Unspoken Intimacy in Henry James's "The Papers"

MATTHEW RUBERY

*I*NTERVIEWING has become such a familiar part of today's news media that it is easy to forget how controversial this practice was for audiences in the nineteenth century. Henry James's characterization of the time in which he lived as the "age of interviewing" came in response to a newspaper press that had only recently begun to use interviewing techniques as a means of generating news.[1] Since James's use of the phrase, interviewing has evolved from an occasional technique for obtaining information into a constitutive feature of social discourse across a wide range of communications media. Sociologists Paul Atkinson and David Silverman argue that we now live in an "interview society" in which shared personal narratives have become fundamental to our self-understanding.[2] Such a society disproportionately values a confessional form of discourse in which personal stories offer privileged access to private experience. In other words,

[1] See Henry James, notebook entry, 3 February 1894, in *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, ed. Leon Edel and Lyall H. Powers (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), p. 86. Hereafter referred to as *Notebooks*.

[2] See Paul Atkinson and David Silverman, "Kundera's 'Immortality': The Interview Society and the Invention of the Self," *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3 (1997), 305.

the most effective way to know a person's "true" self is through that individual's own voice.

Atkinson and Silverman identify three conditions distinguishing the interview society that was just coming into visibility in James's time. First, the individual has to be perceived as a worthwhile source of information. Second, various professions need to be in place in order to elicit and record personal testimony. And third, a mass communications media is necessary for the distribution of the interview to readers. While particular kinds of interrogation have always taken place, it was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that the press began to consider individuals as valuable or even appropriate sources of knowledge about their own experience.[3] As late as the end of the nineteenth century, it was still socially unacceptable in many circles for a journalist to question a stranger about personal matters. In 1901 one of James's contemporaries, Lady Broome, complained: "My experience of being interviewed began many years before the invention of the present fashion of demanding from perfect strangers answers to questions which one's most intimate friend would hesitate to ask."[4] The interviewing method that would become a defining feature of modern journalism was still in its infancy at the beginning of the twentieth century.

It has become something of a commonplace for legal historians to point out that the right to privacy was not defined until it was thought to be endangered. According to sociologist Edward Shils, the "intrusive perception" of watchdog occupations such as journalism posed the greatest threat to the informal privacy enjoyed at the end of the nineteenth century.[5] Similar accounts of public life at this time have identified a tenuous separation between the public realm of impersonal institutions and the private realm of intimate relationships.[6] Privacy, in these ac-

---

[3] See Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, "From the Individual Interview to the Interview Society," in *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*, ed. Gubrium and Holstein (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2002), pp. 3–32.

[4] Lady Broome [Mary Anne Barker], "Interviews," *Cornhill Magazine*, n.s. 10 (1901), 473.

[5] See Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 319.

[6] Jeff Weintraub provides an overview of the four organizing frameworks used in discussions of "public" and "private" as well as the key differences among the public

counts, designates what we are entitled to keep inaccessible, protected, or out of sight from others, a notion generally associated with personal life. In *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* (1873), James Fitzjames Stephen was one of the first to defend personal life against "unsympathetic observation" that might inflict pain and moral injury.[7] Nearly two decades later, Samuel D. Warren and Louis D. Brandeis's "The Right to Privacy" in the *Harvard Law Review* established a legal right to privacy in the United States.[8] No direct legal protection was given to privacy prior to this landmark essay, which focused on the publication of details relating to a person's private affairs. Mental anguish inflicted upon individuals by newspapers was suspected to be the primary threat to privacy: "The press is overstepping in every direction the obvious bounds of propriety and of decency" ("The Right to Privacy," p. 196). The essay itself was thought to have been written in response to Boston newspapers that had printed personal details (little more than the family's name and address, as it turns out) about Mabel Warren's society dinners held in the Back Bay.[9] This was the era of "keyhole journalism," after all, which made the protection of individual privacy an issue at the end of the nineteenth century, the very years in which Henry James composed his own fictions supposedly attributing the

---

spheres of Alexis de Tocqueville, Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, Norbert Elias, Richard Sennett, and Philippe Ariès (see Weintraub, "The Theory and Politics of the Public/Private Distinction," in *Public and Private in Thought and Practice: Perspectives on a Grand Dichotomy*, ed. Weintraub and Krishan Kumar [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1997], pp. 1–42).

[7] See Stephen, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1873), p. 160.

[8] See Warren and Brandeis, "The Right to Privacy," *Harvard Law Review*, 4 (1890), 196. On the legal history of the right to privacy in America, see Judith Wagner DeCew, *In Pursuit of Privacy: Law, Ethics, and the Rise of Technology* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1997). On the relevance of these arguments for British legislation, see Walter F. Pratt, *Privacy in Britain* (Lewisburg: Bucknell Univ. Press and Associated Univ. Presses, 1979).

[9] The *Saturday Evening Gazette* reported: "—Mrs. S[amuel] D[ennis] Warren, Jr., gave a dinner for twelve on Wednesday, at 151 Commonwealth Avenue" ("Out and About," *Saturday Evening Gazette*, 22 March 1890, p. 3b). In *Brandeis: A Free Man's Life* (New York: Viking Press, 1946), p. 70, Alpheus Thomas Mason refers to this account as the "lurid detail" motivating the defense of privacy. This account has since been disputed, as Lewis J. Paper notes (see Paper, *Brandeis* [Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1983]).

loss of privacy to an invasive press.[10] Yet, as recent studies of James have begun to recognize, the very technologies blamed for encroachment were in fact responding to the increasing anonymity of urban life, which fueled a desire to read about other people in the newspapers.[11]

Defenders of privacy rights seldom considered that the most serious obstacle to their establishment might not be legal. One exception was the defense of privacy made in 1890 by Edward Lawrence Godkin, who had persuaded James to write reviews for *The Nation* and was later cited as a source by Warren and Brandeis. Godkin's essay for *Scribner's Magazine* concedes that individuals vary in their desire for privacy and, in what amounts to a troublesome point for any defense, that some people have no wish to protect it at all: "To some persons it causes exquisite pain to have their private life laid bare to the world, others rather like it."[12] Soon after the publication of Warren and Brandeis's article, Godkin wrote a piece for *The Nation* predicting that legal intervention would be ineffective with newspapers because of their popularity: "a very large proportion of every community nowadays dislike privacy so much for themselves that they are very unlikely to help other people to secure it. It has to struggle against the passion for notoriety on the part of obscure people—one of the strongest of social forces to-day."[13] A major obstacle to privacy rights, then, was the simple fact that many people did not want them, as inexplicable as this idea may have seemed to its defenders such as Warren, Brandeis, Godkin, and James. Yet the desire to appear in the newspapers—"the passion for notoriety" cited by Godkin—ultimately poses a more profound problem in James's fiction than does the relatively straightforward defense of privacy against invasive journalists

---

[10] See Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History, 1690–1960*, 3d ed. (New York: Macmillan Co., 1962), p. 444.

[11] In "The Construction of Privacy in and around *The Bostonians*," *American Literature*, 64 (1992), 719–47, Brook Thomas locates James's fiction within the context of contemporary debates over privacy rights. See also the recent approaches to the issue of privacy discussed in the essays collected in *Privacies: Philosophical Evaluations*, ed. Beate Rössler (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2004).

[12] E. L. Godkin, "The Rights of the Citizen. IV.—To His Own Reputation," *Scribner's Magazine*, 8 (1890), 65.

[13] [Edward Lawrence Godkin], "The Right to Privacy," *The Nation*, 51 (1890), 497.

for which James has been credited. James's tales about journalism such as "The Papers" (1903) were among the first to identify changing conceptions of intimacy brought about by new communication technologies that had only recently become a part of everyday life. This essay begins by considering James's "The Papers" within the print culture at the turn of the century, and then it examines how the conversational format of the interview became the focal point for James's critique of newspaper publicity as well as of a society in which intimate personal stories were becoming a defining feature of public life.

⮑

One incident from Henry James's life that is known to have influenced his attitude toward journalistic invasions of privacy deserves recounting here for the specificity with which it singles out the practice of interviewing. In October 1886 Julian Hawthorne published a private conversation with his former Harvard tutor James Russell Lowell under the heading "Lowell in a Chatty Mood" in the New York *World*.[14] Lowell's response in the Boston *Advertiser* insisted: "nobody could ever have been more surprised and grieved than I by Mr. Julian Hawthorne's breach of confidence in his report of my conversation with him. . . . It never entered my head that the son of my old and honored friend was 'interviewing' me. If it had he would have found me dumb."[15] It is not surprising that the *World* editors, under the heading "The Lowell Interview," defended Hawthorne's conduct.[16] The next day, in an editorial, they suggested: "Mr. Lowell is not the first man of distinction who has been shocked by seeing his own freely expressed opinions in print. They are often distressing."[17] Lowell responded with a statement defending the privacy of all individuals against

[14] See [Julian Hawthorne], "Lowell in a Chatty Mood," New York *World*, 24 October 1886, p. 9. In "The Hawthorne-Lowell Affair," *New England Quarterly*, 29 (1956), 493–502, George Knox describes the press coverage.

[15] James Russell Lowell, quoted in "A Card from Mr. Lowell," reprinted in New York *World*, 27 October 1886, p. 4e.

[16] See [Anon.], "The Lowell Interview," New York *World*, 28 October 1886, p. 4c.

[17] See editorial remarks, New York *World*, 29 October 1886, p. 4a.

unnecessary public exposure: "The life of a man into whose private affairs the public assumes the right to look is far from agreeable at the best, but on the terms which Mr. Hawthorne seems willing to justify it would be unbearable."[18] Hawthorne's final letter to the press went unacknowledged by Lowell, who watched in mortification as the press continued to discuss the affair for the next two months. Afterward, Henry James in a notebook entry condemned in the most explicit terms Hawthorne's "beastly and blackguardly betrayal" of Lowell (this notebook entry, along with an indiscreet letter published in the *World* by Mary Marcy McClellan, would provide the material for James's short novel *The Reverberator*, published in 1888).[19] The incident was a vivid example for James of how drastically public exposure could affect the meaning of a private conversation, a fate he sought to avoid by burning any potentially indiscreet correspondence to which he had access.

The first published interviews were discomforting for audiences not accustomed to such personal forms of news. The emergence of the interview in American newspapers during the early 1860s has been well documented by historians.[20] The British press refused to adopt the method until nearly two decades later, though audiences were able to read amusing excerpts from the American papers, in reviews such as "Interviewing Extraordinary" in *All the Year Round*, long before the interview became standard practice.[21] Use of the interview confirmed for many critics the degradation of a British press that had formerly distanced itself from the intrusive New York newspapers once ridiculed by Charles Dickens through parodic titles such as the *Peeper*, *Private Listener*, and *Keyhole Reporter*. One of the first interviews in England took place when Liberal politician W. E. Forster agreed to be interviewed by W. T. Stead in

[18] James Russell Lowell, quoted in "Another Card from Mr. Lowell," New York *World*, 1 November 1886, p. 5b.

[19] See Henry James, notebook entry, 17 November 1887, in *Notebooks*, p. 41. McClellan's letter was published in the New York *World*, 14 November 1886 (see *Notebooks*, p. 40n).

[20] See Michael Schudson, "Question Authority: A History of the News Interview," in his *The Power of News* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), pp. 72–93.

[21] For the early use of the interview by the British press, see Lucy Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 160–66.

October 1883, under the condition that Forster be permitted to revise the manuscript before publication. Stead would become Britain's most vocal advocate for the practice of interviewing in the pages of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, which under his editorship published more than one hundred interviews in 1884 alone.[22]

No matter how controversial the interview may have been initially, this format was far too popular among readers for editors to resist publishing them for long. Arnold Bennett's *How to Write for the Press: A Practical Handbook for Beginners in Journalism* (1899) made no apology about devoting an entire chapter to "The Art of Interviewing."[23] Each of Bennett's five styles of questioning—the conversational, the argumentative, the interrogatory, the one-sided, and the descriptive—was designed to be a more efficient way of eliciting information from the variety of speakers encountered by the journalist. The Scottish journalist Alexander Innes Shand questioned whether such subtlety was necessary at all when dealing with a public who, contrary to James's notebooks, willingly cooperated with the journalist: "as a rule, we imagine that the accomplished interviewer makes his entry by the front door, and is courteously welcomed by his victim."[24] Newspapers and magazines benefited from the name recognition of a celebrity, who in turn received free publicity while boosting the circulations of these periodicals. By the 1890s, even those celebrities who once avoided the press began to recognize the value of making themselves available to journalists. Swedish soprano Christine Nilsson spoke of being interviewed at this time as "the penalty of celebrity" that no public figure could reasonably expect, or even desire, to avoid during an international tour.[25]

[22] See the detailed account of Stead's interviews in Raymond L. Schults, *Crusader in Babylon: W. T. Stead and the Pall Mall Gazette* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1972), pp. 61–87.

[23] See [Arnold Bennett], *How to Write for the Press: A Practical Handbook for Beginners in Journalism* (London: Horace Cox, 1899), p. 55.

[24] [Alexander Innes Shand], "Contemporary Literature—II. Journalists and Magazine-Writers," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 125 (1879), 78.

[25] See John B. Lane, "Confessions of an Interviewer," *Pall Mall Magazine*, 2(1893), 307.

After moving to London in 1876, James would have been well aware of the debate over the boundaries of journalistic inquiry on both sides of the Atlantic. The intimate style of news reporting associated with the "New Journalism" arising in Britain in the 1880s was at the center of debates over privacy rights.[26] While it has often been claimed that the commercial journalism taking shape at the end of the nineteenth century brought about a more standardized culture (or what Matthew Arnold deemed a more "feather-brained" one), Paul Starr argues that efforts to reach a mass audience instead encouraged diversification of content and style.[27] Banner headlines, illustrations, and interviews were among the most conspicuous changes to newspapers at this time; depending on whom you asked, these innovations were either sensational or progressive. It was the latter for American-influenced editors who encouraged audience involvement through an intimate rhetorical style, in marked opposition to the tradition of impersonal journalism in Britain.

The interview was a particularly effective way of making newspapers accessible to casual readers. Whereas for most of the century newspapers had reported parliamentary speeches verbatim with minimal attention to the speaker, T. P. O'Connor insisted that personalities, not politics, sold newspapers and that the best way to attract readers was through a "personal tone" involving detailed descriptions of a public figure's appearance, clothes, habits, home, and lifestyle.[28] New York *World* correspondent R. Landor's interview with Karl Marx in 1871, to take one notable example, sought to bring readers into personal contact with the man rather than the philosophy: "He has entered and greeted me cordially, and we are sitting face to face. Yes, I am tête-à-tête with the revolution incarnate, with the real founder and guiding spirit of the International Association."[29] One

---

[26] See the historical accounts given in the essays collected in *Papers for the Millions: The New Journalism in Britain, 1850s to 1914*, ed. Joel H. Weiner (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1988). See also John Stokes, *In the Nineties* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1989).

[27] See Starr, *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), pp. 233–66. Arnold's comments about the new journalism first appeared in his "Up to Easter," *Nineteenth Century*, 21 (1887), 629–43.

[28] See O'Connor, "The New Journalism," *The New Review*, 1 (1889), 423.

[29] R. Landor, "The Curtain Raised. Interview with Karl Marx, the Head of L'Internationale," New York *World*, 18 July 1871, p. 1f.

could say that debates in the 1860s over the anonymity of journalists were replaced in the 1880s by debates over the anonymity of their subjects. The British journalist Stephen Stapleton even described interviewing as a way of speaking about celebrities "as if they were your old familiar friends."[30]

The interrogative methods criticized by many readers for being too personal were at the same time criticized by others for not being personal enough. Skeptics doubted the interviewer's ability to provide anything more than a superficial image of the speaker. The conversational format enabled individuals to describe experiences in their own words, and yet, as Pierre Bourdieu has argued, to consider life as a meaningful sequence of events is already to conform to what he calls the "biographical illusion."[31] While the interview has been accepted by many scholars as an authentic account of subjective experience, journalists writing in the nineteenth century were among the first to raise questions about the reliability of interviews. One contributor to Dickens's *All the Year Round* contended that the interview had less to do with realism than with fantasy:

> As for verisimilitude, interviews are supposed to be pictures from the life. As a matter of fact, the supposition is merely supposition, for that is what they never are. If they were pictures from the life, some people would keep interviewers away from them with tooth and nail, with sword and gun — some of the very people who now welcome them with open arms.[32]

This account dismisses any idea of a threat to privacy posed by interviews that can hardly be said to resemble "pictures from the life" in the first place. In spite of the pretense of spontaneous conversation, these interactions nearly always took place in accordance with well-established conventions. Even the most self-aware interview proceeded under the dubious assumption that a speaker's personal stories were authentic and valuable in their own right. When *The Idler* in 1895 published the symposium "Are Interviewers a Blessing or a Curse?" involving Stead, Eliza Lynn Linton, Barry Pain, John Strange Winter, and W. L. Alden,

---

[30] Stapleton, "Society Journalism," *The Monthly Review*, 21 (November 1905), 111.

[31] See Bourdieu, "The Biographical Illusion," in *Identity: A Reader*, ed. Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans, and Peter Redman (London: Sage Publications, 2000), p. 297.

[32] [Anon.], "Interviewers and Interviewing," *All the Year Round*, ser. 3, 8 (1892), 425.

Linton for one derided the notion that a sequence of formulaic questions could capture experiences accumulated over a lifetime: "an interviewer comes in with a few superficial questions and a sharp look round on the outsides of things, and presto! there you are, in a few sentences introduced to the world as a perfectly understood and perfectly represented human being!"[33] The main target of Linton's criticism was the inductive method by which outward signs were interpreted as revelatory indexes of an individual's inner life. Hair color might be reported without embellishment, for instance, but furniture was likely to be taken as the metonymic expression of the speaker's mind, books as an expression of the intellect, and manners as an expression of the soul. The American journalist Rollo Ogden went one step further in declaring that an interviewee's reserve only encouraged him "to gather the truth from his gesture and expression, to guess at what is left unsaid," a method that makes for good reading but hardly makes for good journalism.[34]

The literary interview was a particular problem for Henry James and other writers who sought to preserve the cultural distinction of authorship in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Arthur Conan Doyle, for example, once replied to an interviewer more interested in his private life than in his writing, "What has the public to do with an author's personality?"[35] Audiences were more interested in reading about the lives of authors at the turn of the century than at any previous point in history. The popular "author at home" feature ostensibly brought readers into contact with the private self, if not the creative mind, of a prominent writer through an intimate conversation conducted inside the author's home.[36] It made little difference how staged and formulaic these conversations might be. One

---

[33] Eliza Lynn Linton, quoted in Linton, Barry Pain, W. T. Stead, John Stranger Winter, and W. L. Alden, "Are Interviewers a Blessing or a Curse?," *The Idler*, 8 (1895), 491.

[34] [Rollo Ogden], "The Interview as Literature," *The Nation*, 65 (1897), 124.

[35] Arthur Conan Doyle, quoted in [Robert Barr], "A Chat with Conan Doyle," *The Idler*, 6 (1894), 341.

[36] In *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters: A Study of the Idiosyncratic and the Humane in Modern Literature* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1969), p. 200, John Gross describes popular interest in biographical information about authors at this time. See also the account of the author profile in Richard Salmon, "Signs of Intimacy: The Literary Celebrity in the 'Age of Interviewing,'" *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 25 (1997), 159–77.
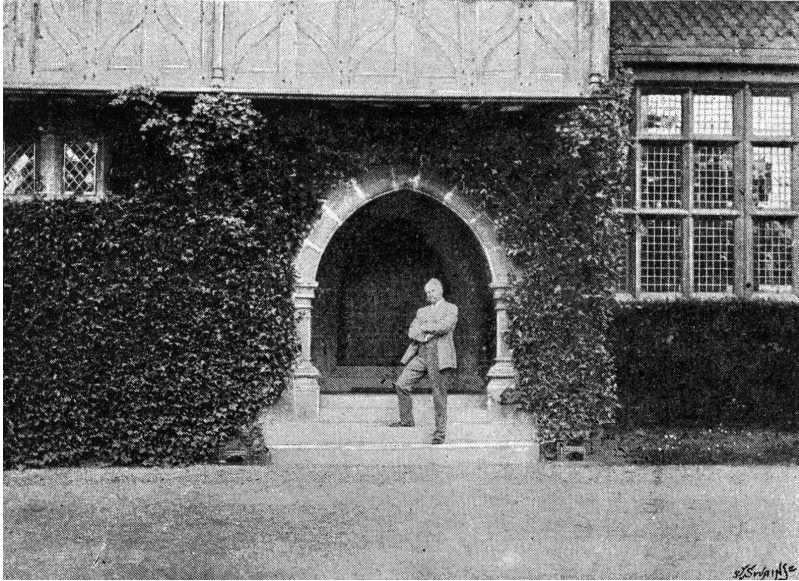
FIGURE 1. W. S. Gilbert "At the Porch" of his mansion in Graeme's Dyke, Harrow Weald. Taken from Harry How's "Illustrated Interview" in the *Strand Magazine*, 2 (1891), 333. Photo by Elliott and Fry. Courtesy of Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Univ. of Pennsylvania.

anonymous reviewer for *The Bookman* complained that the "Chat with an Author" feature invariably presented identical series of illustrations, including the author's face, profile, front door, library table, and garden.[37] Harry How's interview with W. S. Gilbert for *The Strand Magazine* in 1891 vividly illustrates such an attempt to capture the artist's genius through a sequence of photographs moving progressively inward from the exterior of the Harrow Weald mansion to a portrait of the composer in his study to a facsimile of the handwritten manuscript for "Tessa's Song," the closest thing possible to a metonymic representation of the artist's mind in the act of creation (see Figures 1–3).

While most authors who protested against the invasion of privacy at the same time welcomed the benefits of publicity in this manner, James's refusal to speak with the press contributed to the mythic image of the artist's self-imposed exile from the

---

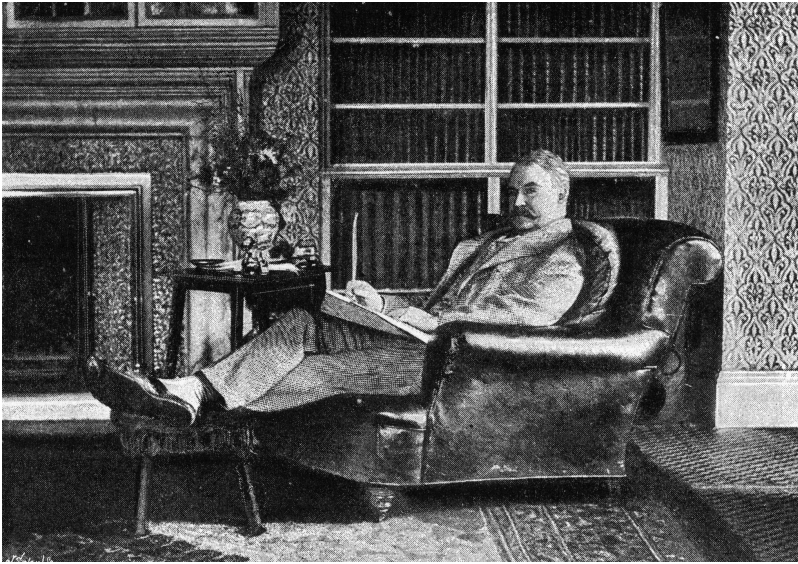[37] See [Anon.], "The Literary Review," *The Bookman*, 21 (1905), 567.

F I G U R E 2. Gilbert "At Work" in the library whose white enamel bookcases contain over four thousand volumes (How, "Illustrated Interview," p. 336). Photo by Elliott and Fry. Courtesy of Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Univ. of Pennsylvania.

popular culture of his time. In his entire career James gave only three interviews, and even those with outspoken reluctance. In 1905, during one of these rare occasions, James explained to the poet Witter Byner his aversion to becoming a literary personality or, worse, a celebrity author:

> "May I add, since you spoke of having been asked to write something about me, that I have a constituted and systematic in-dis-position to having anything to do myself personally with anything in the nature of an interview, report, reverberation, that is, to adopting, endorsing, or in any other wise taking to myself anything that any one may have presumed to contrive to gouge, as it were, out of me? It has, for me, nothing to do with *me*—*my* me, at all; but only with the other person's equivalent for that mystery, whatever it may be."[38]

[38] Henry James, quoted in Witter Bynner, "A Word or Two with Henry James," *The Critic and Literary World*, 46 (1905), 148. James's two other interviews are Florence Brooks's "Henry James in the Serene Sixties" (*New York Herald*, 2 October 1904 [Magazine Supplement], p. 1); and Preston Lockwood's (misleadingly titled) "Henry James's

You are Too aged to remember
        That withered bosom's earliest glow;
Dead is the old romantic Ember
        That warmed your life-blood years ago.
If from our sweetheart we are parted
        (old men know nothing of such pain)
Two maidens will be broken-hearted
        And quite heart-broken lovers Twain!
                How pray, for goodness' sake · remember
                    I've no desire to be uncouth;
                But we are June & you're December —
                    What can you know of Love & Youth!

FIGURE 3. Gilbert's "Fac-simile of Ms. of Tessa's Song" (How, "Illustrated Interview," p. 338). Photo by Elliott and Fry. Courtesy of Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Univ. of Pennsylvania.

Were his distaste for newspaper publicity not so well known, James's opposition to the interview might seem to be at odds with his long-standing ambition to achieve popular success as a novelist. James's defensive characterization of the interview as an invasion of privacy in which the author's words are taken by force—"gouged" out of him, as it were—along with his comparably hostile remarks made in conversations, letters, notebooks, and elsewhere have encouraged the critical reception of James's fictional journalists along similar lines.[39] The shortcoming of such readings, however, is their failure to explain James's attention to precisely those characters most interested in reading about other people's private lives. The explanation given to Bynner might be taken to show less concern for James's "*my* me," the private self with whom the public has nothing to do, than for

First Interview" (*New York Times*, 21 March 1915 [Magazine Section], pp. 3–4). Both interviews are reprinted in *Henry James on Culture: Collected Essays on Politics and the American Social Scene*, ed. Pierre A. Walker (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1999), pp. 35–41 and 138–45. See also Olga Antsyferova, "Three Interviews of Henry James: Mastering the Language of Publicity," *Henry James Review*, 22 (2001), 81–92.

    [39] There have been numerous studies of James's relation to journalism since Abigail Ann Hamblen, "Henry James and the Press: A Study of Protest," *Western Humanities Review*, 11 (1957), 169–75. Richard Salmon's *Henry James and the Culture of Publicity*

what he might have called "*their* me," the public persona with whom the public has everything to do.

James's interest in interviewing is best observed in the way in which he describes the manufactured intimacy between characters in "The Papers," the last of his fictional tales devoted to newspaper journalism. A brief review of "The Papers" may be helpful, since this *nouvelle* is not one of James's best-known works. According to records kept by James's amanuensis, the long tale was finished on 13 November 1902 and appeared the following year in the story collection *The Better Sort* (1903). In his notebooks James describes an idea for a story about the contrasting fortunes of a cynical male journalist who never fails to get the scoop, and an aspiring female journalist who never succeeds in doing so. These characters later became Howard Bight and Maud Blandy in "The Papers."[40] (James's own experience as Paris correspondent for the New York *Tribune* in the 1870s is the source of Howard's comment, "We do the worst we can for the money.")[41] The two interviewers regularly meet to discuss the parallel careers of Sir A.B.C. Beadel-Muffet, a Member of Parliament who has mastered the mechanisms of publicity, and Mortimer Marshal, an obscure dramatist whose only ambition is to appear in the press. The plot is set in motion when Beadel-Muffet seeks Howard's help in disappearing from public life, only to watch the disappearance itself become the subject of further publicity in The Papers, an anonymous corporate entity whose name is always capitalized in James's tale. The romance between the two journalists becomes central to the story when Maud rejects Howard's first marriage proposal in Richmond Park while he continues to promote her career. Once the sensational disappearance of Beadel-Muffet is resolved to everyone's satisfaction, the story ends with Maud's acceptance of Howard's proposal by way of a kiss beneath the stars and an announcement of their retirement from journalism.

(Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997) remains the most extensive treatment of the influence of newspaper publicity over James's aesthetics.

[40] See Henry James, notebook entry, 19 October 1901, in *Notebooks*, p. 200.

[41] Henry James, "The Papers," in his *Complete Stories, 1898–1910*, ed. Denis Donoghue (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1996), p. 549. Further references are to this edition and appear in the text.

James's journalists have long been taken to express the author's hostility toward the invasion of privacy by an increasingly sensational newspaper press. While there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of James's wish to be left alone, there is little evidence in his fiction that he saw newspaper reporters as in fact the greatest threat to that privacy. In "The Papers," Howard Bight describes the very opposite situation, in which the culprit responsible for the loss of privacy turns out to be none other than the public itself:

> "People—as I see them—would almost rather be jabbered about unpleasantly than not be jabbered about at all: whenever you try them—whenever, at least, I do—I'm confirmed in that conviction. It isn't only that if one holds out the mere tip of the perch they jump at it like starving fish; it is that they leap straight out of the water themselves, leap in their thousands and come flopping, open-mouthed and goggle-eyed, to one's very door."
> ("The Papers," p. 548)

Where we might expect to encounter an unwarranted invasion of privacy in James's narrative, we find instead that there was never any initial privacy to be invaded. Howard has little need to extort information from these "open-mouthed and goggle-eyed" respondents, who are well aware that there is no such thing as bad publicity: "What is the sense of the French expression about a person's making *des yeux de carpe*? It suggests the eyes that a young newspaper-man seems to see all round him" (p. 548). The very invocation of privacy would be out of place when referring to a public who fears cultural invisibility more than any other fate. Indeed, Howard is not an investigative reporter at all, but rather an interviewer whose professional success depends on the respondent's cooperation. Why James continued to write about journalism even after acknowledging that its interrogative methods scarcely constituted an invasion of privacy is a question yet to be explained.

What set James's fiction apart from other defenses of privacy at the time was its abiding interest in situations in which there is little initial privacy to be invaded. Despite James's outspoken concern for protecting numerous forms of privacy, his journalism tales are noteworthy for their attention to precisely

those characters least interested in avoiding the public gaze. Whereas earlier works such as *The Bostonians* (1885–86), *The Reverberator*, and "The Death of the Lion" (1894) raised questions about individual reportorial responsibility, "The Papers" directs its satire toward the eponymous corporate media under which the ethical deliberations of individual journalists make little difference. Numerous readers have noticed the shift in James's tone from the satirical treatment of journalists in his earlier works to something approaching sympathy for the journalists Maud and Howard.[42] Howard Bight's name may even mislead readers of the earlier satires into expecting the "bite" to be the journalist's own. "The Press, my child," as the journalist says to his colleague, Maud, "is the watchdog of civilisation, and the watchdog happens to be—it can't be helped—in a chronic state of *rabies*" ("The Papers," p. 586). This image of rabid publicity would seem to suggest that the press has overstepped its bounds as protector of society and become, through the very ferocity for which it originally had been employed, a threat to that society. The metaphor of the rabid dog is grossly out of proportion, however, in reference to the blasé attitudes of the story's two journalists. "Muzzle your Press," demands one client ("The Papers," p. 586), but Howard and Maud imply that the appropriate metaphor would surely be the gag rather than the muzzle, for it is more bark than bite. The metaphor is doubly misleading in attributing a single voice to a press that speaks through many voices, not least among them those in quotation marks. If anyone in "The Papers" is in a state of rabies it is the public, described in James's 19 October 1901 notebook entry as hounding Howard for publicity rather than the other way around: "they leap, bound at him, press, surge, scream to be advertised" (*Notebooks*, p. 200).

The story's pseudo-celebrities Beadel-Muffet and Marshal yearn for the very exposure that had always confounded James and that he could address only through caricature. These two characters in search of a newspaper have no greater wish than to surrender their private lives—or their very lives themselves, as it

---

[42] See, for example, David Howard, "Henry James and 'The Papers,'" in *Henry James: Fiction as History*, ed. Ian F. A. Bell (London: Vision Press; and Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble Books, 1984), pp. 49–64.

will turn out—in order to become personalities talked about by
the newspapers. Far from defenseless victims of cunning re-
porters, they exhibit an appetite for media attention character-
ized as "*the* greed, the great one, the eagerness to figure, the
snap at the bait of publicity" ("The Papers," p. 546). Howard's
"at home" interview with Beadel-Muffet is just one example of
the self-promotion intended solely to keep the man's name visi-
ble in the press. He is a distinctly modern version of celebrity,
or, as Daniel J. Boorstin put it, famous only for being famous.[43]
Despite James's visual image of the interview providing the
celebrity with "a glass case all to himself" ("The Papers," p. 546),
there is little sense that its pictorial conventions provide a trans-
parent image of the speaker at all. Beadel-Muffet, who is present
in the narrative through intermittent headlines alone, sustains
his celebrity status by establishing himself as a voice to be heard
above the crowd. The ability to attract attention to one's name
through the spadework of soliciting journalists was a necessary
skill for those hoping to make use of a mass-circulation press in
which celebrity was insistently verbal: "The fame was *all* voice"
(p. 547).[44] Beadel-Muffet appears in the newspaper with such
regularity that he has passed from obsolescent content to serial
form: "He was universal and ubiquitous, commemorated, under
some rank rubric, on every page of every public print every day
in every year, and as inveterate a feature of each issue of any self-
respecting sheet as the name, the date, the tariffed advertise-
ments" (p. 546). This is the very idea of publicity that haunted
the dreams of Selah Tarrant in *The Bostonians*, whose greatest
wish is that he might someday be interviewed by the newspapers.

Although James's publicity-seeking characters share a taste
for fame, Marshal's ineffectual desire for publicity separates him
from as much as it aligns him with Beadel-Muffet. While Selah
Tarrant would be envious of the serialized publicity accorded to
Marshal by "Personal Peeps—Number Ninety-Three: a Chat

---

[43] Both Boorstin and Leo Braudy attribute the separation of achievement and ac-
claim to the mass media arising at the beginning of the twentieth century. See Daniel J.
Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Harper and Row,
1961); and Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986).

[44] In his *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minneapolis: Univ. of
Minnesota Press, 1997), P. David Marshall describes celebrity's discursive power.

with the New Dramatist" ("The Papers," p. 576), Maud's unpublished interview with the playwright at his Earl's Court Road flat indicates that the problem is not getting Marshal to talk but rather getting anyone else to listen: "She had described with humour his favourite pug, she had revealed with permission his favourite make of Kodak, she had touched upon his favourite manner of spending his Sundays and had extorted from him the shy confession that he preferred after all the novel of adventure to the novel of subtlety" (p. 555). The trivial details about pugs and leisure parody the invasiveness of the interview as well as its presentation as a revelatory moment: Marshal's camera choice is revealed with "permission," and a modest literary preference is facetiously "extorted" from him. The conversation presumes rather than cultivates intimacy, a condition figured through the eighty-three photographs decorating the flat. These images suggest that the playwright experiences his internal life theatrically, as though he were oriented toward an audience long before he had an opportunity to speak with the press. Marshal's sentimental response anticipates the intimate relationships that twentieth-century audiences would develop with personalities known only through media images, a condition described by psychologists today as "parasocial interaction."[45] The term approximates Marshal's own relation to celebrities as well as the position he aspires to hold in relation to the anonymous readers of his interviews; the scarcely mentioned plays are merely the pretext for personal disclosure. Hence his longing to be talked about conceives fame as a voice—"the great murmur"—that will compensate for the inability of the eighty-three photographs to speak ("The Papers," p. 602). A confessed need for "the breath of sympathy" (p. 556) from newspaper audiences suggests just how literally he takes the company of potential readers. Marshal serves as a cautionary tale when it comes to mistaking publicity for intimacy, since he never appears in the

---

[45] Rebecca B. Rubin and Michael P. McHugh document this behavior in their "Development of Parasocial Interaction Relationships," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 31 (1987), 279–92. On how social interaction with new media may be far more widespread than many observers believe, see Byron Reeves and Clifford Nass, *The Media Equation: How People Treat Computers, Television, and New Media like Real People and Places* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996).

company of anyone except journalists. In fact, the sight of Maud's interview in *Brains* magazine elicits a marriage proposal from Marshal, for what better way to ensure daily exposure through the "at home" interview than by making arrangements with the journalist for it to become "our home" (p. 580)?

As Marshal's proposal suggests, the professional transaction of the interview could easily develop into an intimate situation—or at least this was the fear of critics concerned with the growing number of women entering the largely male profession of journalism at the turn of the century.[46] The impropriety of women conducting conversations with men in an unsupervised setting was a common argument made in order to keep women out of the profession altogether. Interviewing itself was considered by many in the industry to be a distinctly feminine branch of journalism, for it gave disproportionate attention to private life. The "lady interviewer" was even thought to possess innate advantages over her male colleagues when it came to the work of conversation. For example, Arnold Bennett's *Journalism for Women: A Practical Guide* (1898) describes verbosity as a potential impediment to women of the press, and Frances H. Low's *Press Work for Women: A Text Book for the Young Woman Journalist* (1904) urges women to make use of an instinctive sympathy appropriate for interviewing.[47] Curiosity, if not anxiety, about the profession helped to make the woman journalist a fashionable heroine in contemporary works such as Elizabeth L. Banks's *Campaigns of Curiosity: Journalistic Adventures of an American Girl in Late Victorian London* (1894), Robert Barr's *Jennie Baxter, Journalist* (1898), and Alice Muriel Williamson's *The Newspaper Girl* (1899), not to mention Henry James's own depiction of the prying Henrietta Stackpole in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1880–81). While David Kramer has argued that the emasculation of male journalists in *The Bostonians* expresses James's discomfort with the popular press, "The Papers" presents a slightly more complicated dynamic through the reversal of both male and female

[46] See Barbara Onslow, *Women of the Press in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000).

[47] See E. A. Bennett, *Journalism for Women: A Practical Guide* (London: J. Lane, 1898); and Frances Low, *Press Work for Women: A Text Book for the Young Woman Journalist: What to Write, How to Write It, and Where to Send It* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1904).

gender roles.[48] Hence Maud Blandy exhibits the masculine traits of "the young bachelor" alongside the "comparatively girlish" Howard Bight ("The Papers," p. 544). The "gestures, tones, expressions, resemblances" through which Maud expresses her masculinity, and which are notably "latent" or "suppressed" in Howard (p. 544), offer one explanation as to why these journalists would be especially receptive to the outward signals through which interviewers are able to detect the hidden lives of interviewees. In fact, Howard's success as an interviewer appears to be directly linked to his feminine passivity; whereas Maud's solicitations initially go unanswered, Howard was "never more void of aggression than when he solicited in person those scraps of information" for which he is never turned down (p. 544). As the story's Shakespearean subtext *As You Like It* suggests, no marriage can take place between the two journalists until they are transformed into appropriately gendered personae, at which point the two should have little inclination to remain part of a scandal-driven press disproportionately oriented toward private life.

Although the ease with which public figures discuss their personal lives might suggest an environment of comfortable intimacy, the inarticulate romance between the two journalists needs to be understood in opposition to this demonstrative behavior. The oddness of the story's romance partially arises out of conversations from which the most meaningful words seem to be withheld. Whereas the story's celebrities instinctively adopt a rhetoric of intimacy with interviewers whom they have never before met, Maud and Howard communicate through the sparest of signs, which might be taken to be at the root meaning of intimacy.[49] Barely perceptible gestures across crowded pothouse tables in the Strand reveal a closeness lost upon outsiders: "So it was, that, at times, they renewed their understanding, and by signs, mannerless and meagre, that would have escaped the

---

[48] See David Kramer's account of the gendering of journalism in his "Masculine Rivalry in *The Bostonians*: Henry James and the Rhetoric of 'Newspaper Making,'" *Henry James Review*, 19 (1998), 139–47.

[49] Lauren Berlant remarks on the genealogy of this term in her introduction to the special issue of *Critical Inquiry* titled "Intimacy," which she edited (see Lauren Berlant, "Intimacy: A Special Issue," *Critical Inquiry*, 24 [1998], 281–88).

notice of witnesses. Maud Blandy had no need to kiss her hand across to him to show she felt what he meant" ("The Papers," p. 550). The messages intimated between the two journalists could not be more antithetical to the transparency of the celebrity interview, in which even the most reticent characters, such as Mrs. Chorner "overflowed," "prattled," and "gushed" (p. 625). When Howard and Maud meet for the first time since Beadel-Muffet's disappearance, Howard does not even respond to Maud's urgent questions:

> Then she as soon felt that his silence and his manner were enough for her, or that, if they hadn't been, his wonderful look, the straightest she had ever had from him, would instantly have made them so. He looked at her hard, hard, as if he had meant "I say, mind your eyes!" and it amounted really to a glimpse, rather fearful, of the subject. (pp. 577–78)

Visual information is taken as verbal information by Maud, who translates Howard's look into direct speech ("I say, mind your eyes!") and then back again into a "glimpse" of a conversation that never takes place and whose meaning is never made explicit. Maud's conversion of Howard's expression into intelligible dialogue bears a conspicuous resemblance to the manner in which the interview deciphers conventional mannerisms (smiles, winks, nods) as rhetorical markers of interiority. The very legibility of Marshal's interview, which endeavors to make his inner life accessible to an audience of strangers, is in stark opposition, however, to Maud and Howard's manner of secret sharing. An implicit familiarity developed over time distinguishes their intimacy from the counterfeit intimacy taken for granted between interviewer and respondent. What the story designates as "the unspoken" (p. 591) between the two lovers 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. The irony of the story is that, in a plot devoted to the confessional manner associated with the interview, Howard and Maud's relationship develops almost entirely without speech.

A further difficulty in following Howard and Maud's romance arises because their dialogue is exclusively about other

people—the very celebrities appearing in the newspapers, in fact. The spaces in which they discuss their own lives are pastoral environments deliberately set apart from the Fleet Street noise ("boom," "bawl," "howl," "roar," "shriek") that ordinarily shapes their thoughts. In the idyllic quiet of Richmond Park, Howard's first marriage proposal to Maud would come as a non sequitur in the midst of a conversation about Beadel-Muffet, were not so much of their intimacy based upon the vicarious experience of other people's lives. In fact, Maud describes the otherwise desirable proposal in terms more appropriate to the rhetorical intimacy associated with journalism than to their habit of gestural intimation. Her complaint that Howard's proposal has "no form" ("The Papers," p. 573) resembles James's own complaint, made one year after the story's publication, that journalism is responsible for "a sort of pseudo-form, a largeness, looseness, and elasticity of talk which has flooded the country with an enormous sea of chatter."[50] It is easy to overlook the precise moment of Maud's change of heart as long as attention is given to the lovers' words (often little more than chatter) rather than to the manner in which the exchange of vows takes place. This attention to minute gestures suggests just how important embodied interaction, or what Maurice Merleau-Ponty referred to as "intercorporeality," remained to intimate conversation in James's eyes.[51] Although Maud's refusal stands out among the crowd of supplicants eager for Howard's attention, she eventually agrees to marry him once the two journalists have established themselves on equal professional footing. She does so without words, however, first through "the long look they exchanged," and finally through that most articulate of inarticulate gestures, a kiss ("The Papers," pp. 589, 638). The story's closing lines leave ambiguous whether what will appear in the papers is the marriage announcement or—as a reading in which actions speak louder than words would have it—the long-awaited kiss that seals the marriage.

Yet even a private language would be of little use if the dialogue continued to be restricted to the private lives of other

---

[50] Henry James, quoted in Bynner, "A Word or Two with Henry James," p. 147.

[51] See Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 302.

people. Throughout the story, Howard and Maud exchange confidences in private but derive pleasure mostly from the publicized world of the newspapers. Thus, after Beadel-Muffet's disappearance, Howard's offer to Maud ("Well then, my child, interview *me*" ["The Papers," p. 614]) is a renewal of the original marriage proposal ("Will you have me?" [p. 572]) as well as its reversal, since it brings their public and private lives into direct conflict by forcing the two journalists to decide whether or not to share their intimacy with the newspapers. Whereas Maud declines the initial proposal out of concern that marriage may imperil their careers, Howard's exclusive story would ensure the success of both of them. Agreeing to the interview, however, would mean surrendering the intimacy between them by converting their unspoken secrets into explicit speech: "But his surrender made her tremble. It wasn't a joke—she *could* give him away; or rather she could sell him for money" (p. 615). The ease with which Maud substitutes "him" for his speech indicates exactly what is at stake in the transaction. If the parallel is still not clear, Maud's reaction to the proposed interview as if it were a marriage proposal should remove any remaining doubts as to whether more is at stake than an exclusive news story:

> So unlike anything that had ever come to her was, if seriously viewed, his proposal. The quality of it, while she walked, grew intenser with each step. It struck her as, when one came to look at it, unlike any offer any man could ever have made or any woman ever have received; and it began accordingly, on the instant, to affect her as almost inconceivably romantic, absolutely, in a manner, and quite out of the blue, *dramatic.* (pp. 615–16)

The gravity of the moment arises from Maud's impending choice between competing marriage proposals from a public figure with no private life and from a private figure with no public life. Maud's decision to reject Howard's offer of an interview ("I'll keep your secret"), then, is what afterward enables her to accept the offer of marriage ("The Papers," p. 615). Instead of two successful journalists who make their livings by reproducing private conversations for public consumption, Maud and Howard resign from journalism altogether in order to keep each other's secrets, including Maud's exclusive interview with

Mrs. Chorner and Howard's exclusive access to Beadel-Muffet. For James the very act of withholding this valuable information preserves and metaphorically deepens the intimacy between the two characters: "There was more between them now than there had ever been, but it had ceased to separate them, it sustained them in fact like a deep water on which they floated closer" (p. 636). This final image of "deep water," an interiority whose depths remain hidden to the naked eye, is in stark opposition to the image of the interview as an overflowing fountain in which the more one has to say, the less one seems to reveal. It is an intimacy based on all that goes unspoken between two private individuals at odds with the publicity-hounding Marshal, whose supplicant pose outside the pothouse is what enables Maud to perceive the change in her relationship with Howard: "she fully perceived how interesting they had just become to themselves" (p. 632). In other words, the story concludes with two journalists who were interested only in the lives of others becoming interested in their own lives for a change.

Journalists appear to have been the least of Henry James's worries when considered as part of the larger print culture in which the interview was becoming the favorite format of readers who, if not yet constituents of a full-fledged interview society, were at least participants in the emergence of that society. One can hardly blame Howard for deciding that it was the public rather than the journalist who sought publicity: "Not that I suppose they don't like it—why should one suppose anything of the sort?" ("The Papers," p. 548). Newspapers were not so much an invasion of privacy as its compensation, offering isolated individuals the chance to read about the private lives of other people and, for the chosen ones, to read about themselves. "The Papers" is James's response to the assurance with which readers presumed to know a person encountered solely through print media. James, even after conceding the public's role in the loss of privacy, continued to be suspicious of the manner in which readers turned to the newspapers to satisfy needs and desires not met in their own lives. The lesson of "The Papers" is that intimacy with people we do not know is far easier to establish than is intimacy with people we do know. As the satirist Barry Pain observed in 1895, "Nothing conceals

one's real self better than an interview, except more interviews" ("Are Interviewers a Blessing or a Curse?" p. 493). The press manipulates the opinions of its audience in a way best called into question by a fictional narrative with its own stratagems— most notably the marriage plot—for manipulating reader sympathies on behalf of its protagonists. It is no coincidence, then, that James's fiction during these same years would take an inward turn, away from journalism's transparency and toward the subtle, demanding reading experience that would come to be recognized as modernist difficulty. That difficulty, it should by now be clear, comes in response not only to the period's popular literature but also to its popular journalism, namely the interview that defines James's own age as well as the age still to come.

University of Leeds

ABSTRACT

Matthew Rubery, "Unspoken Intimacy in Henry James's 'The Papers'" (pp. 343–367)

Henry James's "The Papers" (1903) was among the first works of fiction to identify changing conceptions of intimacy brought about by new communication technologies during the late nineteenth century—a time described by James as "the age of interviewing." This essay's consideration of the interview as a model for supposedly intimate conversation reveals how the public's desire to appear in newsprint ultimately poses a far more profound problem in James's fiction than does the relatively straightforward defense of privacy against invasive journalists for which James has been credited. Such readings fail to explain James's attention to precisely those characters most interested in reading about other people's private lives or even in having their own private lives read about by others, a problem best assessed in terms of interpersonal relationships. What "The Papers" designates as "the unspoken" between the two journalists, Maud Blandy and Howard Bight, might instead 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. A number of conversations involving unspoken intimacy suggest that the lesson of "The Papers" is that intimacy with people we do not know is far easier to establish than intimacy with people we do know.

Keywords: Henry James; Interview; Newspaper; "The Papers"; Intimacy