



Beloved Boy: Letters to Hendrik C. Andersen, 1899-1915

Henry James, Hendrik Christian Andersen, Millicent Bell, Rosella Mamoli Zorzi, Elena di Majo

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Already the subject of articles in the *International Herald Tribune* and the *London Times*, *Beloved Boy* is a remarkable collection of letters tracing Henry James's fascination with and enduring devotion to a young Norwegian-American artist. James was already fifty-six when, visiting Rome in 1899, he was introduced to the twenty-seven--year-old Hendrik Andersen. In an uncanny instance of life imitating art, Andersen bore an unmistakable resemblance to the title character of James's 1875 novel *Roderick Hudson*?a figure who, like Andersen, was a young sculptor venturing into life as an expatriate in Italy. Although his initial meeting with Andersen was brief, James was deeply moved by the young man. He wrote to Andersen almost immediately after his return to his Sussex home, and remained a faithful correspondent until his own death in 1915.

The two men met on only seven occasions, and never for more than a few days, so their friendship was almost entirely epistolary. The letters assembled here, nearly half of which are previously unpublished, exhibit a voice decidedly more vulnerable than that which we usually associate with James. They also shed new light on the writer's homoerotic leanings, as he approaches Andersen with a passion, as well as a tenderness, typically reserved for a lover.

Even greater than his feelings for Andersen, however, was James's devotion to art. Despite an initially positive opinion, James was forced to reassess Andersen's work, which became increasingly grandiose—exhibiting "megalomania," as James bluntly diagnosed it. The sculptor's tendency toward monumentality, including plans for a utopian "World City," were at odds with James's commitment to observing reality in all its complexity and imperfection. Despite this, James's affection for his friend never wavered; his letters remained occasions to celebrate the youth and beauty personified for him by Andersen.



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