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 onomatopoetic 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."[1] 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.[2] 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.[3] 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

[1] 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."

[2] 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).

[3] *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 Théatre 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.[4]

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

[4] 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.[5] 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.

[5] 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."[6] 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).[7]

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.[8] Explaining his refutation of

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[6] American critic Richard Poirier coined this term in his classic analysis *A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature*.

[7] 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).

[8] 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 1871and 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.[9] 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

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).

[9] 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*.[10] 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."[11]

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.[12] 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,

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[10] 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.

[11] *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).

[12] 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).[13] 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).

[13] 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's 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).[14] 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

14 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.[15] 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."[16] 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.[17] This hypothesis is confirmed by the fact that Lamb House shelves also contained

[15] 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).

[16] See *Literature I*, April 16, 1898, 453.

[17] 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."[18]

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.[19] 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).[20] A distinguishing feature of *Leaves of Grass* is Whitman's frequent use of onomatopoetic slang, exemplified not only by his "yawp," but also by neologisms such as "the blab of the pave," "Washes and razors for foofoos," 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

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

18 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).

19 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.

20 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 10th Street, New York." Across, on the inside of the cover, written in the same hand, "1st 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 onomatopoetic 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).[21] "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 limpid

[21] 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 onomatopoetic 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*.[22] 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)

[22] 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.[23]

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!"[24] 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."[25] Indigenous to

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23 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.

24 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 Shakepeare'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).

25 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, emblematized 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 farily *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 onomatopoetic "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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