Introduction

LEONARDO BUONOMO
University of Trieste

While James's hyper-active eye and his abundant literary use of painting have been the subject of extensive and probing scholarship, his attention to sound, and indeed his general relationship with it, have been only sporadically examined. And yet even a cursory glance at James's long career reveals his continuing alertness and discriminating responsiveness to auditory experience. From his early tales of the 1860s to his three massive novels of the first decade of the twentieth century, from his first travel pieces to *The American Scene* and *Italian Hours*, and throughout his criticism, autobiographies, notebooks, correspondence and unfinished work, James recorded the constantly changing soundscapes of the United States and Europe and left significant evidence of his interest in and commitment to the aural dimension of his writing. No less than his eye, James's ear captured the minutest nuances of social, cultural, local and national difference and adaptation, together with the impact of technology, and the role of music as elements of setting or delineators of character.

Although James downplayed his appreciation of music, he did use musical performance to great effect on more than one occasion, most memorably, perhaps, in the first appearance of Madame Merle in *The Portrait of a Lady*. Many years later, looking back at his childhood in *A Small Boy and Others*, he

mentioned with obvious fondness, as part of his formative experience, his early exposure to opera. He clearly delighted in listing the singers' exotic names: Angiolina Bosio, Cesare Badiali, Giorgio Ronconi, and Balbina Steffanone. Nor could he ever forget the excitement of attending a recital of the then child prodigy Adelina Patti at Castle Garden (*SB* 98). Not only did those names evoke the performance of music, but they *were* music because of their sound, to which James had become increasingly attuned in his late years, as a result of dictating his works. And it was largely as sound that the elderly James also rediscovered, and paid homage to, the language of two American authors he had previously dismissed, Edgar Allan Poe and Walt Whitman.

As Pierre Walker aptly reminds us in the opening essay of this volume, music was a not insignificant part of James's cultural formation as well as his social life, and he was capable, on occasion, of recognizing and responding to its finest expressions. Evidence of James's knowledge of music and, in particular, of the cultural associations pertaining to the production of certain composers, can be found, Walker notes, in his first novel *Watch and Ward* and in such major works as *The American*, *The Bostonians*, and of course *The Portrait of a Lady*. Nor was James unacquainted with the terminology of music, as Rebekah Scott argues in her extensive discussion of James's conception and use of the technical expression "in the minor key" over the years, from the early story "Madame de Mauves" to his late correspondence and travel writing. For her part, Dee MacCormack finds abundant evidence of James's cognizance and appreciation of the atmospheric power of music in his detailed notes on musical accompaniment in the stage directions for *The Saloon*, based on his ghost story "Owen Wingrave." Music also plays a crucial role, Joseph O' Leary contends, in what is arguably James's most enigmatic novel, *The Sacred Fount*. Long overlooked by scholars and readers, the scene at the center of O'Leary's analysis brings all the characters together and may be regarded as the culminating point of the story.

Sound figures very prominently in James's *The American Scene*, especially in the New York sections, in which the discordant notes of modernity and technology assault and bewilder the returning expatriate. In those sections James captured an urban soundscape which, like the city's skyline, had changed beyond recognition during his twenty-year absence, filled as it now was with intrusive, unfamiliar noises and foreign voices, the latter an audible testimony to New York's extraordinary multi-ethnic demographics. Perhaps inspired (or goaded) by the abundance of actual acoustic stimuli around him, James also

made extensive use of figurative sound in *The American Scene*. In addition to having recourse to the vocabulary of music (concert, conductor, notes, tone, accents, etc.), he literally gave New York City a voice which, in his mind, addressed him directly and took him to task for his ambivalence towards his place of birth.

In early twentieth-century New York James found himself intensely longing for silence which was in very short supply in the metropolis. Throughout his career, he had been keenly aware of the potentialities of silence as a device in literature, especially for creating an aura of expectancy, foreboding, and unease. James's specific use of silence as part of his unique take on the supernatural is appropriately the focus of Taeko Kitahara's essay on "The Turn of the Screw" and Li Chen's analysis of "The Jolly Corner." But silence, although synonymous with the absence of audible speech, can still be replete with sound, as Anna Despotopoulou shows in her essay. Indeed, especially in his middle and late writing, Despotopoulou notes, James ushers us into two soundscapes "in constant tension" between each other: an outer soundscape of "speech, sound, and noise," and an inner soundscape resounding with mental voices (Despotopoulou 70).

Taking inspiration from his experience of teaching the ever-elusive story "The Beast in the Jungle," Michael Anesko delves into the revealing differences in speech patterns between the two protagonists, as well as the significance and dramatic impact of what is left unspoken. Speech as a vehicle for incantation and, as such, an indispensable tool in the arsenal of witches or witch-like figures, is what links "The Aspern Papers" to one of its possible sources, namely Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, according to Carmine Di Biase. James's handling of speech is closely interrelated with national and cultural identity, and especially with issues of class and gender, as Kathleen Lawrence demonstrates in her analysis of the New York Edition revision of the story "The Siege of London." As Sonoko Saito points out, James's concern with traditional norms of discourse as a crucial part of the cultural heritage of the United States found eloquent expression in his lecture on "The Question of Our Speech" and his revision of *The American* for the New York Edition and the stage. The auditory dimensions of communication are the focus of Jan Zieliński's essay on "The Figure in the Carpet."

The lingering effects of James's passion for the theatre, his experience as a *listener* of dramatic language, and as a playwright, resonate intensely in his dialogue-driven novel *The Awkward Age*, in which nearly every page, as

Philip Horne argues in his essay, is informed by James's acoustic sensitivity. So are, also—according to Melanie Ross—James's scenarios, the outlines he meticulously prepared for his plays, a practice he subsequently adopted for his works of fiction as well.

Finally, and fittingly, in her analysis of John Banville's *Mrs. Osmond* (a sequel to James's *The Portrait of a Lady*), Bethany Layne invites us to consider if, and to what extent, the sound of James, to quote the title of the 8th International Henry James Conference and of the present volume, can be recreated or at least evoked.The distinctive sound of James's language is one of the many facets of the aural dimension of James's work that in the course of the conference were discussed by scholars from Austria, Canada, China, South Korea, France, Japan, Greece, Italy, Poland, Serbia, Spain, the United Kingdom, the United States, South Africa and Switzerland—a rich variety of approaches and perspectives that Giulia Iannuzzi, in the appendix to this volume, has preserved in her comprehensive survey of the conference program.

Works by Henry James

The American Scene. Collected Travel Writings: Great Britain and America, edited by Richard Howard, Library of America, 1993, pp. 351-736.

The Portrait of a Lady. Edited by Leon Edel, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1963.

SB—A Small Boy and Others: A Critical Edition. Edited by Peter Collister, U of Virginia P, 2011.