Studia Anglica Posnaniensia 61(s.1) (2026): 91–103
doi: 10.14746/stap.2026.61.17

THE IDEAL CITIZEN: WWI AND THE LETTERS OF HENRY JAMES

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ABSTRACT

While Henry James's World War I correspondence is frequently read as a biographical supplement to his late fiction and wartime essays, this article examines his letters as primary sites where he models a theory of ethical, active citizenship. Drawing on William James's somatic theory of emotion and Mutlu Konuk Blasing's theory of lyrical language, I argue that as the "boundless enormity" of the war rendered conventional fictional representation impossible, James turned to personal correspondence to translate immediate bodily sensations into shared, communal affect. Through close readings of his 1914–1915 letters – including his instinctive shift to collective pronouns ("we" and "our"), his epistolary exchanges with Edith Wharton and Grace Norton, and his 1915 decision to adopt British citizenship – this study demonstrates how Jamesian "impressions" operate as civic acts. By inviting readers into a "quavering communion" of feeling and shared language, James's wartime letters collapse the boundary between private sensibility and public responsibility, revealing that for the late Master, the emotive is inherently political.

Keywords: Henry James, World War I, epistolarity, affect theory, William James, Mutlu Konuk Blasing, lyrical language, citizenship

In preparation for the 8th International Conference of the Henry James Society in 2019, held that year in Trieste, Italy, I approached James's autobiographical works, *A Small Boy and Others* and *Notes on a Son and Brother*, by examining his use of lyrical language (Horne 2005) to ask whether James's style of language could be read as a means to an amorphous yet political end. In other words, my aim was to ask: what does the sound of Jamesian language teach us about Henry James's theory of the ideal American citizen? And how does his writing invite readers to participate in the creation of this ideal citizen? To answer this question, I engaged with a small selection of his letters as a "representative documentary corpus" (Ionescu 2005: para.19), selecting key phrases to uphold my very

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rudimentary claim: James's language functions as an aesthetic production which engages and challenges readers to find their individual subject position in a collective experience of language and sound. Nevertheless, although the practical application of James's letters certainly assisted my theoretical claims based on what was achieved through his autobiographies, I failed to ask: are the letters equally valuable as primary rather than secondary sources, and would my understanding of the Jamesian ideal citizen benefit from a closer examination?

In my previous work (Čikeš 2021), I suggest that James utilizes the language of feeling, lyrical language as theorized by Mutlu Konuk Blasing (2009) to evoke a sense of collective identity in his autobiographies through affect and sensation. When turning to James's WWI essays, Hitomi Nabae's (2007) study offers a reading of the Mother/Child trope found in "Refugees in Chelsea" as a unifying signifier that resists the Rooseveltian, aggressive, masculine power and offers another model of the ethical citizen, a reading which suggests a link between the WWI essays, in their effect rather than style, and the theoretical underpinnings of the autobiographies. In other words, both forms of nonfiction writing stress the importance of feeling, community, language, and identity. By turning our attention to the letters as not only sources of biographical insight but as models of the *practices* involved in embodying the ideal citizen, this article will show that in the last years of his life, from the onset of WWI, James's practice of letter writing was linked to his theory of the ethical citizen and artist. By approaching the letters as a part of the larger corpus, I hope to show that, for James, the political is the emotive, and emotive is unquestionably political.

Two weeks following the onset of WWI, Henry James wrote Mrs. Alfred Sutro:

> My aged nerves can scarcely stand it, and I bear up but as I can. I dip my nose, or try to, into the inkpot as often as I can; but it's as if there were no ink there, and I take it out smelling gunpowder, smelling blood, as hard as it did before. And yet I keep at it – or mean to.
>
> (James 1920: 388)

Although James clearly intended to continue working on his fiction and nonfiction at the onset of the war (*The Ivory Tower*, *A Sense of the Past*, *The Middle Years*), efforts to continue any past project, that is, any project that had been initiated before the onset of the war, were ultimately abandoned. James witnessed "The plunge of civilization into this abyss of blood and darkness" (James 1920: 384) and soon realized that the fictional form could not capture the only subject that was worth thinking of or representing. The isolating and all-consuming experience of the war, then, offers readers of James's letters an opportunity to witness the process of creating a sense of communal identity without the aid of fiction.

The war, in James's letters, is described as a Monster (James 1920: 459), a "sickening blackness" (James 1920: 386), and a myriad of metaphors that

communicate the overarching presence in James's consciousness. The war, therefore, is the presence that oversees, overtakes, and overwhelms all life. Fiction writing under the pressure and presence of "the boundless enormity" is impossible since writing is the act of making meaning, not recording it. In his infamous reply to Wells, James declares: "It is art that makes life" (James 1920: 490), suggesting that meaning, what we 'make' in life, is one sculpted by the artist who translates life's little private dramas to reveal the relevance, potential meanings, and connections through its representation. The War, in its enormity and potential consequences, blocks one's view of the individual scenes that the author and reader are able to represent and imagine. It "blocks out…every other object and question, every other thinkability, in life" (James 1920: 395).

Since the War overtakes "every other thinkability", James declares, "We eat and drink, and talk, and walk, and think, we sleep and wave and live and breathe only the War" (James 1920: 406); the mammoth is too large to represent in fiction since the "windows of attention" that fiction represents can only occur *after* the "shocks" and "anxieties" of such an experience. Individual stories are smothered by "the great public blackness" (James 1920: 384), leaving the author of depths of individual and collective consciousness to muse: "how [can one] represent that horrific capability, *historically* latent, historically ahead of it? How on the other hand *not* represent it either – without putting into play mere fiddlesticks?" (James 1920: 446, emph. original). In other words, the mass is too large to approach with any certainty. Not only are events rapidly changing, but the end result is not known, leaving all possibilities in symbolic limbo. For an author who "needed to stand on extraordinarily firm ground before he would think he knew a world" (Ford 1945: 47–53, qtd. in Wiesenfarth 1991: 62), the war rendered James's process of reflecting on his subjects impossible in the moment, but his imagination reaches, still, leaving him to muse on what others, those who survive the war and that possess the skill to reflect back, symbolize, and create webs of association, will *do* in the fictional form: "Those of us who shall outwear and outlast, who shall above all outlive, in the larger sense of the term, and outimagine, will be able to show for the adventure, I am convinced, a weight and quality that may be verily worth your having waited for" (James 2000: 544).

Non-fiction, save for the essays and biographical sketch, was also impossible to undertake unless the focal interest was the War. This is understandable considering the space needed to write fiction was needed in his autobiographical sketches as well. Taking on the role of the gaping boy (*A Small Boy and Others*) or the wandering traveler (*The American Scene*), those personas never directly address the reader. The boy continues to gape, and the traveler wanders, and it is months or decades later that James is able to refashion the wandering and gaping into a trope to serve the text and series of impressions in question. While the wartime essays constitute another important chapter in comprehending

The Master's *donnée*, their differentiation from the wartime letters is in James's intent: unlike the impressions that generate feeling and associations in his fiction and non-fiction works pre-1914, these essays present "something as concrete and 'human' as possible" (James 1920: 482). The proposed subject in James's letter to Pinker, June 29, 1915, was to "[do] something about the British soldier, his aspect, temper and tone, and the considerations he suggests, *as I have seen him since the beginning of the war in Hospital*; where I have in fact largely and constantly seen him" (James 1920: 482, emph. original). By presenting the British Soldier for American audiences, James creates a metonymic play for the tragedy of war since every soldier's death opens "an abyss into which one can simply gaze appalled" (James 1920: 442). Alongside his ever-shifting subject position throughout his works (Nabae 2007: 51), Tintner points out "The metaphors in these essays are as original and brilliant as any in *The Golden Bowl*" (Tintner 1985: 173). Yet, the essays are problematic to view through a purely artistic lens. Their production was part of James's efforts to convince American citizens that their engagement in the war must be direct and immediate. He focuses on urgent needs – specifically funds and American involvement – not only to convey the war's tone to a distant readership, but also to present the "black mass" in a form that rouses readers to act immediately rather than engage in a play of associations.

The events of WWI threw James into continual observation and processing, and the figure that likewise returns in his letters is that of the gaping observer; however, unlike *The American* Scene and *A Small Boy and Others,* his gaping occurs in the moment, and we now see the model of observing and processing in practice. No longer a young, gaping boy nor a wandering traveler, the letters demonstrate James processing the war as at one moment a "poor old gaping visitor" (James 1920: 470) and at other times actively attempting to make meaning via his "poor groping speculations" (James 1920: 436). Here, James puts into practice or models the means by which the ideal "American" citizen engages and processes via affect at the personal and collective level. In other words, the letters can be seen as a part of James's *donnée* not just in terms of style and artistry, but also as part of the overarching work that James's writing offers – a theory on becoming a Jamesian American via the process of individual and collective affect.

To understand the importance of affect and the role it plays in the creation of the ideal citizen, a small reminder of William James's formulation of emotions may help readers decipher the function of language in this creation. The James-Lange theory of emotion and identity postulates emotion as "nothing but the feeling of a bodily state" (James 1950b: 459). Unlike previous theories and views that "treated emotions as purely psychological states… James' countering proposal posits that 'an emotion [is] indicative of physical change, not the cause of such changes'" (Stanley 2017: 98–99). Although William James did not

specify the process of moving from sensation to thought to language, Mutlu Konuk Blasing's theory of lyrical language provides a fascinating lens through which this process may be viewed.[2]

According to Blasing, lyric poetry resonates with readers/listeners due to its use (or access to) the public power and realm of language. According to Blasing, the individual's entry into signification can be remembered, or re-experienced through poetic language since it "mobilizes [our] emotions" (Blasing 2009: 1), presenting a language that "resists communication" (Blasing 2009: 27) of and for the social order. More specifically to the issue of the auditory register, Blasing states, "even after sounds are channeled into linguistic use, these experiences of sounds and voices seem to continue a subliminal existence and can be recalled in certain kinds of language use" (Blasing 2009: 49). The relationship between sound and the written word is one of continual negotiation since "[although] sounds are processed in the right hemisphere, speech is processed in the left. Poetic language must be processed both acoustically and phonologically, in both hemispheres, because it carries acoustic information in excess of the linguistic information", yet this excess also means that it resonates with the pre-linguistic self, the pre-I, the self that is cut into language, and so it is a language that resonates with all speakers of a given language – the "mother tongue". Specifically, the pre-linguistic self, the self of 'the more', retains its memories (scant as they may be) with the somatic articulation of sounds.

The interpretation of physical sensations is what produces the aligning emotion, and the interpretation is processed and communicated by the last stage, the translation into language. Nevertheless, language can never fully convey the bodily experience since "emotions are always retrospective interpretations" (Stanley 2017: 99) that must reach across 'the more' of our identity, which language cannot convey. To express the emotion, then, is to utilize the "radically public language" (Blasing 2009: 10) of lyrical language that gazes directly into the void rather than denying its ever-constant presence in our self, our language, and our way of knowing the world.

To delve deeper into affect theory via William James's theory of the self would involve a much closer examination of the distinction between the "I" and "me", along with a view of the various selves (the material self, the social self, the spiritual self, and pure ego), a task beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is useful to remember, when discussing the Spiritual Self, James declares:

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[2] Although affect theorists have stressed the role of storytelling and narrative, emphasizing how "storytelling is the way that worlds are made" (Truran 2022: 33), Blasing's theory takes this concept a step further into how the 'sound' of language affects native speakers/listeners.

> this central part of the Self is *felt*… it is at any rate no *mere ens rationis*, cognized only in an intellectual way, and no *mere* summation of memories or *mere* sound of a word in our ears. It is something with which we also have direct sensible acquaintance, and which is as fully present at any moment of consciousness in which it *is* present, as in a whole lifetime of such moment.
>
> (James 1950a: 299, emph. original)

The feelings (sensations) that instigate emotion and are expressed or conveyed via language correspond to the core of one's identity, the Spiritual Self, where "our moral sensibility and conscience [and] … our indomitable will" reside (James 1950a: 296).

For both Henry and William, then, the highly attuned, feeling subject is the ethical subject. According to William, "only those who are introspectively attuned to the positive or negative valence of their feelings are equipped to distinguish good from bad guiding 'notions' of how to act" (James 1899: 169–195, qtd. in Stanley 2017: 106). Perhaps this is the reason Henry expresses exasperation at the fact that "the dreadful nations couldn't not suddenly pull up in a convulsion of horror & shame" (James 2000: 542), suggesting the feeling of war should have deterred any ethical subject away from the corresponding, "brutal blow" (James 1920: 468). While it is difficult to trace or determine the extent to which William's theories influenced and shaped Henry James's own views and practices, *feeling* and *being* seem to be synonymous for the younger brother, and, for the younger James, language is the link between these registers of experience, not only narratives or stories. For instance, James insists his use of "we" and "our" when discussing English society at the beginning of the conflict is "absolutely instinctive and irresistible with me that I should feel quite abject if I didn't" (James 1920: 386). In other words, James's *feeling "English"*, his collective identity linked with the category of "English", expresses itself 'instinctively' as already determined in the soul and now emanating through his social language. Thus, one's identity or self, including its feeling, ethical self, is linked with the language that one shares.

If James's use of the collective pronoun emerges from the core affect of *feeling* English, it also indicates James's central focus during this tumultuous time. The experience of the war has disconnected James from his previous life, rendering all past experiences "disconnected and fabulous, fatuous, fantastic, belonging to another life and another plane" (James 1920: 388), and it is only through the collective sense of self that James finds comfort and inspiration:

> Infinitely thrilling and touching such a community with the so all-round incomparable nation. I feel on my side an immense community here, where the tension is proportionate to the degree to which we feel engaged – in other words up to the chin, up to the eyes, if necessary.
>
> (James 1920: 391)

This connection to the community or collective is experienced in feeling and emerges from James via language in an instinctive use of the personal pronouns that identify him as a British citizen almost a year before James undertook the process of naturalization. Although this process was instigated by practical needs (to have access to Lamb House without Police supervision), the feeling of being a part of a community, of being shaped and having shaped the national voice and character, resides in James's thoughts long before his practical needs or his ethical dissatisfaction with his birth nation's lack of involvement in the War effort.

Yet not all 'linguistic experiences' convey the same vibration, nor are they all of the same value to James during this time of crisis. The exchange of conjectures, while in other times may have served as an exchange of pleasantries, at this time was experienced as "[p]romiscuous chatter" from "gossip" that is exchanged amongst "more or less wailing women" (James 1920: 423–424). In a time of such crisis and tragedy, James states: "You can't say things unless you have been out there to learn them, and *if* you have been out there to learn them you can say them less than ever" (James 1920: 441). In other words, the war has "used up words" (James 1999: 144), and the only connection left is the language of feeling: "I only feel, and feel, and *toujours* feel about them unspeakably, and about nothing else whatever – feeling so in Wordsworth's terms of exaltations, agonies and loves, and (our) unconquerable mind" (James 1920: 430). The witnessing, experiencing, and feeling subject, unable to represent the war for reflection, can only represent the impressions themselves – unprocessed – with only the ability to offer readers the accompanying feelings generated by those impressions or experiences. The letters, then, retain James's lifelong project of offering impressions as a gesture of unification via mutual affect and therefore mutual understanding.

This model of language and the role of the writer remains consistent in the nonfiction works: to convey impressions in a linguistic form that allows readers to immerse themselves in the text and the feelings the linguistic code reverberates, thereby creating a collective experience based on individual perception. The role of the writer, then, is to offer "the extension of life" (James 1920: 490), as James stresses in his letter to Wells. In its "plasticity and liberality", fiction offers readers the greatest freedom to create associations and to expand their own experiences, yet the exchange of impressions through personal letters also shows this capacity for language to expand ourselves. While direct impressions from the warfront are welcomed for their ability to inform, expand understanding, or "knowing", their role in conveying impressions is described as "the further refreshment of my soul" (James 1920: 429). If the soul, as William James postulates, is *felt*, to be moved by a linguistic register that evokes, through impressions, passions and sensations is to affect the very soul of another.

But feeling, and our ability to share sensations rather than concrete facts, resides not only in the individual, nor does it remain significant only to the

individual subject experience. James begins his letter to Mrs. Richard Watson Gilder, "My dear Helena", by describing the process of "passing…through the regular fiery furnace" while France and Belgium received "lacerations" (James 1920: 401), only then describing the process of feeling the war as a force or energy that "presses…with every throb of consciousness". Throughout, feelings or sensations accompany every new thought or piece of information, and the exchange between the two becomes an opportunity to revisit their mutual love of cousin Minnie Temple. In that exchange, revisiting the past, James is left "deeply moved … and surely I can but be glad to have given you the occasion" (James 1920: 402). The writer of impressions is able to expand oneself and to instigate that growth in others. What James shares is not the details of life that cause the physical sensations, but the sensations themselves and the resulting affects that arise. To convey and mutually share a sensation suggests we are able to, perhaps, share "no *mere* summation of memories or *mere* sound of a word in our ears" (James 1950a: 299), but our deeply human "experience of the intimate otherness", "unheimlich" (Blasing 2009: 9), or 'the more' that eludes language and comprehension.

To feel "with consuming passion" is to observe, learn, and convey to others; therefore, to feel is to do. As William's theory postulates, the connection to the feeling subject leads to more ethical decision-making, hence, ethical actions. Yet, the feeling one conveys to another must be preceded by an experience of one's sensations, and this entails close, immediate observations. According to James, the closer one observes the events at the centre of the conflict, the more one can 'take in' and thereby convey to others, creating a continual vibration of communal feeling. Limited by his age and physical ailments, James celebrates Edith Wharton's ability to partake in the war effort in France:

> I unutterably envy you these sights and suffered assaults of the *maxima* – condemned as I am by doddering age and "mean" infirmity to the poor mesquins *minima*, when really to find myself in closer touch would so fearfully interest and inspire and overwhelm me (as one wants to be overwhelmed.) However, since my ignoble portion is what it is, the next best thing is to heap you on the altar of sacrifice and gloat over *your* overwhelmedness and demand of you to serve me still more and more of it. On this I even insist now that I have tasted of your state and your substance – for your impression is rendered in a degree so vivid and touching that it all (especially those vespers in the church with the tragic beds in the aisles) wrings tears from my aged eyes. What a hungry *luxury* to be able to come back with things and give them then and there straight into the aching voids: do it, *do* it, my blest Edith, for all you're worth: rather, rather – "sauvez, sauvez la France!" Ah, je la sauverais bien, moi, if I hadn't been ruined myself too soon!... Ce que c'est for you, evidently, to find yourself in these adventures, like Ouida, "the favourite reading of the military". Well, as I say, do keep in touch with your public!
>
> (James 1920: 452–453; emph. original)

Wharton's proximity to the war allows her to gather impressions and transmit them to her "public", a collective position James takes on now that he is reliant on her "overwhelmedness". Yet this process of collecting experiences and impressions is described as a "hungry luxury", aligning the writer's pursuit of impressions with the physical sensations that accompany the experience of doing so. To seek impressions is to feel, and the communication of those feelings is a practice (or an act) of the engaged, active citizen and artist.

This implies the author's role is one of creating vibrations that connect each individual reader to a communal readership. These vibrations begin, however, as a gleam, as James had stressed and offered during his 1904–5 tour in his address to American women. Throughout the letters, gleams of communion are celebrated as the hope that will uplift both James as reader and the communal spirit in Britain. This gleam is of the utmost importance in a time of "unspeakable and immeasurable horror and infamy" – a reality so vast that "no words fill the abyss of it – nor touch it, nor relieve one's heart nor light by a spark the blackness" (James 1920: 405). Light is found in poetic forms that cause James to experience a "quavering communion" with the "I" of Rupert Brooke's "1914" Sonnets, yet gleams are found in other, less lyrical forms, including letters. In a response to Edmund Gosse, James alludes to "old George Sand, holding out through the darkness at Nohant, but even there giving out some lights that are caught up in her letters of the moment" (James 1920: 410–411). Letters from the past are capable of evoking the sensations of the past into the present – the vibration of emotive or lyrical language survives in the transference via reading.

Aside from becoming an ethical subject and connecting subjects from across the linguistic gap, the sensation that moves one body – leading to associations and emotions – can move a nation if a shared language is in question. Sensation and feeling reverberate through the subject and the collective, and although it stands as a poor substitute for direct action, James writes: "if to *feel*, with consuming passion, under the call of the great cause, is any sort of attestation of use, then I contribute my fond vibration" (James 1920: 408). Later that month, James writes to Grace Norton, settling the question of the value of such vibrations when he reassures her "that the hand of understanding and sympathy reached out across the sea causes a grateful vibration" (James 1920: 412). This 'hand of understanding' refers to Grace's "beautiful and touching little letter" (James 1920: 412); however, the letter serves metonymically to convey on the one hand the plea for US support and involvement, and on the other hand the personal exchange between friends. In both cases, the fraternity between the US and Britain rests upon the shared language, the shared "linguistic experience" (Blasing 2009: 12) of its peoples.

In William James's view, consciously attuning to one's feelings awakens a "wiser", ethical self; translating those internal feelings into language then binds individuals together into what Blasing calls the "communal personality of a people"

(Blasing 2009: 12). However, feeling is also linked to the vibrations that can create ripples to interrupt the tide, or "the Great Interruption", of war (James 1920: 387), perhaps a reason for James's intense frustration with his birth nation's reticence to participate and offer assistance in the "Allies' doings" (James 1920: 454). While James celebrates the significance of the intimate experience of emotive, lyrical language, such as in his description of the power of Brooke's poetry as transmitted through "some telepathic intimation", one which leads to "quavering communion" (James 1920: 462), the vibrations this intimate language evokes are capable of conjuring a "formidably clamour within us for the recorded execration of history" (James 1920: 398). Feeling, then, is the precursor to the creation of a communal identity. In fact, "we feel" seems to be the foundation of collective identity:

> That we can feel, or that the individual, poor resisting-as-he-can creature, may on such a scale feel, and so intensely and potently, *with* the endlessly multitudinous others who are subject to the same assault, and such hundreds of thousands of them to so much greater – this is verily his main great spiritual harbourage.
>
> (James 1920: 412, emph. original)

Therefore, while James has been characterized and classified as a writer of deeply individual consciousness, individual feeling and doing have greater vibrations than assumed (Rowe & Haralson 2012: 6). Individual "gleams" of action and representation have ramifications if "rendered in a degree so vivid and touching" (James 1920: 452) to move others. The act initiated in the ethical, feeling subject has political ramifications, as we see in James's final act, his acquisition of British citizenship.

In his letter to nephew Henry James, junior, the "all affectionate, old Uncle" (James 1920: 479) explains his decision to seek naturalisation was "absolutely tied up with my innermost personal feeling" (James 1920: 479). Nevertheless, he precedes this sentiment with a list of practical reasons leading to the decision:

> I have spent here all the best years of my life – they practically have *been* my life: about a twelvemonth hence I shall have been domiciled uninterruptedly in England for forty years, and there is not the least possibility, at my age, and in my state of health, of my ever returning to the U.S. or taking up any relation with it as a country. My practical relation has been to this one for ever so long, and now my "spiritual" or "sentimental" quite ideally matches it.
>
> (James 1920: 478, emph. original)

James also alludes to the previously mentioned practical need:

> My feeling has become acute with the information that I can only go down to Lamb House now on the footing of an Alien under Police supervision – an alien friend of course, which is a very different thing from an alien enemy, but still a definite technical outsider to the whole situation here.
>
> (James 1920: 477–478)

The driving force behind the decision is linked with "the public situation", the War, and necessitates a gesture or act of "offering…allegiance and devotion" which is aligned with James's "spiritual", "sentimental", and "moral weight" (James 1920: 478–480). Consequently, the experience of living in a country for forty years and yet not having full, free access to his home stands as the physical impetus for the feeling and public expression of his collective identity and the moral, ethical concepts conjured from that feeling.

The very real experience of the war was the impetus, as James confirms when he states, "let me repeat that I feel sure I shouldn't in the least have come to it without this convulsion, but one is *in* the convulsion….and one must act accordingly" (James 1920: 479, emph. original). In accordance with William James's theory, Henry James claims his experience, or the sensations experienced in his body, leads to an emotion which compels him to act, in this case in the realm of representation in the collective, which has political consequences and, therefore, vibrations. While adopting British citizenship – altering one's practical status and civic title – begins as an act of personal conscience, a civic title is always inherently political. In this way, the ethical self and the political self converge: through this model of active citizenship, even Henry James's most subjective "impressions" emerge as the expressions of a political subject.[3]

Approaching Henry James through the lens of Blasing's theory of lyrical language entails a much closer examination of the linguistic registers at play throughout, and how this language invites readers to engage with and between the texts. Yet this initial examination of the WWI letters and the possibilities for further insight into the political nature of Henry James's work overall aligns with what has been seen thus far. For James, the ideal citizen is one who engages with texts, expands through this experience, and thereby is able to entertain and uphold multiplicities. To do so, Henry James offers the space where experiencing, feeling, and acting converge in the realm of lyrical language, the realm where we experience both our individual and communal selves. What this examination has sought to find is whether the linguistic register James offers in his autobiographies and nonfiction works is at play in his personal letters. If so, the letters may serve as a means to witness James's theory of moral citizenship in practice and to witness the intricacies of this subject's engagement with others. It seems James was hopeful, at least publicly, that this communal tide of affect would lead to American involvement in the War:

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[3] A point iterated throughout Jamesian scholarship, most notably through John Carlos Rowe's *The Other Henry James* (1998) and Sara Blair's *Henry James and the Writing of Race and Nation* (1996).

> I feel all the while too that the tide of American identity of consciousness with our own, about the whole matter, rises and rises, and will rise still more before it rests again – so that every day the difference of situation diminishes and the immense fund of common sentiment increases.
>
> (James 1920: 479)

Identity, consciousness, and affect converge in James's account of the ethical subject since aligning with England was, for James, the only ethical choice for America. Although James was correct, America eventually entered the war; his own experience of *feeling* English preceded this involvement by roughly two years. Even as James discerned an "immense fund of common sentiment" binding Americans to Britain (James 1920: 479), he recoiled from the terms of "precautionary 'friendship'" his country maintained with Germany (James 1920: 484). His decision to become a British subject gives this tension a concrete form. In taking up a citizenship that matched his sense of belonging, James made public the allegiance he already felt. The gap between American sympathy and American policy leaves open the question his own naturalisation answers at the level of the individual: what does a shared feeling oblige us to do?

While this study only begins to trace the web of connections across these late letters, approaching them as primary sites of civic practice opens up vital new ways of reading Henry James's wartime corpus. Rather than stepping back from political life during the crisis, James used the intimate space of correspondence to test and model how individual sensation becomes shared affect – and how shared affect compels ethical action. Aside from offering myriad models of linguistic engagement and collective consciousness, these letters remind us of the enduring power of feeling and shared communion to bridge the ongoing divide between ourselves as individuals and as collective, political entities.

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