

Imitation and the Construction of Tradition: Henry James and the Representation of the American Voice^{*}

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This paper explores the idea of “tradition” addressed by Henry James in “The Question of Our Speech” in relation to the representation of the American voice in his novel and play *The American*. “The Question of Our Speech” was James’s commencement address to graduating American female students at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania on June 8, 1905. It was given during one of his visits back to the United States. Having observed the multilingual U.S. society firsthand after more than two decades of absence from his home country, he speculates on “the question of culture” (QS 42) and presents his idea of “tradition.” His particular focus is on “speech” as it is “the medium” through which “*we* communicate with each other” and “*our* relations” are made possible (QS 44, my italics). James discusses the issue of what form of English should be adopted in the United States and what attitude young Americans should take toward their own speech. Importantly, his discussion of “tradition” is simultaneously engaged in defining boundaries (what the referents of “we” or “our” are and who is to be included

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within them). This paper discusses how he manages the boundaries in presenting his idea of “tradition” by drawing on the multilingual situation of *The American* where language and “speech” play a significant role.

The American, one of James’s earliest novels, was published in different editions and versions created over time including the play versions, which he managed to have performed on stage. The novel version of *The American* was published in book form in 1877 after appearing serially in *The Atlantic Monthly* from June 1876 to May 1877. The novel was later extensively revised for the New York Edition and was published in 1907. Between these editions, James wrote a four-act play entitled *The American* in 1890, which was staged first in January 1891. *The Complete Plays of Henry James*, edited by Leon Edel, includes a different version of the fourth act, which was written and staged in 1892.

The setting of the novel is multilingual, and the story deals with the issue of communication between people whose first languages differ from each other and who supposedly speak different variants of English. Christopher Newman is an American English speaker (from the West); the American Tom Tristram, whose competence in French is not known, only socializes with other Americans; Noémi Nioche and her father are French but speak enough English to communicate with Newman; the Marquise de Bellegarde (Senior), born Lady Emmeline Atheling, married a French aristocrat and raised her children in France. The Bellegarde children, Urbain, Valentin, and Claire, are therefore bilingual. Dramatizing and staging this configuration of characters required James to address the issue of multilingual communication and, in particular, the sound of the languages and accents involved.

Securing a meaningful “tradition” for Americans is something that concerned James all his life. “The Question of Our Speech” was presented during the period between the theatrical version of *The American* and the New York Edition version of the novel. Looking at different versions of *The American* in relation to “The Question of Our Speech” offers an insight into what the American tradition had come to mean to James over time.

A CALL FOR A CONSCIOUS USE OF LANGUAGE

James’s early vision of an American identity can be seen in his 1867 letter to Thomas Sergeant Perry. He calls a new generation of writers “young Americans” and “men of the future” and writes as follows:

To have no national stamp has hitherto been a defect & a drawback; but I think it not unlikely that American writers may yet indicate that a vast intellectual fusion and synthesis of the various national tendencies of the world is the condition of more important achievements than any we have seen. We must of course have something of our own—something distinctive & homogeneous ... (*CL1* 179-80)

The “something of our own” is in other words the outcome of learning and imitating characteristics understood as belonging to other nations. James is making an effort to explain this “something” in his thought in the nation-state framework. This causes a struggle because it requires him to explain how fusion and synthesis of copies can be “distinctive” and “homogeneous,” or, in other words, “original.” What he formulates here is something that could be called an “original copy.” It further seems, while he tries to envision the way Americans understand themselves in the existing framework of the nation-state, that his course of thinking is opening up to something that cannot be grasped within the same framework.

About forty years later, “The Question of Our Speech” shows a more specific but still similar insight by James into what “tradition” Americans would possess; the “tradition” is still an outcome of “imitation.” James presents his thoughts as belonging to the same U.S. culture as the audience, as his use of the possessive pronoun “our” indicates. His key concern was that “*our* national use of vocal sound” (my italics) or “the *vox Americana*” should suffer “a deplorable effect” (*QS* 48, 51, 50) and a “want of attention” (*QS* 48). James notes a number of unfavorable characteristics, such as “the vowel sounds” failing of “purity” and speech “destitute of any approach to an emission of the consonant” (*QS* 49). James draws attention to prolonged vowel sounds and the way in which consonants are dropped or replaced with guttural or other displeasing sounds. The examples include the drawl in “Yeh-eh” or “Yeh-ep” instead of “Yes,” “vanilla-r-ice-cream” or “fatherr and motherr” (*QS* 49-50).

The primary reason James gives for the phenomena is the influx of people from outside the country, “our now so profusely imported and ... quickly assimilated foreign brothers and sisters.” They “dump their mountain of promiscuous material into the foundations of the American” (*QS* 54) and influence the English language. James thinks “attention” should be paid to “a speech-standard” and “a tone-standard” and calls on the audience to pursue a conscious use of English as “there is no such thing as a voice pure and simple” (*QS* 42, 52, 51). He further advises on how they should put

this more conscious attitude into practice: they should “attend to” or profit from “adequate representatives of some decent tradition” (QS 56). He goes on to say: “Imitating, yes; I commend to you, earnestly and without reserve, as the first result and concomitant of observation, the imitation of formed and finished utterance wherever, among all the discords and deficiencies, that music steals upon your ear” (QS 56). James here discusses the importance of “imitation.” In his opinion, a higher standard of the *vox Americana* could be secured through imitation of pleasing elocution from “some decent tradition” that would then be available to succeeding generations of Americans. The passing on of this tradition would take place not only synchronically but also diachronically because it would be constructed through a series of imitations of existing “decent” voices, or the voices of the past. Not only the past and the present, this tradition presupposes the future as well. According to James, if Americans are able to meet “adequate representatives,” “the interest of a new world, a whole extension of life” (QS 56), or the future of an American tradition, would open up for them.

This function of speech as the moment where tradition is constructed is profoundly important for James because it is “the medium” that creates a community and even shapes people’s “life.” As he says: “All life therefore comes back to the question of our speech, the medium through which we communicate with each other; for all life comes back to the question of our relations with each other” (QS 44).¹ The outstanding question, however, is the range of that tradition. While the collective pronouns “we” and “our” suggest an entity limited to a certain group, their referents remain vague.

WHAT CONSTITUTES A TRADITION?

THE GREAT TRADITION AND “TRADITION AND THE INDIVIDUAL TALENT”

Discussions of a tradition generally seem to begin with the discussions of the range wherein the specific tradition works. When F. R. Leavis expounds his “great tradition,” to which Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad belong, he means “the tradition to which what is great in English fiction belongs” (7). In Leavis’s case, the boundary is not based on the novelists’ national

¹ Denis Donoghue cites the same passage and discusses James’s concept of tradition in terms of spiritual continuity (214).

origin. He writes, "In seeing him [Henry James] in an English tradition I am not slighting the fact of his American origin; an origin that doesn't make him less of an English novelist, of the great tradition, than Conrad later" (10). Leavis judges that James is not only "unmistakably an American," and also "very much a European," but that "there could be no question of his becoming a French master in English" (12). Richard Chase in *The American Novel and Its Tradition* regards Leavis's "great tradition" as "Anglo-American" (3). While admitting "the American novel is obviously a development from the English tradition," Chase himself sees "another tradition" (3) of the American novel, which carries "an element of romance" (viii). Chase's tradition is based on "the originality" and "Americanness" (vii) and accommodates novelists whose origins are basically American. Chase's work would, in Lawrence Buell's perspective that will be dealt with later in this paper, belong to a critical tendency that emphasized "native influences" (Buell 198).

Denis Donoghue deals with the issue of tradition in "The Question of Our Speech" and writes "tradition is the relation ... between what ... comes before and what comes after" (212) for Leavis's great tradition. Not only for Leavis but also others, tradition is a matter of relation, or "influences" (Buell 198). However, James and T. S. Eliot seem to present a slightly different view from Leavis or Chase in that they focus on a conscious attempt to create a new tradition by facilitating the relations, rather than simply justifying the range of the tradition they are committed to. James's concern is the need to define the boundaries between "relations with each other" where, in James's maxim, "relations stop nowhere" (*RH* vii). When Eliot, also an expatriate, discusses what tradition is in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), he is also committed to defining the boundaries, but in a creative way. Although Donoghue focuses on Eliot's idea of tradition as a "force" (210), which the individual talent should submit to, what Eliot seems to be suggesting is an individual's capacity for adjusting the boundaries and creating a new range of tradition.

When Eliot writes, "It [Tradition] cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labor," tradition is something that an individual could or should consciously achieve, rather than accept as something simply handed down. Eliot writes on how the poet should relate to tradition as follows:

The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly,

altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature, will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. (35)

In Eliot's view, tradition is constructed through interaction between the past and the present. Not only is the present under the influence of the past, but the past too is under the influence of the present. The appearance of a new work of art brings about changes in the existing tradition, which develops into a tradition of its own. In this context, the poet is "the catalyst" (37)—rather than "the medium"—who promotes transformation of the past and future of a tradition. As he further specifies the three possible courses of choice and stresses the importance of being aware of "the main current" (35), choosing a tradition to belong to is also a subject to be handled by the poet. His explanation seems to show that, in his case, the choice is English literature connected to a European tradition. In a way, he is adjusting the boundaries of the tradition of his choice so that they suit him as a contemporary poet.

The idea that the past can be altered by the present, and construct the future, overlaps with that of James. Both expatriates theorize a tradition's plasticity that allows an individual's conscious commitment. In a way, their view is based on their alienation from a strong sense of belonging to a certain language and tradition, and their theory also invites the reader or the audience to a departure from the unconscious attachment to their language and culture. Both James and Eliot, by once becoming aware of the disconnectedness, individuals are bestowed autonomy and the ability to choose a tradition and divert it in a certain direction.

This choice and adjustment, however, seem to work arbitrarily in their theories, reflecting an individual's anxiety. James's reaction to "foreign brothers and sisters" seems to be suggesting that he is trying to find an acceptable point of closure. Americans need to be able to distinguish "the" voice from the disturbing voices of immigrants in order to form a tradition that deserves to be passed on to the next generation and that can be called the "American tradition." However, there is no guarantee that James's "we" separates a voice of higher quality from other voices. James's approaches to American voices register the tension between opening up to the influx of diverse peoples and languages in the immigrants' America and closing off when faced with the

wider range of “National tendencies of the world.” In this sense, John Carlos Rowe’s view seems to be applicable when he says on “The Question of Our Speech,” “he James endorses the assimilationist positions prevalent at the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries” (211). Rowe also points out that “Women and immigrants will *change* English, James argues, and as long as such change occurs within certain acceptable parameters, then it is one of the positive consequences of modernization” (211).

AN AMERICAN TRADITION AS THE ORIGINAL COPY

James’s novel *The American* is considered to be James’s attempt to identify—through the character of a wealthy Californian of thirty-six—what it means to be an American and what tradition could be available for Americans. The serialization of the novel started in the centennial year of the nation’s Independence. According to the narrator, the protagonist is “a powerful specimen of an American” that expresses “that look of being committed to nothing in particular” with an eye “full of contradictory suggestions.” Newman’s expressiveness as an American is the sort that “the discriminating observer” might perfectly have measured but “have been at a loss to describe it” (*AM1* 18). This characterization of Newman as hard to pin down recalls the young James’s struggle to describe characteristics of future Americans. This American “vagueness” persists in the novel in the 1870s, where Newman turns to the fire into which he has thrown a little paper of evidence, thereby negating the moral nature to be a fixed characteristic of being an American. As known, though, this ending is changed for the New York Edition.

Newman, a fusion of contradictory characteristics, does not very much discriminate between the original and the copy. He rather admires “the copy much more than the original” (*AM1* 17). Drawing on Carolyn Porter’s words, this judgement of Newman’s follows “an economic order of value” (107). The original is “not for sale” (*AM1* 20), like the original paintings at the Louvre; similarly, Claire, who ends up confined in a convent, is unavailable while Noémi enjoys an elevated value as a copy of an aristocratic woman. Copies have the ability to circulate, which the “practical man” is more interested in. Newman is in this sense “a shrewd and capable fellow,” but he is perceived by French society as nothing but a “Western Barbarian” (*AM1* 19, 17, 42). As a result, once he seeks to marry an aristocratic French woman and become a

part of that society, he is cruelly denied entry. His whole experience in Paris prompts Newman to go back to his native land. He fails to become part of “the original” aristocracy. However, in a way, Newman is an original copy that has the mobility of copies and has acquired the knowledge of autonomy backed up by ample capital.

Newman’s experience seems to coincide with James’s own. After completing *Roderick Hudson*, James moved to Paris in November 1875, with the intention of settling there. However, in December of the following year, he moved to London. Part of the reason is the “bottomless superficiality” (CL2 149) he encountered in France and his sense of himself as “an eternal outsider” (CN 217). If James’s own understanding of French culture was not the obstacle to permanent residence there (as Peter Brooks has noted: “[James] had the requisite command both of the French language and of French culture, and ... had been admitted to the most exclusive literary circle in France” [48]), what was it that made him feel less rooted in French society? The lack of knowledge of English and the appreciation of literature in English in the French literary circle might constitute part of the reason (Brooks 48). The closed relations he left behind, however, seem not just of French society but also of the American colony in Paris. Just before describing himself as “an eternal outsider,” he wrote, “I remember how Paris had, in a hundred ways, come to weary and displease me; I couldn’t get out of the detestable *American Paris*” (CN 216-17). James must have rejected the exclusivity of a community that prevented inter-relationships from developing.

Looking at James’s practice of staging the story further gives a further insight into his approach to a tradition. In May 1889, James agreed to write a play for British actor-manager Edward Compton of the Compton Comedy Company, and the first performance of *The American* took place in Southport, England, on January 3, 1891. To present his work to a British audience, James seems to have lent more credibility to the French characters’ English in the play version. When Newman says of the Bellegardes, “you seem all to speak such fine old English,” Valentin replies: “My dear mother is English; she has always, from our infancy, addressed us in that tongue” (AMP 197). Likewise, the rather sensible Noémi says of the English of her father and herself, “Papa’s English is so good. ... We were in London, you know, for years, when I was a child” (AMP 195).

Moreover, as staging involves sounds, James seems to pay careful attention to the sounds of his American protagonist. According to Edel, in the manuscript preserved at the Lord Chamberlain’s Office, “James inserted in

parentheses phonetic aids to the American pronunciation of certain key words as a guide to Edward Compton” ((AMP 196n1), who played Newman’s part. Some examples of the directions given in Edel’s notes to the script are as follows: want [wauhnt]; want [wawnt]; after [A-a-after]; lost [lawst]; man [mahn]; long [lawng]; mine [maihne (drawn out)]; time [taihme (drawn out)]. Attention seems to be directed mostly to prolonging the vowel-sounds, and this instruction looks rather exaggerated and less practical compared to the points he raised in the address in the United States. This attempt to represent “the American accent,” though, seems to have created a rather uncomfortable effect. Edel cites some of the contemporary reviews of this play version, and among them is on Newman’s supposedly American accent as an “irritating drawl” (Edel 189).

The cast of the play seems to have added another turn to the story’s multilingual situation. After the tour in England, Scotland and Ireland, the play was to be staged in London at the Opera Comique Theatre in the Strand, with the American protagonist played by British Edward Compton, Claire by American Elizabeth Robins, Madame de Bellegarde by American Kate Bateman, Noémi Nioche by French Adrienne Dairolles (Edel 187). Fabio L. Vericat gives an interesting account of the language situation on the stage of *The American*. According to Vericat, Dairolles as Noémi spoke with a “perfect English accent,” the rest of the French characters were played by British actors, and Compton could not “quite suppress his British accent in playing an American.” He then points out that the characters “are all speaking English as a second language” where no one “holds any ascendancy over English” (518) as they speak it with some accents displayed.

Vericat’s suggestion is that under these circumstances, James dealt with “voice” on the stage as “*literary* rather than *actual* utterance” and as “a deliberate rhetorical exercise” rather than commitment to “reproduction of the natural sounds of speech” (518). Vericat then notes James “denationalizat[ed]” voice (502). Drawing on Virginia Woolf’s observation that James employs “a more elaborate English than the native—but never such unconscious English that we feel the past of the word in it, its associations, its attachments” (Woolf 3),² Vericat discusses the example of Eliot’s use of English alongside James’s (Vericat 513). As an American expatriate, James might not have been

² It should be noted that Virginia Woolf’s essay is a review of *Climats* (1928) by French writer André Maurois, and her observation here is a brief comment on writing by “a

a self-sufficient “native speaker” of English but a self-conscious speaker for whom relations between language and place in the essentialist sense are disconnected. Following Vericat’s suggestion, it might be correct to say that James’s representation of American speech was a conscious, rather than unconscious, professionally-minded practice for theatrical performance.

It can be said that staging *The American* involved the act of imitation in language use, which disconnects or disturbs people’s ordinary relations with language at different levels. English communications among the characters were presented by actors who spoke different English variants. The variants were supposed to be the performance of copied speech based on the fictional characters’ linguistic backgrounds, but their English variants were further complicated by the actors’ own linguistic backgrounds. This places English variants on an equal footing without any “original” English available on the stage. Furthermore, the relations between language and nationality unconsciously assumed by the audience are troubled, thereby disturbing the audience’s relations with their language.

The troubled relations between the copy and the original seem to be those that anticipate the act of “mimicry” or “repetition” in postcolonial theory. In this sense, James’s novel and theater might be moving toward uncovering a more profound question. The question must be “more than a simple mismatch between language and landscape”; it was an issue pointing to “a radical ‘inauthenticity’ in the word” (Ashcroft 139). It would be relevant to say, at least, the language brought from Britain must have posed for the settlers the question of whether language was essentially rooted in a certain nation-state or culture.

THE AMERICAN AS A POSTCOLONIAL SUBJECT

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin discuss the experience of settler colonies and specifically refers to such writers as James and Eliot:

So when elements of the periphery and margin threatened the exclusive claims of the centre they were rapidly incorporated. This was a process, in Edward Said’s terms, of conscious affiliation proceeding under the guise of filiation, that is, a

foreigner” with “a perfect command of English” (Woolf 3). While she mentions Henry James, she does not touch on American language or culture in general.

mimicry of the centre proceeding from a desire not only to be accepted but to be adopted and absorbed. (3-4)

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin see these expatriate writers as examples of “those from the periphery” who “immerse themselves in the imported culture, denying their origins in an attempt to become ‘more English than the English’ (4). However, the theories of tradition by James or Eliot are rather disruptive in that they seem to intend to modify the range of tradition surrounding English so that it would accommodate them. In this context, James’s use of imitation would overlap with what the idea of “mimicry” or “repetition” introduced by Homi K. Bhabha points to as “one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” (85). In his theory, mimicry can be a “menace” because of “its double vision” which discloses “the ambivalence of colonial discourse” and “disrupts its authority” (88). James and Eliot’s idea of tradition, that is, choosing a certain tradition, imitating the chosen tradition and their owning it by adjusting its boundaries, seems to overlap with the idea of mimicry by the colonized.

Looking at the so-called mainstream American culture from a postcolonial perspective could be controversial. However, it would be undeniable that the idea of American culture was formed under the tension between attraction to the European tradition and the need for their own tradition as distinct from it. Lawrence Buell takes up this question as “the issue of American writers’ cultural dependence upon vs. emancipation from Europe” (199). In dealing with antebellum writing, Buell points out that, while this issue of “cultural dependency” has been met with a critical tendency of “parochialism” that focuses on “native influences” (200, 198), its role would need more critical attention. According to Buell, even during the period of the so-called “American Renaissance,” the contemporary travel narrative tends to see the United States as “a cultural outback” in literary aspects, with a “condescending colonializing gesture” (200, 202). James or T. S. Eliot’s critical comments are suggestive of some other routes that were taken by American writers in situating themselves in relation to the European literary tradition.

In addition, James’s idea seems to overlap with another aspect of the settler colony’s post-colonialism, as conceived by Buell. The latter sees the “continuum between colonial and imperial mentalities” (213) as “the single most instructive dimensions of U.S. settler culture postcolonialism” (Buell 199). Along similar lines, Stephen Slemon has drawn attention to the

“entanglement of anti-colonial resistances within the colonialist machineries they seek to displace” (Slemon 39). America’s ambivalent location between the colonized and the colonizer, seems to exist in James’s ambivalent attitude towards tradition as well. James’s deliberate but arbitrary warning against an influx of “all the discords and deficiencies” that immigrants would bring in seems to represent the same tension—between the necessity of diversity and the inclination to reject it.

On the one hand, his idea of the plasticity of tradition allows him to conceive of a tradition that keeps its relations open. This would counter the exclusivity of Parisian society as well as the potential colonial nature of the “American Paris.” Rowe associates James’s ambivalent love of Europe with the fear of repeating “the mistakes of previous empires” (206). Rowe includes in these “empires” a “little American colony abroad” (208) as well. James’s play was the sort that prepares the audience to be open to a multilingual situation to come. “The Question of Our Speech” further registers James’s readiness for coping with a multilingual society where more relations are brought in by immigrants with diverse linguistic backgrounds. This idea of tradition could provide an “in-between” space that possesses “productive capacities” (Bhabha 38) where the ambivalence troubles the authority of colonial discourse.

On the other hand, James also seems to be trying to promote exclusivity in the same space. Alarmed by the diversity he has witnessed, he ends up suggesting drawing a certain boundary to limit inclusiveness at a certain point. James here seems to be showing the similar tendency to the exclusivity he detested in Paris. In other words, it seems that James’s response to diversity arbitrarily changed in accordance with his own need under the transformation of the domestic and international landscape. This might be pointing to the same fear that Ashcroft sees in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* or W. B. Yeats’s response to the play *Ubu Roi* by Alfred Jarry. Ashcroft claims that Yeats’s response expresses the fear of “the Other” that might “overwhelm high European civilization” (Ashcroft 156). Or, the fear could be related to the “incredulous terror” of “unhomeliness” that Bhabha sees in *The Portrait of a Lady*’s Isabel Archer at the world expanding “enormously” for her (Bhabha 9).

AMERICANS IN IN-BETWEEN SPACES

From a comparison between the earlier and the later novelistic versions of *The American*, a transformation can be seen in James's view towards what constitutes an American. There are significant changes between the two versions in the description of Newman. While in both versions, Newman is "the American type" (*AM1* 18; *AM2* 3), in the earlier version of the 1870s, Newman is "a powerful specimen of an American" (*AM1* 18). In contrast, in the New York Edition, in the 1900s, the expression is changed to "superlative American" (*AM2* 2). In addition, notably, the term "national" that appears to describe Newman in the earlier version is replaced by different terms. In the earlier version, the narrator says, "An observer, with anything of an eye for national types, would have had no difficulty in determining the local origin of this undeveloped connoisseur [Newman] ..." (*AM1* 17-18), while the narrator in the later version says, "An observer with anything of an eye for local types would have had no difficulty in referring this candid connoisseur to the scene of his origin..." (*AM2* 2). Also, in the later version, Newman fills out "the mould of race" (*AM2* 2) rather than "the national mould" (*AM1* 18). In Newman, "the traces of national origin are a matter of expression even more than of feature" (*AM1* 18) in the earlier version, while in the latter this becomes "the betrayal of native conditions is a matter of expression even more than of feature" (*AM2* 3). By contrast, descriptions of French characters whose features are associated with their nationality do not show any significant difference between the two versions. The conversation between Valentin's servant and M. Ledoux exemplifies "the national talent" (*AM1* 225) in the earlier version, and "the national gift" in the New York Edition (*AM2* 385). Also, the duchess ("the Duchess" in the New York Edition) looks at Newman with a smile in "the charming manner of her nation" in both the earlier and later versions (*AM1* 291; *AM2* 507).

These descriptions of the American protagonist are less mindful of the nation-state framework. It can be said that, while James's early quest for an American identity has survived the dynamic change his native country underwent, with French characters not affected much through time, the effort to narrate Newman as the definitive representative of the American nation is toned down. James in the New York Edition seems to have shifted his focus in a way that characterizes Newman as a subject that eludes categorization based on national boundaries.

James's effort to foresee the immigrants' impact on the future of American language and culture is likely to have continued on with a transformation. Matthew Peters notes that "James's attitude towards values and civilities loosened" between the time of the writing of "The Question of Our Speech" and that of the last chapters of *The American Scene* (1907) "in a way that enabled him to comprehend and to represent American social change" (327). In *The American Scene*, in regard to "the cauldron of the 'American' character," James poses a question, "What meaning, in the presence of such impressions, can continue to attach to such a term as the 'American' character?—what type, as the result of such a prodigious amalgam, such a hotch-potch of racial ingredients, is to be conceived as shaping itself?" (AS 92) Then we see a certain sense of reconciliation with inevitable loss and change in his impressions. He makes the following predictions:

The accent of the very ultimate future, in the States, may be destined to become the most beautiful on the globe and the very music of humanity (here the "ethnic" synthesis shrouds itself thicker than ever); but whatever we shall know it for, certainly, we shall not know it for English—in any sense for which there is an existing literary measure. (AS 106)

James leaves a train of questions unanswered regarding how to draw a line between immigrants and Americans: "Who and what is an alien?" "Which is the American?" "Which is *not* the alien?" (AS 95) His interrogation never rests. Feeling a "lettered" anguish about the impact of immigrants on "the linguistic tradition" (AS 105), James does not reach any conclusion in an environment that remains "phantasmagoric" (AS 101). In the end, what he could say was, "it is the younger generation who will fully profit, rise to the occasion and enter into the privilege" (AS 92). "We young Americans" was what he wrote to Perry. "We" in the 20th century would not provide him with a familiar image; rather, his "extension of life" would inevitably be entrusted to the hands of younger and even more phantasmagoric generations, whatever properties they would "dump" (QS 54) on the American foundations that he knew. Relations stop nowhere, and tradition transforms itself without him knowing how.

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