is both exhilarating and mind-numbing. Stamina is only one of the reader’s problems--Stephen Crane, commenting on Tolstoy’s War and Peace said, "the book goes on and on, like Texas;" so too Thoreau's Journal. Beyond length the Journal has, explains Cameron, a "radical generic strangeness (47)." Thoreau was attempting to "write nature." His Journal sought to understand nature on its own terms, not to explicate it but to be its witness, its beholder and its spokesman. Hence Thoreau's radical writing experiment sought to explore and express nature's inhuman features keeping the human observer bracketed and removed from the scene. "The Journal's so-called first person is not the teller of its own story, but is rather witness to a story of preemptive importance" (91). For Cameron Thoreau is the teller of nature's relation to itself.

Cameron states candidly that the sheer mass of the Journal makes necessary a selection of representative passages. While one might agree that "writing nature" an important, even major theme of the Journal it is by no means the center of gravity of Thoreau's reflections. Cameron does not convincingly establish "writing nature" preeminence. She might have made such a case but her complex, convoluted, compressed prose sabotaged her. While her claims are interesting and provoking, they lack persuasive argument and evidence. Nonetheless, what has been clearly and convincingly established is that Thoreau's Journal deserves to be scrutinized independently and separately. Whether it is "writing nature" or writing generally, the studies by Cameron and Burkett-Steward point to a gold mine waiting in Thoreau's Journal.

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The Sweetest Impression of Life: The James Family and Italy.

At the very outset of these scholarly and rhapsodic essays one is quickly struck by Henry James's description of Italy during his first visit there in the autumn of 1869. He portrays the Italian peninsula as "a beautiful disheveled nymph." Henry senior must have been proud! The phrase and its total cultural context seems to fulfill well that early wish expressed by him in a letter to Emerson in the summer of 1849 to provide his children with a "sensuous education" abroad.

It is well known how Henry pursued this "disheveled nymph" in the familiar haunts of Venice, Verona, Florence, Rome and the Italian countryside. It was here that he tasted the dolce vita and found the palimpsest for his art. Yet the reality of Henry's
art was found more in Italy's past and the artistic effort it inspired than in its present. Italy was and is the great metaphor of art, but art itself posed as the real and true symbol signifying the human condition in all its joys and sorrows. Orchestrated in different tones and nuances this is a theme that runs throughout this book from the first essay by Leon Edel to the last by Agostino Lombardo. The book illustrates the impact upon the James family of Italian travel and experience, history and culture. Yet through it all William remained more thoroughly American and Henry more European in sympathy.

The title of this book, *The Sweetest Impression of Life*, conveys the marked affective effect (an experience recognized equally by William and Henry as full and fertile) of Italy upon feeling, sense and mind. The book, edited by James Tuttleton, Professor of English and Associate Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Science at New York University, and Agostino Lombardo, Professor and Chairman of the Department of English at the University of Rome "La Sapienza," resulted from a symposium originally convened at New York University. Over a dozen distinguished scholars contributed individual essays on a variety of topics.

While this book does sustain an attention to Henry James and his particular relationship with Italy, it does much more than that. It is really a book not about an individual, but about a family -- the James family -- especially the brothers William and Henry, and their sister and father, Alice and Henry. It is about their ambivalent love affair with Italy. As such it provides absorbing and alluring reading about them and Italy as the ground of their experience and influence. It reveals the power of a sense of place over a body of work, as well as its effect upon temperament, that characteristic whose affinity with one's philosophical perspective William so often stressed. It shows equally a similar effect upon temperament for an artistic perspective.

Penetrating the essays is the attraction of Italy and the pregnant power of the picturesque. This builds a natural bridge between William and Henry in their exploration of perception and cognition in their individual roles as traveler, philosopher, psychologist, novelist, essayist and artist. As Bonney MacDonald illustrates in her piece on "The Force of Revelation," there is a deep common sense of the visual and its power to reveal in the paradoxically similar writings of William's phenomenological descriptions of perception and cognition and Henry's perceptually sensitive novels, and travel essays in particular. William's accounts of perception and consciousness and Henry's narrative accounts both suggest that "knowledge about" an object (a cathedral or Venetian place, for example) begin in a "receptive moment of visual awe," in which what is at hand simultaneously discloses itself. In their own ways and by their own paths they both support the "referential" and "intentional" dimension of con-
sciousness as it emerges from tactile and visual experience. This is equally true of the experience of the individual unities of paintings and places, as well as of the total physical and visual "impression" of complex and complete Italy itself. Henry manifests this sense of the picturesque in a letter to William from Rome. He writes that he has realized for the first time what it is. It is "simply the presentation of a picture, self-informed and complete."

The work of both William and Henry was joined by close but different ties to Italy. Pragmatism enjoyed a significant influence in Italy. William, as well, admired Papini's description of it as a method being "like a corridor in a hotel, from which a hundred doors open into a hundred chambers," all with their own actualities and possibilities. For Henry, as Lombardo affirms, the reality of Italy lay in the drama of the artist, which ultimately lay in the drama, destiny and truth of the human condition. Italy was sunny but cast the shadow of darkness. It was bright but dank with the tide of time. It held forth the bitter-sweet taste of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Jamesian art was a representation of life and beauty and joy -- often of Italy -- but always in the shadow, the human shadow, of sorrow, mystery and death. It is no wonder then that brother Henry so appreciated William's appropriate inscription on his sister Alice's urn. It was a line from Dante: "ed essa da martiro e da essilio venne a questa pace" (from martyrdom and exile she came to this peace).

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William James, Public Philosopher, by George Cotkin. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990. xii+218. $32.50.

Cotkin's volume is a vibrant, valuable study of James the man and thinker, America's public philosopher, par excellence:

The impetus behind this book, in addition to seeking to bathe itself and its reader in the warm light of James's personality and ideas, is to return James to the context of his life and time . . . . This book is an avowedly contextualist reading of James and his philosophy. It is predicated on the assumption that the personal, philosophical, and historical are emphatically connected. (2)

Cotkin's James is a late nineteenth-century thinker who responded to an agenda of American problems and issues:

I argue that James's life and thought may be fully comprehended, and the grand contours of this great thinker heartily embraced, by demonstrating the cen-