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‘What the World Says’: Henry James’s *The Reverberator*,

Celebrity Journalism, and Global Space

Richard Salmon

Abstract

This essay examines the influence of late-nineteenth-century transatlantic celebrity journalism on the conception of Henry James’s novel *The Reverberator* (1888). A relatively neglected work in James’s canon, *The Reverberator* is known for its satirical treatment of popular journalism and the ‘mania for publicity’, but the depth of its engagement in contemporary debates on the ‘New Journalism’ in Britain and equivalent journalistic practices in America, has not been fully recognized. Inspired by two documented cases of transatlantic controversy generated by Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World*, *The Reverberator* explores the mass-mediation of cultural conflicts in an age of telecommunication and the incipient globalization of geographical space. The essay focuses in particular on James’s response to the furore surrounding Julian Hawthorne’s purported ‘interview’ with James Russell Lowell, published in October 1886: an example of the type of celebrity culture often associated with the New Journalism and inscribed in such textual forms as the interview, gossip column and cable news report. In *The Reverberator* James emphasizes the process by which these journalistic forms and their associated technologies reconfigure the conventional boundaries of cultural space and the narrative possibilities of the international theme.

When Matthew Arnold toured the United States as a lecturer for the first time in 1883 he was privately shocked at the ‘blaring publicity’ which his visit attracted, primarily within the

American press (Arnold, 1895: 2, 221). In his late essay 'Civilization in the United States', published in *The Nineteenth Century* shortly before his death in 1888, Arnold recalled a series of anecdotes from his visit intended to exhibit the aggressive familiarity of American newspapers and the frenetic pace of news circulation on the other side of the Atlantic.

Arriving in Boston he came across a newspaper column under the heading 'Tickings', which was apparently meant to suggest 'news conveyed through the tickings of the telegraph'. One such 'ticking' reports, inaccurately according to Arnold, that 'Matthew Arnold is sixty-two years old' (Arnold, 1888: 490). Proceeding to Chicago, Arnold opened another newspaper to find a report of his visit under the heading 'We have seen him arrive', containing the following personal description: 'He has harsh features, supercilious manners, parts his hair down the middle, wears a single eyeglass and ill-fitting clothes' (Arnold, 1888: 491). Some time later, a New York newspaper attributed to Arnold a criticism of Chicago recorded in the *London Pall Mall Gazette*. One of his American friends telegraphed Arnold to find out if the attribution was correct and Arnold responded immediately by telegraph to issue a denial; whereupon Arnold was sent a copy of a Chicago newspaper reporting his denial of the charge and containing an editorial rebuttal which 'refuses to accept Arnold's disclaimer' and describes him as a 'cur'. This sorry catalogue of events may now seem rather comical, but it nicely demonstrates the accelerated circulation of 'news' about celebrities within the emerging mass-media economy of the 1880s. Newspaper reports and telegrams are issued in a frenzied exchange of messages, circuiting back and forth across cities and continents. The more messages proliferate the greater scope there appears for misapprehension and conflict between the parties involved, and the less prospect of shared knowledge. Moreover, the 'personal' tone and content of American journalism was viewed by Arnold as deleterious to the society which it claimed to reflect, leading to a circular equivalence of supply and demand: 'if one were searching for the best means to efface and kill in a whole nation the

discipline of respect, the feeling for what is elevated, one could not do better than take the American newspapers. The absence of truth and soberness in them, the poverty in serious interest, the personality and sensation-mongering, are beyond belief' (Arnold, 1888: 490). Arnold's bemused summary to British readers of *The Nineteenth Century* - 'You must have lived amongst their newspapers to know what they are' - echoes the response of Gaston Probert, a Frenchman of American descent, on returning from a brief visit to his ancestral land in Henry James's novel *The Reverberator*, written and published in the same year as Arnold's essay: "“Lord, they're too incredible!”" (James, 1888a: 215).

Arnold, of course, was only one of a series of prominent British writers who made high-profile professional visits to the United States throughout the nineteenth century and expressed strong reactions to the American press – from Dickens in the 1840s to Wilde in the 1880s. Arnold's reflection on his visit, though, holds a particular significance for the transatlantic development of popular journalism into a recognized form of modern mass culture. It coincides almost exactly with his identification of a 'New Journalism' in Britain which was consciously influenced by American models. In his recent study, *The Americanization of the British Press, 1830s–1914*, Joel Wiener locates the 1880s as the crucial decade in which 'the specter of popular journalism finally became a reality, as the full impact of transatlantic influence began to be felt and absorbed in Britain' (Wiener, 2011: 154). Although the term 'New Journalism' was not directly used in an American context before the mid-twentieth century (when it became the label for a different kind of personalized journalistic writing), the phenomenon which it was meant to describe in Britain became synonymous with the importation of American cultural practices, and the decade also witnessed a dramatic extension of these practices within America itself. Indeed, as Wiener notes, the phrase, 'Americanization of the British Press', first occurred in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1882, and it was the same publication which promoted the 'New Journalism' as an

ideal under the editorship of W.T. Stead (1883-9). Arnold is usually credited with coining the term ‘New Journalism’ for pejorative usage in a covert attack on Stead in May 1887, also published in *The Nineteenth Century* (‘Up to Easter’), but Stead was quick to use it as a more positive slogan (Stead, 1 October 1887: 8). Just as Arnold was horrified by the triviality of ‘what the Americans call news’, so he castigated the *feather-brained* nature of Stead’s ‘new journalism’ (Arnold, 1888: 490; Arnold, 1977: 202). Though his role in defining the New Journalism may be overstated, Arnold thus occupied a key juncture in the debates of the mid-1880s around the cultural significance of this transatlantic confluence of popular journalism.

Henry James’s *The Reverberator* was conceived, written, and published within the same highly-charged historical moment. James’s original Notebook sketch for the story is dated 17 November 1887 and the novel was first published in six monthly instalments in *Macmillan’s Magazine* from February to July 1888. Not unexpectedly for a James novel, *The Reverberator* is also overtly transatlantic in its focus on the disruptive cultural effects of American newspaper journalism and ‘publicity’. Written towards the end of a decade in which James had published a series of lengthy realist novels, the form of *The Reverberator* reverts back to his earlier mode of fiction from the 1870s: the lighter and more concise comedy of manners on the ‘international theme’ popularized by *Daisy Miller* (1878) and *The American* (1876-7). *The Reverberator* doesn’t quite fit into the received narrative of James’s artistic development over these two decades. On the one hand, it has been read by modern critics as an attempt to recapture James’s dwindling readership, even as a ‘pot-boiler’ or formulaic work of genre fiction.¹ On the other hand, *The Reverberator* clearly sustains the social concerns of James’s more recent novels, most obviously *The Bostonians* (1886). In an often-cited Notebook prompt for *The Reverberator*, James declared: ‘One sketches one’s age but imperfectly if one doesn’t touch on that particular matter: the invasion, the impudence and shamelessness, of the newspaper and the interviewer, the devouring publicity of life, the

extinction of all sense between public and private' (James, 1961: 82). This remark could just as easily serve as an outline of the earlier novel in its suggestion of a sustained literary project to represent some of the most characteristic features of modern culture. In *The Reverberator*, then, James returns to the 'international theme' of transatlantic cultural exchange but with a sharpened eye for symptomatic historical phenomena. While James's earlier international fiction observes humorous and sometimes tragic encounters between American and European cultures, *The Reverberator* foregrounds the very process by which cultural conflicts and national differences are mediated in an age of burgeoning mass culture. It represents a more self-reflexive mode of international fiction, in which distinctive expressions of national identity are ultimately less significant than the globalized channels of communication through which they 'reverberate'. In this essay, I wish to extend an argument that I have made previously about James's engagement with debates on the New Journalism by showing how *The Reverberator* draws specifically on two well-known organs of transatlantic celebrity journalism from the 1870s and 1880s, both of which – perhaps not coincidentally – bore the title of *The World* (Salmon, 1997a: 120-37). Framed in his Notebook sketch as a dramatization of a perverse modern condition – the 'mania for publicity' – the novel responds to new journalistic forms such as the celebrity interview, gossip column, and cable news report, as well as reflecting on how these forms, and the technologies which enable them, transform perceptions of global space (James, 1961: 82).

At first glance, *The Reverberator* offers a familiar Jamesian narrative of the American experience of Europe. Set in Paris, the story concerns the interaction of two displaced American families: the Dossons, recently arrived tourists, and the Proberts, long-established émigrés who have adopted the cultural norms of French aristocratic society. The romantic union between Francie Dosson and Gaston Probert in which the novel culminates is threatened by the rupture between the two families created by the publication of gossip about

the Proberts in the eponymous American society newspaper derived from Francie's 'interview' with the American journalist George Flack. Though its content is not directly represented in the text, the newspaper thus functions as the central plot mechanism of the drama. Of the two recognized 'germs' of the novel documented in the original Notebook sketch, however, only one concerns the experience and impact of Americans in Europe: the minor social scandal caused by a young American woman, May Marcia McClellan, who wrote an 'inconceivable letter' to the New York World (published on 14 November 1886 under the heading 'English, Even in Italy. All the Swells Modelled on British Fashions and Manners'), revealing intimate details about the Italian aristocratic families whose hospitality she was enjoying at Lake Como. The other concerns the same newspaper's publication of an 'interview' with a celebrated American man of letters on his return to his native country after an extended residence in England. Alluding to these two documented cases of 'newspaper publicity', Michael Anesko has observed that *The Reverberator* was 'the closest thing to a roman à clef that James ever wrote' (Anesko, 1997: 193). Both sources bear witness to the expanding transatlantic circulation of print media in the late nineteenth century, and both reflect specific forms of journalism pioneered by the New York World, particularly during its ownership by Joseph Pulitzer from 1883. Of the two incidents, it is McClellan's indiscretion which has a more visible correspondence with the narrative scenario of *The Reverberator* and has thus received the greater share of critical attention. In this essay, though, I will explore the significance of the less prominent of the two 'germs': 'a letter as monstrous as Julian H.'s beastly and blackguardly betrayal last winter of J.R.L.' (James, 1961: 83). Mentioned only in passing in the Notebook sketch, seemingly as an afterthought to James's sustained reflection on McClellan, Julian Hawthorne's 'interview' with James Russell Lowell was published a few weeks earlier in the New York World of 24 October 1886 under the header 'Lowell in a Chatty Mood'. The 'interview' took place at Deerfoot Farm, Southborough, Lowell's

residence in rural Massachusetts, following the established convention of the ‘celebrity at home’ genre (to which I return later in this essay). The location of the interview provides an appropriately intimate setting for what appears to be a frank account (in response to Hawthorne’s prompting) of Lowell’s experiences of British society as an official representative of the United States government in London. Lowell is generally positive in his views and is quoted as expressing a personal preference for living in England rather than America, but at the same time he makes a number of unflattering personal comments on prominent figures in British public life, such as that the Prince of Wales is ‘immensely fat’ and ex-Prime Minister Gladstone ‘rather unmanageable’ (Hawthorne, 1886: 9). While hardly calculated to ingratiate the readership of *The New York World*, Lowell’s quoted speech was equally a potential source of embarrassment with regard to his reputation in Britain.

The headline of the article, ‘Lowell in a Chatty Mood’, followed by the sub-heading, ‘He Talks Freely to Julian Hawthorne about his English Experiences’, clearly implies that Lowell had consented to the interview, however grudgingly. Hawthorne frames their dialogue by stating:

Mr. Lowell seemed to think that the American people would value his opinion less after becoming acquainted with it than before, but he settled himself with manly resignation to the fate before him, and in the conversation which followed no chance listener would have imagined, from the tones of his voice or the expression of his countenance, that he was stretched upon that modern rack of inquisition which has been evolved by nineteenth-century civilization from the torture-chamber of the Middle Ages. (Hawthorne, 1886: 9)

Hawthorne’s arch self-consciousness in constructing the interview as a written text implies that the same degree of awareness, on both parties, has governed the performance of the interview as an oral event. By figuring the interview as a modern-day equivalent to a

Medieval ‘inquisition’, Hawthorne hints at the potential of the medium for extracting private information from the interviewee involuntarily, but the preceding context suggests that Lowell is equally mindful of the instrument of ‘torture’ to which he submits: in other words, that he freely enters into an asymmetrical ‘conversation’ with Hawthorne for the purpose of addressing the absent third party of the interview, ‘the American people’. Yet Lowell immediately denied that he had given consent for the interview, claiming to have been oblivious to Hawthorne’s intentions: ‘It never entered my head that the son of my old and honored friend was “interviewing” me: if it had he would have found me dumb’, he wrote in a letter to the Boston Advertiser the following day. Not only was the publication of the ‘interview’ a ‘breach of confidence’, but Lowell also disputed the accuracy of the recorded dialogue: ‘I am at a loss to find any ground in my own mind for many of the opinions attributed to me, and must protest against their being received as in any way representative of my deliberate self’ (New York World, 27 October 1886: 4.). How Hawthorne could have transcribed Lowell’s speech at length without alerting him to the purpose of the conversation, or whether in fact the published dialogue was constructed after the event is unclear.

The ensuing dispute between Hawthorne and Lowell as to which of these versions of the event was true was conducted publically in a series of denials and counter-denials sent to various daily newspapers, and reproduced extensively in the American press throughout October and November 1886. Not surprisingly, The New York World stood by their journalist’s account, accusing Lowell of acting from embarrassment at his own indiscretion, and more broadly, according to George Knox, American press opinion tended to side with Hawthorne, partly because of Lowell’s perceived Anglophilia and reputation as a Boston ‘savant’ with ‘allegedly aristocratic leanings’ (New York World, 28 October 1886: 4; Knox, 1956: 498). The credibility of Lowell’s position *prima facie* was not strong, as even sympathetic observers in the British press were prepared to point out (Saturday Review, 13

November 1886: 640). Yet *The New York World* was equally willing to report pro-Lowell sentiments on the other side of the Atlantic under the heading ‘They Don’t Like It’ on 16 November, as well as printing several of Lowell’s letters of complaint. Setting aside judgements on the plausibility of their competing claims, what is more interesting about the Hawthorne-Lowell dispute is the way in which newspaper circulation radically amplifies the controversy, both by expanding its geographical locus and accelerating its temporal frequency. Newspapers reporting on the coverage of other papers, whether in conflict with or in support of their editorial positions, form an echo-chamber of telegraphic news circulation resembling Matthew Arnold’s earlier experience of the American press. Hawthorne, for example, informed the *New York World* on 27 October that he had discovered Lowell’s objection to the interview by reading a quotation from the *Boston Advertiser* in the *New York Evening Post* (Knox, 1956: 496). This proliferation of media representations of the dispute is also evoked by the word which James used in the title of the novel conceived partly in response to the Lowell ‘interview’.

The whole episode could be taken as an ironic validation of Lowell’s observation in his 1884 lecture on ‘Democracy’ that while the concept may be ‘nothing new’, ‘we are more conscious of its practice ‘because in this age of publicity, where the newspapers offer a rostrum to whoever has a grievance, or fancies that he has, the bubbles and scum thrown up by it are more noticeable on the surface than in those dumb ages when there was a cover of silence and suppression on the cauldron’ (Lowell, 1887: 11-12). The fear of democracy, Lowell explained to his British audience, was exacerbated in those societies ‘where the number of citizens made but an inconsiderable fraction of the inhabitants, where every passion was reverberated from house to house and from man to man with gathering rumor till every impulse became gregarious and therefore inconsiderate’: conditions more applicable to Europe than to America, but whose full extension through the development of the ‘electric

telegraph' was 'yet to be measured' (Lowell, 1887: 24). Lowell's assumption that the democratic 'reverberation' of opinion is more unsettling to societies which distinguish sharply between an elite citizenry and disenfranchised populace is shared in James's conception of *The Reverberator*, especially in its development of the May Marcia McClellan scandal originating in Italy. But the suggestiveness of the name given to the fictive American newspaper of James's novel renders this term broadly applicable to both sides of the transatlantic world. Whether or not James borrowed the word directly from Lowell's writing, the figuration of newspaper publicity as a 'reverberation' of sound through space became a pervasive trope in his fiction and correspondence.²

On 13 November 1886, while the Hawthorne-Lowell affair was still 'reverberating' through the press, James took sides unequivocally with Lowell in a letter to his brother William, writing: 'We are sickened, unspeakably, by the infamous trick played upon Lowell by Julian Hawthorne, who must have become the basest cad unflogged' (William James, 1993:53). Three days later James wrote an extraordinary, impassioned letter of sympathy to Lowell in which he professed: 'Julian Hawthorne's damnable doings make me feel that I want to throw myself into your arms—or to take you tenderly & healingly into my own'; adding that Hawthorne 'ought to be shot & that is the end of it'. He assured Lowell that the interview had had limited impact in Britain, drawing on the same word which Lowell had used to characterize the 'age of publicity': 'It isn't for any reverberation of the incident here that I wish to condole with you, for that strikes me as nothing worth speaking of. Rather than damaging Lowell's reputation, James insists that what 'will survive in the World's pretended report of your conversation will be simply the memory of an advanced modern fraud' (James, 16 November 1886).³ Given the strength of his own reaction to the dispute, though, such reassurance does not seem entirely convincing.

Central to the controversy, clearly, was the practice of interviewing itself, which was first employed in the American press during the mid-nineteenth century, but by the 1880s was seen as the epitome of American cultural influence on the New Journalism in Britain (Wiener, 2011: 146-9). In *The Americanization of the World*, written at the end of the century, W.T. Stead described the interview as ‘a distinctively American invention, which has been acclimatized in this country’ (Stead, 1902: 292-3). In an article for *The North American Review* of April 1889, Horace Townsend suggested that the practice was already deeply embedded in American society: ‘The foundation, as it were, of all news in this country is the interview; our people are one and all, from the rich merchant and professional man down to the humble inhabitant of Avenue A, ready and willing to be interviewed at any time and on any pretext’ (Townsend, 1889: 522). The assumption that Americans were more ‘willing to be interviewed’ than Europeans is clearly reflected in the central dramatic scenario of *The Reverberator*. As Matthew Rubery points out, in the novel James ‘establishes consent prior to the interview’ between George Flack and Francie Dosson, significantly averting the key issue raised in the Hawthorne-Lowell dispute (Rubery, 2009: 123). The young American woman modelled on May McClellan is shown to be naïve or insensitive in not considering that the Gallicized Proberts might take exception to exposure in the newspapers, but she is not simply a manipulated victim of the interviewer as Lowell claimed to be. Flack makes little attempt to conceal his intentions before opportunistically quizzing her about the family into which she hopes to marry:

‘Of course I must be quite square with you,’ the young man said. ‘If I want to see the picture it’s because I want to write about it. The whole thing will go bang into the Reverberator. You must understand that, in advance.’ [...] ‘You may say what you like,’ Francie rejoined. ‘It will be immense fun to be in the newspapers.’

(James, 1888a: 138)

The ensuing conversation does not constitute a celebrity interview of the kind practised by Hawthorne, nor are the objects of Francie's gossip 'celebrities' in the same sense.

The Proberts are of interest to Flack on account of their elevated social position, which makes them appropriate material for the type of 'society news' column purveyed by the popular press; though through the mechanism of publicity, of course, such individuals are also capable of attaining celebrity status. Creatively synthesizing its source material, *The Reverberator* conflates the story of the 'intrusive' interviewer with the incident of the 'chatty' American girl, inculcating both manifestations of the 'mania for publicity' in equal measure.

As the Hawthorne-Lowell affair showed, however, the degree to which interviewers met with consent or complicity on the part of their subjects also depended on the extent to which the 'interview' was recognized as such in advance. Whereas some celebrity interviews of the period were conducted on the condition that the resulting text met with the subject's approval before publication, others, as Lowell alleged, were undertaken without prior agreement or knowledge. Wiener suggests that British interviewers, including Stead in *The Pall-Mall Gazette*, tended to adopt the former convention whereas American practice was less formal and more likely to fall into the latter category (Wiener, 2007: 59). In 'The Art of Interviewing', an article for *Lippincott's Magazine* published in 1890, the American journalist Frank Burr freely admitted rewriting written statements received from public figures into dialogue form in order to simulate the oral context of an interview, thus blurring the distinction between 'interviews' as speech events and printed texts (Burr, 1890: 401-2). By contrast, the author of an unsigned article on 'The Ethics of Interviewing' cited the case of Hawthorne and Lowell as one in which the interviewer had 'betrayed the confidence of our most honored literary man and representative American', providing a model of

bad journalistic practice (New Princeton Review, 1887: 127-9). Despite its wider acceptance in American society, then, interviewing remained a controversial form of journalism through the late nineteenth century on both sides of the Atlantic: not all Americans were 'willing to be interviewed', and, moreover, what constituted the 'interview' as a form was itself ambiguous.⁴ Rubery argues that *The Reverberator* 'ultimately poses a larger formal question about the degree to which the experience of reading an interview and reading a novel should be taken as analogous acts', and this can be supported through the predominantly dramatic form of the novel (Rubery, 2009: 127). Flack's conversation with Francie for *The Reverberator* is only one of numerous dialogues in the novel which have the potential to become 'interviews', given the contingent nature of the distinctions between the intention of participants and the retroactive designation of the form. If Francie's consent to the publication of her gossip is explicitly provided, it remains less clear how this fictitious form of published conversation might be distinguished from the dialogical mode which inheres in the novel itself.

Another issue of concern illuminated by both of the newspaper scandals which came to James's attention in the autumn of 1886 was the capacity of mass-circulation media to disseminate information rapidly on a global scale at the potential cost of increased misunderstanding between cultures. Like its historical analogue the *New York World*, James's fictional American newspaper is shown to have a transatlantic reach. The European ramifications of Flack's 'interview' with Francie for *The Reverberator* form a key element in the novel's comic drama; though, as some critics have noted, the outraged response to publicity of the Europeanized Proberts is as much a target of James's satire as the unscrupulous journalist and the compliant Dossons.⁵ The mildly salacious gossip about the Proberts' familial connections with French aristocratic society exploits cultural and class

difference in much the same way that McClellan's letter to the *New York World* presented the peculiar mores of Italian aristocrats and Hawthorne's text framed Lowell's divided loyalties between Britain and America. Flack succeeds in rhetorically constructing the socially-exclusive Proberts as undemocratic enemies of the 'light of the Press' (James, 1888a: 68), and the latter as representative of a mass American public. The journalist's stated ambition is to create 'the most universal society-paper the world has seen' (James, 1888a: 67): 'The society news of every quarter of the globe, furnished by the prominent members themselves (oh, they can be fixed—you'll see!) from day to day and from hour to hour and served up at every breakfast-table in the United States—that's what the American people want and that's what the American people are going to have' (James, 1888a: 68). Flack's aim of delivering global news to a readership defined by its common national identity within the simultaneous space of the 'breakfast table' might serve as an illustration of Benedict Anderson's well-known account of the historical role of the newspaper press in forging the nation as an 'imagined community'. James was sensitive to the ways in which the popular press often invoked national – and potentially nationalistic – sentiment through its representation of perceived foreign threats, commenting, a decade later, in a letter to his brother William on sensationalist press coverage of the Spanish-American War: 'I see nothing but the madness, the passion, the hideous clumsiness of rage, or mechanical reverberation; and I echo with all my heart your denouncement of the foul criminality of the screeching newspapers' (James, 1984: 72). The frequency and rapidity with which news could be transmitted across the globe resulted from technological developments which brought competing nations closer together within the spatial imagination, most notably the construction of a transatlantic telegraph cable in 1866. Flack's ambition for *The Reverberator* is only conceivable in the context of what Stead called 'the rush and whirl of a telegraphic age', to quote from his first editorial for the *Pall Mall Gazette* (Stead, 1 January 1885: 1). Yet while some late-nineteenth century

observers saw the development of telegraphic communication as a means of fostering ‘human sympathy’ across national boundaries, as Richard Menke has shown, it was also capable of exacerbating conflict, as James seems to suggest (Menke, 2008: 93).

Given *The Reverberator’s* preoccupation with testing the boundaries between different cultural attitudes towards newspaper publicity within an imagined global space it seems more than coincidental that the Notebook outline of the novel makes reference to two separate publications bearing the title of *The World*. James’s explanation for choosing to situate resistance to the American ‘mania for publicity’ in France rather than in England is that the latter is ‘also a newspaperized world’: ‘*The World and Truth*, etc., stare one in the face—people write to the newspapers about everything’ (James, 1961: 84). Here, James is referring not to the *New York World*, a mass-circulation daily, but rather to the British weekly society paper, *The World: A Journal for Men and Women*, founded by Edmund Yates in 1874, and its slightly later offshoot, Henry Labouchere’s *Truth*. Like its American namesake, *The World* established a distinctive profile within late-nineteenth century popular journalism (though its circulation only reached about 22,000 copies), and their shared title can be linked to the new discursive forms and technologies of the transatlantic press developed during this period. The very idea of calling a newspaper *The World* reflects the capacity for imagining a global space of news created by these developments. Yates has been described by Wiener as ‘the founder of “society journalism”’ and ‘among the pioneers of the “new journalism” in Britain’, whose reputation (or notoriety) was built on his early use of the celebrity interview and gossip column (Wiener, 1985: 259). Two of *The World’s* most prominent and long-running features were the series of interviews entitled ‘Celebrities at Home’ and the society gossip column ‘What the World Says’. During the mid-1880s the paper also ran a regular column of ‘Gossip from Paris’ which – much like George Flack in *The Reverberator* - reported scandals within fashionable society, as well as reviewing theatrical entertainment. In one instance, the

columnist ‘Theoc’ acknowledged that ‘[t]he men whose quarrels and scandals are thus laid before the public and telegraphed even to the ends of the earth by zealous newspaper correspondents are not worthy of much attention’ (Theoc., 7 June 1885: 20). Disingenuous or not, there is an underlying tension here between two different and competing senses of ‘the world’. In his weekly editorial column ‘What the World Says’, signed under the pen name ‘Atlas’, Yates’s conception of the journal’s role in disseminating society-news is defined by traditional class hierarchies: ‘the world’, as reflected by *The World*, means primarily fashionable London (or Parisian) society, including gossip on the court, parliament, and aristocracy (an earlier incarnation of the column was titled ‘The Wicked World’). Although it gained a reputation for irreverence and vulgarity, as James’s Notebook comment suggests, Yates’s Prospectus for *The World* envisaged it appealing to the middle classes as a publication ‘written throughout by gentlemen and scholars’; he was at pains to distinguish the paper from ‘lower’ forms of journalism and to avoid libellous scandal (Yates, 1884: II, 321). At the same time, Yates was keen to foster the impression of the journal’s global reach, specifically in relation to its wider colonial readership. In his autobiography, written at the height of *The World’s* popularity in 1884, Yates proudly declared:

The letters which reach one from every part of the world convey the pleasant consciousness that *The World* succeeds in giving a social and political record, whose truth is as instinctively recognized at the Antipodes as within the sound of Big Ben. There is no quarter of the globe which the paper fails to penetrate, and the reason is that each successive number as it appears provides a faithful epitome, a genuine concentration and amalgam of what those of our countrymen and countrywomen, the officers and civilians, their wives and daughters living under a foreign sun, want to know; of what they would actually hear and see if they were at home. (Yates, 1884: II, 335)

Anticipating Flack's ambition for *The Reverberator*, Yates appeals to the democratic legitimacy of addressing a globalized national audience, whilst simultaneously reinforcing boundaries around the privileged social 'world' to which his readers are given vicarious access.

The series 'Celebrities at Home', which began in 1877, offers the best example of Yates's journalistic innovation and his market positioning of *The World*. While the idea of exploring the private space of public figures can be traced back to the 1840s, Yates was one of the first writers on either side of the Atlantic to use the domestic setting as the stage for an explicit encounter between journalist and 'celebrity', and established an influential template for celebrity 'at home' interviews in newspapers and magazines well before the publication of 'Lowell in a Chatty Mood'. As I have argued elsewhere, the intimacy of the home functions in this genre as a signifier of the unique interiority which the celebrity is deemed to possess: celebrities reveal their authentic selves, or are involuntarily revealed, through the material fabric of their domestic surroundings.⁶ This assumption is explicitly revealed in a feature on Mark Twain at Hartford, Connecticut (1879), in which Yates asserts that Twain's 'mansion with its quaint old English architecture and its exquisite tiles and mosaics, the rich ferneries and half-tropical hothouses, are no mere extraneous accumulations such as any man of wealth might create, but a gradual and organic outgrowth of the owner's mind which gives you a delightful peep into the recesses of his character' (Yates, 1879: 135). Here, and throughout the series, the home serves to express the personality of the celebrity in the way that it both invites and resists journalistic exposure. Unlike the furore surrounding the Lowell-Hawthorne interview, however, Yates took pains to emphasize the consensual nature of his celebrity encounters. He prefaced the three volume reprint of *Celebrities at Home* (1877-9) with an explicit statement to this effect, and in his later autobiography refuted the 'silly idea that any system of espionage would be practised, that admission into houses would

be unduly obtained, and that there would be a general disclosure of skeletons in cupboards' (Yates, 1884: II, 331). Yates was well aware that his style of 'personal journalism' was often viewed in Britain as 'an importation of the worst principles of American journalism', and condemned for being 'un-English' (Yates, 1884: II, 333). While he didn't deny the comparison, having previously worked as a European correspondent for the *New York Herald* before establishing *The World*, Yates was evidently keen to suggest the propriety of his enterprise.

In comparison to Yates's *London World*, the *New York World* of the 1880s represented a far more ambitious attempt to configure global space within a textual form. Historians of the press have well documented Joseph Pulitzer's transformation of the *New York World* into the largest-selling daily newspaper in America, with a circulation which grew to over 250,000 by the middle of the decade (Wiener, 2011: 165-70). Before the advent of his rival William Randolph Hearst in the following decade, Pulitzer's *New York World* was the leading example of a new type of sensationalist popular press (subsequently labelled 'yellow journalism'), which gave greater prominence to crime reports, sports news, celebrity interviews and gossip, and pioneered new typographical and stylistic forms, including shorter paragraphs, extensive use of headlines, and photographic illustration. From its inception in 1860 the *New York World's* global perspective was signalled by its mast-head which displayed two adjacent globes representing the Old and New Worlds, linked by the central figure of the Statue of Liberty radiating 'the light of the Press' [Figure 1]. This logo emblemizes the capacity of the modern newspaper to encompass and represent global space for the imagined community of the nation. By the 1880s, the *New York World* published numerous columns of cable news reports from Europe, the United States, and elsewhere, including a regular column under the heading 'Voices in the Air' containing snippets of news compiled from other newspapers. The title is evocative of Flack's uncanny ability to plot the

movements of American travellers around Europe in *The Reverberator*: ‘Such knowledge came to him by a kind of intuition, by the voices of the air, by indefinable and unteachable processes’ (James, 1888a: 29). Like the *New York World*, James’s society journalist appears to have mastered the field of global communications, receiving ambient ‘voices’ as if transmitted by telegraphic wire or telephone, in stark contrast to the hapless miscommunication of his fellow Americans, the Dossons.⁷ Under Pulitzer’s ownership, the *New York World* also became known for organizing promotional stunts, including in 1890 a circumnavigation of the globe in 72 days by one of its reporters Nellie Bly, inspired by Jules Verne’s celebrated novel *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1873). Emphasizing the speed of modern forms of transportation and telecommunication rather than the cultural particularity of the places visited, according to Jean Marie Lutes, this stunt ‘places New York at the world’s center’ in a similar manner to the paper’s mast-head (Lutes, 2008: 171). The increasing mobility of journalism across national and cultural boundaries is used in this instance to support a quasi-imperial appropriation of global space.

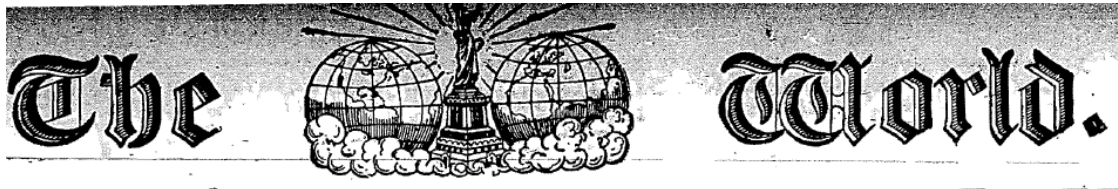


Figure 1: masthead of the *New York World*, 16 November 1886.

To what extent does James in *The Reverberator* envisage an alternative way of inhabiting ‘the world’? The most obvious answer would be to say that James values a cosmopolitan ideal which mistrusts the attempt of any given national media to project its version of truth onto the world, whether from New York, London or Paris. One of Flack’s most cutting jibes against his romantic rival, Gaston Probert, is that he is a ‘man without a country’, an American who has never visited America and has no understanding of its society

- a charge which Gaston readily concedes (James, 1888a: 72). Yet, for all Gaston's confused and ineffectual cultural identity, it seems unlikely that James wanted readers to judge him from Flack's nationalistic standpoint. If anything, the charge of being a 'man without a country' rebounds upon Flack as it aligns him with the punitive narrative perspective of Edward Everett Hale's short story of that title, first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1863. Written, according to its narrator, 'as a contribution [...] towards the formation of a just and true national sentiment', 'The Man Without A Country' offers a stern didactic warning to those who would betray their country at a time of civil war (Hale, 1882: 5). Philip Nolan, the eponymous figure of the story, is punished for alleged treason against the United States government with permanent exile from his homeland, spending the remaining 56 years of his life as a prisoner on board US naval vessels as they circumnavigate the globe. Nolan's cosmopolitan upbringing, the narrator implies, is partly responsible for his enforced expulsion from the nation's geographical boundaries. But perhaps a more appealing figure of cosmopolitan identity in the novel than Gaston is the American impressionist painter Charles Waterlow. In his interview with Hawthorne, Lowell was quoted as remarking that American artists 'can take the best qualities of the French and English and be ourselves too' (Hawthorne, 1886: 9), and this presumption that hybrid forms of cultural identity are not incompatible with national character is one that James supports through the figure of Waterlow, often thought to be based on his acquaintance with John Singer Sargent (Hawthorne, 1886: 9).⁸ The reader is told that Waterlow 'combined in an odd manner many of the forms of the Parisian studio with the moral and social ideas of Brooklyn, Long Island, where his first seeds had been implanted', and indeed he takes pleasure in mocking Gaston's 'want of national instinct' in his courtship of Francie (James, 1888a: 75, 41). Like John Singer Sargent, Waterlow has been a student of the French portrait painter Carolus-Duran, whom James described in one of his earlier letters to the *New York Tribune* as the 'most

successful' 'of all the modern emulators of Velasquez' (James, 1978: 21). During the course of the narrative Waterlow himself travels to Spain with Gaston on an artistic tour. As an American Impressionist of the 'French school' inspired by Spanish art, Waterlow thus serves to illustrate the 'paradox' that James identified in his 1887 essay on Sargent for *Harper's Magazine*, 'that when to-day we look for "American art" we find it mainly in Paris' (James, 1956: 216). When set against the damaging 'reverberations' of newspaper publicity, this example of the permeability of national borders suggests a more positive dimension of James's international theme.

James's satirical response to the 'mania for publicity' which he saw expounded in the celebrity journalism of the *New York World*, and its transatlantic counterpart, can no doubt be aligned with Arnold's contemporary observations on the New Journalism, and hence with a broader strand of the conservative aesthetic critique of emerging mass culture. What I have sought to emphasize in this essay, though, is that James's fiction was imaginatively engaged by the cultural and technological transformations of late-nineteenth century journalism, not in an abstract or Olympian manner but through intimate familiarity with its characteristic textual forms: the celebrity interview, society gossip column, and cable news report. Such forms are of interest to a broader consideration of the novel as a heteroglossic genre, and, more specifically, they mediate the process of transatlantic cultural exchange on which James built his reputation as a novelist. The 'reverberation' of stories, information, rumours, and knowledge about individuals across the globe, some of whom were already visible within the public domain, was the primary function of these new journalistic forms, and hence perhaps an unavoidable topic for James's international fiction. In *The Reverberator* James finally reveals the role of the underlying historical forces which enabled his fictional exploitation of the transatlantic comedy of manners.

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Notes

¹ Maxwell Geismar described *The Reverberator* as 'a kind of potboiler designed to restore James's literary position with his popular audience' (1964: 80), and subtler variations on this interpretation have been developed by Anne T. Margolis (1985: 4) and Thomas Strychacz, (1993: 53).

² A copy of Lowell's *Democracy and Other Addresses* was listed in James's library.

³ Although not published in any collected editions of James's correspondence, this letter was reproduced in George Knox's essay 'Reverberations and *The Reverberator*', published in 1959. More recently, Gary Scharnhorst has made the remarkable (re-)discovery that James himself was interviewed by Julian Hawthorne nearly twenty years later on a visit to California in 1905, the result being published on 27 March in the *Los Angeles Examiner*. See 'Julian Hawthorne Interviews Henry James' for a reproduction of the interview text and an account of the circumstances behind it.

⁴ The issues of consent and potential fabrication raised by the interview as a journalistic form are also considered at length in the contemporary fiction of James's friend, William Dean Howells. In *A Modern Instance* (1882) the sensational journalist Bartley J. Hubbard discusses the rationale for his series of interviews with local business leaders, titled 'Solid Men', for the Boston Events. Hubbard is convinced that 'people are always tickled to be interviewed' and their complaints usually factitious. As the series is intended to be respectable, Hubbard submits proofs to the subjects for authorization so as to 'make 'em particeps criminis' (Howells, 1957: 159). Similarly, the opening chapter of *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) introduces the title character through the medium of an interview for the 'Solid Men' series conducted by Hubbard, but we are later given access to Silas's view that the journalist 'put a lot of stuff in my mouth that I never said' (Howells, 1885: 201).

⁵ See, for example, S. Gorley Putt (1968: 173-4), Strychacz (1993: 54), and Salmon (1997a: 125-7).

⁶ See Salmon (1997b: 166-9). Charles Ponce De Leon offers a similar reading of the rhetorical strategy of this form of celebrity journalism, though he mistakenly suggests that it did not become prevalent until after 1900 (2002: 57-80). Wiener claims that Yates 'virtually coined the word celebrity in making the "Celebrities at Home" series' (1985: 269).

⁷ The telephone came into use by American journalists from the late 1870s onwards (Mott, 1962: 499). For further discussion of the asymmetry of communicative competence in *The*

Reverberator, see Salmon (1997a: 134-5). The phrase ‘voices of the air’ also recurs several times in James’s later story of newspaper publicity, ‘The Papers’ (1903).

⁸ James, however, explicitly denied that Sargent was the model for Waterlow in a letter to Henrietta Reubell [1888b].