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Henry James across Borders

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Abstract: This essay explores the opposition between the figures of the cosmopolitan and the patriot in a selection of James's letters and travel writings. It focuses on the crossing of borders as revelatory of the mutual haunting of the "native" and the "alien." But crossing the frontier also entails encountering the representatives of State violence. Through James's *mise en scène* of his ambivalent fascination for the martial figure of the soldier, the frontier becomes a critical locus for the queering of identities and affiliations.

Keywords: Henry James, cosmopolitanism, patriotism, frontier, soldiers

Résumé : Cet article explore les tensions qui résultent de la confrontation entre les figures du cosmopolite et du patriote dans une sélection de lettres et d'écrits de voyage de James. Il s'intéresse au passage de la frontière et à la façon dont celui-ci révèle la hantise mutuelle du « natif » et de l'« étranger ». Mais la frontière est aussi l'occasion d'une scène de rencontre avec les représentants de la violence d'État pour lesquels James voyageur éprouve une ambivalente fascination teintée d'érotisme qui dérouté oppositions binaires et identifications normatives.

Mots clés : Henry James, cosmopolitisme, patriotisme, frontière, soldat

In a letter to Thomas Sergeant Perry from September 20, 1867, Henry James famously turned the predicament of his American nationality, and more generally of the Americans' supposed lack of cultural knowledge, into a resource for aesthetic creation, claiming for himself and his fellow citizens the vantage of a distinctly national outlook paradoxically predicated on a capacious, if not rapacious, cosmopolitanism:

We are Americans born—*il faut en prendre son parti*. I look upon it as a great blessing; and I think that to be an American is an excellent preparation for culture. We have exquisite qualities as a race, and it seems to me that we are ahead of the European races in the fact that more than either of them we can deal freely with forms of civilization not our own, can pick and choose and assimilate and in short (aesthetically &c [sic]) claim our property wherever we find it. 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. (James, 2006 179-180)

The young James, then at the outset of his literary career, provocatively equates being "an American" with having "no national stamp" of one's own. To be an American in this sense means to be free to "pick and choose and assimilate" national properties the better to realize a "fusion" that the bilingual texture of his own letter, mixing freely French and English, literally performs.¹ The American writer who proves capable of achieving such "synthesis" concomitantly produces himself as a citizen of the world whose sense of his own nationality depends on the appropriation of foreign traits. From this perspective, self-identification relies on the incorporation of difference and cosmopolitanism operates as the underlying "condition" of (American) national belonging, even as it warrants ultimately the superiority of the United States in the global struggle for cultural distinction.

Ten years later however, after a decade of transatlantic travels and much peregrination through Italy, Switzerland, Germany, France, and England, James revisited his early cosmopolitan ambition of cultural appropriation and assimilation. In “Americans Abroad,” published in *The Nation* in 1878, he now rued the fact that his international experience should have proven him wrong: “Americans in Europe are *outsiders*,” he conceded, “that is the great point, and the point thrown into relief by all zealous efforts to controvert it. As a people we are out of European society” (787). Instead of fulfilling his initial dream of fluid “fusion” within the crucible of an American yet—or rather because—cosmopolitan identity, his own confrontation with “the various National tendencies in the world,” albeit limited to European instantiations, had served to reassert violently their impermeability, while reinscribing the American traveller and would-be cosmopolite within a logic of cultural exclusion. Although from the 1850s onward American tourists and expatriates might be able to cross ever more easily the political frontiers erected by the different European states, as James’s own long-standing habit of international travel readily suggests, cultural borders remained impassable and the treasured properties they contained, forever out of reach.²

The conflicting perspectives that the foregoing passages register—and that James’s writings rehearse repeatedly—hinge in part on the possibility, or the difficulty, to experience what Bruce Robbins has termed “actually existing cosmopolitanism” (1-19). They also, and consequently, depend on the persistence of national borders and local attachments in a world—James’s as much as ours—increasingly characterized by the global circulation of people and commodities. That the cosmopolitan ideal presented James with a set of difficulties as much as with a sense of opportunity transpires in a travel essay from that period titled “Occasional Paris,” in which James recounts and meditates on his return to Paris in 1877. Under cover of a series of “disjointed reflections” resulting from his experience of “comparing one race with another” (721), he carefully articulates the crisis of identification that the crossing of borders both precipitates and dramatizes, and that this essay proposes to explore by way, first, of a reading of this lesser known piece which concentrates the main motifs that the ensuing sections will detail.

Occasional Cosmopolitanism

In “Occasional Paris,” James frames indeed with great clarity “the conflict between local and global affiliations” which has shaped so many philosophical appraisals of cosmopolitanism from its first formulations in Diogenes and Seneca, to its further characterization in Kant and Marx, up to its more contemporary elaborations in the work of Martha Nussbaum, K. Anthony Appiah, Homi Bhabha and others (Berman, 2010 120). Lamenting “the baleful spirit of the cosmopolite,” James begins by casting his own cosmopolitan condition as a fateful “accident,” “the uncomfortable consequence of seeing many lands and feeling at home in none” (James, 1993 720). Extensive travel and the consequent experience of “[moving] about in the world,” of “[living] about” (720), spell out a regrettable sense of distance, detachment and disaffiliation, so that cosmopolitanism seems to put the very possibility of identification, national or otherwise, into crisis. “To be a cosmopolite is not, I think, an ideal,” James contends, “the ideal should be to be a concentrated patriot” (720), an aspiration which stands in sharp contrast with, for instance, more recent vindications of “cosmopolitan patriotism,” “rooted cosmopolitanism,” or “vernacular cosmopolitanism” (cf. Appiah; Ackerman; Cohen; Bhabha, 1996). For the James of “Occasional Paris,” these wilfully paradoxical phrases cannot bear the weight of the untenable contradictions they seek to accommodate, insofar as, unlike the “concentrated patriot,” the cosmopolite is from the start beset with “the danger [...] of subjective dispersal” (Katz 26), which comes, in James’s own words to which I return below, from “[having] lost that sense of the absoluteness and the sanctity of the habits of your fellow-patriots” (721).

Yet this opening jeremiad and its attendant anxiety of rootlessness rapidly turn into a defence of “the cosmopolite spirit” (721), to the extent that such spirit helps precisely to develop a critique of the limitations of “concentrated patriotism” when it yields to jingoism and underwrites warmongering. For “estrangement and expatriation” are first and foremost for James “strategies of critical perception” (Katz 23). As such, they enable a form of ironic and salutary relativism:

You have seen that there are a great many *patriæ* in the world, and that each is filled with excellent people for whom the local idiosyncrasies are the only thing that is not rather barbarous. There comes a time when one set of customs, wherever it may be found, grows to seem to you about as provincial as another; and then I suppose it may be said of you that you have become a cosmopolite. (721)

James’s irony is twofold here. On the one hand, every country in the world proves similarly peopled with “concentrated patriots,” so that the very universality of the category already begins to give the lie to the patriot’s pretensions of distinction. On the other hand, the logic of patriotism itself, which projects barbarity everywhere outside the confines of the *patria*, gets to be replicated in inverted form across the world to the point of cancelling the “binary opposition between the ‘home’ and the ‘foreign’” that subtends it (Katz 26). The cosmopolitan’s perspective thus brings to light the contingency, rather than the particularity, of the “local idiosyncrasies” to which the patriot is so attached, as well as the universally tautological nature of his attachment to the local. As Daniel Katz elegantly puts it, “A patriot, then, is not someone who is attached to a particular set of values for their inherent worth, but someone attached to the *arbitrary proximity* of himself or herself to that set, that is, someone attached to attachment itself” (27).

At the time James was writing “Occasional Paris,” the kind of chauvinistic blindness that the patriot’s circular attachment to attachment is bound to generate, and that the essay diagnoses so acutely, was largely fuelling European politics, dominated as they were by the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 which quickly turned into a scramble for continental hegemony between the Great European powers. In Britain in particular, where James had been living in 1877, the war gave way to an outpouring of aggressive patriotic rhetoric that came to be associated with the word *jingo*, a term borrowed from a popular music-hall song hailing the decision of Lord Beaconsfield to send a British fleet into Turkish waters to resist the advance of Russia in 1878 (Scott). In this sabre-rattling context, the grandiose preparations for the Paris World Exhibition of 1878, “looming up as large as a mighty mass of buildings on the Trocadéro can make it,” “magnificent and fantastical [...] in their sudden immensity and glittering newness,” looked to James as particularly “destitute of a sense of the opportune” (James, 1993 723):

The moment certainly does not seem very well chosen [...] The world is too much occupied with graver cares—with reciprocal cannonading and chopping, with cutting of throats and burning of homes, with murder of infants and mutilation of mothers, with warding off famine and civil war, with lamenting the failure of its resources, the dullness of trade, the emptiness of its pocket. (724)

Not only does James find the stark contrast between the “fairy-tale” atmosphere surrounding the upcoming Exhibition and the ongoing atrocities in Eastern Europe particularly odious (724), but he also connects implicitly the staging of celebrations of national greatness that the Exhibition will enable with the aggressive expansionist policies and imperial ventures that such manifestations of “concentrated” patriotism actually undergird. “Baleful” as it may be, then, the spirit of cosmopolitanism nevertheless helps to recognize and resist the bellicose “folly” that patriotic sentiment elicits (721, 723). The essay’s initial preference for “the concentrated patriot” over “the cosmopolite” is therefore complicated by the critically “discriminating” powers afforded to the observer by his accidental cosmopolitan condition (721), which bring to light the jingoistic bent of patriotism. In this sense, James’s “Occasional Paris” offers far more

than a series of “disjointed reflections,” as it frames the description of the “wonderful structures on the Champ de Mars and the Trocadéro” within an elaborate geo-political argument about the dangers of patriotic attachment and the corresponding virtue of cosmopolitan detachment (723)—a detachment, one should add, that is not synonymous with a refusal to participate in the making of history and assume political responsibility, as the case against the supposed privilege of cosmopolitanism so often goes (Robbins 4), so much as it authorizes a pointed critique of the politics of attachment itself.

About halfway through the essay, James chooses to locate his critique of patriotic attachment quite literally on the border between barbarity and civility, between the foreign and the home, or, in his case, between two equally foreign spaces. In this instance, the border is the one that separates England and France, as James remembers his experience of being “still out in the channel,” when suddenly “you pass into a region of intenser light—a zone of clearness and colour” (726). The “picturesque [...] properties” of the frontier are however inseparable from “the blue and red douaniers and soldiers” waiting for the foreign traveller as he “fairly [stands] upon that good Boulognese quay” (726). James’s memory of his encounter with the customs officers in Boulogne occasions an extended reflection on the “military surveillance” exerted by the French “administration” over foreign travellers (727). For in the eyes of the state, as James explains at length, national identity is definitely “something in need of scrutiny and policing” (Berman, 2010 141).

In France, the “administration” is the first thing that touches you; [...] you feel somehow that, in the process, you have lost the flower of your self-respect. Of course you are under some obligation to it. It has taken you off the steamer at Folkestone; made you tell your name to a gentleman with a sword, stationed at the farther end of the plank—not a drawn sword, it is true, but still, at the best, a very nasty weapon; marshalled you into the railway-station; assigned you to a carriage—I was going to say a seat; transported you to Paris, marshalled you again out of the train, and under a sort of military surveillance, into an enclosure containing a number of human sheep-pens, in one of which it has imprisoned you for some half-hour. [...] The administration at any rate has finally taken you out of your pen, and, through the medium of a functionary who “inscribes” you in a little book, transferred you to a cab selected by a logic of its own. In doing all this it has certainly done a great deal for you; but somehow its good offices have made you feel sombre and resentful. (James, 1993 727)

James’s grammar dramatizes the opposition between the state as an impersonal subject following “a logic of its own” and the traveller as an object at once severely coerced and intensely embodied. On the one hand, the anonymity of the administration’s official representatives (the ominous “gentleman with a sword,” the faceless “functionary”) and the progressive elision of the subject pronoun “it” in the course of the central sentence work to emphasize the cold impersonality and implacable agency of the state apparatus. On the other hand, and simultaneously, James foregrounds the administration’s power of bodily regimentation, reminding us that the state’s touch, however civil, is never a light one: it “inscribes” its mark on the subjects it regulates and whose integrity and intimacy of body and mind it thus violates, as suggested by the trope of the “lost [...] flower of your self-respect.” In addition, although constantly on the move throughout the passage, from steamer to railway carriage to cab, the foreign traveller is in fact constrained to take a series of compulsory steps which belie the cosmopolitan ideal of fluid and free circulation, while assimilating him to a piece of moveable property and registering, if implicitly, the association between cosmopolitanism and capitalist trade. Moreover, and rather contradictorily, the traveller’s journey, however forced, is always at risk of being interrupted, as the threat of imprisonment and prolonged captivity hovers over him. On this count, the image of the “human sheep-pens” highlights wryly the administration’s lack of humaneness, even as it confirms the traveller’s dehumanization as he struggles to cross safely state borders.

This scene of encounter on the border is further structured by a chromatic inversion between the “intenser light [...] and colour” shining as James approaches the French coast and the “sombre and resentful” mood that overcomes him after he successfully reaches Paris (726, 727). In the meantime, the picturesque and apparently harmless “blue and red douaniers and soldiers” have been replaced by the civil yet menacing figure of the “gentleman with a sword,” the mere sight of whose “very nasty weapon” threatens, but also fascinates, “the returning observer” (726, 727, 732). Whether incorporated into an aestheticized and playful *tableau* of the second “impressions” of an American coming back to France (726) or suffered as part of the inevitable but painful process of border-crossing, these martial figures evidently captivated James’s imagination upon his return to Paris. As a matter of fact, they literally bookend his *œuvre*, from some of his early Civil War stories—such as “The Story of a Year” (1865) or “A Most Extraordinary Case” (1868)—to *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914) and a late essay like “Within the Rim” (1916) (Rawlings, 2005 33-68). For all its unpleasantness, then, the experience of being “marshalled,” “assigned,” “transported,” “transferred,” and “marshalled [...] again,” which anticipates a famous passage from *The American Scene* to which I will return, is not entirely devoid of excitement: the memory of being handled, touched, and felt, however brusquely, is also somewhat thrilling. From this perspective, James’s account highlights the ambivalent function of the state’s military representatives, at once a potential obstacle to and an inescapable “medium” for the traveller’s passage.

Following James’s lead in “Occasional Paris,” the rest of this essay proposes to reflect on the tangle of relations between James’s cosmopolitan and patriotic imaginings in a range of letters and travel essays across his career. It further explores the ways in which the experience of border-crossing functions as a privileged locus for the negotiation of identities through the traveller’s fascinated encounter with the figure of the soldier. As we shall see, the tension between cosmopolitanism and patriotism and their mutual production is but a variation on the proper/improper, canny/uncanny, familiar/strange problematic that readers of James’s fiction have long engaged with. What differs here, perhaps, is, in line with the purpose of this special issue, the explicitly nonfictional status of the texts that this essay investigates, from early and late letters about the experience of international travel, to journalistic essays whose concern is in part the question of the border and the difficulty of its crossing, to a travelogue like *The American Scene*. More directly than in the fiction, these texts grapple with the reality of travel and border-crossing and the critical representation of their attendant politics. In its partly arbitrary construction, the corpus of this essay does posit James as a somewhat unified author figure whose thinking about borders and identities is seen to evolve from one text to another. Yet I do not wish to reduce this figure to the empirical author, although James’s biography and cultural milieu evidently determined, at least in part, the way he approached these issues. Likewise, I am not interested in James’s politics—were it even possible to reconstruct them—so much as I will seek to tease out the literary politics of cosmopolitan patriotism such as they emerge from the following juxtaposition of nonfiction writings about travel and borders. To do so, I begin with James’s transnational fantasy of fluid continuity between the English and American worlds in a letter from 1888, before attending to his longing for the equally fantasmal circumscription of national identities, especially in *The American Scene*, to suggest that, in both cases, the opposition between the home and the foreign, whether elided or maintained, indexes a relation of mutual haunting. Eventually, focusing on the 1878 essay “The British Soldier,” I turn to the notion of national identity as performance, whereby James intertwines his critique of patriotic essentialism with the erotic appeal elicited by the spectacle of the martial theatre.

The “Anglo-Saxon Total”

It has become a critical commonplace to characterize James and his work as “moving [...] fluently across international borders” (Giles, 2018 32). Reflecting James’s own enduring habit of transatlantic and European travels, the predominance of the “international theme” throughout his fiction has done much to establish his reputation as a cosmopolitan writer whose entire *œuvre* “[problematizes] conceptions of spatial and geographical demarcation,” “[ironizes] the process of boundary-setting,” and complicates “inherited assumptions about national identity” (Giles, 2018 33, 35).³ A letter addressed to his brother William in October of 1888 and written from the *Hôtel de l’Écu* in Geneva, where the James family had already stayed almost thirty years earlier in the winter of 1859, illustrates the ease with which James was able to travel across Europe at a moment’s notice and how this informed his privileged sense of the irrelevance of national boundaries and identities. Sitting comfortably in the “old family *salon*” of his hotel apartments, “in sociable converse with family ghosts,” James narrates his unexpected, almost whimsical, retreat to Switzerland: “I became conscious, suddenly,” he writes, “that I wanted very much to get away from the stale dingy London [...] so I came straight here” (James, 1999b 211-212). In so doing, James reminds us that, despite the progressive democratization of international travel at the end of the nineteenth century and although he himself takes great pains to refute by anticipation the accusation of “wanton travelling” (212), the satisfaction of his irrepressible compulsion to “get away” was also the product of his social standing and of the affluence that enabled it.

The letter continues with a report on their sister Alice, who had by then moved to England and whom William suspected of suffering from “homesickness” (212). Taking this opportunity to reflect on the consequences of “living in a country not ones own [sic],” James challenges, and even rejects, the very terms of the debate, thus cancelling the opposition it hinges on between “a home” that one is supposed to have left and miss and a foreign “habitation” that one is only momentarily, and reluctantly, occupying (213):

For myself, at any rate I am deadly weary of the whole “international” state of mind—so that I *ache*, at times, with fatigue at the way it is constantly forced upon one as a sort of virtue or obligation. I can’t look at the English & American worlds, or feel about them, any more, save as a big Anglo-Saxon total, destined to such an amount of melting together that an insistence on their differences becomes more & more idle & pedantic & that the melting together will come the faster the more one takes it for granted & treats the life of the 2 countries as continuous & more or less convertible, or at any rate as simply different chapters of the same general subject. Literature, fiction in particular, affords a magnificent arm for such taking for granted, & one may do an excellent work with it. (213)

Following James’s logic, the “‘international’ state of mind” he wants so desperately to escape is the effect of a misplaced attachment to the very possibility of a “home,” or rather of the erroneous construction of “home” as a space which one could claim to possess and identify with naturally. The example of Alice’s lack of “a definite, concrete nest to revert to—a home of her own” (213) confirms how, for her brother, exile and expatriation actually function as “an allegory of the necessarily uncanny character of all ‘homes’ to begin with” (Katz 29). In the absence of a home of one’s own, insofar as home is always already, as it were, home to the experience of the foreign, the question of national affiliations and borders becomes moot, so that James can easily claim “the English & American worlds [...] as a big Anglo-Saxon total [...] continuous & more or less convertible.” Erasing the border between the two countries and imaginatively bridging the transatlantic gulf that separates them, James eschews patriotism’s solidification of local differences into native and natural “peculiarities” in favour of a cosmopolitan process of “melting together.” The trope of “melting” speaks powerfully to the dispersal, the emptying out of national identity, that is, to the production of a “fluid nonidentity”

which seems inextricably bound up indeed with the experience of “cosmopolitan expatriatism” and its “deliberate transgressing of boundaries” (Posnock 191, 194).

This reading overlooks however the concomitant production of a cosmopolitan, fluid self and of “a big Anglo-Saxon total,” whereby James’s “politics of nonidentity,” to quote Ross Posnock again (285-292), not only becomes inseparable from, but quite literally underwrites, an imperialist “agenda of Anglo-Saxon racial hegemony” (Giles, 2018 33). This fantasy of racial melting resonates with the mention, in the first paragraph of his letter to William, of Robert Louis Stevenson’s journey to “some undecipherable cannibal-island in the Pacific”: “They are such far-away, fantastic, bewildering people,” James observes, “that there is a certain fatigue in the achievement of putting one’s self in relation with them.” (James, 1999b 211) Interestingly, and as the ostentatious reprise of the word “fatigue” at key moments in this letter suggests, James’s weariness originates simultaneously in his reluctance to relate to the native people of the South Sea islands and in his aversion to the setting up of artificial national disparities between “the English & American worlds.” Claiming Anglo-American continuity while refusing to identify with the “bewildering people” of the Pacific, James both denies and recognizes therefore “the prospect of geographic alterity” (Giles, 2018 33), even as he frames his cosmopolitan ideal within a Victorian structure of cultural and racial hierarchy. In other words, James’s efforts to erase national borders within the confines of his cosmopolitan world coincide with a contradictory impulse to reproduce a binary logic of opposition between the near and “the far-away” that amounts to restoring a set of boundaries eventually protective of the integrity of the “general” Anglo-Saxon “subject.”⁴

Formal Enclosures

Evidently then, and for all its cosmopolitan fluidity, James’s world was not boundless, as a letter written to Hendrik Christian Andersen towards the end of his life makes even clearer. Responding to Andersen’s pamphlet entitled *A World Center of Communication* and its plans to design a “World City,” James wrote on September 4, 1913:

I simply *loathe* such pretentious [*sic*] forms of words as “World” anything—they are to me mere monstrous sound without sense. The World is a prodigious and portentous and immeasurable affair, and I can’t for a moment pretend to sit in my little corner here and “sympathise with” proposals for dealing with it. It is so far vaster in its appalling complexity than you or me, or than anything we can pretend without the imputation of absurdity and insanity to do to it, that I content myself, and inevitably *must* (so far as I can do anything at all now), with living in the realities of things, with “cultivating my garden” (morally and intellectually speaking), and with referring my questions to a Conscience (my own poor little personal), less inconceivable than that of the globe. (James, 1984 682)

One arguably hears the voice of the novelist dreading the uncontrollable immensity of experience and feeling painfully the limits of perception. Yet James’s diatribe may also be read more politically as belying the kind of cosmopolitan commitment he articulated at the end of the 1880s. Pitting the world’s inscrutable, “appalling complexity” against the restricted vista afforded by the “little corner” of his “Conscience,” the elderly writer explicitly recognizes, in an approving nod to Voltaire’s *Candide*, his preference for “[his] garden” over “the globe.” Disowning what appears to him as his friend’s “deplorable and delirious connections” with the idea of a unified and continuous world (682), he claims to be able only to enter into relation with more localized and proximal particularities.

In this context, it is no wonder to observe that James returned, time and again, to the question of affiliation, whether local, regional, or national. From *A Little Tour in France* (1884) to *English Hours* (1905), *The American Scene* (1907), and *Italian Hours* (1909), the list of his main collections of travel essays alone is enough to illustrate his long-standing concern with geographic rootedness and its relation to the shaping of national character, and thus with the

possibility, if not the necessity, to establish clear lines of demarcation. In *The American Scene*, for instance, James makes a repeated use of the “door” to signify the more or less lawful and legitimate crossing of borders, even as the text displays an obsessive, and somewhat essentializing, quest for locating “the American spirit” (James, 1994 79, 95, 196).⁵ A “spirit,” one may add, that the “initiated native” (3) spectacularly failed to embody when, reaching Florida in the final chapter of his travelogue, he was mistaken for an “inquiring stranger” (3) as a “gentleman” suddenly approached him and exclaimed quite out of the blue: “I guess we manage our travelling here better than in *your* country!”—whereby he so easily triumphed, blank as I had to remain as to the country he imputed to me” (311-312). The observer’s sense of defeat and helplessness in this scene of misrecognition stems from the violent experience of uprooting that the gentleman’s jocular remark subjects him to, relocating him as it does in the “blank” limbo of statelessness and leaving him unhomed in his own country. The blankness imposed on the travelling analyst resonates ironically with “the constituted blankness” which, from Cape Cod to Charleston, characterizes his perception of the United States at the turn of the century (30). As Marie-Odile Salati and others have noted, the repeated occurrences of the adjective “blank” throughout *The American Scene* index the lack of depth and substance of modern America in the eyes of the observer, as well as its formlessness. Yet the nation’s blankness simultaneously becomes a material surface through the recurring image of the “big brush, a brush steeped in crude universal white” (226), covering and quite literally whitewashing what James calls, at the end of the Washington chapter, “the bloody footsteps of time” (268), that is, America’s history of racial violence against native populations and black slaves (Haviland 56-57). Interestingly, this aesthetic and political tangle, linking up James’s critique of the nation’s blank formlessness and its politics of racial erasure, resurfaces in the opening of the Florida section. Immediately after confessing to his own blankness, the traveller is confronted with “the negro porter engaged at the door of the conveyance,” whose “detachment” signals for him “the apparently deep-seated inaptitude of the negro race at large for any alertness of personal service” (312). His racial prejudice is both baffled and exacerbated as the vision of the black porter standing “at the door” of the railway carriage, and guarding symbolically the gateway to the South, elicits on the part of the traveller a sentimentalized response that speaks to the vexed issue of his “sectional” identification: “I could have shed tears for them [the old planters] at moments, reflecting it was for *this* they had fought and fallen” (312).

While the trope of the door serves, in the Florida section, to name the uneasy union of North and South and the equally difficult passage from one to the other, in the early chapters of *The American Scene* it rather marks a concern for the undue openness of America and, conversely, a partiality for enclosed spaces. Evoking “the definite, the palpable affirmation and belated delimitation of College Yard” at Harvard during his stay in Cambridge, James lingered on this “admirably interesting example of the way in which the formal enclosure of objects at all interesting immediately refines upon their interest, immediately establishes values” (49). Yet he instantly qualified his celebration of such an “aesthetics of circumscription” (Hsu 237), noting that “the enclosure,” however “impressive” and “sovereign,” actually “signifie[d] little [...] in the land of the ‘open door’” (James, 1994 49). Emphasizing how “historical analogy” is first for James a way to “investigat[e] aesthetic form,” John Carlos Rowe has argued that the enclosure of Harvard Yard functions as “an apt metaphor for the relation of form to meaning” and for the restless analyst’s “own activity of giving shape and dimension to the formless and often chaotic world he encounters.” (Rowe, 1976 148, 158). Through its contrast with the characteristically “open door” of modern America and its attendant threat of constant “disclosure,” as James observed in his *Notebooks* after his visit to Harvard (James, 1947 316), the enclosure operates as a safeguard against the blur of formlessness and the loss of distinction, and reminds us that the production of meaning, upon whose interest and value the analyst seeks

to capitalize, is always already, as it were, a function of form. Yet the scare quotes that James uses to designate, and critique, America's flawed aesthetics of openness ("open door") also invites to read the relation between "historical analogy" and "aesthetic form" in the opposite direction and to note the political overtones of his choice of metaphor, which resonate with the nation's "'Open Door' approach to foreign policy" promoted by Secretary of State John Hay from 1899 (Hsu 237). Designed as a one-way, non-reciprocal trade strategy only, the Open-Door policy was supposed to facilitate American access to Chinese markets, while the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882—renewed in 1892 and made permanent from 1902—made sure to cut short the prospect of Chinese immigration to the United States. James's imagery implies however that an open door inevitably allows passage in both directions, thus raising the spectre of mass immigration and its attendant threat of adulteration of "the 'American' character" (James, 1994 92).

This may explain why his meditation on the aesthetic value of Harvard Yard, and potentially of all enclosures, led the restless observer on the next page to think about his as yet unrealized project of visiting Ellis Island and of witnessing first-hand "the plenishing of our huge national *pot au feu*, of the introduction of fresh—or perpetually fresh so far it isn't perpetually stale—foreign matter into our heterogeneous system" (James, 1994 50). To be sure, the image of the fearful open door indeed returns in the following chapter, as James famously imagines "the million or so of immigrants annually knocking at our official door":

Before this door, which opens to them there only with a hundred forms and ceremonies, grindings and grumbings of the key, they stand appealing and waiting, marshalled, herded, divided, subdivided, sorted, sifted, searched, fumigated for longer or shorter periods—the effect of all which prodigious process, an intendedly 'scientific' feeding of the mill, is again to give the earnest observer a thousand more things to think of than he can pretend to retail. (66)

For the "inconceivable alien" (66), going through America's door and crossing the border into the United States is made even more difficult than it was for the James of "Occasional Paris" to enter France, as national "administrations" on both sides of the Atlantic seem equally bent on policing the identities of those they allow to pass through. Not only is the description of the "prodigious process" of border-crossing strikingly similar in its emphasis on state violence and bodily regulation, but, as Daniel Katz observes, the very same lexicon and rhetoric serve, thirty years apart and despite the difference in narrative configuration between the early essay and the later travelogue, to characterize the effect of such disciplinary "marshall[ing]" on the formation of national identity (32).⁶ In "Occasional Paris," international travel made one "[lose] that sense of the absoluteness and the *sanctity* of the habits of [one's] fellow-patriots" (James, 1993 721, my emphasis). In *The American Scene*, the vision of the flow of immigrants causes such a shock that it compels "any sensitive citizen" to reconsider his prior assumptions vis-à-vis his own sense of national attachment:

He [the sensitive citizen] had thought he knew before, thought he had the sense of the degree in which it is his American fate to share the *sanctity* of his American consciousness, the intimacy of his American *patriotism*, with the inconceivable alien; but the truth had never come to him with any such force. [...] So is stamped, for detection, the questionably privileged person who has had an apparition, seen a ghost in his supposedly safe old house. (James, 1994 66, my emphasis)

The scene of watchful border-crossing, or door-opening, at Ellis Island is thus underwritten by a double form of haunting. On the one hand, the native, "American consciousness" is revealed to be always haunted by the "ghost" of the alien immigrant, so that the (national) home always houses the foreign (Posnock 278-279). "With [...] no one of its indoor parts distinguishable from any other," then, national consciousness turns out to be architected through a "diffused vagueness of separation between apartments, between hall and room, between one room and

another, between the one you are in and the one you are not in,” much like the actual houses that the dismayed “restored absentee” visits in New York (James, 1994 125). On the other hand, and complementarily, the lexical echoes between the two texts suggest that the cosmopolite and the patriot always haunt each other: to be a cosmopolite means to be haunted by the patriotic nostalgia of prior attachments, while to be a patriot means to be haunted by the antecedent presence of the alien at home.⁷ I would further argue that this reciprocal haunting is never more apparent than in the act of crossing a border, which James himself so often did and narrated. In this sense, the scenes of border-crossing featuring in his travel essays introduce us, as much as his fiction, to what Homi Bhabha famously described, in his brief discussion of Isabel Archer at the beginning of *The Location of Culture*, as “the ‘unhomeliness’ inherent in that rite of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiation. [...] In that displacement, the borders between home and the world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting.” (13)

Passable Figures

From this perspective, cosmopolitanism and patriotism do not stand in a relation of binary opposition and mutual exclusiveness, so much as they refract and problematize each other (Giles, 2002 95, 99). James’s 1888 letter to his brother William, quoted above, is a case in point:

I have not the least hesitation in saying that I aspire to write in such a way as it wd. be impossible to an outsider to say whether I am, at any moment, an American writing in English or an Englishman writing about America (dealing as I do with both countries,) & so far from being ashamed of such an ambiguity I should be exceedingly proud of it, for it would be highly civilized. (James, 1999b 213)

Despite his fantasy of “a big Anglo-Saxon total,” James does not aspire to cancel national identities, then, but rather to turn them into temporary “habitation[s]” in order to make strategic use of the critical “ambiguity” thus afforded to him (213).

Ten years earlier, in an essay entitled “The British Soldier” and published in *Lippincott’s Magazine* in August 1878, James resorted to another trope in order to foreground the vantage of such “ambiguity,” that of national identities as costumes to be donned and doffed at will.⁸ Returning to the troubled geo-political context that already informed his discussion of the cosmopolite spirit in “Occasional Paris” a year earlier, he reflected on the heated debates sparked by the Russo-Turkish conflict among the London socialites and offered, with much playfulness and irony, his own solution to the conundrum of national affiliations and partisan attachments:

Every one about me was either a Russian or a Turk, the Turks, however, being greatly the more numerous. It appeared necessary to one’s self-respect to assume some foreign personality, and I felt keenly, for a while, the embarrassment of choice. At last it occurred to me simply that as an American I might be an Englishman; and the reflection became afterwards very profitable. When once I had undertaken the part, I played it with what the French call *conviction*. There are many obvious reasons why the rôle, at such a time as this, should accommodate itself to the American capacity. The feeling of race is strong, and a good American could not but desire that, with the eyes of Europe fixed upon it, the English race should make a passable figure. (James, 1999a 6)

Punning on the double meaning of the word “passable,” “connoting both acceptable and capable of passing” (Hannah 34), James envisions national identity as a theatrical performance. As his commutable syntax suggests (“as an American I might be an Englishman”), identities function like reversible garments, so that “the better American he is,” the better Englishman he actually proves (James, 1999a 6). At first, James’s successful performance in inhabiting the English consciousness apparently confirms his “American capacity” for impersonation and paradoxically consolidates his own sense of national belonging in an ironic gesture of “filial

piety” towards the Mother country, just as his “self-respect” is strengthened by his temporary “foreign personality” (6).⁹ Yet in these times of crisis, the English national consciousness was anything but unified and the “rôle” that James willingly played was from the outset Janus-faced, torn at “the dilemma” between the excessive “brutality” and jingoism underwriting pro-Turkish positions and the equally violent, and therefore morally unacceptable, consequences of “Russian conquest” (6). In the end, then, the assumption of “some foreign personality” does not enable a closing of the circuit of national self-recognition. On the contrary, it confronts the performer with a double or split consciousness, figured as yet another pair of opposed nationalities, which his own practice of national impersonation mirrors and diffracts, as James’s passing reference to the French further instantiates in a move reminiscent of his letter to Thomas Sergeant Perry quoted at the beginning of this essay, where the recourse to French idioms helped to articulate national self-recognition as cosmopolitan identification.

The various performances of nationality that texture James’s travel writings and writings about travel register more generally the acute understanding that his texts deploy of travel as “traversal” and “deviation,” if not “deviance,” and thus as enabling “a principled rejection of what is straight and straightforward” (Giles, 2002 100). By privileging the “tantalizing, liminal space” between different possibilities of identification and affiliation (Giles, 2002 101), and by locating his work “at the site of contact” between them (Hsu 237), James plots in effect a “libidinal economy” linking desire and place (Buelens 301), whereby identities, national and otherwise, can be both queried and queered. This liminal and libidinal economy turns the crossing of borders into a scene of encounter in which, as we have seen, the figure of the soldier often plays a key role. Just as “Occasional Paris” evidenced James’s complex fascination for the martial representatives of the French administration while questioning the disciplining of identities they performed, “The British Soldier” likewise foregrounds its titular figure as a locus for “interrogating the narratability of national and imperial identities and for imagining the relation of the impressionable, feminized observer to a military masculinity that always allured and perplexed him” (Hannah 32). Not only does the essay reflect on the return of British soldiers within the national borders, whose presence suddenly makes home an unhomely place, but it also emphasizes the ambiguities of the “picturesque” and “ornamental” spectacle they offer and of James’s own “lively admiration of the military class” (James, 1999a 3). As Peter Rawlings has argued, with special reference to “The British Soldier,” soldier bodies do “represent for James sites of compromised authority, unstable boundaries, and furtive desires” (2004 182). And while the aestheticization of the non-combatant soldiers arguably obfuscates the imperial violence they enact outside the metropolis, it also blurs their identification as straightforward representatives of manly virility and national greatness (Hannah 32-34). Indeed, the comparison of the soldiers’ “huts” to a “cushioned and curtained [...] pretty house in Mayfair” deflates the earlier and glorifying representation of “the tall Life Guardsman” sitting “monumentally, astride of his black charger [...] cuirassed and helmeted, booted and spurred” (James, 1999a 12, 9). In addition, throughout the essay, James occupies in turn the position of the spellbound “gamins who stand upon the curbstone to see [the] soldiers pass” and that of “the young ladies” contemplating the same spectacle (9, 12). Infantilized and feminized, the “philosophic observer” and “contemplative pedestrian” confesses to being “always very much struck by the sight of a uniform,” finding particularly alluring the soldiers’ “undress uniform—with their tight red jackets and tight blue trousers following the swelling lines of their manly shapes” (5, 8). His encounter with British soldiers manoeuvring at Aldershot thus enables the American expatriate to engage in a series of eroticizing manoeuvres of his own, linking up his intricate cosmopolitan politics with the queer erotics of national performance and testifying eventually to the unhomeliness of his own “foreign personality” (6).

At the other end of James’s literary career, and as a coda to this essay, the Southern chapters of *The American Scene* exemplify one more time this logic while displacing it simultaneously, as

James maps his querying of national identity onto the sectional geography of the United States. Relocating the question of border-crossing on the Mason–Dixon line, he confronts the difficult question of national unity in the wake of the Civil War. As Paul Giles compellingly argued (2002 112-115), James’s account of the South strains at the tension between, on one hand, his attempt at fluidifying, or melting, identities into what he called in the New York chapters “the cauldron of the ‘American’ character” (James, 1994 92) and, on the other hand, his growing sense of the “greater intensity of the South” and its local particularities as he travels down to Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina (229). This tension rends the texture of his account in a section of the Baltimore chapter titled “The Tepid South,” where James describes himself as “a constitutional story-seeker” (231). His self-appointed role evidently speaks to his desire to weave the regional strands of his travelogue into the “vast simplified scheme” of a seamless national fabric and to produce “a direct connection between the snow-banks [of New England] and the orange-groves [of Florida]” (226, 225)—a connection both figured and facilitated by the development of the national railroad network, with its Pullman trains roaring “from Atlantic to Pacific and from great windy State to State” (226). This political aesthetics of “continuity” is repeatedly confronted however to the tremendous pressure resulting from the perception, by “the restless analyst,” of the many differences in climate, geography, and history of the South, a region still haunted by “the huge shadow of the War” (225, 229), so that *The American Scene* may be seen to reinscribe the North-South divide it sought to overcome. Yet this opposition is neither static nor essentialized, and occasions instead a process of reciprocal “hollowing out” whereby regional and national identities on the American scene come across eventually as a series of performances without substance (Giles, 2002 114).

James’s visit to the Confederate Museum in Richmond is a case in point: although it takes the form of a restaging of the Civil War, the muted conflict between “the least blatant of Northerners” and “a very handsome, young Virginian” and “son of the new South” (1994 286, 285) is also fraught with queer desire, which contributes to ironizing the combatants’ respective positions (Buelens 307-308). Recalling “some paternal adventure [...] which comprised [...] the lucky smashing of the skull of a Union soldier” (James, 1994 285), the young Virginian initially stands for his Confederate forefathers and comes to represent at once a martial figure guarding the Confederate border and a gateway to “the Southern spirit” that the “expatriated observer” and “palpitated pilgrim” wants so keenly to penetrate (276, 270). Rather than opposing him and playing his Northern part in a show of confrontational manliness, however, James masochistically entices him to further aggression, even finding the Southerner’s readiness to violence “charmingly suggestive” (285). Yet instead of confirming the Southerner’s claim to self-identification (“That’s the kind of Southerner *I* am!” [286]), James’s performance of submission allows for a final reversal, insofar as the Southerner’s bellicose “passion” inhabiting his “consciousness” is eventually assimilated to a meagre item of decoration “[adorning] its bare walls” (286). As disfurnished as the South is culturally “disinherited” (284), the Virginian’s consciousness is emptied out of its pretensions of soldierly grandeur, even as his performance of regional belonging remains “charmingly suggestive” in the eyes of the “vague Northerner” (285). In the end, then, James’s performance of identity does prove a critical “strategy of paradox and reversal” (Giles, 2002 117). Turning regional and national borders into fluid spaces and reversible interfaces and revealing the queer unhomeliness of attachments, the cosmopolitan logic at work in his travel essays and elsewhere thus corroborates T. S. Eliot’s assessment from long ago that “the fact of being everywhere a foreigner was probably an assistance to his native wit” (1).

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¹ James's rather prodigious letter begins in fact with a long sequence in French, which he interrupts after exclaiming: "Décidément, je plante là mon français: ou plutôt c'est lui qui me plante" ("Decidedly, I drop here my French: or rather it drops me."). Yet he continues to intersperse his text with French words and phrases, enacting his own brand of bilingual cosmopolitanism and jokingly noting at one point: "Tiens! Mon français qui me retrouve!" ("Say! My French has found me again.") (James, 2006 177, 180; trans. 182, 184). On James's use of French in this and other letters, see Karlin; on French as a "fantasmal idiom" in James, see Derail-Imbert.

² For a penetrating discussion of the figure of the ubiquitous American tourist in Europe and the desire for cultural appropriation in James, see Buzard 217-284.

³ In addition to Adeline Tintner's intertextual study of *The Cosmopolitan World of Henry James*, several critics over the past thirty years have investigated the many aesthetic and political facets of James's cosmopolitan imagination. See in particular Rowe, 1984, 1998, and 2003; Peyser 135-168; Griffin; and Berman, 2001 and 2010.

⁴ A similar logic of racial hierarchy and Euro-American privilege underwrites the numerous, often unsigned, reviews of travel narratives and ethnographic studies that James published between 1873 and 1878, mostly in *The Nation*. See Blair 15-59.

⁵ I can only acknowledge here that, even as it recurs in several places of James's travelogue and textures his account, the phrase "the American spirit" arguably indexes for the observer shifting realities. In the New York chapter, for instance, it designates the material and mercantile "hotel-spirit" of modern America (79), while in the Concord section it is embodied in the speculative writings of Emerson and the New England Transcendentalists (196). Despite their referential variety, however, the occurrences of this phrase seem to me to mark the analyst's endeavour to sublimate the heterogeneity of the "'national' life" (323), even though his multifarious experience of that heterogeneity contradicts, and possibly defeats, this initial purpose.

⁶ The rhetorical proximity is further underscored by the fact that, in both "Occasional Paris" and *The American Scene*, the narrative voice inhabits, at least in part, the perspective of the "returning observer." Such proximity is not synonymous with continuity, however, and James's narrative technique and biographical investments evidently vary from his letters, to his travel essays, to such a piece as *The American Scene*. While mindful of these differences, this essay nevertheless wishes to trace the persistence of the cosmopolitan/patriot tension across various texts, if only to register the nuances of its treatment in different rhetorical and narrative contexts.

⁷ Daniel Katz further suggests that "to be 'haunted' in any sense is for James to be pushed into a 'cosmopolitan' sort of subjective vagary" (32). Although it is beyond the scope of this essay to reflect on James's cosmopolitics of haunting, Katz's insight may for instance help to read a story like "Maud-Evelyn" (1900). Determined to offer their dead daughter the life she should have had, Maud-Evelyn's parents convince Marmaduke to marry her ghost, which enables the preservation, subsequent growth, and eventual transmission of their considerable fortune. Yet this structure of exchange through a dead child also replicates the imperial circuit of Britain's accumulation of wealth through the sacrifice of the nation's youth across the colonies at the end of the nineteenth century, so that the ghost of Maud-Evelyn also functions as a figure for Britain's imperial politics and globalized economic ventures, whose spectres haunt the characters' consciousnesses (see Constantinesco).

⁸ Cornelius Crowley also discusses "The British Soldier" in his article collected in this issue (editor's note).

⁹ One may observe in addition that, unlike in "The British Soldier," in "Occasional Paris" the obligation to "assume" one's own national "personality" in the act of border-crossing occasioned precisely the loss of one's "self-respect."