

# The Sound of James: The Aural Dimension in Henry James's Work

*Papers from the 8<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the Henry James Society  
Trieste, 4-6 July 2019*



EUT

edited by  
Leonardo Buonomo



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# Introduction

LEONARDO BUONOMO

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## WORKS BY HENRY JAMES

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

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

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



# Henry James and Music

PIERRE A. WALKER  
Salem State University

Henry James's copious writing on the sister arts of drama, sculpture, and painting is exceeded in quantity, among his non-fictional writing, only by his extensive writing on literature.<sup>1</sup> He was an enthusiastic follower, reviewer, and critic of the dramatic and the visual arts, and both his fiction and the scholarship on James and the sister arts reflect these interests in drama and art. From *The American* to *The Ambassadors*, the theatre, with a particular emphasis on Paris's Théâtre Français, is a recurring reference point. From "The Madonna of the Future" to "The Real Thing," by way of Agnolo Bronzino's portrait of Lucrezia Panciatichi in *The Wings of the Dove* and the Lambinet landscape in *The Ambassadors*, the pictorial arts play a central role, though perhaps never so much as in *The Tragic Muse*, where life in the theatre and the studio are as central as can be to the novel's setting and subject. James scholars, from Viola Hopkins Winner and Adeline Tintner to Joseph Litvak and Kendall Johnson, have studied James and the visual and the dramatic arts.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> James's complete art and drama criticism have been collected in *The Complete Writings of Henry James on Art and Drama* and almost all of his literary criticism in *Literary Criticism*.

<sup>2</sup> See also John Carlos Rowe's "Hawthorne's Ghost."



By contrast, music is the sister art that has seemed to have little relevance in James's world. James is himself partly to blame for this. He once described himself "as a strictly nonmusical auditor" (*PS* 174), and in his letters to his family, he shows little enthusiasm for the musical soirées he attended in Paris in 1876. Scholarship appears to have taken James at his word, for aside from a small quantity of work on James and opera and an important article by Daniel Hannah, there is precious little scholarly writing on James and music.<sup>3</sup> And yet, what better place than a conference on "The Aural Dimension in Henry James's Work" to urge the value of exploring the importance of music in both James's biography and his fiction.

It would be wrong to suggest that music is prominent in James's writing in the way it is, for instance, in the work of another James, James Joyce. Henry James's writing rarely refers to the important composers who were his contemporaries or near contemporaries. However, it is worth considering that *The American* appeared the same year (1877) that Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila* was first staged. Gilbert and Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore* had a 571-performance run in London in 1878, overlapping the serialization of "Daisy Miller," and their *Mikado* (1885, with a run of 672 performances) was contemporary with the serialization of *The Bostonians*. Works such as these or such as Tchaikovsky's violin concerto (1879) or Elgar's *Enigma Variations* (1899) are not usually cited as part of the cultural context for James's own work. In spite of this, only five years after the first of Elgar's pomp and circumstance marches appeared (1901), when James began to revise *The American* for the New York Edition, he altered a sentence which in the earlier editions of this novel explains that Monsieur Nioche "pronounced his words with great distinctness and sonority" (*AM* 65) to: "He pronounced his words with great *pomp and circumstance*" (*AM* 1907 69, emphasis added).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For scholarship on James and opera, see particularly the work of Michael Halliwell but also that of Pierre Degott, Peter Dyson, and Jeremy Tambling. For scholarship specifically on James and music, in addition to Hannah, see articles by Laura F. Hodges (on *The Portrait of a Lady*), Roland Jordan and Emma Kafalenos (on "Owen Wingrave"), and Kermit Vanderbilt (on "Fordham Castle" and on "Four Meetings").

<sup>4</sup> Another of James's revisions for *The American* also has a musical basis. The early editions of the novel express Valentin de Bellegarde's appreciative observation of pretty women thus: "He looked at a pretty girl as he would have listened to a piece of music. Attention, in each case, was simple good manners" (*AM* 190). For the New York Edition, James revised these two sentences to: "He looked at a pretty person as he would have listened to a good piece of music. Intelligent participation was in such a case simple good manners"

Nevertheless, James did know music and musicians. The first music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Georg Henschel (1850-1934), was one of James's correspondents, and thanks to Henschel, James attended the Boston Symphony on 17 March 1883 and heard, among other pieces, Brahms's second symphony (a work only six years old at the time), two Slavonic Dances by Antonin Dvořák (published but five years before), and Henschel's wife, Lillian Henschel (another of James's correspondents), singing three selections for voice and orchestra.

Indeed, during the winter of 1883, which James spent in Boston following his father's death, James attended a number of concerts. He wrote to his close friend Lizzie Boott (whose father, another of James's friends, was a composer) on 27 March 1883 that "I dine out a little, & go to concerts with [Anna Sophia Cabot] Lodge" (*CLHJ 1883-84* 1:75), the mother-in-law of James's Harvard Law School friend George Abbot James (and also mother of the first Senator Henry Cabot Lodge as well as a cousin of William James's associate, Charles Sanders Peirce).

James also heard music in Paris, during 1876, when he attended several musical soirées, and it is his critical remarks, in his letters, about some of these soirées that have led James's biographers to dismiss the idea that James had any particular interest in music. In one such instance, James wrote his brother William of hearing "of late a quantity of music" and then rattles off the names of four musical hostesses (*CLHJ 1872-76* 3:105-6). One of these is Pauline Viardot, the famous singer who lived in a *ménage à trois* with her husband and Ivan Turgenev. In a letter to his father, James describes a musical evening at the Viardots', and this letter has been cited as evidence of James's lack of interest in music. James wrote that Viardot's "musical parties are rigidly musical & to me, therefore, rigidly boresome"; "the other night," he continues, "I stood ... on my legs for three hours ... in a suffocating room, listening to an interminable fiddling, with the only consolation that Gustave Doré, standing beside me, seemed as bored as myself" (*CLHJ 1872-76* 3:97). It is this description that prompts Peter Brooks to write of James being "*subjected* to musical soirées, at the Viardots and elsewhere" (33, emphasis added).

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(*AM* 1907 208). In both passages, listening to music has its element of politeness, but in the revised passage, "music" becomes "good music," and "Attention" becomes a much less passive, and perhaps more rewarding, "Intelligent participation."

But while this description obviously criticizes the “interminable fiddling” Viardot offered her guests, it does not mean that James had no interest in music. In fact, what the description does prove is that James could discriminate, for the passage concludes on a positive note: “But when M<sup>me</sup> Viardot does sing, it is superb. She sang the last time a scene from Glück’s *Alceste*, which was the finest piece of musical declamation, of a grandly tragic sort, that I can conceive” (*CLHJ 1872-76 3:97*).

James praises other vocal performances, such as Joséphine Conneau’s (in the letter to William); her “singing is the finest thing possible” (*CLHJ 1872-76 3:106*). Conneau, the wife of Napoleon III’s physician, was not internationally known, like Pauline Viardot, so James’s appreciation shows that something more than Viardot’s star power appealed to his ear. And in 1870, James insisted, while writing his publisher, James T. Fields, that Fields tell his wife, Annie Fields, that he, James, had heard the night before the concert at the Boston Music Hall of the famous Swedish singer, Christina Nilsson (*CLHJ 1855-72 2:382*).

James, in these letters, was not so much reporting that he was being “subjected to musical soirées” (to repeat Brooks’s phrase) as that he could be a discriminating and appreciative listener. In the same text where he calls himself “a strictly nonmusical auditor,” James proceeds to devote the better part of a paragraph to “the brilliant short season of Italian opera” (*PS 174*). James had heard two works by Giuseppe Verdi, *Aida* and the *Requiem*, and he calls the vocalists’ performances “phenomenal” and “enchanting.” “I don’t know when I have partaken of such a feast of vocalism,” he continues. And he adds that he “found” the *Requiem* “in places irresistibly moving” (*PS 175*). Rather than taking James calling himself “strictly nonmusical” at face value, it makes more sense to see the phrase as a gesture of (perhaps false) modesty in keeping with journalistic conventions of the time. Furthermore it certainly shows the danger of quoting James out of context and taking what he says about his (lack of) interest in music at his word.

Richard Wagner is the one contemporary composer whom James does occasionally mention and about whom James scholars have written,<sup>5</sup> particularly in respect to James’s declining Paul Zhukovsky’s offer in 1880 to meet “the musician of the future” (*CLHJ 1878-80 2:154*), as James, like Wagner’s supporters, called the composer (an important point, for it shows

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<sup>5</sup> See Chris Brown, Gary Lemco, and Shirley Rose for three examples.

that James knew enough about Wagner to have been aware that his champions considered him and called him “the musician of the future”). James knew what Wagner represented as an artist and used him as a sign of unlimited will to power (based on Wagner’s *Ring of the Nibelungs* tetralogy) in the 1874 story “Adina” and of German nationalism in “Collaboration” (of 1892).<sup>6</sup>

James attended a Wagnerian musical soirée at Zhukovsky’s in Paris in 1876; he described it in letters to his father and to Lizzie Boott. He told his father that the “musical séance” had “lasted from 9 till 2 a.m.,” and that “I was bored, but the rest were in ecstacy” [sic] (*CLHJ* 1872-76 3:215). To Lizzie Boott James described his fellow-listeners as “a small Russian circle,” whom “I enjoyed” (*CLHJ* 1872-76 3:213). The program consisted of “a lot of selections from Wagner’s Bayreuth operas” (*CLHJ* 1872-76 3:215), and James confessed to “an overdose of Wagner” (*CLHJ* 1872-76 3:213). Nevertheless, the performer was “A young French pianist of great talent” (*CLHJ* 1872-76 3:215). Brooks (33) cites the letter to James Sr. as evidence, along with the description of Viardot’s interminable fiddler, of James’s unenthusiastic response to the music he heard in Paris. Yet if James was not enthusiastic about those particular performances, it does not mean that he was generally unmusical, and his acknowledgement of the “great talent” of the “young French pianist” is an additional indication of James’s ability to discriminate.

James lived most of his life before the advent of the gramophone. The residents of middle- and upper-class homes during James’s day provided their own music by owning, playing, and knowing how to play musical instruments. Much as paintings adorn the walls of the homes in James’s fiction (for instance the picture-gallery at Gardencourt in *The Portrait of a Lady* or, again, the Bronzino portrait in *The Wings of the Dove*), so too, when they are at home, do James’s fictional characters listen to each other play music.

As a result, musical instruments appear often and in important ways in James’s fiction. In chapter 7 of *Watch and Ward*, Nora decides not to attend the opera, and instead Hubert and she “have an opera of our own” in which “she played Weber for more than an hour ... to the man she loved.” James’s early text, like its successors will, concludes the scene by adding to what the character played a judgment of *how* the character played: “I have never played so well” (144). This passage, while it marks a point in Nora’s sentimental

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<sup>6</sup> For “Adina” and Wagner see Walker, “Adina,” and Rowe, “Hawthorne’s Ghost.” For “Collaboration” and Wagner see Walker, “Art and Nationalism.”

journey (from the unscrupulous and philandering Hubert to the steady and faithful Roger), also shows something of Nora's evolution from the wayward orphan of the first chapter to the sophisticated and independent-minded young woman who plays Weber and Mozart (as she does in the serial text, 584-85, Weber being a revision for the book edition) and spends the evening unchaperoned in the company of a young man, much as in the concluding chapters she travels alone to New York.

In *The Bostonians*, the text tempers Olive Chancellor's single-mindedness of purpose by revealing her susceptibility to well-performed music. Olive scorns New York and Boston high society; she "loathed and despised ... the world of fashion" (106). Yet in chapter 18, when Olive reluctantly accompanies Verena in a visit to Henry Burrage's Boston lodgings, we learn that Burrage is a fine pianist and that Olive, a bit grudgingly, falls under the spell of his playing. "Olive was extremely susceptible to music," the text tells us. She is "beguiled by the young man's charming art" (152), and she is able "to surrender herself, to enjoy the music, to admit that Mr. Burrage played with exquisite taste." As a result, "Her nerves were calmed" (153).

Burrage's impromptu piano recital in chapter 18 and Olive's enjoyment of it have no plot relevance in *The Bostonians* (unlike in "The Turn of the Screw," where Miles's piano art equally beguiles the narrator-governess and serves the plot function of giving Flora rein to wander off to the lake and, possibly, commune with Miss Jessel). The inclusion of Burrage's playing and of Olive's appreciation of it in *The Bostonians*, therefore, serves some other function. At one level, that function is to round out Olive's character, to show that there is more to her than her single-minded and all-consuming devotion to women's rights. But at another level, by showing that Olive has a degree of artistic sensitivity, this early part of the novel prepares readers' sympathies for the moment in chapter 39, in the Cape Cod section of the novel, when Olive is faced with losing Verena's companionship. When Basil takes Verena away for a day, Olive's unhappiness overwhelms her: "But an immeasurable load of misery seemed to sit upon her soul; ... now she was too weary to struggle with fate" (406).

Readers' responses to Olive have evolved over time, from the middle of the twentieth century, which disparaged what Madoka Kishi has called "Olive's pathological nervousness" (101), to half a century later, when Terry Castle championed Olive as "English and American literature's first lesbian tragic heroine" (171). Whereas earlier readers scorned her lesbian possessiveness of

Verena, increasingly in the twenty-first century, readers are able, at the very least, to register and feel the degree of heartbreak to which she is subjected in the later chapters. *The Bostonians* begins by setting its readers up to dislike Olive, and then through its many pages, it gradually turns readers toward a more sympathetic view and toward facing the fact that her feelings for another woman are as valid and deserve as much sympathy as any feelings might. Few readers, few people, if any, have *not* felt “misery” or “despair” or had to “struggle with fate” (406), and therefore this moment in *The Bostonians* asks its readers to recognize their shared humanity with Olive. The inclusion of Burrage’s recital and of Olive’s appreciation of music—coming as it does early in the novel, when Olive’s intolerance of just about everyone and everything and her purchase of Verena from her parents (for that is what it amounts to) are fresh in readers’ consciousness—lays the ground for the appeal to Olive’s shared humanity in chapter 39.

Two passages that highlight musicianship in two other early novels, one in *The American* and one in *The Portrait of a Lady*, also have no plot importance but nonetheless have a different kind of significance. One musical scene in *The American* is already well-known: this is chapter 17, which James set at the Paris Opera and where Christopher Newman hears Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, while Valentin de Bellegarde sits in a box occupied by Noémie Nioche, trading insults with the son of an Alsatian brewer who will eventually shoot Valentin in a duel. John Carlos Rowe, in *The Other Henry James*, has given this chapter its definitive reading.<sup>7</sup>

But the opera chapter is not the novel’s only scene to foreground music significantly. Another instance appears in the middle of chapter 13. The scene itself is short, though the chapter is one of the novel’s longest. It takes place in the Bellegardes’ drawing room, but its position at the middle of the novel’s thirteenth out of twenty-six chapters makes it the novel’s very center. It is sandwiched between two scenes in which Claire has discussed with Newman his relations with her family. During this middle scene, Claire is restless, and the “violent storm” and “howling wind” out of doors echo her restlessness (*AM* 229). Claire stares out the window, but suddenly she turns around and pleads to her sister-in-law, “with peculiar eagerness,” to “‘For Heaven’s sake ... go to the piano and play something’” (*AM* 230).

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<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, two other important readings of this chapter are Tintner’s, in *The Cosmopolitan World*, and Degott’s (32-38).

The novel has already shown this sister-in-law, the young Marquise de Bellegarde, to be a good pianist. In chapter 10, Newman had heard the young Marquise “at the piano, playing a very expressive waltz” (*AM* 167). The “waltz” fits with her enjoyment of dancing, but she plays expressively, which indicates the quality of her interpretation.

Chapter 10 concludes with Claire’s surprise announcement that she will join her older brother and his wife in attending a ball (*AM* 178). Claire’s announcement is a surprise because “She has not been into the world these three years” (*AM* 178). Newman’s overture to Claire—he had proposed to her in the preceding chapter, chapter 9—would appear to have prompted her sudden change. Newman represents for her the possibility of a larger embrace of life and of the world and the wish no longer “to bury herself alive,” as her younger brother puts it (*AM* 178).

Claire’s restlessness in the later, middle chapter, chapter 13, and her equally sudden request that her sister-in-law play something comes as a coda or repeat of sorts to chapter 10. But here the suddenness is less positive, prompted by the subject of the two tête-à-tête conversations with Newman that sandwich the request: Newman’s relations with her mother and elder brother. It is an intimation of what is to come later, when this same mother and brother will become outright hostile to Newman.

Young Madame de Bellegarde does not accede to Claire’s request for music. Instead, she suggests that Claire should “Play something yourself” (*AM* 230). At first Claire refuses; “It is absurd for me to play when you are present,” she says, thus acknowledging the young Marquise’s musicianship. “But the next moment she went to the piano and began to strike the keys with vehemence. She played for some time, rapidly and brilliantly” (*AM* 230). Not only are we again told *how* the character plays, but there is a distinction: young Madame de Bellegarde plays expressively. But Claire’s technique is not bad; she plays “rapidly and brilliantly.” It is the young Marquise who gets called a “gad-about” (*AM* 169), not Claire; one would expect Claire, who has known suffering, to play with the kind of sensibility that would come of an experience of life’s difficulties, and her apparently superficial sister-in-law only to play technically well. But it is the contrary, revealing, first, that the younger Madame de Bellegarde, as the novel will state explicitly much later, “was not such a goose as she seemed” (425).

Newman, who cares for music (he had told his friend Tom Tristram in chapter 2 that in Paris he wanted “to hear some good music” [*AM* 30]),

asks Claire, after she stops playing, to play some more. But she refuses, and when he insists, she offers that: “I have not been playing for you; I have been playing for myself” (*AM* 230). This is a telling—and very rare—instance where Claire puts herself first. The novel almost always, otherwise, presents a Claire who has let herself be sacrificed on the family altar (when she was married off to the late Monsieur de Cintré) and who, according to her younger brother, is “fond of pleasing” others (*AM* 137). Her playing for herself is a moment of rebellion on her part. It is therefore a key moment in the novel, for it shows her to be not always just the dutiful daughter, and it suggests (as did the sudden decision in chapter 10 to attend the ball) that contact with Newman has inspired her to gratify, at least some, her own desires. Furthermore the “vehemence” of her playing is in fact the giving rein to her repressed feelings of frustration at both the general situation and her mother’s and older brother’s enmity toward Newman, which is why, when she decides at the end of the novel to take the veil, we have reason to see her decision as an act of rebellion against the tyranny of her mother and brother, an act that uses their professed religious values as a weapon against them, for as staunch Catholics they cannot criticize her, even though her taking the veil frees her of them. The piano playing in *The American*, therefore, is as important a symbolic correlative to the characterization of Claire (and of her sister-in-law) as the Bronzino portrait is to Millie Theale’s in *The Wings of the Dove*.

The musical scene in *The Portrait of a Lady* occurs in chapter 18, when Isabel Archer first meets Serena Merle.<sup>8</sup> They meet because Isabel is attracted to the sound of a piano being played, it turns out, by Madame Merle. In the original editions of *The Portrait of a Lady*, the text specifies that Madame Merle “was playing something of Beethoven’s” (*PL* 1882 165). But for the 1908 revised edition, James changed Beethoven to Schubert (*PL* 1908 1:245). This is a significant change for two reasons. One is that one of the salient facts of Schubert’s short life (1797-1828) is that he died fairly young of tuberculosis, like James’s cousin Minnie Temple, but more importantly, like Isabel’s cousin, Ralph Touchett, and like the English painter Richard Parkes Bonington (1802-28), an example of whose “beautiful and valuable” (*PL* 1882 547) and “charming and precious work” (*PL* 1908 2:404) Isabel examines in the

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<sup>8</sup> For a different reading of this scene and of James’s revision of the composer’s name, which provides, among other things, insight into the original edition’s use of Beethoven, see Hannah (133-35).



Touchetts' gallery just before she goes to sit at Ralph's deathbed. The change from Beethoven to Schubert reinforces a motif of references to young men cut down early in life by tuberculosis.

In addition, the fact that Madame Merle plays piano music by Schubert shows something of James's general knowledge of music. Beethoven had, of course, been a well-known pianist and, by the time James wrote *The Portrait of a Lady*, was generally considered among the greatest, if not the greatest, classical European composer.<sup>9</sup> That a proficient pianist would play Beethoven is no surprise, and Merle is a proficient pianist: James's text describes her playing "softly and discreetly," and Isabel compliments "your playing" for making the music "more beautiful still" (*PL 1882* 165). For the 1908 edition, James added that her playing "showed feeling" (*PL 1908* 1:245). Unlike with Beethoven's, much of Schubert's music took many years to enter the standard repertory. Beethoven's music can be "characterised," as Michael Anesko writes in glossing this passage, as "achiev[ing] dramatic emotional and musical effects" (591n82). The same can be said of much of Schubert's music. But one feature that distinguishes Schubert's music is the prominence of passages of heart-wrenching sadness, especially in some of his more mature compositions, such as the slow movements of his string quintet or his "Death and the Maiden" string quartet. James's switch from Beethoven to Schubert not only brings out more strongly the tuberculosis motif, but it connects that motif and the tragedies of all those young people's deaths with the emotional power of Schubert's most heartfelt music.

Lastly, also according to Anesko, "the very gradual publication of the full range of his works throughout the nineteenth century" meant that "for a long period" Schubert was "associated with less prestigious musical genres than those of his predecessor," Beethoven (591n82). Schubert was less well known during his short life, but where he was known, and for quite some time after, it was primarily as a composer of songs. It took decades before "the full range of his works" became widely known and appreciated. Even by the time James

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<sup>9</sup> One indication that, by the end of the nineteenth century, Beethoven was considered the leading composer of European classical music is visible on the proscenium arch of Boston's Symphony Hall, construction of which began in the late 1800s and which opened in the fall of 1900. The design for the proscenium includes large medallion-like plaques, each of which was "meant to be inscribed with the names of great composers, but the hall's original directors were able to agree unanimously only on Beethoven, so his remains the only name above the stage" ("A Brief History" 19).

prepared the New York Edition, Schubert's reputation was not yet what it later became. But James's revision reveals his prescience, since the playing of Schubert's solo piano music is very much in keeping with the overall arc of *The Portrait of a Lady*, the story of a young woman of great talent and with so promising a future that ends so sadly, an arc that Schubert's own parallels, albeit more fatally.

James might have learned of the appropriateness of substituting Schubert for Beethoven in chapter 18 of *The Portrait of a Lady* from his acquaintance with George Grove. When James began publishing with Macmillan, one of the editors James worked with was Grove, then editor of *Macmillan's Magazine* (which serialized *The Portrait of a Lady*). Grove was a prominent British musicologist; he created the first edition of *The Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, the standard reference work on music (first published beginning in 1879). Among Grove's important contributions to musicology are his championing of Schubert and his discovery, during research trips to Vienna, of manuscripts of otherwise lost scores by Schubert.

While James himself was certainly no musicologist like Grove, while he was by no means the fervent student and critic of music that he was of fiction, drama, and art, it is wrong to dismiss James's connection and the connection of his fiction to the musical world of his time. Scholarship exploring James's musical contexts will likely never surpass in quantity the considerable number of studies that have explored (and continue to explore) the dramatic and visual arts as contexts for James's own work, but giving more attention to the role that music plays both in James's life and in his writing is a potentially fruitful, and relatively neglected, path of enquiry.

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# Henry James: “In the Minor Key”\*

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In the spring of 1909 Henry James invited his feminist friend Violet Hunt to “think of [him] as henceforth in the pleasing & unaggressive minor key,” having just announced to her: “my pitch of life is lowered—which on the whole, at my advanced age, is an excellent thing” (qtd. in Secor 24-25).<sup>1</sup> What James meant to convey by this musical term “the minor key” (or indeed “the lower pitch”), beyond a humorous sense of chivalry<sup>2</sup> or else his exhaustion after a series of illnesses following the monumental task of preparing the *New York Edition*, is worth pursuing in the context of James’s

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<sup>1</sup> James was almost 66 years old when he wrote this letter to Hunt, who herself was 46.

<sup>2</sup> What I mean by this is his “unaggressive” to her generally more aggressive stance in life. The year before, in 1908, the not-so-shrinking Violet had helped to form the Women Writers’ Suffrage League; Hunt’s dalliance with (some would say “dominance” of) various men of James’s acquaintance (Wells, Ford Madox Hueffer) may have been known to him. See Hardwick’s *Life of Violet Hunt* (1990) for further details.



auditory imagination. In its entry for the figurative sense of the musical term “minor” (defined as “the sombre, plaintive, or subdued effect associated with minor chords and keys”) the *Oxford English Dictionary* reaches for James’s *Watch and Ward* (1871; 1878) to furnish its literary example: the climactic scene in which Roger Lawrence proposes to his ward Nora (whose “ear was still closed,” we are told, “to his uttermost meaning”). Here one finds Roger, as quoted by the *OED*, “pleading for very tenderness, in this pitiful minor key.”<sup>3</sup> Over the course of his career, James’s notations of (and in) “the minor key” went from sounding the plaintive note in relationships—Roger and his ward, say, or Madame de Mauves and her husband (“it was not a man’s fault if his wife’s love of life had pitched itself once for all in the minor key” [*MMN* 253])—to subduing his own unwieldy materials into a more manageable, or more *minimal*, form. As his Prefaces attest, James would typically “strain the minor key ... almost to breaking” (a result, in part, of his “own appointed and incurable deafness to the major key”) in evocations of heroines such as Julia Bride and Pandora Day (*AN* 264, 273).<sup>4</sup> In this essay I follow James’s fascination with this suggestive term at both ends of his career, from the tale “Madame de Mauves” (1874; 1878) and the contemporaneous French literary criticism, to the late Prefaces, touristic pieces and letters, demonstrating what I think it means to write, and finally to exist, “in the minor key” for a typically exuberant writer such as James. While he seems, in these earlier pieces, to associate “the minor key” with negative qualities such as “pitiful” and “melancholy,” taking his cue from the emotional range attaching to this musical key, and in the later texts with more positive values such as “pleasing” and “tender,” James often drops the musical sense of “minor key” altogether in favour of another set of associations, involving either “minority” (as small-scale or miniaturising) or else “keys” themselves, in an idiosyncratic process of what could be termed metaphorical drift. It is equally difficult to pin down James’s orientation towards this ambiguous phrase: his early handling of it would suggest that he is initially *dismissive* of characters

<sup>3</sup> “Minor, adj. and n.” *OED Online*, Oxford UP, June 2019, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/118931](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/118931). The *OED* quotes from Ch. 8 of the single-volume first book edition (1878) of *Watch and Ward* (168). Alongside James’s “pitiful,” further dictionary examples under the subheading “minor-key” include the nouns “pathos” and “sentiment” and the adjectives “pitiful” and “sad.”

<sup>4</sup> From the 1909 Prefaces to vol. 17 and 18 of the *New York Edition of the Novels and Tales of Henry James*, in which James treats “Julia Bride” and “Pandora,” respectively.

who operate "in the minor key"; however, reading his literary criticism of the same period alongside these remarks about his minor characters raises the possibility that the term is in fact *laudatory* (in a poet such as Gautier, for example), expressive of subtlety, complexity, and nuance. By the end of his career, James can be shown to take up "the minor key" as authentic to his own lived experience as someone physically beleaguered and depleted but at the height of his creative powers, and as someone poised at a fulcrum in time: occupying precisely the point where, as a cultural commentator and participant, he could look both forwards to the glaring publicity and supreme confidence of modern modes of communication ("the major key") and backwards to the delicacy and modesty of past forms of expression ("the minor key").

"A word of manifold signification": so begins the entry for "key" in Grove's original edition of *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1879-1883), which now bears his name.<sup>5</sup> Other popular dictionaries of James's day show that "the minor key" was similarly manifold, as in this entry from Webster's *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1865): "that key, or arrangement of tones and semitones, which is chiefly used for solemn and mournful subjects" (841). The modern-day *Merriam-Webster* is even more discriminating on this topic, splitting the head sense of the term "minor-key" into its technical sense ("a musical key or tonality in the minor mode") and its figurative sense ("a mood of melancholy or pathos"). Such definitions take much of their suggestive force from the modifier "minor," which is to say "the lesser" of two things: that which is, comparatively speaking, on "a small or limited scale," or else executed in "a restrained manner."<sup>6</sup> This may partly explain why melancholy, modesty and restraint have come to be associated with musical works composed in "the minor key." "There is a very common opinion," Grove's *Dictionary* continues in its entry for "key," "that the tone and effect of different keys is *characteristic...*" (52; my emphasis). Despite the reluctance of the author of

<sup>5</sup> "Key." *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 2, 51. James owned two English language dictionaries, one British and one American: Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* (1866-70) in 4 vols. and Funk & Wagnall's *Standard Dictionary of the English Language* (1893-95) in 2 vols. Neither has an entry for "the minor key." See Leon Edel and Adeline R. Tintner, "The Library of Henry James, From Inventory, Catalogue, and Library Lists" (1982).

<sup>6</sup> "Minor key, n." *Merriam-Webster Online*, Merriam-Webster, Inc., June 2019, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/minor%20key](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/minor%20key).

this entry to commit to such an “opinion” himself, it seems right to suggest that the sound of, and impression produced by, music written in the minor key is distinctive: Bach’s *Cello Suite no. 2 in D Minor* (BWV 1008); Schubert’s *Piano Sonata in A Minor* (D784); Grieg’s *Piano Concerto in A Minor* (Op. 16); Albinoni’s (technically Remo Giazotto’s) *Adagio in G Minor*; the opening strains (in C# minor) of Mahler’s *Fifth Symphony*. Each of these compositions is characteristically plaintive or melancholy, but to group them together in the category of works “in the minor key” would reduce them, since it would not allow for their complexity and variety, their many small departures from the minor key, nor would it allow for their distinctiveness from each other. Were this argument to be transposed to the field of literary composition, would the same objections be raised? This provokes further questions: how would a piece of fiction (or an essay, or a letter) written in “the minor key” strike the inner ear? Would its key signature, as it were, be as immediately communicable?

#### THE VOCAL INSTRUMENT

The nascent field of “auditory” Henry James Studies has produced at least two critics who consider James’s musical rhetoric: Daniel Hannah, in his account of James’s unembarrassed admission (to composer Georg Henschel) to “a certain lack of musicality” which lends “the rhetoric of music in his works its peculiar charge” (130); and Christopher Voigt, whose work on intonation in James takes some account (via Victorian classicist E.M. Cope’s commentaries on Aristotle) of the rhetorical concept of “tonality” (10). Of course, “tone,” as many others have pointed out, is one of James’s key terms, and with its applications in music and painting it has an important place in James’s conception of writing as continuous with these other artforms.<sup>7</sup> Unlike “tone”, however, “key” has gone largely unremarked, despite its implications for the question of our sense of Jamesian musicality versus, say, his *un*musicality, his tone-deafness.

One of the first instances of the phrase “the minor key” in James’s writing occurs in his 1873 essay “Théophile Gautier,” revised and collected

<sup>7</sup> In addition to the work of Daniel Hannah and Christopher Voigt, see the work of Sarah Campbell: in particular, her PhD dissertation “The Turn of the Ear: Reading for Speech in Henry James” (2008) and her essay “The Man Who Talked Like a Book, Wrote Like He Spoke” (2009).

in *French Poets and Novelists* (1878), in which he pays tribute to the minor-key tonalities of the Romantic-turned-Symbolist poet. In this affecting memorial essay James invokes "the clear, undiluted strain of Gautier's minor key," something he sets in contrast to another of his contemporaries, "the vast, grossly commingled volume of utterance of the author of *Men and Women* [i.e. Robert Browning]"—where "volume" as bound book shades into "volume" as loud noise. The imagined disparity is not so much one of key (a minor versus a major, say) as of scale (in the non-musical sense of small- or large-scale) and tone. James registers this difference in the singularity and clarity of Gautier's verse and poetic vision, which he here describes as "undiluted" but which elsewhere in the essay he describes as "localised" and "circumscribed," and the harder-to-characterise variety and "vastness" of Browning's "commingled" monologues ("Gautier" 356).<sup>8</sup> James uses another musical term to preserve the gap between the tunefulness and tonic purity of Gautier's musical "strain" and the more aggressively modulative or remote-key Browning. This would appear to involve the poet in a delicate balancing act: realising purity and singleness of tone somehow without monotony (literally, "one tone" or "the same tone").<sup>9</sup> James concludes this essay with a musical analogy for the mind and its creative faculty: "a man's supreme use in the world is to master his intellectual instrument and play it in perfection" ("Gautier" 356). For James, this "perfection" revolves on Gautier's ability to compose on a reduced scale: his miniaturising tendency.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> An example of Gautier's "minor-key" works (as quoted by James) is the "perfect little poem" 'L'art' in the collection *Émaux et Camées* (*Enamels and Cameos*, 1852). This might be contrasted with (although James does not) Browning's key-shifting monologue on the subject of art 'One Word More' in the volume *Men and Women* (1855).

<sup>9</sup> "Strain, n.2." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, June 2019, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/191172](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/191172). The OED defines the musical senses of "strain" as "a definite section of a piece of music"; or, "a sequence of sounds; a melody, tune"; or, "a passage of song or poetry"; or, in a wider sense, and transferred from its musical sense, "Tone, style, or turn of expression; tone or character of feeling expressed; tenor, drift, or general tendency or character (of a composition or discourse)." Tone is important here because, when describing musical keys, the root note of the key is known as "the tonic": the most resolved note in a key. Anticipating and recognising departures from, and resolutions of, the tonic are often thought to be what makes music pleasing.

<sup>10</sup> At the start of this essay James describes Gautier as "a French poet in his *limitations* even more than his gifts" and declares that "[c]ompleteness *on his own scale* is to our mind the idea he most instantly suggests" (355; my emphasis), both of which observations

A note of confusion is thus sounded in what James intends to convey by “the minor key”: in this instance, given his repeated emphasis on the “geniality” of Gautier rather than any sense of the poet’s melancholy, “the minor key” becomes something like “the small-scale,” and the particular pleasures (concentration, focus, fineness) such a form entails.<sup>11</sup> In this way, Gautier’s “minority” (in the sense of his inveterate miniaturising) is as much a feature of his style as any tonal qualities that might be characterised as “minor.”

### THE FEMININE REGISTER

James was not alone in tuning in to the lyricism of Gautier: several French Romantic-era composers set his poems to melodies, notably Berlioz and Bizet. The refined mixture of sentiment and simplicity belonging to Gautier “at his purest” meant that for James, in the 1870s at least, Gautier’s “minor-key” works sounded a distinctly feminine note—feminine because of this term’s own connotations of sentimentality, simplicity, and purity, as well as qualities such as modesty and restraint. This does reveal the extent to which James’s characterisation of certain textual styles as feminine was informed by his widely-held beliefs on what constituted femininity in the period.<sup>12</sup> In his 1875 essay on “Madame de Sabran” (1749-1827), the Restoration letter-writer who was still remembered and discussed in James’s day, James elaborates on this theme of what it is to communicate in “the minor key,” an increasingly gendered key for him.<sup>13</sup> Here, he writes:

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suggesting the “distillation” (362) of the poet’s endeavour. Furthermore, James concludes: “our author’s really splendid development is inexorably *circumscribed*” (374; my emphasis).

<sup>11</sup> Some adjectives James uses to convey a sense of Gautier’s verse style are “light,” “superficial” and “genial.” The last of these is particularly at odds with a conception of Gautier as a writer in the musical “minor key.”

<sup>12</sup> In his 1877 *Galaxy* essay on “George Sand”, republished in *French Poets and Novelists* (1878), James remarks: “What was feminine in [Sand] was the quality of her genius; the *quantity* of it—its force, and mass, and energy—was masculine, and masculine were her temperament and character” (*Literary Criticism* 2: 716). This chimes with James’s estimation of the slightness or lightness of Gautier’s output, what one might call its *feminine* “quantity”.

<sup>13</sup> This essay was also lightly revised and collected in *French Poets and Novelists* (1878), the version I use here.

Madame de Sabran's letters have in the direct way but a slender historical value, for they allude to but few of the important events of the time. ... Their compass of feeling is not wide ... If they are passionate, it is passion in the minor key, without any great volume or resonance. Yet for all that they are charming, simply because so far as they go they are perfect. Madame de Sabran had an exquisite talent for the expression of feminine tenderness, and a gift like this has an absolute value. ("Madame de Sabran" 651)

James's association of the "minor key" with softness, mellowness, mutedness, and sweetness, chimes with his description of Gautier serving as a counterpoint to the great "volume" of Browning—"volume" in the sense of both "loudness" and "quantity" or even (in this case) "significance." Aside from their "feminine tenderness", part of the "charm" of de Sabran's letters, no doubt, and part of their "absolute value," lies in their *pastness*: as a document of the decline of the First French Empire. However, as James says, her subject was rarely politics; what seems to have appealed most to him was her sentimental side. If one imagines her kind of "feminine tenderness"—"tenderness" being a key sense of "pathos"—as being conducted on a personal rather than a political level, then "the minor key" in the case of this understated belletrist communicates a pathos, delicacy, and fineness—again, a miniaturising skill—that must have resonated with James's own manner of expression. The negative grammatical construction of his subject's "passion" ("*without* any great volume or resonance") initially suggests a reduction, but it is more likely for James a compliment of the highest order; a "passion in the minor key" could never be "gross"—as with Robert Browning—in any of its senses, but especially: obvious, coarse, rude, dull, physical, corpulent, bloated.

The decline of the Second French Empire is the period in which James's delicately worked tale "Madame de Mauves" (1874; 1875; 1908) is set; it also dwells on (and in) "the minor key," this time in relation to a young American woman of fortune who has married a French nobleman, the Comte de Mauves, in the hope of acquiring something of his old-world chivalry and nobility; the ignoble Comte, on his part, merely hopes to acquire her dollars and carry on his innumerable affairs. We meet her, as the hero Longmore meets her, in her radically disillusioned (though not yet miserable) state. Initially Longmore is unsure of where to place the blame for the failed relationship. As the periodical and first book versions (published a year apart) have it: "there were times when our hero was almost persuaded against his finer judgement that he [the Count de Mauves] was really the most considerate of husbands, and that his wife

liked melancholy for melancholy's sake" (*MMC* 151).<sup>14</sup> When he came to revise the tale for the *New York Edition* of 1908, James altered the wording thus: "there were times when Longmore was almost persuaded against his finer judgement that he was really the most considerate of husbands and that it was not a man's fault if his wife's love of life had pitched itself once for all in the minor key" (*MMN* 253). Judging by this variant, "melancholy for melancholy's sake" is synonymous with, if finally inferior to, "the minor key" in James's thinking, possibly because it sounds too self-indulgent, too whimsical for the "stoical" resignation of Euphemia; however, later in the story, James does preserve the more fitting phrase "self-contained melancholy," in all three versions of the text. Madame de Mauves, who is repeatedly described as a paragon of "purity" and "tenderness" and as having "tones" both "delicate" and "touching," is a perfect example of the feminine minor key, especially given that her "melancholy" suggests not so much "dejection" or "introspection" as a "tender, sentimental, or reflective sadness; sadness as a subject for poetry, or as a source of aesthetic pleasure" (*OED*).<sup>15</sup> In this revision "the minor key" plays a crucial role in making the *NYE* text more colloquial, as the endpoint of the slangy sequence that begins with "not a man's fault" and runs through "love of life," "pitched itself" (another musical metaphor), and "once for all," to resolve on "the minor key." Ultimately, its substitution here suggests that it is a term that retains its sharpness for James across the span of his career: from the 1870s to the 1900s.

#### THE MINOR MODE

Turning to *Julia Bride*, in the tale of that name written in 1908, James reflects in his Preface of the following year that poor Julia had been "foreshortened ... to within an inch of her life," and he spends a large part of the Preface reliving the artistic problem of "how such a majestic mass could be made to

<sup>14</sup> Edel's edition of the tale reprints the first British book edition of 1875, which does not appreciably differ from the first magazine version of the tale, published the year earlier in two instalments in *The Galaxy* 17 (Feb.-Mar. 1874).

<sup>15</sup> "Melancholy, n." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, June 2019, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/116007](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/116007). The *OED* quotes from Ch. 5 of the 2nd vol. of the first book edition (1878) of *The Europeans*: "As with her charming undulating step she moved along the clean, grassy margin of the road, ... she was even conscious of a sort of luxurious melancholy."

turn round in a *nouvelle*." Wouldn't such larger-than-life heroines as Julia Bride and Daisy Miller, James asks—with their "note, so to call it, of multitudinous reference"—exceed the confines of short fiction, "strain the minor key ... almost to breaking?" (*AN* 262-63, 264, 263, 264).<sup>16</sup> James imagines these constraints upon himself and his materials in pictorial or plastic terms as well as musical ones, and across the extent of his Prefaces "the minor exhibition" becomes associated with the "minor key": both of which connoted for James small-scale performances. Of "Fordham Castle" (1904) James writes in his 1909 Preface to *Daisy Miller* (among other tales): "I was but to feel myself fumble again in the old limp pocket of the minor exhibition, was but to know myself reduced to finger once more, not a little ruefully, a chord perhaps now at last too warped and rusty for complicated music at short order" (*AN* 276).<sup>17</sup> The disorientating mix of metaphors is classic James, and this slippage from visual—or material, as though the showman is a magician in a coat with oversize pockets—to auditory, and vice versa, becomes a habit throughout the Prefaces (as it does, moreover, in the fiction itself). In this instance, the hesitant fumbling to produce "the minor exhibition" (or display) spills into the rueful "fingering" of the (minor?) "chord," which one is tempted to read here as a *rueful* or doleful chord. This kind of spillage is very much of a piece with late James's indulgence in what might be called a chronic metaphorical drift, and raises the question of whether "minor" meaning "lesser" or "small" may in fact be connected to "minor"-key meaning "rueful" or "doleful"?—in that an enforced contraction or constriction may inspire ruefulness over a life curtailed or foreshortened (although these terms, "minor-key" and "foreshortening" are purely technical, non-value-laden terms in their respective fields).

<sup>16</sup> James associates the *nouvelle* with another musical phrase: "the minor scale" (see the Preface to "The Lesson of the Master," Etc, *AN* 220). Of course, "note" is another of James's musical terms.

<sup>17</sup> From the Preface to vol. 18 of the *NYE*. The exhibitional method is closely tied to "the scenic method" for James and is the cornerstone of his own representational practice, as laid out in the Prefaces. James appears to be drawing on the sense of "exhibition" as "a public display" (of art, or objects of manufacture, etc), so his discussion of a given character's "exhibitional" values could be drawn from the language of pictorial or plastic art, or of drama, or indeed of any kind of "show" (including, even, magic); elsewhere in the Prefaces, James's "exhibition of a case" (as he writes of Stransom in "The Altar of the Dead") seems to draw on the language of philosophical logic and aesthetics.



## METAPHORICAL DRIFT

Before asking himself whether Julia Bride (or “Julia Bride”: heroine and *nouvelle*) might not in fact “strain” the minor key, James had asked himself: “What if she were the silver key, tiny in itself, that would unlock a treasure?—the treasure of a whole view of manners and morals, a whole range of American social aspects?” (*AN* 264). The habit of what could be described as zeugma or syllepsis but what I am calling metaphorical drift is ubiquitous in late James, as others have ably shown in their discussions of mixed metaphors in James’s late style.<sup>18</sup> The reason why this drift exceeds the rhetorical device of zeugma is that the “yoking” which occurs in these cases doesn’t merely serve to join two unrelated things (the literal and the metaphorical), but rather indicates that the senses of a single term have become figuratively associated (or even confused) for James. Most often, what begins as a musical metaphor—say, the search for a “compositional key,” as in the 1909 Preface to *The Wings of the Dove*—shakes off its musical sense to become something more mundane (the search for an actual key, for example, the loss of which results in the author being, metaphorically speaking, locked inside himself): “one begins so, in such a business, by looking about for one’s compositional key, unable as one can only be to move till one has found it. To start without it is to pretend to enter the train and, still more, to remain in one’s seat, without a ticket” (Preface to *NYE*, vol. 19, *AN* 294). Here, the apparent search for a key signature turns into, or functions simultaneously as, a literal hunt (“looking about”) for an actual lost key. Another drifting musical metaphor, in this case the “lower key” rather than the “minor key”, can be found in Part III of “Madame de Mauves,” in the first book edition of 1875: “...it seemed to him [Longmore] simply that her whole being [the eponymous heroine’s] was pitched on a lower key than harmonious Nature meant” (*MMC* 144). Over the page, the “lower key” metamorphoses, probably by an associative process, into another key: “She was not striving to balance her sorrow with some strongly flavoured joy; for the present, she was trying to live with it, peaceably, reputably and without scandal,—turning the key on it occasionally, as you would on a companion liable to attacks of

<sup>18</sup> There has been no sustained study of this subject, although there has been much passing commentary on it; memorably, Dorothea Krook in *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James* (1967) points out that the “running together of logical and pictorial imagery ... tends to become a favourite type of ‘mixed metaphor’ in the late novels” (397).

insanity" (*MMC* 145). Once again, there is the transformation of the "lower key" (or musical register) into the (mock-)sinister "key" of the madhouse jailor, the disarming substitution of one metaphor for another here leading the reader into darker imaginings—or at least more sombre tones—than may have been anticipated. The earlier fittingly feminine "minor-key" melancholy of Euphemia's has now become something different: the "lower key" of her destructive "settled ache."<sup>19</sup> All of this points to the already metaphorical nature of the musical "key" itself: a metaphor that becomes shorthand for James in his discussions of character, tone and mood in both literature and visual art.<sup>20</sup> The inherently metaphorical nature of the musical "key" is brought out by a recent updating of the term "key" in *Grove Music Online*: "While the French *ton* and the German *Tonart* stress the importance of the tonic, the English term has a broader meaning: as a metaphorical 'key,' the tonic 'unlocks' or clarifies the arrangement of pitch relations that underlies the music."<sup>21</sup> Further into the entry for "key" there is a helpful turn of the screw: "The idea that a piece or a passage lies 'in' a given key may reflect a cultural inclination to conceptualize key as a musical container." By extension, key as "musical container" may also apply to other aesthetic forms *qua* containers: namely, literary texts. When

<sup>19</sup> The figurative senses of "low-key" and "minor-key" are very similar: As we recall, "minor-key" connotes "sombre, plaintive, subdued" (*OED*, "minor" sense A.6.e) while "low-key" suggests "muted, restrained, modest" (*OED* sense B.2). See the entry for "low key, n. and adj." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2021, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/334723](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/334723).

<sup>20</sup> The "compositional key" in the example above could of course be a travelling metaphor: from music to painting. It was not unusual, in the nineteenth century, to talk of a picture's "key." The *OED* gives this definition for "key, n." (*figurative*, 18.c. *Art*): "The prevailing range of tones in a painting; the relative intensity of a particular colour scheme," citing an example from Ruskin. In his earlier-mentioned essay on "Gautier" James remarks that "As an artist, he never knew an hour's weakness or failed to strike the note that should truly render his idea"—merging painterly with musical images and techniques, in a spirit true to the Aestheticism of the era.

<sup>21</sup> Brian Hyer, "Key (i)." *Grove Music Online*. 2001. Oxford UP. Date of Access 31 Oct. 2020. [www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000014942](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000014942).

There is another sense in which the musical "key" may be said to be metaphorical. Hyer continues: "Keys are often said to possess characteristics associated with various extra-musical emotional states. . . . Though highly specific with respect to different repertoires and listeners, these expressive qualities fall into two basic categories, which conform to the basic difference—often asserted as an opposition—between major and minor: major is heard to be brighter and more cheerful than minor, which in comparison is darker and sadder."

one thinks of the “compositional key”—or indeed the “minor key”—in this way, the key becomes, as in “The Figure in the Carpet,” not so much the thing that miraculously unlocks the meaning of the story, but the thing that unifies, clarifies, and contains it—even though it may be strained “to breaking,” as James says elsewhere.

#### VARIETIES OF MELANCHOLY

The suggestion of feminine restraint or else effeminacy that one finds attaching to “the minor key” in Henry James is something that William James had theorised—in the terms, or so one fancies, of a James family language—in his Lectures VI and VII on “The Sick Soul” (whose title is a glancing reference to Gertrude’s guilt-ridden speech in *Hamlet*, Act 4, scene 5, lines 17-20), which he collected in *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (1902). In these lectures, William supplies this footnote to his discussion of the varieties of “melancholy” (religious and otherwise):

f.74. The difference between Greek pessimism and the oriental and modern variety is that the Greeks had not made the discovery that the pathetic mood may be idealized, and figure as a higher form of sensibility. Their spirit was still too essentially masculine for pessimism to be elaborated or lengthily dwelt on in their classic literature. They would have despised a life set wholly in a minor key, and summoned it to keep within the proper bounds of lachrymosity. (*Varieties* 142)

Henry James, as Philip Horne has demonstrated, was rather sensitive to the charge of being unmanly or “undersized” (240).<sup>22</sup> Despite such sensitivities, and especially when he is not on the defensive, James appears to be thoroughly reconciled and even “attuned” to what we might call the “feminine note,” what William calls “the pathetic mood” (or pathos?), figured as a “higher form of sensibility.” In Henry’s amusing letter of 16 March 1909 to his friend the writer Violet Hunt, James (we remember) had announced: “my pitch of life is lowered ... Therefore think of me as henceforth in the pleasing & unaggressive minor key” (qtd. in Secor 24-25). As I proposed at the start of this essay, this sounds to me part chivalry, part camaraderie—even though James was “not

<sup>22</sup> For an elaboration of this argument, see Philip Horne, “Henry James and the ‘forces of violence,’” 237-47.

eager," as he put it to suffragette Violet a few weeks later, on 6 April, "for the *avènement* of a multitudinous & overwhelming female electorate" (*HJLL* 478)—and part morbidity (what began for James as suspected heart trouble, later became depression and complete nervous collapse).<sup>23</sup> In a letter to Edmund Gosse the following summer, dated 13 June, 1910 James described the way in which "black depression—the blackness of darkness & the cruellest melancholia—are my chronic enemy & curse" (*HJLL* 494). It is at this time that "the minor key" is intimately tied up with the figuration of illness for James—illness as a dramatic or *melodramatic* form often embodied by the figure of the hypochondriac.

#### A METAPHORICS OF ILLNESS

James was disposed to drop into "the minor key" when his letters took a medical turn, as they increasingly did, in line with the deterioration of his own health and that of his good friends. In a letter to the writer Rhoda Broughton, composed on 25 February 1911, during the last days of winter, James recounts:

I have just had a letter from dear Mary Clarke, not overflowing with any particularly blest tidings, and containing, as an especial note of the minor key, an allusion to your apparently aggravated state of health and rather captive condition. This has caused a very sharp pang in my battered breast—for steadily battered I have myself been, battered all round and altogether, these long months and months past: even if not to the complete extinction of a tender sense for the woes of others. (*LHJ* 2: 178)

James sympathetically catches "the minor key," in this case, from the socialite Mary Clarke's reportedly gloomy letter, and tunes his own woes to her key; the understatement and negative grammatical constructions that

<sup>23</sup> Horne gives an account James's "heart trouble" (and more generally his deteriorating health) in various entries but see especially *HJLL* 485. A reader might wonder if there is any association between James's minor female characters, with their note of "multitudinous reference" and the "multitudinous & overwhelming female electorate." In both cases James could be drawing on the vocal sense of the word: "Of a sound: made by many people" or its commoner senses: "numerous" or "crowded." Either way, the suggestion of volubility and/or numerosity forms part of James's customary lament: that there is hardly space in modern life for such expansive characters who cannot help but exceed their bounds.

tend to dominate the Jamesian minor key are found here: Lady Clarke “*not* overflowing with any particularly blest tidings” is later echoed in James’s litotes in referring to his own state (“even if *not* to the complete extinction of a tender sense”). The result is a muted, reticent quality that is tactfully appropriate to the reporting of another’s illness and is somehow in sympathy with the confinement of Rhoda Broughton’s own “captive condition.” James’s hyperbole (“battered all round and altogether”) is rather fitting, given the threat of his potentially all-consuming hypochondria (“even if not to the *complete* extinction of a tender sense for the woes of others”). While it is true that James had found the cumulative strain on his nerves difficult, particularly after William’s death, his depression had lifted enough for him to joke and tease and indulge in a little tonic self-mockery (“tonic” in both senses: musical *and* medicinal). However, James found his next health complaint, the shingles, utterly debilitating (he was confined to his bed for four months), as he recounts in another letter to Gosse, of the following year, of 10 October 1912:

I am emerging, but it is slow, and I feel much ravaged and bedimmed. Fortunately these days have an intrinsic beauty—of the rarest and charmingest here; and I try to fling myself on the breast of Nature (though I don’t mean by that fling myself and my poor blisters and scars on the dew-sprinkled lawn) and forget, imperfectly, that precious hours and days tumble unrestrained into the large round, the deep dark, the ever open, hole of sacrifice. .... But there is too much to say, and I am able, in this minor key, to say too little. We must be at it again. (*LHJ* 2: 250)

What is perhaps most striking about these late letters supposedly written “in this minor key”—and distinguished, one could say, by their affliction chords—is how vigorous and humorous they are, how undaunted in the face of serious health conditions. For all that he doesn’t say, for all the presumed (or pretended) minimalism of the minor key as James conceives of it—its “little”-ness as he says here—James manages to say quite a lot. The “minor key” in this case remains something of a false threat, ironic given his playful prolixity, as is the dwindling of this great interlocutor: “We must be at it again.”

This note is often heard in the late travel essays, in the description of rumoured worn-out places that seem nevertheless to offer up unexpected riches. Take, for instance, “Old Suffolk” (originally of 1897 and collected in *English Hours* of 1905), which describes in painstaking detail the impression left on James by unremarkable Dunwich:

I defy any one, at desolate, exquisite Dunwich, to be disappointed in anything. The minor key is struck here with a felicity that leaves no sigh to be breathed, no loss to be suffered; a month of the place is a real education to the patient, the inner vision. ... Dunwich is not even the ghost of its dead self; almost all you can say of it is that it consists of the mere letters of its old name. The coast, up and down, for miles, has been, for more centuries than I presume to count, gnawed away by the sea. All the grossness of its positive life is now at the bottom of the German Ocean ... Few things are so melancholy—and so redeemed from mere ugliness by sadness—as this long, artificial straightness that the monster has impartially maintained. (255)

The paradox of “desolate, exquisite” (dismal or deserted, yet somehow beautiful, consummate); the irony of “the minor key,” with its emotional correlation to “sadness,” being struck with “a felicity”; the delicate litotes of “no sigh to be breathed, no loss to be suffered,” returning us to that same mode of understated negation seen earlier; the uncanniness of the thing that has “ceased to be at all” being raised if not to ghostliness (“not even the ghost of its dead self”) then to something like the spectrality of signification (“the mere letters of its old name”); the sloughed-off, sunken “grossness” (recalling Browning) that is the opposite of minor-key *finesse*—all of these effects invite the question, *What other mode is there, if not that of the minor key ...?* It is, after all, the key that invites us to sound both the pelagic depths of “the large round, the deep dark, the ever open, hole of sacrifice” and the littoral zone along the stretch of Suffolk coast that has been hungrily consumed. Surely there was nothing ever written in the *major* key that had anything like the “absolute value” shown by this? Indeed, which writer ever confided they’d lapsed into the major key: blatant, brash, showy, triumphalist ...?<sup>24</sup> Admittedly, there is Ray Limbert in “The Next Time” (1895; 1896), whose supremely literary flop is called *The Major Key*: a book that asserts itself a little too stridently, that has been “hammered at,” that “reeked with culture” and that has been “keyed ... up too high,” according to the vacuous Mrs. Highmore (197, 215).<sup>25</sup> One

<sup>24</sup> Tellingly, the *OED* doesn’t list a figurative sense for “the major key”; although Browning, again, comes to the rescue, this time in his dialogue with the English composer Charles Avison in *Parleyings* (1887): “Blare it forth, bold C major!”. Charles Avison’s *Essay on Musical Expression* (1752) was the first piece of music criticism published in English. See “Major, adj. and n.1.” *OED Online*, Oxford UP, June 2019, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/112621](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/112621).

<sup>25</sup> Edel reproduces the first book edition of the tale, from the collection *Embarrassments* (London: Heinemann, 1896).

thing emerges with some clarity from all this: James's oddly upbeat confession of diminution, which we hear repeatedly in his later years in those hints at deterioration and even derogation, is rather an *assertion*: he may be physically ailing and reduced, but his intellectual—his creative and critical powers—are supremely intact.

For James, then, “the minor key” signalled a variety of related phenomena: the subdued female character (“subdued” in the sense of “restrained, toned down” or else “subjugated”); the constrained genre (the lyric poem or the *nouvelle*); and the reduced state of mental or physical being—all of which somehow succeed in disavowing their attenuation. Its collection of associations—from the feminine to the miniaturised to the circumscribed, from melancholy to sorrow to ruefulness—leaves us to posit a possible connection between them. What James understands by this term is something cultural—epochal even—which applies not simply to his sense of key or tonality within gender relations but more widely to the particular time of accelerating historical change in which he lived. James was in many respects eager to embrace modernity, but modernity, to his ear, was so often jarring in its modulation between keys, or else conducted too wholly, too demonstratively, in the major key (too much brass and not enough strings). By contrast, the past—the “palpable imaginable *visitable* past”<sup>26</sup> of the Romantic era, the “mysteries” of which, for James, were often still within reach or earshot—was so expressively evoked by “the minor key.” This is because it is the only key that allows the reflective, the understated, the inward, the emotional, the melancholy, the feminine—and all the other things that suffer, in the modern world, certain forms of curtailment—to make their verbal music heard and felt.

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<sup>26</sup> As James puts it in his 1908 Preface to *The Aspern Papers*, vol. 12 of the *NYE* (*AN* 164).

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“... between absolute silence and absolute sound”:  
Orchestrating the Action in Henry James’s  
*The Saloon*

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Based on James’s 1892 ghost story “Owen Wingrave,” *The Saloon* is a one-act drama that tells the story of a military cadet who has come to hate the idea of going to war. The Wingraves have a long history of military service and Owen’s decision to abandon the profession deeply shocks his family and friends, including Kate Julian, a young woman who lives in the Wingrave family home and is “predestined” (*OW* 182) to Owen. To prove that his decision to leave the military is not based on cowardice, Owen is persuaded by Kate to spend the night locked in a room which is supposedly haunted by one of Owen’s military ancestors, a Colonel Wingrave. Many years ago, the young son of Colonel Wingrave died following a beating from his father and is laid to rest in this room. The next day, the Colonel is found dead in the same room, with no visible signs of injury on his body. Following his own night in the haunted room, Owen too dies a mysterious death.

While *The Saloon* is much shorter than “Owen Wingrave,” James changes little in terms of the plot, the central characters and the anti-war theme of the original story. If anything, James strengthens the anti-war message by explaining that the child who dies is beaten for refusing to fight a school friend. James does make a slight change to the ending of the play, perhaps to achieve

a greater dramatic effect—while Owen dies alone in the original story, in the stage version, Kate is with him. James first began working on the script for *The Saloon* late in 1907, intending it as a potential curtain-raiser for *The High Bid* which was being staged the following year in Edinburgh and the provinces by the actor-managers Henry Forbes-Robertson and his wife. However, according to James, the Forbes-Robertsons “could make neither heads nor tails of” *The Saloon* (LL 473). James was later advised by the playwright St John Hankin to submit the play to the Incorporated Stage Society, an English theatre society which put on private Sunday performances at London theatres such as the Royal Court, of new and experimental plays that might otherwise not be staged, often because the censor had not licensed them for public performance. The Stage Society’s back catalogue includes plays by literary heavyweights such as James Joyce, Chekhov, Strindberg, Lord Byron and W.B. Yeats. At first glance then, it might appear to be an eminently suitable home for one of James’s plays. However, while James certainly experimented in his drama with different genres, ranging from melodrama to murder, he did not intend the plays themselves to be experimental. Rather, he was aiming squarely at the mainstream, looking for the sort of popularity achieved by the likes of Arthur Pinero or Harley Granville Barker. James submitted *The Saloon* in 1908 but the Stage Society rejected it. The decision was conveyed to James by the Irish playwright Bernard Shaw, resulting in a protracted and on Shaw’s side at least, irascible, exchange of views on art, drama, and the laying of ghosts. Shaw accuses James of writing a play that “is like a king with his head cut off” (CP 643) and of “giving victory to death and obsolescence” (CP 646) by allowing the ghost to win out through Owen’s death. James’s replies remain impeccably polite and reasonable in the face of Shaw’s comments on “the little piece,” resorting only to a “vengeance” which is peculiarly Jamesian in its cerebral intangibility: “my worst vengeance shall be to impose on you ... the knowledge of a much longer and more insistent one” (LL 476). At the time of writing to Shaw, James was working on converting his novel *The Other House* into a three-act play, and this may have been the longer piece that James refers to.

*The Saloon* was eventually produced in 1911 by Gertrude Kingston, an English actor with strong links to the Stage Society who opened her own playhouse, known as The Little Theatre in 1910. Here, according to an interview Kingston gave to *The New York Times*, she would produce “only plays of artistic merit and serious bent” (Interview). Kingston, like many in

the nineteenth century, including William James and to a lesser degree James himself, had a keen interest in psychological phenomena and the supernatural. This fascination with spiritualism and the supernatural manifested itself across a broad spectrum of nineteenth-century life and culture, both in Britain and the United States. Transcending social and economic hierarchies, the paranormal excited interest from every social class, including Queen Victoria herself. Those looking for entertainment as well as potential enlightenment from the other side could visit spiritualists, take part in seances, and witness the exploits of mediums such as Cora Tappan-Richmond, the inspiration for Verena Tarrant in James's *The Bostonians* (Cruise 136). The more serious-minded could join one of the many societies dedicated to the science of the supernatural, such as the Society for Psychical Research. William James was president of the Society between 1894 and 1895 and founded the American Society of Psychical Research. In Victorian literature the influence of the supernatural is widespread, from the early gothic monsters of Mary Shelley to the subtly disquieting ghost stories of M.R. James. Henry James began writing ghost stories early in his career—"The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" was written in 1868 when James was twenty-five. Readers are more likely to be familiar with "The Jolly Corner" or "The Turn of the Screw" than the lesser-known "Owen Wingrave," but what all James's ghosts have in common is a certain delicacy, an understated menace—not for James the obvious monsters, no gore or clanking chains or headless horsemen. Seen in slow glimpses, and then only through the lens of nervous or overwrought imaginations, the ghosts of James's supernatural tales are invariably silent and deliberately ambiguous, their existence debatable for both the readers and the protagonists of James's stories.<sup>1</sup> They are also curiously inactive, content to merely appear rather than do. But, while passive themselves, they stir the recipients of their ghostly visitations into frantic physical or mental activity. So, we have Brydon's agonised soul-searching in "The Jolly Corner" and the increasingly frenzied, and ultimately fatal, attempts of the governess in "The Turn of the Screw" to protect her young charges. In "Owen Wingrave" the ghost is a silent menace, much spoken of and alluded to but never seen as a solid presence.

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<sup>1</sup> For a critical analysis of James's ghost stories see, for example, T.J. Lustig, *Henry James and the Ghostly* (1994), Martha Banta, *Henry James and the Occult: The Great Extension* (1972), Anna Despotopoulou and Kimberley C. Reed, editors *Henry James and the Supernatural* (2011), Hazel Hutchison *Seeing and Believing: Henry James and the Spiritual World* (2006).

While the ghost that haunts *The Saloon* may be silent, sound is a key element in the play. The script for *The Saloon* is unusual amongst James's plays in that his stage directions contain specific references to music. In a broad sense, there is nothing exceptional in this—music was an integral part of Victorian drama, used to underscore the action and alert the audience to a character's motives or state of mind. Incidental music was also used to cover curtain-raising and scene-changing. In the earlier part of the century, stock musical pieces were associated with different character types, particularly in melodrama, where musical accompaniment was "almost continuous" (Booth, "Victorian Age" 123) throughout the whole performance. So, whatever the play, the entrance of the hero, heroine or villain would be accompanied by the same piece of music, familiar to the audience through long use. Popular music was used in a similar way, as Michael Pisani notes, both to "stimulate a sense of pleasure in recognition" and to act as an "authenticating device" for the action being played out (79). In the later decades of the century, the practice of using stock musical pieces to represent certain character types began to fall out of favour, and actor-managers increasingly began to commission original music for new plays. In an article on "Music and Drama" that appeared in *The Stage* in 1887, the writer notes this change of practice, claiming that "modern ideas of art" rendered the use of such stock pieces "ridiculous." Music was still an important element of drama however, as the writer in *The Stage* acknowledges, claiming music to be "the very wisest way of enhancing the power of the drama itself" (Review). Demand for music in the theatres remained high, despite what Pisani refers to as "changing tastes towards more realism" (72). Music was still being played live at this point and provided employment for considerable numbers of people. While the invention of the phonograph in the 1870's, and its more sophisticated successor the Gramophone a decade later, made the recording of sound possible, the techniques were still in their infancy and provided neither the quality nor the atmosphere the Victorian audience would expect. In London, the larger West End theatres had their own orchestras but smaller, less prestigious, theatres would still have one or two resident musicians (Booth, "Victorian Age" 33). At the larger West End theatres orchestras with around twenty to thirty musicians was still the norm well into the twentieth century (Pisani 81). Many of the larger theatres even had their own musical directors who kept a stock of appropriate musical passages, known as *melos*, which were used to accentuate speech and action (Pisani 83). Stage managers also played a key role in setting a performance to

music though not all were equally skilled in this area. *The Stage* notes that “All stage-managers who know their work can be fully depended upon by authors in this matter of dove-tailing music into a drama” but it goes on to warn of “woe to the author who puts his faith in a stage-manager who does not know his work. A drama overburdened with music drags most fearfully” (Review). The voices of actors were also used to musical effect and, as Booth notes, actors had to work with the musical accompaniment for any play, using it to strengthen and enhance their own performance. Actors such as Ellen Terry, Fanny Kemble and Edmund Kean were known for the musicality of their vocal delivery as much as for their acting (Booth, “Victorian Age” 121-23). Part of the role of a musical director or composer in the theatre was to ensure that the musical accompaniment did not drown out the voice of the actor. Pisani notes that the actor-manager Henry Irving was conscious of the power of his own voice, which he thought of as “a musical instrument equivalent to that of a singer,” to the extent that he would carefully choose the music that was used to accompany his acting with a view to intensifying rather than distracting from, that voice (82). Irving was not alone in exerting influence over the music used in his theatre. Knowing the importance of that music in the development and understanding of their acting roles, most actor-managers would have worked closely with their musical director from the first rehearsals right through to the final performance.

James was neither actor nor manager but as a seasoned theatregoer and critic he would have been fully aware of the power that music had to either enhance or diminish dramatic effect. All of James’s plays that reached production would have had the standard musical accompaniments, but what is unusual about *The Saloon* is that, rather than leave it to the judgement of the musical director, he incorporates musical references in the script himself, references that seem designed to create a sense of unease and disquiet amongst the audience, much as modern filmmakers do.<sup>2</sup> References to music exist in only one play other than *The Saloon*, James’s first play scenario *Pyramus and Thisbe* (1869). In this two-hander the female protagonist, Catherine, is a music teacher who antagonises her male fellow-lodger with the “violence”

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<sup>2</sup> James may also have had a more prosaic reason for introducing the piano-playing. Photographs of *The Little Theatre* show that the building is so small there is no room for even a small orchestra. Placing a piano on the stage and having one of the characters play would have provided a practical solution in addition to functioning as an atmospheric device. [www.arthurlloyd.co.uk/LittleTheatreLondon.htm](http://www.arthurlloyd.co.uk/LittleTheatreLondon.htm)

of her piano playing (*CP* 75). In this play, the piano itself has a key function within the script, serving as a means for Catherine to display her annoyance at her noisy, cigar-smoking neighbour without having to resort to unladylike shouting or language. Ultimately, the piano is also a device for bringing the two young people together. In *The Saloon*, the piano has no integral role in the plot—the action of the play would unfold in the same way whether the piano was there or not. Nor does music feature in the original story of “Owen Wingrave,” other than a passing reference to Spencer Coyle having the appearance of “a concert-giving pianist” (*OW* 156). In the story, James slowly introduces discordant notes by referencing the “sinister gloom diffused” throughout the old house, the strangely unnerving portraits of Owen’s ancestors adorning the walls, and the “wicked and weird” (*OW* 175) impression it all makes on the dinner guests. As a one-act curtain-raiser for the main play, *The Saloon* would necessarily be of short duration, offering James scant opportunity for that slow build-up of tension which leads, in the original story, to Owen’s mysterious death. Instead, the stage version begins with the last part of the story, the dinner party at the Wingrave family home that immediately precedes Owen’s death. Without that additional space to develop both plot and atmosphere, James seems to be using music to create a build-up of tension quickly and subtly, without the need to resort to trickery and special effects. The play opens with Kate, her back to the audience, playing the piano, “drawing from it a low thin music” (*CP* 651). At first, the music is a quiet accompaniment to the action, as if Kate is “playing to herself” but at the same time “vaguely preluding” the horror to come (651). As Kate’s “softly-incoherent playing” (653) continues behind the other characters’ dialogue, the “nervous up-and-down pat” (654) of Mrs. Julian’s foot and the “drum” (652) of Coyle’s fingers against the furniture act as grace notes to Kate’s playing, wordlessly emphasising the tension the characters feel and adding to the general atmosphere of vague unease. As the play proceeds and the subject of the family ghosts is discussed by Coyle and Owen, the piano music begins again, this time off-stage. However, as Owen’s mysterious death looms closer, Kate’s playing increases in both sound and intensity, becoming “a sudden gust of strange extravagant music, fantastic and exotic” which thoroughly unnerves Lechmere and Coyle. Coyle declares Kate’s “wild, extraordinary music” to be “Too *hard*—on top of that story!” leading him to exclaim “it’s more than I can stand. For God’s sake, stop her!” (659). In the final scene of the play, hearing Kate cry out on

discovering Owen’s lifeless form, Coyle rushes onstage. The play ends with Coyle’s declaration that Owen has died the death of a soldier, which he makes in a voice that sounds “like the curt hard blare of a trumpet” (674).

James was not alone in seeing the musical and dramatic potential in the story of “Owen Wingrave.” In 1970, the composer Benjamin Britten wrote an opera, based on James’s tale. Filmed on location in Aldeburgh, Suffolk, *Paramore* was Britten’s first opera written for television, and it aired on BBC2 in May 1971. While James might have appreciated the staging of “Owen Wingrave” 60 years after it was first produced there is one aspect of Britten’s opera he might not have approved of. *Paramore* features not one but two ghosts, that of Colonel Wingrave and the child he kills. And, while the ghosts of Britten’s opera remain silent, they are very much visible, stepping from the portraits on the walls of Paramore’s stairway to escort Owen to his death. Like James, Britten seems to have been an exacting master and the singers in *Paramore* may well have sympathised with the actors in *The Saloon* trying to decipher James’s complex stage directions. In an interview with cast members from the original production, they speak of Britten’s precision and his insistence on detail, claiming that Britten wrote “difficult things but never impossible.”<sup>3</sup> In 1954 Britten had also written an opera based on another of James’s ghostly stories, *The Turn of the Screw*. The ghosts of Miss Jessel and Quint, though silent in James’s story, and visible only to the governess, have singing parts in Britten’s opera. James would surely have approved of the location for the first performance though, the Teatro la Fenice in Venice, one of James’s favourite European cities.<sup>4</sup>

In the Victorian theatre, all musical notations and directions were included in a play’s prompt book. There is no extant prompt book for *The Saloon*, and so it is difficult to judge whether James’s intentions regarding music in *The Saloon* were carried out and, if so, how successful the use of music was. Newspaper reviews of the play make no mention of piano playing or music of any kind. This absence of comment was not unusual, reviews of Victorian plays rarely mention the music that would invariably have accompanied each

<sup>3</sup> <https://brittenpears.org/explore/benjamin-britten/music/operas/owen-wingrave/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://brittenpears.org/explore/benjamin-britten/music/operas/the-turn-of-the-screw/>. At the time of writing this chapter in March 2020, a production of Britten’s version of *The Turn of the Screw* was in production at The Theatre Royal in Newcastle—testament to the continuing longevity and popularity of James’s work.



performance. In the case of stock musical accompaniments, which would be familiar to the audience from countless other plays, it may be that the music was simply so familiar as not to merit comment. Even reviews of so-called musical plays—lightweight fare featuring dancing and spectacular costumes aimed at the popular market—have little to say about the music that one would assume from the name was a key feature of the performance. In a review in *The Eastbourne Gazette*, the popular production *Our Miss Gibbs* for example, merits only a reference to “pretty music” (Review) while in *The Clarion* a review of *The Arcadians* at Manchester’s Prince’s Theatre refers to it as “the finest musical play that has ever been put on a stage” but goes on to make not a single mention of that music (Review). According to Pisani, this general lack of acknowledgement of the role music played in the Victorian theatre continues today, as least as far as the musicians are concerned: “the lives of the theatre musicians have never been documented, nor can information about them be found in musical or theatrical reference works” (79). Certainly, though James reviewed countless plays, commenting on the actors, the costume, the scenery and even his fellow playgoers, music is the one aspect of drama that he affords little attention. Nor does James mention music in relation to the production of his own plays. The playbill for *Guy Domville* lists Walter Slaughter as musical director and Slaughter is also credited with writing the play’s incidental music. Slaughter was a well-known musical director and composer who worked for West End theatres including the Opera Comique, where James’s play *The American* was produced in 1890, and the Prince of Wales, writing both full scores and incidental music. At the time *Guy Domville* was produced, Slaughter was musical director for the St James. Writing to Elisabeth Robins during the rehearsals for *Guy Domville*, James refers to both costumes and scenery but makes no mention of music (Robins 141). James does seem to have had an interest in the lives of theatre musicians however, even if he does not refer to them in his critical work. In *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), the character of Mr. Vetch is employed as the second fiddle in the orchestra at the Bloomsbury Theatre, where he earns “a few shillings a week” (PC 17) for his pains.

Music is not the only sound to feature in the script for *The Saloon*. The sound of James’s own voice can be clearly heard in the long and intricate stage directions, which in turn dictate to the actors how *they* should sound, act and feel. Lengthy stage directions were not unusual in Victorian plays. James’s dramatic contemporaries such as Wilde, Pinero and Shaw made extensive use of them, partly as a means of keeping control of the script throughout

rehearsals and production, but also since playscripts were often published as a means of making the dramatist some money even if the plays themselves were not performed—in fact, Cary Mazer claims that “the only way Shaw could reach an audience in the nineties was to bring out his plays in print” (214). However, the extent to which James uses stage directions in *The Saloon* is unusual. The first page of the version of the script published in the *Complete Plays*, for example, consists of nothing but directions and, further in there are two pages of directions with only eleven lines of spoken text. There are two potential explanations for why James’s stage directions for *The Saloon* are especially numerous and intricate. The most obvious reason is simple expediency. At the time rehearsals began, James was spending an extended period in America during the illness and death of his brother William and had no opportunity to attend rehearsals as he would normally have done, or to speak to either Kingston or the actors. In November 1910 James sent his literary agent, James B. Pinker, a copy of *The Saloon* to give to Kingston. The letter accompanying the script makes clear James’s concern that his play would be difficult for Kingston “to do full justice to” and alludes to the “drawback” of his “absence from rehearsal and preparation” (*Letters* 4: 565). Writing to Sydney Waterlow a few months later in January of 1911, James was still worried, rightly as it transpired, that Kingston would be able to successfully “interpret” his “black little play” (*Letters* 4: 570). While James’s friend John Pollock, who was also a friend of Kingston, acted as James’s representative during the production (*Letters* 4: 565), this was not enough to reassure James that his absent voice would be heard strongly enough. Writing to Kingston on 31 January 1911, some two weeks after the opening night of *The Saloon*, James’s anxieties regarding the staging of his play are clear. James declares himself “resigned” to the production of the play in his absence, telling Kingston that he takes comfort “from the fact of my so extremely detailed & numerous indications & aids; with which my copy fairly bristled” (LL 497-98). Since James was not able to be physically present at rehearsals of his play, he uses the script to try and direct both the actors and the action as far as possible. There are two surviving copies of the playscript in the Houghton Library at Harvard, the first of which has extensive notes and revisions added in James’s own handwriting.<sup>5</sup> The version that appears in the *Complete Plays* is the second typescript, incorporating James’s revisions, and it could certainly

<sup>5</sup> MS Am 1237.10 1-2, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

be said to “bristle” with indications, some of which, such as the description of Spencer Coyle having a “grizzled, intellectual head [and] a spare, clean-shaven, pedagogical, but eminently intelligent, acute and witty face” (*CP* 652) would have provided the actors and producer with not a few challenges. The numerous pages of stage directions certainly live up to James’s description of them as “extremely detailed.” Every aspect of the setting for the opening scene of the play has been thought out in meticulous detail, down to the “old, pre-aesthetic papering” on the walls, the “large lamp” that “burns with an old-fashioned globe but with no smart modern shade,” and the “little basket” for Mrs. Julian to place her “work and her keys” (*CP* 651). Even things that James dismisses as “not important,” such as the “question of a chimney place” are covered, while his instructions for how the piano that Kate plays should look, and the place on stage it should occupy, are painstakingly detailed. Placed against the opposite wall to a “large glass case containing precious military relics,” the piano must be “spare, upright... of the old-fashioned “cottage” order but with faded and fluted green silk in the front” (*CP* 651). James’s finely drawn sketch is a masterclass in scene-setting, designed to create the perfect atmosphere, the right impression of faded grandeur and the Wingrave family’s “diminished honours” (*OW* 163), allowing the audience an insight into the lives of James’s characters even before those characters utter their first lines. However, James’s intentions may have been lost on a Victorian audience looking for spectacle and splendour such as that displayed in Wilde’s society comedies, and who might well have wondered at the Little Theatre’s apparent lack of decent props. It was certainly lost on Shaw, who informed James that it was “a damnable sin to draw with such consummate art a houseful of rubbish” (qtd. in *CP* 643). How far Kingston was willing, or able, to dress the stage just as James wished is now impossible to judge but certainly it would have been easier for the stage-manager to find a piece of faded green silk for the piano than it might have been for the actor playing Mrs. Julian to display the “elegance of frugality” (*CP* 651) that James’s directions demand of her. As well as serving to voice his intentions during his enforced absence, James’s exacting stage directions may also have been motivated by accumulated experience. By 1911, when *The Saloon* was staged, James had been writing, viewing and critiquing drama for more than forty years. *The Saloon* was his fifth play to reach the point of rehearsals and the fourth to be produced at that point in time. His own experiences over the years, and that of his theatrical friends and acquaintances, would have taught James the degree to which an original playscript was subject

to revision by managers, actors and even the audience. Writing in 1890, the successful actor-manager, Mrs. Madge Kendall, acknowledged that “very few plays indeed have ever been acted before the public in the state in which they were originally brought into the theatre. They undergo a thousand changes” (qtd. in Jackson 342-43). Having experienced those enforced changes himself and become increasingly frustrated with them, it seems reasonable to postulate that the length and complexity of James’s stage directions would increase exponentially over time, in an effort to circumvent radical revisions. Looking chronologically at the development of James’s dramatic writing supports this theory. The stage directions in James’s earlier plays are shorter and less specific than those of his later drama. James’s playscript for *Daisy Miller* (1882), for example, other than instructions for entrances and exits, mainly consists of simple one or two word directions to the actors on their demeanour and tone of voice, such as “Disappointed” (CP 152) or “Gravely” (CP 156). By the time of writing *Guy Domville* (1893), while the script still contains simple one-word instructions such as “Aghast” (CP 496) and “Laughing” (CP 497), James’s directions are becoming more intricate, and more demanding of the actors’ skills. So, Lord Devenish is instructed to be “Smiling, urbane, successful, with the movement of complacently swinging a cane” (CP 497) while Mrs. Peverel is described as “Listening an instant, and as if subjugated by his returning sanctity” (516). By the time James wrote *The Outcry* in 1909, almost every line of dialogue is accompanied by a direction ranging from the basic—“staring” (CP 793) to the bewildering: “Theign: (coming down, worked up by the unconsciously irritating insistence of the others to something quite openly wilful and perverse now)” (CP 798).

From James’s letter to Kingston it would appear that at least some of the “detailed and numerous” instructions set out in his script had been followed. While James was not present to see the play himself, he received reports from “three or four friends” who had seen it and he “rejoice[d] to hear that so careful account had been taken” of his instructions (LL 498). However, we know from a cable from James to John Pollock that Kingston cut two pages from the script, a fact which “horrified” James (CP 648). The real horror though was Kingston’s decision to go against James’s specific instructions in one critical area—the appearance of the ghost. Like the subtle shades that flit through his supernatural stories, it is clear from James’s letter that he intended the ghost to be merely a suggestion, a hint that would allow the theatre audience to conjure up its own demons, unless of course, like Mrs. Wingrave in the

original tale, that audience had “too little imagination for fear” (*OW* 66). In the end, the imaginative powers of the audience were not put to the test. Far from remaining, as James intended, “invisible and inscrutable, only intensely presumable and felt” (*LL* 498) the ghost took a visible and, if the critics are to be believed, entirely unconvincing, form. James’s displeasure at this departure from such a crucial part of his script is clear in his letter to Kingston: “I gather with real dismay that at the final crisis ... during the momentary rush of black darkness, some object or figure *appears* on the stage ... There is absolutely no warrant or indication for this in my text, and I view any such introduction with the liveliest disapproval” (*LL* 498). James would no doubt have been doubly dismayed on reading the critics’ reaction to the appearance of this ghostly apparition. *The Sporting Times* mocks the appearance of a “ghost that tries hard to horrify but only succeeds in raising a laugh” (Review) while *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* describes the play as “smooth talk rudely interrupted by an incongruous episode of supernatural melodrama” (Review). Despite James’s assertion that his script has “no warrant or indication” for a visible ghost, “a monster that walks” (*LL* 498), it is just possible to see how Kingston might, wilfully or otherwise, have misinterpreted James’s references to the “muffling whirlwind of an Apparition” and “a Shade that passes the window” (*CP* 673). There can be no excuse however, for the single shriek of James’s script translating on stage into a confusion of shouting and screaming. Between Kingston’s heavy-handed approach and the incompetent acting, James’s subtle and claustrophobic ghost story, with its haunting music, becomes a discordant cacophony. And, while the music that accompanied James’s play, whatever form it eventually took, does not feature in the newspaper reviews, the sound of the decidedly unmusical voices of the actors certainly does. *The Globe* refers to the “awful shrieks” of those actors and derides the ending as “pitilessly theatrical.” The review is not critical overall however, describing James’s “development of the little horror” as “imaginative and powerful” (Review). Similarly, while the writer in *The Sketch* derides “the clumsiness of the needlessly numerous entrances and exits” he acknowledges that the play has “a thrill in it, it arrests attention and excites curiosity” (Review). Reviewing James’s play in *The Pall Mall Gazette*, the playwright and critic H.M. Walbrook was scathing about the lack of acting skills that sees the ending degenerate into “a crude contest between a man yelling and a woman shouting, a sheer noise that afflicted the ear” (116). In Walbrook’s view, should the actors playing Kate Julian and Owen Wingrave have “played their scene with a little more

quiet intensity and a little less uproar” they would have “got a good deal nearer to the emotional centre of the audience” (116). Walbrook ended his review by declaring *The Saloon* to be “one of the most thrilling one-act plays produced in London of late years” (116).

In *Pyramus and Thisbe*, one of the characters declares that “there is something between absolute silence and—absolute sound” (CP 77). In his use of music as a plot device in *The Saloon*, perhaps James is trying to reach that “something between,” using music to help create an atmosphere within the confines of the stage that might be evoked in his novels by the silences between the dialogue, where James allows his characters the space to think and feel and imagine, and where we, as readers, silently use our own imaginations. On the Victorian stage the sound of James’s own voice, filtered through his intensely detailed stage directions, is silenced by the shrieking of the actors and by the critics’ mockery of a ghost that James never intended to be seen or heard. There is a line in the original story where Coyle declares that Owen is “of a substance too fine to be handled by blunt fingers” (OW 169). A fitting epitaph perhaps for Kingston’s cacophonous rendering of James’s quietly eerie tale.

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# Music in *The Sacred Fount*

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What may be the most extended description of music in James' oeuvre occurs at the geometric center of *The Sacred Fount*, in a scene that does not seem to have attracted much attention from those who have scrutinized this baffling novel. The scene offers no new clues to the reader who has become obsessed, with the narrator, by the psychological detective story, yet as a unique moment which assembles all the characters in silent contemplation it may provide the keystone in the aesthetic design of the novel and function as the watershed in its action. Taking up this thread, let us see if it can guide our descent into this fictional labyrinth and our safe return:

It may just possibly have been an hallucination of my own, but while we sat together after dinner in a dispersed circle I could have worked it out that, as a company, we were considerably conscious of some experience, greater or smaller from one of us to the other, that had prepared us for the player's spell. Felicitously scattered and grouped, we might in almost any case have had the air of looking for a message from it... The whole scene was as composed as if there were scarce one of us but had a secret thirst for the infinite to be quenched. And it was the infinite that, for the hour, the distinguished foreigner poured out to us, causing it to roll in wonderful waves of sound, almost of colour, over our receptive attitudes and faces. (*SF* 100-01)

The music is produced by the only foreigner to penetrate the precincts of Newmarch, and brings a message from outside, from beyond. But this connects with the constant play of musical effects throughout the text up to that point. These sound-effects—the voices and their “tone,” the elegant but teasing dialogues, the moments of silence, and the shifting rhythms of the narrator’s inner ruminations, even the “music” of the train at the start (*SF* 4)—are matched by what might be called the balletic effects of the characters’ movements around the terraces and landscape gardens. The novel is charged with high consciousness of aesthetic artifice, in its marked observation of the neo-Aristotelean unities, taking place in one extended day, in one privileged space, and with one theme insistently pursued. Knit together as tautly as a classical French drama, it fails, however, to reach an explicit denouement in which all the threads are united in a lucid pattern. Or rather, it holds out to “the reader as detective”<sup>1</sup> the possibility of such a thoroughly satisfying vision. But even if the basic solution is worked out, there are so many ambiguities and puzzles in every chapter that no matter how often the text is reread one’s detective skills will be constantly stretched. In the meantime, the readers are lured and lulled with one exquisite sensation after another, and the musical scene assures them that the quest itself, in its very unfulfillment, is of precious value.

The music occurs at the moment when the narrator comes closest to completing his palace of thought, which crumbles thereafter. After all the intangible intimations that have teased us so far, the language of music, suspending the finite puzzles, multiplies allusions to an ineffable infinite. It becomes a sacred fount, the Egerian spring of the novel’s dominant metaphor, meeting “a secret thirst of the infinite to be quenched” and now “poured out to us” (*SF* 101). The hearers’ search for a “message” in the music matches the readers’ search for the message of the novel. Their care for the conventional appearances of civilized life in their “posture of deference to this noble art” (*SF* 101) is correlated with “the infinite,” as the human attitude best befitting its revelation.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the Newmarch guests form a community, as they

<sup>1</sup> See Tintner, “A Gay Sacred Fount.”

<sup>2</sup> As a pianist, the young woman in “A Most Extraordinary Case” “would discourse infinite melody” (*Complete Stories 1864-1874*, 277). Wagner launched the notion of infinite melody (*unendliche Melodie*) in his essay *Zukunftsmusik*, first published in French translation (*La musique de l’avenir*) in 1860. Here we may have a very early Wagnerian allusion. Emma Sutton notes that James, who had turned down an opportunity to meet

share not only their well-schooled appreciation of art, and the self-conscious refinement of their behavior, but a sharp interest in one another.

Are there other presences of “the infinite” in the novel? One may say that the narrator’s obsessive speculations about the riddle he has posed to himself entails a quest for the infinite value of truth, or of knowledge. He pursues as well an infinity of reflection, following up every subtle nuance of the situations he glimpses or imagines (as James himself would later milk to the last drop the relationships explored in *The Golden Bowl*). There is also an infinity of art, not only in the graciousness of the week-end gathering in its gorgeous setting, but in the creative imagination of the narrator. One could read the novel as a symbolist work, where the gestures and postures of the characters become emblems of the human being reaching out to mystery, as in Maeterlinck’s *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1893) for instance.<sup>3</sup> But such works normally have a coherent plot, though this may not be the case with the *Nouveau roman* with which *The Sacred Fount* has also been compared. To call it “a *stripped* novel, almost a Flaubertian ‘livre sur rien,’ in which only the principle of composition really matters” (Bouraoui 96), sounds like an attempt to make a virtue of hermeneutic failure.

The music is a clue to how the whole novel should be read, as an elegant ballet or drama or painterly composition. The theatricality of the novel also reaches its high point in this scene:

every actor in the play that had so unexpectedly insisted on constituting itself for me sat forth as with an intimation that they were not to be so easily disposed of. It was as if there were some last act to be performed before the curtain could fall. Would the definite dramatic signal for ringing the curtain down be then only—as a grand climax and *coup de théâtre*—the due attestation that poor Briss had succumbed to inexorable time and Mrs. Server given way under a cerebral lesion? Were the rest of us to disperse decorously by the simple action of the discovery that, on our pianist’s striking his last note, with its consequence of permitted changes of attitude, Gilbert Long’s victim had reached the point of final simplification and Grace Brissenden’s the limit of age recorded of man? (*SF* 102)

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Wagner in 1880, “referred to the composer or his works in more than a dozen of his novels and short stories from the 1880s to the early twentieth century” (Sutton 3).

<sup>3</sup> See Moon.

An art of sacral ritual is also evoked here: "They has truly been arrayed and anointed, they had truly been isolated, for their sacrifice" (*SF* 102).<sup>4</sup> The narrator, in this whimsical extrapolation, may imagine with Pascal that *le dernier acte est toujours sanglant*, but in fact his obsession, unlike those of the narrators of "The Aspern Papers" or "The Turn of the Screw," fails of murderous effect, and the curtain will come down on a scene of comic discomfiture as he is dismissed as "crazy" (*SF* 192).

The style of the novel is part of the very substance of its drama. Readers of it in translation would be quite cut off from this aspect. Lines like "You after all then now don't?" (*SF* 192) or "all that at dinner had begun to fade away from me came back with a rush and hovered there with a vividness" (*SF* 101) represent a stylized diction that cannot rejoin the platitude of ordinary converse. Since the conversation picks up the stilted phrases and further varies them, the artificiality of the language, sometimes savoring of Gallicism, becomes cumulative:

"Don't I make things of an ease, don't I make life of a charm, for him?"

I'm afraid I laughed out. "That's perhaps exactly it! It's what Gilbert Long does for *his* victim—makes things, makes life, of an ease and a charm." (*SF* 27)

The constant conatus of style is one with the epistemological striving; the narrator is as much devoted to creating beauty as to discerning truth; indeed his hope to is achieve both at one and the same stroke, despite the threat of contradiction between the two goals.

The word "tone" occurs thirteen times<sup>5</sup> and the word "note" in the quasi-musical sense twelve times. "Talk" (102 occurrences)<sup>6</sup> preponderates over "silence" or "silent" (twenty-one occurrences)<sup>7</sup> in the novel's soundscape. The narrator's laughter, chiming with that of other characters, is a sound-effect of a distinct kind, accentuating the singular style of the novel. The verb "laugh" occurs fifty-four times,<sup>8</sup> the noun five times and "laughter" three

<sup>4</sup> "Sacrifice" as verb and noun occurs 22 times in the novel.

<sup>5</sup> 54 occurrences in *The Ambassadors*, 26 in *The Wings of the Dove*, 67 in *The Golden Bowl*.

<sup>6</sup> 140 in *The Ambassadors*, 132 in *The Wings of the Dove*, 136 in *The Golden Bowl*

<sup>7</sup> 63 in *The Ambassadors*, 64 in *The Wings of the Dove*, 73 in *The Golden Bowl*.

<sup>8</sup> Compare 132 occurrences in *The Ambassadors*, 19 in *The Wings of the Dove*, 47 in *The Golden Bowl*.

times. Thirty-five of these refer to the narrator's laughter, fourteen to Grace Brissenden's, six to Ford Obert's. The narrator's laughs can be adversarial: "I almost triumphantly laughed"; "my certainty made me laugh" (*SF* 127); "We stood face to face a moment, and I laughed out" (*SF* 160). "I continued to laugh.... She didn't like my laughter" (*SF* 162); "It made me somehow break into laughter" (*SF* 175). Or it can be nervous and uncontrolled: "I'm afraid I laughed out" (*SF* 27); "I laughed out doubtless too nervously" (*SF* 87); "I risked the long laugh which might have seemed that of madness.... And whether or not it was the special sound, in my ear, of my hilarity, I remember just wondering if perhaps I mightn't be [insane]" (*SF* 168). Grace's laugh, too, can be a weapon: "She celebrated her humility in a laugh that was proud" (*SF* 43); "she could by this time almost coarsely laugh" (*SF* 180); "'Dear no—you don't perpetrate anything. Perhaps it would be better if you did!' she tossed off with an odd laugh" (*SF* 181); "'He has his amusements, and it's odd,' she remarkably laughed, 'that you should grudge them to him!'" (*SF* 187). The battle of tone between the two becomes a context to see who can laugh the other off the stage.

Fiddling with this Rubik's Cube of a novel would be a grim business were it not for the music of its style. If the phantasmagoria is "a magnificent chiaroscuro of color and shadow" (*SF* 134), it is also a delicate polyphony of evasions, ambiguities, musically expressed in questioning echoes or in false accords. The narrator may slip himself up and tumble clownishly, but the ballet-master integrates every misstep into the choreography. Grace's tone may be rude in the final long-drawn-out dialogue and the narrator may hit many dubious notes, as he nervously feels, but the "touch" of the composer is impeccable. It may be objected that none of these virtues are specific to *The Sacred Fount*, but can be found in all James's novels. I would urge, however, that each of James's major compositions has its distinctive climate and style, just as, say, each of Beethoven's symphonies has.

Moreover, James at this stage in his career is exploring new possibilities of style, finding a pretext for license in the popular genres of Gothic horror ("The Turn of the Screw"), mystery involving time travel (*The Sense of the Past*, begun in 1900), and in the present case the detective story. Nor did he return to sedulous realism in the succeeding three great masterpieces, which have little concern with real-life society but rather give free rein to the phantasmagoric imagination. They reintroduce the "international theme" but the America of these novels is an imaginary vision (James had not been in the US since

1882). Colton Valentine's demonstration that the later James rereads Balzac no longer as a documentary realist but as a fantastical visionary carries over to such works as *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*. It would be heavy-handed to seek a well-thought-out critique of capitalism or class struggle in these products of excited imagination, which develop according to their idiosyncratic laws of composition without any sustained reference to socio-political reality. A fortiori, it is misleading to say that "*The Sacred Fount* is not just metaphorically a narrative of vampirism; it quite graphically describes how the ruling class works to take possession of others" (Rowe, *Other* 26).<sup>9</sup> This might apply to *The Golden Bowl*, but the guests at Newmarch are social equals, and their social graces are celebrated rather than denounced. Nor is the "ruling class" of *The Golden Bowl* realistically observed. Rather we are offered an allegorical meditation on the glories of civilization, represented by princes and art collectors, which is haunted by the uneasy awareness of a hidden flaw. The power play in the relationships at Newmarch is more subtly masked. Grace and Long no doubt "take possession of others," but not without the willing collusion of their victims.

There is also at the heart of the narrator's labyrinth the infinity of love: if May Server is a sacred fount wasting away from passionate devotion to her dominant partner, then her self-giving bespeaks an absolute adoration that touches on the infinite. The sacral language would thus be more appropriate than at first suggested by the apparently frivolous McGuffin of the "sacred fount." May is ranked with James's sublime female victim-figures, alongside Daisy, Tina/Tita Bordereau, Maisie, Marie de Vionnet, Milly Theale, May Bartram, and Maggie Verver (whose surname rhymes with hers). The novel's romantic portrayal of May Server shows her as the victim not of some bizarre magic but as a martyr of unrequited love, such as Rilke celebrated in the first *Duino Elegy*.<sup>10</sup> She stands out in the civilized tableau the narrator composes during the recital:

<sup>9</sup> Similarly, "James's text asks directly what is implicit in his other writings: how is individual expression possible given such determinants as convention and tradition" (Rowe, "Authority" 224). Mark Seltzer goes further: "the banishment of the narrator as mad explicitly reconfirms the ruling 'tone' of Newmarch" and "the novel itself... effects a segregation of the literary from the shame of power that trivializes the power of social order even as it leaves that order intact" (161).

<sup>10</sup> "*Jene, du neidest sie fast, Verlassenen, die du/ so viel liebender fandst als die Gestillten*" (Those abandoned ones, you almost envy them, that you found so much more loving than

I followed many trains and put together many pieces; but perhaps what I most did was to render a fresh justice to the marvel of our civilized state. The perfection of that, enjoyed as we enjoyed it, all made a margin, a series of concentric circles of rose-color (shimmering away into the pleasant vague of everything else that didn't matter,) for the so salient little figure of Mrs. Server, still the controlling image for me, the real principle of composition, in this affluence of fine things. (*SF* 101)

This time of silent listening is a moment of peace for the troubled May:

There was for the time no gentleman on whom she need pounce, no lapse against which she need guard, no presumption she need create, nor any suspicion she need destroy. In this pause in her career it came over me that I should have liked to leave her; it would have prepared for me the pleasant after-consciousness that I had seen her pass, as I might say, in music out of sight. (*SF* 102)

Indeed, James allows May to pass out of sight at this point of the novel, as if fearing to spoil her delicate bloom. In the remaining chapters she no longer figures directly and the narrator's conversations with the two people with whom he has shared his speculative analyses (Grace and the painter Ford Obert) supply the chief action. These conversations put in doubt his imaginations, as if the second half of the novel, which takes place at night, were digesting or cannibalizing the first radiant half, as a kind of "self-consuming artifact." One might invoke another art here, that of architecture, which has been called "frozen music."<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Pater's dictum that "all art constantly aspires to the condition of music" could fit *The Sacred Fount*, and in the musical paroxysm at its center this aspiration reaches an exquisite moment of fulfillment (Pater 86). The remainder of the novel enacts a long falling-off from this pitch, as the narrator's castle of speculation is dismantled, "piece by piece" (*SF* 188), leaving him in a final state of mystification. The centrality of the music is marked by later references to "after the music" (*SF* 118, 154, 172). The beautiful rounded world of Newmarch begins to show its cracks and flaws in this deflationary second half. But the vision of a self-recollected art remains with the reader,

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the contented ones) (Rilke 686). Przybylowicz peremptorily declares that "Obviously the narrator is in love with May Server" (75), but one can love without being in love; nor does the narrator express the regrets inspired by the other May in "The Beast in the Jungle." But Kappeler understates the narrator's sentiment for May Server: "She is of as much interest to him as is Madame Bovary to Flaubert" (122).

<sup>11</sup> For the origins of this saying, see Michailow.



who will try to recover it in the satisfying form of the novel itself. Solving its riddles then becomes one with vindicating its aesthetic perfection.

If *May Server* is the sublime “vanishing point” in the novel’s romantic perspective, the other “victim,” Briss, also acquires privileged aesthetic salience, underlined shortly before the music is played: “He reminded me at this hour more than ever of some fine old Velasquez or other portrait—a presentation of ugliness and melancholy that might have been royal” (*SF* 96). This refers back to the mysterious portrait, modeled on Velázquez’s “Portrait of the Jester Calabazas,”<sup>12</sup> in which the characters recognize the face of Briss.

Is the novel just a kaleidoscope of musical patterns with no inner core? Tintner’s solution of the detective plot invokes the principle of Sherlock Holmes that “when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, *however improbable*, must be the truth” (“*A Gay Sacred Fount* 224). Unlike Holmes or Hercule Poirot, the narrator never has a moment of triumph in which he exposes the culprits. In fact he never finds the solution, but the reader can do so. He fails to pick up the clues that point to the solution, which at times he seems to glimpse but which he does not allow into clear consciousness. The solution—that May is Grace’s “sacred fount,” while her husband is Long’s—bears on “the love that dare not speak its name,” and as such cannot be spoken without dragging into the light a complex of relations that the society depicted represses from awareness even when it tacitly accords a measure of toleration to it.

James takes his readers into a beautiful maze, so constructed that on each reading of the novel one becomes lost in it and has the greatest difficulty finding the way out. The ballet of suppositions, misapprehensions, avoidances, meetings, and surprising recognitions begins in the opening scene at Paddington and on the train:

When she [Grace] mentioned Lady John as in charge of Brissenden the other member of our trio [Gilbert] had expressed interest and surprise—expressed it so as to have made her reply with a smile: “Didn’t you really know?”...

“Why in the world *should* I know?”

<sup>12</sup> Johnson finds ambiguities in the Velázquez painting itself reflected in the reactions to it by James’s characters (120). Tintner, who sees the novel as reflecting a Venetian *commedia dell’arte*, unconvincingly suggests Pietro Longhi as the model of James’s painting (*Henry James* 145), despite his actually naming Velázquez.

To which, with good nature, she had simply returned: "Oh, it's only that I thought you always did!" And they both had looked at me a little oddly, as if appealing from each other. "What in the world does she mean?" Long might have seemed to ask; while Mrs. Brissenden conveyed with light profundity: "*You* know why he should as well as I, don't you?" In point of fact I didn't in the least. (*SF* 4-5)

This passage is the first to challenge the reader's detective skills. Following up later references to Lady John's travel arrangements, one may piece together the solution. Grace is suggesting that it is Long who gave Lady John the idea of traveling with Briss, which Grace has accommodated "with good nature." but in the end the reader will detect that the arrangement does not serve to screen Lady John's relation with Long, but rather Brissenden's. One of the puzzles for the reader is then to measure Grace's awareness of this, and to discover at what point she becomes aware. Tintner takes it that Grace is aware of "the homosexual truth about the quartet" from the start ("*A Gay Sacred Fount*" 232). But would she allude so lightly and indiscreetly to the relation between Long and her husband, the very matter that leads to her panicked crackdown at the end of the novel?

One suspects a lapse from consistency on James's part in the contradiction between chapter 1: "That's why I [Grace] kindly arranged that, as she [Lady John] was to take, I happened to learn, the next train, Guy should come with her" (*SF* 7), and chapter 3: "'Very well then,' said Mrs. Brissenden, 'doesn't Mr. Long's tenderness of Lady John quite fall in with what I mentioned to you?' I remembered what she had mentioned to me. 'His making her come down with poor Briss?'" (*SF* 21-22). Later the narrator supposes Lady John to recall that "Grace had lent herself with uncommon good nature, the previous afternoon, to the arrangement by which, on the way from town, her ladyship's reputation was to profit by no worse company, precisely, than poor Briss's" (*SF* 113). "The arrangement" must stem from Long, who says he has not seen Grace since her marriage (*SF* 5). Long will have proposed to Lady John to use Briss as a "screen" for their supposed relation (whereas in reality it is she who is used as a screen for his relation with Briss).

In the novel's final retrospective turn, the matter of Briss coming down with Lady John is revisited, and both of these accounts receive a mention:

"If Briss came down with Lady John yesterday to oblige Mr. Long—"  
 "He didn't come," she interrupted, "to oblige Mr. Long!"

“Well, then, to oblige Lady John herself—”

“He didn’t come to oblige Lady John herself!”

“Well, then, to oblige his clever wife—”

“He didn’t come to oblige his clever wife! He came,” said Mrs. Briss, “just to amuse himself.” (*SF* 187)

This string of denials masks the solution, of which Grace is now fully apprised, that Briss indeed obliged Long, but in order to screen his relationship with Long. The reference to Guy’s “amusements” suggests that Grace is aware of Guy’s affair with Long and does not grudge it to him (though now calling a halt to it).

The narrator finds Guy in his own room in the bachelor quarters and guides him to his proper room there; the passage bristles with suggestion:

He had been put by himself, for some reason, in the bachelor wing and, exploring at hazard, had mistaken the signs. By the time we found his servant and his lodging I had reflected on the oddity of my having been as stupid about the husband as I had been about the wife. (*SF* 14)

The “epistemology of the closet” gives the hermeneutic key to two conversations in which both Gilbert and Guy become jumpy and defensive.

“Behind you; only don’t turn round to look, for he knows—” But I dropped, having caught something directed toward me in Brissenden’s face. [This is not immediately explained]. My interlocutor remained blank, simply asking me, after an instant, what it was he knew. On this I said what I meant. “He knows we’ve noticed.”

Long wondered again. “Ah, but I *haven’t!*” He spoke with some sharpness.

“He knows,” I continued, noting the sharpness too, “what’s the matter with him.”

“Then what the devil is it?”

I waited a little, having for the moment an idea on my hands. “Do you see him often?”

Long disengaged the ash from his cigarette. “No. Why should I?”

Distinctly, he was uneasy—though as yet perhaps but vaguely—at what I might be coming to. That was precisely my idea, and if I pitied him a little for my pressure my idea was yet what most possessed me. “Do you mean there’s nothing in him that strikes you?”

On this, unmistakably, he looked at me hard. “‘Strikes’ me—in that boy? Nothing in him, that I know of, ever struck me in my life. He’s not an object of the smallest interest to me!” (*SF* 16)

Denial, especially when so emphatic, amounts to confession in this novel, if not everywhere in James. There is a similar edginess in an exchange with Guy in chapter 7:

I had made him uneasy last night, [this refers to Guy's look when the narrator was talking to Long] and a new reason or two for my doing so had possibly even since then come up; yet these things also would depend on the way he might take them. The look with which he at present faced me seemed to hint that he would take them as I hoped, and there was no curtness, but on the contrary the dawn of a dim sense that I might possibly aid him, in the tone with which he came half-way. "You 'know'?"  
 "Ah," I laughed, "I know everything!" (SF 67)

Guy looks up to the narrator as what Lacan would call "the subject supposed to know," in pathetic hope of release from his trapped state; this is sensed even as it remains unspoken. When the narrator suggests that Guy is "charmed" with Mrs. Server, the implication is that their shared condition draws them together:

"I'm not at all easily charmed, you know," he the next moment added; "and I'm not a fellow who goes about much after women."  
 "Ah, that I never supposed! Why in the world *should* you? It's the last thing!"  
 I laughed. "But isn't this—quite (what shall one call it?) innocently—rather a peculiar case?" (SF 73)

Hence Mrs. Server's qualities of being "beautiful and gentle and strange" are for Guy "not an attraction. They're too queer" (SF 74).

James's cryptic remarks to Mrs. Humphry Ward suggest that Grace cracks down on Guy's affair with Long and on her own with May:

As I give but the phantasmagoric, I have, for clearness, to make it *evidential*, and the Ford Obert evidence all bears (indirectly) upon Brissenden, supplies the motive for Mrs. B.'s terror and her re-nailing down of the coffin. I had to testify to Mrs. S.'s sense of a common fate with B. and the only way I could do so was by making O. see her as temporarily pacified. I had to give a meaning to the vision of Gilbert L. out on the terrace in the darkness, and the *appearance* of a sensible detachment on her part was my imposed way of giving it. Mrs. S. is back in the coffin at the end, by the same stroke by which Briss is—Mrs. B.'s last interview with the narrator being all an ironic *exposure* of her own false plausibility. But it isn't worth explaining, and I mortally loathe it! (L 186)

The narrator's phantasmagoria cannot be corrected from within, so clues must be planted by external observation that can guide the reader to the light—a process compared with the exit from Plato's cave: "I was really dazzled by his image.... 'Your image is splendid, ... your being out of the cave' (*SF* 134). Ford's "evidence" includes the comment that May's lover (male) "isn't here," which the narrator thinks mistaken—"Delighted as I was that he should believe it"—though he concurs with it: "No; he isn't here" (*SF* 133). Ford goes on to say he has done without May's male lover as he watches the Brissendens, "And naturally, above all, ... the wife" (*SF* 133). "What I call the light of day is the sense I've arrived at of her vision... Of what they have in common. *His*—poor chap's—extraordinary situation too... the sight of another fate as strange, as monstrous as her own" (*SF* 135). This must refer to May's vision of Guy's role as sacred fount. Grace re-nails the coffin of her marital authority, leaving Long desolate. Guy looks around the smoking-room on his last appearance, no doubt looking for Long, "as if, for me, he were seeking such things—out of what was closing over him—for the last time" (*SF* 137). Guy moves from the bachelor quarters back to his wife's room (*SF* 132), his holiday ended; for his real romance can flourish only in the free realm of a country house. Now, he is "thoroughly got back into hand" and is "the same poor Briss as before his brief adventure" (*SF* 120). The *false* meaning ascribed to Long in the darkness is that May has detached herself from him; she is now "all right," making the narrator "all wrong" (*SF* 139); the true meaning is that Grace has detached Guy from him, and cast May into outer darkness as well. There is a striking parallel with a later novel: Maggie Verver arranges the fates of four people, as she closes the marital lid on Amerigo, and detaches Charlotte from him, imprisoning her in the wedlock with her father. Grace's arrangement of the fates of Guy, May, and Long is neither as elegant as the narrator's speculative version nor as satisfactory as what the real desires of the four would dictate, did society allow.

The phrase "poor Briss" (never "poor Brissenden") occurs no fewer than sixty-one times in the novel, with provocative insistence (along with nine occurrences of "Guy Brissenden" and fifty-three of "Brissenden"). The sympathetic narrator accompanies him in a ritual of compliance with his doom within the structure imposed by society and his wife:

I trod with him, over the velvet and the marble, through the twists and turns, among the glooms and glimmers and echoes, every inch of the way, and I don't

know what humiliation, for him, was constituted there, between us, by his long pilgrimage. It was the final expression of his sacrifice. (*SF* 136)

Guy again displays a panicky jumpiness in a moment that is at once comic and tragic:

“Good-night, Brissenden. I shall be gone to-morrow before you show.”

I shall never forget the way that, struck by my word, he let his white face fix me in the dusk. “Show? *What* do I show?”

I had taken his hand for farewell, and, inevitably laughing, but as the falsest of notes, I gave it a shake. “You show nothing! You’re magnificent.”

He let me keep his hand while things unspoken and untouched, unspeakable and untouchable, everything that had been between us in the wood a few hours before, were between us again. But so we could only leave them, and, with a short, sharp “Good-bye!” he completely released himself. (*SF* 137)

When a word is echoed in this novel, it is often with a slide or modulation giving it a new sense, as happens blatantly here. There can be little doubt what most figured as “unspeakable and untouchable” six years after the Wilde scandal.<sup>13</sup> The narrator’s laughter at Briss’s “Show?” is perhaps false in that it affects to treat lightly what is of tragic import to Briss, whom he congratulates implicitly on keeping the secret of his homosexuality or of his affair with Long. When the implicit threatens to become explicit, their communion must break off. “He let me hold his hand” suggests that the words that might be spoken are ones admitting erotic attraction. The narrator has “tears in my eyes” (*SF* 137) as he leaves Guy, tears that cannot be explained by readings that reduce the story to neurotic phantasmagoria. The mixing of genres produces exquisite harmonies of humor and pain.<sup>14</sup> The narrator’s elegiac farewell to Briss may be addressed to his own renounced identity as well:

With my hand on the latch of the closed door I watched a minute his retreat along the passage, and I remember the reflection that, before rejoining Obert, I made on it. I seemed perpetually, at Newmarch, to be taking his measure from behind. (*SF* 137)

<sup>13</sup> See Forster: “I’m an unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort” (159). Forster’s *Maurice* belongs to the same time as *The Sacred Fount* was published when Forster was twenty-two.

<sup>14</sup> “Such doubleness is productive of, is practically the very definition of irony. What separates camp from irony tout court is camp’s historically determined anchoring in the problems of a proscribed sexuality” (Gutkin 118).

It is worth noting the symbolic details in this scene: the dark passage in which the two are isolated, “the velvet and the marble” of soft but firm social constraint, “the twists and turns, among the glooms and glimmers and echoes” of closeted existence, “the latch of the closed door” that none dares to open.

In the long-drawn-out final scene, Grace is visibly nervous and hiding something, as her shifting set of alternatives to the narrator’s supposition indicate. She had proposed Mrs. Server as the sacred fount for Long, supposedly in the spirit of speculative play. But it may be that from the start she has conceived this teaming as the ideal double screen to conceal the true partners of both. Now she has changed her mind, alarmed by the narrator’s lack of discretion and alerted by it to the danger of social disgrace and the need to clamp down on the relations that might occasion it. Perhaps it’s a slip that she refers to Mrs. Server by her first name, indicating a nearer relationship than she’d earlier avowed.

As strange as anything was this effect almost of surprise for me in the freedom of her mention of “May.” For what had she come to me, if for anything, but to insist on her view of May, and what accordingly was more to the point than to mention her? Yet it was almost already as if to mention her had been to get rid of her. She was mentioned, however, inevitably and none the less promptly, anew—even as if simply to receive a final shake before being quite dropped. (*SF* 149)

James’s remark about Grace’s “re-nailing down of the coffin” indicates this purpose of concealing and repressing the two gay relationships. Grace withdraws the Long/May combination as an inadequate screen and promotes the obviously false Long/Lady John one instead. While pretending to finally lay her cards on the table, she produces the most obvious, blatant lie, taking us back to the very first supposition of the entire plot, in her repeatedly trumpeted “Lady John *is* the woman” (*SF* 183). Even as logic totters, “mere sound” comes powerfully to the rescue:

It was preposterous, hang though it would with her somersault, and she had quite succeeded in giving it the note of sincerity. It was the mere sound of it that, as I felt even at the time, made it a little of a blow—a blow of the smart of which I was conscious just long enough inwardly to murmur: “What if she *should* be right?” (*SF* 184)

The musical effect of her “tone” carries the day. She triumphs by a wildly opportunistic display of shifting logic sustained by a loud rhythmic rhetoric, as in an operatic duet wherein one singer sings down the other with a repeated phrase.

As Grace demolishes his “perfect palace of thought,” the narrator pleads for his “frail, but, as I maintain, quite sublime structure” that “weren’t the wretched accident of its weak foundation, it wouldn’t have the shadow of a flaw” (*SF* 188). Her last bid to silence the narrator is a tale that Briss was “annoyed” to discover that Long and Lady John are lovers (*SF* 187); whether this is Grace’s or Briss’s invention it strengthens the screen against discovery of the relation of the two men. In addition she claims that Briss told her that “horrid” May “made love to him” (*SF* 191). Grace is proud of these two screens: “what he tells... is not always so much to the point as the two things I’ve repeated to you” (192). The narrator gasps at “the presentation of her own now finished system” (*SF* 192). The last sentence of the novel echoes an earlier one: “I *should* certainly never again, on the spot, quite hang together, even though it wasn’t really that I hadn’t three times her method. What I too fatally lacked was her tone” (*SF* 193); compare: “Things *had*, from step to step, to hang together, and just here they seemed—with all allowances—to hang a little apart” (*SF* 138). “From step to step” is the exertion of scrupulous “method,” a sedulous art, but one that has become a ritual obsession, at the service of an aesthetic vision.

One critic suggests that “the receptacle of the narrator’s secret but overflowing spring is his ‘crystal palace,’ the flower of his theory, into which all his strength, his energy and his intelligence are poured,” leaving him depleted (Kappeler 123). But this effect is reinforced by the way Grace takes the upper hand in her third interview with the narrator, drawing on him as an inspiring fount of wisdom, and leaving him “drained” (*SF* 49). In her final demolition of his theory, she again acts a ruthless domineering part, making the narrator her third victim alongside the rejected May and the recoffined Briss (or the fourth if we count Long). In the battle of wits with Grace, the narrator speaks of his “priceless pearl of an inquiry” as “so private and splendid a revel—that of the exclusive king with his Wagner opera” (*SF* 179). Why “exclusive” rather than “reclusive”? Perhaps to underline the high quality of the exquisite inward music the narrator retains, over against the triumphant “tone” of Grace. Even if Ludwig II was crazy, that does not detract from the radiance of *Lohengrin*. To the reader, as detective and even as artist, is handed the task of saving a solution and a satisfying pattern from the apparent wreckage.



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# “I keep a band of music in my ante-room”: Henry James and the Sound of Introspection

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In the personal memoir narrating her work as Henry James’s amanuensis, Theodora Bosanquet reflected on the effect that the mechanical clicking of the typewriter had on the author as he dictated his late work: acting “as a positive spur,” the “music” of the Remington triggered thought and generated characters and stories (35). Bosanquet notes that “he found it almost impossibly disconcerting to speak to something that made no responsive sound at all” (35), inspiring critics such as Hazel Hutchison to argue persuasively that “the ambiguity of James’s late style” “can be understood as a problem of sound,” with the writing simultaneously “reveal[ing] and protect[ing],” “distract[ing] and obscur[ing],” “like the noise of the Remington itself” (159). Likewise, Matthew Schilleman maintains that the psychological depth of James’s late characters seems dependent on the “rhythms of his writing machine,” rhythms that form the “technological dimension” of his work (15). If, as Bosanquet describes, James’s narratives resulted from his habit of talking to himself and to the interactive typewriter “until the person and their actions were vividly present to his inward eye” (36), it seems that James’s inward eye was, to a large extent, activated by his ears. Indeed, Bosanquet’s Henry James must have been acutely conscious of three different sound environments while working:

one created by the sounds and noises of the physical world surrounding him; one generated by his “talking out” method (Bosanquet 37), that is, his own voice painstakingly rehearsing resistant or otherwise challenging points in the narrative; and one taking life on the typed page. This last soundscape would of course consist of its own variable sound environments. Considering the prevalence of introspection in James’s middle and late writing, with thoughts covering more pages than speech and dialogue (excluding the more dramatic works), one would think that his fictional texts are particularly silent.<sup>1</sup> And yet, James’s pages evoke two different soundscapes in constant tension, an outer and an inner: speech, sound, and noise, on the one hand, and, on the other, an alternative sound that resonates very clearly in his writing—the sound of introspection. This tension, which parallels his own negotiation between the clicking of the typewriter (or the sounds from the street below his window at Rye) and his voice sounding his thoughts, figures in many of his fictional works and is expressed through the interaction between external and often extraneous sounds and noises and the inner voices that his characters generate and make heard. As palpable settings fade away in James’s novels and short stories, the subjective, inner, sonic environments, so vividly conjured by thought processes, become as audible as the more objective, outer, ones. In line with Hutchison’s point about “the increasing importance of sound in James’s sensory awareness and his fictional landscape” (159), my essay will focus on the inner sounds of James’s stories.

The title of my paper is derived from *The Portrait of a Lady*, where Ralph Touchett in conversation with Isabel Archer formulates an intricate sound-related metaphor to illustrate his preference for privacy and introspection exercised in what he calls “the private apartments” of his mind:

“I keep a band of music in my ante-room,” he said once to her. “It has orders to play without stopping; it renders me two excellent services. It keeps the sounds of the world from reaching the private apartments, and it makes the world think that dancing is going on within.” It was dance-music indeed that you usually heard when you came within ear-shot of Ralph’s band; the liveliest waltzes seemed to float upon the air. (113)

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<sup>1</sup> Hutchison’s fine article emphasizes the importance of the sense of sound in James’s writing, a sense that, if cultivated by his readers, will enable them to savour the “undertones” and “the echoes and patterns of his strange and beautiful ‘Remingtonese’” (161).

Ralph seems well aware of the inevitable performative aspect of the self, in his case sociability and lightheartedness, which are represented in this metaphor by the dance music that he commands the band to play. However, his metaphor also conveys the anxiety resulting from the incursions of the outer into the inner, with the sound of music reinforcing the blocking function of the door and making it a second, and more effective, barrier between public and private. This musical barrier distracts and disorients aspiring or inquisitive visitors while at the same time attenuating the external noise of matters uninteresting to Ralph which do not reach the private space of introspection. Ralph's subjectivity therefore is conceptualized through spatial and auditory parameters which Ralph controls, transforming the "ante-room," this semi-public space of sociability into one of protection, hence separating the outer from the inner and shielding the "private apartments," the chamber of consciousness, from penetration. Seán Street in his book *Sound Poetics* argues that artificial sound environments can desensitize the listener, dulling his or her senses and causing confusion or errors of judgement (65). However, in Ralph's case, as in James's experience with the typewriter and the talking-out method, sound does not alter perception; rather it helps generate a space of introspection which has its own sound. Like James's pages, Ralph's solitary rooms, which represent his mind, are not soundless. Just as the fine spider-web threads in James's ghostly chamber of consciousness vibrate with the tiniest sensory perception,<sup>2</sup> Ralph's inner rooms are alive with sound and voice as he constantly processes thoughts, perceptions, and impressions received from the outer world. And the energetic dance music, which tragicomically contrasts with Ralph's sedentary habits and his weak health, reflects this lively introspection, since the withdrawal that his extended metaphor suggests is far from mental passivity. James often has Ralph talking to himself, as when with his inner voice (in quotation marks) he transforms Isabel into a "beautiful edifice," inviting yet impregnable (116)—another spatial image which symbolizes not only the interior life of Isabel but also the independence of the cousins who are both interested in knowing each other but without possessiveness.

In her effort to understand her cousin, Isabel lightly taps at the "door" of his mental space but unsuccessfully as she is not allowed in and cannot until much later be privy to his thoughts (114). Ralph, on the other hand, is

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<sup>2</sup> I refer here to James's famous "chamber of consciousness" metaphor in his essay "The Art of Fiction" (194).

a more perceptive listener. Despite the barriers erected between them (the figurative door of Ralph's rooms and Isabel's edifice, which later on mutates into a mask that blocks Ralph's view of Isabel's face [443]), Ralph has "the imagination that communes with the unseen" (441), and the unheard, one might add, as from the beginning of the novel he reads character in a more accurate way. Isabel, throughout the novel, struggles to do the same. After her marriage she habitually and covertly watches Osmond, wishing "as much as possible to know his thoughts, to know what he would say, beforehand, so that she might prepare her answer" (467). However, up until chapter 42, Isabel's pre-formed theories and rather distorting imagination prevent her from entering the inner chambers of Ralph, Osmond, and Madame Merle. Ironically, her friend Henrietta successfully challenges such boundaries. According to Ralph, "She walks in without knocking at the door" (146), as her "tone" is "earnest and inventive" (143), undeterred by conventional manners and morals. Her genuine tone may be contrasted to that of Madame Merle whose artificial accent and mode of speech generate mystery. Preferring open, unencumbered thresholds to anterooms and doors (146), Henrietta demolishes the distinction between inner and outer, which perhaps explains why she is seldom given space for introspection in the novel. Nevertheless, unlike Isabel, who as Lord Warburton rightly points out "judge[s] only from the outside" (134), Henrietta can see beyond appearances. It is only Ralph, however, who is attuned to the "deeper rhythms of life" (170), with his "band of music" metaphor emphasizing the important connection between sound and the private exercise of introspection.

James's text therefore attends to the subjective nature of sensation, not only of visual sensation, but also of acoustic. The characters' response to sound—real or imaginary—is diverse and often antithetical. Isabel's naïve impressionability makes her an ineffectual or passive listener in the first part of the novel. This becomes clear in her first meeting with Madame Merle where Isabel, following the sound of a piano melody in the otherwise silent Gardencourt, enters the drawing room and encounters a woman previously unknown to her playing a classical tune. Isabel at first tries to pigeonhole Madame Merle from the two sounds that she perceives: Schubert, the composer whose music she guesses Madame Merle is playing, and the latter's accent while pronouncing a French phrase. While the first guess turns out to be correct, a result of Isabel's musical education, the second incorrect conjecture that "She's a Frenchwoman" (225) showcases Isabel's inability, at the beginning of the novel, to see beyond what

is immediately accessible through the eyes and ears. Madame Merle's foreign accent sparks Isabel's interest in cultural difference, but she is unable to move beyond the ante-room of European sophistication that Madame Merle has built up around her inner self. As the latter continues to play on the piano, Isabel notices how "the shadows deepened in the room" (226), the obscuring function of the fading light intensifying the distracting or even numbing properties of the artificial sound that blocks her rather immature penetrative abilities: the darkness and the music relieve her of her anxiety for her dying uncle while at the same time shielding the sinister mystery of Madame Merle. Like Ralph's "band of music," Madame Merle's piano playing and her perfect French accent protect her privacy. As John Picker argues in *Victorian Soundscapes*, the listening experience of individuals is affected by specific cultural circumstances and motivations (14), and these certainly come into play in this first exchange between the two women.

Corroborating Street's argument about the dulling effect of external sounds that may cause errors of judgement (65), Madame Merle's sounds that penetrate Gardencourt create an artificial sound environment that attracts but also confuses Isabel. The contrast between Madame Merle's "unexpected sound" (224) of music and the silence of the house where Mr. Touchett is dying creates a poignant binary that alerts the reader to the intrusive presence of the former and to her potential to confuse our heroine's perception with her sounds, thereby limiting her mental space for reflective thinking. This scene may be compared to an earlier one which records Isabel's first meeting with her aunt, back in Albany. There again it is the unanticipated sound of Mrs. Touchett's "inquisitive, experimental" step (79) in the silent house, before the two women meet face to face, that leads Isabel to make rather superficial conjectures. In the first half of the novel, Isabel remains a passive listener of such obtrusive sounds, her senses dulled by the artificial sound environments that Madame Merle and later on Osmond construct with their "copy-book" (571) words and expressions or Madame Merle's "art of conversation" (597). To quote from *What Maisie Knew*, life for Isabel, is "like a long, long corridor with rows of closed doors" (36). Like Maisie, Isabel feels that "at these doors it was wise not to knock—this seemed to produce from within such sounds of derision" (36), the baffling sounds of Madame Merle and Osmond's incomprehensible liaison. Perplexed by the sounds of the said and the silence created by the unsaid, Isabel becomes, in the words of Street "like a lone child lost in a jungle of crossed wires and interwoven signals, with interaction sometimes at the



mercy of false prophets informing the quest for the retention of a personal identity” (54). Self-awareness ensues from one’s ability to process the sounds of interaction, the truths, half-truths, and opinions that are often transmitted by sources which on closer scrutiny may prove alien or misleading (Street 54). Isabel’s consciousness of Madame Merle’s falseness and her first recognition of an anomaly in the relationship between Osmond and Madame Merle come during her “impression” of a “desultory pause” in their communication (458). In the famous scene where Osmond sits while Madame Merle stands, Isabel is alerted to their peculiar intimacy not only by the “visual shock” (Bersani 133) that she receives, but most importantly by the pregnant silence between them, the mute way in which they “exchange ideas without uttering them” (458).<sup>3</sup> It is this alien non-sound, therefore, that forewarns her of the threatening potential of Madame Merle’s involvement with her husband and makes her conscious of the risk incurred to her hitherto confident sense of self. Learning to interpret silence and classify sounds becomes, therefore, an important part of Isabel’s intellectual and emotional growth. It is after her marriage, however, that her consciousness acquires its own sonic dimension, which like Ralph’s is energetic and even rebellious in countering artificial sounds.

If Ralph’s metaphorical rooms constitute a virtual setting for audible introspection, the Roccanera drawing room in chapter 42 becomes Isabel’s actual space for self-reflection, one that is full of auditory sensations. Isabel’s vigil is prompted by the echoes of sounds, real and imagined: the “deep” “vibrations” of Osmond’s venomous words before he leaves the room; but also an imperceptible sound which represents her long-standing connection with Lord Warburton, a sound that she also “seemed to hear ... vibrate” (472). Furthermore, memories of spoken phrases acquire new significance: Osmond’s words of disdain for her “too many ideas,” which he wanted her to get rid of, “had been nothing superficially; but when in the light of deepening experience she had looked into them they had then appeared portentous” (477). Layers of meaning therefore are unfolded in Isabel’s consciousness as echoes

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<sup>3</sup> Analyses of such scenes in James’s work have mostly focused on the importance of sight, arguing in line with Leo Bersani’s influential study that the “visual shocks” that his characters often receive “constitute crucial turning points” leading to recognition and understanding (133). For Bersani “a process of awareness is compressed into an instant of packed vision” (134). My reading emphasizes the contribution of hearing to such moments of recognition, as the sound or the silence of the scene intensifies, to paraphrase Bersani (134), the violence with which fact presses on the consciousness.

vibrate in her mind. Sound and thought become one: inner speech. Isabel's physical space of introspection fuses with her chamber of consciousness which processes thoughts through free indirect discourse or interior monologue, making her mind and the chapter that hosts it, chapter 42, one of the most sound-filled in the novel. The fullness of questions and answers that preoccupy her mind contradicts the style of elliptical speech that obscures meaning and conceals secrets in the spoken conversations between the principal players. Isabel's space of introspection, literal and metaphorical, is thus a busy, noisy soundscape which contrasts with the "house of dumbness" (478) that Osmond has imposed on her, where dumbness results from his attempt to silence her ideas. While not physically violent, Osmond, by muffling Isabel's ideas, emulates his literary predecessor, Grandcourt in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, who, as Picker argues, in his "tyranny of silence" subscribes to the idea of marriage as a repressive institution aiming to suppress women's voices (94). Osmond's "rigid system" (480), which Ralph later calls "the very mill of the conventional" (622), is thus represented spatially through the Palazzo Roccanera, which "draped though it was in pictured tapestries" (480) becomes for Isabel a suffocating prison disguised as a museum; as an inmate or as a rare *objet d'art*, Isabel is equally muted. Nevertheless, chapter 42, with its lively inner exploration testifies to Isabel's still mobile mind and its capacity to fight for its freedom. The sound of her introspection reanimates the deadly Palazzo just as it reanimates the ruins of old Rome, which she often visits: with her aural imagination she evokes "the haunting sense of the continuity of the human lot" from the silence of the scene (564).

In her final confrontation with Madame Merle at the convent, Isabel is alert not so much to the latter's words, but to her "break of ... voice, a lapse in her continuity," the "gradations in her speech, not one of which was lost upon Isabel's ear, though her eyes were absent from her companion's face"; she becomes aware of "an entirely new attitude" on the part of Madame Merle from her tone of voice (597). Compared to sound, tone is impalpable, yet as William James noted in *Principles of Psychology*, it is essential in the cognitive reception of the "idea" behind uttered words. To quote William James, "It is the overtone, halo, or fringe of the word *as spoken in that sentence*. It is never absent; no word in an understood sentence comes to consciousness as a mere noise" (281). Madame Merle, despite the momentary drop in tone (when she realizes that Isabel knows her secret), is able to recover her perfect pitch and rhythm of speech; yet Isabel is able to grasp deeper layers of meaning beyond the actual words uttered: she

hears Madame Merle's "confidence ebb," and her only revenge is "to be silent still" (598), leaving Madame Merle for the first time guessing. Isabel's more mature understanding, therefore, manifests itself as a refinement of the senses, not only of her vision, but most importantly of her hearing.

Back at Gardencourt, at the end of the novel, Isabel's inner voices and sharpened hearing flourish even more. It is here that she is able to distinguish between natural and artificial, forced, sounds, the latter having been part of Madame Merle's "cluster of appurtenances" (253). In the beginning of the novel, Gardencourt had been described as a space generating natural sounds: It was a "place where sounds were felicitously accidental, where the tread was muffled by the earth itself ... and all shrillness [dropped out] of talk" (108). Yet Isabel had not been able to register the difference between Gardencourt's natural sound environment and Madame Merle's constructed soundscape. On her return to her uncle's house, however, its incidental rather than deliberate sounds allow her to become detached from the surroundings and listen to her inner voices which are paralleled by the sound of her footsteps, an auditory motif, in the "perfectly still" and deeply silent house (614). Countering the echoes of previous, numbing external sounds, and opening up a new personal sound environment, the echo of Isabel's footstep here has little in common with the sounds of her earlier marching steps which had represented her "intellectual pace" back in Albany (79). There and then her mind had been taken over by vociferous biases and formulaic theories that had blocked her deep hearing potential. At Ralph's death, her new ability to perceive imperceptible sounds enables her to hear the ghost of Gardencourt: "She heard no knock, but ... she started up from her pillow abruptly as if she had received a summons" (624). The summons, imperceptible to the ear, is an uncanny call haunting her from within and conjuring up the traumatic knowledge that has been the necessary precondition for the vision. Kristin Boudreau argues that Isabel's "visitation is primarily intellectual rather than sensible, a matter of inner vision rather than perception" (39-40), yet the acoustic imagery of the summons suggests James's awareness of the contribution of all the senses to the conjuring up of the knowledge that Ralph's ghost signifies. The imperceptible call that Isabel receives is a call to independent agency and uncaging,<sup>4</sup> materialized in her final undisclosed trip to Rome.

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<sup>4</sup> Before her marriage, Ralph had foreseen that she would be "put into a cage" (392).

It is thus the insensible world that comes into acoustic focus for Isabel towards the end of the novel. Her new sonic environment consists of internal sounds which manifest themselves forcefully in her consciousness, sometimes obliterating the outer sounds. In the final scene between Isabel and Caspar, during the intense contest between his voice "harsh and terrible" and her own "confusion of vaguer sounds," it is this latter, subjective, soundscape of Isabel's that prevails over Caspar's "act of possession" (636) which is envisaged in terms of a mighty, fathomless sea about to engulf her (635). Once again, Isabel is threatened with silencing, the imagined seawater functioning, like the "house of dumbness," as a liquid dungeon to which Caspar now consigns her. Yet her consciousness acquires a strong aural dimension, as the noise of the waters that she hears, represents her resistance to the sinking and suffocating effect of Caspar's words and his grasp: "The confusion, the noise of waters, all the rest of it, were in her own swimming head. In an instant she became aware of this" (635). This "subjective fact," as James calls her deafening internal soundscape (635), is a strong inner voice of defiance, which in its aural vagueness and flux saves Isabel from becoming fixed by systems of patriarchal logos and intention. Hence when Caspar next learns that "She started for Rome", a phrase that he repeats wonderingly, "Oh, she started—?", he acknowledges the elusiveness and open-endedness of Isabel's mobility.

The tension between inner and outer sounds is explored even more explicitly in late James, with characters seeking either literal or metaphorical sequestered spaces of silence. Milly Theale, in *The Wings of the Dove*, is particularly vulnerable to invasive external sounds, and tired of "the language of London" (285), she retreats to the upper floor of the Palazzo Leporelli, where in solitude and silence her inner voices flourish: it was only "in stillness" that "things spoke to her with penetration," "that they spoke to her best" (284). Kate, Mrs. Lowder, and their entourage are here represented as oppressive "voices" (284) of "the concert-pitch," as loud as a boom, which prevent Milly from hearing herself think (285). During her earlier visit at Matcham, Milly had perceived the effect of Mrs. Lowder's insistent words, "You must stay among us—you must stay" (136), as a "protective mantle, a shelter," but one covered by a heavy eastern carpet (141) that carries a risk of suffocation. Yet, her understanding of the motives of the London crowd had been "nebulous" and "slightly confused" (141), the barrage of voices and noises causing self-alienation, as becomes clear in the Bronzino scene. James's pages are filled with Milly's tortuous introspection as she tries to attend to the enigmatic

discourse of Lancaster Gate, fragments of phrases in quotation marks echoing incoherently in her consciousness. So her retreat to the upper floor of the Venetian Palazzo is like Ralph's to the inner rooms of his consciousness, where the inner sounds may prevail over the disorientating outer noise that interferes with the sense of self. One may argue that what connects Ralph Touchett and Milly Theale is their tendency to associate the spatial and the auditory on a metaphysical level, both acknowledging that the mind needs to be sequestered from threatening sounds. Additionally, in both cases, virtual and physical spaces—the ante-room and the Palazzo—protect the ailing, vulnerable body from invasive, distracting, and ultimately harmful voices. The Palazzo, steeped as it is in its own history, is Milly's ideal means of tuning out, as it provides a space outside the actual course of time.

Merton Densher also relates introspection to space and sound when he describes his consciousness as a chamber that may shelter imperceptible sounds. After Milly's death, her memory figures in his mind as "audible as a faint, far wail" only captured by the "spiritual ear"; "This was the sound that he cherished, when alone in the stillness of his rooms. He sought and guarded the stillness, so that it might prevail there till the inevitable sounds of life, once more, comparatively coarse and harsh, should smother and deaden it" (451). But even at the beginning of the novel, his ears are attuned to the impalpable voices of houses and furniture. At Lancaster Gate, "It was the language of the house itself that spoke to him" (54), revealing to him the ostentatious expenditure and consumerism of Maud Lauder and her circle. The voices of her furniture and decorations are juxtaposed with "his own world of thought" (55), which is animated by inner voices. For both Milly and Densher then aural imagination expands and enriches their experience of space which otherwise resonates with intrusive sounds and voices. In James's pages, human sense perception is depicted as capable of capturing obscure or audibly imperceptible sounds, which, in turn, block out extraneous or insignificant sensations that, like Maud Lauder's superfluous things, tend to overload the consciousness. For William James it is "the reinforcing and inhibiting agency of attention" that is responsible for the focalization on and the selection of some of the mental data available (288). And while, James continues, a distinction between objective and subjective sensations may be maintained in theory, in practice, "The mind chooses to suit itself, and decides what particular sensation shall be held more real and valid than all the rest" (286). Densher's selective appropriation of sensory experience in the above scenes demonstrates the predominance not

only of his subjective vision, but also of his subjective hearing. In his book on *Victorian Soundscapes*, John Picker quotes from James Sully, psychologist and professor of the Philosophy of Mind who in 1872 published an article entitled "Recent Experiments with the Senses." There he claimed that "a purposed act of attention will frequently extend the borders of conscious life by discovering impressions heretofore obscure and unknown" (qtd. in Picker 90). Through deep introspection and willed acts of attention James's characters acquire such a power to receive, select, or generate sounds not normally heard by the human ear. The sound imagery and metaphors consistently employed by Densher and Milly transform the inner recesses of the mind into a virtual soundscape that resists but is also, inevitably, vulnerable to outer noise.

In *The Golden Bowl* Maggie Verver's thoughts also unfold within a metaphorical setting vividly encompassing visual and auditory elements. While Isabel's last thoughts as she stands at the transitional space of the threshold, as we saw before, become "a confusion of vaguer sounds," vague and inconclusive, like the ending of *The Portrait of a Lady*, Maggie's thoughts, as soon as she starts suspecting her husband's infidelity, gradually become part of a less ambiguous soundscape. The second book of the novel opens with Maggie developing a new capacity for listening and recognizing the "new tone" with which her own inner voice speaks: "It was not till many days had passed that the Princess began to accept the idea of ... having listened to any inward voice that spoke in a new tone" (299). This new tone triggers intuitions and unfolds layers of meaning which take the form of echoing sounds. "She had knocked" at the outlandish pagoda which stands for the anomaly she now discerns in her father's marriage and her own, and she realizes that "Something *had* happened; it was as if a sound, at her touch, after a little, had come back to her from within; a sound sufficiently suggesting that her approach had been noted" (300). The reciprocity between her tap and the strange echo from within help to orient Maggie, who until now has been entirely oblivious of hidden meanings. Such imagined sounds help her navigate the real world, while transferring the plot to an interior, subjective setting.

In this second part of the novel, virtual spaces, such as the pagoda which houses Maggie's consciousness, take over the real setting. However, rather than being spaces of silence and detachment, these spaces are full of would-be dialogue, "unuttered sound[s]" (311), as Maggie rehearses questions, answers, and plans. It is sound, therefore, that constitutes these virtual spaces of consciousness, providing Maggie with mental and emotional resources for

assertive action. Characteristic is the scene of Amerigo's return from Matcham, where, after a long tortuous wait, she meets him with unspoken questions and declarations of love, elaborately uttered by the inward voice, even in direct speech with quotation marks, while the actual words are withheld or partially and vaguely rendered: "Why, why' have I made this evening such a point of our not all dining together? Well, because I've all day been so wanting you alone that I finally couldn't bear it..." (310). Amerigo's thoughts are likewise conjured up and transcribed as direct speech by Maggie ("You needn't *pretend*, dearest, quite so hard, needn't think it necessary to care quite so much!" [317]), as opposed to his uttered words which are often rendered in passive voice. Elsewhere, Maggie articulates mentally the unspoken utterances of her father, who towards the end of the novel is envisaged tugging at that disturbing silken halter looped around Charlotte's neck: she imagines him saying, "Yes, you see—I lead her now by the neck, I lead her to her doom, and she doesn't so much as know what it is, though she has a fear in her heart which, if you had the chances to apply your ear there that I, as a husband, have, you would hear thump and thump and thump" (508). The unuttered words, again in quotation marks, provide a virtual chorus and soundtrack to Maggie's mental performance, for which words, gestures, actions, and telepathic communication are improvised and orchestrated in her mind: one might call it, Maggie's "talking in" method. The imagined thumping of Charlotte's heart is part of this virtual chorus, a good example of mental descanting, the superimposition of one melody over the other, all nevertheless conducted by Maggie's consciousness.

But not all sounds are derived from Maggie's imagination. As she becomes more aware of the complex relations between her husband and Charlotte, she also starts discerning tones of real, audible voice. Like Isabel in her last confrontation with Madame Merle, Maggie is able to detect a "new note of diplomacy, almost of anxiety, just sensible on Charlotte's part" (325) when the latter starts realizing that Maggie's attitude towards her has changed. After the silken noose scene, Charlotte's earlier note of anxiety becomes "the shriek of a soul in pain" (512), her "high voice" as she explains her husband's objects of art to unsuspecting visitors at Fawns, unable to cover an imperceptible quaver, heard only by "conscious ears," those of Maggie, Adam, and potentially Fanny Assingham (512). Amerigo too is imagined by Maggie as overpowered by the inaudible shriek, fleeing Fawns in order "to escape from [this] sound" (514). Charlotte's internal wail ripples outward, becoming a metonymy for her awareness of having been betrayed by her lover; the imagined but piercing

sound becomes the catalyst for Amerigo's gradual submission to Maggie. In other words, Maggie's consciousness, in its aural dimension, hosts a theatre of violence, deception, and sympathy, a world of noisy volatility that muffles the real sounds of the novel.

As conductor or director Maggie therefore exerts power over her silenced opponents, her mind providing them with imagined voices, words, or wails. As central reflector Maggie also acts as a ventriloquist, gradually objectifying Amerigo and Charlotte, turning them into Madame Tussaud effigies (561), or a ventriloquist's dummies, in the last scene of the novel.<sup>5</sup> Maggie's inner voices thus supplant their own, and the inner soundscape or soundtrack of her power game, as opposed to the scant and elliptical verbal communication that takes place in the novel, has the power to animate or not, as the case may be, her "human furniture" (560-61). At such moments, Maggie's internal dialogues create the sense of a parallel existence, during which the external physical world recedes from consciousness. Nevertheless, Maggie's mental spaces become what Street describes as the "real 'reality,'" which "may lie not in what we receive, but what we transmit to ourselves from within, finding a true voice with which to counter societal misunderstanding through personal interpretation" (54). And in Bakhtinian terms, these imagined dialogues become Maggie's "internally persuasive discourse" which struggles successfully against the "alien discourses" (figured by the pagoda) that have imposed specific narratives on her own self (Bakhtin 342). The elaborate soundscape of Maggie's introspection, which not only compensates for the disturbing semantic nothingness of the verbal interactions but is also telepathically received or transmitted to other characters' minds, thus reinforces the advantage of knowledge with which she outwits her opponent.

James's long meandering sentences which echo the tortuous thought processes of his characters are starkly contrasted to the brief sounded phrases of elliptical conversation that enact modern intimacies in the context of fleeting interactions. As various scholars have noted, verbal utterances in James's work resemble telegraphic transmissions that the author made use of in life and in fiction.<sup>6</sup> His soundscapes of dialogue and music generate the mystery of the unsaid. Conversely, James's representation of thought, as Jonathan Freedman argues in his article on James and the mediascapes of modernity,

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<sup>5</sup> See Davies for an analysis of ventriloquism and gender in *The Bostonians*.

<sup>6</sup> See Pollard (82) and Wicke (151), for example.



is “untelegraphic, as if to register a silent protest at the ways in which the compression of the form [of communication through telegrams] reshapes social intercourse” (251-52). In this sense, his pages of sometimes deafening introspection enact in private what public utterance (whether spoken at close quarters or transmitted through wires) seems unable to do: they convey what in *The Portrait* James calls “the subjective fact” (635), a true inner voice that in its incoherence, confusion, or clarity counters societal sounds. James’s esoteric, private chambers of consciousness, so meticulously and architecturally constructed, consist of a carefully delineated audible environment which thus links introspection to knowledge, power, and agency. James’s characters, therefore, learn not only how to see and interpret visual impressions in his novels, but also how to listen to and compose personal choruses which create sound out of silence.

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# The Haunted Theater of Fiction: Silence and Sound in “The Turn of the Screw”

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One of Henry James’s most critically debated tales, “The Turn of the Screw” (1898), has given rise to diverse interpretations related to ghosts, psychoanalysis, and ambiguity. Throughout its critical history, Marxist, gender-based, and postcolonial interpretations amongst others have been applied to the novella.<sup>1</sup> Since the tale was adapted as an opera by Benjamin Britten (1954) as well as a film, *The Innocents* (1961), directed by Jack Clayton, one can also assume that these renditions contain textual richness, especially in their audio-visual aspects. “The Turn of the Screw” is filled with sounds, from the natural (including rain, wind, and birdsong) to the artificial (such as pianos and bells). James seems mainly to use such sound effects in scenes that take place under ordinary circumstances. Unlike Clayton’s film adaptation, which effectively uses eerie sound effects in the ghostly scenes, silence dominates the novella’s uncanny scenes. Why does James emphasize silence instead of sound during these ghostly moments? One answer to this question lies, I argue, in James’s deep interest in theater.

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<sup>1</sup> For a concise critical history of “The Turn of the Screw,” see Beidler, section 3; Cornwell and Malone, introduction.

Although James called “The Turn of the Screw” “a potboiler,”<sup>2</sup> he wrote the tale after his disastrous experience of staging the play *Guy Domville* in 1895. At this crucial time, the author took up his “own old pen again” (*Notebooks* 179) and put all of his energy, effort, and playwriting experience into his prose fiction.<sup>3</sup> James did not wholly abandon his playwriting but made another attempt, with a favorable reception, in the British theaters in his later years (Edel, *Complete Plays* 66-68). His central concern immediately after *Guy Domville*, however, was focused more on fiction than drama. By focusing on the aural dimension of “The Turn of the Screw,” I hope to shed new light on this challenging text.

My approach will unfold in four parts. The first comprises an analysis of James’s use of silence and sound in “The Turn of the Screw”; section two focuses on the human voice, in particular; and section three considers the aural and other dimensions of the story in the context of James’s ambitions and disappointments in the theater. My discussion in these sections focuses primarily on the unnamed governess’s ghostly account, which is the story within the narrative frame that James uses to structure the novella. In my final section, I consider the narrative frame itself and its implications. Where relevant, I compare and contrast the published story with the film adaptation, *The Innocents*. As is often noted by literary or film critics, this version cleverly reproduces the ambiguity of the original text, and it seems worthwhile to examine its sonic effects among the many film and television adaptations.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> He does so in a letter to Howells, dated January 28, 1898 (see Anesko 306).

<sup>3</sup> This episode is well-known to Henry James scholars. Novick, in particular, elaborates on the details in “Closing the Chapter” (217-28). See also Kaplan 375-79 and Edel *Life*, 414-29. Novick also writes about the positive side of James’s theatrical experience, suggesting that he was not downhearted by the reception of *Guy Domville* (“Henry James on Stage” 6-9). Richard Ellmann mentions that James was perfectly collected after the opening night. He offered dinner to the cast and attended the performance of *Guy Domville* on the second night (40). This time the play was received with respect.

<sup>4</sup> J. Sarah Kock compiled “A Henry James Filmography,” where she mentions 16 total adaptations into TV, film, and opera (351-54). Some of the criticism of the film version is cited hereafter in my discussion.

## SILENCE AND SOUND

Criticism of “The Turn of the Screw” has long focused on James’s use of silence. In her essay “Henry James’s Ghost Stories,” Virginia Woolf writes: “Perhaps it is the silence that first impresses us. Everything at Bly is so profoundly quiet” (159). By means of silence, Woolf argues, James makes his readers afraid of something that is “unspeakable” or “unnamed.” Woolf describes this “unspeakable” feature as a sense of “obscenity” (292). Led by Edmund Wilson, psychoanalytic critics have supported Woolf’s insight by highlighting the former governess’s illicit relationship with the valet.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Dídac Llorens Cubedo stresses that the tale “can be said to revolve around a nucleus of silence” (101).

Silence features prominently in James’s treatment of the ghosts in “The Turn of the Screw,” who seem to haunt the text itself. Except for the governess, the characters at Bly hardly speak of them, and so their presence itself remains ambiguous. The housekeeper at Bly, Mrs. Grose, whose lack of imagination arguably makes her a reliable witness,<sup>6</sup> endorses the governess’s account in two respects. First, she acknowledges the governess’s detailed descriptions of Peter Quint and Jessel. Secondly, she witnesses Flora’s vehement condemnation of her present governess during the lake incident, in which the latter tries to force the girl to admit that she has seen Jessel’s ghost. After this incident, although we do not know what Flora specifically says in the course of her feverish breakdown, Mrs. Grose suggests that the little girl’s “appalling” language reminds her of Jessel (*TS* 74). As she says: “Well, perhaps I ought to also—since I’ve heard some of it before! Yet I can’t bear it” (*TS* 74).

Despite the close relationship they shared with the dead servant and governess, Miles and Flora are strangely reluctant to speak of them. According to Mrs. Grose, “for a period of several months Quint and the boy had been perpetually together,” and when “they had been about together quite as if Quint were his tutor—and a very grand one—and Miss Jessel only for the little lady” (*TS* 34–35). Do they keep silent because of their ghostly communion or is there no ghost at all? As some scholars have argued, what is left silent in

<sup>5</sup> Wilson introduced this argument in “The Ambiguity of Henry James” (1934).

<sup>6</sup> Concerning this point, James writes that she “was a magnificent monument to the blessing of a want of imagination” (*TS* 43).

the work means much.<sup>7</sup> If we trust the governess's view, the peculiarly angelic children could be hiding their secret communion with their demonic friends, though this remains a mystery.<sup>8</sup>

In the governess's descriptions of her encounters with the ghosts, the silence in her ghostly confrontations can be recognized both during the day and at night. Although Fred L. Milne points out that the governess experiences "trouble" at "transitional moment[s]" like "dawn" or "twilight," when "silence gives way to sound," the ghosts, on the other hand, appear at any time (295). They are literally speechless, only exchanging glares. When the governess encounters Quint, she notes that "We were too far apart to call to each other, but there was a moment at which, at shorter range, some challenge between us, breaking the hush, would have been the right result of our straight mutual stare" (*TS* 16). When she first notices Jessel across the lake, the dead governess and Flora are both very quiet: "all spontaneous sounds from [Flora] had dropped" (*TS* 29). There seems to be a silent communication between Jessel and the child into which the governess can never intrude. Silence dominates these scenes, and the governess is overwhelmed by what she sees. Her logic fails to grasp the meaning of her vision. Her paralysis can be relieved only by using her voice—the power of sound. This leads to a kind of exorcising power on the part of the governess in the story, as Jessel vanishes when she shouts at her: "You terrible miserable woman!" (*TS* 57).<sup>9</sup>

By contrast, Mrs. Grose does not articulate her experience of the ghostly presence, requiring the reader to make inferences based on her statements. The dialogue between the governess and the housekeeper comes to resemble that in a play, because there is significant room left for interpretation. For

<sup>7</sup> In his monograph *Silence in Henry James*, John Auchard argues that "the more developed modernist consciousness reads legitimate evanescence in the air—call them ghosts, metaphoric or liberal" (45). Another essay on this theme is Bruce E. Fleming's "Floundering about in Silence," which suggests that the governess is forced to be silent by her employer (137). Kimberly C. Reed discusses the significance of textual "silence" in association with the governess's vision (109-17).

<sup>8</sup> To the governess's eyes, the children "were like those cherubs of the anecdote..." (*TS* 19).

<sup>9</sup> In discussing *The Innocents*, Edward Recchia also uses the word "exorcise": "[Miles] then collapses and dies, either because the governess has exorcised his evil companion or because he has been terrorized by a strange woman..." (33). Similarly, James W. Palmer refers to the governess as a "sincere and much-needed exorcist" (206).

example, after she confesses to witnessing Quint, the governess discusses it with Mrs. Grose, who asks:

“Have you seen him before?”

“Yes—once. On the old tower.”

She could only look at me harder. “Do you mean he’s a stranger?”

“Oh, very much!”

“Yet you didn’t tell me?”

“No—for reasons. But now that you ’ve guessed—”

Mrs. Grose’s round eyes encountered this charge. “Ah, I haven’t guessed!” she said very simply. “How can I if *you* don’t imagine?”

“I don’t in the very least.” (*TS* 21)

These textual riddles and the use of pauses in this exchange suggests that James may have had theatrical dialogue in mind when writing the story. Here, what I mean by “silence” is what is left unsaid by the speaker. In other words, while the governess assumes Mrs. Grose can “guess” what she has witnessed and might even know the identity of the stranger in question, the housekeeper naturally denies that possibility. James masterly creates a dialogue out of the blanks in their conversation.

Although Mrs. Grose identifies Quint and Jessel from the governess’s description of them, she does not see them herself; indeed, she even contradicts the governess when the latter sees Miss Jessel across the lake: “Where on earth do you see anything?” (*TS* 69). Mrs. Grose’s lack of commentary on witnessing the former governess or the dead valet—her silence—does nothing to endorse the governess’s claim or the ghostly presence. Nonetheless, there is much meaning in her inarticulacy. Conventionally, sounds accompany the appearance of a special entity, like a ghost.<sup>10</sup> In the movie adaptation of the story, for example, sound effects (e.g., ominous sounds or Flora humming her melody-box tune) are produced before the ghosts appear. James’s fiction, however, highlights these ghostly appearances through the use of a pregnant silence—another sound effect. In addition to James’s emphatic use of stillness,

<sup>10</sup> Dorothy Scarborough mentions the use of sound effects in gothic fiction such as the sound of an owl, of a bat, a raven, or music from a violin or a harp. What she emphasizes is “vocal” sound (42, 45). She points out that while “the early ghosts were for the most part silent,” gothic ghosts were “sometimes vocal and sometimes silent” (97). Melissa Kendall Mcleod covers a similar theme in her dissertation and focuses on the “aural representations” in James’s ghost stories.



therefore, he employs Mrs. Grose's verbal inability to express herself to suggest the presence of the ghosts within the text itself.

The ghostly, unspeakable elements in "The Turn of the Screw" are thus expressed via silence rather than the human voice. The children's intentional silence, for example, could be interpreted as some kind of conspiracy with the ghosts. In particular, when Flora slips out of her bed and stays near the window on a moonlit night, the governess searches for her brother and finds him outside on the lawn. Miles stands "there motionless as if fascinated, looking up" to "a person on the tower" (*TS* 43).

If James uses silence evocatively in the scenes of confrontations with the ghosts, "The Turn of the Screw" is also full of sounds, as Llorens Cubedo indicates (100-01). We hear everything from the cawing of rooks, piano melodies, church bells and footsteps, to human voices—talking, laughter, singing, whispers, sobbing and cries. What are the functions of these natural and artificial sounds? Are there differences between the two? In the first instance, it is notable that these sounds are usually described under ordinary (that is, not supernatural) conditions in the story, like in the opening scene, when we hear the carriage's "wheels on the gravel" and cawing rooks (*TS* 7). While riding in the carriage and entering the magnificent mansion with a courteous welcome from the servants, the governess feels as if she is becoming the mistress of Bly. The auspicious sound of rooks<sup>11</sup> seems to herald a bright future, and she is delighted to be surrounded by the merriment and laughter of angelic children.

Some sounds, however, have uncanny effects: on her second day at Bly when "the first birds began to twitter" at dawn, the governess hears "a sound or two, less natural" in the mansion (*TS* 7-8). She also recognizes "faint and far, the cry of a child" and a "light footstep" before her door (*TS* 8). Since she suggests that these could be her fancies, it is unclear whether the sounds are real. In the film, Clayton effectively uses the sound effect of a female voice calling, "Flora," when Miss Giddens arrives at Bly, creating an uncanny atmosphere. James G. Palmer suggests that Clayton skillfully mixes the "subjective" sounds that the governess hears and the "objective" sounds of the outer world to recreate the original text's sense of ambiguity (202).

In the text, natural and artificial sounds belong to the normal condition of real life, so when the sounds disappear from the scene—like the cessation

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<sup>11</sup> James uses "rooks," which has positive connotations, instead of "crows."

of church bells or the rooks' cawing—silence becomes dominant, suggesting the appearance of a ghost. As in *Roderick Hudson* and *The Wings of the Dove*, James stages a dramatic storm before the climactic scenes of “The Turn of the Screw.”<sup>12</sup> The governess describes how “The weather had changed back, a great wind was abroad... I sat for a long time before a blank sheet of paper and listened to the lash of the rain and the batter of the gusts” (*TS* 60). The following day there is an eerie, quiet scene in which the two governesses confront each other when the governess searches for the missing Flora at the lake: “Miss Jessel stood before us on the opposite bank exactly as she had stood the other time” (*TS* 68). By skillfully using the dramatic device of a storm, James heightens the effect of the mute confrontation in which the innocent living and the evil dead encounter each other. In other words, highlighting the ghostly presence by contrasting sound and silence creates certain theatrical effects and adds a melodramatic note to the story.

#### VOICE

Of all the sounds in “The Turn of the Screw,” human voices are the most important. Indeed, the narrative primarily proceeds through the dialogue between the governess and the housekeeper, by which the tale comes to resemble a theatrical two-hander. The children do not speak until Chapter 10. It is only then that readers finally hear Flora's precocious diction teasing her governess: “You naughty: where *have* you been?” (*TS* 40). Before this, however, readers have already grasped Bly's mysteries through the exchanges between the governess and Mrs. Grose, due to the former's probing questions and the latter's evasive answers. There remain, for example, the mystery surrounding Miles's expulsion from school, the boy's personality, and why the ghosts appear before the children, as well as what the four's relationships at Bly were like. The governess, perhaps out of a sense of rivalry, is curious to learn about her predecessor and the cause of her death, to which Mrs. Grose

<sup>12</sup> In *Roderick Hudson* a storm erupts before Roderick's death in the Alps, just when Rowland Mallett and the others are beginning to worry about the missing sculptor (*Roderick Hudson* 381). In *The Wings of the Dove*, during a violent storm in Venice, Lord Mark breaks to Milly the devastating news that Kate and Merton are lovers. We then learn that, as a consequence, Milly “turned her face to the wall” (*Wings* 413, 415, 421).

replies: “[the master] never told me! But please, Miss,... I must get to my work” (*TS* 13).

James repeatedly contrasts the characters’ voices with their silence. Here, silence, including muteness, tends to confirm the existence of the ghosts. By contrast, as previously mentioned, the governess’s verbalizing the ghosts’ presence leads to an exorcism. Indeed, speaking itself is associated with risk: if the characters even discuss something unspeakable, it results in a kind of retribution, such as Flora’s feverish over-excitement and Miles’s subsequent cardiac arrest.

Verbalizing any ghostly phenomena is a taboo and the governess is keenly aware of “the old tradition of the *criminality* of those caretakers of the young who minister to *superstitions and fears*” (*TS* 45; my italics). In other words, especially because of her employer’s insistence on never troubling him, the governess considers that raising “the question of the return of the dead” is “forbidden ground” (*TS* 49). The unspoken taboos also include other kinds of boundary-breaking, involving the former valet and governess, and the children. Millicent Bell argues that the story not only involves a cross-class non-marital sexual relationship between Quint and Jessel, but also implicitly refers to homosexuality and pedophilia (“Class” 91-119). However, the heroine’s pseudo Jane Eyre fantasy (which will be discussed in more detail later) is perhaps her gravest sin which she dares to articulate only to herself in her manuscript. In short, the governess’s romantic wish to be united with her master may be the cause of all her ghostly encounters, which in themselves are hard to prove.

On the other hand, what is spoken remains within the realm of logos, so the message cannot reach the story’s core. As Llorens Cubedo similarly suggests, the “crucial enigmas” of the story concern Miles’s dismissal from school and what kind of relationship the children had with the dead employees (102). We never know the truth: the realities of Quint and Jessel are provided as fragments by Mrs. Grose. (Likewise, the children never ask why, on one occasion, the governess does not attend church.)

Although key enigmas are left untouched and unspoken, when the governess dares to name “Miss Jessel” to Flora, Mrs. Grose utters “the shriek of a *creature* scared, or rather wounded” (*TS* 68; my italics). Moreover, when she compels Miles to name the ghost, we hear the boy’s similar “cry of a *creature* hurled over an abyss” (*TS* 85; my italics). On both occasions, those who are forced to face the taboo are presented as *creatures* who can make only

frightened sounds, thereby suggesting the power of the supernatural to strip the human of its defining characteristics of rational language.

In short, it seems that speaking about or trespassing on forbidden ground goes against the natural law and its result are horrors. Rather than the human voice, silence dominates not only the scenes that precede a ghost's appearance but the entire tale itself. The stillness expresses ghostly elements, or taboos, while breaking the silence exacts a heavy price. Thus, James successfully creates a singular tale located between the physical realm and the supernatural world: in-between worlds.

## THEATER

If we consider James's use of silence as a kind of sound effect, we may characterize "The Turn of the Screw" as a hybrid work inspired by both fiction and drama, representing another example of Jamesian "in-betweenness."<sup>13</sup> As we observe in the governess's description, she and the children live "in a cloud of music and affection and success and *private theatricals*" (TS 38; my italics). There are repeated references to the theater in "The Turn of the Screw" and the text often utilizes theatrical similes. For example, according to the governess, the "Remarkably" handsome Peter Quint looks like an "actor," who is "tall, active, [and] erect" (TS 23). Furthermore, in autumn, "with its grey sky and withered garlands, its bared spaces and scattered dead leaves," Bly "was *like a theatre after the performance*—all strewn with crumpled playbills" (TS 50; my italics). Based on this observation, the governess might have foreseen the tragic ending in store. On happier days, however, the governess and children enjoy singing and performing various plays, featuring the children as "tigers," "Romans," "Shakespeareans," "astronomers," and "navigators" (TS 37). They also hold a poetry recital. (This part is well-developed in *The Innocents*, where Miles reads a poem, suggestive of his hidden desires for Quint.)

The reason why this work becomes a hybrid of fiction and drama can be linked to the author's dramatic experiences in London. Because of his long-term interest in playwriting as well as his financial need, James ventured on

<sup>13</sup> David McWhirter discusses James's attempts in "The Turn of the Screw" to present "the experience of in-betweenness for which our language and culture, and all the genres of genre they entail, possess no adequate terms" (142).

his dramatic career (Edel, “Dramatic Years” 45-51; Novick, “Henry James on Stage” 2-6). Unlike his smooth career in fiction writing, however, the dramatic path was thorny due to various factors. Although James was the very same author, in writing a drama, he could not always have his own way and had to compromise with the actor-manager as well as the actors. He also had to think about his theatrical audience or “the public” and the reviewers (Edel, “Dramatic Years” 52-56). One such change was the case of rewriting a happy ending for *The American*.<sup>14</sup> The theatrical power balance, accordingly, subverted James’s expectation of what the author and his art meant. James had to resign his authorial privilege to some extent for commercial success—to please a mediocre audience and actor-manager who did not fully appreciate his artistry. In one of his letters to his brother William, James comments: “[W]ith all usual theatrical people [of *Guy Domville*], who don’t want *plays*... of different kinds, like books and stories, but only of one kind, which their stiff, rudimentary, clumsily-working vision recognizes as the kind they’ve had before. And yet I had tried so to meet them! But you can’t make a sow’s ear out of a silk purse” (*Notebooks* 181; my italics).

James’s difficult struggle with theatrical projects, especially *Guy Domville*, just before writing “The Turn of the Screw,” likely resulted in a turning point where he wanted to reclaim his authority as an artist of prose fiction. Upon this ghostly story, James seems to project his theatrical trials and grope for meaning in the figure of the governess with her singular experiences at Bly. In this sense, the governess, whom it is hard to place within her surroundings, is one side of James himself. At the same time, the governess’s imagination and behavior could suggest something different, which will be analyzed later.

Peter G. Beidler aptly points out that “The Turn of the Screw” is one of James’s “most theatrical” works, as it has “a single setting in a mysterious mansion, pale faces at windows, strange figures appearing and disappearing, dramatic scenes and dialogue, a melodramatic interplay of innocence with the haunting forces of darkness” (14). I agree with most of his points concerning the setting, characters, scenes, and dialogue. For instance, the singular positioning

<sup>14</sup> Novick mentions this in “Henry James on Stage” (4). In the same context, Matthiessen and Murdock note this point, writing that after “... [James’s] bitter experience with the current standards of the stage [*Guy Domville*] made him take it for granted that he would have to sacrifice much of his essential theme for the sake of a happy ending” (174).

of the governess and the ghosts as well as the limited number of characters and the probing dialogue are all suggestive of the theater stage. The vertical or horizontal positioning of the governess and ghosts also creates certain stage-like effects. For example, when the governess sees Quint from the ground, he “[does] stand there!—but high up, beyond the lawn and at the very top of the tower” (*TS* 15). The heroine also notices the former governess at the bottom of the stairs: “Looking down it from the top I once recognised the presence of a woman seated on one of the lower steps with her back presented to me” (*TS* 41–42). In another very theatrically staged scene, the two governesses face each other from across the lake. For a work of fiction, moreover, the number of central characters (the governess, the children, and Mrs. Grose) is relatively small, though there are many employees at Bly. Thus, James guides the reader to focus on a small group of characters, who endure exceptional hardships “onstage.”

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, the key dialogues that occur between the governess and either Mrs. Grose or Miles are characterized by inarticulacy or hesitation; they often stop midsentence when hinting at the enigmas surrounding Miles, such as his expulsion from school and his relationship with the ghosts. The governess and Miles discuss his return to school:

“Were you very happy at school?”

He just considered. “Oh, I’m happy enough anywhere!”

“Well, then,” I quavered, “if you’re just as happy here—!”

“Ah, but that isn’t everything!” Of course *you* know a lot—”

“But you hint that you know almost as much?” I risked as he paused.

“Not half I want to!” Miles honestly professed. “But it isn’t so much that.”

“What is it then?”

“Well—I want to see more life.... I want my own sort!” (*TS* 54)

Here, Miles avoids answering what exactly had happened at school. The dialogue continues like this until the climactic scene, where the governess forces Miles to confess that he had stolen her letter, as a proof that theft is her presumed reason for his having been expelled from school. Accordingly, the audience must guess what is on the characters’ minds.<sup>15</sup> By using this type of dialogue—that contains pauses and blanks—James provides his readers, or

<sup>15</sup> At this point, Novick mentions James’s exploration of human perception and writes that his readers “appeared not to notice that James had deployed all the devices of his

virtual audiences who would expect a staged performance, with more room to imagine the horror.<sup>16</sup>

Why does James allow his narrators to repeatedly refer to the theater in the story? Curiously, the governess writes: “with the word [Miles] spoke, the *curtain rose* on the last act of my dreadful *drama* and the catastrophe was precipitated” (*TS* 53; my italics). Since she calls her life at Bly a “drama,” it seems natural that she would consider herself the leading figure of this performance. Aside from being the captain of “a great drifting ship” (*TS* 9), the “heroic” governess also intends to be a “screen” between her innocent pupils and the evil spirits (*TS* 27). This kind of confrontation between goodness or innocence and evil places the tale firmly within the genre of melodrama.

James hints at the governess’s romantic inclinations, noting that she is an avid reader of sentimental and gothic novels such as *Amelia* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, respectively. As Bell points out, even though she does not bring up the title of *Jane Eyre*, the heroine has probably read this governess novel and fancies for herself the same romantic ending (*Meaning* 226–28). She tends to be intoxicated by a sense of her own heroism as the protector of the children and tacitly expects a reward in the form of a prince charming—her employer at Harley Street—who will appreciate her performance and ask for her hand. This daydream happens just before her first ghostly encounter. When she strolls the garden at Bly, she imagines: “Some one would appear there at the turn of a path and would stand before me and smile and approve” (*TS* 15). In this sense, Clayton’s film is highly suggestive, as the dandy in Harley Street clearly says, “Give me your hand. Give me your promise” (Archibald and Capote). Furthermore, the location is transferred from London to the countryside. Being entrapped in a mysterious, gothic mansion, confronting the evil enemies that try to “corrupt” the innocent and take them away to Hades, the “pretty” governess becomes a suitable heroine for a melodrama (*TS* 12). The ending of this melodrama, however, deviates from convention since there is no poetic justice at work.<sup>17</sup>

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new style, and that considerable conscious effort was required from the reader” (*Mature Master* 280).

<sup>16</sup> T. J. Lustig examines this point in his *Henry James and the Ghostly* (115–25, 271–72); the argument reappears in the essay “Blanks in ‘The Turn of the Screw.’”

<sup>17</sup> Peter Brooks explores this dynamism in his *The Melodramatic Imagination* (198–206).

Although I have referred to the tale as resembling a two-hander, one might also consider the children to be the true lead actors who only pretend to be clever and innocent in the haunted theater of Bly. Seen this way, the story offers us a different view of power subversion. That is, as James as a dramatist experienced it, the governess (or one side of the author) faces the subversion of power, just like that between the author and the audience. In this sense, the governess would be the audience, who gradually becomes aware of the situation: “the real account, I feel, of the hours of peace I could still enjoy was that the immediate charm of my companions [the children] was a *beguilement* still effective even under the shadow of the possibility that *it was studied*” (TS 37; my italics). It seems that the governess is watching a mime with four performers—the children and the ghosts. It is no wonder that spoken words are unnecessary, since the performers can silently communicate with each other.

The self-appointed protectress of the innocent, the governess regards her own behavior as sacred and just, because she believes that she is helping the children—and thus her adored employer. Nevertheless, it is difficult to consider the governess’s true motivation as selfless or sincere. Figuratively speaking, her behavior is like breaking onto the mime stage, and then joining and meddling with the performers. As her behavior disturbs the dramatic order, her manners are reminiscent of the vulgar audiences that James encountered at the St. James’s Theatre on the first night of *Guy Domville*. The governess’s statement, “the curtain rose on the last act of my dreadful drama and the catastrophe was precipitated,” may refer to James’s personal experience (TS 53). Naturally, then, the show must conclude without a satisfactory ending.

From this perspective, one can assume that there is continuity between *Guy Domville* and “The Turn of the Screw.” It is well-known that James was an avid theatergoer since childhood, and he had hoped to find success in the theater during the middle of his career (Kaplan 22-25, 373-79). The consequence of his ambition, however, was the failure of *Guy Domville*: “hoots & jeers & catcalls of the roughs” during its opening night in 1895 (Novick, *Mature Master* 219). This was three years before the serialization of “The Turn of the Screw.”

Leon Edel proposes an insightful connection between the author’s traumatic experience of staging *Guy Domville* and the writing of “The Turn of the Screw” as well as his other stories about children, such as *What Maisie Knew* (1897) and *The Awkward Age* (1899). Edel writes:



The violence of the *Guy Domville* audience had revived the violences and dramas of childhood—and James would embody portraits of himself as a little boy and a little girl in the succeeding novels from *What Maisie Knew* to *The Awkward Age*—and above all in ‘The Turn of the Screw.’ (*Life* 452)

In these stories, the young characters are thrown into the manipulative, selfish world of adults. As Edel suggests, the “innocent” author, “the little Henry,” was brutalized by the vulgar audiences at *Guy Domville* performances (*Life* 480), and projected these and his own childhood traumas onto his stories of innocent children versus evil forces. It must be added that before this drama, James does portray young, vulnerable characters, such as Isabel Archer and Catherine Sloper, who seem to reflect the author himself. Considering the long hesitation and high expectations to move onto the playwriting project, it is not difficult to imagine the author’s disappointment at the audience’s response at the St. James’s Theatre on the first night. In “The Turn of the Screw,” the governess is the egoistic adult, while Miles and Flora mirror the author in his inexperienced youth. It is therefore not an exaggeration to suggest that the trauma of James’s failure in the theater helped give birth to “The Turn of the Screw,” or that writing it may have been a form of self-healing that allowed him to reflect on and analyze his serious theatrical project. Through the act of the governess’s exorcism, that is, James may himself have exorcized his personal demons so that he could regain a sense of integrity.

Given these resonances with James’s own biography, it is no coincidence that we find several theatrical references in the story. Edel pertinently writes that James “imported the stage into his novels” (*Life* 434).<sup>18</sup> While Edel suggests that James became downhearted after the *Guy Domville* incident, Novick points out that he was not that psychologically damaged, but rather the incident helped him to set his mind in the direction of his talent (Edel,

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<sup>18</sup> In another biographical interpretation, Edel points to James’s potential fears about owning Lamb House in relation to his writing of “The Turn of the Screw.” Citing James’s repressed memories of his elder brother, moody mother, and charismatic aunt, Edel suggests that James projected his self-assertive wish to seek masculinity onto Miles (Edel, *Treacherous Years* 200-14). Similarly, Kaplan indicates that “The Turn of the Screw” is the “nightmare variation on James’s own sense of his helplessness” in his household as well as his “artistic rendering of homosexual panic” (414). Novick mentions James’s positive departure from his experiments with commercial playwriting to the art of writing prose fiction (*Mature Master* 224-25).

“Dramatic Years” 61; Novick, “Henry James on Stage” 6-9). Considering James’s stunning productions during his major phase, perhaps the Novick-thesis is convincing enough; however, I do not reject Edel’s ideas completely. Being as he was a shrewd author, therefore, one can say that James never failed to learn from his bitter experiences and probably transformed his traumatic experience at St. James’s Theatre into a kind of fable, in the guise of a ghost story, about writing and authorship by repeatedly interweaving theatrical aspects into the story.

#### FROM POLYPHONY TO MONOLOGUE

Lastly, I would like to point out the structural framework of “The Turn of the Screw,” which resembles the act of raising the curtain in a theater performance. (In the movie version, Clayton boldly cuts the frame, so that audiences can concentrate on the heroine’s psychology.) In the narrative frame, Douglas, the unnamed narrator, and other guests gather around the hearth, telling ghost stories during the Christmas season. Conventionally, the purpose of using a narrative frame in a ghost tale is to generate ambiguity about the story’s authenticity. That is, the frame effectively heightens the reader’s disbelief about the supernatural incident narrated in the story, and the governess’s account. This doubt is reinforced at the beginning of “The Turn of the Screw” by the fact that Douglas may have been infatuated with the governess, and the unnamed narrator withholds judgment.

Unlike the enclosed manuscript mentioned by Douglas, where only four characters speak, in the narrative frame of James’s tale, the reader hears several characters’ remarks on the ghostly subject matter and on Douglas’s romantic feelings. The voices of the guests, represented by the Griffins, create certain polyphonic effects in the opening scene. The ladies, in particular, seem to represent the worldly curiosity of general audiences, and barely understand the subtle beauty of Douglas’s narrative. On being asked if they will not depart, they reply: “Everybody will stay!’ *I will—and I will*’ cried the ladies whose departure had been fixed” (*TS* 3). When Mrs. Griffin asks who the governess is in love with, Douglas flatly explains that “the story *won’t* tell... not in any literal vulgar way.” Mrs. Griffin complains, “More ’s the pity, then. That’s the only way I ever understand” (*TS* 3). Impatient for the manuscript’s arrival, however, the whimsical ladies depart before the story begins.

Intriguingly, we notice a theatrical situation similar to what we have already observed in the discussion of the “inside” story. The frame (i.e., the introduction) offers a vision of the two main narrators and a mediocre audience. From the viewpoint of Douglas, only the main narrator (nameless and of unknown gender) is the sole trustworthy audience member. As Douglas calls him/her “acute” (*TS* 3), he eventually entrusts this person with the governess’s manuscript. Hence one may picture Douglas reading aloud while facing a select audience.

What does James wish to express by this delineation of a “compact and select” audience (*TS* 4)? I submit that this can be understood as reflecting James’s ideal audience. In his theatrical endeavors, the author likely confronted the incompatibility of his desires for both popular and artistic success. For James, the chatter of the nosy ladies and their vulgar reactions to the romantic episode may echo the behavior of his unappreciative theater audiences. Read in this way, we may understand why the frame narrator, who is a kind of surrogate author, disapproves of the ladies’ clamorous, polyphonic voices.

James the author favored a more monological discourse, channeling the chaotic voices of others through a single narrator. At first, the polyphonic voices crowd the scene, but once the noisy characters exit, Douglas and the narrator are spotlighted. By reducing the polyphony of intrusive voices in the narrative frame to the dominant voice of Douglas allows James finally to let a sensitive, decent man deliver his monologue “with a fine clearness” after having remained silent for decades (*TS* 6). In other words, James’s art requires that mediocre and vulgar voices be subdued. In this way, “The Turn of the Screw” reflects the author’s concept about the ideal audience for his miniature drama. Moreover, by establishing his narration in the monologue, we can foresee James’s development of imaginative reflectors, such as Lambert Strether, in *The Ambassadors*.

To summarize, the introductory pages of “The Turn of the Screw” function similarly to raising the curtain in a theater and introducing the “inside” story. In this context, James used both the thematic and formal features of “The Turn of the Screw” to communicate his ideas about art and his concept of the ideal audience that might appreciate it. Although the author was challenged by his dramatization of *Guy Domville*, he transformed his bitterness into a unique psychological drama of silence and sound, and thus created a “haunted theater” of fiction.

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# Sound, Speech and Silence in “The Jolly Corner”

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Henry James’s ghost story “The Jolly Corner” was published in 1908. Like *The American Scene*, published one year earlier, “The Jolly Corner” testifies to James’s complex response to his motherland after 20 years of living abroad. In the story under consideration, Spencer Brydon returns to the United States after 33 years in Europe. This essay intends to approach the question of Brydon’s experience from the auditory perspective. Henry James’s ghost stories are usually silent. Both humans and ghosts are quiet. Even dialogues are soundless since they are generated by the characters’ sub-conscious. In “The Jolly Corner,” James dramatizes the ghost hunting game when, at midnight, Spencer Brydon is the only living soul in the jolly corner and silence reigns over the house. Yet, if we listen carefully, we can hear sound and speech within the silence. This essay, therefore, will first reveal how James uses sound to transfer Brydon from the human into the ghostly realm, where his psychological self-examination takes place. It will then explain how speech and silence function in James’s presentation of Brydon’s psychological exploration, analyzing the dialogue of self and other, the confrontation of conscious and unconscious by means of Lacan’s mirror theory. Finally, by revealing what the ghost says, this essay argues that the ghost hunting is not only a metaphor for Brydon’s



self-recognition, but also for James's own sense of place in his reevaluation of American culture and European culture when he, like Brydon, returned to the United States after a twenty-year absence.

#### SOUND WITHIN SILENCE

The story builds up juxtapositions of two parallel worlds: the present and the past, the realized and the potential, choice and regret, all pointing, finally, to Europe and the United States. The story, like James's other ghost tales, is pervaded by silence. Yet sound is heard through the encroaching silence, functioning as a gateway through which Brydon moves from the human world into the ghost world, where he is determined to meet his American alter ego.

As Brydon steps into the haunted house, he lingers, listens, and focuses "his fine attention, never in his life so fine, on the pulse of the great vague place" (*JC* 86). Brydon begins his exploration by listening to the pulse of the house, which, although apparently empty, is full of life for him. Compared to the almost inaudible pulse of the house, the American scene he experiences when he comes back, is "all mere surface sound" (*JC* 86-87). Brydon

projected himself all day, in thought, straight over the bristling line of hard unconscious heads and into the other, the real, the waiting life; the life that, as soon as he had heard behind him the click of his great house-door, began for him, on the jolly corner, as beguilingly as the slow opening bars of some rich music follows the tap of the conductor's wand. (*JC* 87)

Sounds are used to transfer Brydon to the world of ghosts, the past and the unrealized potential of his life. James compares the "click" of the "great house-door" to "the tap of the conductor's wand" that initiates a sequence of "some rich music."

Repeatedly, James resorts to the effect of sound to reinforce the transition into that mysterious world which is both of the past and the present. When Brydon steps into the house, tapping his walking-stick along the marble floor, the click it makes beckons him back to the world of the past: "He always caught the first effect of the steel point of his stick on the old marble of the hall pavement, large black-and-white squares..." (*JC* 87). The effect is

the dim reverberation *tinkle* as of some far-off *bell* hung who should say where?—in the depths of the house, of the past, of that mystical other world that might have nourished for him had he not, for weal or woe, abandoned it. (*JC 87*; my italics)

The "dim reverberation tinkle of some far-off bell" awakens the mystical other world, so that the jolly corner is both real and virtual, real as the past of Brydon's childhood, virtual as his possible other self.

Comparing this mysterious other world to a "great glass bowl," "the concave crystal," James further pursues the sound effect. Brydon "placed his stick noiselessly away in the corner—feeling the place once more in the likeness of some great glass bowl, all precious concave crystal, set delicately *humming* by the play of a moist finger round its edge" (*JC 87*; my italics). Here, the image of concave crystal conveys both visual and auditory implications. While concave crystals are lenses used to focus sight, quartz crystal lenses can also transmit sounds. Running a moist finger round its edge will send it "delicately humming." This "indescribably fine murmur of its rim was the sigh ... of all the old baffled forsworn possibilities" (*JC 87*). The "great glass bowl" of "the concave crystal" contains the other world, Brydon's unrealized American life.

Sound within silence functions as the transition from one world to the other, delivering Brydon to the world of the past and his unfulfilled potential, and James to the drastically changed American scene from which he had been away for years.

#### SPEECH AND SILENCE

As the sound of the tinkling bell beckons Brydon from the human world to the ghost world, he is determined to confront his other self, to articulate the "old baffled forsworn possibilities" (*JC 87*). The ghost hunting dramatizes the process of self-recognition through the confrontation of the conscious with the unconscious, self with other. James combines the ghostly with the philosophical. Hunting for the ghost, Brydon is the one who speaks, who has the power of discourse whereas the ghost remains silent. However, the ghost, at first oppressed, assumes the power of speech at the end of the story, revealing to Brydon what he desires but dares not see, and to James what he was shocked to realize. In the silent "chamber of consciousness," while hearing only a monologue, we are aware of two speakers.

In the novella, this ghostly other represents the stunted life of Brydon, “the small tight bud” “blighted for once and for ever” before it grows into “full blown flower” (*JC* 84). It is a life that is unrealized, the other side of Brydon, the unconscious that has been repressed. The ghost, like the human sub-conscious, remains obscure and elusive. He is hunted and hard-pressed, driven to the corner or behind the door, deprived of the right of speech.

Besides the Freudian idea of the conscious and the sub-conscious, the relation of Brydon and the ghost resembles metaphorically that of self and other in the sense proposed by Jacques Lacan. Before confronting his alter-ego, Brydon insists, “He isn’t myself. He is the just so totally other person” (*JC* 85). Brydon definitely regards his alter ego as an “other,” in Lacan’s sense that self consists of the other. And Brydon immediately adds, “But I do want to see him. And I can. And I shall” (*JC* 85). This again supports Lacan’s theory that the subject relies on the other, and that the concept of I is formed through the recognition of the other.

According to Lacan, the mirror stage is the process of identification, “the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image—whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term *imago*” (*Écrits* 2). The concept of the mirror stage derives from the “mirror test” conducted by French psychologist Henry Wallon in which a six-month old infant and a baby chimpanzee of the same age are put in front of a looking glass. Dylan Evans explains, “in 1936–49, Lacan seems to see it is a stage which can be located at a specific time in the development of the child with a beginning (six months) and an end (eighteen months),” yet by the early 1950s “Lacan no longer regards it simply as a moment in the life of the infant, but sees it as also representing a permanent structure of subjectivity” (118). Lacan assigns a twofold value to the phenomenon of the mirror stage: “In the first place, it has a historical value as it marks a decisive turning-point in the mental development of the child. In the second place, it typifies an essential libidinal relationship with the body-image” (qtd. in Evans 118). Therefore, the mirror stage is a phase “in which the subject is permanently caught and captivated by his own image” (Evans 118).

Lacan’s “mirror stage” is dramatized twice in the novella when Brydon and his alter ego are face to face. The first episode is when Brydon realizes the ghost is just behind the door, and the second mirror scene appears at the end of the novella, when Brydon is ambushed by the ghost and forced to face

his alter ego. The two mirror scenes, constituting two climaxes in the novella, lead to the subject's self-recognition by means of identification with the other, and the revelation of the unconscious. Yet, while in Lacan's theory, the mirror stage is a visual scene, in "The Jolly Corner," the visual contact is accompanied by the dialogical monologue of Brydon, especially in the first mirror scene, when visual communication is obstructed by the closed door.

When Brydon comes back to the house again one night, he is immediately aware that something is different. He says of the ghost, "He's there, at the top, and waiting – not, as in general, falling back for disappearance. He's holding his ground" (*JC* 89). While Brydon feels a mixture of fear and curiosity, the ghost closes the door which had previously been left open. Facing the closed door, Brydon realizes the ghost is on the other side, "this time at last they were, the two, the opposed projections of him, in presence" (*JC* 92). Here, the "opposed projection" clearly presents the scene of the mirror. Nevertheless, Brydon is psychologically unprepared to see the other side of himself, the self that he had chosen not to be:

It was the strangest of all things that now when, by his taking ten steps and applying his hand to a latch, or even his shoulder and his knee, if necessary, to a panel, all the hunger of his prime need might have been met, his high curiosity crowned, his unrest assuaged—it was amazing, but it was also exquisite and rare, that insistence should have, at a touch, quite dropped from him. (*JC* 92)

Brydon hastens to the door and places his hand on the doorknob but he lacks the courage to open the door, or to face directly his other self, that part of himself that he had relinquished in the past but wishes to get back:

He wouldn't touch it—it seemed now that he might *if* he would: he would only just wait there a little, to show, to prove, that he wouldn't. He had thus another station, close to the thin partition by which revelation was denied him; but with his eyes bent and his hands held off in a mere intensity of stillness. (*JC* 93)

Between the subject and its other, there is only a thin partition. This is a symbolic matrix in which "the I is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject" (Lacan, *Écrits* 2).

In Lacan's mirror scene, the subject sees his reflection in the mirror, communicating visually with it. In the mirror scene of "The Jolly Corner," however, Brydon is conscious of his alter ego's presence, but cannot see him. The communication is not through visual contact, but the soundless dialogue between self and other, the speaking Brydon and the silent ghost. Brydon, as the central consciousness of the novella, speaks for himself and for the ghost. According to Lacan, who emphasizes the power of language, the subject is the one who speaks. It is "language" that "restores to" the I "its function as subject" (*Écrits* 2). In contrast to the speaking Brydon, the ghost remains silent. His silence echoes "the blank face of the door" (*JC* 92). However, silence does not mean speechlessness, and blankness is not nothingness. As John Auchard comments, "In James's fiction, vitality often comes from the force of silences... Language itself becomes anti-language, and silence—not merely dumb tribute to the incommunicability of things—becomes charged expression and the major force of human action" (Auchard 8). Looking into the "blank face of the door," Brydon reads the ghost's silence as a challenge: "Show us how much you have!" (*JC* 92). The ghost, wearing a mask of blankness, "stared" and "glared back" at Brydon (*JC* 92). Brydon recoils:

He *listened* as if there had been something to hear, but this attitude, while it lasted, was his *own communication*. "If you won't then—good: I spare you and I give up. You affect me as by the appeal positively for pity: you convince me that for reasons rigid and sublime—what do I know?—we both of us should have suffered. I respect them then, and, though moved and privileged as, I believe, it has never been given to man, I retire, I renounce—never, on my honor, to try again. So rest for ever—and let *me!*" (*JC* 93; my italics)

The contact between Brydon and his image—the ghost—turns into the former's "own communication." It is Brydon who speaks for his other self and the ghost is deprived of the right to speak. Yet the silence of the ghost does not mean that he is totally at the mercy of Brydon. Brydon himself clearly feels the challenge and horror through the silence and blankness.

In this first mirror scene, Brydon the subject tries to build up his ego, eager to meet his apparitional other. Yet the mirror fails to be reflective. Brydon cannot see his imago reflected in the mirror. He is projecting his self into emptiness. The other is still blocked and the unconscious remains unrevealed. His attempt at self-recognition by means of identification with the other

is frustrated, albeit due to his own cowardice. This sense of frustration is reinforced by the silent and empty town. Corresponding to the silence of the ghost and the blankness of the door, outside the haunted and haunting house, the town wears the mask of void and stillness. It is not emptiness but a denial of revelation. It seemed to Brydon

he had waited an age for some stir of the great grim hush; the life of the town was itself under a spell—so unnaturally, up and down the whole prospect of known and rather ugly objects, the blankness and the silence lasted. Had they ever, he asked himself, the hard-faced houses, which had begun to look livid in the dim dawn, had they ever spoken so little to my need of his spirit? Great builded voids, great crowded stillnesses put on, often, in the heart of cities, for the small hours, a sort of sinister mask, and it was of this large collective negation that Brydon presently became conscious—all the more that the break of day was, almost incredibly now at hand, proving to him what a night he had made of it. (*JC* 93-94)

He yearns to hear "some stir of the great grim hush," yet "the blankness and the silence lasted." The city holds its secret, has "spoken so little" in spite of the need of his spirit. The "great builded voids, great crowded stillnesses" constitute this "large collective negation." The ghost, putting on a "sinister mask," refuses to reveal himself, which, in turn, leads to the second mirror scene.

The second mirror scene appears at the end of section two of the novella. While Brydon didn't dare to open the door previously, the ghost opens the door for him this time: "an appearance produced, he the next instant saw, by the fact that the vestibule gaped wide, that the hinged halves of the inner door had been thrown far back" (*JC* 95). Now the door opens, transforming itself into a mirror. Brydon "gaped at his other self," "a man of his own substance and status," "rigid and conscious, spectral yet human" (*JC* 96).

In the last scene of ghost hunting in the jolly corner, the ghost finally reveals himself before Brydon:

The indistinctness mocked him even while he stared, affected him as somehow shrouding or challenging certitude, so that after faltering an instant on his step he let himself go with the sense that here *was* at last something to meet, to touch, to take, to know—something all unnatural and dreadful, but to advance upon which was the condition for him either of liberation or of supreme defeat. (*JC* 96)

The previously absent other now acquires a presence: “It gloomed, it loomed, it was something, it was somebody, the prodigy of a personal presence” (*JC* 96). The repressed sub-conscious speaks through its presence, informing Brydon of what he wants to know. One important idea forwarded by Lacan is that unconsciousness functions as speech. He takes pains to prove that Freud’s theory actually does interpret the unconscious as language, although in Freudian theory the unconscious is not language. Lacan proposes the famous formula that “the unconscious is structured like a language” (*Seminar* 20). He argues that “the unconscious is neither primordial nor instinctual” (*Écrits* 170); it is primarily linguistic. The unconscious (ness) also has the function of language.

At this moment, it is Brydon who, being appalled, loses his voice, his power to speak: “Horror, with the sight, had leaped into Brydon’s throat, gasping there in a sound he couldn’t utter” (*JC* 96). The ghost is now the powerful one. As the ghost

had advanced as for aggression, and he knew himself give ground. Then harder pressed still, sick with the force of his shock, and falling back as under the hot breath and the roused passion of a life larger than his own, a rage of personality before which his own collapsed, he felt the whole vision turn to darkness and his very feet give away. (*JC* 97)

Just as Lacan “situations aggressivity in the dual relation between the ego and the counterpart” (Evans 6), the ghost is aggressive, exerting a menacing pressure on Brydon.

The power of the ghost in the novella undergoes a transformation from timidity to ferocity. At first, the ghosts in the jolly corner are mere echoes, formless and immaterial: “The concave crystal held, as it were, this mystical other world, and the indescribably fine murmur of its rim was the sigh there, the scarce audible pathetic wail to his strained ear, of all the old baffled forsworn possibilities” (*JC* 87). And it is Brydon who insists on turning these formless, immaterial echoes into ghostly existence: “What he did therefore by this appeal of his flushed presence was to wake into such measure of ghostly life as they might still enjoy” (*JC* 87). This is the first stage of ghost hunting. The ghosts are formless, mere “murmuring sighs,” a scarcely “audible pathetic wail.” It is the recurrent presence of Brydon that awakens them into ghostly life. These ghosts are initially harmless:

They were shy, all but unappeasably shy, but they weren't really sinister; at least they weren't as he had hitherto felt them—before they had taken the Form he so yearned to make them take, the Form he at moments saw himself in the light of fairly hunting on tiptoe, the points of his evening-shoes, from room to room and storey to storey. (*JC* 87)

In the novella, Brydon, as the one who speaks, initially wields power. It is Brydon who is determined to meet the ghost. In the world of apparitions, Brydon is "an incalculable terror" (*JC* 88). He is the one who hunts down the ghost while the latter is terrified, dodging, retreating and hiding. As Martha Banta observes, "Previously the emphasis in James's supernatural tales had been on the man haunted, whether by externally visible ghosts or by invisible apparitions of self. Now there is a noticeable rise of interest in the man who not only finds himself haunted, but haunting others as well" (136).

But as the ghost is continuously molested, he fights back in order to "hold his ground" (*JC* 89). He now becomes "the fanged and antlered animal brought at last to bay" (*JC* 89). James uses the image of the beast to describe the ghost turning from meek to aggressive. It might be worthwhile reading "The Jolly Corner" in the context of "The Beast in the Jungle," published five years earlier. John Marcher in "The Beast in the Jungle" spends his life vainly waiting for a catastrophe, the jumping out of the beast. In "The Jolly Corner," likewise, James also uses the metaphor of the beast. Brydon "had tasted of no pleasure so fine as his actual tension, had been introduced to no sport that demanded at once the patience and the nerve of this stalking of a creature more subtle, yet at bay perhaps more formidable, than any beast of the forest" (*JC* 87).

As "the fanged and antlered animal brought at last to bay," the ghost becomes more challenging, closing the door and waiting behind it for Brydon; Brydon, on the other hand, retreats, not daring to confront his ghostly other. As the ghost becomes stronger, it is Brydon who, from initially being the "terror" in the world of apparitions, turns out to be terrified and tries to flee. However, the ghost won't let him go. He waits for Brydon at the front door and forces him to face his alter ego.

Henry James claims this novella is about power and "violence." In the Prefaces to the New York Edition, tracing the adventure of Brydon in "The Jolly Corner," James says:



At any rate, odd though it may sound to pretend that one feels on safer ground in tracing such an adventure as that of the hero of “The Jolly Corner” than in pursuing a bright career among pirates or detectives, I allow that composition to pass as the measure or limit, on my own part, of any achievable comfort in the “adventure-story”; and this not because I may “render”—well, what my poor gentleman attempted and suffered in the New York house—better than I may render detectives or pirates or other splendid desperadoes, though even here too there would be something to say; but because the spirit engaged with the forces of violence interests me most when I can think of it as engaged most deeply, most finely and most “subtly” (precious term!) (*LC* 1260)

For James, Brydon’s adventure story is better than that of pirates or detectives, because “forces of violence” are played most “deeply, finely and subtly,” not only through the ghost hunting, but through the manipulation of speech and silence. In the novella, power comes from language and speech. Although for Lacan the mirror stage is mainly visual, he claims that “psychological action is developed in and through verbal communication, that is, in a dialectical grasp of meaning” (*Écrits* 9). To Lacan’s way of thinking, language is primarily “a mediating element which permits the subject to attain recognition from the other” (Evans 99).

In “The Jolly Corner,” there exists between Brydon and the ghost a change in a power relationship related to speech and silence. While the speaking Brydon’s power decreases, the silent ghost’s power increases. Initially, it is Brydon who speaks; language endows him with power. Yet his power declines along with his loss of speaking power. He is finally speechless and overwhelmed by the power of the ghost. On the other hand, the ghostly other gradually gains power and, speaks through silence.

#### WHAT THE GHOST SAYS

So what does the ghostly other say to Brydon that is so overwhelming that it causes him to faint? In the Prefaces to the New York Edition, Henry James attributed “the very source of wise counsel and the very law of charming effect” of the story to “the appeal to wonder and terror and curiosity and pity and to the delight of fine recognitions, as well as to the joy, perhaps sharper still, of the mystified state” (*LC* 1256). What, in other words, are

the "wonder" and "curiosity," the "recognitions," and the consequent "terror" and "pity"?

At the very beginning of the story, Brydon discovers his potential talent for business and is intrigued by the possibility of success if he remained in America. This is Brydon's quandary. The resultant picture of himself seems to him to be horrible. Brydon's alternative is rich, powerful, but monstrous. He wears a "dangling double eye-glass" and is in an evening dress "of gleaming silk lappet and white linen, of pearl button and gold watch-guard and polished shoe" (JC 96). Yet Brydon only suffers from a sense of revulsion at his double's elegant appearance. His alter ego, for all his subsequent achievements and triumph, refuses to show his face by covering it with his injured hands. When he finally removes his hands, the face revealed turned out to be "evil, odious, blatant, vulgar," too "hideous" to be his (JC 97). The recognition is devastating. Brydon denies any connection with this "unknown, inconceivable, awful" identity (JC 96). He can't concur with what the ghost says to him, as if it were too horrible for his conscious to accept his unconscious.

As many scholars have noted, "The Jolly Corner" is, to some extent, the fictional version of *The American Scene*, published a year earlier. James recounted in this novella his ghostly return home relatively fresh from his trip to the US. There exist obvious similarities between Henry James and Brydon. Both came back to America after years of living in Europe and were shocked by what they experienced in their homeland, which is no longer familiar to them. However, if Brydon is so obsessed with his American alternative, does this signify that James was also obsessed with his possible success in the business world if he had stayed in America? That he was terrified by his unconscious desire to be rich, as the unconscious usually reveals one's repressed desires? Might this other self, though repugnant, represent, perhaps, what James desired—power and wealth? As Collins Meissner states, maybe James was not "a genteel aesthete who lived off an inheritance" and stayed far away from the realistic world in which money counts as everything, but actually was always interested with the business world, and his description of successful businessmen such as "Christopher Newman and Adam Verver betrays a latent interest in getting into the corporate game, but also a fear of its intensity and immediacy" (Meissner 265).

It would be pointless to equate Brydon's curiosity to James's curiosity. Actually, James was not curious about what he might have been if he had finished his education at Harvard, but about the ways in which his motherland

had changed during his twenty-year absence. As Brydon is shocked by the image of his American ego reflected by the mirror, James was shocked by what he found in his changed country. Brydon's horror upon seeing his American self echoes what James recounted in *The American Scene*, in which he showed his horror at early twentieth century American commercialization and materialism. The American scene, as observed by Henry James, was what the ghost represents to Brydon. It was rich, powerful, but vulgar. In *The American Scene*, James expressed how he was impressed by the power of New York, "the real appeal, unmistakably, is in that note of vehemence in the local life of which I have spoken, for it is the appeal of a particular type of dauntless power" (AS 74). Nevertheless he complained bitterly about how the worship of money infiltrated every aspect of American life. As has been frequently quoted, "the preliminary American postulate or basis for any successful accommodation of life" is "that of active pecuniary gain and active pecuniary gain only—that of one's making the condition so triumphantly pay that the prices, the manners, the other inconveniences, take their place as a friction it is comparatively easy to salve, wounds directly treatable with the wash of gold" (AS 236-37). James observed, "To make so much money that you won't, that you don't 'mind,' don't mind anything—that is absolutely, I think, the main American formula" (AS 237). In Leon Edel's words, "in the rediscovered country, Henry James found a corrosive materialism, a vulgarity of affluence, as if the very plumbing, in which the nation took such excessive pride, had to be made of gold" (AS xix). As Collin Meissner has commented, "Upon returning to America in 1904 James was shocked at the impression of 'an entire nation squandering a tremendous opportunity by cashing in its potential for the immediacy of gain'" (Meissner 272).

James's shock is dramatized as Brydon's shock. American culture, as represented by the ghost, implies power, brutality, and vulgarity. As Philip Horne has pointed out, the image of the ghost recalls that of Theodore Roosevelt, the man of masculinity and action, who denounced Henry James in the essay "True Americanism" as "the undersized man of letters, who flees his country because he, with his delicate, effeminate sensitiveness, finds the conditions of life on this side of the water crude and raw" (qtd. in Horne 240). What the ghost says to Brydon is what James recognized in the American scene, a culture in which "success" and "identity" were understood as "active pecuniary gain" and "democracy" was symbiotically related to "commercialism" (Meissner 264). Although Brydon's wonder is not James's wonder, Brydon's recognition symbolizes James's recognition, and Brydon's terror dramatizes James's terror.

In Aristotelian tragedies, recognition leads to both fear and pity. In "The Jolly Corner," while Brydon is terrified by the brutal ghost, Alice Staverton pities him and accepts him. Before Brydon meets his other self, she has already seen him in her dreams, but keeps silent until the ghost speaks to Brydon himself.<sup>1</sup> She knows what Brydon would have turned out to be if he had stayed in America and she still loves him, showing her sympathy for the ghost as an American who lives in America at a time of brutality and vulgarity. "He has been unhappy, he has been ravaged," she tells Brydon (*JC* 100). For Alice "he was no horror," and she "had accepted him" (*JC* 100). At the end of the novella, with the help of Alice, Brydon is able to accept his other self. Both Brydon and Alice find love as Brydon "drew her to his breast" (*JC* 100). As Barbara Hardy has noted, "Love makes the divided self whole in understanding not only the existential self but also the whole potential" (13). In Brydon's ghost hunting in "The Jolly Corner," elements of recognition, pity and fear in the Aristotelian sense are identified, followed by reconciliation and love.

Pity and fear were also James's response to the American culture that developed in the early twentieth century. In the face of this awareness, James experienced both fear and pity. While Brydon's attitude to the ghost represents James's fear, Alice's attitude implies his pity. He was terrified by modern America's brutality, as represented by the domineering personality of Roosevelt himself, according to Philip Horne (245). Meanwhile, being an American he loved his country, however scathing his criticism might be. Just as Alice pities the ghost and accepts Brydon's inconceivably different alter ego, James pitied America's degradation, lamenting that the country, though rising as a global power, was "unhappy," and had been "ravaged." In this sense, "The Jolly Corner," in which Brydon finally comes to terms with his American identity, suggests James's final reconciliation to his native culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Alice recalls May Bartram in "The Beast in the Jungle" and Maggie in *The Golden Bowl*. In all three works, the heroines know more than the heroes do but are willing to reveal only a limited portion of what they know. May is as silent as a Sphinx: enigmatic and yet all knowing. May keeps to herself what she knows about John Marcher's beast until her death, leaving Marcher to realize too late and suffer forever from the consequences of what he has missed. For Maggie, silence is the weapon she employs to separate Amerigo and Charlotte and so preserve the stability of two marriages. Alice, for her part, maintains a perfect balance between speaking and silence. She fully understands Brydon's self-centered determination to meet his other self, and although she knows what Brydon's Other looks like, she does not tell him directly but promises that she will do so at an appropriate time.

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# The ... in the Jungle: The Sounds—and the Sounding—of Silence in Late James

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I had occasion lately to teach (or try to teach) “The Beast in the Jungle” to a class of undergraduates—almost all of them first-semester freshmen, few of whom (I’m sure) will be destined to become English majors. To get things going, I asked them first simply to tell me what they thought the story was about. Perhaps not surprisingly, the class fell silent when confronted by that basic question, and I then prompted them to consider whether their collective (non)responsive blank might not, in fact, be an appropriate answer. The absence of sound might be a clue. How does one write a story about nothing? I then asked them to consider a series of brief quotations from the story, drawn sequentially from the text:

Oh, he understood what she meant. (*CS* 513)<sup>1</sup>

He laughed as he saw what she meant. (*CS* 517)

[Again, Marcher:] “Why what you mean—what you’ve always meant.”

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<sup>1</sup> In the New York Edition text, Henry James underscores the irony by substituting an exclamation point for the terminal period.

She again shook her head. "What I mean isn't what I've always meant. It's different." (CS 525-26)

He had had her word for it as he left her—what else, on earth, could she have meant? (CS 529)

If he could but know what she meant! (CS 532)

The point of this schematic summary of narration and dialogue was to help the class better appreciate the elusive nature of *meaning*—and to recognize the story's (deliberate) internal descent from confident interpretation toward a veritable abyss of ambiguity and uncertainty. Accordingly, this last exasperated thought of Marcher's could be transliterated back into the group's silent response to my first question: If we (as readers) could but know what James meant!

Of course, there are lots of critics who think they know what James meant—even if he didn't, or couldn't bring himself to uncloset the latent implications of his tale.<sup>2</sup> At any rate, it's useful to remember (and to remind one's students) that the story doesn't just end with a collapse into uncertainty—it also begins that way, too, although the overtones at the start of things are decidedly different.

Even though "The Beast in the Jungle" isn't *Gigi*—far from it—the comic exchange of miscommunication and misremembrance between Marcher and May Bartram at the beginning of the story anticipates the lyrical strains of "Yes, I Remember It Well" and underscores just how important gaps, omissions, and silences will be in the pages ahead. Their first meeting wasn't in Rome (it was in Naples); no, it hadn't been seven years before (it had been more nearly ten); and May Bartram's traveling companions were not her uncle and aunt but rather her mother and brother. In these details—and almost everything else—Marcher gets everything wrong. "Oh, he understood what she meant!"—except, of course, he doesn't.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, from the very first line of the story, James provokes the reader by leaving things out:

<sup>2</sup> Especially since Sedgwick published her transformative re-reading of the story as a closeted confession of homosexual panic.

<sup>3</sup> As Heyns observes, the story gets its start through the demonstration of an "inequality of memory" (112). In a memorable passage from the preface written later for the volume of the New York Edition in which this story was reprinted, James classifies Marcher among the "poor sensitive gentlemen" for which he had such an "attested predilection" (*FW* 1250). One might venture to say, however, that John Marcher is one of the most *insensitive* characters James ever created.

What determined the speech that startled him in the course of their encounter scarcely matters, being probably but some words spoken by himself quite without intention—spoken as they lingered and slowly moved together after their renewal of acquaintance. (*CS* 496)

It is hardly accidental that “The Beast in the Jungle” begins with an ellipsis, a reference to discourse to which the reader (as yet) has no access—another tip-off, in its way, that the dramatic interest of the story will be intensified by silence, by words unspoken or unrecorded, and gestures unmade.<sup>4</sup>

We should also note that James frequently employs another version of this technique in the representation of direct discourse, especially at moments when May Bartram is responding to Marcher’s badgering questions or blandly patronizing observations. Whereas his speech typically appears on the page as a continuous utterance, Bartram’s more often is paused by nominative interjections, which have not only grammatical but also psychological implications. Quantitatively speaking, the record of Marcher’s speech usually requires only two quotation marks: opening and closing. Bartram’s requires four. A telling example comes near the beginning of section 3 of the story, when Marcher (perhaps prodded by something like a guilty conscience) acknowledges the social inequality of their odd relationship: her more or less constant acquaintance having “saved” him by making him “indistinguishable from other men.” “What is it that saves *you*?” he now asks—a question further elaborated in free indirect discourse:

saved her, he meant, from that appearance of variation from the usual human type. If he had practically escaped remark, as she pretended, by doing, in the most important particular what most men do—find the answer to life in patching up an alliance of a sort with a woman no better than himself—how had she escaped it, and how could the alliance, such as it was, since they must suppose it had been more or less noticed, have failed to make her rather positively talked about? “I never said,” May Bartram replied, “that it hadn’t made me talked about.” “Ah well then, you’re not ‘saved.’”

<sup>4</sup> As Phelan notes, “Beginning this way allows James not only to employ the dramatic method that he favors but also to guide our interest, our suspense, in that drama in a rather pointed way” (109). Less charitably, Geismar deplors “the typical Jamesian sexless diffusion of passion through conversation,” which only confirms the author’s “true failure as a human being” (35, 40).



“It has not been a question for me. If you’ve had your woman, I’ve had,” she said, “my man.” (*CS* 516)

In both instances here, the deferred specification of meaning silently suggests hesitation, as if she is weighing alternatives or possibly repressing one thought in place of another.<sup>5</sup>

As such, these moments of implied silence foreshadow the climactic turn of the story (in section 4), when the two of them are standing before the cold fireplace in her London flat and Marcher anticipates that, because she is dying, May Bartram at last will reveal the mystery of his fate:

It had become suddenly, from her movement and attitude, beautiful and vivid to him that she had something more to give him; her wasted face delicately shone with it, and it glittered, almost as with the white lustre of silver, in her expression. She was right, incontestably, for what he saw in her face was the truth, and strangely, without consequence, while their talk of it as dreadful was still in the air, she appeared to present it as inordinately soft. This, prompting bewilderment, made him but gape the more gratefully for her revelation, so that they continued for some minutes silent, her face shining at him, her contact imponderably pressing, and his stare all kind, but all expectant. The end, none the less, was that what he had expected failed to sound. (*CS* 526-27)

Presumably, Marcher expresses his frustration in cruel remonstrance or insult (“he was afterwards to say to himself that he must have spoken with odious impatience” [*CS* 527]): so that one form of repressed speech perversely mirrors the other. And the effect, as we all know, is fatal. May Bartram carries her silence to the grave, where the two names on her tombstone become “like a pair of eyes that didn’t know him” (*CS* 535)—a grim echo, in fact, of the scene just cited, when, expecting some kind of answer or explanation from May (but not getting it), Marcher receives instead a silent gesture: “the mere closing of her eyes” (*CS* 527).

For better or worse—and critics disagree violently on this point—the conclusion of “The Beast in the Jungle” is anything but silent.<sup>6</sup> Instead, in

<sup>5</sup> For a more general examination of this technique, see Wexler.

<sup>6</sup> If anything, the critical debate concerning the psychological implications of May Bartram’s deliberate reticence has become rather shrill. Instead of reading May’s silence as a conventional symptom of feminine propriety, Petty sees her “concealment of her feelings”

the closing paragraphs of the story, James seems to merge his narrative voice with Marcher's anguished consciousness, making explicit—and apparently privileging—one kind of meaning at the possible expense of others. (“The escape would have been to love her; then, *then* he would have lived” [CS 540].) I asked my students if the story wouldn't, in fact, be better if James had omitted section 6 altogether—if, so to speak, he had kept *his* mouth shut. Many of them were taken aback by the suggestion—how could an author like James be *wrong*? Still, it is fascinating to know that the Master himself had reservations about the story's conclusion, reservations that were shared by at least one contemporaneous reader (Morton Fullerton), who complained about what James himself called “the superfluous passage toward the climax” of “The Beast in the Jungle.” “It is over-insistent,” James confessed, “& as of the school-slate and the columns of figures, & I felt that even as I did it. And yet I did it consciously,” he explained, “anxiously, for the help of the unutterable reader at large who would have been incapable, down to his boots,” of understanding the significance of the tale. “I find myself, again & again, counting on my fingers for him, the thankless idiot!” (WMF).

In this same letter James went on to say that, in the New York Edition (which already—in 1903—he was planning) he would suppress the offending paragraphs. But he must have concluded, just five years later, that most readers still were thankless idiots, because he left the “superfluous passage” unchanged.<sup>7</sup> If nothing else, *that* has given all of us something to talk about.

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as “a manifestation of her ambivalence about permanent romantic attachment” (249-50). Buelens, on the other hand, finds something almost sinister in her purported scheme of entrapment: if May's “initial investment” in Marcher's story appears “masochistically inflected (involving the surrender of her own ego to the demands of his masterplot),” it subsequently becomes “sadistic.” “She exerts mastery; she inspires Marcher with fear; she becomes the focus of what has now (but only now) become a life filled with terror” (24).

<sup>7</sup> It might be worth noting, however, that, in revising the story for later publication, James did alter some of its wording—significantly deleting forms of the verb *to say*, for example, as well as *to sound*. E.g.: “Marcher said to himself” / “Marcher could only feel”; “‘Oh!’ he confusedly sounded, as she herself of late so often had done. / “‘Oh!’ he confusedly breathed, as she herself of late so often had done.” These changes work to reify the theme—and role—of silence in the tale. I am grateful to Miranda El-Rayess for sharing the table of textual variants that the late Neil Reeve had compiled for their forthcoming volume of *The Complete Fiction of Henry James*, to be published by Cambridge University Press.

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“All the voices and light footsteps”:  
*Macbeth* and the Incantatory Power of Speech  
in “The Aspern Papers”

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When he wrote “The Aspern Papers” Henry James was inspired, at least in part, by Alexander Pushkin’s “The Queen of Spades,” which first appeared in 1834 but which James read in Prosper Mérimée’s 1849 French translation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Neil Cornwell for James’s use of Mérimée’s translation of Pushkin’s story (2004: 193–210). “The Queen of Spades,” unlike “The Aspern Papers,” is told by an omniscient narrator, but the similarities between the two are striking. Pushkin’s central character, Hermann, overhears the story of an old countess who possesses the secret to fate: she knows the identity of three cards that will allow a gambler to defy chance and win whatever sum is wagered. Driven by greed and lust for such power, Hermann begins a disingenuous courtship with the countess’s young waiting maid, Lizaveta, who is flattered by him. Thinking that she is planning a secret encounter with him, Lizaveta inadvertently reveals to him how to reach the countess’s sleeping chamber. Hermann stows himself there, hiding quietly until the countess enters, whereupon he emerges and demands that she reveal to him the secret of the cards. Sensing her resistance, he draws his pistol and threatens her, and the terrified old woman collapses in fear and dies. Later, her ghost appears to the badly shaken and drunk Hermann and tells him to play the three, the seven and the ace, and to wait twenty-four hours before playing the second and the third. Afterwards, she warns him, he must never play again, and he will be forgiven for having caused her death. Soon, he finds himself at a card table. He wagers a stunning sum on the three and wins, and the next night he wins twice as much with the seven. On the third night he thinks he has

In both stories, a male villain seeking “esoteric knowledge” (255),<sup>2</sup> as James’s narrator calls it, attempts to steal it from the vulnerable, aged owner, whose death is hastened as a result. Both villains believe their fate is determined by women who in some way are associated with witches. And A.D. Briggs, who was the first to suggest Pushkin as a source,<sup>3</sup> identified a shared “architecture,” consisting of three climactic moments: “infiltration, confrontation and aftermath.” This architecture “seems custom made for the theatre,” he added, noting that Pushkin’s story had inspired an opera by Tchaikovsky and James’s story a stage play by Michael Redgrave (57). All of this, however, could also be said of *Macbeth*, which I believe might be the most profound of all the literary influences on “The Aspern Papers,” an influence rooted in James’s fascination with the incantatory power of human speech and Shakespeare’s dramatization of it.<sup>4</sup>

There is no evidence to suggest that Pushkin himself drew from *Macbeth*, but these similarities, and others, suggest that his story and *Macbeth* could have lived side by side in James’s mind.<sup>5</sup> Hermann, for example, at a climactic

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played the ace and proclaims victory before he even looks at the card he has played. When he finally looks down at it, he realizes, to his horror, that it is not the ace but the queen of spades, one eye winking at him mockingly, the expression looking eerily like that of the old countess. After this defeat he loses his mind and spends the rest of his days in an asylum, speaking to no one, rehearsing to himself, over and over, his fatal mistake.

<sup>2</sup> All references to “The Aspern Papers” will be to the first book edition of 1888, as published by The Library of America, unless otherwise specified. When variants are significant, references will be made to the serialized edition, which appeared earlier that year in three installments in *The Atlantic Monthly* and to The New York Edition (NYE) of 1908.

<sup>3</sup> See also Neil Cornwell and Joseph O’Leary, whose more recent studies confirm Briggs’s discovery.

<sup>4</sup> James was so steeped in Shakespeare that it is often difficult to know whether he wants his allusions to the poet’s works to be noticed or, especially in subtle cases, James is writing under Shakespeare’s influence quite unconsciously. Peter Rawlings, who has examined James’s use of Shakespeare in “The Birth Place” and “The Papers,” says quite rightly that “the practical and methodological difficulties of distinguishing between allusion and suffusion, say, are immense” (96-97).

<sup>5</sup> What Adeline Tintner has said about James’s use of Shakespeare and Balzac seems relevant here: “In *The Ambassadors*, which James counted his favorite of his productions, his two great masters, Balzac and Shakespeare, rub shoulders without causing any bruises and without our needing to be too much aware of specific sources. What the reader gains is the wisdom and experience that James had himself gained from his lifelong apprenticeship to those great fabulists” (321). Balzac of course was a much greater influence on James

moment, pulls out his pistol and calls the countess: "Old witch!" (215). This is the only instance of the word in Pushkin's story, but it richly informs her mysterious apparition in the end, where she gives Hermann the false knowledge that will undo him. He never masters the secret of the cards, just as Macbeth never savors the power of the crown; and both villains are driven mad, their insanity manifesting itself in hallucinations. Macbeth sees the ghosts of his victims, apparitions invoked by the witches, and Hermann sees the ghost of his victim, the "old witch" herself. The countess is "surrounded," moreover, by "three elderly maids" (213); and later, at a ball, Lizaveta, the countess's young waiting maid, is accosted by another group of three women (217). These groups of three might have evoked for James the three witches of *Macbeth*.

The three women who occupy the Bordereau household are all dark figures, and all, to one degree or another, are aligned with witches. "Perhaps the people are afraid of the Misses Bordereau," says Mrs. Prest. "I daresay they have the reputation of witches" (232). The narrator, by the time he is negotiating his rent with Juliana, agrees: "She was such a subtle old witch that one could never tell where one stood with her" (287).<sup>6</sup> A little later, after her disturbing meeting with the narrator, who refuses her offer of Aspern's portrait for a thousand pounds, Juliana lies in her bed, asleep and exhausted, looking indeed like a witch:

Miss Bordereau had been divested of her green shade, but (it was not my fortune to behold Juliana in her nightcap) the upper half of her face was covered by the fall of a piece of dingy lacelike muslin, a sort of extemporized hood which, wound round her head, descended to the end of her nose, leaving nothing visible but her white withered cheeks and puckered mouth, closed tightly and, as it were, consciously. (294)

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than Pushkin was, but in "The Aspern Papers," Pushkin seems to "rub shoulders" with Shakespeare in much the same way. Rawlings takes Tintner to task, saying that her work "exhibits many of the delights and pitfalls of hunting for allusions to and uses of Shakespeare in James's fiction" (97).

<sup>6</sup> O'Leary observes that Hermann, in "The Queen of Spades," also calls the countess an "old witch." See also Amy Green's compelling argument that, in creating Juliana, James might have had an aged Juliet in mind (20-54). James's narrator, pondering "Romeo's vows," wonders if "Juliana, on summer nights in her youth, might have murmured down from open windows at Jeffrey Aspern, but Miss Tita was not a poet's mistress any more than I was a poet" (260).

She and her niece are “mysterious” (228), and the narrator wonders “what mystic rites of ennui” they “celebrated in their darkened rooms” (256). Olympia, too, the “white-faced” maidservant, wears “a shawl in the fashion of a hood” and “flitted” into the house’s “impenetrable regions” (236).

This common element of witchcraft, because it involves the power of incantation, or naming, is what makes *Macbeth* resonate in “The Aspern Papers” more consistently, and more poetically, than any other literary source. The most compelling resonances occur on the level of diction. James’s use of the word “what,” for example, is suggestive. “You speak the language so beautifully,” says the narrator when he first meets Miss Tita: “might I ask what you are?” (238). In *Macbeth*, when Banquo first sees the witches, he asks, “What are these, / So withered and so wild in their attire?” and Macbeth is more direct: “What are you?” (I.3.39-40, 47).<sup>7</sup> Especially striking, however, is James’s use of “weird.” This word is rare in his work. Consider first its occurrence in *The Bostonians*:

It wasn’t a party—Olive didn’t go to parties; it was one of those weird meetings she was so fond of.

“What kind of meetings do you refer to? You speak as if it were a rendezvous of witches on the Brocken.”

“Well, so it is; they are all witches and wizards, mediums, and spirit-rappers, and roaring radicals.” (805)

The weird sisters of *Macbeth* come to mind here, as they do in “The Aspern Papers,” where “weird” occurs only once, and in connection with Juliana: “in my heart,” says the narrator, “I thought the old woman capable of any weird manoeuvre” (293). It is conspicuous that this single instance of “weird” only came in with the first book edition.<sup>8</sup> The word is also rare in Shakespeare’s works: there are only six instances—all of them in *Macbeth*, and all in reference to

<sup>7</sup> Even the porter, imagining himself tending to “hell gate,” uses this construction: “What are you?” he calls out, to those who are knocking on the other side of the castle gate, the morning after the king’s murder (II.3.2, 15). And it is notable that James, in *The Portrait of a Lady*, uses the construction “what are you?” in connection with “horror”:

*It was not that Madame Merle had at last thought it the right time to be insolent; for this was not what was most apparent. It was a worse horror than that. “Who are you—what are you?” Isabel murmured. “What have you to do with my husband?”* (723)

<sup>8</sup> In *The Atlantic Monthly* “weird manoeuvre” had been “such a manoeuvre” (577).

the witches<sup>9</sup>—and the word, which in his time meant fatal, aligns the witches with the three fates. Lady Macbeth refers to the prophecy of the witches as "fate and metaphysical aid" (I.5.28); and Macbeth calls the mysterious dagger, a delusion brought on by their prophecy, a "fatal vision" (II.1.37).<sup>10</sup> This too is how James used the word. His narrators, wondering if Tita will hand over the papers, says, "I expected her now to settle my fate" (309). O'Leary observes that this moment echoes perhaps "The Queen of Spades," in which, again, Hermann's initial encounter with Lizaveta "decided his fate" ("Pushkin in 'The Aspern Papers'"; Pushkin 210). Here, however, the influence of Pushkin could have operated on James in perfect harmony with that of Shakespeare.

Absent from Pushkin's story is any suggestion of the witches' brew and their elusive power to charm their loathsome ingredients. This is subtly evoked by James's narrator, to whom Aspern's papers are "crumpled scraps," as "odious" to him (317) as the "finger of birth-strangled babe" or even the king's crown are to Macbeth (IV.1.12, 30). What both characters want, and never achieve, is the power to animate the things of the world—organs, limbs, crowns, love letters—which have been severed from their life source. The theme is more explicit in "The Turn of the Screw," where the governess gloats over her ability to sway Mrs. Grose, whom she makes "a receptacle of lurid things"; indeed, "had I wished to mix a witch's broth and proposed it with assurance, she would have held out a large clean saucepan" (689). This power to animate is verbal; it is poetry. It is what Othello demonstrates in his mesmerizing monologue on "the anthropophagi" and the "men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders" (I.3.144-45). The irony of Othello's conclusion—"This only is the witchcraft I have used" (I.3.169)—left a deep impression on James.<sup>11</sup> It dramatized for

<sup>9</sup> The witches call themselves the "weird sisters" once (I.3.32); Macbeth calls them "weird" three times (I.5.8, III.4.134, and IV.1.158) and Banquo does twice (II.1.21, III.1.2).

<sup>10</sup> In Holinshed's account of Macbeth, which was Shakespeare's source, there are "a sort of witches" (209), but they are different and separate from the "three women in strange and wild apparel": these are "the *weird sisters*," the "goddesses of destinie," who meet Macbeth and tell him his fate (210-11). In *Macbeth*, however, witches and "weird sisters" are one and the same. Shakespeare, according to Jacqueline Simpson, might have been the first to conflate the two (17-18).

<sup>11</sup> "These words," says Adrian Poole, "are vital to James's imagination" ("Henry James, War and Witchcraft" 302). In a letter of 1880, James speaks of his Daisy Miller as precisely such an innocent as Desdemona is. "The whole idea of the story," he wrote, "is the little tragedy of a light, thin, natural, unsuspecting creature being sacrificed, as it were, to a



him the power of poetic creation, which in “The Art of Fiction” he describes thus: “when the mind is imaginative—much more when it happens to be that of a man of genius—it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into reverberations” (52). The “man of genius” in “The Aspern Papers” is dead, and so are his papers: “but the situation,” says the narrator, “had been different when the man’s own voice was mingled with his song. That voice, by every testimony, was one of the sweetest<sup>12</sup> ever heard. ‘Orpheus and the Maenads!’ was the exclamation that rose to my lips when I first turned over his correspondence” (231). Aspern’s lover, Juliana, is the only living person who can resurrect that voice: “I think I had an idea,” says the narrator, “that she read Aspern’s letters over every night or at least pressed them to her withered lips. I would have given a good deal to have a glimpse of the latter spectacle” (249).<sup>13</sup> Her refusal to utter Aspern’s name accentuates the authority of her voice.

As a character in his own story, the narrator fancies himself capable of summoning the spirit of Jeffrey Aspern: “I had invoked him and he had come; he hovered before me half the time” (254). There is a certain pathetic vanity about this, as there is when he utters Jeffrey Aspern’s name for the first time to Tita: “I watched her well as I pronounced that name but I saw nothing wonderful. Why should I indeed—was not Jeffrey Aspern the property of the human race?” (267). What the narrator lacks is the power to charm. In James, “charm” and its variants “slip off his pen,” says Adrian Poole, “with surprising and even irritating frequency,” but “something is always *at work*,” he stresses, “when the epithet ‘charming’ is deployed, or the noun and the verb, to charm and be charmed” (“Henry James and Charm” 115). In short, the word often carries in James the same dark meaning it carries in *Macbeth*<sup>14</sup>: incantation or spell. In “The Aspern Papers,” which Poole never mentions, James uses

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social rumpus that went on quite over her head,” and, alluding to Othello’s monologue, he assures his reader: “This is the only witchcraft I have used” (122-23).

<sup>12</sup> Significantly, in the NYE “sweetest” became “most charming” (7). As is discussed below, “charm” and its variants are charged, in “The Aspern Papers,” with the sense of incantation.

<sup>13</sup> In the NYE “the latter spectacle” becomes “those solemnities” (35), suggesting a dark ritual.

<sup>14</sup> James’s use of “charm” also evokes Hawthorne, who “reminds us,” says Poole, “of the deeper, darker meaning of ‘charm’, its associations with magic, with witchcraft, with the occult. These are the only meanings that Shakespeare and his first audiences would

the word in precisely this way. The narrator, for example, attempting to gain control over Tita, "poured treasures of information about Venice into her ears, described Florence and Rome, discoursed to her on the charms and advantages of travel" (276). The passage might evoke Lady Macbeth's plot to corrupt her husband: "Hie thee hither, / That I may pour my spirits in thine ear" (I.5.24-25). Only when the narrator becomes the teller of his tale, however, will he acquire what James would call, in his "Introduction to *The Tempest*," the "power of constitutive speech": this, he says, echoing Lady Macbeth, is what allowed Shakespeare "to make of our poor world a great flat table for receiving the glitter and clink of outpoured treasure" (1211).<sup>15</sup>

This crucial distinction, between the narrator as a character in his own story and the narrator as the teller of it, has been most insightfully addressed by Philip Horne, who has unearthed an important allusion to *Macbeth*. In the 1888 version, the narrator, pondering Tita's unsettling proposal, describes his gondola ride thus: "He rowed me away and I sat there prostrate, groaning softly to myself, with my hat pulled over my face" (315). For the New York Edition, James changed "face" to "brow" (136), which, as Horne notes, echoes Malcolm, in the England scene, urging Macduff to express his grief: "What, man, ne'er pull your hat upon your brows. / Give sorrow words" (IV.iii.209-10). This moment speaks to how James's "publishing scoundrel" (303) will become the eloquent teller of his own story. Horne suggests that, "if the narrator behaves badly in the action of the tale his conduct in the telling of it is a different matter and that the meanings in this allusion (if we choose to take it) are not beyond the range of his narration" (*Revision* 225-66). This allusion to the England scene (I do choose to take it) may not be the only one. In discussing his plot with Mrs. Prest, the narrator is self-incriminating: "Hypocrisy, duplicity are my only chance. I'm

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have recognised, most notably in plays where magic is overt such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Macbeth*, and *The Tempest*" ("Henry James and Charm" 120).

<sup>15</sup> What Nadia Fusini says with regard to "The Birth Place" applies equally to the narrator of "The Aspern Papers": "it is part of our human, all too human nature, to want to pry into the affairs of others, to look too closely and curiously and impertinently into the lives of others—perhaps because we are dissatisfied with our own" (155). And perhaps the narrator can only become a writer when he realizes that Jeffrey Aspern is not in his private letters to Juliana but in the poems that have been available all along. The name of "the creator," says Fusini, "is the name of the work," and it is the work that "names the creator" (159). This observation is perfectly in keeping with James's own view, expressed in his introduction to *The Tempest*, that Shakespeare is "effectually locked up and imprisoned in the artist" and can only be known through his works (1209).

sorry for it, but for Jeffrey Aspern's sake I would do worse still" (234). That last clause would become, in the New York Edition, "but there's no baseness I wouldn't commit for Jeffrey Aspern's sake" (12), another echo of Malcolm, perhaps, who enumerates Macbeth's vices only to incriminate himself: "But there's no bottom, none, / In my voluptuousness" (IV.3.60-61).

The theme that informs this scene, and indeed all of *Macbeth*, is, as I have written elsewhere,<sup>16</sup> the power of naming. It is most vividly dramatized of course in the scene with the witches at their cauldron, chanting the names of their ingredients and establishing their power over them. This scene responds to the England scene, where in similar catalogue fashion, Malcolm accuses himself of being capable of unspeakable crimes. He is testing Macduff to see if he, like Macbeth, will embrace such criminality as well; but Malcolm is not merely pretending: he is peering into the cauldron, or "cistern" (IV.3.63) that is his own soul and naming every crime of which he too is capable. Thus, he gains control over them, "charming" them in the same way that the witches do the ingredients of their "charmèd pot" (IV.1.9). Like the names of his vices, however, or of the brew's ingredients, proper names and titles—such as Glamis, Cawdor and King—also have an incantatory power. Macbeth's real desire is not to be king but to have the power to determine his own identity, to name himself; hence the deep irony that, by Duncan's authority, he inherits the name, and treasonous character, of Cawdor. And this power to name oneself is exactly what James's narrator wants.

This relationship between Macbeth and Cawdor echoes that between James's narrator and John Cumnor. The narrator's name might already be known to the Misses Bordereau because, like the rebuffed Cumnor, he has published his studies. Mrs. Prest tells him, "you will have to change your name" (235), but he has already seen to the problem: "I drew out of my pocket-book a visiting-card, neatly engraved with a name that was not my own" (235).<sup>17</sup> When he first enters the Bordereau house, he presents his card to the maidservant thus: "I took my false card out of my pocket and held

<sup>16</sup> See "I am as I have Spoken": The Act of Naming in *Macbeth*."

<sup>17</sup> When, for the NYE, James changed "a name that was not my own" to "a well-chosen *nom de guerre*" (13), was he perhaps recalling, with some irony, Macbeth the soldier, whose sword "smoked with bloody execution," and of whom the bloodied captain says: "brave Macbeth—well he deserves that name" (I.2.16)?

it up to her, smiling as if it were a magic token" (236).<sup>18</sup> The feeble power of this card becomes clear when he reveals his real name and that he had been Cumnor's colleague. Tita seems willfully naive: "Gracious, gracious!" she says. "I feel as if you were a new person, now that you have got a new name" (299, 300). Tita seems to know that, like Macbeth, who inherits both the title and the treasonous character of the former Thane of Cawdor, her tenant inherits, at this climactic moment, a similarly dreaded title—"publishing scoundrel"—from his own predecessor. One might even hear, in the name Cumnor, an echo of the name Cawdor.<sup>19</sup>

All of this happens, in both works, amid an almost palpable silence. James's Venice is so quiet that it seems he took its nickname, *La Serenissima*, literally. The hushed setting of "The Aspern Papers" so heightens the incantatory potential of speech that even a character's silence is charged with meaning. James's narrator tells Tita that he "wanted quiet" (239), but what disturbs him most is reticence, especially Juliana's. His reluctance to utter Jeffrey Aspern's name points to his acute awareness of the signifying power with which the sound of that name would land on his ears, if only Juliana—the only living person with true authority to do so—would "pronounce" it: "her lips," however, "never formed in my hearing the syllables that meant so much for her" (288). For James's narrator, all experience is aural, and it is measured in syllables, as it is for Macbeth: "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow / Creeps in this petty pace from day to day / To the last syllable of recorded time" (V.5.19-21). James must have been highly sensitive to the presence of this theme in Shakespeare's play. When Macbeth asks the witches, "What is't you do?" they taunt him with a reply that suggests the ultimate silence—"A deed without a name" (IV.1.71)—as if to mock him and his wife for avoiding the word "murder" and resorting instead to "deed,"<sup>20</sup> a euphemism. James's male

<sup>18</sup> For the NYE, in a remark leading up to this passage regarding the visiting card, James changed "mentioned" and "mention" (231-32) to "name" (8), as if he wanted to accentuate this theme.

<sup>19</sup> O'Leary says that this card "echoes perhaps the losing card Hermann plays at the end of the game," and that James might have had the name Cumnor from Julius Mickle's "Ballad of Cumnor Hall" and the novel it inspired, Walter Scott's *Kenilworth* ("Pushkin in 'The Aspern Papers'").

<sup>20</sup> By the time that all three witches say, "A deed without a name," in unison, the Macbeths have used "deed" evasively eleven times: I.7.14 and 24; II.1.62; II.2. 10, 14, 36, 70, and 76; III.2.45 and 47; and III.4.145.

characters, especially during this period of his work, “control with language,” as Greg Zacharias has shown, whereas the feminine characters “control with silence” (149). In “The Aspern Papers,” the narrator’s attempt to control the Misses Bordereau with his deceitful use of language is mocked by the reticence of Juliana and also, ultimately, by the permanent silence of Jeffrey Aspern, whose papers go up in flames at the hands of Miss Tita.

The hushed setting also accentuates the villain’s fear of discovery, which in both works is embodied in the sound of footsteps on stone floors and the sound, or sensation, of his pounding heart. Macbeth, pondering his crime, asks himself, “why do I yield to that suggestion / Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair / And make my seated heart knock at my ribs / Against the use of nature?” (I.3.134-37); and he fears that the stones under his feet might “prate of my whereabouts” (II.1.59). This complex image, which occurs often in “The Aspern Papers,”<sup>21</sup> might evoke the floorboards and the wild palpitations of the narrator in “The Tell-Tale Heart,” which itself bears signs of the influence of *Macbeth*. However, the lexical and imagistic echoes of *Macbeth* in “The Aspern Papers” suggest that Shakespeare, and not Poe, was the more direct influence.<sup>22</sup> In Piazza San Marco, where James’s narrator attempts to charm Tita into complicity, speech mingles happily with the sounds of footsteps:

The whole place, of a summer’s evening, under the stars and with all the lamps, all the voices and light footsteps on marble (the only sounds of the arcades that enclose it), is like an open-air saloon dedicated to cooling drinks and to a still finer degustation—that of the exquisite impressions received during the day. (259)

The piazza forms a contrast with the Bordereau household, which, like that of the Macbeths, is closed and almost utterly silent. When he first sees the house,

<sup>21</sup> Unlike Macbeth, Pushkin’s Hermann has no palpitations. His “heart,” as he intrudes upon the countess, “beat regularly” (213).

<sup>22</sup> Burton R. Pollin points out “a slight but meaningful two-word phrase, ‘damned spot,’ linking Lady Macbeth’s guilt and would-be purgation with ‘The Tell-Tale Heart.’ Parallels at once appear, between the innocent, benevolent, father-surrogates in both plots; the need to avoid semblances of criminality; emphasis upon bloodshed and ‘washing away’ the ‘tell-tale’ signs; the madness that comes from ‘thinking on it’ (Lady Macbeth and the narrator); the evenhanded justice overtaking such dire murder. The parallel chains seem to stretch out further and further” (161). It is possible, moreover, that Poe’s life, particularly his engagement to Sarah Helen Whitman, exerted some influence over James as he conceived of Jeffrey Aspern and Juliana Bordereau (Kennedy 17-18).

the narrator "looked at the place with my heart beating" (236); when Tita tells him that Juliana indeed has the papers—"Oh, she has got everything!" (277)—her words "caused all my pulses to throb" (277), and like the words of the weird sisters, which Macbeth often repeats to himself, so Tita's words resound in the narrator's mind: "'Oh, she has got everything!'" echoed so in my consciousness" (278), as if that consciousness had the echoing properties of stone. The scene in which the narrator makes his attempt at the papers might, indeed, evoke Macbeth as he approaches Duncan's chamber. James's villain, however, though he proceeds "with a light tread" (296), is betrayed by the floor. "I heard your step" (297), says Tita, which surprises him, and the two of them "strolled through the fine superfluous hall, where on the marble floor—particularly as at first we said nothing—our footsteps were more audible than I had expected" (298).<sup>23</sup>

When he finally does intrude, the silence is the same: "There was no sound—my footstep caused no one to stir" (302). Juliana's words then break this utter silence with the full, crushing force of truth: "Ah, you publishing scoundrel!" (303). This climactic moment is a powerful, humiliating act of naming; "neither shall I ever forget the tone" (303), says the narrator. The words are as terrifying as Macduff's outcry, upon discovering the murdered king: "Ring the alarm bell! Murder and treason! (II.3.73). There is nothing unique, of course, about this, but if this murder scene and its immediate aftermath had in fact influenced James, then surely he would also have been influenced by the ominous knocking at the gate. In fact James stressed this very moment when he wrote about *Macbeth*. Disappointed by Tommaso Salvini's production, James recalled an earlier one which had fully exploited the power of silence to intensify the sense of fear leading up to the knocking at the gate. When Charles Kean "staggered out of the castle," James wrote, "with the daggers in his hands, blanched and almost dumb, already conscious, in the vision of his fixed eyes, of the far fruits of his deed, he brought with

<sup>23</sup> This heightened sense of hearing, which is traditionally associated with witches, aligns the characters of "The Aspern Papers" more closely with those of *Macbeth* than with those of "The Queen of Spades." Pushkin's countess, in fact, is loud and coarse, and hard of hearing. Note her response to Lizaveta, who reads to her from a book: "Louder! What's wrong with you, old girl? Lost your voice or something?" (206). Juliana's hearing, by contrast, is acute. As she tells the narrator, "I hear very well" (242).

him a kind of hushed terror, which has lingered in my mind for many years as a great tragic effect" (176).<sup>24</sup> Salvini's production, however, had fallen short:

That knocking is of great importance,—that knocking is almost everything; this is what I mean by saying that everything in the scene hangs together. Signor Salvini should have read De Quincey's essay before he arranged those three or four vague, muffled, impersonal thumps, behind the back scene. Those thumps would never have frightened Macbeth; there is nothing heart-shaking in those thumps. (177)

As De Quincey had understood so well, the Macbeth household, silent and sleepless, is closed off from the temporal world, which by contrast is marked by speech and sound in general, and the knocking at the gate represents the forcible resumption of time. James was intimately familiar with the acoustical properties of a wooden theatre<sup>25</sup>—with the voices and the tympanic footsteps made by the "poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage" (V.5.24-25)—and how fully the knocking at a stage door can embody fear. In "The Aspern Papers," the word "knock" occurs only once, but in a most significant place, landing, with great emphasis, as the conclusion not only of a sentence but of a paragraph: "My door is shut," says Juliana to the narrator, "but you may sometimes knock" (275). Like Macbeth, James's narrator does not knock; both of them intrude silently, by stealth, and then fail, of course, to

<sup>24</sup> Silence, says Rawlings, is one of the features which characterize the influence of Shakespeare on James: "'Shakespeare'—constituted for James not least in terms of overwhelming and suggestive senses of absence, mystery, silence and all things enigmatic and imponderable—is to an almost unfathomable extent the allusive medium of his criticism, fiction, drama and immense epistolary *corpus*" (96).

<sup>25</sup> The quietude of James's Venice is explicitly aligned with that of a theater: *And somehow the splendid common domicile, familiar, domestic and resonant, also resembles a theatre, with actors clicking over bridges and, in straggling processions, tripping along fondamentas. As you sit in your gondola the footways that in certain parts edge the canals assume to the eye the importance of a stage, meeting it at the same angle, and the Venetian figures, moving to and fro against the battered scenery of their little houses of comedy, strike you as members of an endless dramatic troupe.* (318)

Indeed it must have been these qualities, at least in part, that led James to set "The Aspern Papers" in Venice. Briggs notes, however, that Verrocchio's bronze statue of the Italian *condottiere* recalls the statue in Pushkin's "The Bronze Horseman," which is set in St. Petersburg, the Venice of the North: "one is almost tempted to believe," says Briggs, that the Verrocchio was what prompted James to set his story in Venice (59); Cornwell seconds this view (2004: 199).

silence the truth of their motives, which arrives as involuntarily as the sounds of footsteps on stone or of the beating of a guilty heart.

One final allusion deserves attention here. Tita at one point feels "that the elements of her fate were thickening around her" (293). Was James recalling Lady Macbeth's "Make thick my blood" and "Come thick night" (I.5.42, 49)? Philip Horne has written eloquently about his discovery of the same allusion in "Daisy Miller":

The recognition was a little chilling, only partly because of the deep chill that Lady Macbeth invokes at this moment. I felt as if an abyss had opened up in the text. James, feeling the desire to enrich the suggestiveness of the language at this crucial point in his story, where the hero fatally rejects a human appeal by the heroine, looks back, consciously or unconsciously, to Shakespeare and to a speech that might be taken as the great locus in English poetry for an evocation of the hardening of heart. ("Poets" 75-76)

It is likely that the occurrence of "thickening" in "The Aspern Papers" was suggested to James by this same poetic moment in *Macbeth*, for James was, as Horne says, "extremely receptive to the language of poetry" ("Poets" 72).

Edith Wharton once described the way in which James read poetry aloud: "He chanted it, and he was not afraid to chant it" (922). When he read from Walt Whitman, whom he considered, says Wharton, "the greatest of American poets," and who, along with Byron, might have been among the poets he had in mind when he created Jeffrey Aspern.<sup>26</sup> Wharton and her friends "sat rapt" the whole evening, as James

wandered from "The Song of Myself" to "When lilacs last in the door-yard bloomed" (when he read "Lovely and Soothing Death" his voice filled the hushed room like an organ adagio), and thence let himself be lured on to the mysteries

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<sup>26</sup> The narrator says that Jeffrey Aspern, whose muse "was essentially American," was able "to feel, understand and express everything" (259). Tony Tanner, pondering what kind of American poetry—"omnivourously inclusive" and "omni-porous"—James might have had in mind, suggests: "Perhaps something like the poetry of Walt Whitman, a poet whom the younger James loudly despised, and the old James quietly adored?" (181). See also Jeremy Tambling. Although James had not met Whitman, he would no doubt have discussed him with his friend and fellow expatriate, Logan Pearsall Smith, who, as a child, had known Whitman well and who wrote an intimate account of him in his memoir, *Unforgotten Years* (69-96).



of the music of “Out of the Cradle”, reading, or rather crooning it in a mood of subdued ecstasy till the five-fold invocation to Death tolled out like the knocks in the opening bars of the Fifth Symphony. (922-23)

This James, although he is perhaps not among the Maenads, is akin to that modern Orpheus he had created in Jeffrey Aspern. And it is fortuitous that Wharton should have mentioned here the opening bars of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, which, not unlike the knocking at Macbeth’s gate, are often thought to signify fate knocking at the door. Wharton knew that James indeed had the sensibility of a poet, and that, for him, the work of the poet was to charm or enchant. Like the mocking bird’s lament in “Out of the Cradle,” which awakens the young Whitman’s poetic voice—“A thousand warbling echoes have started to life within me, never to die” (392)—so too, it seems, did Shakespeare awaken the poetic voice of Henry James.

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# Liquid Sound, Fluid Gender: Speech and Sexuality in the New York Edition's "The Siege of London"

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—The priest departs, the divine *literatus* comes.  
Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas* (1871)

When Henry James sat down in the quiet of Lamb House in May 1908, to begin revising the New York Edition's "The Siege of London," he was not the same person he had been in 1883, when the tale was first published by Macmillan. With the rhetorical daring of his late style and the authorial independence of advancing age, he changed oblique references to his anti-heroine's promiscuity to explicit ones, fully exploiting the symbolic valences of her name "Mrs. Headway." Marking a personal and literary evolution a decade in the making, James shook off any lingering Victorian restraint and paralleled these salacious new details with radically altered dialogue, allowing his profligate the full latitude of her Western American vernacular. With these edits, James transformed the sound as well as the sense of his narrative, weaving onomatopoeic slang into a modernist style that he was in the process of inventing. His anti-heroine's libidinous drawl linked his tale to a queer

discourse and diverse American sensibility he had formerly spurned, evidenced by his early rejection of Walt Whitman's flowing cadences and "barbaric yawp."<sup>1</sup> With this sensuous aural dimension, the new "Siege" presaged a more multitudinous world while enacting James's late phase assault on England's genteel diction and binary definitions of gender.

Even before its 1908 incarnation, the original 1883 Macmillan "Siege" was a complex intertwining of multiple literary antecedents, French, English, and American, the latter providing a fund of colloquialisms associated with Gilded Age humorist Mark Twain.<sup>2</sup> At its most basic level, the tale was a re-write of two French plays, *L'Aventurière* (1848) by Émile Augier and *Le Demi-Monde* (1855) by Alexandre Dumas  *fils*, considered by James to be the quintessential French comedy.<sup>3</sup> James's reaction to these plays, in particular to *Le Demi-Monde*, signaled his open stance on the fate of independent women in society, an agenda that drove both versions of his tale and was highlighted by his 1908 revisions. In "Siege," James used *L'Aventurière*, defined as "The Adventuress," as the proverbial play within the play, *in medias res* at the Comédie Française

<sup>1</sup> James's now infamous critique of Whitman's *Drum-Taps* (1865) appeared in *The Nation* 1 (16 November 1865), 625-26. His chosen title of "Mr. Walt Whitman" indicated that he intended to dismiss Whitman's *oeuvre* in its entirety. The opening line read, "It has been a melancholy task to read this book; and it is a still more melancholy one to write about it."

<sup>2</sup> Anticipating Augier and Dumas, William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, published in 1848, warned of the dangers for marriage and social stability from the sexual machinations of cunning status seekers. James's anti-heroine's maiden name "Nancy Beck" alludes to *Vanity Fair*'s Becky Sharp, thus adding Thackeray's comedy of manners to James's cluster of references. James underscores his point with an even more explicit reference when, after meeting her English lover Sir Arthur Demesne, young Waterville mentions that "he had heard of him in London and had seen his portrait in *Vanity Fair*" (*Macmillan* 13; *NYE* 156).

<sup>3</sup> *L'Aventurière* was produced at the Comédie Française in 1848 as a comedy in five acts, reduced by Augier in 1860 to four. The play enjoyed a positive contemporary critical reception as a compound of a *comédie picaresque* and *drame bourgeois*, or comedy of manners, in both its first and second incarnations. Recounting his recent Paris sojourn to his brother William from England in 1870, James proclaimed, "Great too is the Théâtre Français where I saw Molière and Émile Augier most rarely played. En voilà, de l'Art! We talk about it and write about it and critique and dogmatize and analyze to the end of time: but those brave players stand forth and exemplify it and act—create—produce!" (*CLHJ* 1855-72, vol. 2, p. 290). By the end of the decade, with many Paris visits undertaken, James could boast, "I have thoroughly mastered Dumas, Augier and Sardou... and I know all they know and a great deal more besides" (*CLHJ* 1877-78, vol. 2, p. 112).

just before his two American protagonists George Littlemore and Rupert Waterville point their opera-glass at Littlemore's former paramour Nancy Beck, now the widowed Mrs. Headway. Waterville, the inquiring junior Secretary to the American legation in London, possesses James's own voracious cultural appetite, for "He had seen *Le Demi-Monde* a few nights before, and had been told that *L'Aventurière* would show him a particular treatment of the same subject—the justice to be meted out to unscrupulous women who attempt to thrust themselves into honourable families" (*Macmillan* 20). This dramatic theme will comprise, with a Jamesian twist, the primary intrigue in which the two Americans become entangled.<sup>4</sup>

Evidence of James's urge to re-purpose Dumas' *Le Demi-Monde* for his own ends appeared in his 1878 travel essay "Occasional Paris," where he called it "on the whole, in form, the first comedy of our day" (*PP* 92). He added that he had "seen it several times but I never see it without being forcibly struck with its merits. For the drama of our time it must always remain the model." Negotiations with Macmillan in the summer and fall of 1882 to include this travel essay in *Portraits of Places* (1883) brought *Le Demi-Monde* to mind just as he was composing "The Siege of London" (*CHJ* 84-85). The essay shows James reproaching Dumas and indeed French civilisation over the handling of Mrs. Headway's prototype Suzanne d'Ange:

An English-speaking audience is more "moral" than a French, more easily scandalised; and yet it is a singular fact that if the *Demi-Monde* were represented before an English-speaking audience, its sympathies would certainly not go with M. de Jalin. It would pronounce him a coward... The ideal of our own audience would be expressed in some such words as, "I say, that's not fair game. Can't you let the poor woman alone?" (*PP* 94-95)

As "The Siege of London" demonstrates, only the most enlightened denizens of the English-speaking world can "let the poor woman alone." Rupert

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<sup>4</sup> Augier's play concerns a young and fair Spanish adventuress Dona Clorinde, formerly an actress in Madrid with a highly unsavory past. She arrives in Padua with her brother and male companion and proceeds to infiltrate the home and affections of the wealthy patrician Muscarade. Believing her spurious tale of noble birth, the older man resolves to marry her, bringing discord into his household, especially with his son Fabrice who strongly opposes to the marriage as a disgrace to the family name. In contrast to James's tale, the adventuress proves unequal to the family's challenge and departs, leaving Muscarade to reconcile with his children.

Waterville, hampered by lingering puritanism, cannot approach James's salutary liberalism. Betraying his rigid moral principles, he criticizes the male and female characters of the two plays: "It seemed to him that in both of these cases the ladies had deserved their fate, but he wished it might have been brought about by a little less lying on the part of the representatives of honour" (*Macmillan* 20; *NYE* 166). Waterville, like the prudish upper-class Victorians arrayed against Mrs. Headway, serves to point up the essential difference between him and his close friend George Littlemore.

Littlemore, the tale's other central consciousness, emulates James's tolerance, thus correcting the harsh social punishment of both *L'Aventurière* and *Le Demi-Monde* and forestalling the potentially ruthless English outcome. This defiance of norms lays the foundation for James's significant thematic and discursive shift in 1908, when narrative and neologisms express even more radical social abrogations. With a twist of Augier's and Dumas' plot, Littlemore enables James's composite of the two fallen French women to be led to the altar by an honourable English baronet. Littlemore ignores her class, her conduct, and her speech in favor of her mental superiority. In both versions, Littlemore calls her "clever" (*Macmillan* 15; *NYE* 158), echoing James's characterization of Dumas' Suzanne d'Ange as a "clever and superior woman" (*PP* 93). Alone among his elite coterie, Littlemore asserts to his sister Mrs. Dolphin, "It seems to me that she's quite as good as the little baronet" (*Macmillan* 91; *NYE* 256). Eschewing the values of a privileged Bostonian, "sent to Harvard to have his aptitudes cultivated" (*Macmillan* 17; *NYE* 162), this American incarnation of Olivier de Jalin refuses to expose his countrywoman's checkered past. As he explains to his young friend Waterville, "There are certain cases where it's a man's duty to commit perjury... Where a woman's honour is at stake" (*Macmillan* 54; *NYE* 210). Yet it is not the European code of honour he is upholding, for that would have demanded expulsion of the intruder who endangers the sacred order.<sup>5</sup> Rather, Littlemore champions the American values of independence and self-reliance. Committing a sin of omission, Littlemore delays his verdict on Mrs. Headway's moral state, testifying to her lack of respectability only after he learns that she and Sir Arthur Demesne are to be married.

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<sup>5</sup> For an insightful discussion of how James modified the original theme of these plays to fit a modernist purpose, shifting the focus from action and suspense to interior moral struggle, see Habegger. Habegger also discusses the French trope of the societal intruder.

While Littlemore undermines class hierarchy in both versions of the tale, James's 1908 edits highlight his democratic instinct. In both versions, James links Littlemore's *laissez-faire* egalitarianism to his adventurous life in America's Far West, where civilization's positive law has relinquished jurisdiction to the natural law of immense untamed landscapes. James establishes Littlemore's West as a kind of Shakespearian Arcadia, like the pastoral Forest of Arden from *As You Like It*, where formalities disappear and rules break down. With her linguistic playfulness, sharp wit, and flamboyant clothes, the New York Edition's Mrs. Headway mimics Shakespeare's comedic Rosalind, with a queer edge. Parallels to Arcadia in American literature include the forest scenes in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, the cabin in the woods in Thoreau's *Walden*, and the rafting scenes in Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, among others. The influence of this pre-lapsarian paradise on form and content has been singled out by numerous American critics and labeled by Richard Poirier as "a world elsewhere."<sup>6</sup> But James's overt sexual overtones and theatrical speech patterns add a new dimension to this mode, with their discursive link to Walt Whitman. His 1908 corrections will align his tale with what Linda Dowling calls *avant garde* primitivism, a *fin-de-siècle* movement within British aestheticism seeking to revitalize culture through sexual expressiveness and slang (182-83).<sup>7</sup>

In 1883 James knew the Far West and its expressions only vicariously, from reading and listening to American humorist Mark Twain, and from interactions with Mid-westerner John Hay and Western explorer Clarence King. These latter two, mutual friends of Henry Adams, visited James in the summer of 1882, just as he was composing "The Siege of London," accompanying him to Paris that Fall where, like his two protagonists, they experienced the wonders of the glittering city.<sup>8</sup> Explaining his refutation of

<sup>6</sup> American critic Richard Poirier coined this term in his classic analysis *A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature*.

<sup>7</sup> Linda Dowling discusses this movement in *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle*, and chronicles the push to "find the real language of men that could supply the passionate syntax and revivifying diction that was needed... Romantic primitivism had turned against what J. A. Symonds called the 'mental ear...'" (Dowling 182-83).

<sup>8</sup> James had first taken notice of the brilliant adventurer Clarence King after reading parts of his *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada* (1872), first published by William Dean Howells in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1871 and mentioned by James in his unsigned review of John Tynadall's *Hours of Exercise in the Alps* [*Atlantic Monthly*, XXVII (Nov 1871), 635].



the label “gentleman,” Littlemore reminds Mrs. Headway of his past life in New Mexico, “I lived too long in the great South-West” (*Macmillan* 26). The New York Edition revises this line, emphasizing Littlemore’s close intercourse with her, “I guess I’ve sat too much on back piazzas” (*NYE* 173). In the 1883 *Macmillan*, as Littlemore reflects on their past history, he remembers, “There had been of old a very considerable absence of interposing surfaces between these two—he had known her as one knew people only in the great South-West” (*Macmillan* 27). Revising the second half of this sentence, James’s New York Edition inserts meteorological conditions of the Far West, perhaps reflecting James’s March 1905 journey across North America, for “he had known her as one knew people only amid the civilisation of big tornadoes and back piazzas” (*NYE* 175). James’s impressions at the end of *The American Scene* (1907) reflect this openness, for he was overcome by “the great lonely land” (*AS* 463) with “such endless stretching and such boundless spreading” (*AS* 465).

Close reading reveals that the Western element in the original version of the tale served to create a satirical portrait of Mark Twain, thus making it a *roman à clef*, and a vehicle for the use of Western dialect. The point of origin for James’s troubled relationship with this rival author was mutual friend and editor William Dean Howells. Howells’ anonymous review of Twain’s 1869 bestseller *The Innocents Abroad* in the *Atlantic Monthly* placed the Western author in league with high-cultural literary humorists James Russell Lowell and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.<sup>9</sup> As the tribute appeared back to back with Howells’ anonymous review of Henry James, Sr.’s *Secret of Swedenborg* (1869), James would no doubt have seen it. This anointing by the *Atlantic’s* high-priest of literature deepened the friendship between Howells and Twain, while James, formerly Howells’ closest friend, was across the sea on his first

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King was a recognized geologist and expert in mining, having followed *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada* (1872) with *Systematic Geology* (1878). Like Littlemore, King was of New England stock and the son of a China trade merchant, although he attended Yale instead of Harvard. Like Littlemore, King had sojourned in the American West when he served as the first director of the United States Geological Survey, and owned silver mines. Also like Littlemore, King took to European culture with relish. During the period when he was composing “The Siege of London,” James wrote Isabella Stewart Gardner, “[King] is a delightful creature, and is selling silver mines and buying water-colours and old stuff by the million” (*CLHJ* 1880–83, vol. 2, p. 229).

<sup>9</sup> See the two reviews back to back in the *Atlantic Monthly*, v. 24, Jul-Dec. 1869, pp. 762–64; and 764–66.

adult European Grand Tour. In yet another coincidence, the January 1875 issue of the *Atlantic* published Twain's first installment of "Old Times on the Mississippi," a series of seven reminiscences about the majestic river, alongside the opening chapter of James's *Roderick Hudson*.<sup>10</sup> On December 15, 1874, the same day the issue appeared, publishers Henry O. Houghton and Melancthon M. Hurd, along with editor Howells, hosted a dinner at the Parker House in Boston for twenty-eight contributors—all men—to celebrate the publication of the first number of its thirty-fifth volume. Twain delivered a lengthy speech that night, one filled with his characteristic Western argot (Scharnhorst 157). As if unaware of their mutual dislike, Howells sat his two friends Twain and James near him, but on opposite sides of the table. The pairing was obviously a failure, for two months later, James took an anonymous swipe at Twain in *The Nation* in 1875, a denigration reminiscent of his critique of Walt Whitman a decade earlier in the same organ: "In the day of Mark Twain, there is no harm in being reminded that the absence of drollery may, at a stretch, be compensated by the presence of civility" (*Nation*, v. 20, 18 February 1875, 553). James's resentment ran deep, for Twain's popular reception and financial gain had indeed made the 1870's "the day of Mark Twain."<sup>11</sup>

Again oblivious to their mutual dislike, Howells apprised James in August 1879 that the droll teller of tall tales was in England to repeat his incredible social and literary successes of 1872 and 1873.<sup>12</sup> During these earlier visits, Twain's privileged social life among the English elite grew to include James's future acquaintances Robert Browning, George du Maurier,

<sup>10</sup> See Henry James, Jr., *Roderick Hudson*, chapter 1, the *Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 35, Jan-Jun. 1875, pp. 1-15; and Mark Twain, "Old Times on the Mississippi," chapter 1, *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 35, Jan-Jun. 1875, pp. 69-73.

<sup>11</sup> *The Innocents Abroad* sold 39,000 copies in its first three months, eventually profiting Twain quarterly royalty checks totalling \$7000. As Michael Anesko reports in *Friction with the Market*, "The account James received from Howells of the popularity of his two little Harper tales in America was particularly disturbing, because of the modest profit he made by them. Harpers had thus far paid him \$200 for the whole American career of 'Daisy Miller' and \$200 more for all rights to 'An International Episode'" (*Friction* 132).

<sup>12</sup> Twain's unexpected success in 1872 also included calls from novelist Charles Kingsley, pre-Raphaelite painter, and later close friend of James, Sir John Millais, and novelist Charles Reade. Tom Hood, editor of the humor magazine *Fun*, entertained Twain at a meeting of the Whitefriars Club, where he was elected an honorary member. Describing his reception, Twain wrote to his wife Livy that he suffered from "Too much company—too much dining—too much sociability" (qtd. in Scharnhorst, 50-52).

Lord Houghton, John Everett Millais, Ivan Turgenev, and George Smalley, along with novelists Wilkie Collins, George Meredith, and Anthony Trollope (Scharnhorst 84-86). Twain was lionized by London's most elite clubs, including the Athenaeum, the Cosmopolitan, the Garrick, the Westminster, Whitefriars, and the Savage. Central to Twain's success were his Western accent and singular diction. While his first set of lectures in 1873 chronicled his travels in the Sandwich Islands, his second and more successful series detailed his adventures in the Far West, a rendition taken from *Roughing It*, his popular 1872 memoir of California mining life (Scharnhorst 103-104).

English critics reacted in particular to the sound of Twain's voice, both his Western accent and idioms. Following Twain's success in 1872, the *London Telegraph* admired his "mingling of Yankee rhetoric with Cockney rhymes" (qtd. in Scharnhorst 51). In 1873, after hearing Twain's lectures at London's fashionable Queen's Concert Rooms, reviewers, almost unanimous in their admiration, noted the "advantage of increased raciness when heard from his own lips" (qtd. in Scharnhorst 92). The *Times of London* noted that "his quaint dry manner and curious accent provoked much amusement," while The *London Globe* noticed in particular his "tricks of style" (qtd. in Scharnhorst 104). Writing to Howells after dining with Twain in London in August, 1879, James echoed these assessments, emphasizing Twain's rough Western characteristics while masking his dislike, "I have lately seen several times our friend Clemens, on his way back to Hartford. He seemed to me a most excellent fellow—& what they call here very 'quaint.' Quaint he is!" (qtd. in Anesko, *Letters, Fictions, Lives* 138).<sup>13</sup> This widespread English reaction, and James's sensitive ear, formed the basis for the original aural dimension of the tale.

James 1883 "Siege" supplied the substratum of his later emphasis on gender non-conformity, as it undercut Twain's tough male persona depicted in *Roughing It* by applying his well-known epithets and salty idioms to Mrs. Headway. After being dubbed the "Wild Humorist of the Pacific Slope" by publisher and fellow humorist Charles Henry Webb in the 1867 introduction to the first edition of *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*, Twain became widely known by that moniker (Twain, "Advertisement"). James uses this same label for Mrs. Headway, dubbing her in as "a flower of the Pacific Slope" (*Macmillan* 15) and also an "American humorist" (*Macmillan* 82).

<sup>13</sup> According to the OED, "quaint" carried a deprecating slant in the mid-nineteenth century, meaning "unusual in character and appearance" as well as "old-fashioned."

Echoing Twain's amazement over his London success, Mrs. Headway describes the power of her speech to her American gentlemen friends in the 1883 Macmillan, "they come simply to get things to repeat. I can't open my mouth but they burst into fits. It's a settled thing that I'm an American humorist; if I say the simplest things, they begin to roar" (*Macmillan* 83). In the New York Edition, James softens her association with Twain by revising this line as "It's a settled thing that I'm a grand case of the American funny woman" (*NYE* 244). Another indication that James shifted his 1908 New York Edition away from a parody of Twain is his labelling of Mrs. Headway as "the well-known Texan belle" (*NYE* 159), a sobriquet with no direct association to Twain. With "Texan belle," James links Mrs. Headway instead to Belle Starr, bandit Queen of the Wild West who robbed trains in the 1880's and married a succession of outlaws, just as Mrs. Headway had "borne half a dozen names... she must have repudiated more husbands than she had married" (*Macmillan* 14; *NYE* 158).<sup>14</sup> And whereas in the Macmillan she possesses a "fund of Californian slang" (*Macmillan* 84), yet another association with Twain, James changes this line in the New York Edition to her "fund of Texan slang" (*NYE* 246).

Having dined with Twain at London dinner parties in the summer of 1879, James's ear could measure the discordant nature of his Western accent against more dulcet English tones. In order to illustrate this dissonance, James inserts Mrs. Headway into the quiet precincts of Longlands, the country seat of her paramour Sir Arthur Demesne. When Mrs. Headway accidentally confronts her American friend Rupert Waterville in the extensive grounds, we learn that her "laugh rang through the stately gardens" (*Macmillan* 71; *NYE* 230). As she explains, "I talk about everything. When I'm excited I've got to talk" (*Macmillan* 71; *NYE*, 230). During the dinner scene at Sir Arthur Demesne's country estate, James is particularly cruel to Twain, as impersonated by Mrs. Headway, by portraying his social success as venal self-promotion, accompanied by flamboyant clothes and low slang. Seen through the eyes of Rupert Waterville, the English "understood each other's accent, even each other's variations. Mrs. Headway, with all her prettiness, seemed to transcend these variations; she looked foreign, exaggerated; she had too much expression; she might have been engaged for the evening" (*Macmillan* 64). James ruthlessly

<sup>14</sup> James might have seen one of the many articles or tales about her, including the popular dime novel *Bella Starr, the Bandit Queen, or the Female Jesse James*, published in 1889, the year of her death, by Richard K. Fox.

parodies Twain's monetary gains: "Waterville remarked, moreover, that English society was always looking out of amusement, and that its transactions were conducted on a cash basis" (*Macmillan* 64). Indeed, Twain himself marveled at his monetary gains during his 1872 lecture tour in Britain, a fact that compelled him to return twice in 1873 (Scharnhorst 86-87). In the New York Edition, James rewrites this passage to underscore its sexually transgressive connotations, replacing "looking out" with "clutching" and "transactions" with the more graphic "business was transacted": "Waterville remarked moreover that English society was always clutching at amusement and that the business was transacted on a cash basis" (*NYE* 221). The later Mrs. Headway's more brazen exploits and added slang heighten her deviance.

The 1908 revisions purposely make Mrs. Headway worse, but James likes her better, for he is shifting the narrative away from a specific satire of Twain towards a parable about the radical personal freedom he experienced in the American West, and his own re-evaluation of Walt Whitman's encoded desire. James's reversal on Whitman, perhaps germinating for years in his mind, was crystalized in 1898 when he positively reviewed two posthumous collections of Whitman's letters for the short-lived journal *Literature*. In re-reading Whitman in the 1890's, James reveled in the intermingling of sexual autonomy with natural wildness, expressed in onomapoetic language.<sup>15</sup> One of those two volumes was the explicitly homo-erotic *Calamus: A Series of Letters Written by Walt Whitman to a Young Friend* (1897). Recognizing "the beauty of the natural," James's review focused in particular on Whitman's aural aspects, lauding the poet's "audible New Jersey voice" that relates "many odd and pleasant human harmonies."<sup>16</sup> A tally of James's Lamb House library reveals that James owned not only these two collections of Whitman's letters, but also Whitman's 1855 first edition of *Leaves of Grass* as well as his final "death-bed" edition, released posthumously in 1900 by Whitman's publisher David McKay, proving that James was collecting Whitman into his late phase.<sup>17</sup> This hypothesis is confirmed by the fact that Lamb House shelves also contained

<sup>15</sup> Ironically, in James's original review of Whitman's *Drum-Taps* in 1865, he specifically called out Whitman's use of slang, objecting to the words "libertad," "camerado," "Americanos," "trottoir," and "chansonnier," asserting "If there is one thing that Mr. Whitman is not it is this..." (*LC* 1: 631).

<sup>16</sup> See *Literature* I, April 16, 1898, 453.

<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that James purchased this particular version of two "death-bed" volumes, containing extra sections of unpublished poems, Whitman's autobiography *A*

John Addington Symonds' 1893 analysis *Walt Whitman: A Study*, and Horace Traubel's *With Walt Whitman in Camden* (1900), a four volume collection of Whitman's conversations, manuscripts, and letters assembled by his devoted amanuensis. This resource contained correspondence to Whitman from English Whitmanites Edward Carpenter and John Addington Symonds, outspoken advocates for decriminalization of homosexuality and for a new literature to express democratic principles based on Whitman's homosocial "adhesiveness."<sup>18</sup>

James's 1908 allusions to Whitman change the sound as well as the sense of his tale, inscribing the coded desire of the poet's queer linguistics.<sup>19</sup> In 1883, justifying his fondness for Mrs. Headway, Littlemore tells Waterville, "Some of those Western women are wonderful" (*Macmillan* 15). James changes this line in 1908 to "Some of those barbaric women are wonderful" (*NYE* 159). While this edit bolsters a continuing trope of Mrs. Headway as an invader into polite society, it also references Whitman's "barbaric yawp" (Whitman, *Leaves 1855* p. 55 and *1900* p. 93).<sup>20</sup> A distinguishing feature of *Leaves of Grass* is Whitman's frequent use of onomatopoeic slang, exemplified not only by his "yawp," but also by neologisms such as "the blab of the pave," "Washes and razors for fofoos," or the "tramp tramp of a million men" (Whitman, *Leaves 1855* pp. 29 and 44; *Leaves 1900* p. 507). Heedless of propriety, Whitman also employs

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*Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads*, as well as facsimiles of personal letters to publisher David McKay inserted after the frontispiece.

<sup>18</sup> James met Symonds face to face early in his London residency, introduced by mutual friend Andrew Lang in February 1877, and corresponded with Symonds after he moved to Davos, Switzerland, sending Symonds his essay "Venice" that appeared in *Century Magazine*, 25 (November 1882), 8-23. Through Edmund Gosse, James remained one degree of separation from Symonds until his death in 1893. His Lamb House library contained no fewer than twenty books by Symonds. In a letter to Manton Marble, James writes that he treasured Symonds' *Walt Whitman: A Study* (1893).

<sup>19</sup> With terms such as "gay" and indeed with the concept itself of identity and desire linked to language and discourse, James introduces *avant la lettre* the paradigm of queer linguistics.

<sup>20</sup> Harvard's Houghton Library holds this rare 1855 *Leaves of Grass* from Lamb House, even though it is not mentioned by Leon Edel and Adeline Tintner in *The Library of Henry James*. Written in pencil on the flyleaf is the statement, "From Henry James' Library at Lamb House, Rye," signed by his nephew, "H. J., 10 East 10<sup>th</sup> Street, New York." Across, on the inside of the cover, written in the same hand, "1<sup>st</sup> very rare edition of Whitman; the set up entirely by the poet himself." James also owned the homo-erotic *Calamus: A Series of Letters Written by Walt Whitman to a Young Friend* (1897), as well as *The Wound-Dresser* (1898), Whitman's touching letters to his mother from the Civil War hospitals where he tended sick and dying Union soldiers.

expletives such as “By God!” and “O Christ!” (Whitman, *Leaves 1855* p. 45 and 64; *Leaves 1900* p. 75). In James’s 1908 version, he changes Mrs. Headway’s ejaculation “for God’s sake” to the more profane “for Christ’s sake” (*NYE 262*), and adds exclamations such as “get right hold,” “make that right up,” and “Oh shucks!”, along with a number of new “ain’ts.” Both versions show her future mother-in-law, the indomitable dowager Lady Demesne, despairing over this incongruous cacaphony, lamenting, “It hurts me to hear her voice” (*Macmillan 80*; *NYE 240*). In the Macmillan version, Waterville counters with, “Her voice is very sweet” (*Macmillan 80*). In 1908, James’s revision is more suggestive, as he ventures instead, “Her voice is very liquid” (*NYE 240*). Significantly, the omniscient narrator adds, “He liked his word.” James, too, liked the word “liquid,” used literally to modify water and bodily fluids and figuratively to describe mellifluous sound and protean identities.

“Liquid” was a word repeatedly deployed by Walt Whitman in both his 1855 first edition of *Leaves of Grass* and his final 1900 ‘deathbed’ version, where “liquid” appears no fewer than fifteen times, in key passages having to do with actual and metaphorical liquidity. For Whitman, “liquid” was an onomatopoeic word that, as both a noun and an adjective, referenced suppressed sexual acts as well as natural phenomena, thus normalizing queer desire by associating it with sounds of birdsong and the sea. Referencing semen, “liquid” appears in 1855 in a homo-erotic verse of “Song of Myself,” “Ever love... ever the sobbing liquid of love” (Whitman, *Leaves 1855* p. 70). In 1900, “liquid” modifies the voice of the consoling bird in Whitman’s poignant elegy “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d,” with “O liquid, and free, and tender, / O wild and loose to my soul!” (*Leaves 1900* p. 371).<sup>21</sup> “Liquid” also frequently appears in Whitman’s two homoerotic poetic sequences, both “The Children of Adam” and “Calamus,” added to *Leaves of Grass* in 1860. In “The Children of Adam,” Whitman calls attention to “liquid” in an alliterative homo-erotic passage, “The curious roamer, the hand, roaming all over the body—the bashful withdrawing of flesh where the fingers soothingly pause and edge themselves, / The limp

<sup>21</sup> Whitman began composition of “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” almost immediately after the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln in April 1865. He included the poem in his *Sequel to Drum-Taps* (1865) and eventually bound it together with *Drum-Taps*. James would have read this poem when he reviewed *Drum-Taps* for *The Nation* 1 (16 November 1865), 625–26. The poem did not appear in *Leaves of Grass* until its 1881 incarnation, which was folded into the 1892 death-bed edition. James instead owned David McKay’s later version.

liquid within the young man..." (*Leaves 1900* p.110). In "Calamus," Whitman embeds "liquid" among a concatenation of onomatopoeic sounds describing the primal sound of the sea. This natural background consecrates the poet's same-sex desire: "I heard the hissing rustle of the liquid and sands as directed to me, whispering, to congratulate me/For the one I love most lay sleeping by me under the same cover in the cool night..." (*Leaves 1900* p.127). In *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, Whitman characterizes his poetry as "liquid, billowy waves, ever rising and falling, perhaps sunny and smooth, perhaps wild with storm, always moving, always alike in their nature as rolling waves... never having the sense of something finished and fixed, always suggesting something beyond" (Traubel, v. 1, 414-15). James's revisions inscribe Whitman's liquidity, tracing a queer linguistic trail throughout the narrative.

As James pivots away from Twain and towards Whitman in 1908, Mrs. Headway's voice, sometimes exclamatory, sometimes liquid, parallels her personal and sexual freedom. When, in the 1883 version, George Littlemore asks if she is traveling with Sir Arthur Demesne, she answers, "Do people travel with their lovers?" In 1908, revealing a more brazen disregard for convention, she answers, "Do people travel—publicly—with their lovers?" (*NYE* 121). James's most sexually explicit revision of "The Siege of London" appears in a scene in the Luxembourg Gardens, where Mrs. Headway has gone with Waterville to see the exhibition of contemporary French painting, noticing in particular Thomas Couture's famous 1847 canvas *Romains de la Decadence*.<sup>22</sup> Littlemore's sister Mrs. Dolphin references this canvas when she regrets that the English aristocracy have become "like the decadence of the Roman Empire" (*Macmillan* 91). With this panorama of lechery as their backdrop, Mrs. Headway confides to Waterville that she has had a questionable past. The 1883 *Macmillan* has the following passage:

They decided I was improper. I'm very well known in the West—I'm known from Chicago to San Francisco—if not personally in all cases, at least by reputation. People can tell you out there... The New Yorkers didn't think me proper. Such as you see me here, I wasn't a success! I tell you the truth at whatever cost. Not a decent woman came to see me! (*Macmillan* 48-49)

<sup>22</sup> Suggesting James's ambiguous reaction to British aestheticism, this scene possibly references Walter Pater's *Marius the Epicurian* (1885), which James owned, a novel that describes Roman decadence in vivid detail, aesthetic images through which Pater hoped to enact a saving sensuality for his own *fin-de-siècle* moment.



The more explicit New York Edition completely revises this section:

There are plenty of spicy old women who decided I was a bad bold thing. They found out I was in the gay line. They discovered I was known to the authorities. I am very well known all out West—I'm known from Chicago to San Francisco; if not personally at least by reputation. I'm known to all classes. They thought me "gay," me gay there in Fifty-eighth street without so much as a cat! (NYE 14 202-03)

As Adeline Tintner explains in *The Twentieth-Century World of Henry James*, according to the OED, being in the "gay line" meant "in *slang* use, of a woman: Leading an immoral life, living by prostitution" (Tintner 197). James thus exposes Mrs. Headway's real profession. She was not just a divorcée; she was a woman of ill repute, "known to the authorities." Emphasizing the diversity of the burgeoning American West, James adds that she was "known to all classes." But "gay" had yet another meaning that Tintner ignores. Repeating "gay" three times, James challenges his Edwardian reader to consider the sexual as well as social connotations of this passage. Recent critics Richard Dellamora (184), Kevin Ohi (38), Hugh Stevens (11-13), and Jeffrey Weeks (42), among others, have shown that by 1908, "gay" as connoting same-sex desire was circulating in homosocial and queer circles. James thus links Mrs. Headway's "bold" past with non-binary gender fluidity.<sup>23</sup>

This radically altered passage shows Mrs. Headway expressing particular consternation over the fact that she was rejected by New York society matrons, even though she lived "without so much as a cat!"<sup>24</sup> James's reference is multilayered, for the OED lists the expression "gay cat" as originating in the American West in 1897, well before James's journey, and defined as "a young and inexperienced tramp, esp. one who has a homosexual relationship with an older tramp; a hobo who accepts occasional work."<sup>25</sup> Indigenous to

<sup>23</sup> While the OED registers the first appearance of 'gay' to mean 'homosexual' in Gertrude Stein's 1922 *Miss Furr and Miss Skeene*, James scholars demonstrate that the term circulated among homosocial and homosexual fraternities much earlier.

<sup>24</sup> According to the OED, the figurative use of "cat" to mean a backbiting or spiteful woman came into use as early as 1225, followed by Shakespeare's use of the word in *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Coriolanus*. But by 1763, as seen in Francis Brooke's *History of Lady Julia Mandeville*, usage shifted to "cat" as a profligate, "An old cat... who is a famous proficient in scandal" (OED, cat, 2. A. figurative).

<sup>25</sup> This term appears in both the OED and the *Oxford Dictionary of Modern Slang*, eds. John Ayto and John Simpson (106).

the West, the expression emphasizes the region's social and sexual fluidity and its acceptance of deviance. James has thus re-written his tale as a subversive parable of untamed centrifugal forces about to dilute England's weakened stock, emblemized by Couture's decadents.

Like a ghostly literary pentimento, James's unwritten second volume of *The American Scene* underlies these camp Western expressions and Whitmanesque queer linguistics. James ended the first volume of *The American Scene* by musing on the meaning of America's vast landscapes that he had viewed from the train as he speeded West in 1905. Anticipating a fuller disquisition on the West in the second volume, he labeled this ominous lament on the taming of the West as "The Last Question": "To what extent was hugeness, to what extent could it be, a ground for complacency of view, in any country not visited for the very love of wildness, for positive joy in barbarism?" (*AS* 462). The word "barbarism" links this passage to Whitman, and anticipates his revised Mrs. Headway. Thrust beyond the comforts of London, James discovered an affinity to the wildness of his own native land. Eventually reaching the Pacific shore, James traveled farther than nature writers Whitman and Thoreau, as far as his old rival Twain. James mourned the ruin of this wildness, personifying the Pullman trains as the enemy of the frontier, "The Pullman cars touch the great lonely land—as one feels it still to be—only to plant upon it some ugliness about which, never dreaming of the grace of apology or contrition, you then proceed to brag with a cynicism all your own" (*AS* 463-64). James, transformed by his pilgrimage, longed for the wild, "Oh for a split or a chasm, one groans beside your plate-glass, oh for an unbridgeable abyss or an insuperable mountain!" (*AS* 465).

Letters reveal that James's proposed second volume of *The American Scene* was to be called *The Sense of the West*, with "sense" signifying the variable intimations of personal experience and individual consciousness. He originally meant to include these impressions in his first volume. As James wrote to D. A. Munro of *Harper's* on September 26, 1905, "What I shall send you will be more or less exactly the following. Boston, Salem, Concord etc. Philadelphia and Washington. Baltimore and the South. The Middle West: an Impression. California and the Pacific Coast..." (*HJL* 427). The completed book instead contained chapters on Boston, Concord and Salem, Philadelphia, Washington, Baltimore, Richmond, Charleston and Florida, but nothing on "The Middle West: an Impression" or "California and the Pacific Coast." Later that autumn, James decided to postpone the Western chapters for yet another

volume. He reported to his close friend Morton Fullerton on December 2, 1905 that “now it appears that I shall have uncannily hived enough acrid honey to make, probably, a couple of books (of social notes &c)—instead of the scant *one* I had very timidly planned” (*HJL* 427). As he told his agent J. B. Pinker on December 5, “I should be willing... to call the second book ‘The Sense of the West’; which is a name that might also do for the first, were it not that the second then remains in the background awaiting its ticket, and that the S. of the W. is better for it than for its predecessor’ (qtd. in Horne, “Sense of the West,” 1). After realizing that this proposed second volume would be unwritten, he suggested a fictional use to Fullerton on August 8, 1907, “I *have* a great many other & *inédites* Impressions—but shall have to use them in some other & ‘indirect’ way” (qtd. in Horne, “Sense of the West” 1).

From letters, we can glean that James’s “sense of the West” was sexually charged, revealing that strong a discursive link to Whitman, and to the edited “Siege,” his “indirect” receptacle for stored up material. As he wrote to his sister-in-law Alice on March 24, 1905, “California... is clearly very amusing and different, quite amiably & unexpectedly *gay*—quite another than the eastern note—& even in the large bustling hall of this (very excellent) hotel, where I write, intimations of *climate*, of a highly seductive order, are wafted in upon me” (*DMF* 53). A week later he reports again on the seductive surroundings and sounds, “The days have been mostly here of heavenly beauty, and the flowers, the wild flowers just now in particular, which fairly *rage*, with radiance, over the land, are worthy of some purer planet than this. I live on oranges and olives, fresh from the tree, and I lie awake nights to listen, on purpose, to the languid lisp of the Pacific, which my windows overhang” (*LHJ* 357). James’s onomatopoeic “languid lisp” presages Mrs. Headway’s “liquid” voice and is reminiscent of Whitman’s descriptions of the ocean, as in “the hissing rustle of the liquid” from “Calamus” or “the hoarse surging of the sea” where the ripples “rustle up, hoarse and sibilant” from “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,” the poem James read aloud in 1904 at Edith Wharton’s house in the Berkshires (*Leaves* 1900 pp. 402 and 408; Wharton 186).

With its sensual aural dimension, James’s second “Siege” reverberates beyond its scant pages, calling us to reevaluate the purpose of the New York Edition, and to seek new sounds in other revised tales. With its link to Whitman and to James’s transformative travels, the 1908 “Siege of London” professes a more radical James, an author intent on promulgating a kind of egalitarianism nurtured by his sense of the West. In the Preface to volume 14

of the New York Edition, where “The Siege of London” is collected, James uncovers this formerly unseen project. He envisions a more diverse society “beyond certain stiff barriers” where he imagines “some eventual consensus of the educated; the exquisite conceivabilities of which, intellectual, moral, emotional, sensual, social, political... may make many of those of a more familiar type turn pale. *There*, if one will—in the dauntless fusions to come—is the personal drama of the future’ (NYE 14, ix-x). James’s “dauntless fusions” suggest a blurring of boundaries, a dissolving of binaries, where the “sensual” element will combine with the social and political to comprise “the personal drama of the future.” Lady Demesne has more to fear than the echo of Mrs. Headway’s barbaric yawp across the quiet precincts of Longlands, for her new daughter-in-law is the harbinger of a pluralistic world.

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# Imitation and the Construction of Tradition: Henry James and the Representation of the American Voice<sup>\*</sup>

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

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<sup>\*</sup> This essay is partly based on my Japanese-language 2019 article whose main title translates in English as “*The American* as Comedy.” Full bibliographic information (in English) is provided in the list of Works Cited.



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

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

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

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

#### A CALL FOR A CONSCIOUS USE OF LANGUAGE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### WHAT CONSTITUTES A TRADITION?

##### *THE GREAT TRADITION AND “TRADITION AND THE INDIVIDUAL TALENT”*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### AN AMERICAN TRADITION AS THE ORIGINAL COPY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

#### THE AMERICAN AS A POSTCOLONIAL SUBJECT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## AMERICANS IN IN-BETWEEN SPACES

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

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

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

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

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

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# The Sound of the “Right Letter”: An Attempt at Deciphering “The Figure in the Carpet”

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“The Figure in the Carpet” was first published in installments in two issues of *Cosmopolis*, starting from the very first one, in January 1896 (it was an experimental “International Revue,” published simultaneously in Paris, London, Berlin, Vienna, St. Petersburg, Amsterdam and New York, with original texts printed in English, French and German). The first installment of James’s short story followed the last, unfinished novel by Robert Louis Stevenson (*Weir of Hermiston*) and a historical paper on the origins of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 and was preceded by a critical appraisal of the last published novel by Thomas Hardy (*Jude the Obscure*), written by Edmund Gosse.<sup>1</sup> In his self-advertisement, the French co-editor (Armand Colin) stressed several times the importance of living languages. He pointed out that not only was the latest paper addressed especially to those who read in foreign languages, “qui lisent les langues étrangères” (1) but that also those who read only in one living language, “qui ne lisent qu’une langue vivante” (2) could profit from some 200 pages of the text available to them. Generally speaking,

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<sup>1</sup> Henry James was a friend of Stevenson and frequent visitor at his house Skerryvore, as documented in *Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson*.



the *novellas* and short stories published every month in one of the three languages were supposed to serve as models to study the most important living languages: “de fournir les plus parfaits modèles qui peuvent servir à l’étude des principales langues vivantes” (2).

The title of the paper was a clear allusion and sort of *homage* to the French writer Paul Bourget and his novel *Cosmopolis* (1892). Bourget, a friend and a disciple of Henry James, came at the end of August 1895 to Torquay with his wife Minnie to spend a month with James, who highly enjoyed the conversations with his French colleague: “Bourget’s mind is in the real solitude in which I live, beneath what has been so much social chatter, a flowering oasis in conversational sands” (L 19, to William James, September 30, 1895). The following August, when the Bourgets came for two days to London, they dined on both nights with James, one of which at the generous invitation of Fernand Ortman, the editor of *Cosmopolis* (L 34, to Edmund Gosse, August 28, 1896).<sup>2</sup> Even if these two occasions, on James’s part, “were not as rich in incident and emotion as poetic judgement demanded” (L 34), Minnie and Paul Bourget remained for James, until their divergence of opinions over the Dreyfus case and even for some years after, participants in numerous conversations. One of the reasons for their reciprocal pleasure is to be found, according to Adeline R. Tintner, in a complex mixture of the general cosmopolitan attitude of both writers, combined with their criticism of some aspects of that very attitude within their respective societies.

The title of Henry James’s story in *Cosmopolis* was most probably taken from “Miss Grief” (1880) by Constance Fenimore Woolson, the American author and Henry James’s friend, who fell from a window in Venice in 1894. Woolson’s story reads like an anticipation of the central problem of “The Figure in the Carpet,” that of the incomprehension of a writer shown by the critics and his longing for an ideal reader, able to fully grasp his literary intention. The heroine of Woolson’s story, a bizarre aspiring female writer, comes to a renowned novelist and recites in front of him one of his works, all of which she knew by heart. The recital involves a conversation between two characters, particularly important for the author and strangely neglected by his readers:

<sup>2</sup> On the relationship between James and Ortman, whom he calls on one occasion “an old acquaintance,” see: Ferguson (295). For a recent analysis of the *Cosmopolis* as a “diplomatic platform” for different forms of cosmopolitanism see: Van Dam 179. For Van Dam “The Figure in the Carpet” is “an allegory of reading as much as it is an allegory on diplomacy” (183), but also “a rewarding case study from a theoretical point of view” (184).

Her very voice changed, and took, though always sweetly, the different tones required, while no point of meaning, however small, no breath of delicate emphasis which I had meant, but which the dull types could not give, escaped an appreciative and full, almost overfull, recognition which startled me. For she had understood me—understood me almost better than I had understood myself. It seemed to me that while I had labored to interpret, partially, a psychological riddle, she, coming after, had comprehended its bearings better than I had, though confining herself strictly to my own words and emphasis. ("Miss Grief" 641)

The recitation of the original text is here opposed to the printed version ("the dull types"); the author's "words and emphasis" come back to him in their full meaning through the voice of the lady as an unexpected riddle, the solution of which eludes him.

"The Figure in the Carpet" explores on different levels the acoustic aspect of human communication. The unnamed narrator describes a sort of speechlessness in the very first sentence of the text, mentioning that George Corvick was "breathless and worried" (C 41), when he came to ask the narrator a service which was to become his new beginning: "my real start" (C 41).<sup>3</sup> Further, he describes the proposal he obtained to review the latest book by the famous writer, Hugh Vereker, in terms that combine a religious, theological notion with a sensual feeling of seizure: "There was almost rapture in hearing it proposed to me" (C 41). The last part of the conversation between the two critics is punctuated by the theme of speaking and of the distribution of roles. Corvick advises: "Speak of him, you know, if you can, as *I* should have spoken of him ... he gives me a pleasure so rare; the sense of—he mused a little—'something or other'" (C 42). The narrator wonders: "The sense, pray, of what?" Corvick insists: "My dear man, that's just what I want *you* to say!" (C 42). The next sentence is, acoustically speaking, a pregnant one: "Even before Corvick had banged the door I had begun, book in hand, to prepare myself to say it" (C 42).

Having published his review, the narrator has an opportunity to meet Vereker at a social gathering. Assuming that the writer has read his review, he is all ears to hear some words of thanks: "I had not yet caught in his talk the faintest grunt of a grudge—a note for which my young experience had already given me an

<sup>3</sup> In order to stress the importance of *Cosmopolis* as a point of departure in the study of living languages, all quotations from "The Figure in the Carpet" are taken from this edition.

ear" (C 43). His expectations are disappointed: "I had on my tongue's end, for my own part, a phrase or two about the right word at the right time; but later on I was glad not to have spoken, ..." (C 44). The hostess, Lady Jane, brings a copy of the paper, unconsciously echoing the formula used by Corvick: "'Some sweet little truths that needed to be spoken,' I heard her declare ..." (C 44). And she persuades, almost forces, Vereker to read the review in question. The result is quite devastating for the young critic, who listens avidly: "and while I strained my ear for his reply I heard him, to my stupefaction, call back gaily, his mouth full of bread: 'Oh, it's all right—it's the usual twaddle!'" (C 45). This verdict gives a taste of the main theme of the story, that of incomprehension.

George Corvick and his fiancée, Miss Gwendolen Erme, are involved in the search for something that can be contained in a letter; according to the narrator: "Vereker's own statement to me was exactly that the 'figure' *would* go into a letter" (C 376).<sup>4</sup> Corvick goes on a professional trip to India and from there he sends, instead of an awaited letter, a telegram, containing only two words: "Eureka. Immense" (C 375). "Eureka" is an exclamation. Also, the letter that follows is preceded by some acoustic effects: "late one day I heard a hansom rattle up to my door with the crash engendered by a hint of liberality" (C 377). This sounds like an announcement of a fearful message in a Greek tragedy. The message itself is short and almost audible, recalling the form of a haiku: "Just seen Vereker—not a note wrong. Pressed me to bosom—keeps me a month" (C 377). This right "note" is an annunciation, a promise, as the next letter from Corvick reveals, that "he'd tell her after they were married exactly what she wanted to know" (C 378).

George Corvick, his fiancée and the narrator (not to mention the generations of readers) are looking for a clue that would fit into a letter and into a marriage. But what if Vereker was thinking not about a letter sent in an envelope but about a letter as a part of the alphabet? Such a solution had already been proposed in the text of "The Figure in the Carpet," namely when the narrator launched the hypothesis "Perhaps it's a preference for the letter P!" (C 51) and gave some examples of potential alliterations: "Papa, potatoes, prunes—that sort of thing?" (C 51). Vereker's answer was ambiguous: "he only said I hadn't got the right letter" (C 51).

Among all the letters of the English alphabet at least two have gained independent personal meaning: *I* and *U*. The former stands for the first

<sup>4</sup> In the book version James replaced "go" with "fit."

person singular, the latter for the second person singular or plural. *I* would qualify for Walt Whitman, the author of "Song of Myself," but not for Henry James. *U*, on the other side, representing *You*, *The Other*, fulfills also the second aspect, connected with the notion of a marriage, of a union between two persons. Corvick's telegram combines both: "Eureka" represents *U*, the solution of the enigma, while "Immense," with a capital *I*, stands for the signature, as the narrator comments: "That was all—he had saved the cost of the signature" (C 375). The frequency of the letter *u* in "The Figure in the Carpet" is about 2.89, slightly above the average for the English language. But in some significant passages it increases rapidly, for instance in the description of Corvick's triumph at his discovery: "He was magnificent in his triumph, he described his discovery as stupendous; but his ecstasy only obscured it—there were to be no particulars till he should have submitted his conception to the supreme authority," (C 376, my italics) it is 5.71, almost twice (1.98) as much. The letter *u* occurs in the word "Figure" of the title of the short story, where one might expect the noun *pattern*. We are left with the impression that it had to contain a *u* since *u* as *you*, the second person singular or plural, is in fact a figure. *U* appears also in a phrase, used by Vereker to describe his secret formula—"It's the very string," he said, "that my pearls are strung on!" (C 55), not only in the transformation of the noun *string* into the verb *strung*, but also in the implied image of a string of pearls, that, seen from the front, recalls the letter *U*.

In a series of comparisons, given by Vereker: "The thing's as concrete there as a bird in a cage, a bait on a hook, a piece of cheese in a mouse-trap. It's stuck into every volume as your foot is stuck into your shoe" (C 50), the shape of the letter *U* seems inscribed in all four of them. Inverted *U* is the shape of a typical bird-cage. Fishing hooks are usually shaped like the letter *U* with one arm longer. In mouse-traps the metal part is nowadays usually rectangular, but at the end of the XIX century it used to be like a *U*—as in the 1879 patent for an "Animal-Trap" by J. M. Keep, with a "pivoted jaw" (1), or in the 1894 patent for an "animal trap" by W. C. Hooker, with "a spring-actuated jaw" (1). The image of a foot inside a shoe also recalls the shape of the letter *U*. In all four similes, true, the *U*-shapes seem to play a secondary role. A bird is more visible than his cage, a piece of cheese as well as a bait more attractive than a trap or a hook, a foot more important than a shoe. That could be explained by the interrelation between *U/You* as an object of love and attention, and *I/Myself*, or the person who has to make the choice and to pronounce: "You!"

Besides that, the letter *u* appears once, sometimes twice, in almost all of the unexpected words used by Henry James in this story. Here are some examples, in alphabetical order: beguiled, commensurate, convolution, a rare dunce, our gregarious walk, grunt of a grudge, lucubrations, the lustre of the article, manoeuvre, obtuseness, ormolu tables, portraiture, secousse, succor, surreptitious. Two of these words seem particularly interesting. *Dunce* as a sort of an ambivalent insider's joke: it denotes nowadays a dumb or lazy pupil, singled out by a conical hat with a big letter *D* written on it, but the origins of the word reach far back into the Middle Ages, to the person of the philosopher John Duns Scotus, when such a hat was a sign of outstanding wisdom. Similarly, the narrator of "The Figure in the Carpet" oscillates between the satisfaction derived from having written an intelligent review and the humiliating admission of his own inability to solve Vereker's enigma. The other word is *ormolu*, which refers to a technique of gilding a solid surface, mostly made of bronze, with gold. The literal sense of the French expression "or moulu" is melted gold. This evokes the phraseological notion of a melted heart. And Vereker speaks about his secret: "Well, you've got a heart in your body. Is that an element of form or an element of feeling?" (C 50). Apart from that, ormolu tables usually have cabriole legs that, taken upside down, form two pairs of the letter *U*.

There are two *u's* in the Latin quote, used by Miss Gwendolen Erme to comment on the discovery made by George Corvick: "Vera incessu patuit dea!" (C 375). This passage from the *Aeneid* (Book I, line 405) speaks about a recognition of the goddess Venus by her gait. Ezra Pound was to use it again, slightly modified, in a poetical description of his own meeting with Henry James in London, soon after 1908, in the seventh of his *Cantos*. According to William Pratt,

James quite deftly implies, that "the figure in the carpet" will be seen as clearly as the figure of the goddess by those who have eyes. Thus, in his first clear description of Henry James, Pound was paying tribute to James paying tribute to Virgil—a kind of double allusion that honored both writers at once—and was at the same time aligning himself with James, since neither Pound nor James easily displayed 'the figure in the carpet' in their works. (149)

The concept of the letter *U* as *You*, the second person pronoun, and of the relationship between the pronouns *I* and *You* is undoubtedly characteristic

of most of the works of Henry James. It reminds one of the basic ideas of the philosophical book *Ich und Du* (*I and Thou*), published seven years after the death of Henry James, by the great Jewish thinker, who attended a Polish high school in Lwów, Martin Buber. In that book Buber makes a direct connection between the notion of another person *You* and the eternal *Thou*.<sup>5</sup>

Towards the end of Woolson's "Miss Grief" an aunt of the heroine accuses the narrator and all male figures of the literary world: "And as to who has racked and stabbed her, I say you, you—YOU literary men!" (654). In "The Figure in the Carpet" this *U/You* is not an accusation but an affirmation. It should be understood rather as an echo of *You*, that opens two great commandments of Christianity: "*You* shall love the Lord *your* God with all *your* heart and with all *your* soul and with all *your* mind. ... *You* shall love *your* neighbor as *yourself*" (Matthew 22.35-40, *my italics*).

The *U* in "The Figure in the Carpet" is not material, like a letter printed on paper—it is immaterial, ideal, a sound that conveys a meaning. One of the interpreters of the story suggested that "the clue is to look at Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*" (Wilson 143).<sup>6</sup> This is an ambiguous lead, because Henry James in his booklet on Hawthorne was at one point highly critical, categorically rejecting the "idea of the mystic *A* which the young minister finds imprinted upon his breast and eating into his flesh, in sympathy with the embroidered badge that Hester is condemned to wear" (*H* 113) and especially the scene when the minister, looking upwards, seems to behold there "the appearance of an immense letter": that was for him going too far, almost "crossing the line that separates the sublime from its immediate neighbor" (*H* 115).

There is, however, a place in James's book on Hawthorne, which gives a clue to the interpretation of "The Figure in the Carpet" proposed here, namely the recollection of the first encounter, as a boy, with *The Scarlet Letter*: "He was too young to read it himself, but its title, upon which he fixed his eyes as

<sup>5</sup> The subject was apparently approached in a Chinese paper by Wei-dong Cao: "Drawing upon the insights of 'I' and 'Thou' proposed by Martin Buber in his book *I and Thou*, the present article considers Henry James's novels within the narrative of dialogism, where love is perceived to be a mutual growing up" (Abstract).

<sup>6</sup> One of his main arguments was the following: "The most symbolic character in *The Scarlet Letter* is named Pearl. Given that Vereker says that he has shouted hints into the faces of critics all his career and that they have always remained blank-faced, does Vereker say that the idea is the string on which 'I string *my* pearls' in order to imply a contrast to Hawthorne's Pearl?" (143-44).

the book lay upon the table, had a mysterious charm. He had a vague belief, indeed, that the *letter* in question was one of the documents that come by the post, and it was a source of perpetual wonderment to him that it should be of such an unaccustomed hue" (*H* 107). This recollection of the double meaning of the word *letter* could suggest, almost half a century later, the use of the same homonymous device in "The Figure in the Carpet."

In order to check the U-interpretation let us confront it now with a theoretical frame, developed in the works of J. Hillis Miller. He is an author of a relatively early (1980) interpretation of the short story in question, expanded later on in his book *Reading Narrative* (1992). This interpretation is based on the notion of unreadability, defined as "the generation by the text itself of a desire for the possession of the *logos*, while at the same time the text itself frustrates this desire" ("Figure" 113).<sup>7</sup> James's story is, according to this interpretation, organized by a chain of interpersonal relations.

Among later books of J. Hillis Miller two are devoted to the speech acts in literature—generally and in the case of Henry James. Even if "The Figure in the Carpet" is conspicuously absent from the latter, it seems worth trying to apply Miller's theory of speech acts to this story. In *Speech Acts in Literature* J. Hillis Miller evokes some 1992 and 1993 Derrida seminars, during which the French philosopher claimed that "Je t'aime" is "a performative, not a constative utterance" (*Speech Acts* 134). The same can be said about *U/You* as a declaration of feelings, as a performative act in choosing a life partner. In *Literature as Conduct* J. Hillis Miller provides in every chapter examples of the use of speech acts in the works of Henry James that give us a clue to understanding "The Figure in the Carpet." Perhaps the most obvious of these is the chapter devoted to *The Wings of the Dove*, with the detailed analysis of the phrase "There you are." J. Hillis Miller questions every single element of this phrase, asking: "You. Who? You as the particular person to whom the assertion is addressed, or the universal 'you,' as in an idiom like 'You never know'? The 'you' at once names the person addressed and generalizes that you by making him or her subject to a universal and universalizing force: 'There you are'" (*Literature* 196). And again: "In order to say 'There you are,' there must be a *Mitsein*, a being together. Uttering it is a violence done to the other, a triumph of the

<sup>7</sup> The idea of unreadability is borrowed from Paul de Man's *Allegories of Reading*, as Hillis Miller himself admits (*Reading Narrative* 43); the expanded version of "The Figure in the Carpet" is here reprinted as Chapter 7 (84-106).

performative will" (197). *U/You* in "The Figure in the Carpet," similarly, is at the same time a particular person, to whom this utterance is addressed, and the universal *You/Thou* as in the Great Commandments or in the philosophy of Martin Buber. It is certainly also a triumph of the performative will.

The discussion of the meaning of Vereker's conundrum by now spans a period of some 123 years. It can be roughly divided into two groups. The first one is exemplified by a letter of Ford Madox Ford to Henry James and the latter's answer dated July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1899, included in Ford's essay on Henry James in *Portraits from Life*, published in 1937, and of T. S. Eliot's search for a Jamesian "figure in the carpet" in Kipling in his 1941 essay on the author of *Kim*, as well as of numerous other attempts to identify the figure with this or that object.

The second group of interpretations, beginning with Shlomith Rimmon (1977) and Tzvetan Todorov (1977), and continuing with David Liss under the auspices of C. S. Pierce (1995), deals with the concept of ambiguity. A whole book was published in 1987 by "an Ordinary Reader," under the name of Benjamin Newman, authored or co-authored by Rosaline Intrater (1925-2010) and entitled *Searching for the Figure in the Carpet in the Tales of Henry James*. A twenty-two page long chapter is devoted to "The Figure in the Carpet," without, however, unveiling the secret, or rather: obscuring it by the predominance of the notion of death.

Ali Taghizadeh in his deconstructivist reading of "The Figure in the Carpet" comes to the conclusion, that "the theme of the story is its narrativity" and that it "render[s] meaning indeterminable" (1929). A similar interpretation appeared in 2013, surprisingly enough, in a paper on "The New Millennium and the Age of Terror." Florin Oprescu argues here that "The Figure in the Carpet" proposes "an essential metaphor," in the sense that "the figure in the carpet contains a message that has no secrets." The illusion of this metaphor is supposed to be "part of the authentic play of literature and art" (62). For Matthew Sussman "The Figure in the Carpet" is "a proleptic satire on the ambiguity tradition" but at the same time "this anachronism is consistent with the normative conception of criticism that can be inferred from James's work" (11).

Other authors propose a single letter solution of the Vereker enigma. Peter W. Lock was a partisan of *V*, writing about a "subtly playful tissue of signifiers beginning with the letter V (Vera, Vishnu, Velázquez, Vandyke, and by immediate suggestion, Virgil, Venus, vulva, victor)," arguing these elements form "the signifiers in a system of connotations which may be seen as composing a semantic field associated with the secret figure of the text"



(171). Samuel Weber proposes considering the letter *P*, which might signify “the *organ of life* that figures the fantasmatic object of narcissistic desire: the penis or phallus.” Raymond J. Wilson summarizes their attempts as follows: “Lock’s opting for ‘V’ enables him to suggest a buried symbolism of ‘the vulva,’ whereas Weber’s suggestion of ‘P’ (despite Vereker’s saying that ‘P’ is not correct) allows Weber to read an implied symbolism of ‘the penis or phallus’” (151n).

Neither the intertextual *A*, as in Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, nor the sexual *P* or *V*, signifying admittedly very important but nonetheless simply parts of the body, could reasonably be considered equivalent to life or called “immense.” From all the 26 letters of the English alphabet these conditions are met only by *U*, considered as an equivalent of the second person singular, an exclamation of acceptance and an affirmation of the chosen person.

Parker Tyler speaks about “James’s waggish and discreetly blasphemous play on the metaphor of the Immaculate Conception” (40), and connects it with the notion of pregnancy and of childbearing.<sup>8</sup> The same metaphor can be used with the *U*-interpretation, without the blasphemy. Gwendolen’s telegram to Corvick, “Angel, write” and other allusions to the Immaculate Conception, suggested by Tyler, can be interpreted as signals of the importance of oral communication, of the very act of announcing to the chosen one our interest and care. But I would contend that it’s the *U*, or *You*, or *Thou*—that the angel addresses to the Virgin Mary that is here especially important.

Coming back to “The Figure in the Carpet,” let us examine the proposed solution of Vereker’s conundrum from the point of view of its aural dimension. True, *U* is a letter, a graphic sign, which appears in the word “Eureka” and which marks abundantly, much above the average frequency, several key passages of the text. But on the other hand *U* acquires additional meaning when spoken, thanks to its homonymy with *you*, with the second person pronoun. In this way *u* becomes a personal *you* through the act of speaking. A “dead” letter becomes a “living” sound, a spoken message. Vereker formulated it: “What I contend that nobody has ever mentioned in my work is the element of life” (C 50). Miss Erme, who received the secret from her first husband Corvick, echoes him in a conversation with the narrator, who reports: “she exclaimed in a voice that I hear at this hour: “It’s my *life!*” (C 385).

<sup>8</sup> Tyler’s friend, Charles Boultenhouse, was at that time working on his first film, *Henry James’ Memories of Old New York*.

The word "Eureka," used by Corvick to announce his discovery and to share his joy, is basically also an exclamation, an interjection, allegedly used first by Archimedes. The letter *u*, used profusely by Henry James in his text, is merely a hint, a clue. In order to make it work one has to pronounce it, to exclaim it in front of another person or another being. A written *u* is a sign, a spoken "You!" is a declaration of love, a promise and a program for life. In *One Thousand and One Nights* a prince buys a flying carpet in order to move to India. In Henry James's story George Corvick is sent, as "a fine flight of fancy" (C 373) of his brother-in-law to India to find there the solution of Vereker's enigma. By exclaiming "Eureka!" and "You!" to his fiancée, he is letting the figure in the carpet speak.

The U-interpretation seems to connect two general schools of interpreting "The Figure in the Carpet". It proposes a concrete meaning of Vereker's riddle—the letter *U* as a graphic equivalent of the performative utterance *You*—but at the same time this *You* is universal, it leaves many possibilities open, it allows several concretizations, including metaphysical ones. *U* solves the enigma and at the same time remains enigmatic.

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# “Mildly Theatrical”: Attending (to) *The Awkward Age*

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The act of attention—of listening, of watching, of sensing, of thinking—is central to James’s art and his notion of experience. “Try to be one of those on whom nothing is lost.” But in the special case of *The Awkward Age*, a special kind of attention is especially demanded—one which particularly involves *listening*.

At the start of an Ibsen play, James says in his Preface to *The Awkward Age*, the spectator or reader... is to be caught at the worst in the act of attention, of the very greatest attention, and that is all, as a precious preliminary at least, that the playwright asks of him, besides being all the very divinest poet can get. I remember rejoicing as much to remark this, after getting launched in *The Awkward Age*, as if I were in fact constructing a play... (FW 1133)

So *The Awkward Age* sets off, as it were, flying the pennant of Ibsen—and of the drama. This is, however, also one of the main reasons why despite having its passionate adherents, *The Awkward Age* presents difficulties peculiar and unique among James’s works—which even when they are as demanding as *The Ambassadors*, *The Wings of the Dove* or *The Golden Bowl* tend to cleave closely to a

character's consciousness—so that we can get through them, as James does in *The American Preface*, by “clinging to [the] hero as to a tall, protective, good-natured elder brother in a rough place” (*FW* 1069). Here the reader is a spectator, as it were in front of the action, facing the stage—hence what the Preface calls

the imposed absence of that “going behind,” to compass explanations and amplifications, to drag out odds and ends from the “mere” storyteller's great property-shop of aids to illusion (*FW* 1131)

The “odds and ends” include any significant reference to the past in flashbacks or in “harking back to make up,” as James calls them in the Preface to *The Ambassadors*, and also elisions within chapters (*FW* 1317). The present action flows continuously and depthlessly before us, all on “one plane of exhibition,” as James says in the *Awkward Age* Preface (*FW* 1134).<sup>1</sup> Disembodied, away from the peopled theatre, it can be hard to read.

The publishing of plays—rare in the English-speaking world till 1891 and the changes brought about by the International Copyright Treaty—was something that James had views about, expressed in the quasi-dramatic critical discussion “After the Play” (1889) where the most James-like of the interlocutors, Dorriforth, complains of “our contemporary drama”

To begin with, you can't find it — there's no text [...] One can't put one's hand upon it; one doesn't know what one is discussing. There is no “authority”—nothing is ever published. (*CWD* 356)

There *was* a text five years later, at least, in James's two Series of *Theatricals*, both published in 1894 (June and December), but the four plays published there were *only* published; they had fallen foul of the conditions of the British theatre—had gone unproduced—and “my good Comptons,” the Compton Comedy Company, *for* whom they'd been written, had dictated the

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Jean Gooder, Adrian Poole and Christopher Ricks, kind and acute readers, for their help and encouragement both with this essay and more generally for many years past. I owe thanks also to the members of my Henry James Reading Group at UCL, without whose communal and collaborative reading of *The Awkward Age* in the autumn of 2018 this line of thought could not have emerged. James writes of ‘the beauty and the difficulty (to harp again on that string) of escaping poverty *even though* the references in one's action can only be, with intensity, to each other, to things exactly on the same plane of exhibition with themselves’ (*FW* 1134).

unambitious limits within which James had to stick (*LL* 237; 8 January 1891). In his fascinating "Note" to *Theatricals, Second Series*, James takes consolation from this printed performance, as one might call it:

Of a published play... it cannot exactly be said that it has not been performed at all; for the disconcerted author at least—if, as he has wrought, the thing has arrived at adequate vividness—the printed book itself grows mildly theatrical, the frustrated effort approximately positive. (*CP* 347)

"The printed book itself grows mildly theatrical": the reader becomes a spectator and auditor, supplying in imagination the stage and footlights, the production, the cast, the interpretation. At least it's beyond the thousand natural shocks of actual West End realisation—shocks which, as is widely known, would put an end to James's *sustained* period of engagement with the theatre. On 10 January of the following year, 1895, he was writing to Henrietta Reubell:

I felt with bottomless dismay how the atmosphere of *any* London theatre is in mortal danger of becoming a complete non-conductor of any *fine* intention or any really civilized artistic attempt. (*LL* 275)

The vocal hostility of part of the audience at the première of *Guy Domville*, on which he comments here, only confirmed James's sense of the forces arrayed against satisfying theatre in Britain.

This essay examines some connections between the unfinished business of *Guy Domville* and *Theatricals* and the mode of *The Awkward Age*, which aspires, famously, to work through "really constructive dialogue, dialogue organic and dramatic, speaking for itself, representing and embodying substance and form," which James says is "among us an uncanny and abhorrent thing, not to be dealt with on any terms" (*FW* 1127). And Ibsen, bulking so unexpectedly large in *The Awkward Age* Preface, plays a part here. For, as Michael Egan remarks in *Henry James: The Ibsen Years*, "James's encounter with Ibsen made novels like *What Maisie Knew* (1897) and *The Awkward Age* (1899) possible" (Egan 312). In 1897 James had remarked, *à propos* of Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman*: "That no one ever does read a play has long been a commonplace of the wisdom of booksellers. Ibsen, however, is a text, and Ibsen is read, and Ibsen contradicts the custom and confounds the prejudice" (*CWD* 454). And reading *John Gabriel Borkman*, James comments that "the whole thing throbs with an *actability* that fairly shakes us as we read" (455; my italics). "Actability"



is an alluring term too with regard to *The Awkward Age*, where, as we've seen, "The printed book itself grows mildly theatrical."

\*

Theatrical production gives a text a physical reality: bodily presences, a defined space, a duration shared between actors and audience, a set of individuals' voices and what Wagner calls a "sound-world" (qtd. in Halliday 33)—and also makes interpretative choices, beyond the text—gestures, intonations, postures, blocking, costumes, sets, make-up, musical accompaniment, often more. That is the theatre's vividness. Such triumphs, however inspiring, though, however valuable, are short-lived—and anyway are fluctuating, indefinable. Theatre history deals in records, however striking, of evanescent performances. But not only are there numerous, differing performances, any one performance is anyhow in itself a personal matter for audiences. One spectator is moved, another bored; one dozes in the front stalls, another is rapt in the "gods" despite a restricted view. So a performance—like any event—is not a simple or single *thing* in the first place, even before it decays and memories of it become distorted. We can sharpen and refine our responses, but could never find, and therefore should not pointlessly seek, a fixed meaning.

Intensely moving or delightful *at the time*, though, like Coquelin's acting in Charles Lomon's *Jean Dacier* in September 1877 which so thrilled James he walked the Parisian streets well into the night, were the achievements of actors in the French tradition—actors for whom James could never hope to write—and they could serve as an inspiration to him in his own field. As he had registered explicitly in 1887, writing about writing about his former Boulogne schoolmate Charles Coquelin's Duc de Septmonts in *L'Étrangère* by Dumas *fi*ls:

There is something in the way M. Coquelin goes through this long and elaborate part, all of fine shades and minute effects, all [appealing] to the finest observation as well as displaying it, which reminds one of the manner in which the writer of a "psychological" novel (when he knows how to write as well as M. Coquelin knows how to act) builds up a character, in his supposedly uncanny process—with touch added to touch, line to line, and a vision of his personage breathing before him. M. Coquelin is really the Balzac of actors. (*CWD* 333)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Peter Collister in his edition of James's writings on Drama usefully gives in an Appendix

Putting this together with the vivid impression, indeed the "throb" and the "shake," caused in James by his reading of Ibsen in 1897, one can see the appeal for him of a formal experiment that would take the lessons of the theatre and exhibit them in the controllable arena and under the favouring light of black-and-white, durable prose fiction—especially since by now the three-decker Victorian-style had collapsed—collapsed *in* 1894, as it happened, when the circulating libraries ceased to prop it up.<sup>3</sup> The dimension of the novel as a constructed *performance* may also have come home to James in February 1897 during the composition of *What Maisie Knew* with the failure of his wrist and his new habit of dictation, which allowed and required a constant voicing of his prose (by him) and a responsive re-sounding of it on the Remington by his first amanuensis William McAlpine.

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The rules James sets himself in *The Awkward Age* are extraordinary: challenging for him and for us, and controversial—it's a novel many people can't get on with—for want, as I've said, of an authorially known consciousness to cling to as a guide for us through the novel's great stretches of talk (as well as the want of a strong and *unmistakeable* dramatic situation). The mode James chooses is that of putative or hypothetical performance—*performability*,

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James's much-revised 1915 version of the essay, where this passage reads: 'M. Coquelin's progress thru [sic] this long and elaborate part, all of fine shades and pointed particulars, all resting on the keenest observation as well as appealing to it, resembles the method of the "psychological" novelist who (when he is in as complete possession of his form as M. Coquelin of *his*) builds up a character, in his supposedly uncanny process, by touch added to touch, line to line, illustration to illustration, and with a vision of his personage breathing steadily before him. It wouldn't take much more than my remembrance of the Duc de Septmonts at the Français to make me pronounce his exponent really the Balzac of actors' (*CWD* 545).

<sup>3</sup> Peter Keating's account of the event is vivid: "On 27 June 1894 Mudie's and Smith's announced that from the beginning of the following year they would pay no more than 4/- (less the usual discounts) per volume for fiction, and that the publishers must agree not to issue cheap editions of books purchased by the libraries until one year after publication. It was an ultimatum. . . . The two main aims of the ultimatum were to render the publication of three-volume novels uneconomic, and to encourage publishers to issue new fiction in single-volume form. Both aims were quickly successful. The number of three-volume novels published in 1894 was 184; this fell to 52 in 1895, 25 in 1896, and 4 in 1897" (Keating 25-26).

“actability”—the “might have been” of the hypothetical theatrical situation: *If* someone had been watching or listening, as at a play, this is *how* they might have interpreted the action.<sup>4</sup>

An example. Near the end, Nanda heroically tries to defend Van’s conduct to Longdon—pained, he stops her, and she may have to acknowledge that even she isn’t capable of such nobility and self-denial. Longdon says, “Don’t!”, and

She had kept, for the time, all her fine clearness turned to him; but she might on this have been taken as giving him up with a movement of obedience and a strange soft sigh. The smothered sound might even have represented to a listener at all initiated a consenting retreat before an effort greater than her reckoning—a retreat that was in so far the snap of a sharp tension. (*AA* 450)

There’s one immediate, representative difficulty here: are the two “hims” in the first sentence the same person? The first seems like Longdon, who’s *there* (“all her fine clearness turned to him”); the second (“giving him up”) like Van ... since she’s obeying Longdon. Why not say so, why not disambiguate? James seems to want us so finely attuned we need no nudge to see this distinction. The “strange soft sigh” alliteratively matches the “smothered sound” and then—weirdly, paradoxically—represents the “snap of a sharp tension.” What such a translation of “soft sigh” to “snap of a sharp tension” *depends* on is someone who “might... have been” present, might have seen and heard, might have interpreted; and—James pushes harder for the larger significance—under such putative scrutiny A “might even have represented” B—that is, rather bracingly perhaps, “to a listener *at all* initiated” (my italics). This imagined audience is a constantly invoked, constantly implied element in *The Awkward Age*—the “continuous spectator of these episodes” (*AA* 432) who notes gestures, insistences, silences, resemblances—and must undergo an initiation in order to cope with such difficulties.

Jean Gooder, in a suggestive essay on *The Awkward Age* from 1984, “*The Awkward Age: A Study in Ephemera?*”, notes that the lack of guiding narration leaves us “no interpretive guide but our own ear for intonation” (Gooder 25.)

<sup>4</sup> As Adrian Poole notes, here “those tenses – and moods ((subjunctive, optative)—are crucial”; the drama takes place in the present tense, before our eyes—but it’s also implicitly a narrated, shaped re-presentation of events already past and not to be changed (though perhaps to be made available for re-interpretation) (personal communication, January 2020).

And our "ear"—for intonation—may be fallible, may miss the connection between "snaps" and "sighs". James has a fine phrase for it in the revised text of the Coquelin essay—"The ear of the public, that field of the auditive intelligence" (*CWD* 539)<sup>5</sup>—only then to remark that, in the theatrical culture of the time, this "ear" has "simply ceased to respond for lack of use." This unresponsiveness and desuetude was problematic for James, and may be for us, in *The Awkward Age*, where *tone* is in so many ways the heart of the *subject*: that of Nanda's entry—coming "downstairs"—into a social circle of *soi-disant* fine intelligences—a circle defined, as the "Preface" says, by "a tone as far as possible removed from that of the nursery and the schoolroom" (*FW* 1123). In fact, as Jean Gooder says, "*The Awkward Age* creates its own reality, as we become aware of tone, differences and samenesses between the characters, and learn to follow references which are made, and dropped, to re-appear with fresh point" (29).

The novel has to educate us then, as we read, in *how* to read it—and though James would never be so crudely avant-gardist as to issue a "manifesto," here as elsewhere he drops some fairly arresting hints. When Longdon is with Nanda towards the end of the novel, we are told that "He looked at her with a complexity of communication that no words could have meddled with" (*AA* 450). This spells out the power of the look, and the dramatic possibilities of silence—recalling the great moments of the stage and, we might say, anticipating one of the great gifts of the cinema. The words cannot "meddle" both in the sense that *Longdon* can't find words, *and* that James's narration can't or won't find them. This is the ineffable, with which by definition you must not *eff—eff* being here, etymologically, from the Latin *effari*, to speak out.<sup>6</sup>

At times James, released from the clumsiness of British theatrical production, imagines moments of almost impossibly *refined* communication—demanding of his imaginary performers supreme feats of nuance and exactness in registration, wanting from his Mitchy, as it were, what he noted in Coquelin:

<sup>5</sup> This is 1915; in 1887 it was 'that exquisite critical sense' and 'from want of use' (*CWD* 329).

<sup>6</sup> Wittgenstein in 1922 put it another way: 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent' (189)

a range and a use of tone, a directed application of it, which are peculiar to the artist who commands them and are surely the most wondrous in their kind that the stage has ever known (*CWD* 537 [1915])<sup>7</sup>

In fact the thought occurs that Mitchy—whose portrayal throughout the novel, “the presentation, throughout, of a Mitchy ‘subtle’ no less than concrete,” is singled out by James in the Preface as one of its greatest achievements (*FW* 1136)—is exactly a part for Coquelin, most famous as Cyrano de Bergerac in Rostand’s 1897 play of that title, which was highly praised by James in his essay on Rostand (there is on YouTube, indeed, a piece of experimental sound film of Coquelin in the part from 1900).<sup>8</sup>

Here then, for example, are Van and Mitchy, in Longdon’s library at night, discussing everyone’s “tact” towards Van:

“Oh, it’s all right,” Vanderbank immediately said. “Your ‘tact’—yours and his—is marvellous, and Nanda’s greatest of all.”

Mitchy’s momentary renewal of stillness was addressed, he managed, somehow, not obscurely to convey, to the last clause of his friend’s speech. (*AA* 314)

Such articulations of response and “complexity of communication” seem to challenge an ideal actor to summon a tremendous clarity of point, through “stillness”—a pause addressed just “to the last clause”—and to do so without strain: “he managed, *somehow*, *not obscurely* to convey...”

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James’s “auditive intelligence” in *The Awkward Age* is perhaps most rewardingly shown in particular scenes; for scenes are, as James says in *A Small Boy and Others* (1913), “the root of the matter” (*A* 159). One scene James picks out in the Preface among “the positively most artful passages” in *The Awkward Age* is Chapter XX, “the hour of Mr Longdon’s beautiful and, as it were, mystic attempt at a compact with Vanderbank, late at night, in the billiard-room of the country-house at which they are staying” (*FW* 1136). James deliberately frames

<sup>7</sup> In 1887 “a range and a use of tone, a directed application of it” was simply “a faculty of vocalization, as one may call it” (*CWD* 326).

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-tzmls4gTgQ>

the billiard-room at Mitchy's rented house as a silent, resonant space in which the two men can *sound* and test each other. Early in the chapter, Longdon

spoke with a weight that, in the great space, where it resounded a little, made an impression—an impression marked by the momentary pause that fell between them. He partly broke the silence, first, by beginning to walk again, and then Vanderbank broke it as through the apprehension of their becoming perhaps too solemn. (*AA* 216)

Longdon's emphasis seems too loud in this acoustic, evokes an echo that silences both men: a silence they both feel must be broken—partly by one, then completely by the two together—before it becomes oppressive. In the resonant space this sets up, James can register tiny nuances and sound effects.

James is fond of the partly new-technological word "click," which he applies to electric light switches, typewriters, horses' hooves, footfalls—and mental processes.<sup>9</sup> In "*Richard III* and *Little Eyolf*" (1897), he applies it to the thrill of absorption—of what he calls in the *Awkward Age* Preface "the act of attention, of the very greatest attention"—that befalls the serious Ibsen-watcher at a certain point:

within five or ten minutes of the rise of the curtain—a moment at which this special spectator becomes aware of an adjustment of his aesthetic sense as definite as a material "click." It is simply the acceptance of the small Ibsen *spell*, the surrender of the imagination to his microcosm, his confined but completely constituted world, in which, in every case, the tissue of relations between the parts and the whole is of a closeness so fascinating. (*CWD* 451)

The spectator, we might say, is "turned on"—a phrase James himself uses (it was well-established for water, steam, gas and electric current). "*Click*" also occurs to break the silence of the billiard-room scene in *The Awkward Age*, where Longdon and Van guardedly manoeuvre as they talk and Longdon makes his offer, his "bribe." "Here we are," says Van at one point—of their confrontation, but also of this metaphorically loaded room of strokes, angles, tight corners.

<sup>9</sup> Melanie Ross in her paper on "Speech-into-Writing" at the 2019 Trieste conference drew attention to the way that for James in his notebooks a 'click' was often the image for a shift or advance in James's own thinking: where he's just declared 'eureka,' he calls it 'a little click of perception' (*N* 217).

His companion looked at him a moment longer, then, turning away, went slowly round the table. On the further side of it he stopped again and, after a minute, with a nervous movement, set a ball or two in motion. "It's beautiful—but it's terrible!" he finally murmured. He had not his eyes on Vanderbank, who for a minute said nothing, and he presently went on: "To see it and not to want to try to help—well, I can't do that." Vanderbank still neither spoke nor moved, remained as if he might interrupt something of high importance to him, and his friend, passing along the opposite edge of the table, continued to produce in the stillness, without the cue, the small click of the ivory. "How long—if you don't mind my asking—have you known it?" (*AA* 219-20)

One notes in this the intricacy of the way setting balls in motion rhymes with the strokes of conversation—making statements or asking questions or even staying silent; and the delineated stages: the delay in the look, then the turn, then the slow circuit, the minute's delay—before the "final" murmur. Van in turn delays a minute—so Longdon speaks again—but only "presently." Van still keeps silent—but respectful and attentive—and Longdon goes on setting balls in motion. "Without the cue" literally and primarily means without the cue-stick—but also puns on a theatrical "cue," means (perhaps) that like an actor whose colleague "dries" onstage, he goes on without the prompt of a response. And of course what most resonates for this argument is "the small click of the ivory," alerting us to the acoustics of the room. The click seems to *prompt* his next question—in which "if you don't mind my asking" acknowledges the possibility that Van's silence expresses resistance as well as interest.

It seems worth dwelling on some of the other minute effects of Jamesian narration, which, one might say, keeps us alert by never moving at quite the same pace as the action being narrated. In their early manoeuvrings, Van says to Longdon, "I think you ought to give me a little more of a clue."

Mr Longdon took off his glasses. "Well—the clew's [sic] Nanda Brookenham."  
 "Oh, I see." Vanderbank had responded quickly, but for a minute he said nothing more, and the great marble clock that gave the place the air of a club ticked louder in the stillness. (*AA* 217)

If this were film—that is, sound-film—or theatre—Longdon could take off his glasses *as* he speaks. And James could have gone for *announced* if not realised simultaneity: we can imagine another writer giving us: "Taking

off his glasses, Mr Longdon said, 'Well—the clue's Nanda Brookenham.'" But James's full stop after "glasses" and the hesitating "Well—..." give us a rhythmic sequence—a series of pauses, what film scripts call "beats." We get the gesture. Full stop. *Then* the speech. Longdon has been buying a tiny bit of time—six words' worth. And varying the rhythm, James has Van respond at once—"Oh, I see"—with then a full stop. *Not, doubly not*, this: "'Oh, I see,' Van responded quickly..."—but a jump ahead in time after the stop to look *back* to this in the pluperfect—"had responded"—from a further silence—with its own oppressive or at least metronomic imposition of a rhythm: "the great marble clock... ticked louder in the stillness". Another reference to "the stillness," by the way—to maintain the scene's fundamental *pianissimo*, there throughout as a contrast to the clicks and ticks, the small but intensely significant noises—including speeches.

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Prompted by Van's "Oh" here, I'd like to end with one word more, a little word—a word which is almost just a sound. In *Either/Or* (1843), discussing music, Kierkegaard mocks those (Romantics) by whom "it is assumed that saying 'Uh' is more valuable than a complete thought" (Kierkegaard, qtd. in Halliday 43-44). It certainly needn't be—but in an artistic context it may register more powerfully than many complete thoughts. Let me recall the last spoken lines of John Huston's classic film *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), where after Brigid O'Shaughnessy, the *femme fatale*, played by Mary Astor, is led away to trial and execution, the hard-bitten private eye Sam Spade, played by Humphrey Bogart, is left with the cop Polhaus, played by Ward Bond—who picks up and examines the titular, once immensely valuable statuette of a bird which has caused such mayhem.

Policeman: It's heavy. What is it?

Sam Spade: The, er, stuff that dreams are made of.

Spade makes here a dry, glancing Shakespearian allusion—to Prospero's words in *The Tempest*, IV.1 ("We are such stuff / As dreams are made on"; Shakespeare, 1680). And then the cop replies with what could be the most relishable last word in any film—if it *is* a "word." "Huh?", he grunts. And nothing more is said. This is powerful not just because it's a dig at the dull



flatfoot, but because it suggests the depth of the dark vision of human delusion and depravity into which this film of glittering talk has drawn us, from which Detective Tom Polhaus is excluded.

There is then reason to appeal for help here not to Kierkegaard but to Christopher Ricks and his praise of the potential for eloquence of the monosyllabic exclamations “Oh” and “Ah”—though “Uh” and “Huh” are, I know, a little different—in *T.S. Eliot and Prejudice* (1988):

An exclamation such as Oh or Ah means nothing more (or less) than the tone in which it is uttered; an exclamation is a vacuum waiting to be filled with a tone. Oh and Ah and Eh are pregnant with potentiality. (Ricks 161)

In other words, we come back to *tone*. Oh and Ah “throb with actability,” we could say—they are sounds as much as words—blank but expressive. “Oh!” occurs 38 times with a simple exclamation mark in *The Awkward Age*, 92 times unpunctuated in “Oh yes” or “Oh no” or “Oh dear” or whatever, and 282 times after a comma. Still, there is one, taciturn character with whom it is particularly associated: Edward Brookenham. It is said in the novel that “Edward’s gloom, on this, was not quite blankness, yet it was dense” (*AA* 382): he specialises in an inexpressiveness that is hard to read.

When Mr Brookenham appeared his wife was prompt. “She’s coming back for Lord Petherton.”

“Oh!” he simply said.

“There’s something between them.”

“Oh!” he merely repeated. But it would have taken many such sounds on his part to represent a spirit of response discernible to any one but his wife. (*AA* 53)

“Simply,” “merely”: Edward Brookenham’s guarded not-quite-blankness *does*, James is saying, amount to “a spirit of response”—but only his wife, the monstrous, wonderful Mrs. Brook, a mistress of tone, can read it (and for us these are printed marks, not “sounds”).

Even so, the rules of *The Awkward Age* mean that we *have* to read his “Oh”s—and the hundreds of others in the novel—and work to fill in the blanks. One way of thinking about our place in the distribution of roles in the text is perhaps through the French word *interprète*—meaning both interpreter *and* performer. The interpretative act of reading here becomes performative—we act the parts, including of course that of the audience. And as a theatre

audience changes from night to night, so *we* are in ourselves, even if only slightly, different from reading to reading—and so the intonations we hear in our sounding of the text will never quite settle, will always have the tantalising elusiveness of a fresh theatrical performance, in which, perhaps, something is always lost on someone, but in which the spectator can be “turned on” with a “click,” can “Try to be one of those on whom nothing is lost.”

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# The Sound of “Scenarios”

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In this paper I will make the case for the orality of Henry James’s “scenarios,” the word he used for his detailed, working-out plans or outlines (*CN* 115).<sup>1</sup> James began this practice during his five playwriting years, 1890 to 1895, using scenarios to write his plays (*CP* 52). In early 1895, however, James starts to write scenarios for his fiction, many of which we find preserved in *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James* (those for the theater, with one exception in the *Notebooks*, are gone).<sup>2</sup> I hope to show here how far this practice enriched his writing process as a whole, and also how it can be seen as more “oral”

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<sup>1</sup> Thank you to Leonardo Buonomo for having conceived of and hosted such a memorable conference, for his work on this volume and for his encouragement to write this paper. Thank you to friends and Jamesians, including the editor of this volume, for inspiring colloquies and valued friendship over all the years. Thank you to “the private class” for so many wonderful sessions analyzing James together. Thank you to friend and neighbor Elaine Stillerman for crucial printing help pre-conference and for her convivial good cheer throughout the writing process. Thank you to Andrew and Jules Rosenberg for their love and support; they helped make writing possible.

<sup>2</sup> Far fewer scenarios remain from 1901 on, however. Lyall H. Powers gives some reasons why in “A Note on the Notes” (*NB* xxii-xxiii).

(James “speak[s]” these scenarios “onto the page,” I’ll try to show) than the “constructing” register of his dictation, which he began roughly two years later, in 1897 (Elbow 9, 144; Bosanquet 34n8). My own argument is informed by Peter Elbow’s *Vernacular Eloquence: What Speech Can Bring to Writing*, which explores all the ways writing can be enhanced by speech and describes two “mental gears” that can be used to write: the “uttering” and the “constructing.” Elbow adds, “we can use either gear whether we are physically speaking or writing” (143–44). As jazz musician Sam Bardfeld put it, while we walked and talked about this paper: James’s composing process, as time goes on, exists in a continuum, a “dialectic,” of these gears and physical modes.<sup>3</sup>

As much as James’s dictating is suffused with elements from speech and delivery (the classical Roman rhetorical term for delivery as a whole, *actio*, captures this active element), the scenarios were “oral” too, I will be arguing (Quintilian 243). James describes his “scenarios” like this in a letter to H. G. Wells in 1902:

A plan for myself, as copious and developed as possible, I always do draw up— ... a preliminary *private* outpouring. But this ... voluminous effusion is, ever, so extremely familiar, confidential and intimate—in the form of an interminable garrulous letter addressed to my own fond fancy—that, though I always, for easy reference, have it carefully typed, it isn’t a thing I would willingly expose to any eye but my own. (qtd. in *NB* xxii)

Here is what I am suggesting we see as James’s—and Elbow’s—“speaking onto the page,” that Elbow also calls “freewriting,” the “uttering” register James “always” uses for his “plan” (9, 391, 144). This paper will explore possible reasons why James started to write scenarios for the *theater* before discussing the consequences for James’s ongoing writing practice. To make this argument, we will first look at descriptions of the writing process by James and others before turning, about midway through, to James’s scenario-writing in particular, first for the theater and then, as James commemorates in a realization that forms the hinge of this paper, for his novels.

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<sup>3</sup> This paper intentionally retains some of its “marks of orality,” in the words of its anonymous reader, inspired by its originally oral delivery. Its trajectory of composition therefore mirrors its topic. Thank you, anonymous reader, for noting this reflection of form and content and for offering helpful and appreciated suggestions.

In a 1907 introduction to *The Tempest*, James gives us a glimpse of scenario-writing... by Shakespeare. Shakespeare wonders (in James's imagination), "if I can but put my hand on the right 'scenario?'" (1210). "Stretching" to "picture" the scene, James sees Shakespeare as

a divine musician who, alone in his room, preludes or improvises at close of day ... [H]is hands wander over the keys. They stray far, for his motive, but at last he finds and holds it; then he lets himself go, embroidering and refining ... [I]t is none the less a private occasion, a concert of one, both performer and auditor, who plays for his own ear, his own hand. (1211)

James appears to be describing Shakespeare's scenario-writing, here, but in his next mention of the "composer" who is "extemporising in the summer twilight," James specifies that Shakespeare is composing *The Tempest* itself (1212). In other words, it is hard to decipher the difference between Shakespeare's scenario-writing and *playwriting*. I am suggesting that a) we map scenario and playwriting by *Shakespeare* onto scenario and *novel*-writing by James. After all, James is himself imagining Shakespeare's composing process. And b) we hereby see evidence for how crucial it is that scenario-writing, for James, emerges at the same time as his writing for the theater. Another takeaway from James's Shakespeare depiction is just how far scenario and "main event" (of whichever sort) writing blend into or cross-pollinate each other.

The improvisation—literally "the unforeseen"—of James's foreseeing scenarios... (Cave 125). In *Institutio Oratoria*, briefly cited above, classical Roman rhetorician Quintilian writes that "the crown of all our study and the highest reward of our long labours is the power of improvisation," predicated as it is on "mental agility" and years of practice (133, 145). Indeed, Bardfeld explains that there is "a highly structured vocabulary and syntax" to jazz improvisation. In other words, the seemingly unstructured (or Shakespeare's "wandering" hand, whether writing a scenario *or* the main-event) is also, simultaneously, structured. James's (in the guise of Shakespeare's) "preludes" (scenarios) and dictation (ludes?), by extension, each in fact contain elements of improvisation, an inherently oral form.

In an 1875 review of a Tennyson play, James describes something that Elbow calls "substantive revising" (that painful yet achievable process of figuring out what you really want to say and making sense), this part of the composition process taking place subsequent to the improvisatory streams



just described, though it is articulated, here, significantly earlier in James's professional life (Elbow 5):

The fine thing in a real drama ... is that it needs a masterly structure. It needs to be shaped and fashioned and laid together. ... He [an artist] must combine and arrange, interpolate and eliminate, play the joiner with the most attentive skill. The five-act drama ... is like a box of fixed dimensions and inelastic material, into which a mass of precious things are to be packed away ... The precious things in question seem out of all proportion to the compass of the receptacle ... (qtd. in *CP* 34-35)

This process does not sound especially “oral”: yes, “substantive revising” requires crafting, self-conscious, weighing, constructing skills, the careful “writing” rather than freer “speaking” gear (Elbow 207). But... wait! As we'll see, James—as “joiner”—uses scenarios to “work ... out” “every main joint and hinge” to create that “masterly structure” of his plays and narratives (*CN* 195, 127).<sup>4</sup> The more oral-feeling and flowing scenario-writing actually does the work of the packing and arranging *within*, constructing *without*, “box”-type of writing above, helps, in other words, to create that structure.

One last look to Shakespeare may be apposite and helpful here. In *Timber* (coincidentally named), Ben Jonson, a rival as well as admirer of Shakespeare writes of Shakespeare, “the players have often mentioned ... that ... he never blotted out line. My answer hath been, ‘would he had blotted a thousand.’ ... [H]e flowed with that facility that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped.” In his commendatory poem on Shakespeare, on the other hand, Jonson writes, “he / who casts to write a living line, must sweat, / (Such as thine are).” Here, in a nutshell, is the dialectic. Did Shakespeare flow too much *or* cast and sweat his figures and structures? Perhaps, as with James's well-made, well-organized box *and* improvisatory flowing, each enables the other.

S. L. A. Marshall, in the “Writing and Speaking” chapter of *The Armed Forces Officer* of 1950:

The only way to learn to write is to write. That is it--there is no other secret than hard unremitting practice. Most writers at the start are mentally muscle-bound and poorly coordinated. ...

<sup>4</sup> Leon Edel's work led me to the above passage; he explores the connection between “joinery” and what James does in/with his scenarios, as well, but analyzes it somewhat differently (*CP* 63).

The only cure for this is constant mental exercise, with one's pen, or over one's typewriter. After a man has written perhaps a half million relatively useless words there comes, sometimes almost in a flash, and at other times gradually, a mastery not only of words, but of phrases, sentences and the composition of ideas. It is a kind of rhythmic process, like learning to swim, or to row a boat, or navigate an airplane. When a writer has at last conquered his element, his personality and his character can be transmitted to paper. ... This does not mean, however, that the task then becomes easy. ... [G]ood writing continues to be a strain even to the man who does it well. Many celebrated men of letters never get beyond the 'sweating' stage, but have to fight their way through a jungle of words, and rewrite almost endlessly, before finding satisfaction in their product. (185-86)

The "sweating" stage reminds us of Jonson; the "jungle of words" reminds us of Philip Horne's work on James and Teddy Roosevelt. Marshall shows how rhythmic and hence oral (and physical) writing is (it takes practice and *is* a practice), but also how "writerly" it nonetheless remains (you have to sweat, fight, construct it). The hands of James and Jonson's Shakespeare, as well as Marshall's, are rhythmic, oral "hands"—as well as casting, carving, writing ones—that create the tracks of language to emerge from the jungle.

Back to practice... Before moving on to James to specifically trace the evolution of his own dialectical writing process, I would like to give one more example of just such a hybrid (we could say) process. Scott Murray's live soccer blogging is a contemporary example of how constraints, "speaking onto the page," practice, mastery and talent—think of soccer playing itself—produce beautiful writing (Elbow 9). Murray is commenting, analyzing, thinking through *and* constructing prose live and minute-by-minute. You can't get behind!<sup>5</sup> His style and the "life" and liveliness of his writing reflect the beauty of "the beautiful game," as some call soccer. Inspiration comes from multiple sources: the matches themselves, the (virtual) presence of the audience—the *fans*—who write in as he writes and to whom he responds. This writing fits Quintilian's definition of improvisation in many ways, so crafted, as perusal of a match chosen at random on the *Guardian's* website will reveal, perfected, perhaps by just such a process as Marshall describes.

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<sup>5</sup> Thank you to Rob Mackey for this insight, for sending the Murray interview and for "talking through," in both writing via email and speaking, additional ideas on the form of live soccer-blogging.

One additional example of the hybrid before zooming in on James's scenario-writing in particular—this one also by James about another writer. In 1897, ten years before his *The Tempest* essay, James writes a commemorative essay on his close friend George Du Maurier who has recently died, celebrating, among other things, their relationship built on walks and talks; he also discusses Du Maurier's late, and successful, turn to novel-writing. Here, as in his *Tempest* essay, I think we can see James reflected in the author described, in some sense a rival too because of *Trilby*'s success. James locates the origin of Du Maurier's style, "extravagantly colloquial," as James puts it, which was to achieve such success in *Trilby*—in a lecture hall (899). A "hall" in some sense recreated through James's own wanderings (the Latin *vagare* or "to wander" is at the root of "extravagant") during dictation and reevoking those wandering hands of Shakespeare. Here, though, is Du Maurier:

that evening at Prince's Hall, ... as he stood there and irresponsibly communicated, ... [h]e had just simply found his tone, ... the familiar carried to a point to which, for *nous autres*, the printed page had never yet carried it. The printed page was actually there, but the question was to be supremely settled by another application of it [when Du Maurier soon after writes his first novel]. (895)

James knew about this tone—it was, in fact, all too "familiar"—because he had himself already been writing it for seven years in his scenarios for the acted and/or printed page; indeed, we saw the word "familiar" in his later letter to Wells explaining just such a tone, again with the oral dimension. James was thus quite familiar with how the presence (or "presence") of an audience brings energy to novel-writing (for Du Maurier, as he was writing and delivering his lecture; for James, as he wrote his scenarios for the plays, or, even as he wrote letters which he sees as his scenarios as resembling), with (completed) novels at a somewhat greater remove from an audience than plays. James's use of the word "familiar" is notable for another reason. As Oliver Herford has shown, oral story-telling in addition to theater-going, was a pivotal part of James family communal life. "Colloquial" comes from "together" and "to speak" (Latin *com* + *loqui*). In the rest of this piece, we'll turn to the "colloquial" foundations of James's scenarios.

## THE THEATER

About to begin his five-year period of writing for the theater during which he restricted himself to penning short fiction, Henry writes to his brother William about *The Tragic Muse*: "One has always a 'public' enough if one has an audible vibration—even if it should only come from one's self" (*LE* 300). Here, as Edel points out, James is already attuned to the oral (aural) nature of reading... and writing, whether with self, family or public (*CP* 43). These aural presences and vibrations—of the public and otherwise—do indeed permeate James's scenario-writing as well as the writing "stages" thereafter.

James's relationship to the theater (familial and otherwise) is a subject for future and past books (and the focus of Dee MacCormack). Sadly, we cannot much explore what James calls "the abyss of the theatre" —or why he calls it that—here (*LE* 510). However, the facts that his 1872 dialogue "The Parisian Stage" notes, "To be read two hundred years after your death is something; but to be acted is better ..." (4); that James was writing plays at age 14 (*CP* 28); that he wonders to himself at age 40 why he hasn't yet started writing for the theater—and pledges that he will (*NB* 226-27), all combined with his waiting until age 47 to begin indicate, as Edel argues, ambivalence (*CP* 5, 41-59). The following metaphor-cum-scene in James's "Note" to *Theatricals: Second Series*—a collection of published unperformed plays—summarizes James's feelings about the challenges of writing for the theater and ties them to his feelings about his family itself:

Heaven forbid we should too rashly drop in upon his private generalisations: those that have gathered about the kindled fire of our hypothetical inquirer will surely constitute a family party whose secrets it were best not to overhear. They are not prepared for company, they are not dressed to go out, and some of them will certainly startle us in their abandonment of the manners of society. ... [T]hey swarm about his hearth. These are the associations that attach him to the insufferable little art with which he is so justly infatuated: ties of infinite reflection and irritation, relations of lively intimacy and of endless discovery. (*CP* 351)

Here James's feelings about writing for the theater go back to childhood and the family: his ideas about the theater "are" family. When James began writing plays full-time, scenarios may have contained *and helped him contain* all of these associations; they allowed him to finally try this

tantalizing but also threatening form. They contain—and maybe even substitute for—intimacy.

How does James experience what he calls “the conditions” of writing for the theater (*LE* 329)? Doing is of the essence! James writes to his brother in late 1890, in the thick of a production, that, “the authorship (in any sense worthy of the name) of a play only *begins* when it is written, and I see that one’s creation of it doesn’t terminate till one has gone with it every inch of the way to the rise of the curtain on the first night. . . . [T]o provide for one’s own old age one is *capable de tout*—and it is a revelation to me to find how ‘capable’ I am, in the whole matter” (*LE* 306). To be capable, to be able, to be writing and doing. This doing applies to the whole playwriting endeavor itself, as he writes to his brother three months later:

Now that I have tasted blood, *c’est une rage* (of determination to *do*, and triumph, on my part), for I feel at last as if I had found my *real* form, which I am capable of carrying far, and for which the pale little art of fiction, as I have practised it, has been, for me, but a limited and restricted substitute. . . . I always, innermost, knew *this* was my more characteristic form—but was kept away from it by a half-modest half-exaggerated sense of the difficulty (that is, I mean the practical odiousness) of the conditions. But now that I have accepted them and met them, I see that one isn’t at all, needfully, their victim, but is, from the moment one *is* anything, one’s self, worth speaking of, their *master*. (*LE* 329)

The scenarios, I want to argue, were a kind of buffer that both expressed and cushioned all of this mastering and attacking—“Shake-spear,” as contemporaries called him—“driving” as James calls his theatrical “pen” in a mid-1893 letter, mode of work (*LE* 426). Certainly this energy of doing (don’t wait for the inspiration, start, and *make* the conditions), as well as the conditions he was writing for (of the theater) motivated the scenarios, themselves motivation, also, as we’ll see in a moment.

Though we know he wrote a great many, only one scenario from the playwriting years remains: “The Chaperon,” dated June 6, 1893 (*CP* 54, 247). James begins by talking to himself, as he does throughout the notebooks—“Is there a subject for comedy . . . . It seems to shimmer before me that there *is*—but I can’t tell till I try.” He then goes on to try: “Out of the mist there looms, somehow, a first act . . . I vaguely see . . .” (247-49). And in a way that we will look at in depth shortly, he puts into words what he “sees.” This is very different from what James does to prepare for writing narrative fiction in the

notebooks, "previous" to the realization we are about to turn to of February 14, 1895; this realization, that he can use scenarios for his fiction-writing also, takes place a month or so after he gives up his "siege" of the theater and is the hinge of the paper I mentioned earlier (*CP* 52).

Up until that realization, James's notebooks feature shortish "written-gear" type entries for his narrative fiction: descriptions and developments of ideas, *not* (with a few, relatively short exceptions) workings-out. The writing that takes place *outside* of the notebooks is the doing: the goal is "to lose myself" in "this workroom" where "I believe, I see, I do"; he knows that once "I begin to straighten things out pen in hand" it will go, but he does *not* do this in the notebooks, by and large (61, 62). That supposedly blissful state occurs outside of his notebooks, in the workroom, but is hard to get himself to begin. In fact, he repeatedly takes himself to task in notebook entries for not working enough, for not or never "let[ting] myself go" ("I have never fully done it") (56-57). In late 1893, James does a scenario-type writing for what becomes *The Other House*, probably perhaps because he is not sure if he wants it to be a book or a play (80-82). However, James writes to W. D. Howells less than two weeks after his disastrous *Guy Domville* premiere of January 5, 1895 and the consequent end of his five playwriting years: "the act of composition is, with me, more and more slow, painful and difficult. I shall never again write a long novel" (*CP* 479; *LE* 513). This comment shows that James has not yet put the easy, conversational freewriting (the planning) of the scenarios together with what he at least sometimes experiences as the painful, constructing "writing" gear of the fiction in a workroom that he both longs for and avoids. Ah, a way to get going! This will all change ... short weeks after this letter.

#### THE REALIZATION: SCENARIOS FOR FICTION

It is February 14, 1895. James is eager to write longer prose, again. He exhorts himself in his notebook to "let one's self go" and "surrender one's self." He writes, "And now, toward the end, it seems, within its limits, to have come" (114). James wrote in his already cited preface to *Theatricals* of his "anxious cultivation of limits" that proved terrifying but also enabling (*CP* 347). What if limits could prove instead mainly enabling, be cultivated to *combat* anxiety? In the next portion of the notebook entry, reflecting on a recent note he

has just reread, he remembers another “jotted” idea from further back and realizes—wait! —he can write a *scenario* for it:

this mere touching of it already makes my fingers itch for it. I seem to see in it something compact, *charpenté*, living, touching, amusing. ... I want to plunge into it: I *languish* so to get at an immediate creation. ... *Voyons, voyons*: may I not instantly sit down to a little close, clear, full scenario of it? As I ask myself the question, *with* the very asking of it, and the utterance of that word so charged with memories and pains, something seems to open out before me .... Has a *part* of all this wasted passion and squandered time (of the last 5 years) been simply the precious lesson ... *of the singular value for a narrative plan too* of the (I don't know *what* adequately to call it) divine principle of the Scenario? ... I almost hold my breath with suspense as I try to formulate it; ... this exquisite truth that what I call the divine principle in question is a key that, working in the same *general* way fits the complicated chambers of *both* the dramatic and the narrative lock. ... The long figuring out, the patient, passionate little *cabier*, becomes the *mot de l'énigme*, the thing to live by. (115-16)

Why don't I just start blocking it out, James realizes *as* and *because* he writes; his use of the word “utterance” shows that he experiences himself as talking here... in writing. He can use this way of getting thoughts and words onto the page that he used to construct his plays... for his fiction as well. And, indeed, a month or two after this, James writes a proper scenario for his fiction. Now, as we can see above, the term “scenario,” and James's use of it, are complex, since it connotes both the process (“the long figuring out”) *and* product of a sort, what James calls the “*scenic method*” (the “scene” in the “scenario”) or “*march of an action*” that he uses the scenarios—AKA “plans” as we saw at the beginning of this paper—to write (167). While the “*scenic method*” sounds (and is) visual, James takes pains to emphasize repeatedly that this method is (also) about the “*mouvementé*.” In James's mind, in other words, and as we explored at the start of this paper, the *process* of writing the scenarios gave James the *structure* which he called “scenic” but which was also about movement, the “march of cause and effect” (158). I'm going to be showing in what remains of this paper how the oral powers both process *and* product/movement.

## FLOWING STRUCTURE

James writes in his notebook on August 11, 1895:

What I should like to do ... is to thresh out my little remainder, from this point, tabulate and clarify it, state or summarize it in such a way that I can go, very straight and sharp ... What I feel more and more that I must arrive at, with these things, is the adequate and regular practice of some such economy of clear summarization as will *give* me from point to point, each of my steps, stages, tints, shades, every main joint and hinge, ... my clear order and expressed sequence. I can then *take* from the table, successively, each fitted or fitting piece of my little mosaic. ... What then is it that the rest of my little 2d act, as I call it, of *The House Beautiful* must do? Its climax is in the removal—*must absolutely and utterly be: voila*—from the house, by Mrs. Gereth, of her own treasures. What are the steps that lead to that? Well, these. (127)

James then spells out the steps, he utters onto the page—he creates *and* summarizes. The “talking onto the page,” with all its fluidity and improvised energy, structures his product while the “sequence,” the “steps,” create a kaleidoscopic “mosaic” of onward motion and movement. Here comes the joinery, as James plots out the “uninterrupted drama” of *The Old Things* which becomes *The Spoils of Poynton* (Feb 19, 1896): “What I am looking for is my joint, my hinge .... I must be utterly crystalline and complete, and my *charpente* must be of steel” (158-59). And, eight months later, “I have brought this little matter of Maisie to a point at which a really detailed scenario of the rest is indispensable for a straight and sure advance to the end. Let me not ... slacken in my deep observance of this strong and beneficent method—this intensely structural, intensely hinged and jointed preliminary frame” (161-62). As with a soccer match, as in improv, play occurs within and because of limits. In this instance, play also produces the limits. But, the “sweating stage” remains. When James fills in or constructs onto his frame, the oscillation between playful elaboration and limits begins again—as Theodora Bosanquet, James’s last “amanuensis” or typist makes clear (36-37; 31).<sup>6</sup> Those brilliant soccer turns that create the flow only look easy (practice helps).

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<sup>6</sup> Bosanquet writes, and then cites James, “the design [or scenario] was thus mapped out with a clear understanding that at a later stage and at close quarters the subject might grow away from the plan. In the intimacy of composition prenoted proportions and



## GETTING HIMSELF TO WRITE (AND WHY)

The scenarios also allow him to work. And this is another hallmark of the oral mode (Elbow, to whom we turn shortly, reminds us): when we feel at ease, it is relatively easy to speak (60). March 30, 1896: "I am face to face now with my last part of *The Old Things* .... I have only to me *cramponner*—and add word to word. ... Little by little, as I press, as I ponder, it seems to come to me, the manner of my denouement—it seems to fall into its proportions and to *compose*. I see 4 little chapters ..." (161). "Composing" is not so hard... when you are "speaking to yourself" this way.

James, contemplating the writing of something "*big*" and ambitious (January, 1899), summarizes for us what he does and maybe why... with scenarios:

Ah, once more, to let myself go! The very thought of it soothes and sustains, lays a divine hand on my nerves, and lights, so beneficently, my uncertainties and obscurities. ... I must have a long *tête à tête* with myself, a long ciphering bout, on it, before I really start. ... I long to represent an *action*: I mean a rapid, concrete action is what I desire, yearn just now, to put in: to build, construct, teach myself a mastery of. (172)

"Beneficent": a variation on the word "benignant," the latter a word frequently used, perhaps ironically, to describe James's performative father and his compelling "talk" (Habegger 351; 299-365). He was the source of many "uncertainties and obscurities" in the James family, as was his writing. Here, James explicitly writes that he *can* "let himself go" in the act of "ciphering," a frequent term of his for scenario-writing (yet this encoding is really a decoding; here James is in charge of both) which is also a soothing conversation or "*tête à tête*" with himself—he is teaching *himself* "a mastery." He takes and builds action through this flow—indeed, James's "beneficent" contains "*-ficere*" of "*facere*": "to do, to make." Even just thinking in this talking type of writing about being able to take action in this way is soothing: "Before I really start." Such a colloquy *is* starting. He has already started.

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arrangements do most uncommonly insist on making themselves different by shifts and variations, always improving, which impose themselves as one goes and keep the door open always to something *more* right and *more* related. It is subject to that constant possibility, all the while, that one does pre-note and tentatively sketch" (36-37).

## THE ORAL SCENARIO VIA ELBOW

Thus far I have tried to show how the flowing and uttered nature of the scenarios helped James construct. Now I would like to show, in particular, how the oral gear in which James wrote his scenarios gives energy and dynamism. The initial material that follows comes from Elbow's chapter in *Vernacular Eloquence* on organization in late-stage revising where he focuses on how speech can help structure and organization in writing! (Taking us back to James's "box of fixed dimensions" playwriting challenge). "Writing involves the ordering of events in time and contains sequences of words that make things happen in the realm of time," he reminds us (301-02). We cannot take it all in at once; a novel or play cannot be experienced simultaneously, like a painting can be, he explains (300). Elbow asks, "So, where do writers find the energy that binds written words together so as to pull readers along from one part to the next and make them experience the text as a coherent whole?" He responds, "Since reading is a series of events in time, my claim is that the answer is the same one that applies to music. Successful writers leads us on a journey to satisfaction by way of expectations, frustrations, half satisfaction and temporary satisfactions: a well-planned sequence of yearnings and reliefs, itches and scratches" (303). [Even the "march of an action" does not have to be a straight line.] Elbow's "theme is *organization as energy*" and he gives many examples from the oral that enable writers to "bind words and pull readers through a text," just as James planned—and accomplished—through his scenarios (James's scenes certainly do this, too) (303). Elbow also invokes James's leveraging of limits, "the cage of time and linearity in language ... is the glory of syntax and language. And of music! ... Rhythm declares to each beat, you must wait for your proper turn; not too soon, not too late. Without linearity, there is no experience of energy or dynamism in language—spoken or written" (314-15).

Elsewhere in his book, Elbow shows how many virtues of the speaking *process*—how we "connect with an audience" (67-68); our corporeal pleasure in speaking/singing (71-73); how we can spit it out, condense to the essence, give the "gist" and *say it*, "overcome resistance" (65-68) —can and should be used in writing. In addition, he looks at spoken language as a *product*, and sees all its many benefits for writing (here is just a small sample): "representing thinking as a process" (as we see in James's notebook entries) (98-100); "intonation" (gives the sound of meaning and of people) (109); "spontaneous

syntax” (ditto) (117); and “involvement strategies” (that draw readers in; as do all of these elements) (80). I am suggesting that James’s scenario-writing set in motion many of these benefits.

Finally, Elbow explores the use of the ear and tongue (the oral) in revising. “What the Mouth and Ear Know” or “guidance of mouth and ear” (219, 227). “I posit therefore that everyone who speaks a native language comfortably has a strong musical sense. ... But can we get music into *writing*. I’d argue that we actually do manage that when we write language that invites readers to clump it into well formed and well connected intonation units” (248). James writes that he wasn’t musical, but, perhaps James’s “music” came from speech, as well as his typewriter (*GDM* 891; Bosanquet 35). Elbow: “Our longest and usually deepest experience of how words carry meaning involves felt bodily experience not just intellectual understanding (252). Elbow explains that our knowledge and experience of speech is “*kinesthetic*,” in the “*body*” (227). What I’d like to suggest, as we reach the final phases of this paper, is that these oral, physical satisfactions moved from James’s childhood to the theater and scenarios, and then into his writing in general: the scenario-writing helped “thresh,” another of James’s favorite words for the process, pain, as we will see (NB 127, 129, 132).

### GOOD MEMORIES AND WHY

Back on October 15, 1895, “thresh[ing] out finely every inch of the action from that point to the end,” James talks to himself, fills his writing with just the sort of “presence” speech is able to contain (as well as infuse):

That confronts me with the question of the action Fleda exercises on Mrs. Gereth and of how she exercises it. ... Well, eureka! I think I have found it—I think I see the little interesting turn and the little practicable form. How a little click of perception ... brings back to me all the strange sacred time of my thinkings-out, his way, pen in hand, of the stuff of my little theatrical trials. (134)

This narration of his thinking—Eureka! —is dramatic, is a mind in process; that “click” brings back previous clicks that took place while engaging in this same process for the theater, not so long, at this point, before. In what remains of this section, I would like to explore why writing scenarios contains and reawakens what was so good from those theater-writing “trials.” “Deep

and dark is the abyss of the theatre," we know James wrote, during trial-time (LE 510). And yet the scenarios retain a power to empower. Maybe because they were "practicable." With them, James felt able to practice and to devote himself to writing as a practice.

Another clue might be oral, aural, spectral presence(s)—either of James's writing selves above (and described earlier in this paper in his letter to his brother) or, to give a contemporary parallel, of fans at English Premier League soccer matches of summer 2020. Looking back, in 1901 (May 23), James says (or writes) to himself:

Work it out. It's a little germ—to be possibly nursed. N.B. How, after a long intermission, the charm of this little subject-noting ... glimmers out to me again—lighting up for me something of the old divine light ... renewing the little link with the old sacred [playwriting] days. Oh, sacred days that are still somehow *there*—that it would be the golden gift and miracle, to-day, still to find *not* wasted! (195)

"Subject-noting," or scenario-writing, once again, has a kind of quasi-religious feel, reconnecting James with an earlier theater—or church—of writing... for the theater, with many somehow pacified presences [perhaps including that of James Senior; it is as if this present, and former, scenario-writing both summoned *and* calmed his "strange sacred," religion-writing (oral) presence]. Again, in 1909 (February 10), James links scenario-writing with playwriting days and dreams: "A sense with me, divine and beautiful, of hooking on again to the 'sacred years' of the old D. V. Gdns. time, the years of the whole theatric dream and the 'working out' sessions, all ineffable and uneffaceable, that went with that, and that still live again, somehow (indeed I *know* how!) in their ashes" (202-03). The working out summons, while laying to rest, painful ghosts, dwells, as we saw in the May 1901 note, in the realm of "nursing" (here a soothing *self*-mothering; see the work of Susan Griffin on Henry James and orality, via his mother, Mary James). Such scenario-writing—turning dream into action, we might say, inspired by Howard Jones's 1980s album, "Dream Into Action"—made what, only five days after the *Guy Domville* debacle, James had turned back around to calling his "legitimate" and "solac[ing]" "form" of prose fiction, doable (LE 509).

At the end of 1909 and early into the next year, once again on the same "subject" or novel from earlier that year, in a very talky note, James experiences, anew, intense relief from "cipher[ing] out"—"doubts and torments fall away

from me, the more I know where I am.” He calls scenario-writing a testing, “putting to the proof and to the test,” “the pressure and the screw,” the “application” (259, 261):

I ... see the thing as almost the Prologue, after the manner in which the first Book is the Prologue in *The Other House*. Oh, blest *Other House*, which gives me thus at every step a precedent, a support, a divine little light to walk by. *Causons, causons, mon bon*--oh celestial, soothing, sanctifying process, with all the high sane forces of the sacred time fighting, through it, on my side! Let me fumble it gently and patiently out--with fever and fidget laid to rest--as in all the old enchanted months! ... [I]t only presents itself too admirably and too vividly ... as a little organic and effective Action. ... But *pazienza*, and step by step. (261)

*The Other House* (written as both a *novel* in 1896 and as a *play* in 1909, with a proto-scenario for the former, as previously mentioned, written during James’s playwriting years) sits at just the crossroads we have been exploring.<sup>7</sup> Taking action through scenario-writing in the playwriting years built “Action” through their “talking” vibrations (echoed by “*Causons, causons*,” “let us chat, let us chat” in French). That endeavor fights on and sheds light, here. This is chamber theater, theater in James’s chamber, with James and his notebook, as in days of old. James can both let go *and* control his “living lines” in these “conditions” (at whatever phase of the composition process). Scenarios combat anxiety and bring sanity; contain, in a calming fashion, the theaters of earlier times and proceed, “step by step,” just as James paced during dictation (Hyde 162).

## OUT LOUD

James writes in his preface to *The Golden Bowl* for the *New York Edition* of his works, the same year as the above notebook entries (1909), that speech or “reading *out*” is the “highest test” of “any literary form ... whose highest bid is addressed to the imagination, to the spiritual and the esthetic vision,” i.e., James’s prose (1339).<sup>8</sup> Should we be surprised that scenarios (early in the writing process) intersect with speech (later) as testing-grounds? When we think about it, James’s prescription is a kind of echo. Aided by pacing,

<sup>7</sup> David Kurnick examines this interplay.

<sup>8</sup> See Oliver Herford, who analyzes this passage in-depth (205-15).

gesturing, pausing, the whole a rhythmic process, "under the guidance of mouth and ear" James's words have emerged, talked *and* constructed, for more than a decade by this point (Elbow 227). For James began dictating, speaking his novels out, literally, in early 1897, as alluded to earlier, a process whose "oral" foreshadowing in scenario-writing we have been tracing all this while. To return to James's discussion of the "*vivâ-voce* treatment," for the reader,

fullest experience of his pleasure ... waits but on a direct reading *out* of the addressed appeal. ... The essential property of such a [literary] form as that is to give out its finest and most numerous secrets ... under the closest pressure—which is of course the pressure of the attention articulately *sounded*. ... Gustave Flaubert has somewhere in this connection an excellent word—to the effect that any imaged prose that fails to be richly rewarding in return for a competent utterance ranks itself as wrong through not being 'in the conditions of life.' (1339)

Pressure can cause resistance, it spurs motion, maybe even emotion. Here once again the *oral* produces this desirable pressure, at the end of the writing process, with its product.<sup>9</sup> "What do you want to say!? Why don't you just write *that*?" and "Write what *you* want to write, as yourself!"<sup>10</sup> Pressure aside, in James's "*vivâ-voce* treatment," oral and visual come together. Those visual figures of speech, "imaged prose," can be called "tropes"—they turn, from the Greek word *trepein*, "to turn." They are structures and can build structures and help structure your text—all the while helping readers see. (Soccer turns do a similar kind of work.) But what James seems to emphasize here perhaps most of all is the embodied nature of his writing. Donatella Izzo's Keynote at the conference where these papers were originally delivered discerned the oral amidst the play of other senses, (de)ciphering these out of what we might call James's "living lines." For "*viva-voce*" directly translates to "with living voice." James's scene of dictation simulates, as does theater (with all *its* "conditions" James lamented in his letter), just such "'conditions of life.'" Conditions which are then compressed into a language that, in turn, "(re-)lives," maybe even "relieves," "*viva-voce*" If you want to let go in writing... how about a scenario? Express it (Elbow 72)! (And then sweat it, and express it some more.)

<sup>9</sup> Elbow discusses the right balance of pressure and overcoming resistance to produce positive flow in the writing process overall (71-72).

<sup>10</sup> Our son Jules Rosenberg and my friend Kathleen Formosa, respectively, gave me those useful pieces of advice... for this piece.

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# Sounds Strangely Familiar: John Banville's Jamesian Pastiche

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In Michiel Heyns's *The Typewriter's Tale* (2005), James's amanuensis likes to "amuse herself" while taking dictation by "trying to predict the outcome of his rumination." Despite having succeeded "only once, when the elusive word turned out to be *thing*," she persists in trying to "pre-empt" her employer's "perversity." His similes are invariably "the opposite of what she anticipated," and a passage from "Julia Bride" proves no exception. The heroine gazes up at Murray Bush "from as far below as"—what? "A mountaineer all strainingly shading his eyes against the vertiginous slope of Mont Blanc?" "An adventurer beneath some tower sung in legend in which a golden-haired princess is incarcerated?" No, she gazes as through from "the point at which the school-child, comma, with eyes raised to the wall, comma, gazes at the particoloured map of the world. Full stop" (Heyns 2).

While Frieda's vague interrogatives appear to die in the air, James's sentence has a commanding rhythm; the two pauses build intrigue before the image unfolds, culminating in a fermata. This passage illustrates a popular perception: that James's sound is inimitable, that no-one could turn a cadence as he himself would. To attempt to do so, moreover, is to guarantee a parodic effect. Thus Benjamin Markovits argues that "it would be impossible, of course, to 'do' late

James; even if you could, the likely effect would be satirical rather than serious” (199). Similarly, William Skidelsky notes that “James’s style—especially his ‘late’ one—has often been parodied . . . but no-one, as far as I know, has ever seriously tried to imitate it.”<sup>1</sup> The extant parodies range from the well-known, such as Max Beerbohm’s “The Mote in the Middle Distance” (1912) and “The Guerdon” (1925) and Theodora Bosanquet’s “Afterwards” (1915), to the comparatively obscure, such as the parodies of *The Sacred Fount* surveyed by T.J. Lustig (25). As defined by Linda Hutcheon, such parodies are “ironic . . . adaptation[s]” (170), with an “overt and defining” relationship to James’s texts (3). They are also very different entities from the text under consideration here, John Banville’s *Mrs. Osmond* (2017). A sequel to *The Portrait of a Lady*, tracing Isabel’s meandering return to Italy and confrontation with Osmond, Banville’s novel also ventriloquises James’s style with both seriousness and success.

The first chapter begins as follows:

It had been a day of agitations and alarms, of smoke and steam and grit. Even yet she felt, did Mrs. Osmond, the awful surge and rhythm of the train’s wheels, beating on and on within her. It was as if she were still seated in the carriage window, as she had sat for what seemed impossibly many hours, gazing with unseeing eyes upon the placid English countryside flowing away from her endlessly in all the soft-green splendor of the early-summer afternoon. (Banville 3)

We recognise the tangible physicality of the language, the parenthetical introduction of the protagonist, and the leisurely arrival of the final sentence at the “two most beautiful words in the English language” (qtd. in Wharton 128). When compared to the opening of “The Mote in the Middle Distance,” the difference is readily apparent:

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<sup>1</sup> A possible counterpoint to the argument that late James is inimitable is W.H. Auden’s *The Sea and the Mirror: A Commentary on Shakespeare’s The Tempest*. In letters to Bernard Spencer, Auden described the sections of the poem written from Caliban’s perspective as “a pastiche of James,” “who was the great representative in English literature of what Shakespeare certainly was not, the ‘dedicated artist’ to whom art is religion” (xxxi-ii). The Jamesian style ventriloquised is undeniably late, to wit the rendering of “As you from crimes would pardon’d be, / Let your indulgence set me free’ as *‘the indulgence for which in his epilogue your personified type of the creative so lately, tamely pleaded. Imprisoned, by you, in the mood doubtful, loaded, by you, with distressing embarrassments, we are, we submit, in no position to set anyone free’* (27). Despite being framed as pastiche rather than parody, I contend that Auden’s Caliban doth protest too much, and that the effect of James’s circumlocutions issuing from Shakespeare’s earthly creature is likely, in Markovits’s words, to be “satirical rather than serious.”

It was with the sense of a, for him, very memorable something that he peered now into the immediate future, and tried, not without compunction, to take that period up where he had, prospectively, left it. But just where the deuce had he left it? The consciousness of dubiety was, for our friend, not, this morning, quite yet clean-cut enough to outline the figures on what she had called his "horizon" .... (x)

While Banville reproduces the distinctive sound of James's syntax, Beerbohm simply enumerates his mannerisms. These include his use of qualifications and the fronting of pronouns ("for him"), his illogical contortions (taking up the future where it has been prospectively left), his colloquialisms ("the deuce") and his quarantining of individual words ("horizon") within inverted commas, as though they might contaminate the rest of the sentence. Synecdoche is Beerbohm's main parodic technique, whereby "the parts (the traits) are taken for the whole (the totality of the original oeuvre)" (Milly, qtd. in Dyer 57). James's corpus contains many examples of these traits, but also any number of unremarkably straightforward sentences. By piling all of these characteristics into a few lines, Beerbohm suggests that James is no more than the sum of his idiosyncrasies. His influence, in this text, is like an egg bulging within a snake's body, whereas in *Mrs. Osmond* it is thoroughly digested and absorbed.

If Banville's engagement with James is more than simply parody, how, then, should it be categorised? In an interview, Colm Tóibín conspicuously avoided the most obvious definition, saying "I'm not finding it a pastiche. I'm not finding any false notes. It seems to me to be a genuine thing" (159). As indicated by Ingeborg Hoesterey, pastiche has a "dual structural profile" (*Pastiche* 83); it refers either to "an entity constructed of many imitative parts of varying provenance" (O'Donnell 154), or to "the extended imitation of the style of a single .... writer" (Sanders 5). Since the second definition is patently applicable to *Mrs. Osmond*, Tóibín's reluctance to use the term could have one of two causes. Either he (mis) understands it as synonymous with parody, whose humorous deformations are invoked in the reference to "false notes," or he sees it as something of a critical dirty word. Such negative connotations spring from Jameson's dismissal of pastiche as "blank parody," a diluted, postmodern version of a modernist form. According to Jameson, pastiche shares in parody's

imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter. (17)

What is lost, for Jameson, in the devolution to pastiche is the possibility of access to the past (Brooker 111). Lacking the “critical distance” and “historical sensibility” necessary for parody, postmodernism “can only play with a degraded historicism” (Duvall 376).

More recently, critics including Hoesterey, Richard Dyer and Margaret Rose have done important revisionist work on pastiche, demonstrating its potential to reengage historicity with affect (Dyer 138) and to carry an “ethical/aesthetic thrust” (Hoesterey, “Genre Mineur” 86). Meanwhile, in James studies, David McWhirter and John Carlos Rowe have indicated the potential of postmodernist responses such as Donald Barthelme’s to dispel “the stultifying aura of sanctity and reverence that had grown so thick around the modernist Master” (McWhirter 173), reassociating him with “a post-World War II cut-up and mimic, a literary clown” (Rowe 9). Furthermore, for Rowe and Gerald Graff, Barthelme’s “deprivileging of literary claims to authority” is anticipated by James’s own “radical subjectivism,” which insight bridges the divide between “modernist seriousness and postmodernist play” (Rowe 8). Notwithstanding these critical recoveries, pastiche’s stigma as a “minor, secondary” mode has proven adhesive in popular culture (Dyer 59). This is evident in the reviews of *Mrs. Osmond*, which were predominantly hostile towards its imitative qualities. Surveying these reviews will establish the nature of popular objections to *Mrs. Osmond* in particular, and to pastiche in general. I then make the case for the critical significance of Banville’s engagement with *The Portrait* in terms of instruction, subversion, and pleasure, recuperating author at the same time as genre, before considering pastiche’s theoretical implications.

In a review entitled “The impossibility of imitating Henry James,” Charles Finch reaches the same conclusion as the fictional Frieda Wroth: that the particular music of James’s prose is invulnerable to counterfeit. Thus by “opting for straight pastiche,” Banville “fails” more “severely” than his contemporaries who wrote biographical fiction about James. The opposite argument suggests that a successful imitation is indeed possible, but is itself tantamount to failure. This is because James is, to misquote Ben Jonson, “of an age, not for all time”; thus to successfully imitate a nineteenth-century novelist is to fail as a twenty-first-century one. Such is the position of Jeffrey Eugenides and Helen Elliott, who hear James’s sound as though it were the puff of a steam train: “ruminative and slow as the age he lived in” (Eugenides) but straightforward anachronism in 2017 (Elliott). A third objection is that any imitation is doomed to be incomplete, for James is more than his style. According to Eugenides, “a writer

isn't only what he writes, he's also what he leaves out, the intrinsic pattern of his noticing and attention. These things are as distinctive as a fingerprint and yet leave no mark." For anyone familiar with debates within adaptation studies, this argument savours of essence criticism; the pastiche, like an unsuccessful adaptation, fails to satisfactorily reproduce the core of the original. Therefore Banville can echo James's sound, but he cannot capture the Portrait-ness of *The Portrait*, the "heart of the artichoke hidden under the surface details of style" (Stam 15). This can be countered by the observation that James's essence, core, or heart is, by Eugenides' own admission, invisible. It is also subjective in the extreme, being located in the reader, not the author.

The final argument is that pastiche is a waste of the author's own style. Thus Eileen Battersby expresses incredulity that "an author with an international reputation as a literary stylist [would] expend his powers on impersonating the very difficult, often sonorous prose and syntax of a writer he clearly admires." This tends rather to elide the differences between James the first, James the second, and James the Old Pretender, sonority and difficulty being more characteristic of the late novels than the mid-period *Portrait*. Nor is Banville's "reputation as a literary stylist" singular and unchanging. He shifts in register depending on whether he writing historical fiction (*Kepler*, 1976), biographical fiction (*The Untouchable*, 1997, about a thinly-veiled Anthony Blunt) or a work of literary fiction like *The Sea* (2005). Moreover, the works published under Banville's pseudonym, Benjamin Black, are interpretable as pastiches of the crime-writing genre, especially *The Black-Eyed Blonde* (2014), an imitation of Raymond Chandler. Such an appetite for generic play is evident in *Mrs. Osmond*, which is, of course, a sequel as well as a pastiche. As a commercial form, the sequel is an unexpected way to respond to a writer of James's cultural cachet, and such perceived incongruence may also inform the adversarial reception outlined above. It is, however, a logical milestone in Banville's career-defining experimentation with genre.

In pursuing the argument that Banville's sequel has three primary effects—to instruct, to subvert, and to give pleasure—it will be crucial to differentiate between knowing and unknowing readers. As defined by Linda Hutcheon in the field of adaptation studies, an unknowing reader is oblivious to a text's status as an adaptation. The result need not be a "failed or insufficient reading" (Sanders 6), but it inevitably differs from the experience of the knowing reader, who is able to recognise an adaptation "as such and to know its adapted text" (Hutcheon 121). The paratext to *Mrs. Osmond* turns any prospective

reader into a knowing one; it includes a quotation from *The Portrait* as an epigraph,<sup>2</sup> while the blurb rehearses the novel's climax: the discovery of Osmond's "shocking, years-long betrayal" (Banville). If the reader has not already identified Banville's title as the married name of Isabel Archer, these other paratextual details ensure that the novel is received as a sequel. But what of Dyer's definition of pastiche as "a kind of imitation that you are meant to know is an imitation" (1)? Whatever Banville might have meant, there will inevitably be readers who recognise that the text is a sequel but not that it is a pastiche. This is because they lack foreknowledge of the style being imitated, not having read *The Portrait* or any other work by James. For such readers, *Mrs. Osmond* is less a pastiche than a primer, maximising the instructive potential to which this essay now turns.

While Seymour Chatman champions "the usefulness of parody for stylistic demonstration" ("Parody and Style" 27), parody's pedagogical qualities are diluted by its reliance on synecdoche, which means that demonstration frequently lapses into caricature. Although Banville happens upon similar characteristics to Beerbohm, the effect is radically different, demonstrating how "the intention inferred" determines whether "the same techniques" produce parody versus pastiche (Dyer 48). Whereas "The Mote in the Middle Distance" is limited to five paragraphs, *Mrs. Osmond* extends to nearly four hundred pages, a vast canvas that testifies to Banville's seriousness of intent. This makes the novel a rich and as-yet-untapped resource for the analysis of Jamesian style. Like Beerbohm, Banville happens upon James's quarantining, singling out individual words as if, Stuart Kelly remarked in *The Scotsman*, "they were held in tweezers." Thus Isabel, on first coming up to town, feels "dulled and dazed, like one who after a long illness is taken out for a supposedly invigorating 'spin'" (Banville 10). What Kelly treats as an affectation of Banville's was, of course, one of James's signatory mannerisms, seen in the description of Pansy Osmond's dress as "too short for her years, though it must already have been 'let out'" James, *Portrait* NYE 251). Kelly is right, however, to criticise Banville's "reams of alliterations," which are apparent in his opening description of "agitations and alarms, of smoke and steam and grit" and which re-infect the novel at intervals throughout (Banville 3). If this indicates pastiche's capacity to "deform the style of its

<sup>2</sup> "Deep in her soul – deeper than any appetite for renunciation – was the sense that life would be her business for a long time to come."—*The Portrait of a Lady* (Banville).

referent" (Dyer 56), it is, in fairness, a rare false note from a voice that is otherwise highly attuned to James's.

Like *The Portrait of a Lady*, *Mrs. Osmond* contains arresting transitions from the abstract to the concrete; whereas James's Isabel is dismayed to find "the infinite vista of a multiplied life" reduced to "a dark narrow alley with a dead wall at the end" (*Portrait* NYE 456), Banville's experiences her break with Osmond as possessed of "such violent abruptness that her nerves still vibrated from the blow, like the tines of a tuning fork" (15). The image of a "blow" in connection with a relationship whose abuses are scrupulously non-physical elicits a corresponding vibration, a sympathetic shudder from the reader. For James, in turn, the image of a dark cul-de-sac connotes a veiled sexual threat, contributing subtly to the Palazzo Roccanerra's atmosphere of dread. The dialogue is, then, an instructive one, demonstrating how James exploits the transition from abstract to concrete to convey latent menace.

As Michael Wood comments in the *London Review of Books*, Banville "does a little Jamesian work with adverbs: "she miserably said," "she inconsequently murmured," "Osmond thinly smiled." One of James's favourite candidates for the split infinitive is the word "beautiful," as seen when a butler in *The High Bid* is asked "to whom do you beautifully belong?" (567). Similarly, in *The Portrait*, Henrietta Stackpole complains at finding Isabel "not the same as she once so beautifully was" (*Portrait* NYE 140), while for Ralph Touchett, Isabel's legacy is his father's "compliment ... on your so beautifully existing" (244). Later in the novel, Osmond accuses Isabel of having "played a very deep game," and "managed it beautifully" (rather than "beautifully managed it") (514). The echoes of the former phrases make Osmond's syntax seem appropriately conventional, and sharpen our sense of his criticism.

James's use of the romance languages as linguistic seasoning has aged rather less well than other elements of his style, and has proven an irresistible target for parodists. Thus Arielle Zibrak provides a handy checklist for anyone suspicious that they may be "in a Henry James novel," of which number twenty is "English is your first and only language but, *comme cela se trouve*, you frequently employ French to communicate sarcasm." This is a direct quotation from James's Madame Merle, whose facility with the language almost persuades Isabel that "she's a Frenchwoman" (*Portrait* NYE 193). (Conversely, Amy Gemini's superlative borrowings fail to convince Osmond that Ned Rosier is indeed "simpaticissimo" (*Portrait* NYE 567). In *Mrs. Osmond*, similar Italianisms cluster, understandably, in the speech of Giancarlo, the major-domo of



Osmond's Florentine villa, who describes his employer as "the signor barone," and Francis Boott as Osmond's "amico Americano" (Banville 263). Other foreign loan words are scattered throughout the novel, as they are in *The Portrait*. But while the listicle format adopted by Zibrak makes her synecdoche even more concentrated than Beerbohm's, the expansiveness of *Mrs. Osmond* means that the more mannered elements of James's style are thoroughly attenuated.

For readers unfamiliar with James, Banville acts, then, as a cicerone, drawing back the curtain and indicating the defining features of *The Portrait's* style. As outlined above, these include James's treatment of isolated words as though "vaguely contagious" (Wood), his skilful juxtaposition of abstract and concrete, his idiosyncratic use of adverbs, and his penchant for foreign vocabulary. This taxonomy serves to position future readers, injecting an element of familiarity into what might otherwise be a disorienting stylistic encounter. This line of argument does, however, veer dangerously close to the vexed conflation of adaptations with study aids. Under this reckoning, the value of the adaptive text depends on its "educational usefulness" to future consumers of its source (Cardwell 39). Eileen Battersby leans into this attitude, concluding her review of *Mrs. Osmond* with the following diagnosis: "if Banville succeeds, and he should, in making readers return to Henry James, this lively enterprise will prove a useful and generous gesture." This reduces *Mrs. Osmond* to 'Henry James lite' valuable only insofar as it readies readers minds for 'the real thing.' But as will now be demonstrated, *Mrs. Osmond's* pedagogical usefulness is only one aspect of its effect. It has an equal and opposite capacity to supplant readings of James, thereby proving as subversive as it is instructive.

The first element of Banville's subversion lies in his appropriation of pivotal scenes from *The Portrait*. Scattered throughout Banville's novel are numerous prose summaries of crucial moments in James's; of these, the précis of Isabel's climactic confrontation with Osmond is perhaps the most sustained. James's catalyst is, of course, Isabel's wish to visit her dying cousin, a journey to which Osmond objects in the most eloquent terms:

"I've an ideal of what my wife should do and should not do. She should not travel across Europe alone, in defiance of my deepest desire, to sit at the bedside of other men. Your cousin's nothing to you; he's nothing to us. You smile most expressively when I talk about *us*, but I assure you that *we, we*, Mrs. Osmond, is all I know. ... You are nearer to me than any human creature, and I'm nearer to you. It may be a disagreeable proximity; it's one, at any rate, of our own deliberate making. You don't

like to be reminded of that, I know; but I'm perfectly willing, because—because—” And he paused a moment, looking as if he had something to say which would be very much to the point. “Because I think we should accept the consequences of our actions, and what I value most in life is the honour of a thing!” (James, *Portrait* NYE 571)

Osmond's speech is a splendid piece of oratory, drawing on every technique in the rhetorical book in attempt to arrest Isabel's momentum. These include parallelism (“should and should not”; “you”/“us”/“we”; “nearer to me”/“nearer to you”) and direct address (“you smile most expressively”; “*we*, Mrs. Osmond, is all I know”). The apparently spontaneous moments are, we suspect, equally studied; the slight stammer of “because—because” and the ensuing pause lends weight to Osmond's final judgment. The words themselves are similarly calculated, wilfully and pruriently misunderstanding Isabel's deathbed vigil. Osmond then opposes the image of Isabel “sit[ting] at the bedside of other men” to the sanctity of her being “Mrs. Osmond,” which reminder affects her as though it were “the sign of the cross or the flag of one's country” (James, *Portrait* NYE 571).

Banville's Osmond is constrained by the limitations of indirect speech, but manages to express much of the same sentiment:

[He] declared her to be committing a shameless and scandalous breach of the rules of right behaviour, those rules by which he, and she, too, or so he had thought until now, had determined life should, and could only in any decency, be lived. He did not seek to deny the pass their union had come to—there were depths of hypocrisy to which even he would not descend—or to pretend the damage done to it could be mended. Yes, they had suffered, and were suffering, and likely would continue to suffer—but that which cannot be cured must be endured, and courageously and uncomplainingly accepted. For it was imperative, he declared, to accept the consequences of our actions, even those in which we were grotesquely mistaken, for by that only—and here he grew paler and intenser still—only by that are we to value the most valuable of all we possess, which is *the honour of a thing*. (Banville 277-78)

The alliteration of “shameless and scandalous” and “rules of right behaviour” gives Osmond's reported speech the same premeditated quality as was noted in *The Portrait*. This effect is bolstered by the use of qualifications (“he, and she, too, or so he had thought”), discourse markers (“yes, they had suffered”), repetition (“and were suffering, and would continue to suffer”), parallelism

(“for that only ... only by that”) and performative flourishes (“and here he grew paler and intenser still”). Free indirect discourse in Banville’s novel thus becomes an effective simulacrum of direct speech in James’s, a resemblance that coheres when we turn from form to content. *The Portrait’s* “ideal” becomes *Mrs. Osmond’s* “rules,” while “a disagreeable proximity” is converted to “the pass their union had come to.” These variations on a theme from *Portrait* culminate in direct echoes of James’s phrases, namely “the consequences of our actions,” “value [the] most,” and “the honour of a thing.”

By Dyer’s reckoning, the intimacy of Banville’s mirroring demonstrates how pastiche “embraces closeness: it accepts the possibility of being seduced, penetrated, dependent or ventriloquised, without seeing this as a significant and anxiety-producing loss of autonomy” (179). In this construction, pastiche is impressively magnanimous, acceding to its passive position without a peep of revisionary response. Such a reading would suggest a willing forfeiture of artistic agency on Banville’s part, his only concern to acquaint the novice with the landmark moments in his source. Banville’s cartology of *The Portrait’s* landscape is not, however, without its dangers. For what if the reader then decides that *Mrs. Osmond* is all the James they (n)ever need? In that case, the text of *The Portrait* is symbolically overwritten. Indeed, Banville’s italicisation of “*the honour of a thing*” seems to anticipate such an outcome, flaunting his appropriation of James’s words. In short, the proximity between James’s text and Banville’s risks that the reader’s encounter with *The Portrait* will be placed on indefinite hiatus. In this scenario, pastiche is not, then, the faithful hound dogging the footsteps of the Master. It is more akin to an invasive species, overpowering and endangering the indigenous text.

Banville’s second act of subversion concerns his technique of “discrepancy,” which creates a slippage between form and content (Dyer 58). Here, the pastiching writer describes “something [the pastiched writer] could not have written about.” The result is that “the style stands out qua style because it no longer belongs naturally, effortlessly, of course-ly, to the subject matter” (Dyer 58). The most intriguing example of discrepancy is Banville’s treatment of sexuality. It is not that James “could not have written about” Isabel and Osmond’s brief honeymoon period, rather that he could not have written about it so explicitly. Banville describes Isabel’s sexual awakening in the following terms:

She had a vague notion of herself enveloped in a sort of sea-mist, inside which an essential aspect of her would remain untouched, unbreached, unbroken; instead, he had turned out to be not the mist but the sea itself, a violent element surrounding her on all sides and pressing irresistibly upon the shell of her very being ... a deep part of herself, an essential part, a part as polished and impenetrable as a pearl .... What she discovered, with an awful thrill, was that nothing could be kept from him, that he would have everything of her, and the surprise and the shock of it were the swooning completeness of her surrender, the moaning abjection with which she prostrated herself before him. (267)

The most arresting element of this passage is its central metaphor of a “polished ... impenetrable ... pearl,” which admits both symbolic and literal interpretations. Its breach is at once the figurative violation of Isabel’s core selfhood, and a physical depiction of cervical contact. Readers turning from this frank recollection of Isabel’s “moaning abjection” might find Goodwood’s kiss, in *The Portrait*, something of a damp squib. It is no more than “a flash of lightning; when it was dark again she was free” (James, *Portrait* 622). But this is, of course, the 1881 text; when James revised the passage for the New York Edition of 1908 he made it considerably more explicit. The kiss, now, is

like white lightning, a flash that spread, and spread again, and stayed; and it was extraordinarily as if, while she took it, she felt each thing in his hard manhood that had least pleased her, each aggressive fact of his face, his figure, his presence, justified of its intense identity and made one with this act of possession. (James, *Portrait* 627)

As Gorra points out, James “could not have written [this] in 1881” (328). He was enabled by the twenty-seven-year fissure, towards the end of which he girded his loins with *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*. In the former, Merton Densher’s “hallucination of intimacy” with Kate Croy is undeniably masturbatory (315), while the latter’s image of Amerigo’s “narrow strait” proceeding through Charlotte’s “tightened circle” describes the literal moment of penetration as much as the abstract “seal” of their “pledge” (180). James’s revisions to *Portrait* are emboldened by these late works. The lightning that served merely to illuminate Isabel’s “very straight path” in 1881 is now undeniably orgasmic, a sensation “that spread, and spread again, and stayed,” while the subsequent double-entendre figures Goodwood’s “hard manhood” less as an abstract insistence and more as a physical pressing. Compared to this, Banville’s passage might be more accurately described as a development

than a discrepancy. It extends and intensifies the kind of imagery James was using in the 1900s, and, in doing so, reveals how “frankly sexual” that imagery was itself (Gorra 328).

Banville’s frankness serves, incidentally, to liberate Isabel’s lost son, who in *The Portrait* existed solely to testify to the consummation of the marriage, but who in *Mrs. Osmond* creates an enduring, irresolvable vacancy. Banville’s evocation of the Osmonds’ initial passion also subverts the stubborn reading of *The Portrait’s* ending as Isabel’s flight from sexual possession. In this interpretation, the Osmonds’ union is implicitly a sexless one, relegating Isabel, as Ralph feared, to “keep[ing] guard over the sensibilities of a sterile dilettante” (James, *Portrait* NYE 373). Banville’s depiction of “swooning surrender” finds a parallel in *The Portrait*, where Isabel recalls having “so ardently given herself” to Osmond, and insists that his “charm” “had not passed away; it was there still; she knew precisely what it was that made Osmond delightful when he chose to be” (457-8). Those who (re)read *The Portrait* in the wake of *Mrs. Osmond* are thus primed to imagine Isabel’s desire for Osmond outlasting the failure of the marriage. Indeed, Banville suggests that Osmond is fully cognizant of “her passion,” and uses it to shore up “his power,” awakening her hunger before leaving her “trembling in frustration and shame” (267-8). Such prurience enables a critical rereading of *Portrait*, which refuses to reduce Isabel’s final choice to the tired formulation of duty (to Osmond) versus lust (for Goodwood). Banville’s intimate rendering of the Osmonds’ marriage, while more explicit than even the late James could countenance, is not, at the last, an imposition. Rather, it excavates *The Portrait’s* latent content, and intervenes in our attempts to understand its ending.

The subtle interplay between Banville and James’s handling of sexuality brings us to the final aspect of pastiche’s effect: to give pleasure. It is self-evident that these pleasures are inaccessible to the unknowing reader, for as Hoesterey asks, “how can one assess and aesthetically enjoy the conceit of the successor if one cannot perceive the play of differences vis-à-vis the original” (*Pastiche* 93)? Some of the most enjoyable conceits in *Mrs. Osmond* are its in-jokes, references to James’s life and works that only readers familiar with those life and works can hear. James’s friends Constance Fenimore Woolson and Francis Boott are referred to in passing, as though they existed on the same ontological plane as his characters, while Isabel’s fear that she is “the carrier of . . . an obscure hurt” invokes the mysterious medical complaint that fascinated James’s biographers (Banville 166). The texts summoned include *The Wings of the Dove* (“could she

ever entirely be again what she had been before?”; 92), *The Ambassadors* (“that night of the party at Gloriani’s house” 156) and, most playfully, *The Golden Bowl*. The Countess Gemini struggles to recall the proprietor of “Fawns, that enormous and perfectly hideous mansion owned by that very rich American” (351), allowing the knowing reader to supply the name of Adam Verver. For Colm Tóibín, who incorporated scenes of inspiration for those same three novels in *The Master*, such inclusions enable “a private moment with two or three readers,” but are wisely limited for fear of becoming “self-indulgent.” Tóibín imagines a democratic contract with the reader, a promise that his book “would contain a world without you feeling, ‘I’m not qualified to read this’” (158). And perhaps such a contract remains unbroken in *Mrs. Osmond*, for why should the unknowing reader suspect that Fawns is anything other than Banville’s construction? But when Madame’s Merle’s “gaze fixed itself as upon a mote in the middle distance,” the reader intimate enough with James’s style to recognise its parodies tastes a pleasure heightened by exclusivity (Banville 326). They feel part of an intended audience, a coterie of taste. This hints at the smugness that haunts pastiche, whose pleasures might evaporate the instant they became more readily accessible.

Such a recognition crystallises what has been apparent throughout the essay: that while pastiche may be predicated on authorial intention, readers, and reading orders, are crucial to its effect. This makes the form theoretically interesting, suggesting a way of nuancing of one of postmodernism’s central tenets. This is Roland Barthes’ assertion that “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author” (148). Pastiche both enshrines the pastiched author and restores the intentionality of the pastiching one, for “the notion of meaning to” is integral to its definition (Dyer 2). However, the author restored through the act of pastiche is a radically different entity to Barthes’ “Author-God,” the “final signified” whose discovery “explain[s]” the text (147). Since pastiche is a transactional endeavour, functioning differently for knowing audiences than for unknowing ones, it relies on the reader for the production of its effect. In its instructive capacity, it either establishes expectations about Jamesian style or is measured against direct experience of that style. In its subversive one, it can affect either how *The Portrait* is read, or whether it is read at all, while its pleasures are also contingent on readerly foreknowledge. While resurrecting the author, pastiche thus avoids an equal and opposite “death of the reader” by activating their critical engagement.

In the face of Barthes's "persistent binaries" (Brooker 112), pastiche insists, then, that we can have it both ways, maintaining the author without surrendering Barthes' hard-fought readerly agency. And, now that we are looking, such a conclusion is anticipated in one of Banville's opening tableau. Isabel, dining at Pratt's, exchanges glances with a fellow diner, whose "stout appearance, bearded and balding" leads us to suspect that this is none other than James himself (17). While he leaves before they have chance to speak, Isabel admits that "definitely, mysteriously, she did miss him, now that he was gone" (20). This suggests a nostalgia that is in keeping with Barthes' later admission: "in the text, in a way, I desire the author: I need his figure ... as he needs mine" (*Pleasure* 27). But consider what 'James' leaves behind him, propped by a jug on his vacated table. A "folded newspaper": a surrendered text (Banville 21). It is a message offered from author to reader: take it, and make of it what you will.

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# Appendix



# Listening to/and James: A Look Back at the 8<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the Henry James Society

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## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

In the course of 2019, scholarship in the field of Henry James' life and work saw attention paid to a vast range of diverse topics, with numerous contributions from all over the world. In particular, 2019 saw the consolidation of a specific focus on "the aural dimension in Henry James's work," to quote the title of the 8th Henry James Society International Conference. Held in Trieste, the 8th edition of the window *par excellence* on Jamesian international scholarship was the most visible occasion in which James' sensibility toward music, sound, and the acoustic found new spaces of critical assessment. It was the opportunity to take stock of a trend that in recent years has added the dimension of sound to the well-established scholarly interest in James' complex relationship with the visual and his acute sensibility for the visual arts—sculpture, architecture, and especially, painting.

In a 2017 essay on the role of Italian opera in literature across the Atlantic, Andrea Mariani wrote: "James knew his limits and how hard it was for him to feel through music. However, precisely because of this, his rare 'incursions' in the realms of sounds, his whimsical reports of fleeting contacts with the

universe of hearing—with its metaphoric potentialities—as well as his few, but apt references to opera, acquire a special significance and must be carefully analyzed” (145). Furthermore, taking its cue from seminal inquiries in the field of James studies and literary criticism (e.g. Buonomo “Listening”; Halliwell; Hanna “‘unlyrical’”), as well as musicology (e.g. Kramer “Dangerous;” Vanderbilt “Complicated Notes”), recent scholarship is bringing to light James’s profound awareness of the classical musical scene and his interest in and engagement with opera, as well as the importance of the acoustic dimension in his work. From the early tales of the 1860s to his major novels, from his travel narratives to his autobiographical writings, criticism and correspondences, music plays a key role in capturing social and physical settings, characters and personalities. A non-rhapsodic attention appears to be paid to aural elements as significant of geographical, social, and cultural differences and transformations, including speech as a marker of ethnic and/or class identity, varieties of the English language and their rendering on the page, as well as the presence of foreign expressions, language and accents, and noises as part of the experience of modernity and technological progress.

Moreover, James’s relationship with music and sound is proving to be an excellent observation point from which to revitalize the study of James’s fortunes and legacies both during his lifetime and after, informing new original research on James’s adaptations on the stage as well as in audio-visual media, and on James’s echoes and refrains in subsequent literature. This essay aims to give an overview of these issues in Jamesian scholarship, organized around thematic clusters, and to take stock of seminal published works as well as more recent publications.

## JAMES AND MUSIC

James’ works is full of musical moments, and as Pierre A. Walker has shown, they are used in just as complex ways as pictorial art is used. One might start with an obvious example of music thematization, such as that found in *The Portrait of a Lady*, when Isabel comes upon Serena Merle playing the piano. Walker points out that having her play Schubert in the New York Edition (replacing Beethoven in the original edition) serves to underscore other references in the novel to young men dying of tuberculosis (such as Ralph Touchett and Richard Parkes Bonington), and bears witness to James’s knowledge of some

of the more obscure aspects of the contemporary European musical scene (on James and Schubert, see also Matthiessen).

Laura Hodges also has occasion to reflect on the piano scene of *The Portrait*, while Natasa Markovic highlights the seductive role played by Serena's voice. Catherine Marquette considers possible real-life sources for the voice of Gilbert Osmond and the sound and structure of the language used by Osmond and the other characters in James's Italian-based fiction. *The Portrait* is also at the center of Shuqin Fu's exploration of auscultation and soundscapes in James's narrative, focusing attention on auditory imagery including the sound of music as well as the presence and function of silence and speech on the page. According to Fu, the example of James may well help to cure what she sees as the "deafness" of literary studies in a society dominated by visual culture, and may serve as a starting point for a broader re-listening of literary canons. In Julie Beth Napolin's view, too, sound is fundamental in *The Portrait*, and she scrutinizes the representation of music floating through the halls of Gardencourt, where Isabel first meets Madame Merle as a sound. In her original take on *The Portrait of a Lady*, Victoria Coulson looks at the characters' relation to music and their figurative roles as musicians as significant indicators of their sexuality and desire.

Other characters "can claim a certain level of musical proficiency": music "delimits the status" of Charlotte Stant in *The Golden Bowl*, another of those women, who, like Serena, "stand outside the familial orbits [... and is] met by the unmusical, amateur appreciation of others" (Hannah, "'unlyrical'" 131). In chapter 13 of *The American*, as Walker points out, Claire de Cintré's vehement playing of the piano for her own self characterizes her restlessness and her state of frustrated repression, offering another example of James's use of music to carefully delineate the personality of his characters.

Hannah also considers figures of professional musicians in James's fiction (e.g. Anastasius Vetch in *The Princess Casamassima*, Vincent Adney in "The Private Life," Mrs. Ryves in "Sir Dominick Ferrand," and Herman Heidenmauer in "Collaboration") to argue that "the relationship between predominantly male professional musicians and the public becomes an important analogue for James's own professional (and theatrical) ventures in these texts, but it is an analogue cut through with uncertainties about the extent to which literature and music can claim each other as sister arts" ("unlyrical" 131 and *passim*).



James's complex relationship with German classical music, as revealed by the above-mentioned scene in *The Portrait*, as well as by earlier travel writings in *Transatlantic Sketches*, is read by Misun Yun also in connection with his professional relationship with *Macmillan's Magazine*, where *The Portrait* was serialized in Britain. The editor of this magazine was George Grove, later to become the first principal of the Royal College of Music, and the publication featured musical scores and frequent essays on German composers.

A reading of *The Sacred Fount* put forward by Joseph O'Leary highlights how, in chapter 9, the characters are attuned to the pianist they are listening to, and how the fruition of music provides a correlative objective of spoken and unspoken social dynamics, as well as almost a meta-commentary on the novel construction of relationships in carefully balanced choreographies and tableaux, to the point of suggesting that the novel itself be analyzed as a musical composition. Hannah ("unlyrical") also proposed a reading of this scene, along with the musical performance in "The Velvet Glove," as an example of how musical performance makes a significant contribution to the structure of relations between characters, and between the narrative voice and James's own audience.

In Larry Gray's opinion, the sounds which accompany visual impressions are key in the singular effects of the portraits in "The Liar," and he shows how sound helps to reveal the dark nuances in Oliver Lyon's character, and in his transposition of his subjects onto canvas, subjects which audiences react to almost as if the portraits had spoken. "A very singular sound" (James, "The Liar" 360) marks in fact the climactic moment in which the Colonel, his wife, and Lyon react to the Colonel's nearly-completed portrait, or to the reaction of others.

Jan Zieliński suggests solving the mystery of "The Figure in the Carpet" by investigating the aural aspect of the novella, including the enigma itself, as something not to be spoken about. He also focuses on the oral character of the secret and the relationship between the spoken and written word (e.g. Corvick's exclamation "Eureka! Immense" and its wired transmission).

Sound is all the more central in the 1909 drama *The Saloon*, based on James's 1892 ghost story "Owen Wingrave," argues Dee MacCormack. In this play, music is used as a plot device to create a sense of unease and anticipation, and the sound of James's own voice is represented, in the text, by long and intricate stage directions.

## JAMES'S VOICE(S)

Written scenes composed as musical pieces, making their melody visible (or audible) through “an abundance of dashes, exclamation points, question marks, repeated words and phrases, and phonetic echoes” are analyzed by a renowned musicologist such as Lawrence Kramer (e.g. *Expression*: 103), keynote speaker together with Donatella Izzo and Matthew Rubery at the 2019 Henry James Society conference. Kramer brings together previous scattered contributions in the field of musicology, e.g. the fascinating argument made by Jordan and Kafalenos about similarities between “Owen Wingrave” and Brahms’s *Intermezzo*, op. 119, no. 1 in their use of systematic ambiguity (see also Vanderbilt [“Notes”] for an analysis of musical analogies in the structures of “Fordham Castle” and “Four Meetings”). Kramer’s work extensively documents and reflects upon James’s sensibility for the acoustic, and his careful construction of his own voice on the page (e.g. see Kramer’s *Expression*: 100 and ff., as well as other works in which James provides material for Kramer to discuss his own theory of ‘melodic speech’), also in terms of fruition on the part of readers, imagining James’s voice as author in their own mind’s ear. In his keynote lecture “Music, Voice and the Sound of Henry James,” Kramer draws from his own experience as composer, in 2006–2007, of a song cycle based on prose passages from Henry James, to argue that setting James to music might give us important clues as to the sound of his voice.

Drawing on Gert Buelens’s seminal work on James’s use of alliteration, Mark Fogel focuses attention on James’s inclination for verbal sound effects, such as alliteration, consonance, assonance, and even rhyme within elaborate prose. According to Buelens (*James and the “Aliens”*), alliteration in James is “a ubiquitous phenomenon,” that “weaves together the text in a ‘continuous and congruous’ manner that is distinctly at odds with the penetrative thrust of the analysis to which that text purports to submit the American scene” (2). Fogel highlights the increased use of alliteration in the later work, in revisions of novels such as *The Portrait* (e.g. the description of Lord Warburton) and *The Ambassadors*.

In “Henry James and the ‘unprovoked harsh note’ of Experience,” Donatella Izzo, taking her cue from the subtitle of the conference, focuses on the aural dimension in *The Ambassadors* and considers it in relation to the treatment of other sensorial experiences in the novel. She shows how tracing and exploring sound offers new insights into James’s major-phase writing.

Philip Horne gives further emphasis to just how receptive James's prose is "to the language of poetry" ("Among the Poets" 72), and other studies on how James's prose can be "felt as 'poetic'" (80) highlight how James's commas might have the same function as line breaks (Dobyns 127). Moreover, to paraphrase Hannah ("Hearing"), the poetics of Jamesian syntax are especially noticeable after he began using dictation when writing, with sentences and paragraphs often being deliberately constructed as formally evocative poetic units.

Dictation and sound in James's late non-fiction and memoirs have also been extensively studied by Oliver Herford, who devotes specific attention to difference as an audible phenomenon, including plays with typographically identical words that mean and sound differently in different languages: this focus raises interesting questions on James's relation to print media and his sense of the variability of language (*Style of Retrospect*, esp. ch. 7; "Sound of Difference"; see also Nabae on dictation, the use of voice, and sound effects in the 1885-1900 stories).

To go back to non-fiction, Melanie H. Ross, relying on Peter Elbow's *Vernacular Eloquence* acquisitions on speech-into-writing, makes an analysis of James's *Notebooks* as a form of free writing that moves from the desire to infuse the page with the liveliness of speech, and channels into writing what might be called "the voice in the head." Connected to deeply conversational elements in the author's letters, Ross argues that "writing as talking"—literally and figuratively—is a crucial part of James's composition process, that dictation explicitly enacts.

Fresh ideas about James's ability to put his own voice on the page also emerge from Willie Tolliver's considerations of the part played by the characters' voices and the construction of soundscapes in *William Wetmore Story and His Friends*. Moving back and forth between the *Hawthorne* biography, works of fiction such as *The Wings of the Dove* and writings by contemporaries, Greg Zacharias investigates the "music of negation," i.e. negative description and the language and syntax that give it structure.

James Lello is working on James's auditive intelligence, and his discrimination of tone as an essential part of this (see, for example, the remarks in "The Question of Our Speech"), and more generally on the theme of intonation in James.

On a different textual level, the presence of musical metaphors was explored by Patrick Jones in his reflection on the role of 'life' in James's aesthetics, reading "The Art of Fiction" alongside passages from Bergson's *Essai sur les*

*données immédiates de la conscience* (1889) in order to show James's relationship with *Lebensphilosophie*.

## JAMES AND VOICE(S)

As Anna Despotopoulou reminds us, transferring the characters' voices to the page can also include inner voices and monologues. In works such as *The Portrait* and "The Turn of the Screw," the complex interactions between the sounds of the outside world and interior mental dimensions of vocal thoughts, questions, and exclamations need investigating in order to understand how the protagonists situate themselves in their worlds and in their relationships; also of interest is the relationship between privilege and voice in James's fiction (e.g. who has the right to speak), as well as the cosmopolitan and transnational nature of his writing. Teckyoung Kwon also works on language as sound in the ears of Miles in "The Turn of the Screw," while Yuehong Wang focuses on the narrator's voice in the same novella: its ambiguities and hesitations, and its relationship with multi-level narrative subjects.

On the rendering of dialogue and conversation on the page, Philip Horne ("Attending") starts his analysis with *The Awkward Age* to describe certain features of James's changing treatment of conversation, in the broader context of James's most intense period of involvement with the theatre.

Sonoko Saito reflects on *The American*, drawing parallels with "The Question of Our Speech" and James's attempt to render American English on the page. Fulvia Sarnelli makes an analysis of "In the Cage," starting from Vericat's statements about "the replacement of the voice in the novel by the aural performance of the writing's own sounds," as a means of liberating the novel from the idealized elocutionary performance of a British authorial voice, and opening it up to the reinvention of its acoustics.

According to Mary Ann O'Farrell, dithering is a characteristic shared by many of James's characters and narrators, and intrigued by the quirky and discordant aspects of James's style, she considers how the habits and practices of wavering are rendered audible in characters' speech and in the language of narration.

## LISTENING TO LANGUAGE(S)

Following in the footsteps of reflections such as Buonomo's ("Listening") on James's response to foreign idioms and the variety of accents in his perception of New York's soundscape, scholarly attention is increasingly drawn to the role of other languages rendered on the page. This happens with the occasional intrusions of words from missing French and German source-texts, and the representation of speech and sound differences, and of a British-American (dis) connection in "A Bundle of Letters" (Buchholtz "Henry James the Translator" and "Setting the Scene"). Adopting a similar perspective, Elzbieta Lubelska suggests that the ambivalent French expression "femme du monde" in *The Ambassadors* is not just an appropriate description of the morally ambiguous character of Madame de Vionnet, but with its mysterious romantic sound, is also a figure in tune with the metaphor of the world as the totality of possible experience in Kantian philosophy.

As Agnese De Marchi points out, vocal patterns (such as speech and accent) together with sounds, convey "the latent poetry of the South" (James, *The American Scene* 657), in representations often connected to the Civil War and to post-war social and cultural tensions, as epitomized by Basil Ranson in *The Bostonians*, and she stresses the synesthetic approach to be found in James's depictions of physical and metaphorical Southern spaces.

Following on from scholars such as Eric Sundquist, Jennifer Cook and Henry Wonham, Kathleen Lawrence argues that the excessive use of frontier vernacular markers such as "ain't" in "The Siege of London" and "Lady Barbarina" signals borderline subjectivities, having much in common with wilderness settings and untamed characters, and harking back to the very idea of "the West." Lawrence looks at the phonic diversity of the characters in order to make a connection between the shift toward greater diversity embodied in Nancy Beck's seduction of Sir Arthur ("The Siege") and Herman Longstraw's capture of Lady Agnes ("Lady Barbarina"), and James's interrogations of his own identity in the years he was writing the two stories 1882-1884—and extending his network of friends into queer circles.

## JAMES AND THE SOUND OF PLACES

The edition of *The Complete Letters of Henry James* provides the opportunity to take stock of James's aural experiences (such as the concerts heard at Pauline Viardot's in Paris) enriched by the painstaking research done by editors such as Pierre A. Walker and Greg W. Zacharias into the factual, biographical and cultural details and settings (see vol. 3: 18, 37, 106).

The letters offer the starting point for cross-cutting readings of works of non-fiction as well as novels and short stories, such as Rebekah Scott's, moving from a letter to Violet Hunt (16 March 1909) to survey James "in the minor key." Or again, as shown by Sarah Wadsworth, private messages can offer golden opportunities to eavesdrop on James's communications with and about women, and rather than position ourselves in line with an authoritative voice, adopt an oblique approach.

Joshua Parker illustrates how computational stylistics can be useful to provide new evidence about the role and distribution of diegetic sounds in James's fiction, by mapping words and phrases that draw attention to sounds and connecting them to areas of interest such as setting and position in terms of narrative plot structure.

Leonardo Buonomo ("Soundscapes") explains how sound connotes New York and London in "An International Episode," and serves to underscore the contrast between American and English manners, with the different conventions followed in social conversation, especially between the sexes (as shown by the character of Bessie Alden). Drawing on examples from James's depictions of modern London, as well as from *The Golden Bowl* and other works, David McWhirter does a fine job of showing how both linguistic and non-linguistic imagined and metaphoric sounds help to constitute the broader soundscape of James's fiction.

The importance of soundscapes in the description of places is also emphasized by Rosella Mamoli Zorzi in her examination of silence and voices in Venice, while Lisa Nais draws particular attention to the voices of Venice in James's construction of modern women figures including silences and silencing, changes of speech patterns, and changes in voice.

As Carmine Di Biase shows, there is a complex interaction between the sound of the setting and the construction of the characters in the Venice of "The Aspern Papers." There, the quietness of the city appears to be functional to the incantatory power of the characters' voices, under the Shakespearian

spell cast by the allusions to *Macbeth* scattered throughout the text as early as the first edition of 1888.

In James's representation of Niagara Falls in his travel piece "Niagara" (first published in *The Nation* in 1871, then revised in *Portraits of Places*, 1883), Sarah Chambré shows the vital role played by the acoustic dimension in pinning down the experience of a distinctive American landscape to challenge the sublime treasures of Europe. At the corresponding stylistic level, poetic devices such as rhythm, alliteration, assonance and onomatopoeia are used by James to craft his landscape, and his use of pacing and silence contribute to the dramatic construction of the Falls, described and rewritten in a vast number of travel writings and fiction in the course of the nineteenth century.

Ivana Cikes makes some interesting points about the sounds present when imagining place and national identities in her analysis of the impressions of James's American visit in 1904-05 and his memories of the America of his childhood, focusing on the differences in the soundscapes of the locations he had grown up in and then returned to years later.

#### JAMES'S SILENCES

The silences present in James's writing have also been listened to as being full of significance for the construction of individual and collective identities, and social life and dynamics. Ki Yoon Jang's investigation into scenes of persistent silence between the two sisters in "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes," is conducted against the backdrop of the characters' opposing dispositions and what they might reveal as regards the period of the story's composition and publication.

In "The Jolly Corner," Li Chen sees the combination of speech and silence as a pivotal factor interacting with the visual dimension to construct horror: there, sound is used to reinforce or relieve ghostly effects, and the ghost, deprived of speech, represents Spencer's depressed unconsciousness, or his Lacanian other. Similarly, according to Linda Raphael, silence in *The Wings of the Dove* is associated with the identity of the stranger or outsider. Building on critical contributions such as Buonomo's "Listening," Raphael reflects on the signs associated with silence in James's novels, starting with Eugenio in *The Wings of the Dove*.

As a way to approach the reading of “The Beast in the Jungle” in the classroom, Michael Anesko proposes an examination of silence together with the other forms of discourse present in that tale, and how they shift progressively in tone, value, and volume as the story evolves (see also Halpert for the teaching of James using digitalized sources). Phyllis van Slyck ably shows how Maggie’s unspoken, imagined words in part two of the *The Golden Bowl* are crucial to her retrieving of Amerigo in the end.

#### JAMES AND THE SOUNDS OF TECHNOLOGY

Fascinated by how James’s techniques were inspired by new communication technologies, Matthew Rubery, in an article published in 2006, describes “The Papers” as being among the first works of fiction to bring onto the page “changing conceptions of intimacy brought about by new communication technologies that had only recently become a part of everyday life” (“Unspoken” 347), during a time, the late nineteenth century, described by James as “the age of interviewing” (*Novelty* 109 and ff.), when a person’s individual voice was rapidly winning society’s favor as “the most effective way to know a person’s ‘true’ self” (“Unspoken” 344). Rubery points out that celebrity is repeatedly characterized in “The Papers” as “insistently verbal” (“Unspoken” 359), and fame is presented as a voice able to attract attention above the crowd, represented as a “great murmur.” What is left unspoken between the two lovers, on the other hand, “might be taken to express the story’s conception of intimacy as a form of speechlessness defined in opposition to the confessional voice of the interview” so that “in a plot devoted to the confessional manner associated with the interview, Howard and Maud’s relationship develops almost entirely without speech” (363), and their discussions of their own life are deliberately located far from the noise of Fleet Street (see also Buonomo, “Listening” on the loudness of New York in *The American Scene*). In “The Master’s Voice,” Rubery delves into the implications and challenges of rendering James’s voice actually audible, as was done in 1942 when “The Turn of the Screw” was first recorded for the visually impaired. Given James’s well-documented fondness for reading aloud, or listening to readings of, literary works, it seems likely, Rubery contends, that he would have appreciated this new way of experiencing his writing.



For Rory Drummond, the noise-filled city of London at the turn of the twentieth century seems to resonate with aural devices such as alliteration, onomatopoeia and rhyme, and similes and metaphors centered on music imagery exploited in the prose of “The Papers,” as well as with celebrity gossip and newsy chatter, while the capital’s background hum is provided by newspapers and magazines.

In a fascinating paper delivered by Cheng Xin, attention is focused on the telegraph in “In the Cage,” not simply with regard to the telegraphist’s role (and proposed overlappings with the author, the typist/text, and the reader), but also to how she uses the power of the sounder and telegraphic code to form her own vision of upper-class society and intervene in the affair between Lady Bradeen and Captain Everard. In Cheng Xin’s opinion, the role of the sounder is not only and not so much a metaphor, but rather a part of a network of relations which includes non-human entities. Dongshin Yi also stressed the role of technology and “the noise of code” in this novella as signs of James’s anxiety about (and fascination with) the coming of non-linguistic, electronic forms of communication, drawing on Katherine Hayles reading of the novella as a “prequel to the story of information in the twentieth century” (71).

June Hee Chung’s paper highlighted the characterizations of technology’s role in shaping practices for communication and aesthetics in “In the Cage” and *The Wings of the Dove*. There are similarities in how the sounder and the telegram are represented in “In the Cage,” and electrical currents and alarms, ships, trains, photographs, and newspapers are represented in *The Wings of the Dove*, with their links to important moments in the novel and their production of noises which in turn help to produce meaning and shape the quality of messages (“Sounders,” see also *Henry James and the Media Arts*, ch. 3).

Furthermore, Merle Williams’ parallel reading of “In the Cage” and *The Awkward Age* shows how conversation, technology, and community interact in James’s take on *fin-de-siècle* “revolting daughters.”

#### THE AURAL DIMENSION, QUEERNESS AND GENDER ROLES

Paul Fisher explores James’s relationship with the portrait-painter John Singer Sargent from an aural perspective: the two men met in Paris in the early 1880s and Sargent was soon introduced into James’s London circle. Sargent’s habit of playing the piano in social settings, and his passion for

modern, experimental, and ethnic music—including his interest in exotic dancers—unsettled James, who criticized Sargent’s painting *El Jaleo* (1882) for the “want of serenity” represented by the female dancer at its center. According to Fisher, James’s negative opinion of *El Jaleo*, when he was usually laudatory of Sargent’s work, is a good example of the two men’s contrasting attitudes toward musical, theatrical, rule-breaking women and the queer transgressions they sometimes embodied (“Want of Serenity”; on James, Sargent, and Henrietta Reubell’s salon as a queer cultural space see also Fisher’s “The Dear Little Tobacconized *Salon*”).

New insights can be found when queer echoes are located from unexpected perspectives in James’s work, thereby revitalizing established academic positions, such as in Christopher Stuart’s proposal to read May Bartram as the Jamesian stand-in in “The Beast in the Jungle,” arguing in favor of intentionalism as regards the transmutation of homosexual romance in the tale.

Brendan Whitmarsh argues that the aural dimension has a vital role to play in engendering new readings of sexual disquiet in *The Wings of the Dove*, where dislocations in spoken language are distinct from those manifested on the scriptural planes of James’s texts.

Mercedes García Palma’s contrastive study of “Julia Bride” (1908) and “Mora Montravers” (1909) uses Lacan’s theory of *jouissance* and the pleasure principle to throw light on the moral implications of femininity and reflecting upon how the eponymous characters change in the course of the narrative, on the role of male voices, and ultimately on connections between the issue of misplaced voices and gender agency.

#### JAMESIAN ECHOES ON STAGE, PAGE, AND SCREEN

In 2005, Michael Halliwell remarked that “the current plethora of films based on the work of Henry James finds something of a parallel in the number and range of operatic adaptations of James’s fiction. During the last forty years there have been at least ten full-scale operas based on his fiction, ranging from the early Benjamin Britten work, *The Turn of the Screw* (1954), to the more recent versions of ‘The Aspern Papers’ by Philip Hageman and Dominick Argento (1988).” He quite rightly described this series of adaptations as “one of the more bizarre coincidences in operatic history” (“Voice” 11), and proceeded to outline the operatic settings and scenes in James’s work, and

discuss the relationships with Jamesian texts of composers and librettists in ten adaptations (an analysis fully developed also in Halliwell's *Opera*, with specific attention devoted to Jamesian narrators and melodramatic aspects in the metaphrastic process).

Taking into account the techniques of adaptation in Britten's version of "The Turn of the Screw," Beverly Haviland focuses her analysis on how music and sound contribute to the transposition of the ambiguity of the tale and the register of the queer, as opposed to film versions such as Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* (1961), and Tom McLoughlin's *The Haunting of Helen Walker* (1995), in which the scores tend to reinforce the heteronormativity implied in the conventional resolution of the Gothic genre. Taeko Kitahara attempts to show how comparing the use of sounds in "The Turn of the Screw" and *The Innocents* gives us a better understanding of James's emphasis on silences, and his use of theatrical techniques on the page.

Chip Badley explores the *acoustmètre*—the off-screen acousmatic sound-track made up of voices, music, sound effects (as defined by Michel Chion)—in Babette Mangolte's avant-garde film *What Maisie Knew* (1975) and points out its pivotal role in dislodging the scopophilic visual gaze of James' novella. In the film, the aural dimension therefore makes it possible for the child to resist heteronormative adult sexuality, by giving representation to the sonic disturbances of a young person struggling to reconcile sound and image, and curating a feminist/queer sonic practice of listening to the *acoustmètre*.

Speech and sound play their part in Jamesian re-uses, imitations of his style, and parodies on the written page, such as in John Banville's *Mrs. Osmond* (2017), Colm Tóibín's *The Master* (2004), and Cynthia Ozick's *Foreign Bodies* (2010), as well as in shorter works analyzed by Mary Burns and Paula Marantz Cohen (see also *Tales from a Master's Notebook*, the recent anthology edited by Philip Horne). Michael Gorra, Philip Horne, and Julie Rivkin also reflect on Banville's novel, and more broadly on the novelist's choice to take up another writer's characters, as opposed to using the characters of myth, the common stock of a culture, and look at the ethical and aesthetic questions raised by such a choice (see also Gorra, "The Lady Lives;" Horne "What Isabel Knew").

Banville's uncanny ability to reproduce the sound of James's style and his narrative voice on the page also caught the attention of Bethany Layne ("Sounds"): this ability is all the more impressive when compared with

other parodies and exaggerations of James's late style, including Max Beerbohm's *The Mote in the Middle Distance* (1912), Theodora Bosanquet's "Afterwards" (1915), and the untitled manuscript of Michiel Heyns's fictionalised Bosanquet (Frieda Wroth in *The Typewriter's Tale*, 2005). In "Henry," Layne shows how in Cynthia Ozick's "Dictation," a work of biographical fiction, James's style in relation to dictation, and a reading of queer desire over the narrative restoration of compulsory heterosexuality take center stage.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

To summarize, the interest in the acoustic dimension in Henry James can be traced back to a handful of seminal works published in the last twenty years, but this interest has grown rapidly in recent times, and has culminated in the 2019 Henry James Society conference.

Let us now try to outline some of the main directions of critical inquiry that this—most certainly incomplete—overview might have helped to identify. The study of Henry James's own voice, and the acoustic dimension of his prose has given rise to research into the stylistic techniques affecting the rendering of sound on the page, the relationship between speech and writing, and dictation in particular, as well as sound and/or music metaphors, and analogies with music in composition techniques.

Much fruitful work has focused on the complex relationship in James's fiction that connects the narrator's voice with those of his characters, especially as regards speech and sound as signifying (or being closely connected to) individual and collective agency, including representation of gender and queerness, and of ethnic and national identities.

Recent appraisals have shed new light on the explicit use of music and musicians in James's fiction, and have unearthed important testimonies concerning his awareness, knowledge, and frequentation of musical performances and performers, as portrayed in autobiographical writings and correspondences.

The attention paid by James to the acoustic dimension of places have led to fresh studies into both the registration of soundscapes in the places he visited and put on the page in his memoirs, letters, and travel writings, and their fictional counterparts in his novels, tales and novellas.

Just as the aural approach is helping to revitalize academic investigations of James's major fiction as well as his less well-known private texts and communication, it is also being used to revisit Jamesian adaptations and re-uses on the page, stage and screen, in which the rendering or parodying of James's voice(s) and its interaction with the acoustic dimensions proper to the performative arts provides fertile ground for further inquiry.

## ABBREVIATIONS

SoJ—*The Sound of James: The Aural Dimension in Henry James's Work: Henry James Society 8th International Conference*, Trieste, Italy, 4-6 July 2019.

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