The generous acknowledgments of William G. Holzberger, textual editor of this fifth critical edition volume of *The Works of George Santayana* indicate the vast historical and institutional scope of the project. As Mr. Holzberger reflects, Santayana’s letters officially became the responsibility of the Santayana Edition in 1988 while it was based at Texas A&M University. Select and condensed versions of these letters previously appeared in print under the editorship of Daniel Cory in *The Letters of George Santayana* (Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1955), and *Santayana, The Later Years: A Portrait With Letters* (George Braziller, 1963). In 1998 the Edition moved with general editor, Herman J. Saatkamp Jr. to Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis where it today resides alongside the C.S. Peirce Edition, and Frederick Douglass Papers. The two Books of Volume Five that are the subject of the present review (One and Three) chronicle two very different, yet not discontinuous periods of Santayana’s life.

Each Critical Edition *Letters* contains copious textual notes, chronologies and addresses, manuscript locations, lists of recipients, unlocated letters, and most helpful of all, detailed textual commentaries directed at the periods in question. The editors describe the volumes of the Edition as “unmodernized,” specifying that they retain “original and idiosyncratic punctuation, spelling, capitalization, and word division in order to reflect the full intent of the author as well as the initial texture of the work” (368). In other words, the only thing altered about the letters as they are presented is that they are typed. Santayana hand-wrote everything, and is known for his immaculate script, which the volumes display handsomely in endpapers containing facsimiles of original letters contained within each collection.

Book One, spanning the years 1868 to 1909, opens with an endearing letter from a precocious Santayana of around age six, writing from Avila, Spain to his half-sisters Susana and Josephine. The letter is precious as memento of Santayana’s early Spanish youth where he resided until eight years of age. The second, and beginning chronology of letters is dated fourteen years later, during which time Santayana had moved to the United States, learned English, was reading Dante in...
Italian, and had just graduated from the Boston Public Latin School with his classmate, John Galen Howard. The letters that follow these opening two refract the rainbow that is Santayana’s correspondences, ranging from personal to professional, speculative to technical, and business to pleasure, each correspondent seeming to fit neatly into the writer’s masterful, panoptic, and imaginative understanding of the world.

Some of the letters are of interest for their providing glimpses of what might have been in Santayana’s published life. Santayana writes, for example, to Anna Boynton Thompson between November of 1900 and December 1901 of his plans, never fulfilled, to publish a translation of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. Elsewhere we get hints of the considerable labor that went into some of his early, more scholarly publications, as when he writes the publishers of his first book of prose (and to this day the most widely recognized book of Santayana’s), *The Sense of Beauty*: “This book has been so long in preparation that I am eager to have the last uncertainties in regard to it over, and to feel that it is, as far as I am concerned, a thing of the past.” (1: 143)

Santayana sometimes provides pithy characterizations of central philosophic concepts in his correspondence that are more revealing than his formal writings, as when he discusses his materialism in a letter to Benjamin Apthorp Gould Fuller, dated December 3, 1904: “The material world is a fiction; but every other world is a nightmare.” (1: 282) Or when he refers to “essence” in a letter to Henry Ward Abbot on January 16, 1887, many years before he formally introduced the doctrine in print: “the hapless word essence—bastard in its birth, overburdened during its life, and dishonored in its grave—seems to have made my sayings still more objectionable.” (1: 44).

In a letter dated June 25, 1905 to Robert Calverley Trevelyan Santayana provides what is likely as clear an account of his abandonment of poetry as has appeared: “The truth is that I have fallen out of love with poetry and feel a kind of incompetence in speaking of it, as one might in the case of a sweetheart that had jilted one.” (1:308) Confessional as this letter is, it is typical of most of Santayana’s correspondence, indeed, of most of his writing, in its tendency to capture everything in the perfect metaphor or analogy. Santayana’s preeminence in this area is incontestable, but it has a frustrating side, one that many have interpreted as a cold aloofness in his manner. One is suspicious that somewhere behind the metaphors lies the “real” Santayana, the *person*, just as somewhere behind his world of instantiated essences the dark forces of matter are at work.

It is for this reason that, by far, the most interesting letter in Book One is a vitriolic sally to Santayana’s teacher and mentor, William James dated “Easter,” 1900, which first appeared in Daniel Cory’s *The Letters of George Santayana*. The letter contains the following angry outburst from Santayana:

> You tax me several times with impertinence and superior airs. I wonder if you realize the years of suppressed irritation which I have past in the midst of an unintelligible sanctimonious and often disingenuous Protestantism, which is thoroughly alien and repulsive to me, and the need I have of joining hands with something far away from it and far above it. (1: 212)

This letter was precipitated by another that James had written to George Herbert Palmer on April 2nd of the same year which was, perhaps tactlessly, sent to Santayana by Palmer upon James’s own request. James’s letter to Palmer contains the following oft-cited assessment of Santayana:
[Having read Santayana’s *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (1900)] I now understand Santayana, the man. I never understood him before. But what a perfection of rottenness in a philosophy! I don’t think I ever knew the anti-realistic view to be propounded with so impudently superior an air. It is refreshing to see a representative of moribund Latinity rise up and administer such a reproof to us barbarians in the hour of our triumph. (*The Letters of William James: Edited by His Son, Henry James*, 2 Vols. Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1920. Volume II: 122-123).

The “perfection of rottenness” rebuke here is more often discussed by scholars than the revealing “moribund Latinity” description that follows. Being a Spaniard, probably a homosexual, a poet, and a champion of dead Ancient and “Latin” wisdom—James thought Santayana largely a Scholastic in modern guise—Santayana was not an easy fit for the racial, sexual, and intellectual narrowness of early twentieth century Boston. His precarious relationship with William James is evidence of this fact. The seven letters addressed to James leading up to the 1900 exchange are warmly headed “Dear Professor James,” the last appearing in 1888. Whatever may have happened to Santayana’s feelings toward James in the twelve-year interim the 1900 letter is angrily addressed “Dear James,” and the seven following that appear up to 1908, just two years before James’s death, are headed with the strangely formal: “Dear Mr. James.” Right or wrong, overly sensitive or not, Santayana, like most humans, was selectively aloof in his personal relations.

The general run of xenophobia he encountered at Harvard, especially in his dealings with its President, Charles William Eliot was undoubtedly a major source of Santayana’s distancing attitude toward America. Eliot had this to say of Santayana in a letter to his colleague Hugo Münsterberg in 1898:

> I suppose the fact to be that I have doubts and fears about a man so abnormal as Dr. Santayana. The withdrawn, contemplative man who takes no part in the everyday work of the institution, or of the world, seems to me to be a person of very uncertain future value. He does not dig ditches, or lay bricks, or write school-books; his product is not of the ordinary useful though humble, kind. What will it be? It may be something of the highest utility; but on the other hand, it may be something futile, or even harmful, because unnatural and untimely.


This letter is deeply disturbing, revealing at once the narrow philistinism and prejudice of a man many consider to be the father of the modern American university. Receptions such as those of James and Eliot help explain the occasional note of resentment in Santayana’s assessments of America, but they do not justify attributing to his personality a cold aloofness. Santayana was heavily involved in social life, official clubs and administrative affairs during the thirty years he was associated with Harvard (1882-1912—see pages 35, and 102-3 of John McCormick’s *George Santayana: A Biography*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987). From the letters of this period there is no indication that this involvement was not, initially at least, an extension of the more general pleasures he took from the academic or first half of his life. This is evident in a letter dated December 1, 1892 to William Cameron Forbes, where Santayana reports a raise in salary and expresses cheer at the approach of his twenty-ninth birthday. A footnote to the letter indicates that Santayana gave a dinner for the occasion, inviting seven of his friends including Warwick Potter and Boylstone Beal. Several years later Santayana would write to Daniel Cory that the occasion was “one of the pleasantest memories of my life” (1: 124). The letters thus show that the negative views
of Harvard and related aspects of American life in Santayana’s later correspondence and autobiography are more a function of major life changes, personal fallings out and the selective attention of hindsight than of any dispositional inability to obtain fulfillment from his academic life and associations, as was the assumption of Eliot in the letter cited above.

Book Three of *The Letters* chronicles the early-to-middle years (1921-1927) Santayana spent in relative freedom from the prejudices he encountered and perceived in America. Having retired from Harvard in 1912, the moment he received inheritance enough from his mother’s death to do so, Santayana spent the rest of his life (until he died in 1952) in Europe, partly in England with respites in France and Spain, but mostly in Rome. The period chronicled in the third book of Volume Five portrays Santayana from age 57 to 64, years that he produced some of his most memorable and impressive works, including *Soliloquies in England* (1922), *Scepticism and Animal Faith* (1923), *Dialogues in Limbo* (1926), and *The Realm of Essence* (1927). This output is the more remarkable for the fact that it came at a time when Santayana was quite nomadic, and searching for a place to settle for the rest of his life. During this period he wintered in various hotels in Rome, and spent summers with his friend and frequent correspondent Charles Augustus Strong in Paris at the *Avenue de l’Observatoire* apartment. There is an original photo of the apartment in the opening pages of Book Three. He would also stay in Ávila with his sisters at the house of another of his correspondents, Celedonio Sastre, husband to Susana.

Two significant features of this period in Santayana’s life are his encounters with Italian fascism, and the resolution of a probable love attachment that he nurtured for the better part of 40 years. Living much of this time in Italy, Santayana witnessed first hand the early rise of Benito Mussolini. The “fascisti” are everywhere “marching about” Santayana remarks in two letters from 1921, one year before Mussolini’s March on Rome and being named Prime Minister by the King, yet Santayana remains undisturbed by it all. By 1923, when the social consequences of Mussolini’s campaign were unavoidable, nullifying various civil liberties and outlawing political parties, Santayana was unmoved:

As to politics, I watch what happens mainly with an eye to discerning, if possible, whether the great international socialistic revolution is coming or not. Russia and Italy now make me incline to believe that the cataclysm will not occur, and that things will go on very much as usual, with a change of personnel and of catch words. Fascism is the most significant thing now… Much of what people complain of in the world after the war does not worry me; on the contrary, if only the “industrial situation” could remain always bad, and the population could diminish, especially in the manufacturing towns, I should think it a good thing. There are now too many people, too many things, and too many conferences and elections. (3: 137)

That Mussolini made the trains run on time and restored order to Italy through various works projects was for Santayana “good” enough to offset what he viewed to be the disorderliness of socialism (see Santayana’s letter to Corliss Lamont, December 8, 1950). It is of course disturbing that Santayana saw the social diminishment of the population as a good thing, but his chilling disdain for “too many” people, things, conferences and elections has the same biographical source as his more general distaste for America. Santayana’s inability to see fascism as the evil that his American and English contemporaries saw it as is another consequence of the “suppressed irritation” with the “sanctimonious Protestantism” he endured while living in America that produced
in him a disgust for liberal politics (see especially “The Irony of Liberalism” in *Soliloqueys in England*).

There is a complimentary letter in Book Three to an early correspondence from Book One on a somewhat mysterious, but obviously deep and important relationship of Santayana’s: that between he and John Francis Stanley, second earl Russell (older brother of Bertrand). At the age of twenty-three we find Santayana’s suggestive, but ambiguous confession to Henry Ward Abbot: “Lord Russell…has been a godsend to me. I don’t tell you anything about my adventures with him because I have to maintain with you my reputation as a philosopher, and in this respect I have quite lost my reason…I will make a full confession of my fall—from grace and self-control I mean…” (1: 62). One can read what one wishes into “adventures with him,” “lost my reason,” and “fall from grace and self-control,” but the case is made more fascinating by the following letter many years later, at the age of 60, where Santayana writes to Russell himself:

> I don’t believe that anything has really happened to alter our relations to one another which were always tacit and expressed in conduct rather than words. You now say more than you ever said to me, even in our young days, about being “attached to me”; you must have been, in some way which in spite of my cold-blooded psychology I don’t pretend to understand. In that case, why drop me now, when certainly there has been no change on my side except that involved in passing from twenty to sixty? (3: 152)

Interesting, Santayana confesses here to Russell, despite his “cold-blooded psychology,” that he fails to understand their attachment. Different episodes, chronicled in both *The Letters* and Santayana’s autobiographical *Persons and Places* indicate that Santayana was uncharacteristically willing to subject himself to different humiliations from Russell, who was outwardly arrogant and indifferent much of the time towards him. Such behavior lends an element of self-awareness to the otherwise almost scientific diagnoses of love and affection in *Reason in Society*: “Love is indeed much less exacting than it thinks itself. Nine-tenths of its cause are in the lover, for one-tenth that may be in the object.” (Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1955 One-Volume Edition).

I have singled out the above letters in part to challenge something Mr. Holzberger suggests in the introduction to Book One, where he writes “…though remarkably interesting and informative, the letters make no sensational revelations about Santayana’s personal life.” (1). In this tabloid culture, where the frenzy for “sensational revelations” is constant and deafening, one must certainly be wary of apppellations for deceased figures like Santayana that smack of gossip, or of fodder for a *People Magazine* exposé. But surely the very act of reading a deceased philosopher’s correspondence confesses an underlying voyeurism not unlike that in those who delight in tabloid reports. Mr. Holzberger is right when he says: “…Santayana’s letters reveal various characteristics of his personality, how a self-portrait emerges from the letters.” (ibid.) But I wonder whether he is not shortchanging the *human* side of Santayana when he provides the following characterization of him: “…someone who was a profound thinker, gifted artist, and sophisticated man of the world.” Such superlatives are true enough of Santayana as chisels on his tombstone, but I find that they fall far short of the impressions that emerge from the rich collection of letters one encounters in Volume Five of the Critical Edition. Certainly one reads Santayana’s letters with an interest in finding philosophical confirmation, evidence of his affairs during crucial publishing stages of his life, or a further means of explaining his elusive dignity. But then one encounters the bawdy Santayana who writes to William Morton Fullerton of the six “Amatory Attitudes”: “(1) Wet dreams and the
fidgets; (2) Mastibation; (3) Paiderastia; (4) Whoring; (5) Seductions or a mistress; and (6) Matrimony” (1: 92), and proceeds to provide a side-splitting analysis of each according to its “merits.” This is the Santayana who wrote eleven cartoons at Harvard for The Lampoon, and who played Maid Marion in an 1884 production of Robin Hood. And there is the tender, gossipy Santayana who took the role of nurturer, advice-giver, or simply friend both in his early letters to Harvard mates Henry Ward Abbot, Bolyston Adams Beal, and William Morton Fullerton and in his later letters to C.A. Strong and Daniel Cory. These are the different Santayana’s that round out his humanity and for which we owe thanks to editors William Holzberger and Herman Saatkamp. The publication of these Critical Editions is an occasion of celebration to the scholar or enthusiast of Santayana as they offer to both a comprehensive, definitive presentation of his correspondences.

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