

WRITING SIBLINGS: Alice James and Her Brothers

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This essay addresses the relationship of writing to embodiment, through representations of bodily sensation and fantasy in the journal of Alice James. It considers Alice James's writing in relation to her two writer brothers, William and Henry, and in light of their father's experiences of impairment and breakdown.

1890 IN THE LIVES OF THREE SIBLINGS

On August 22, 1890, William James wrote to Henry James: "With . . . your *Tragic Muse*, and . . . my *Psychology*, all appearing in it, the year 1890 will be known as the great epochal year in American literature" (Allen, p. 295). Writing in her journal, less than a year later, Alice acknowledges her brothers' achievements, while taking care to make room for herself in the picture: "Within the last year [Henry] has published *The Tragic Muse*, brought out *The American*, and written a play, *Mrs. Vibert* . . . and his admirable comedy; combined with William's *Psychology*, not a bad show for one family! Especially if I get myself dead, the hardest job of all" (June 16, 1891; A. James, 1999, p. 211¹). (Alice reiterates the point in a letter to William's wife: Asking for notices of William's book, she describes the excitement surrounding the opening of Henry's play, and notes her own "hard work" at getting herself dead.²) Coming as it does in this line-up of fraternal achievements, I am inclined to read Alice's project of "getting dead" as a way of indicating the ascendancy of writing over the invalid's sick body. Death, rendered in writing by the journal she kept with great care, would be her final aesthetic and moral achievement. The diary of Alice James (1848–1892), examined through her relation-

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ship to her two writer brothers, William James (1842–1910) and Henry James (1843–1916), is the springboard for this inquiry into the relationship of writing to embodiment.

The youngest of five siblings and the only girl, Alice James lived a life of invalidism from adolescence until her death in 1892 from breast cancer. Without much in the way of formal education, she was nevertheless a dedicated letter-writer, correspondence-school teacher, and, in the last years of her life, the writer of an extraordinary journal that sheds light on the relation of writing and textuality to bodily experience, sensation, and fantasy. As the sole girl in the family, it seems that Alice never received much encouragement to develop an identity outside of the intimate sphere of family life. And yet while a history of physical and emotional collapse may have identified her as an invalid, Alice managed in her last years to achieve her own distinctively Jamesian triumph in the form of a journal that documents the writer's inner life, offers reflections on embodiment and mortality, and sustains engagement with the world through acute social commentary.

Alice, who was most impeded by illness and came latest of the three siblings to writing, broke new ground as she took on bodily experience through a strategy of active negation, pitting herself against her own body as antagonist. The pages of the journal become the staging ground for that dramatic encounter. Paradoxically perhaps, the very symptoms that constrained Alice James physically came to supply an energizing force in her writing. Alice draws on invalidism in ways that amplify our understanding of writing in relation to fantasies and fears of bodily experience.

Given the responsiveness of the three siblings to one another, I propose to examine Alice's deployment of sickroom scenes in relation to Henry's awareness of the theatrical aspects of fictional spaces, as well as his actual ventures into the British theater, and to explore the interest Alice shared with William in the divided self and in sickness as a source of creativity. Toward the end of her life, as Alice moved to consolidate her conception of herself as a writer, the work that William and Henry were doing supplied her with support and inspiration. Quite explicitly, Henry's dramatization of his novel *The American* and William's essay "The Hidden Self" gave Alice opportunities not only to participate vicariously in her brothers' achievements, but to develop in writing her own distinctive claim to these topics.

Alice James thus joins her brothers William and Henry, for whom writing became not only a means of working through physical and emotional crises, but of articulating new insights into the dynamics of consciousness. In doing so, all three siblings drew on a complex inheritance from their father (Strouse, 1980, pp. 128–129). Henry James, Sr., bequeathed to his children a legacy of investment in writing that was linked to experiences of crisis and bodily impairment. Green (1994) frames his study of the Jameses in terms of the “*the function of writing within the psychic activity of the members of one family*” (p. 586, emphasis in original). Henry Sr.’s experiences resonate in the emotional lives of his children, most particularly his loss of a leg in a childhood accident and his experience of breakdown and recovery—what he came to call his “great vastation”—in adulthood. This dual inheritance, a distinctive psychic economy of woundedness and writing, stirred William, Henry, and Alice to express themselves in writing that bears traces of the damaged or wounded body as its animating source.

JAMES FAMILY WRITING AND THE CULTURE OF INVALIDISM

Economic metaphors abound in accounts of illness in American culture in the second half of the nineteenth century and provide us with a point of entry into the world of the James family correspondence (Gosling, 1987, pp. 85–86). Among family members, letter writing served as a forum in which intimate bodily concerns might be shared and monitored. Eakin (1992) refers to “a veritable politics of illness in the James family circle” (p. 60), while Strouse (1980) observes that the members of the James family lived by a “bank account conception of an exhaustible fund of energy,” so that one family member’s health was understood to come at the cost of another’s illness. Strouse gives the example of a letter home from Europe in which Henry Jr. posits “a theory that this degenerescence of mine is the result of Alice and Willy getting better and locating some of their diseases on me” (p. 111). A shifting balance between health and illness energizes the letters that members of the family write to one another and fuels the creativity of each.

Open experience of pleasure was suspect for these New Englanders, observes Feinstein (1984) in his biography of William (p. 193). Travel in Europe, to take a major James family focus, could be justified primarily through health requirements. "Between 1866 and 1873," Feinstein (1984) notes, "sickness became a means by which the James children struggled for their share of the family resources. Sickness had been the price the elder Henry had paid for seizing his rightful share, and now ill health became a weapon for his children to use to take theirs" (p. 194). The parents would figure out who might travel abroad by assessing the physical needs of their offspring. Both parents used "the letters written by their traveling invalid children to monitor expenditures and healthful returns" (Feinstein, 1984, p. 194). The fact that the senior Jameses routinely opened their children's mail, treating letters as "public property" (Fisher, 2008, p. 212), gives a vivid glimpse into the epistolary and bodily circuitry that animated James family life.

Illness in the nineteenth century also carried suggestions of spiritual crisis and supported claims to higher levels of consciousness that might find expression in writing. For Henry Sr. it was an episode of breakdown in 1844 that enabled him to formulate his vocation. This was the experience of finding himself immobilized in the face of a demonic presence, an episode he later referred to as his "great vastation," the Swedenborgian term given to him by a chance acquaintance in Europe. This classification allowed Henry Sr. to articulate the mission that was to sustain his writing and lecturing career.

So inextricably linked are illness and creativity in the work of family members that creative achievement never completely loses the mark of illness. As the eldest, William James struggled to work through his own debilitating ailments, in the process finding his way to new forms of inquiry into mental life. The concept of the "sick soul" that William (1902) developed in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* is a category that includes his own emotional crises. According to William's son Henry, it was in the spring of 1870 that William James experienced the emotional crisis that he presents in disguised form as a report from a French correspondent in the *Varieties of Religious Experience* (Allen, 1967, pp. 165–166). In this famous passage William gives a powerful account of his own acute episode of "panic fear," disguised as case material that was sent to him and that he had translated from the

French. The speaker in this first-person account delineates an episode of “horrible fear of my own existence,” and likens himself to the alarming figure of an epileptic patient he had seen in an asylum: “That shape am I” (W. James, 1902, pp. 145–146). Given our knowledge of William as the author, this account is all the more remarkable for the multiple positions that William occupies in it. He positions himself as the addressee (recipient of the account), but he is also the analytical observer, as well as the actual subject of the terrifying experience that is recounted. As the narrating subject, he goes so far as to identify himself with the figure of the epileptic.

It is worth noting that both William and Alice were struggling with emotional crises in the years 1867–1870. For Alice this took the form of her first major breakdown in the winter of 1866–1867; eventually she traveled to New York to be treated by Dr. Charles Taylor (Strouse, 1980, pp. 106–109). (Twenty years later, as we shall see, Alice was to write an eloquent account of this early breakdown in her journal.) At the time, William was also experiencing significant emotional and physical distress, including suicidal impulses. With the support of his father he traveled to Germany to study, but was unable to settle down or formulate his goals; he described himself in a letter to Wendell Holmes as a “mere wreck” (Allen, 1967, pp. 134–135; Strouse, 1980, p. 110).

William’s disguised autobiographical account of his 1870 breakdown clearly echoes Henry Sr.’s account of crisis, his “great vastation.” And in fact we find a footnote on the very next page of *Varieties* in which William directs readers to a publication by Henry James, Sr., that describes an account similar to the one he has just included. Thus William documents his own identification with his father, even as he disguises the connection. The identification with his father undoubtedly gave support to William as he argued for addressing a broad range of spiritual phenomena, including personal crises, in any study of the mind. The concept of the “twice born” that William develops in the *Varieties*—those who endure spiritual crisis and find renewal in it—exemplifies his ability to transform personal experience into the kind of inquiry that shapes a vocation and a field.

The vocabulary of woundedness and impairment can be discerned in the references of Henry James, Jr., to the “obscure hurt” that he endured at the time of the Civil War. This was Henry Jr.’s

phrasing for the mysterious back injury that provided a blurred cover for his failure to participate in the Civil War. The phrasing cannot avoid some reference to his father's loss of a leg in a childhood accident. In Henry's case, Edel (1987) suggests a hysterical component when he observes that Henry James's "allusions to his early physical problems and what he called his 'obscure hurt,' suffered while acting as a volunteer fireman at a Newport stable fire just before the Civil War, suggest a greater invalidism than actually existed. Doctors at the time found no injuries" (p. 1).³

More obliquely perhaps, the familial economy of wounding, embodiment, and writing may be sensed in Henry's novelistic efforts to render the subtle movements of consciousness and to recognize the troubling realm of bodily sensation and desire. The fiction of Henry James breaks new ground in exploring conflicts in the domain of desire, at times producing gentle comedies of awkward or disavowed bodily sensation. In the Jamesian fictional universe, desire and the press of physical urges cause problems and threaten catastrophe. Indeed in the minds of many a Jamesian protagonist, these threatening outcomes—whether real or imagined—provide the motivation for an ethic of renunciation. More often than not, major characters sacrifice physical sexuality in order to sustain and preserve the possibility of friendship and community.

It is also interesting, in this respect, to consider those novels in which Henry James explicitly evokes the perspective of a child whose mind registers but cannot comprehend the turbulent world of adult sexuality, as in *What Maisie Knew* (1897) or *The Awkward Age* (1899). James's ability to depict the nuances of a child's point of view makes a powerful contribution to his portrayal of adults in whom we feel the persistence of the child. Consider, for example, *The Ambassadors* (1903), in which we are made to experience Lambert Strether's resistance to recognizing the unmistakable evidence of adult sexuality.

Illness and creativity are linked for the Jameses: The extreme receptivity to stimuli that opens one person to creative experience could also indicate the onset of illness or the danger of collapse in another. Prevailing conceptions of gender at the time identify these traits of receptivity and vulnerability as feminine. Warman (2009) notes a crisis of gender toward the end of the nineteenth century, observing that masculinity "becomes a con-

tested area in which the traditional features of rational control and physical strength are in some ways seen as less developed than the highly sensitive male" (p. 16). William James and Henry James shed light on a central aspect of this crisis: William's autobiographically motivated interest in the sick soul and Henry's explorations of the nuances of self-reflective consciousness indicate the degree to which each sought a way out of the conventions of a rough-hewn masculinity.

As the sole girl among four brothers, it fell to Alice to be ill on an ongoing basis. While family members noted the vibrancy of her intellect and her curiosity, they seem not to have thought of offering her the opportunities that were given to her two eldest brothers, nor did they preserve any of the letters that she wrote during her youth. A seeming paradox of gender: William and Henry found ways of avoiding stereotypically masculine roles, including military service in the Civil War. Was it then necessary to deny Alice's creativity in order to maintain the difference between the *feminine* connotations of William's and Henry's interests and the talents of the one *girl* in the family, who was every bit as smart as her brothers?

Neurasthenia, felt by some to be the American ailment, suggested the exhaustion of the organism in the face of the demands of technology and progress. In its American context, the connotations of neurasthenia were masculine, although it was not restricted to men, and indicated the depletion of energies that had been employed in productive work (Rabinach, 1992). Hysteria, while not confined to women, retained the link to femininity that its etymology conveys. Associating femininity and the female body with disease became a commonplace in Britain and the United States toward the end of the nineteenth century, with bed rest and confinement almost a way of life for many women of the middle and upper classes. Gender thus inflected categories of disease in a manner that linked femininity to debility and masculinity to a norm of activity that proved exhausting—for men and for women—to sustain.

With the support of their parents, the two oldest James brothers found their way to forms of work that allowed for inquiry and expression. Lacking the support and the educational resources to which her brothers had access, Alice remained caught on the threshold of expression. Green (1994) observes that Alice's "deep

inclination to aggression prevented the outcome of creativity in her writing (which would have placed her on a par with her brothers), so that she could not receive anything from him but his amputation, symbolized in the paralysis of her legs" (p. 600). In this emotional economy, Alice's physical symptoms read both as an outlet for aggressive energies and as a form of self-punishment for them. Alice's breakdowns and the litany of her symptoms identified her place within the family, despite her epistolary accomplishments and her work in distance education. William and Henry may each have taken a very long time to find their respective vocations, but Alice's coming of age as a writer took her whole life.

ALICE'S JOURNAL

Alice James maintained a journal in the last few years of her life, years in which the breast cancer that was to claim her life at age 42 was first diagnosed. Her letters to family and friends from England through the 1870s and 1880s, along with her correspondence school teaching and the commonplace book into which she copied noteworthy passages, all formed part of an apprenticeship for the momentous move to the diary that she would make in the late 1880s.

Given the strictures of her moral sensibility, Alice James lived a life in which symptoms took the place of actions. In light of these restrictions, it is all the more striking to see that writing moves to center stage in the diary over the last three years of Alice's life. In the hard-won work of that final project, illness may have shut down physical movement definitively, but it animates her writing. Body finds voice as Alice chronicles faints, blushes, embarrassments, moments of acutely painful self-consciousness, innervation, collapse, and the imminence of death. We can agree with Duquette (2005), who concludes that Alice James's rendition of the process of her own dying is her most fully realized work (p. 722).

Alice James inaugurates the journal in May 1889 with a declaration of the intention of "writing a bit about what happens, or rather doesn't happen," in order to offset "the sense of loneliness and desolation which abides with me" (p. 25). That rather bleak formulation in the opening entry gives way immediately to writ-

erly exuberance at the sheer overflow of experience: “My circumstances allowing of nothing but the ejaculation of one-syllabled reflections, a written monologue by that most interesting being, *myself*, may have its yet to be discovered consolations. I shall at least have it all my own and it may bring relief as an outlet to that geyser of emotions, sensations, speculations and reflections which ferments perpetually within my poor old carcass for its sins; so here goes, my first Journal!” (May 31, 1889; p. 25). Exuberant eruptions fuel this move into the highly personal form of the journal, putting the diary page in place of the body, as a “carcass,” a physical frame, of a different sort.

The very experience of writing—the flow of ink onto the page—elicits powerful images of eruption and liquidity. The vitality that animates Alice’s syntax conveys a sense of the erotic pleasures that await her, as she explores the nooks and crannies of “that most interesting being, *myself*.” This diary opening reads almost as if it were a demonstration of masturbatory pleasure.⁴ Indeed with its strikingly autoerotic turn, this passage—and much else in the diary as well—invites a reading that is attentive to the dynamics of the infantile body as the source of pleasure, fantasy, and sensation. With its suggestions of the autoerotic pleasures of *writing*, this opening formulation indicates the kind of exchange between body and text that is my focus.

The diary of Alice James merits study in light of a feminist psychoanalysis that seeks to address women’s experiences of their bodies.⁵ I have in mind Rosemary Balsam’s (2008, 2012) recent critiques of the psychoanalytic literature on women for either its omissions of women’s positive feelings about their bodies, or for its imposition of a negative template of shame and lack on women’s bodily experience.⁶ While Alice James does not claim much in the way of physical pleasure, her diary has a place in the larger historical context to which Balsam directs our attention for its disclosure of the particular gratifications of engaging embodiment in writing. Opening up a fierce internal battleground, the journal communicates a sense of embodiment-in-writing that runs as deep as the currents of shame that infuse Alice’s strident critiques of bodily visibility.

Drawing on the interior realms of body and sickroom, Alice directs her energies into an expressive domain where writing could take the place of the body, but without ever completely leaving it behind. It appears that this transfer of bodily energies into writing could only occur through pathways of pain and illness. Alice James's diary and letters highlight a spectrum of positions, ranging from the mute realm of symptomatic collapse, all the way to the diary as a project meant for publication. While invalidism ruled Alice's body, circumscribing her activities and ambitions, the diary breaks new ground in recording the transfer of bodily sensation into the realm of textuality.

Using the diary to redeem and transform corporeality, Alice James highlights her absorptive capacities in a suggestively Romantic manner, detailing crises of feeling that are a function of heightened responsiveness. Reporting that Nurse has asked her if she would like to be an artist, Alice conjures up those "beings who are made up of chords which vibrate at every zephyr" (June, 13, 1889; p. 31). In this image of the wind harp, a familiar Romantic emblem of inspiration, Alice pictures her own experience of a body so responsive that it immobilizes her. One day later she notes that "Yesterday I was lying in a meadow at Hawkes's farm, absorbing like blotting-paper hay-ricks, hedges and trees composing themselves into a multitude of pictures" (June, 14, 1889; p. 33). Her entire body has become blotting paper—an essential writer's tool. The materiality of blotting paper condenses physical sensation and literally incorporates it into the writing process.

In approaching the relation of embodiment to textuality, I draw on Litowitz's (2002) psychoanalytic conception of the semiotic body. The semiotic body can be understood in terms of infantile sexuality, the developmental processes through which the surfaces, orifices, and interiors of the child's body acquire definition and take on significance. Considered developmentally, signs or words are the successors to physical movements and gestures. Intelligibility originates in the realm of the infantile body, whose borders and edges, orifices and passageways, first acquire definition through tactile experience and fantasy (Erreich, 2003). Infantile sexuality comprises this demarcation or inscription of the body over time. A psychoanalytic semiotics might thus consider infantile sexuality to be part of the prehistory of writing, insofar

as bodily sensation and fantasy supply the grounding for later experiences of reading and writing. Indeed the very malleability of writing as an expressive medium might be understood as a powerful derivative of experiences and fantasies of the infantile body. If words carry the impress of bodily experience, then textuality is a broader concept that connects the sensations of amplitude and depth encountered in writing and reading to the infantile body as their archaic source. (This is not to reduce writing and reading to their infantile determinants, but rather to acknowledge the vitality of the infantile body as an energizing source in later forms of expressive activity.)

The journal of Alice James gives evidence of the transfer of energies from the physical body to writing, from embodiment to a kind of embodied textuality. In March 1891 Alice opens a discussion of nutrition with reference to bodily processes, a rhetorical strategy that allows for a metaphysical turn. She writes:

If the aim of life is the accretion of fat, the consumption of food unattended by digestive disorganization, and a succession of pleasurable sensations, there is no doubt that I am a failure, for as an animal form my insatiable vanity must allow that my existence doesn't justify itself, but every fibre protests against being taken simply as a sick carcass, as foolish friends so flatteringly insist, for what power has dissolving flesh and aching bones to undermine a satisfaction made of imperishable things. (March 23, 1891; p. 183)

The very disgust with which she designates flesh and fat as objects of disdain fashions this opening gambit. Alice sustains the motif of nutrition in order to turn it away from the "food" and "fat" that belong to "digestive disorganization." Marked as physical by the insistent alliteration of "f's" and "d's," her phrasing reminds us that the physical body, encumbering as it is, remains a vital source of feeling. The insistent physicality of repeated consonants allows her to put writing in place of a body whose energies she could never fully control.

She continues:

This winter has been rich beyond compare, the heart all aglow with the affectionate demonstration of friend and brother, the mind deeply stirred by most varied and interesting events, public

and private, the spirit broadened and strengthened, let me hope, by a clearer perception of the significance of experience, whilst from the whole has flowed perpetually those succulent juices (male or female) which exude at the slightest pressure from the human comedy. (March 23, 1891; p. 183)

Transforming the body into food for metaphor, Alice moves “nutrition” into the realm of “imperishable things,” such as friendship. Refusing to let her “sick carcass” define the sickroom, Alice transforms the sickroom into the space in which imperishable relationships are cultivated. Disdaining other forms of nourishment, she supplies herself and her companions (including potential readers) with the “succulent juices” of the human comedy that she observes around her. Writing is the activity that puts pressure on the social body to make it exude these “succulent juices.”

Alice’s use of the body to adumbrate the life of the mind acknowledges the body as the source of metaphor. Immobilized by illness, her body is transformed into writing that draws on energies deriving from the physical body. As her physical body wastes away in illness, a lost realm of infantile responsiveness reappears in the form of writing. (It is worth noting that this 1891 diary entry itself marks a new stage in Alice’s journal-keeping: No longer able to hold the pen herself, Alice now dictates her entries to her companion and caregiver Katherine Peabody Loring.)

It appears that the diagnosis of a fatal tumor in her breast allowed Alice to express in writing the experiences and sensations of a more primitive embodiment. My use of “primitive” here is admittedly speculative, somewhat in the sense of an analytic reconstruction. The propulsive force of Alice’s writing suggests to me a resurgence of the vital energies that animate the infantile body: The text is alive with feeling, as if it were that animate body. Paradoxically, it would seem that Alice gained fuller access to the animating force of the *infantile* body at the *end* of her life, when her physical body was most profoundly out of commission.⁷

BODY THEATER

Cultivating her sensibility as a writer, Alice transforms sickroom and journal into embodied spaces, theaters of the body. Her sense of space may be likened to Henry’s use of fictional space as the

intimate theater of consciousness, an awareness that antedates the few years during which he actually wrote plays. In the Preface to the New York edition of *Portrait of a Lady*, Henry James (1908, p. xxiv) describes the “house of fiction” with its windowed apertures high up; in this formulation, these “pierced apertures” are the openings to perception: Each constitutes a point of view. The house of fiction is a vaulted space, suggestive of embodied space. So too in “The Art of Fiction,” Henry James (1884) delineates space of mind as a theater of experience. He characterizes experience as “an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind” (n.p.). This spatial sense of mind as the setting for activities of thought resonates with Alice’s organization of the sickroom as metonym for a kind of civilized selfhood.

A spatial conception of cultivated selfhood organizes the well-known photograph of Alice’s sickroom at Leamington Spa that dates from the late 1880s, around the time that she inaugurated the diary. With no visible sign of the unruly body, composure characterizes this photograph of two women, Alice and her companion Katherine Peabody Loring, one reclining on a daybed, the other at her side holding a book. Several distinct sources of light, including a sun-filled window, illuminate a rich harvest of decorative objects—books, photographs, and prints—carefully placed throughout the room. Emblematic of invalidism as a way of life, the photograph enables us to look into the sickroom, while its very structure and contents also frame access to the world outside. Not only the window, but the many framed scenes that adorn the walls open out to the larger world and insist metonymically on sustaining links to it. The photograph affirms and extends a tradition of cultivated invalidism, a sensibility detailed earlier in the century by the writer Harriet Martineau (1844) in her volume, *Life in the Sickroom*.⁸

Henry’s foray into the British theater circa 1890 seems to have stimulated in Alice a heightened awareness of her own engagement with the sickroom as a theatrical space. Over the course of 1890, Alice tracked with excitement Henry’s involvement in bringing to the stage his early novel *The American*, which was “to be brought out in the Provinces and acted there thro’ the winter and taken to London in the spring” (May 13, 1890; p. 114).

Through the winter of 1890, diary entries suggest that Alice has ambitions of her own to portray *an American*, herself, an American lady living in England. Thus Alice pictures an unfolding drama in her own sitting-room: the witnessing of her will by the American consul and several of her compatriots. As dramaturge, Alice details the disposition of her body in the scene. With faultless narrative control, she situates herself as one who is so overcome at the "arrival of this august personage the Consul" that she "had to be put to bed." Developing the literary properties of her narrative, she notes that "I felt as if I were assisting at the reading of my own Will, surrounded by the greedy relatives, as in novels" and includes the exclamation of one witness who describes the scene as "the most picturesque and American."

Hinting at a bit of sibling rivalry, Alice concludes: "I can't complain of not being taken seriously and I think it is the first time that *picturesque* and *American*, which are usually supposed to neutralize one another so completely, were ever conjoined. In recounting the story to H.[enry] he said, 'You can't say you've done nothing for your Race since you've brought that about in your own person'" (February 17, 1890; p. 90). Yet Henry's fraternal tribute, which clearly means matters greatly to Alice, offers recognition for an *oral* account of the scene, while for Alice, an oral account is only the first stage of a process that will culminate in the diary's written communication. It is the diary that allows Alice to employ delicate shifts in point of view through which she positions herself as hapless protagonist, proficient narrator, sometime pundit, and acute observer.⁹

Long experience as an invalid fuels her observer's eye and quick wit, most particularly when the object of observation is herself. Reflecting on her immobilization in illness, responding to her environment, engaged by politics, the Irish question in particular, Alice fashions a distinctive stance as an American living in England. Vivid scenes of life as an invalid, including her own collapse into insensibility, give immediacy to her writing. In positioning herself as observer, Alice separates herself from other women. She seems to engage in a rhetorical renunciation of femininity that allows her to join her older brothers in shaping a writer's identity, yet, of course, she is also subject of the discourse. Thus she is both the invalid that her writing portrays and the authorial voice that imaginatively reconstructs scenes of invalidism.

In fact, Alice remarks with some frequency on women's self-display. Her letters and journal entries communicate horror at the very fact of visibility of the adult female body. A rush of five visitors in three days leaves her feeling "like a Barnum Monstrosity which had missed fire" (December 2, 1889; p. 63), a harsh image in which she likens herself to a freak show that ultimately disappoints its audience. So too in a letter to William, March 16, 1890, Alice writes: "I ought to have been started by Barnum" (James, A., A. James to W. James, notes p. 8). These "Barnum" references reflect popular interest in the deformed body, the "freak," as commercial spectacle. In Alice's usage, references to a "Barnum monstrosity" equate the invalid female body with shocking visibility. She conveys a similarly sharp sense of helpless visibility when she notes that some visitors come to see her once only, never to return (December 2, 1889; p. 63); she perceives these visitors as having rejected her sickroom as insufficiently entertaining. The challenge of writing for Alice is to circumvent the popular culture of entertainment exemplified not only in freak shows, but in more modulated form, in sickroom scenes of benevolence toward invalid ladies as well.

Boudreau (1993) finds evidence in Alice James's responses of her horror at a culture of sympathy that treated invalids as the objects of benevolence. For Alice, as Boudreau puts it, sympathy "renders the body a monstrosity." Noting Alice's efforts to rewrite the body as "'other,' a monstrosity which is both of her and alien to her" (p. 60), Boudreau argues that by "recasting sympathy as theatrical, James challenges the fiction of benevolent sympathy so prevalent in her age" (p. 58). Both Boudreau and Duquette (2005) draw attention to Alice's skillful manipulation of sickroom scenes to subvert the sentimentalizing of death and illness so popular at the time. Offering a discourse of the body in place of the body itself, Alice's narrative strategies push back against the invalid's shamed helplessness, even as she stages her own objectification.

And yet we would miss a crucial component in Alice's sickroom theater if we were to focus simply on mastery. Alice takes at least as much care to detail moments when her control of imagined or re-created scenes fails. She stages shame in order to expose and explore its dynamics. At such moments, the diary becomes the vibrant setting for a theater of embodiment. In the entry for June 13, 1889, Alice notes how she felt on hearing that someone

she had never met had characterized her as «very charitable»: “I felt as if all my clothes had been suddenly torn off and that I was standing on the steps of the Town Hall, in the nude, for the delectation of the *British Matron*” (p. 32; emphasis in original). In the semi-private space of the written page, Alice offers a vivid and yet wholly imaginary public scene: Her body figures at the center of an economy of display that insists on her (imagined) sensation of shame. She turns the diary into a public stage for a spectacle of the body, albeit a body that has actually been withdrawn from social life.

So too the diary insists on a number of vivid physical images that make place for distinctly discomfiting sensations of embodiment. Alice records her thoughts on reading the memoirs of the seventeenth-century Sophia of Hanover, whose excitement over philosophy would cause her nose to redden and led her to “hide herself from the world.” Using direct address, Alice enlists not only Sophia but the reader in a kinship made up of those in whom excitement expresses itself physically in ways that may not be visible, but are potent nonetheless. Addressing Sophia directly, Alice writes: “Dear friend, how I feel for you!—retrospectively, not to say introspectively, for which of us has not a red nose at the core of her being which defies all her philosophy, the courage of our features being the least attainable of all the heroisms” (December 12, 1889; p. 71).

This “red nose at the core of her being” is both metaphor and the literal truth of embodied selfhood. Alice highlights the paradoxical performativity of her own body, active in fantasy, while immobilized and concealed in her sickbed. Body and intellect are at odds here: Philosophy is put at risk by the shame of a “red nose at the core of her being,” a fleshy inner protuberance, the paradox of an invisible spectacle. Yet while acknowledging the wish to hide caused by this sensation of a “red nose,” Alice James uses all her rhetorical skill to give it place in her writing. She makes us feel it and thus refuses to banish the sensations of an unruly embodiment from the domain of philosophy. Within the intimate space of the diary page, an imagined scene insists on the visible bodily excitement that is caused by philosophical ideas.

Alice’s narrative reflections on bodily sensation and philosophical excitement bear comparison with Henry’s fictional elaborations of situations in which characters struggle with the awkward

facts of physical being. Not long after Alice's death, Henry James (1892) published "Nona Vincent," a story in which a young man's theatrical ambitions play out among three women, each of whom embodies some aspect of his ideal. Set in the world of the theater, "Nona Vincent" uses the facets of theatricality to fashion three women out of one: Mrs. Alsager, the older woman who is friend and muse to the aspiring writer; Nona Vincent, the dramatic character whom the writer invents, based on his feeling for Mrs. Alsager; and Violet Grey, the young actress who is hired to play the role of Nona Vincent. With considerable charm and comic spirit, the story distributes friendship, desire, and embodiment among these three women, thus avoiding confrontation with the physical reality and emotional complexity of any one embodied being.

WILLIAM AND ALICE: HYPNOSIS, MIND-CURE, SPIRITS

We see evidence of Alice's sense of theatricality at play in her responses to William's interest in "mind cure." Alice shared with William a dynamic interest in mental life, albeit with some significant differences. In the mid-1880's, William came to accept a broader range of approaches to the science of mental life, a shift that may correspond to his own experience in consulting mental healers (Sutton, 2012, p. 117). Through his mother-in-law he began a long association with a celebrated trance medium, Mrs. Leonora Piper. Responding to a request from William in 1885 for a lock of her hair for a psychic reading by Mrs. Piper, Alice took pleasure in tricking her brother by sending him the lock of hair of a friend who had died some years earlier (Allen, 1967, p. 283). Alice's gleeful deception conveys the kind of pleasure that she took in outwitting medical experts. But while she undoubtedly took pleasure in imagining the scene that her deception provoked, the episode also suggests her resistance to strategies and diagnoses that too quickly subordinated spiritual concerns to a physical universe involving locks of hair and séances.

In the 1880s William consulted with a "mind-cure doctress," whom he saw for ten or eleven visits, during which he would enter a trancelike state: "I sit down beside her and presently drop asleep, whilst she disentangles the snarls out of my mind" (Allen, 1967, p. 288). Alice was consistently scornful of mind-curers. On

November 25, 1889, she wrote to William of a visit from a woman who spoke to her about her experience of mind-cure, but without really being able to say anything about it.¹⁰ A year later she composed a rather satirical account of her encounter with a couple of “mind-curers, Charles and Susan Bowles, who are giving lectures” (November 9, 1890; pp. 152–153) in London. At Alice’s suggestion (“I thought it would be ‘fun’ to see and hear the process”), Susan Bowles is “invited to give me a treatment” (November 9, 1890; pp. 152–153). Setting the scene with characteristic deftness, Alice records not only the words Susan Bowles speaks, but her own unspoken response as well:

She bade me shut my eyes and say over to myself, “I am a child of God and *as* such pure, perfect and without flaw!” My mind of course began skipping about the horizon and every now and then I was recalled by her saying “Now, rest your mind from the thought,” “Now, bring your mind back to the thought.” After it was over she said I was too much barricaded by my “intellectual friends,” I was too intellectual, etc. which methought a delicious fetch. She nobly declined remuneration, because it was such a pleasure to meet a “New England mind,” etc. I think she is sincere, but what a revelation of mental penury in the race that that’s the sort of thing that impresses the mass. (November 9, 1890; pp. 152–153)

Alice’s humorous account gives evidence of the invalid’s defiance of those who want to cure or at least enlist her in their spiritual projects, but it also conveys fierce insistence on the power of her own thoughts. As she constructs the scene, the very act of dismissing the mind curer’s simplistic formulations allows her to highlight the darting movements of her own mind. The deadening clichés of the mind-curer serve as foil to the “skipping” movements with which her own thoughts delineate the horizon of her inner life.

Alice takes full possession of the project of articulating her experience of mind and body in a remarkable series of diary entries in October 1890. Taking note of the publication of William’s (1890a) essay “The Hidden Self,” in *Scribner’s* for March 1890, Alice proceeds to exercise full authorial control, as she writes her own version of “The Hidden Self” over the course of several journal entries that, taken together, demonstrate the scope of her am-

bition as a writer. (In what follows, I build on Strouse's account of Alice's response to William's essay [1980, pp. 117ff.])

Some comments first on William's essay. Taking the occasion of the publication of Janet's massive treatise on dissociation (1889), William parts company with those scientific contemporaries who demand absolute order of science; he opens with an emphatic affirmation of the value of "the Unclassified Residuum," a phrase he adopts to designate phenomena that do not fit into existing systems of thought. (This is consistent with the general approach to mental life as a kaleidoscopic continuum that he develops in the 1890 *Principles of Psychology*.¹¹) News of the work of the French gives William (W. James, 1890a) the material he needs to argue for "the traditions and practices of the occult" (p. 362) as a valuable means of access to phenomena that escape the "scientific-academic mind." In taking this position, William explicitly aligns himself with the otherwise denigrated domain of the "feminine-mystical mind" (p. 362). William addresses what Janet calls "contractions of the field of consciousness" (quoted in W. James, 1890a, p. 363), arguing by implication for the greater breadth of emotional experience in the lives of those who are subject to hysterical disorders, somnambulism, hypnotic suggestion, and animal magnetism.

William makes it clear that his own interest in exploring the "splitting up of the mind" goes further than the work of Janet (W. James, 1890a, p. 371). As Goldstein (2013) points out, Janet never ceased to focus on the unifying power of volitional consciousness as a higher function of mind, thus viewing psychological "automatism," hysteria, and psychasthenia as lower forms of mental life that belonged to a "liminal zone between morbidity and healthy functioning" (p. 65). Therefore, while William applauds Janet for recognizing the "simultaneous coexistence of the different personages into which one human being may be split" (W. James, 1890a, p. 368), William goes on to explore the features of hysteria that Janet, for one, would simply classify as pathological: "The anaesthesias, paralyzes, contractions, and other irregularities from which hysterics suffer seem, then, to be due to the fact that their secondary personage has enriched itself by robbing the primary one of a function which the latter ought to have retained" (p. 369).

William may well have had in mind his sister's emotional suffering when he notes that "an hysterical woman abandons part of her consciousness because she is too weak nervously to hold it all

together” (W. James, 1890a, p. 371). Indeed, he may be acknowledging her qualities of mind when he proceeds to draw a clear distinction between a hysteric’s breakdown, on the one hand, and, on the other, the “stability, monotony, and stupidity” of a life lived with no awareness of secondary selves or split-off parts of the mind (p. 371). Acknowledging the emotional risks that come with experiences of the split self, William clearly regards them as preferable to an unreflective or untroubled way of life. (This preference shapes the later *Varieties of Religious Experience*, where William takes the “sick soul” as his central focus for all its rich complexity.)

Beginning with the journal entry of October 26, 1890, Alice launches a response to her brother’s essay. Taking note of William’s “excellent expression” in “The Hidden Self,” she highlights his characterization of the “nervous victim” as someone who “abandons” certain portions of his consciousness (October, 26, 1890; p. 148). Quite promptly Alice goes on to make the term her own, noting that “I have never unfortunately been able to abandon my consciousness and get five minutes’ rest. I have passed thro’ an infinite succession of conscious abandonments” (October 26, 1890; pp. 148–149). The word “abandon” serves Alice as a rhetorical marker, over the course of two contiguous journal entries, as she frames her own thoughts on the subject of the not-so-hidden self. The result is a reflective essay that looks back to her first serious breakdown twenty years earlier and sustains a certain rhetorical elegance, even when she notes an episode of nervous collapse that has disrupted her ability to write. If her brothers achieved fame through writing that explored the hidden recesses of subjectivity, Alice stakes her claim here to a comparable terrain of inquiry located squarely in her own experience.

Looking back, Alice identifies the first of that “infinite succession of conscious abandonments”—the first episode of breakdown of which she was consciously aware—in 1867 or 1868, when she was nineteen. Alice sets the scene retrospectively in the James family library, where her father sits writing and she is locked into immobility by fiercely competing currents of feeling. In exquisite detail she narrates the surges of impassioned impulses—murderous and self-destructive—that assail her, painting a vivid picture of muscular energies and impulses for which there was no outlet:

As I used to sit immovable reading in the library with waves of violent inclination suddenly invading my muscles taking some one of their myriad forms such as throwing myself out of the window, or knocking off the head of the benignant pater as he sat with his silver locks, writing at his table, it used to seem to me that the only difference between me and the insane was that I had not only all the horrors and suffering of insanity but the duties of doctor, nurse, and strait-jacket imposed upon me, too. (October 26, 1890; p. 149)

Alice notes her own versatility in occupying the multiple roles and functions—"doctor, nurse, and strait-jacket"—that constitute this inner drama, exposing what had been hidden perhaps even from her own conscious awareness. With the control of retrospection, Alice dramatizes a youthful battle with the violent waves of feeling that swept through her at the time. Noting the opposing thrusts of violent inclination that invaded her muscles, she delineates conflicting impulses, either toward aggressive assault on her father, "the benignant pater," or against herself, in the imagined violence of throwing herself out the window. To my eye, Freud's (1924) theoretical account of primary erotogenic masochism is animated by comparable insight into the violent opposition between inwardly directed energies and their outward turn. The concept of erotogenic masochism acknowledges those libidinal energies that find expressive outlets only after they have been turned inward in experiences of pain, so that pain and pleasure can never fully be dissociated from one another.

Alice's exposition of "violent turns of hysteria," as she puts it, takes us into the inner life of the twenty-year-old young woman overwhelmed by intolerable feelings that appear to have sentenced her to lifelong invalidism. The library is an evocative setting, indicating that life of the mind to which Alice undoubtedly aspired. This analytical self-portrait assigns a certain heroism to the young woman whose energies were consumed at the time by "the duties of doctor, nurse, and strait-jacket." In this episode of nervous prostration, the "moral power" pauses, and for the duration of each of an "infinite succession of conscious abandonments" violent impulses hold sway.

Feinstein (1984) offers an astute comparison of this vivid passage to William's youthful Newport drawings, which figured de-

pictions of angry animal rage (p. 201). He emphasizes Alice's almost clinical precision in documenting, twenty years after her breakdown, the effort to maintain "muscular sanity" and the consequent collapse into illness. In this portion of the diary, the distance of time and the stimulus of William's essay of 1890 give Alice unprecedented access to the intense conflicts of her younger years.

What I am calling Alice's version of "The Hidden Self" continues in the next diary entry, dated November 7, 1890. Alice picks up again on the verb "abandon," giving it a new twist, with this announcement to her imagined audience:

I must "abandon" the rhetorical part of me and forego the eloquent peroration with which I meant to embellish the above, on the ignorant asininity of the medical profession in its treatment of nervous disorders. The seething part of me has also given out and had to be abandoned. We were going to pitch our tent with a view to permanence in Tunbridge Wells but I have gone into pie, so remaining here at loose ends seemed the only exit from chaos. (November 7, 1890; p. 150)

The verb "abandon" here signals a further modulation of her writing to acknowledge the collapse of the writer in the very moment of writing. The rhetorical interest of such a moment is underscored in Alice's reference to the "peroration," the formal conclusion to an oration. Her exercise of the classical form is both disrupted and transformed by a sudden episode of illness: "I have gone into pie."

The phrase "gone into pie," which Alice uses here and elsewhere, is a colloquialism for going to pieces or falling apart. Interestingly, this meaning of "pie" derives from the business of setting type, where it indicates "a mass of type mingled indiscriminately or in confusion, such as results from the breaking down of a form of type." (The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives several nineteenth-century uses of "pie" to indicate "a disintegrated and confused mass; a jumble; medley, confusion, chaos; a mess."¹²) It is quite possible that Alice thought to picture her physical and emotional collapse as a typographical mess. Making the phrase her own, she uses it to indicate a breakdown of expressive language: she can neither speak nor write; she cannot order the letters to form words and sentences.

Yet, of course, by recording the experience of “going to pie,” she puts it to work in her writing. She can *write* her experience, with the intention moreover of having her writing *set into type* after her death. The collapse of writing—going “to pie”—thus becomes intelligible as one part of the writer’s struggle. From a contemporary feminist perspective we might think of Alice James as modifying the classical form of the essay, whose terminology she quite deliberately invokes here. Disruption does not halt her writing, but rather transforms rhetorical structure. Her insistence on the classical form of the peroration conveys the intensity of the effort to sustain intelligibility and has the effect of changing the relation of writing to the experience of collapse.

Working her way toward a witty and elegant substitution of the written page for the invalid’s troublesome body, Alice configures a textuality that is shaped by symptomatic disruption. Rhetorical form incorporates reflections on her first breakdown twenty years earlier, while taking into account collapse in the present—going “to pie,” instead of to Tunbridge Wells. It even allows for a look into the future, as Alice imagines the moment of her dying: “As dissolution advances I am to be carried to H.’s flat it not being aesthetic to die in an hotel” (November 7, 1890; p. 150). Writing is the medium through which she fashions this theater of body and mind.

COMPOSITE BODY: ALICE JAMES AND KATHERINE P. LORING

Alice’s epic inquiry into the not-so-hidden self gives vital place to her companion and caregiver, the redoubtable Katherine P. Loring. She writes:

A life lifted out of all material care or temptation to which all the rudimentary impulses were unknown, a collection simply of fantastic unproductive emotions enclosed within tissue paper. Walls, rent equally by pleasure as by pain—animated by a never-ceasing belief in and longing for action, relentlessly denied, all safety-valves shut down in the way of “the busy ineffectiveness of women.” As I look up and find my better half Katharine effectually removing certain streaks of grime from the wall paper with a bit of India rubber my spirits rise in the hope that the unremitting and

various nature of her muscular contractions may shed a glamour over her humiliated appendage (November 7, 1890; p. 151).

Alice tells us here about the mixture of pleasure and pain that is her experience of writing as an invalid—where bodily experience and writing, pain and pleasure, disclose their commonality. The “tissue paper” of her contemplation becomes in the very next sentence the substance of “walls.” What can these be, other than the “walls” of her body? Anatomy becomes architecture, as Alice notes that these walls are like “tissue paper,” “rent equally by pleasure as by pain.” (This suggestively hallucinatory scene of bodily writing anticipates the yellow wallpaper in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s famous story.) Alice’s writing has been shaped by struggle, “a never-ceasing belief in and longing for *action*, relentlessly denied, all safety-valves shut down in the way of the “busy ineffectiveness of women,” as she puts it.

Structurally and anatomically, this passage delineates the pathways through which her symptoms take shape. Katherine P. Loring’s wall-cleaning labors become confused or interchangeable with the care that she gives to the invalid body. The reference to Katharine’s “muscular contractions” redeems the uncontrollable physicality of Alice’s breakdowns, described so often as muscular contractions and contortions that are involuntary and humiliating. Katherine’s muscles contract with work, productive labor. Alice is subsumed into Katherine’s physical being, to the extent that she now sees herself as Katherine’s “humiliated appendage.”

To concede her body to Katherine has a logic of its own in Alice’s experience. After all, this is the Katherine of whom Alice wrote to Sara Sedgwick Darwin, on August 9, 1879: “I wish you could know Katharine Loring, she is a most wonderful being. She has all the mere brute superiority which distinguishes man from woman combined with all the distinctively feminine virtues. There is nothing she cannot do from hewing wood and drawing water to driving run-away horses and educating all the women in North America” (Yeazell, 1981, p. 82). This admiration for Katharine’s prowess illuminates Alice’s description of herself eleven years later, in 1890, as Katherine’s “humiliated appendage.” That is, Alice invests Katharine with a body that is capable of everything that a body can do; Katharine becomes body.

In the picture of Katherine laboring with India rubber to remove streaks of grime from the “wall paper,” it becomes apparent that Katherine is Alice’s writing arm. In fact, Alice is now paralyzed. Katherine now writes for Alice when Alice can no longer lift the pencil. The streaks of grime are Alice’s writing, as Alice works relentlessly to refine it. Streaks of grime, written on the walls of the sickroom that is her body, become her writing tablet. Collaboration with Katherine P. Loring in the space of the sickroom gives Alice these opportunities to explore embodiment in writing.

As a richly textured composite, this scene of writing gives full expression to activity that takes up conventional gender distinctions only to throw them awry, confusing body and room, masculine and feminine attributes. How are we to parse gender in this scene: Is Katherine P. Loring Alice’s woman or Alice’s phallus? Is Loring’s writing arm a reference to the father’s dismembered leg? These entries anticipate the mad confusion of a writing come alive with which “The Yellow Wallpaper” ends. Moving forward in time, it anticipates as well Balsam’s (2008, 2012) more recent call for fuller recognition of women’s active impulses and bodily sensations.

It’s worth noting that removing “streaks of grime from the wall paper with a bit of India rubber” is the work of a scribe, precisely the function that Katherine took on in Alice’s life. This complementarity comes through in a diary entry that Alice composed, or rather, dictated, on January 1, 1892, two months before her death. Reflecting on illness in relation to friendship, Alice writes: “As the ugliest things go to the making of the fairest, it is not wonderful that this unholy granite substance in my breast should be the soil propitious for the perfect flowering of Katharine’s unexampled genius for friendship and devotion” (p. 225). The “unholy granite substance” of her tumor offers testimony to the final negation of her body, even as it enlivens her tribute to the transformative powers of friendship and writing.

Toward the end of Alice’s life, William recommended that she try hypnotism and referred her to Dr. Charles Lloyd Tuckey, “a pioneer in hypnosis therapy and author of a book William admired, *Psycho-Therapeutics: or Treatment by Hypnotism and Suggestion*” (Allen, 1967, p. 338). With characteristic acerbity, Alice reported to William, in a letter of December 2, 1891, that the results were

“nil,” as far as relief from pain, aside from “the violent resuscitation of a dormant toothache” (Yeazell, 1981, pp. 190-191). In Alice’s orchestration of her dying, the major role goes to Katherine P. Loring, who rules over the “digestive Boreas” “with solemn majesty” (Yeazell, 1981, p. 191). Nevertheless Dr. Tuckey remains a good source of comic material for Alice. On February 2, 1892, she paints a scene in which he assures her that she will “live a good bit still—I was terribly shocked and when he saw the havoc that he wrought, he reassuringly said: ‘but you’ll be comfortable, too,’ at which I exclaimed: ‘Oh I don’t care about that, but boo-hoo, it’s so *inconvenient!*’ and the poor man burst into a roar of laughter” (p. 230). Sickroom comedy gives way to an intimate interior space, as Alice turns to the reader to express a more private concern:

I have always thought that I wanted to die, but I felt quite uncertain as to what my muscular demonstrations might be at the moment of transition, for I occasionally have a quiver as of an expected dentistical wrench when I fancy the actual moment. But my substance seemed equally outraged with my mind at Tuckey’s dictum, so mayhap I shall be able to maintain a calm befitting so sublimated a spirit! (p. 230)

Suggesting an almost unbearable excitement, “muscular demonstrations” constitute a dynamism that threatens to disrupt the “calm befitting so sublimated a spirit” to which Alice aspires. But while Alice’s use of the word “sublimated” indicates the wish to attain the level of the sublime in dying, the vivid image of “dentistical wrenches” invokes the inevitable bodily stimuli that she cannot control.¹³ And yet this too is an imagined scene. Dr. Tuckey plays his part in a comedy of manners that serves ultimately to underscore Alice’s writerly aspirations. Alice gives him place in the imagined scene of a dying that is at once sublime and comic: She registers the unruliness of her body, even as she claims it through writing.¹⁴

TOWARD A CONCLUSION

The diary of Alice James testifies to a struggle to find a different ground than a simple vitalism rooted in the body, for which physical health was the norm. She rejects the notion of cure, choos-

ing instead to work out a shift from the physical body, wasted by illness, to the body of writing, amplified on the journal page. We might think of Alice James in relation to those women suffering from hysteria whose words first led Freud to the discovery of the unconscious body of infantile sexuality, with the important difference that it is Alice James who articulates her own experience in writing. In my reading, the diary of Alice James enters into conversation with the psychoanalytic conceptions of infantile sexuality and of erotogenic masochism, two of the ways in which psychoanalysis has sought to understand problems of excess in bodily energies. These are related analytic concepts that posit a history of the subject in the broadest sense as the history of the vicissitudes of instinctual energies. Alice James writes a part of that history for us, bringing to life on the pages of her diary the sensations of bodily excitement, collapse, and innervation that dominated her life. Staging a drama of the body in writing, the diary of Alice James reminds us of the resonances of embodiment in the realm of textuality. Her work draws our attention to the vestiges of bodily sensation and fantasy that inform activities of reading and writing.

Precisely the conjunction that constrained creativity and mobility in Alice's earlier years becomes in the diary the source of her distinctive gift. She puts her finger on the equation when she connects illness with creative strength, commenting on "the sense of vitality, in short, simply proportionate to the excess of weakness" (July 12, 1889; p. 49). Her phrasing suggests a common source for energies that either turn outward into writing or inward into bodily symptoms and collapse.

While the next-to-last diary entry, February 29, 1892, the night before her death, conveys resignation to a history of the body in illness, it also sustains the ability to reflect actively on the crystallization of bodily substance into written form:

How wearing to the substance and exasperating to the nerves is the perpetual bewailing, wondering at and wishing to alter things happened, as if all personal concern didn't vanish as the "happened" crystallizes into history. Of what matter can it be whether pain or pleasure has shaped and stamped the pulp within, as one is absorbed in the supreme interest of watching the outline and the tracery as the lines broaden for eternity. (pp. 231-232)

At this final moment Alice positions herself as witness to the writing that takes shape out of the pulpy substance—the body—of her experience. Articulation into writing redeems that pulpy mass, as the diary moves outside of the body, but it does so only on condition of preserving intimate connection to the felt materiality of physical being. Writing to the very end, Alice becomes the reader of the text—“the outline and the tracery”—that is her own body.

In this context, we read Katherine Loring’s closing observation of Alice’s last day and night, spent “making sentences” and revising them. She tells us that Alice revised a sentence to end with the words “whilst moral discords and nervous horrors sear the soul” (p. 232). Noting the power of those two paired noun phrases, one might imagine Alice working with Katherine to hollow out a space for herself in the repeated combination of r’s and o’s, as if to carve out a last warm shelter inside her writing.

Some time ago I examined one of the four original printed versions of Alice James’s diary, the one entrusted to William James, whose signature is on the flyleaf. William’s son, Henry James III, bequeathed it in 1944 to Harvard, his alma mater (class of 1899), where it can be found in the repository of the James family papers. This beautifully printed and bound volume presents the text of the diary as one continuous piece of writing, with specific dates inserted in a manner that is subordinated to the overriding discursive structure of paragraphs. No longer are entries set off from one another by date, as one might expect of a diary (and as is the format in contemporary publications of the diary of Alice James). One can only assume that this mode of presentation reflects the author’s wishes, as carried out by her companion, Katherine P. Loring. It is a format that enhances the authorial persona of the writer: Her voice unifies the individually dated entries, as if to override the conventional segmentation of diary form and to assimilate the material to a new discursive whole, making it difficult to tell where one entry ends and another begins.

NOTES

1. All subsequent citations of Alice's journal will include only the date of the entry and the page number in this source.
2. In a letter of November 26, 1890, to William's wife Alice, Alice James asks for notices of William's book, comments on the excitement surrounding the opening of Henry's play *The American*, and concludes, "I am working away as hard as I can to get dead as soon as possible, so as to release Katharine; but this play of Henry's makes a sad complication, as I don't want to immerse him in a deathbed scene on his 'first night,' too much of an aesthetic incongruity!" (Yeazell, 1981, p.185).
3. Robertson and Wilkie fought bravely for the Union cause in the Civil War. In contrast, William and Henry appear to have claimed illness (William's eyes, Henry's bad back) to avoid enlisting, while each sustaining "the illusion that he participated in the national struggle" (Feinstein, 1984, p. 199).
4. While it might seem to suggest masculine arousal and eruption, it is perhaps to be associated with the less obvious evidence of female engorgement. I am indebted to Rosemary Balsam for this insight
5. Duquette (2005) critiques psychoanalytic readings of the diary of Alice James as all too often emphasizing loss and failure, in a manner that "seriously obscures what she actually does achieve in the text" (p. 717). As I hope to show, an analytic approach to the writing of Alice James that allows her writing to shape the path of inquiry can draw attention to the aspects of bodily experience and anticipation of death that inform her work. These facets of her writing, among others, constitute her particular contributions as a James; they also demonstrate the boldness of her thinking about subjects that were treated either sentimentally, as Duquette shows, or not at all.
6. Remarkings on the absence of women's voices from medical discourse at the end of the nineteenth century and from psychoanalytic theory at the end of the twentieth, Balsam (2008) notes wryly that "many of our clinical accounts and our emphases in theory still treat female body pleasure as a well-kept secret" (p. 119). She calls for a revision and amplification of theory, urging a renewed effort at listening that might register more of women's gratification in their bodies.
7. Fisher (2008) observes that sickbeds of the time period "crackled with an erotic charge" (p. 457).
8. In a chapter titled "Nature to the Invalid," Martineau (1844) considers which views are best suited to the life of the invalid, expressing a personal preference for the sea, less for "its space than its motion, and the perpetual shifting of objects caused by it" (p. 67). Martineau's writing situates the window as frame for the sea beyond it, almost as if to contain its incessant motion.
9. Thus I would not agree with Boyer's (2013) reading of the discontinuities, gaps, and "spontaneous erratic flow of content" in the diary as indicative of the kind of private writing that is not meant for publication. Boyer does nevertheless take note of the power of the substitution of text for body: She comments on Alice's experience of a tumor as form-giving experience that "creates determinacy for Alice in a meaningful, tangible way" (p. 41).
10. "When I asked her what the attitude of mind was that she assumed in her wrestle with fate the poor lady cd. not make an articulate sound notwithstanding her 30 hrs. of instruction, she finally murmured that it was 'to lose oneself in the Infinite,' wh. process seems to bring one rather successfully to the surface in the finite

- as the Curer 'says her power is the same as Christ's only less perfect' (Yeazell, 1981, pp. 173–174).
11. In *Principles of Psychology*, published in 1890, and in a one-volume version a year later, William (1890b) develops the concept of the "stream of consciousness" to refute the English and German schools of psychology, and their more atomistic approach to mental life.
 12. The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers several nineteenth-century citations, which Alice may have known: Carlyle, writing on the French Revolution (II.II.iv): "Your Arrangement going all (as the Typographers say of set types, in a similar case) rapidly to pie!" and Mrs. Lynn Linton in *Fortnightly Review*, October 532: "Witness the 'pie' he made of his finances."
 13. Instructions for cremation and ashes in an urn to be buried at the side of her parents in a Cambridge cemetery obviate any lingering risk of exposure. Nevertheless, even here she conveys to us her initial discouragement at the thought of how "fussy and expensive" cremation is, concerns that are only allayed by Katherine's sending for "the circular," which clarifies how "simple and inexpensive" a procedure it is (February 17, 1890; p. 88).
 14. In the diary entry of February 28, 1892, less than a month before her death, Alice makes fun of William's interests, joking that she fears that she may be "spiritualized into a 'district messenger'" after death, deputized into carrying messages for Father and Mother. The threat of taking on the role of "the dreadful Mrs. Piper," who "has done more to degrade spiritual conception than the grossest forms of materialism or idolatry" prompts Alice to reiterate her distaste for "the squalid intestines of human affairs" and the "spongy minds that sop it all up and lose all sense of taste and humour!" (p. 230). Alice's banter in the face of death allows her to insist once more on her own conception of an aesthetic dying, as distinct from the interventions of spiritualists such as Mrs. Piper.

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