

A VIRTUAL HENRY JAMES

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How might we reread James for a digital age? Should we use him to resist the impacts of new media and technologies? Or can we exploit these technologies to better popularise and understand James's writing?

Almost all of James's fictions are now available online as e-texts. If you're interested in James and communications technology, read "In the Cage," the tale of telegraphy he dictated in 1898, and some of the recent papers on it. What more could you want? As the contents of Richard Hathaway's *The Henry James Scholar's Guide to Websites* indicates, James studies *has* responded to the digitisation of Western culture.

These responses are unlikely to be the final word, however. This paper lays out a possible agenda of issues for James studies in thinking about how further to respond to the ongoing social, cultural, and academic implications of new media. It explores the possible application of three central concepts that have established themselves during the last ten years of cyberculture studies (the cyborg, hypertext, and virtuality) though these concepts may well be superseded in future. At the time of writing, some of the most effective work pushing forward the theorising of new media is being undertaken by Lev Manovich, particularly in *The Language of New Media* (2001).

One of the aims of this paper is to indicate some key secondary texts in this way. Rather than attempt to resolve issues through detailed argument, I indicate, fairly briefly, some principal lines of enquiry. I have adopted a simple hypertext format of presentation, though readers can also print out an alternative linear version. My discussion reviews some of the major existing frameworks for debate and points to possible future developments. While some of these developments might be taken up by individual scholars, such as myself, other potential projects would require a more collective response.

¹ My approach is informed by a recent doctoral study of death in James's fiction and by my teaching experience on the Humanities IT programme at London Metropolitan University. Many of the arguments summarised here were first developed in discussions with my supervisors and examiners, through conference papers, and with colleagues. Thanks to Laurel Brake, Stephen Connor, Vanda Corrigan, Julia Kuehn, Peter Rawlings, Richard Salmon, Megan Stern, and Pamela Thurschwell. Richard Hathaway and Gert Buelens also provided helpful feedback and encouragement.

1. CYBORG

James is cautiously interested in new media, such as photography, as an aspect of modernity. His suspicions of the effects of new media on the individual and culture might provide an historical precedent for present-day cautions against utopian enthusiasms for wired society. But why resort to the language of the cyborg in order to understand this particular aspect of his work? Isn't this over-reading and pandering to fashion?

- The popularity of the idea of the cyborg might bring new readers to James, allied to promoting "In the Cage" as a canonical James tale.
- The cyborg, as a socio-political idea, might be useful in understanding James's role as a cultural critic, for example in *The American Scene*.

"In the Cage"

This romantic novella about an anonymous young telegraphist is an obvious starting point for attempts to reread James's fiction in the light of new technologies and media emerging during the late nineteenth century. "In the Cage" makes accessible parallels between the nineteenth-century telegraph and late twentieth-century communications technologies, such as the World Wide Web. Perhaps this tale therefore needs to take its place alongside "Daisy Miller" (1878), "The Turn of the Screw" (1898), and *The Portrait of the Lady* (1881) as one of *the* key texts by which James is introduced to new students.

Modernist subjectivity

"In the Cage" offers an impressive representation of consciousness pervaded and constructed by interaction with a machine environment. The story shows the telegraph subtly permeating the protagonist's experience - mentally, physically and socially.

The tale can be read using a familiar opposition:

- technology as a form of dehumanisation - desensitising, materialistic, and mechanical;
- technology as a creative opportunity - contributing to the development of James's own late style and subjects, and providing the basis for the telegraphist's romance.

"In the Cage" shows the telegraphist mostly at the counter, away from the sounder (the heart of the machine, housed in a cage within the cage). While she is not literally penetrated by the machine, the story nevertheless shows her connection via the telegraph to a network of information. This happens on social and psychic levels:

- In order for her to send messages she must be fluent in Morse code, whose sound fills her workspace.
- She seems to acquire new intuitive abilities by virtue of her role as medium – she “found her divinations work faster and stretch further” (846).
- This increased sensitivity is clearly a result of intimate proximity to the machine. Fighting to attain an identity for herself despite her circumstances, the protagonist likes to think it’s because she’s a lady, not a common shop-girl, that she is peculiarly sensitive in the role of medium. The tale allows the reader to share these feelings, but also shows them to be in large part a romantic fantasy.

The tale illustrates James’s interest, not in technology as novelty, but in technology in advanced stages of diffusion through the layers of self, society and culture. The telegraph was no longer a new technology by the 1890s. Thus in “Telegraphic Realism: Henry James’s *In the Cage*” (2000) Richard Menke argues that James recasts the telegraph, used by Trollope and other mid-Victorian writers as a figure for realism, into a figure for modernism.

“*In the Cage*” shows the blurring, not the collapse, of boundaries between human and machine that Donna Haraway describes in her famous “*Cyborg Manifesto*” (1991). The story works within a humanist frame of reference; James cannot be claimed as a signed-up posthumanist.

The American Scene

The cyborg is a socio-political concept. At stake is not just the recording of individual experiences of the machine - the construction of subjectivities. Also at issue are key processes of modernity, such as bureaucratisation, urbanisation, fordism, mediatisation and consumerism.

“*In the Cage*” focuses on personal relations and eschews direct socio-political comment. A somewhat more overt site for reading James as cultural critic is *The American Scene* (1907), as Ross Posnock argues in *The Trial of Curiosity* (1991). *The American Scene* does not directly report on factory work or criticise the theories of scientific management. Instead it shows subtle processes of control masquerading as forms of social and personal opportunity. Two examples:

- At the Waldorf Astoria hotel in New York, the guests and employees are like an “army of puppets” subject to the control of “master-spirits of management” (444). They are unaware of their strings being pulled and instead revel in their apparent freedom.
- American women appear to enjoy advantages of social freedom compared to their European counterparts, but these advantages are actually a form of disenfranchisement. American women thus constitute “a new human convenience” comparable with “ingenious mechanical appliances, stoves, refrigerators, sewing-machines, type-writers, cash-registers” (639).

These examples point beyond the relatively individualised focus of “In the Cage” to a more directly socio-political level of analysis. They indicate a limited basis for extending the idea of the cyborg in James’s work beyond technologised subjectivities. They don’t make such a task easy, however.

Disguising the machine

In *Bodies and Machines* (1992), Mark Seltzer argues that James’s dictated texts work hard to disguise the presence of the machine - in particular the typewriter. This presence therefore needs to be excavated through careful analysis of the tone, style, and structure of James’s work.

Seltzer’s observation is part of a theorisation of James’s switch in compositional method in the late 1890s to the use of dictation. Leon Edel suggested in the final volume of his biography of Henry James (1972) that the switch to dictation contributed to the development of the late style. In Friedrich Kittler’s *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* (1990), Seltzer’s *Bodies and Machines*, and Pamela Thurschwell’s *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920* (2001), the switch to dictation becomes a socially, aesthetically, and psychologically complex change to James’s scene of writing:

- The switch becomes a professional response to rival media, such as cinema and journalism.
- The change is gendered by the woman’s role as medium and by James’s own self-preservation (in common with other men in privileged social positions) from direct contact with the machine.
- The presence of the machine in the writing process is repressed rather than displayed overtly.

There is a growing critical interest in James's relationship with photography across a wide range of his writing. By contrast, "In the Cage" is often treated as *sui generis* in its direct response to communications technology. This tale could instead provide a starting point for investigating across James's fiction subtle, internalised responses to late nineteenth-century media and technologies.

Style and the management of attention

If the machine is internalised in James's writing after the switch to dictation, then his readers undertake a kind of *work at the machine-like interface of the text*.

With its semantic ambiguity and ethical complexity, James's late style has been read as offering its readers a particularly active, free role as interpreters and constructors of meaning. At the same time, the late works increasingly place intense demands upon the reader in terms of concentration and stamina. Not for nothing is late James dubbed "difficult." Works such as *The American Scene* control the reader's attention through a sustained pressure of semantic and syntactic complexity.

The intensification of James's demands upon his readers after 1900 can be explained in terms of a turn-of-the-century cultural matrix comprising factors such as:

- the burgeoning power of advertising and journalism as cultures rivalling the traditional status of literature;
- the increasing importance of visual culture, reflected in spectacular entertainment on screen, stage and showground;
- theories of crowd and consumer psychology, cultural degeneration and the unconscious, emerging alongside social science disciplines.

These are aspects of cultural history integrated, for example, in Jonathan Crary's study of attention, *Suspensions of Perception* (1999) or Daniel Pick's *Svengali's Web* (2000), a study of George du Maurier's 1894 novel *Trilby*. "The machine" is not isolated or reified in these studies, nor should it be in studies of James's writing. Instead it is internalised and synthesised among a rich array of contemporary cultural contexts.

2. HYPERTEXT

Jerome McGann, editor of the *Complete Writings and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* hypermedia research archive (developed during the 1990s), proposes in *Radiant Textuality* (2001) that hypermedia archives provide the best current model for scholarly electronic editions. Such archives can

- promote a more comparative, intertextual, reader-centred approach - because of the ease of searching, linking between texts, and providing multiple, customised views;
- integrate the visual, auditory, and conceptual aspects of literary texts - by providing tools for comparative searching and analysis alongside simulations or digital facsimiles of material aspects of the text, such as its physical appearance;
- provide an opportunity for scholars to understand their author afresh - through the process of designing effective electronic systems to store, analyse and distribute his or her works.

McGann builds on seminal arguments laid out by the English scholars Jay David Bolter in *Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing* (1991) and George Landow in *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology* (1992) - both of which have recently appeared in revised editions.

The largest undertaking of collective scholarship currently in progress within James studies is the *Complete Letters of Henry James* project, led by Greg Zacharias and Pierre Walker. They intend to produce an online version of their work, and this will undoubtedly be a major contribution to the resources available to James scholars across the world. But this project alone does not constitute a Henry James hypermedia archive. What is at stake in discussing such major e-initiatives?

Outline content of a Henry James hypermedia archive

There would be difficult copyright issues with much of this potential content. The archive would need multiple interfaces for different purposes of data-inputting, searching, viewing sources, and outputting of findings.

Bibliographic database of James's publications

An online version as detailed as Edel and Laurence's bibliography.

Companion and concordance databases	Developing work such as Gale's <i>Henry James Encyclopaedia</i> (1989) and the concordance at Adrian Poole's website (2000-2002).
Biographical timeline and notes	Developed from chronologies like those regularly printed in student editions of James's books.
Hypertext editions of James's fiction	On a simple level, these would add hot-linked footnotes to existing e-texts.
Digital facsimiles of James's manuscripts, periodical publications and book editions	These sources are not generally available in their original form outside research holdings, such as the Houghton library. Online distribution would need to enhance interest in the primary sources themselves, rather than diminish their value.
Database listing and archive of film, TV, and radio adaptations	Extracts, stills, screenplays and transcripts in digital form, expanding, for example, on Sarah Koch's filmography.
Archive of paperback book covers	A resource for research into global perspectives on James and popular perceptions of his fiction as a "classic" brand.
Archive of related critical and contextual sources	As McGann points out when discussing the Rossetti Archive, hypermedia archives are unfinishable in principle, as they can open out into ever wider archives of material potentially relevant to understanding an author's life and work. This open-endedness does not mean that the archive cannot have a coherent structure into which new material can be added.

E-initiatives

Development of anything like a "complete" Henry James hypermedia archive would be a massive undertaking requiring a long-term commitment from the James studies community.

The production of e-resources is extremely labour-intensive. The Electronic Text Centre at the University of Virginia Library, which supports McGann's project among others, is exceptional in the resources and expertise it can draw upon - such as a large school of literature graduates trained in e-text markup.

Designers of a James archive could take advantage of the skills and resources developed in the production of other archives to date, but there is no off-the-shelf shell that can be quickly and easily customised. (1) The volume of potential material for inclusion is huge. (2) James scholars need to learn about James through the difficult process of designing an archive that works for his particular case - for example, by finding ways to register the subtle nuance and referential range of his writing.

A hypermedia archive is a sound pragmatic response to the digitisation of Western culture within the framework developed in Humanities Computing in the 1990s.

Such an archive is not automatically the best choice for James studies, however. The horizon of Humanities Computing has arguably moved on, illustrated by McGann's move from the Rossetti Archive to his latest project, the "Ivanhoe Game," outlined in *Radiant Textuality*. Rather than respond reactively to the main developments of Humanities Computing, how might James studies take the initiative by contributing to the imagination of new kinds of digital system, adding to our existing matrix of critical and pedagogical tools? What might Henry James e-resources look like, beyond the model of the hypermedia archive, for twenty-first century students growing up in an increasingly digitised culture?

Debate over the future direction of e-initiatives is not currently at the heart of James studies.

Perhaps there is some resistance to the exploration of computer-aided critical practice among the community of James scholars. This would not be unusual among Humanities scholars generally. James can also be taken to be an especial representative of values attached to print culture and subtle representation of consciousness - resisting vulgar commodification and mechanisation, such as

computer applications might imply. The idea of a monumental “complete” James archive may be repugnant, as well as risible, to many Jamesians.

By contrast, James Joyce scholars have made hypertextuality a central aspect of Joyce studies.

Derrida indicated this possible direction in a paper to the 1984 James Joyce Symposium. Since then, critics such as Donald Theall have read the encyclopedic, intertextual and glossolalic qualities of Joyce’s writing as anticipating the hypertextuality materialised differently in computer hypertext. There are ongoing developments of hypertextual editions of *Ulysses* and *Finnegan’s Wake* and a well established Hypermedia Joyce Studies journal.

Might hypertext offer a model for analysing James’s writing, for example its narrative strategies or the complexity of his late style?

James’s narratives are fundamentally linear. Could they be presented in a hypertext form where the reader would jump backwards and forwards across the narrative? Could such an edition/adaptation change pagination or paragraphing? James’s long sentences and paragraphs don’t offer any easy points for interruption. The transition from the solid materiality of the printed page to the flickering insubstantiality of text on a computer screen can be very unsettling - may have its own lessons to teach about James’s writing.

A reader of one of James’s late novels or tales does carry out internal and intertextual cross-referencing, but of an extremely subtle and tenuous kind. How could such referencing be represented using hotlinks? Hypertextualisation beyond hot-footnoting would be either a means of textual analysis in its own right, or a means of presenting a guided reading.

Hypertext also challenges the conventions of linear argument and presentation in printed form that dominate academic discourse, including James studies.

The online version of this paper uses a very simple hypertext format made familiar by thousands of online academic essays and teaching resources. Hotlinks to World

Wide Web sites, graphics, and hot-linking to footnotes are obvious advantages of the form. More subtly, the form also enables an argument to circle round a central theme or concept instead of developing a linear argument towards a conclusion.

As the philosopher David Kolb argues in *Socrates in the Labyrinth* (1994), the non-linearity of hypertext constitutes a challenge to assumptions about rationality that are central to Western culture. My online paper does no more than gesture towards such large stakes. What new arguments about James might the very form of hypertext enable students of James to advance?

3. VIRTUALITY

The virtual has become especially associated with digital media, for example as virtual identities in chat-rooms or virtual reality in 3D computer graphic simulations. But the virtual also functions beyond the narrow association with computers, by providing another name for age-old debates about appearance and reality, fact and fiction, mind and body, idealism and materialism. Specific instances of these debates occur in aspects of computer culture. For example:

William Gibson, science fiction author of *Neuromancer* (1984), is generally credited with the invention of the idea of cyberspace: a global information cityscape that computer users enter, leaving the “meat” of their body behind.

Artificial intelligence researcher Marvin Minsky, in essays such as “Will Robots Inherit the Earth?” (1994), claims that we’ll eventually be able to replicate our brains using nanotechnology and thus transcend the mortality of the body. Others fantasise about downloading one’s consciousness into a transferable computer program.

Howard Rheingold and other advocates of “virtual communities” seek respect for the social relationships that can develop through online communication systems.

Thus the offline material world normally designated as “real” is only one of many realities among which there is no longer any authoritative hierarchy. A key figure for this line of argument is Jean Baudrillard. Essays such as “The Precession of Simulacra” (1983) propose the death of the real: a global culture is already upon us in the form of a sign

economy, which systematically deauthenticates the self and the world and renders every aspect of them the subject of representation.

The relationship between realism and romance is one of the staples of debate about James's fiction. His key essay "The Art of Fiction" (1884) makes a commitment to realism while rejecting narrow definitions of reality: "the measure of reality is very difficult to fix. The reality of Don Quixote or of Mr Micawber is a very delicate shade... Humanity is immense, and reality has a myriad forms" (51). Some of the explorations of consciousness in his later works are indeed very delicate shades - haunted visions markedly removed from the more fully consensual and embodied world that his earlier work represents and addresses. Hence the strand of judgment, typified by the chapter on James in F. R. Leavis's *The Great Tradition* (1948), that prefers the works of his early and middle periods on the basis that they are more solidly real. By contrast, defenders of James's twentieth century work point out that it does not simply retreat from reality. It seeks new ways to (a) represent mind and body and (b) respond to the challenges made by New Journalism, investigative biography and photography to the traditional authority of literary culture to represent the real.

- "The Papers" (1903) anticipates the triumph of mass media representations over any private or literary "real."
- The phrase "virtual Henry James" suggests a computer simulation. This would be a contemporary contribution to the iconography of James the Author - a discourse which he actively initiated with the New York Edition of 1907-9.

"The Papers"

This sourly comic novella marks a distinct exaggeration of awareness in James's fiction of the challenges made to established interests and traditional hierarchies of discourse by what Richard Salmon calls a "culture of publicity." For Salmon, "The Papers" conjures an extreme, farcical vision of a world in which publicity has become "a well-nigh universal ontological condition" (139). The mediating power of newly incorporated newspapers displaces any possibility of direct access to the self or the world:

The tale constructs the actual world of newspaper production as an offstage space from which the narrative's main characters and its readers are excluded. We wander the Strand, with its paperboys hollering headlines, but enter none of its

offices. They are centres of power reaching out across information space, as if through the very ether.

Sir A. B. C. Beadel-Muffet K.C.B., M.P is a phantom character who exists only inside this information space. He is reported to have been found dead in a hotel room in Frankfurt, having shot himself rather than face a sexual scandal, but then turns up unharmed. He thus undermines the credibility of any future possible report of his death and thereby becomes “immortal” (634). He disappears into the publicity system as into an afterlife. By contrast, the narrative emphasises the physicality of desperate publicity-seeker Mortimer Marshall and then condemns him to a living death of obscurity when his one chance of fame - an exclusive about Beadel-Muffet’s death - vanishes. Like Gibson’s hacker-addict in *Neuromancer*, Marshall experiences death as exclusion from the system.

The two central characters, Maud Blandy and Howard Bight, are aspiring journalists. They are also defeated by Beadel-Muffet’s resurrection. The tale ends with them renouncing their barely begun careers and deciding to marry. The happy-ever-after gesture of the ending can’t undo their contamination by journalism, however. The tale has shown the power of publicity operating as circuits of desire, exposure, and obscurity always already inside the characters and their social relations. These circuits cannot be excised by a simple act of renunciation. There is no longer a private, interpersonal “reality” safe from the logic of publicity powered by corporately-run mass media.

Simulating James

H.G. Wells’s parody of James’s late style in *Boon* (1915, under the pseudonym of Reginald Bliss) is so effective because the style is so distinctive a target. Thus a computer programme could well simulate this style too, though not as humorously as Wells does. Max Beerbohm similarly caricatured James in a series of cartoons which seek to establish the power of a simplified, repeated representation of the author over the complexity of his written works.

James himself began to take greater interest in his public persona and posthumous image during the last decade of his life. Sargent paints his portrait. Visiting America in 1904-5, James gives celebrity interviews for the first time, and Katherine McClellan takes a portfolio

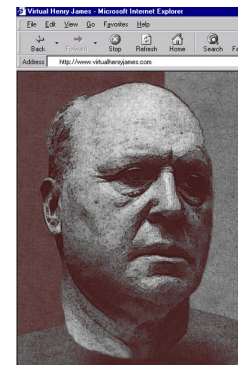
of flattering photographs. Together with family snapshots, these photographs provide the means for photographic manipulations of James's image, for example using standard software such as Adobe Photoshop.

James notoriously resented the intrusion of biographers into the private lives of writers. "The Aspern Papers" (1888) and a host of other stories revel in the ambiguities of the writer-biographer relationship - including James's complicity with the dastardly investigator. The New York Edition, the autobiographies, and two bouts of burning personal papers (but not the Notebooks) are further evidence of James's attempt to control his posthumous reputation. Michael Millgate groups these attempts together, in his study of James, Hardy and Browning, as biographobic "testamentary acts." Or we can see them as founding contributions to the iconography of James the Author.

Many virtual Jameses

There are many different versions of James in James studies. Computer simulations of his figure could likewise be numerous.

Example - a 3-D model of James's head could be constructed as an interface to an artificial intelligence system. The system might be based on an expert system model, so as to simulate James the "Master." Natural language processing could be added to enable user interaction, on the model of chatting to a bot. The system could be a case study in developing a computational model of creativity, so that the virtual James could author new works. Each of these aspects of AI is, of course, highly contentious.²



² An expert system is a branch of artificial intelligence focussing on providing the user with a simulated consultation with a human expert; knowledge is gathered from experts and coded into a system, for example for medical diagnosis. A chatterbot is a system that mimics written interaction with a human user; a famous example is Alice. A computational model of creativity aims to understand the constituent processes of human creativity through developing computer systems to generate, say, poetry or a musical composition. The image of James is a manipulation in Adobe Photoshop of a photograph taken in 1913 by F. Hilaire d'Arois as a preparatory study for a bust by Derwent Wood. The photograph is reproduced in Kaplan's biography of James and can be found at Houghton Library [Portraits - H James, Jr. Pf MS Am1094].

An interactive 3D simulation, available online or installed via CDROM, would provide a literal example, using today's technology, of Pamela Thurschwell's remark in *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking* that "[h]owsoever dead the authorial body may appear, technological resuscitation is always possible from the end of the nineteenth century onwards: phonographs and automatic writing assure that spectral authors can always re-emerge" (4).

An online computer graphic simulation of James might constitute a virtual shrine, taking its place among the diversity of memorials to James, including the grave in Cambridge Cemetery, Lamb House, and the plaque in Westminster Abbey. Any interactive online simulation of James's figure would raise numerous ethical, aesthetic and political questions about the representation of the dead.

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