

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁵ See Davies for an analysis of ventriloquism and gender in *The Bostonians*.

⁶ See Pollard (82) and Wicke (151), for example.

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

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