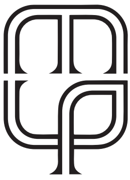

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Translating *le vrai americain*: Multilingualism in Henry James's *The Ambassadors* and James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*

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Abstract

Drawing upon work from translation studies that posits the precariousness of living between languages, this article explores how the French–English bilingualism in Henry James's *The Ambassadors* (1909) and James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956) foregrounds the identity fissures that arise in their American protagonists when they arrive in Europe. In both novels, language plays a key role in mining the inner worlds of protagonists preoccupied with lives they fear they haven't lived; these preoccupations intersect with race, nationality, sexuality, and class. Although other scholars have previously used these four identity markers as entry points into exploring these novels, this article includes multilingualism in the nexus to argue that language offers a visible and textual platform through which the mediation of identity can take place.

Keywords: multilingualism, language, hybrid identities, James Baldwin, Henry James

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In Julian Preece and Aled Rees's study of "the Modern Languages Novel," which they define as fiction by native English speakers that incorporates non-English languages into the text, the authors observe four main examples of how multilingualism features prominently in fiction. First, there are narratives centered around experiences of travel. Second, there are those that explore alienation, wherein protagonists find themselves stranded in unfamiliar languages and cultures. Third, there are narratives in which characters assimilate; and finally, there are those that contain instances of linguistic "non-translation," where the text includes "snippets of untranslated dialogue or quotations from other languages" that serve as a metaphor for the book's themes.[1] Preece and Rees argue that multilingualism in these works not only reflects the range of a writer's personal linguistic repertoire, but also the various selves that these languages bring out in their lives.

The exploration of languages' connection to writers' selfhoods is a rich and timely route for study as globalization popularizes hybrid identities in the stories we tell. Among these stories are expatriate narratives that follow central characters whose personal visions grow to align, or clash, with local views in revelatory ways. Henry James and James Baldwin—who both left their native America for Europe—are two writers whose exploration of American expatriate life in *The Ambassadors* (1909) and *Giovanni's Room* (1956) has been frequently studied and compared in existing literature. However, meaningful interrogation of their use of language in fiction is sparse. This article aims to fill this gap by demonstrating how the two writers embrace French–English multilingualism to highlight how a story's form—namely, its manipulation of language—affects the way a character develops. I further argue that, despite their common literary genealogy, the dissonances between James's and Baldwin's treatment of expatriate life demonstrate how a character's time abroad is informed by many idiosyncratic factors beyond language and nationality. Though both writers encourage readers to consider characters through the lenses of what languages they do or don't speak, or what cultures they do or don't know, they simultaneously challenge readers to consider these characters first and foremost as individuals struggling with universal concerns.

I posit that, in both novels, language plays an indispensable role in mining the inner worlds of protagonists preoccupied with the possibility of lives they could have lived in different cultural circumstances, or rather, how the concept of the unlived—or what one is afraid to live—intersects with race, nationality, sexuality, and class. Although many scholars have used these four identity markers as entry points into exploring these books' most pertinent themes, the role of language is one that I bring to the forefront with the claim that it offers a platform through which the mediation of identity can take place.

To this end, this article will explore how French–English multilingualism in Baldwin's and James's novels can be read in three ways. First, it can be read as a reflection of the precariousness of cosmopolitan life; secondly, it can be read as a commentary on the metaphorical significance of translation to transnational characters; and lastly, it can be read as a reminder of what remains unrepresentable

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despite our attempts at communication. Though multilingualism can reflect a divide between both people and the societies they inhabit, it also illustrates inherent connections between them. It can reveal how, in our need for language that sometimes fails us when we need it most, we all share the “bodily and moral corruption” that Baldwin calls the common “stink” of humanity.[2]

In *The Ambassadors*, James’s middle-aged protagonist, Lambert Strether, has been sent to Paris to bring back the prodigal son of his Massachusetts-based fiancée. In *Giovanni’s Room*, Baldwin’s younger narrator, David, arrives in France to escape the heteronormative demands that his family and society make of him as a man in America. Mediated in a mix of French and English, their interactions with expatriates and exiles in cosmopolitan Paris expand their notions of themselves and the homes they have left behind, reflecting precarious senses of self that wax and wane as the novels progress.

The novels’ shared themes are no coincidence. *Giovanni’s Room* was Baldwin’s response to reading James upon arriving in Paris.[3] In a 1986 interview with Baldwin, David Leeming recalls the author’s description of James as the writer who “shares with him the one essential theme, that of the failure of Americans to see through to ‘the reality of others.’” Such a failure of vision also contributed to America’s “race problem,” which Baldwin, who had garnered acclaim for his exploration of the Black American experience in *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), sought respite from when he arrived in Europe.[4] In “the silence” of living in a country where the language and people were still unfamiliar to him, Baldwin found himself capable of writing *Giovanni’s Room*, a book in large part inspired by *The Ambassadors.* As Christopher Stuart writes on the connection between the two books, *The Ambassadors*—in its depiction of a character who begins the novel with a strong sense of selfhood and ends it with a shaken sense of emotional and national affiliation—taught Baldwin “that our common humanity always precedes and transcends our racial and gender identities.”[5] In addition to seeing through to “the reality of others” free from gendered, racialized, and national expectations, both writers recognized that doing so would first require leaving their native homelands.

Eric Savoy describes James’s and Baldwin’s creative fascination with Paris as one mediated through an American lens, in which Paris becomes “a place of feared Otherness” where difference “enables, and is the sign of, ironic distance and re-vision.”[6] With the impetus of new vision thrust upon James’s and Baldwin’s protagonists by a different geography, they are forced to confront key details of their American lives in new and often discomfiting ways. This process of “discernment”—which Savoy describes as one of “identifying, marking out, drawing a circle around” one’s subject position and “resisting their ideological inheritance”—leads them to both accept and resist old views in a defamiliarization process aided by their authors’ use of language.[7]

The Ambassadors is in the limited third-person perspective, which encompasses both the thoughts in Strether’s mind and observations that are beyond his grasp. The way snippets of French are woven into the English narration suggests

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that Strether is familiar with the French language. French is used in a variety of manners and contexts, sometimes italicized, at other times not.[8] Nouns indicating rooms and structures (like *porte-cochère*, *salle-à-manger*, *salon de lecture*) are often written in French, as are food and drink common in France (*omelette-aux-tomates*, *bock*). French is mixed into dialogue as exclamations, such as the wealthy Woollett son-turned-refined-Europeanized-American Chad Newsome's shouts of "voyons!" or "Allez donc voir!" Readers can also find French in the many bilingual characters' linguistic repertoires, as in the case of Chad's friend Miss Barrace, who weaves terms like *bien aimable* into an English-dominant description of another character.[9]

The insertion of French feels natural in the prose, echoing, as it does, James's multilingual repertoire in real life. Much like the case of his fiction, Daniel Karlin notes that James's French—in the context of his private notes—is often "interpolated into English sentences" such that they seem "mortared in, so to speak, to the brickwork of English."[10] This has "no local or particular explanation," but is rather governed "by a general predisposition" toward the language in a manner informed by the social and intellectual milieu in which James made his Parisian home.[11] As a marker "of cultural sophistication and freedom from the dreaded stigma of provincialism," French was a language that marked its non-native user as especially fashionable and cosmopolitan, Karlin writes. Though Karlin doesn't argue that James intended to convey such an effect in his fiction, the uniquely elevated status carried by French—a lingua franca in global business and diplomatic contexts, even in the twenty-first century—makes it an effective vehicle to convey a sense of highly esteemed, yet still foreign, charm in an English-language context.[12]

It isn't surprising then that many of the Americans Strether meets in France—who kickstart his defamiliarization process by representing an Americanness qualified by expatriatism—are not only bilingual but also part of a fashionable cosmopolitan class. French is spoken by Chad, whose more assertive and expressive mannerisms Strether assumes to have been completely "made over" by his time in Europe.[13] Another key bilingual character is the long-time American expatriate Maria Gostrey, who—as a *ficelle*, a figure who assists the reader in eliciting comments and thoughts from Strether he otherwise would not reveal—plays a double-ambassadorial role for the reader and for the novel's imagined America, working as a "general guide to 'Europe'" for Americans.[14] Bilingual, too, are the French American artist Gloriani and the "intense American" Little Bilham, whose integration into a polyglot French society gives Strether the opportunity to experience France in their shared native English.[15] By encompassing identities that embrace both sides of the Atlantic, these characters are cosmopolitan both in biography and in outlook. Their use of French—and the dual life this represents—demonstrates to Strether the possibilities of blurring the borders of one's national identity.

In comparing himself to these Europeanized Americans, Strether comes to see himself and his own biases more clearly. When Miss Barrace cryptically remarks, at Gloriani's party, that "in the light of Paris one sees what things resemble," Little

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Bilham chirps in agreement just as Strether asks, “But for what they really are?” Miss Barrace is amused: “Oh I like your Boston ‘reallys’!,” she replies.[16] Here, Strether’s “Boston reallys” allude to his skeptical mode of seeing things: either something is as it *really* is, or it isn’t. But the longer Strether is in France, the more he realizes the narrowness of his own vision, which becomes clearest when Chad’s mother—agitated by Strether’s inability to bring back Chad on his own—sends her daughter and family to Paris. There, they seem not to observe Chad’s refinement at all. Strether’s daughter-in-law-to-be, Sarah Pocock, “won’t be touched,” Strether laments to Gostrey about the situation. “I see it now as I’ve never done … it was, in fact … what, at home, I *had* done. But somehow over there I didn’t quite know it.”[17]

The intensely hybrid nature of Gostrey, Chad, Bilham, and Gloriani’s France allows Strether’s internalized ambivalence about himself, his country, and his mission to come to the forefront of his awareness. I believe that language plays a key role in this outcome in various ways. Firstly, the clearly visible Otherness of French in the English prose makes cosmopolitan Paris—so different from Strether’s American existence—come to life on the page. Secondly, English enables honest and easy communication for Strether, who finds safety in English when conversations become terse or uncomfortable: the presence of English-speakers in France allows him to become vulnerable in ways he would not be able to, had he been forced to speak exclusively in French.[18] Lastly, the presence of both French and English highlights the constant translation happening in Strether’s life in ways beyond language. The relative absence of boundaries in the expatriates’ lives reminds Strether of a youth “he had long ago missed,” which appears to him everywhere in Paris. It appears “in the outside air as well as within”; “in the long watch, from the balcony, in the summer night, of the wide late life” of the city.[19] France, and French, become associated with an unlived reality in Strether’s mind, one in which he may have fallen in love as a young man, for example, and started a family of his own. As the novel progresses, he comes to see himself as a man worn down by the demands of responsibility and time. He moves between two worlds—America and France; his youth and his middle age—with great wistfulness.

In this process, Strether experiences what Mary Besemeres describes as the “dangerous threat to self” that translation can bring forth. Quoting Alice Kaplan, Besemeres writes that the emotional consequences of language change testify that “to be without language or between languages, is as miserable […] as to be without bread.”[20] In Besemeres’ description, language is a source of nourishment, a necessity for survival, and translation—a marker of change and in-betweenness—is what threatens the sanctity of this nourishment. Echoing the idea of translation as rupture, Aurelia Kimkiewicz argues that translation

> helps the otherness of the self to come to the surface, because it makes the two parts of the self physically present, visible, and audible… Becoming *as the other* means pretending to erase the past, the distance and differences inscribed in the exile’s identity.[21]

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In *The Ambassadors*, Strether is caught between two parts of himself in a dissonance that leaves him stranded in a way akin to Besemeres' languagelessness. Although it isn't bilingualism per se that brings to the surface previously hidden aspects of Strether's personhood, I posit that language is the tool that both creates and highlights his identity fissures. It creates these fissures in the sense that they become something to think about, and highlights them in the sense that they become more central to the novel as Strether's mission evolves. The fluid American identities enabled by French offer up a series of prototypes that suggest to Strether alternative modes of being that do not compromise his existing sense of self. The ways in which these types overlap with America, or what is familiar, suggest the hope that Strether might be able to encompass a similar kind of hybridity and thus reclaim the sense of boundless youth he feels that he has lost. Although the process of finding oneself between two cultures can be alienating and "miserable," as Besemeres describes, it can also be generative and hopeful, as these American exiles in Paris show with their gaiety and abundance.[22] When Strether is able to become "as the other," as in Kimkiewicz's analysis, he is able to "erase the past," his rigid past: one in which he has typecast himself as a failure, beholden to the women beside him.[23] He is capable of being much *more*.

Best encapsulating this sense of "more-ness" might be the character of Madame de Vionnet, an older, half-English, half-French woman who is revealed to be Chad's lover. She is fully bilingual, speaking native French in addition to a unique English "of a color and a cadence that were both inimitable and matters of accident."[24] Maria Gostrey, a childhood acquaintance of Vionnet's, likens the difficulty of describing her to finding a middle ground "between French and English," while Miss Barrace describes her as a "various" woman who encompasses "fifty women."[25] It is this multitudinous aspect of Madame de Vionnet that slowly abolishes Strether's careful categorization of the people around him and, most of all, himself. She is also the character who most emphasizes the precarity of having a cosmopolitan identity, highlighting how French, to Strether, is his entry to a world in which he is simultaneously an insider and outsider. French carries the threatening capacity of both welcoming him in and shutting him out.

This precarity is most evident in the scene where Strether—believing Chad and Madame de Vionnet's relationship to be a pure, innocent one—runs into the two lovers sharing an intimacy that surprises him and proves him wrong. In the awkwardness of the moment, there is an unusual profusion of French in the subsequent dialogue between the two parties. Strether observes that Madame de Vionnet's "overflow of surprise and amusement"—which is delivered "wholly in French"—escapes his comprehension, "taking all at once little brilliant jumps that he could but lamely match."[26] Here, French most obviously functions as an obstacle to comprehension. From Madame de Vionnet's perspective, it is likely that her voluble use of French is an intentional attempt to create distance between herself and a friend she feels she has been dishonest to. It is a distance in which she can bide the necessary time to figure out how to proceed, and one that obliquely reveals that there were parts to her that had always been

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opaque to Strether. She creates a division between the two in which French is her domain, and English, the American's. What lies in between becomes a kind of no-man's land, an ambiguous space that many of the book's characters occupy but never explicitly address.

De Vionnet's attempt at cloaking herself under the guise of language illustrates where the risk of cosmopolitanism lies. Though language bridges people, it can also keep them apart. As a corollary, to address where one falls within the spectrum between America and Europe may also require addressing one's exility, or in other words, where one is allowed to go and where one might not be welcome any more. Perhaps it is Strether's desire not to lose himself in this abyss that convinces him to return to America at the novel's end. In broadening his perspective on life and the world, Europe has given him both the opportunity to lament the youth that he has unknowingly relinquished, and, as an extension, seize onto what he already has: America, or a home to return to.

Though the protagonist of Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* finds himself confronting a similar choice between America and Europe, his return to the former carries greater resignation than it does resolution. After having learned that his lover has been sentenced to death, David—whose first-person narration guides the novel—looks back upon their relationship and how his failure to accept his own sexuality was implicated in Giovanni's fate. His failure is one that is both highlighted and entrenched by the other expatriates he encounters in Paris: the gay Belgian-born American businessman Jacques, who insists that David is doomed to eternal lovelessness unless he is honest with himself; Sue, an American woman who David seduces in a pitiable attempt to convince himself of his heterosexuality; and his American fiancée Hella, an independent and cosmopolitan woman whose trust in men is shattered by David's self-deceit. Unlike the multilingual expatriates in *The Ambassadors*, however, the Americans in *Giovanni's Room* are not models toward which David strives, but rather embodiments of what David fears he is or might become: people who run away to a foreign country in part to escape the judgments cast upon them in the places they know as home. Moreover, these individuals—unlike Strether's companions—are aware of the judgments that surround them and try to resist being boxed in by these views. In this context, I believe that the novel's use of multilingualism offers these characters opportunities to embrace plural identities, but not without the risk of what it *cannot* provide: the freedom from being categorized as an exile.

In the polyglot bubble of David's France, Baldwin weaves snippets and streams of untranslated French into an English-driven narrative such that French plays an important role in unraveling the precarity of national and interpersonal allegiances. In some contexts, it enters David's English-language narration explicitly as a form of "tourist" French. Proper nouns, terms, and items that are mainstays of daily French life or culture—such as *vin chaud* or *carte de travail*—are left in untranslated French, as are loan words into English that a non-French-speaking reader would understand from context alone (*milieu, patron, quartier*). Objections and exclamations are frequently expressed in French, as we witness in David

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and Giovanni's first toast to one another: *à la votre*, the two say, as they clink glasses.[27] Despite David's seeming familiarity with the language, French to him is still very much a foreign tongue, one he describes as "curiously measured and vehement," reminiscent of "stiffening egg white," "stringed instruments," and "always of the underside and aftermath of passion."[28] His use of the language is therefore depicted as something contrived rather than natural.

Beyond these instances of tourist French, the language is implicitly present throughout the novel as Baldwin guides readers to understand that many of David's transcribed conversations are in fact translations from the French. Although French is neither David nor Giovanni's first language—they are both migrants in Paris: David is from America while Giovanni is from Italy—French is their only shared tongue. The reader learns that Giovanni understands but does not speak English; the only time a translation is made explicit on the text-level is when Jacques asks Giovanni a question in English, to which Giovanni simply "looks blankly" at the two American men.[29] It is only after Jacques translates the question that Giovanni speaks for the first time. Although the literal words the reader encounters are in English, Giovanni's engagement implies that the group has switched to a communal language. Another element that hints at the transcription of French into English are examples of unusual syntax that betray French provenance. When Giovanni asks David what he wants to drink for a second round—"and for you—it is the same?," he asks—he uses a word order that sounds unnatural in English.[30] However, when the phrase is reverse-translated into French (*et pour vous—c'est le meme?*), the "it is the same" construction reads conventionally.

When David's internal world is mediated so strongly along the axes of language and place, it is inevitable that French ceases to play a harmless or neutral role in the text. As Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi write in their work on postcolonial translation practices, "translation is not an innocent, transparent activity but is highly charged with significance at every stage; it rarely, if ever, involves a relationship of equality between texts, authors or systems."[31] Though David and Giovanni are both exiles communicating via a second language, they do not meet in French as equals. Their reasons for knowing the language—and for leaving home in the first place—are vastly different. Giovanni arrives in France having lost his first-born child and his relationship with his wife and family. As a penniless newcomer, he makes do with a bartending job where he is sexually harassed by his boss, Guillaume. Meanwhile, though David arrives in Paris similarly having lost an assured sense of his own manhood, he retains a connection to his family via a father who is willing to support him financially in the hopes of his return. David himself admits that being in Paris is more of a choice, one that offers a freedom from judgment that seems impossible back home in America. "Under a foreign sky, with no-one to watch [and] no penalties attached," he can attain a version of himself distinct from the compromised selfhood "from which [he] had spent so much time in flight."[32] Consequently, Giovanni's dependence on David and France is far more precarious than David's reliance on Giovanni; while David has the financial freedom to leave

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and make his life elsewhere, Giovanni does not. Their conversations in French are a continual reminder that they are living in a third space between America and Italy, one that enables an escape from their past lives while reinforcing the chasm between the two men's present circumstances.

What makes this inequality all the more heartbreaking are the ways in which the two men see, or refuse to see, each other as home. In being a lovable, holdable presence in Giovanni's life, David becomes a type of home—a lifeline, even—for Giovanni. "If you cannot love me, I will die," Giovanni tells David.[33] When David is absent, Giovanni admits to realizing "how terrible it is to be in this cold city."[34] Yet Giovanni, for David, is often the opposite of home, a frequent reminder that he is first and foremost an alien American. Giovanni calls David a *vrai americain* (true American) when he is "displeased" with him, and flips to calling David "not an American at all" when he is "delighted" with him.[35] David resents this flip-flopping: he resents "being called an American" and resents resenting it, "because it seemed to make me nothing more than that, whatever that was"—but being called *not* an American "seemed to make [him] nothing."[36] In either scenario, David's Americanness is a precursor to a feeling of becoming void, or having that void be filled by an identity that feels alien to David. He is saddled with the guilt of Giovanni's Americanizing gaze. To Hella, he expresses distress about Giovanni's financial desperation ("I can't stand having him watch me—as though—I'm an American, Hella, he thinks I'm *rich*"), and is disturbed when his Americanness is blamed, by Guillaume, as the obstacle to his intimacy with Giovanni.[37] By being constantly disturbed by an identity David cannot shed or leave behind, his naïve belief in his ability to escape his regular life by traveling across borders is shattered. His identity becomes something that haunts him rather than shields him with its associated privileges.

Describing *Giovanni's Room* as a "queer diasporic novel," Meg Wesling argues that movement in the novel is heavily gendered and politicized. "David's fascination with movement, with flight," she writes, "becomes a subtle yet significant means for Baldwin to turn our attention to the ways that sexuality is constructed through histories of nation-building and global displacement."[38] Taking place on foreign soil, David's intimacy with Giovanni and his inability to see him as an equal are portrayed as a kind of modern-day imperialism of another person's body and spirit. When combined with Stephanie Li's analysis of *Giovanni's Room* as a novel that "figures as a book about blackness"—one in which David attempts "to negate his homosexual desire by racializing it"—Wesling's queer diasporic approach produces an even more sinister view of the novel's inequities and power imbalances. Race and sexuality are used by one character to dominate another, even if they meet in equally alienating circumstances.[39]

In David's reluctant migration, what might Giovanni offer David in the way of home, if anything? Quoting from Baldwin's assertion that "people invent categories in order to feel safe," Valerie Rohy writes that "the white or straight world invents its other in order to recognize itself, making the 'inauthentic' define the authentic."[40] Combined with Wesling's and Li's analyses, this line of logic leads us

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to believe that David traveled to Paris to explore his sexuality in a "safe" environment. In finding his homosexuality a threat to his moral and personal sanctity, he ultimately needs to believe in Giovanni's Otherness to justify his own self-alienation. Giovanni is a home to David as long as he remains an Other. Meanwhile, David is also a home to Giovanni as a non-European Other whose relative wealth and promises of another world make Giovanni's life possible. Silently, by predicating their affection on precarious conditions of exile, the two men are inflicting on one another the same kind of stereotyping that they both desire to escape. Here is where the question of David's exility becomes most complicated: although he might be in Paris voluntarily, he is involuntarily trapped in an identity that will always separate him from the people he loves.

Possibly one of the most notable, heartbreaking examples of this predicament is evident in David's reconstruction of what Giovanni might have done the night he strangled and killed Guillaume, the crime for which he is arrested and sentenced to death. David imagines how Giovanni must have killed Guillaume in the deep anger he felt about being used and taken advantage of by his boss. He pictures how Guillaume might have goaded Giovanni by mentioning David, *le jeune americain* who abandoned the young Italian man because, as Guillaume says in David's imagination, "the Americans always fly. They are not serious."[41] David is relegated, even in the darkest places his imagination can go, to a shell of himself that he cannot escape. And it is his inability to redeem himself by escaping that shell—and loving Giovanni totally and unabashedly—that haunts him, even at the end of the book.

If being without language is the ultimate kind of homelessness, I argue that David's inability to express the magnitude of his guilt and grief after Giovanni's death can be interpreted, too, as not having a home. In *Giovanni's Room*, to be unable to find the right words in any of the multiple languages one knows suggests that it may not be language that renders some feelings unspeakable, but something much deeper that remains fundamentally unrepresentable. It speaks to how George Steiner conceptualizes translation in *After Babel* (1975): how, "inside or between languages, human communication equals translation."[42] When two or more people communicate—whether consciously or unconsciously, in monolingual or multilingual settings—they are always practicing translation in the processes of deciphering, code-switching, and meaning-making that accompany their attempts to reach one another. Despite these efforts, some distance might inevitably remain, as Caryl Emerson describes in her preface to Mikhail Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984). "Every speaking subject speaks something of a foreign language to everyone else," she writes.

> It also means that every speaking subject has more than one native language at his disposal. To understand another person at any given moment, therefore, is to come to terms with meaning on the boundary between one's own and another's language: to translate.[43]

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It is David's failure to translate his love for Giovanni into action, to take responsibility for his own life, that renders him speechless at the novel's end.

Conclusion

By incorporating French into English prose, *The Ambassadors* and *Giovanni's Room* invite us to consider how entering into new cultural, linguistic, and social worlds highlights or suppresses parts of ourselves that are dominant elsewhere. For characters whose senses of self—unknowingly, as in Strether's case, or not, as in David's—are heavily impacted by American mores and customs at the beginning of their respective narratives, Europe becomes a site where they might achieve greater self-knowledge. Living in two languages with other hybrid expatriates who straddle multiple worlds, they come to recognize that to leave the confines of a singular identity is a choice they can make. This decision, however, has great consequences in regard to questions of nationality and geography, as well as the deeper layers of race, class, power, and sexuality that inform these questions.

In this article, I have argued that language—in serving as a visual and textual code for the coexistence of differences—plays a crucial thematic role in both novels. It is what enables the creation of the hybrid "types" of Americans who demonstrate to Strether and David the possibilities of what they might be or become; highlights the various kinds of non-linguistic translation that the two men experience as a result of their mobility; and emphasizes ways in which language both succeeds and fails them in their attempts at making themselves known. But ultimately, what James and Baldwin suggest via these complexities is that regardless of our geographical provenance and linguistic allegiances, we all harbor multitudes of emotional, national, sexual, racial, and linguistic ambiguities that we seek to clarify in our relationships with each other. Such ambiguities come to the forefront in places where we find ourselves both local and foreign. And though this experience of being "in between" can be a painful one, it forces us to work toward a more compassionate sense of what it means to meet where our common humanity lies.

Notes

1 Julian Preece and Alex Rees, "How Bilingual Novelists Utilize their Linguistic Knowledge: Towards a Typology of the Contemporary 'Modern Languages Novel' in English," *Modern Languages Open*, 1 (2021), p. 2.

2 Christopher Stuart, "Finding the Jimmy in James: How James Baldwin Discovered 'Giovanni's Room' in Lambert Strether's Paris," *MELUS*, 40:2 (2015), p. 60.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

4 David A. Leeming, "An Interview with James Baldwin on Henry James," *The Henry James Review,* 8:1 (1986), p. 48.

5 Stuart, "Finding the Jimmy in James," p. 54.

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6 Eric Savoy, “Other(ed) Americans in Paris: Henry James, James Baldwin, and the Subversion of Identity,” *English Studies in Canada*, 18:3 (1992), p. 336.
7 *Ibid*., p. 342.
8 Whether James intended italicization or not is unclear, as the text switches between the two styles, often for the same word. The textual notes in pp. 349–54 in the Norton Critical Edition of *The Ambassadors* offer examples of this phenomenon occurring between the American, English, and serialized editions of the novel.
9 Henry James, *The Ambassadors*, ed. S. P. Rosenbaum, 2nd ed. (New York, W.W. Norton, 1994), pp. 142, 144, 158.
10 Daniel Karlin, “‘The patient, passionate little cahier’: French in Henry James’s Notebooks,” in Jason Harding and John Nash (eds.), *Modernism and Non-Translation* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 26.
11 Daniel Karlin, “‘Our precious *quand même*’: French in the Letters of Henry James,” *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens*, 78 (2013), p. 26.
12 Karlin, “French in Henry James’s Notebooks,” p. 26.
13 James, *The Ambassadors*, pp. 95–6.
14 *Ibid*., p. 26.
15 *Ibid*., p. 83.
16 *Ibid*., p. 126.
17 *Ibid*., p. 300.
18 *Ibid*., pp. 101, 304–5.
19 *Ibid*., p. 284.
20 Mary Besemeres, *Translating One’s Self: Language and Selfhood in Cross-Cultural Autobiography* (Oxford, Peter Lang, 2002), p. 208.
21 Aurelia Kimkiewicz, “Self-translation as Broken Narrativity: Towards an Understanding of the Self’s Multilingual Dialogue,” in Anthony Cordingley (ed.), *Self-translation: Brokering Originality in Hybrid Culture* (London, Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 194.
22 Besemeres, *Translating One’s Self*, p. 208.
23 Kimkiewicz, “Self-translation as Broken Narrativity,” p. 194.
24 James, *The Ambassadors*, p. 312.
25 *Ibid*., p. 157.
26 *Ibid*., p. 312.
27 *Ibid*., p. 29.
28 *Ibid*., p. 69.
29 *Ibid*., p. 26.
30 *Ibid*., p. 32.
31 Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, *Postcolonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (London, Routledge, 1998), p. 2.
32 *Ibid*., p. 18.
33 *Ibid*., p. 122.
34 *Ibid*., p. 123.
35 *Ibid*., p. 79.
36 *Ibid*.
37 *Ibid*., pp. 120, 96.
38 Meg Wesling, “Sexuality and Statelessness: Queer Migrations and National Identity in James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 55:3 (2019), p. 325.
39 Stephanie Li, *Playing in the White: Black Writers, White Subjects* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 154.

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40 Valerie Rohy, "Displacing Desire: Passing, Nostalgia, and *Giovanni's Room*," in Elaine K. Ginsberg (ed.), *Passing and the Fictions of Identity* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 227–8.
41 Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room,* p. 36.
42 George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 49.
43 Caryl Emerson, "Editor's Preface," in Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. xxxii.

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