

The Sound of “Scenarios”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE THEATER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE REALIZATION: SCENARIOS FOR FICTION

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

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

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

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

FLOWING STRUCTURE

James writes in his notebook on August 11, 1895:

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

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

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

GETTING HIMSELF TO WRITE (AND WHY)

The scenarios also allow him to work. And this is another hallmark of the oral mode (Elbow, to whom we turn shortly, reminds us): when we feel at ease, it is relatively easy to speak (60). March 30, 1896: “I am face to face now with my last part of *The Old Things* I have only to me *cramponner*—and add word to word. ... Little by little, as I press, as I ponder, it seems to come to me, the manner of my denouement—it seems to fall into its proportions and to *compose*. I see 4 little chapters ...” (161). “Composing” is not so hard... when you are “speaking to yourself” this way.

James, contemplating the writing of something “*big*” and ambitious (January, 1899), summarizes for us what he does and maybe why... with scenarios:

Ah, once more, to let myself go! The very thought of it soothes and sustains, lays a divine hand on my nerves, and lights, so beneficently, my uncertainties and obscurities. ... I must have a long *tête à tête* with myself, a long ciphering bout, on it, before I really start. ... I long to represent an *action*: I mean a rapid, concrete action is what I desire, yearn just now, to put in: to build, construct, teach myself a mastery of. (172)

“Beneficent”: a variation on the word “benignant,” the latter a word frequently used, perhaps ironically, to describe James’s performative father and his compelling “talk” (Habegger 351; 299-365). He was the source of many “uncertainties and obscurities” in the James family, as was his writing. Here, James explicitly writes that he *can* “let himself go” in the act of “ciphering,” a frequent term of his for scenario-writing (yet this encoding is really a decoding; here James is in charge of both) which is also a soothing conversation or “*tête à tête*” with himself—he is teaching *himself* “a mastery.” He takes and builds action through this flow—indeed, James’s “beneficent” contains “*-ficere*” of “*facere*”: “to do, to make.” Even just thinking in this talking type of writing about being able to take action in this way is soothing: “Before I really start.” Such a colloquy *is* starting. He has already started.

arrangements do most uncommonly insist on making themselves different by shifts and variations, always improving, which impose themselves as one goes and keep the door open always to something *more* right and *more* related. It is subject to that constant possibility, all the while, that one does pre-note and tentatively sketch” (36-37).

THE ORAL SCENARIO VIA ELBOW

Thus far I have tried to show how the flowing and uttered nature of the scenarios helped James construct. Now I would like to show, in particular, how the oral gear in which James wrote his scenarios gives energy and dynamism. The initial material that follows comes from Elbow's chapter in *Vernacular Eloquence* on organization in late-stage revising where he focuses on how speech can help structure and organization in writing! (Taking us back to James's "box of fixed dimensions" playwriting challenge). "Writing involves the ordering of events in time and contains sequences of words that make things happen in the realm of time," he reminds us (301-02). We cannot take it all in at once; a novel or play cannot be experienced simultaneously, like a painting can be, he explains (300). Elbow asks, "So, where do writers find the energy that binds written words together so as to pull readers along from one part to the next and make them experience the text as a coherent whole?" He responds, "Since reading is a series of events in time, my claim is that the answer is the same one that applies to music. Successful writers leads us on a journey to satisfaction by way of expectations, frustrations, half satisfaction and temporary satisfactions: a well-planned sequence of yearnings and reliefs, itches and scratches" (303). [Even the "march of an action" does not have to be a straight line.] Elbow's "theme is *organization as energy*" and he gives many examples from the oral that enable writers to "bind words and pull readers through a text," just as James planned—and accomplished—through his scenarios (James's scenes certainly do this, too) (303). Elbow also invokes James's leveraging of limits, "the cage of time and linearity in language ... is the glory of syntax and language. And of music! ... Rhythm declares to each beat, you must wait for your proper turn; not too soon, not too late. Without linearity, there is no experience of energy or dynamism in language—spoken or written" (314-15).

Elsewhere in his book, Elbow shows how many virtues of the speaking *process*—how we "connect with an audience" (67-68); our corporeal pleasure in speaking/singing (71-73); how we can spit it out, condense to the essence, give the "gist" and *say it*, "overcome resistance" (65-68) —can and should be used in writing. In addition, he looks at spoken language as a *product*, and sees all its many benefits for writing (here is just a small sample): "representing thinking as a process" (as we see in James's notebook entries) (98-100); "intonation" (gives the sound of meaning and of people) (109); "spontaneous

syntax” (ditto) (117); and “involvement strategies” (that draw readers in; as do all of these elements) (80). I am suggesting that James’s scenario-writing set in motion many of these benefits.

Finally, Elbow explores the use of the ear and tongue (the oral) in revising. “What the Mouth and Ear Know” or “guidance of mouth and ear” (219, 227). “I posit therefore that everyone who speaks a native language comfortably has a strong musical sense. ... But can we get music into *writing*. I’d argue that we actually do manage that when we write language that invites readers to clump it into well formed and well connected intonation units” (248). James writes that he wasn’t musical, but, perhaps James’s “music” came from speech, as well as his typewriter (*GDM* 891; Bosanquet 35). Elbow: “Our longest and usually deepest experience of how words carry meaning involves felt bodily experience not just intellectual understanding (252). Elbow explains that our knowledge and experience of speech is “*kinesthetic*,” in the “*body*” (227). What I’d like to suggest, as we reach the final phases of this paper, is that these oral, physical satisfactions moved from James’s childhood to the theater and scenarios, and then into his writing in general: the scenario-writing helped “thresh,” another of James’s favorite words for the process, pain, as we will see (NB 127, 129, 132).

GOOD MEMORIES AND WHY

Back on October 15, 1895, “thresh[ing] out finely every inch of the action from that point to the end,” James talks to himself, fills his writing with just the sort of “presence” speech is able to contain (as well as infuse):

That confronts me with the question of the action Fleda exercises on Mrs. Gereth and of how she exercises it. ... Well, eureka! I think I have found it—I think I see the little interesting turn and the little practicable form. How a little click of perception ... brings back to me all the strange sacred time of my thinkings-out, his way, pen in hand, of the stuff of my little theatrical trials. (134)

This narration of his thinking—Eureka! —is dramatic, is a mind in process; that “click” brings back previous clicks that took place while engaging in this same process for the theater, not so long, at this point, before. In what remains of this section, I would like to explore why writing scenarios contains and reawakens what was so good from those theater-writing “trials.” “Deep

and dark is the abyss of the theatre," we know James wrote, during trial-time (LE 510). And yet the scenarios retain a power to empower. Maybe because they were "practicable." With them, James felt able to practice and to devote himself to writing as a practice.

Another clue might be oral, aural, spectral presence(s)—either of James's writing selves above (and described earlier in this paper in his letter to his brother) or, to give a contemporary parallel, of fans at English Premier League soccer matches of summer 2020. Looking back, in 1901 (May 23), James says (or writes) to himself:

Work it out. It's a little germ—to be possibly nursed. N.B. How, after a long intermission, the charm of this little subject-noting ... glimmers out to me again—lighting up for me something of the old divine light ... renewing the little link with the old sacred [playwriting] days. Oh, sacred days that are still somehow *there*—that it would be the golden gift and miracle, to-day, still to find *not* wasted! (195)

"Subject-noting," or scenario-writing, once again, has a kind of quasi-religious feel, reconnecting James with an earlier theater—or church—of writing... for the theater, with many somehow pacified presences [perhaps including that of James Senior; it is as if this present, and former, scenario-writing both summoned *and* calmed his "strange sacred," religion-writing (oral) presence]. Again, in 1909 (February 10), James links scenario-writing with playwriting days and dreams: "A sense with me, divine and beautiful, of hooking on again to the 'sacred years' of the old D. V. Gdns. time, the years of the whole theatric dream and the 'working out' sessions, all ineffable and uneffaceable, that went with that, and that still live again, somehow (indeed I *know* how!) in their ashes" (202-03). The working out summons, while laying to rest, painful ghosts, dwells, as we saw in the May 1901 note, in the realm of "nursing" (here a soothing *self*-mothering; see the work of Susan Griffin on Henry James and orality, via his mother, Mary James). Such scenario-writing—turning dream into action, we might say, inspired by Howard Jones's 1980s album, "Dream Into Action"—made what, only five days after the *Guy Domville* debacle, James had turned back around to calling his "legitimate" and "solac[ing]" "form" of prose fiction, doable (LE 509).

At the end of 1909 and early into the next year, once again on the same "subject" or novel from earlier that year, in a very talky note, James experiences, anew, intense relief from "cipher[ing] out"—"doubts and torments fall away

from me, the more I know where I am.” He calls scenario-writing a testing, “putting to the proof and to the test,” “the pressure and the screw,” the “application” (259, 261):

I ... see the thing as almost the Prologue, after the manner in which the first Book is the Prologue in *The Other House*. Oh, blest *Other House*, which gives me thus at every step a precedent, a support, a divine little light to walk by. *Causons, causons, mon bon*--oh celestial, soothing, sanctifying process, with all the high sane forces of the sacred time fighting, through it, on my side! Let me fumble it gently and patiently out--with fever and fidget laid to rest--as in all the old enchanted months! ... [I]t only presents itself too admirably and too vividly ... as a little organic and effective Action. ... But *pazienza*, and step by step. (261)

The Other House (written as both a *novel* in 1896 and as a *play* in 1909, with a proto-scenario for the former, as previously mentioned, written during James’s playwriting years) sits at just the crossroads we have been exploring.⁷ Taking action through scenario-writing in the playwriting years built “Action” through their “talking” vibrations (echoed by “*Causons, causons*,” “let us chat, let us chat” in French). That endeavor fights on and sheds light, here. This is chamber theater, theater in James’s chamber, with James and his notebook, as in days of old. James can both let go *and* control his “living lines” in these “conditions” (at whatever phase of the composition process). Scenarios combat anxiety and bring sanity; contain, in a calming fashion, the theaters of earlier times and proceed, “step by step,” just as James paced during dictation (Hyde 162).

OUT LOUD

James writes in his preface to *The Golden Bowl* for the *New York Edition* of his works, the same year as the above notebook entries (1909), that speech or “reading *out*” is the “highest test” of “any literary form ... whose highest bid is addressed to the imagination, to the spiritual and the esthetic vision,” i.e., James’s prose (1339).⁸ Should we be surprised that scenarios (early in the writing process) intersect with speech (later) as testing-grounds? When we think about it, James’s prescription is a kind of echo. Aided by pacing,

⁷ David Kurnick examines this interplay.

⁸ See Oliver Herford, who analyzes this passage in-depth (205-15).

gesturing, pausing, the whole a rhythmic process, "under the guidance of mouth and ear" James's words have emerged, talked *and* constructed, for more than a decade by this point (Elbow 227). For James began dictating, speaking his novels out, literally, in early 1897, as alluded to earlier, a process whose "oral" foreshadowing in scenario-writing we have been tracing all this while. To return to James's discussion of the "*vivâ-voce* treatment," for the reader,

fullest experience of his pleasure ... waits but on a direct reading *out* of the addressed appeal. ... The essential property of such a [literary] form as that is to give out its finest and most numerous secrets ... under the closest pressure—which is of course the pressure of the attention articulately *sounded*. ... Gustave Flaubert has somewhere in this connection an excellent word—to the effect that any imaged prose that fails to be richly rewarding in return for a competent utterance ranks itself as wrong through not being 'in the conditions of life.' (1339)

Pressure can cause resistance, it spurs motion, maybe even emotion. Here once again the *oral* produces this desirable pressure, at the end of the writing process, with its product.⁹ "What do you want to say!? Why don't you just write *that*?" and "Write what *you* want to write, as yourself!"¹⁰ Pressure aside, in James's "*vivâ-voce* treatment," oral and visual come together. Those visual figures of speech, "imaged prose," can be called "tropes"—they turn, from the Greek word *trepein*, "to turn." They are structures and can build structures and help structure your text—all the while helping readers see. (Soccer turns do a similar kind of work.) But what James seems to emphasize here perhaps most of all is the embodied nature of his writing. Donatella Izzo's Keynote at the conference where these papers were originally delivered discerned the oral amidst the play of other senses, (de)ciphering these out of what we might call James's "living lines." For "*viva-voce*" directly translates to "with living voice." James's scene of dictation simulates, as does theater (with all *its* "conditions" James lamented in his letter), just such "'conditions of life.'" Conditions which are then compressed into a language that, in turn, "(re-)lives," maybe even "relieves," "*viva-voce*" If you want to let go in writing... how about a scenario? Express it (Elbow 72)! (And then sweat it, and express it some more.)

⁹ Elbow discusses the right balance of pressure and overcoming resistance to produce positive flow in the writing process overall (71-72).

¹⁰ Our son Jules Rosenberg and my friend Kathleen Formosa, respectively, gave me those useful pieces of advice... for this piece.

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