

**Celebrity and the Body in *The Bostonians***

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The world in which the characters of *The Bostonians* circulate and interact is one tempered by shifting views of privacy, publicity and the body. While changing modes of technology bring to American culture the prevalence of mass media and the dissemination of the image through photography and the popular press, the boundaries of privacy are at stake with the ease of its dissemination across multiple channels. While distinctly left out of the media in 18th century conceptions of writing<sup>1</sup>, the body takes a renewed place at the center of public life with relaxed views of privacy in the press, the rise of lecture culture, and dissemination of images across advertisements and publicity. While women begin speaking in public and details of celebrity's private life seep out through the press, the anxieties about shifting boundaries of privacy and publicity are often manifest in one's relation to the body of these celebrities. While the image of the celebrity may be universally constructed and shared among its recipients, the individual's personal relationship with an otherwise universal message or image allows us to read in the body of the celebrity the desires and anxieties of her public.

The phenomenon of celebrity love can be examined in terms of a mass public's intimate relationship with a public figure. In the formation of a mass public, a natural affective relationship emerges out of a group dynamic in which a mass public feels affection and identification towards its public figures.<sup>2</sup> In Michael Warner's essay "The Mass Public and the Mass Subject," the author figures the public's relation to the mass celebrity as a means to provide a body to an otherwise abstracted mass public:

As the subjects of publicity—its "hearers," "speakers," "viewers," and "doers"—we have a different relation to ourselves, a different affect, from that which we have in other contexts. No matter what particularities of culture, race, gender, or class we

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Warner, *Letters of the Republic*

<sup>2</sup> In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud discusses the identification and idealization members of a group feel towards their leader. Warner's discussion of the "self-abstracted public" seems to follow in this vein.

bring to bear on public discourse, the moment of apprehending something as public is one in which we imagine—if imperfectly—indifference to those particularities, to ourselves. We adopt the attitude of the public subject, marking to ourselves our nonidentity with ourselves. (Warner, 234)

Warner identifies individuals' experience in the mass public as dissolution of identities in favor of a flat, undifferentiated public. Differences fall away in order for a public to coalesce around a public figure. Out of this self-abstracted mass, however, comes a need for embodiment that is denied by one's participation in the group. Warner sees in the figure of the celebrity a reconciliation of this need. More than the objects around which a public coalesces, celebrities become the site at which individuals can map their personal desires and affections. "In the figures of Elvis, Liz, Michael, Oprah, Geraldo, Brando, and the like, we witness and transact the bloating, slimming, wounding, and general humiliation of the public body. The bodies of these public figures are prostheses for our own mutant desirability" (Warner, 250) In the changing bodies of the celebrities, the members of the mass experience their own changes. In an otherwise self-abstracted sphere, the body of the celebrity becomes the only body through which the public can experience and identify. As part of the mass public, the members of the public are intimately implicated in the bodies they witness. In the celebrity's body, then, we find a portrait of the mass that witnesses it.

In Henry James' *The Bostonians* we find an apt portrait of the age in the figure of Verena Tarrant. From the reader's first interaction with Verena, she is constructed primarily as a celebrity, one made completely for the public sphere.<sup>3</sup> In a crowded parlor, Verena is introduced

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<sup>3</sup> Philip Fisher notes in "Appearing and Disappearing in Public" that: "The genius of James's novel is not to ask the question of how, out of normal human materials, such blatant performing personalities are made. Instead, he begins with Verena's instinctively public self and asks how, out of this, an intimate and human-scale personality might be won." (Fisher, 180) Fisher sees this device by James as a demystification of many of the "larger-than-life"

to the reader as a performer prior to any personal or private dialogue. When Basil Ransom first sees her, he notes the publicness saturated through her entire presence:

“she had the sweetest, most unworldly face, and yet, with it, an air of being on exhibition, of belonging to a troupe, of living in the gaslight, which pervaded even the details of her dress, fashioned evidently with an attempt at the histrionic. If she had produced a pair of castanets or a tambourine, he felt that such accessories would have been quite in keeping.” (54)

Even off the stage, Verena’s appearance marks her as a celebrity. Her appearance embodies the state of publicness that resists a private facet, as one totally given up to the private sphere. As other characters come to interact with her, even the most private moments of their relationships are tempered by her celebrity status. In Verena’s moments of intimacy with these characters we start to see the contours of the ways in which individuals of this age must navigate the changing norms of publicity and the body.

Verena’s most intimate relationships are with two characters, Olive Chancellor and Basil Ransom. Throughout the book, the two vie for her affection and control by different methods and for different reasons. Olive Chancellor is a staunch suffragist reformer of old Bostonian stock who sees in Verena a beacon for the suffragist cause: “She says it’s a great advantage to a movement to be personified in a bright young figure” (95). Olive, who is too shy to speak for herself in public, takes Verena under her tutelage so that she can relay her teachings to the public sphere without appearing herself in public. In managing her Verena’s public circulation, Olive also comes to control Verena’s private life; her wish is for Verena never to marry but to stay with her forever. While seeing Verena through her “phase” of courtships, Olive tries vehemently to

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celebrities of his day, such as P.T. Barnum and Mark Twain. For him, Verena’s final “disappearance” at the end of the novel is the celebrity’s consummate escape into a fully private life.

keep her out of the hand of various men, most notably Basil Ransom. Ransom, Olive's distant cousin and an imposing and eloquent Southerner, lies on the outside of Boston's progressive society due to his strongly-held conservative social views. While highly attracted to Verena's body, Ransom wishes to suppress her public voice both to support his own views and to make her his wife: "You won't sing in the Music Hall, but you will sing to me; you will sing to every one who knows you and approaches you... Your facility, as you call it, will simply make you, in conversation, the most charming woman in America" (376). Both characters' infatuation with Verena at once marks a desire to enter into an intimate relationship with the individual, and to project their own views into the public sphere. In this dual objective, we find a distinct way by which the two characters attempt to navigate their increasingly mediated world.

Helpful to our exploration of different characters' relationship to celebrity and publicity will be John Durham Peters' distinction between dialogue and broadcast. In his book *Speaking into the Air*, Peters describes dialogue and broadcast as the two central modes of communication throughout history. Beginning with the teaching styles of Socrates and Jesus, Peters re-writes "the history of the idea of communication" through the lens of these two modes. While he maintains that no form of communication can forge a real "connection" between individuals, each type carries with it its advantages, illusions and characteristics. While both forms of communication are utilized in the text, in "broadcast" we see the form communication most associated with mass media dissemination.

Peters finds in the Synoptic Gospel's parable of the sower (a "parable about parables") an early description of broadcast:

The diverse audience members, like the varieties of soils, who hear the parable as told by the seashore are left to make of it what they will. It is a parable about the

diversity of audience interpretations in settings that lack direct interaction. It examines the results when sender and receiver, sower and eventual harvest, are loosely coupled. In contrast to the *Phaedrus*, which at key point is nervous about the folly of scattered seeds and the dangers of promiscuous couplings, the parable of the sower celebrates broadcasting as an equitable mode of communication that leaves the harvest of meaning to the will and capacity of the recipient. (Peters, 51-52)

In contrast to dialogue, a broadcasted message is spread to as many people as possible without regard to who is receiving the message; while its "seed" may be wasted, its effectiveness is in the mind of whomever who picks it up. While dialogue advocates exchange as a means to flesh out an ideal meaning of a message, under the use of broadcast, the message is left in the hands of the receiver to foster a meaningful interpretation. While in most cases the message falls on deaf ears, when a recipient does take hold of it, her connection with it is deeper and more profound.

In *The Bostonians*, broadcast is manifest in the public speeches of Verena Tarrant as well as in the devices of mass publicity in the press, promotional posters, and collectable trinkets. While broadcasted communication most typically falls within these formal channels, broadcasted communication also comes to permeate modes of personal interactions, such as Verena's initial contact with Ransom and Selah Tarrant's uncanny smile. It is through these more personal communications by which we will explore the individual's relationship with a public figure and with the mass public. As instances of broadcast and dialogue between different characters vacillate throughout the book, we find the character's bodies implicated in different ways. In bringing together studies of communication with analyses of the body, I hope to demonstrate the

importance of the celebrity as a locus through which one can analyze the various anxieties of an age, particularly springing from the rise of mass publicity and the creation of a mass public.

In the first section of my paper, I will explore various characters' relationships with burgeoning technologies of publicity as they relate to their own and the celebrity's body. While not a central aspect to the plot of the novel, these characters' relationships with changing forms of media establish an atmosphere of heightened eroticism around new forms of media and distinctions between public and private. In the section second of my paper, I will explore Verena Tarrant's personal relationships with Olive Chancellor and Basil Ransom and how their shifting modes of communication demonstrates alternative strategies of relating to the mass public. Through this study, I hope to establish the role of the celebrity's body as a locus of contemporary anxieties about changes in privacy and publicity.

### **The Status of the Body in the Culture of Publicity**

Around Basil and Olive's interpersonal relationships with Verena, a distinct culture of publicity is established through the lives of various auxiliary characters. Associated with the protagonists in varying degrees, these characters must negotiate the changing world of publicity in their own day-to-day life. In Matthias Pardon, we find a man who had made his living on the crest of the publicity revolution. At the helm of *The Vesper*, Pardon's interview tactics obliterate former norms of privacy and is likewise the first person to suggest that Verena take a "run" of the lecture circuit. Pardon views the world as a "perpetual evolution of telegrams" and heralds media and modernity over the most personal aspects of his life (117). Selah Tarrant is similarly infatuated with the modern world, though remains largely outside of its main current. His profession as a mesmeric healer and his history in various free-love communities points to an

infatuation with the latest, and often misguided, fads. His uncanny conception of success in the public world suggests a full inclusion of the body through the dissemination of print media. Taking the distinctly counter view-point is Basil Ransom in his own ideas about the role of the body in traditional publication. He seems the one character in the book that stands against the oncoming tide of mass media and upholds many traditional views. His views provide a good counter-point to Pardon and Tarrant and establishes an introduction to the anachronisms of his world-view.

The world of the popular press is hyperbolically embodied in the personage of Matthias Pardon. Pardon, a young opportunistic newspaper man, sees in the popular press a universal medium:

For this ingenuous son of his age all distinction between the person and the artist had ceased to exist; the writer was personal, the person food for newsboys, and everything and every one were every one's business. All things, with him, referred themselves to print, and print meant simply infinite reporting, a promptitude of announcement, abusive when necessary, or even when not, about his fellow-citizens. (117)

Pardon's view of the role of newspapers marks a change in the conception of writing in the public sphere as disembodied from its author.<sup>4</sup> In the distinction between the "person" and the "artist," James marks the traditional 'distinction' between the private body of the individual and his public alter-ego. Thus, if "the writer [is] personal," the explicit boundary between the image of the artist and the individual behind it is permeated; the artist at once permits more of "himself" to bleed through his work, as well as an increase in the liberality in the amount of private information divulged about individuals. While one's public utterances can be expected to

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<sup>4</sup> Warner, *Letters of the Republic*



carry more of oneself in them, the artist must also expect deeper penetration into the privacy of his own life. This sea-change in modern publicity at once marks the dissolution of the traditional view of the artist, wherein one's public persona is detached from a private self, and the creation of the mass media artist, whose private life is indistinguishable from his public persona, and diffused into it. The rearrangement of these boundaries is not a destruction of the public/private dichotomy, but a drastic inclusion, a "flattening" of what is considered public.

Pardon demonstrates this "flattening" quality of the popular press in his tendency to condense events and persons in the columns of his paper. In trying to appeal to Olive's movement, Pardon offends Olive in calling the women's suffragist movement "the great modern question" (James, 137). Since Olive sees the struggle as ongoing for "many years to come," in Pardon's condensing it to a "modern" phenomenon, Olive sees the movement denied the movement its historical weight and moral urgency (James, 137). Fit for the sensationalist pages of his paper, Olive thinks Pardon's view undermines the movement's social and political merit. Pardon's emphasis on immediacy creates a leveling of value across events and movements: "[E]verything to him was very much the same, he had no sense of proportion or quality; the newest thing was what came nearest exciting in his mind the sentiment of respect" (James, 117). While the women's suffragist movement carries implications for the life of a whole population, the necessity of condensation onto a newsprint renders the issue ephemeral, though ubiquitous.

This same flattening device is used in Pardon's rendering of the body of the female celebrity. While the condensation of the body onto the pages of the *Vesper* reduces the message of the artist to the same level as the details of her private life, it also makes public her otherwise marginalized body. The effects of Pardon's rendering of female bodies is seen in his interview methods:

He was particularly successful in drawing out the ladies; he had condensed into shorthand many of the most celebrated women of his time—some of these daughters of fame were very voluminous—and he was supposed to have a remarkably insinuating way of waiting upon *prime donne* and actresses the morning after their arrival, or sometimes the very evening, while their luggage was being brought up. (James, 117)

In this passage, James brings out the corporeality in writing about or interviewing a subject. James plays with the idea of volume both in the words it takes to describe an actress, and the size of her bodily mass. While a particular “prime donne” may be “voluminous” in the length of her description, one also imagines a shrinking of the body of the star onto the pages of the press. The author must squeeze a corpulent woman into the columns of a paper. Also, James’ insistence on the Pardon’s waiting at the celebrity’s room suggests Pardon’s emasculation in his pursuit for newspaper content. While Pardon’s interview methods at once bring forth the female body into the public sphere, it marks the de-sexualization of his own body in the process.

In Basil Ransom’s desire to publish his conservative views, we find an instance of a traditional view of the public voice that desires to maintain the separation of the individual’s body from the public sphere. Despite his recognition and abhorrence for the “nervous, hysterical, chattering, canting age” of publicity, Ransom believes a place for effective writing still exists in traditional publication (322). While Ransom believes the body can still be separated from public writings, he also believes in the effectiveness of writing to produce an effect in its audience. Unlike the immediate sensationalist practices of the popular press, Ransom sees in scholarly publication a means of engaging a sympathetic audience without the public projection of his own body.

Ransom senses the possible impact his published ideas have on a mass body. Despite his disapproval for the current trend in publicity, he finds pleasure in disseminating his own ideas across a public: "to cause one's ideas to be embodied in national conduct appeared to him the highest form of human enjoyment (179). While Pardon's brand of publicity focuses on the spectacle of the image, Basil sees in publication a veritable way to influence action and opinion. In justifying his unpopular ideas to Verena, Ransom assures her that he is:

"Not the only person who feels so, but very possibly the only person who thinks so. I have an idea that my convictions exist in a vague, unformulated state in the minds of a great many of my fellow-citizens. If I should succeed some day in giving them adequate expression I should simply put into shape the slumbering instincts of an important minority." (318)

In Ransom's conception of publication, he sees the act of disseminating one's word a means of organizing a "sleeping" contingent of like-minded individuals. As the traditional view of the role of public voice, Ransom's publication would in fact be the voice of his fellow-citizens, not merely an external, individual viewpoint. As Warner points out in his book *Letters of the Republic*, the role of the public voice in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was one that stood for the voice of the public body, rather than an individual within it or outside it. We see this view reflected in Ransom's own view of publication and his attestation that his opinions are already extant in the minds of the public. While dismissing the effectiveness and morality of mass mediation, he finds pleasure in the idea of being the voice of the public with a capacity to directly affect popular consciousness. While he wants to his body outside the public sphere, he wishes to affect the constitution of the public body through the dissemination of his ideas.

His desire for traditional publication is also a desire to keep his own body out of the public sphere. Ransom sees in the venue of traditional publication a means of getting his ideas across to a public without implicating his body in the process. While Ransom's ideas are drastically conservative ("about three hundred years behind the age" (180)), Ransom's Southern drawl carries with it a recent history of slave-holding oppression, a racial specificity, and the erotics of the South. While Ransom wishes to alter the public consciousness by his ideas, the modern vehicles of mass communication would undermine an unbiased reception of his argument due to his body's presence. While Verena Tarrant benefits by such a presence, Ransom sees in the implication of the body in the venue of mass media both as a detriment to his own cause.

Ransom demonstrates the regulation of his private self from the public sphere when he refuses to discuss with the ladies at Miss Birdseye's his anecdotes of the South:

"He had a passionate tenderness for his own country, and a sense of intimate connexion with it which would have it as impossible for him to take a roomful of Northern fanatics into his confidence as to read aloud his mother's or his mistress's letters." (46)

For Basil, so personal an issue as the relation to one's home is much too intimate to divulge to this band of ladies assembled to hear a lecture. To speak of something he holds so dear in public he compares to the reading of intimate letters from a mistress or his mother. In this instance, Basil links the sharing of one's personal life in a public medium as the divulgence of something erotic or sensual. He feels too literally the implication of his own hyper-masculinized Southern body in the sharing of something personal in the public realm and individualizing his voice for

public consumption. To carry his own self into the public is to transgress his own sensibility of sexuality and privacy, and thus chooses to refrain from speaking.

The collapse of body and mass media is also found most radically in the Tarrants' conception of their daughter's success in the public world. Not concerned with ticket sales for her lectures or the effect of her message on a populace, the Tarrants see Verena's ubiquitous presence in writing and mention of her in the papers as the sign of her success. While Verena constructs a name for herself by her physical presence in front of a lecture hall, only after the resonance of her name, image, and private life has saturated the public do her parents regard her as successful. For Verena to 'make it,' Tarrant expects the complete diffusion of Verena's private life into the press: "Success was not success so long as his daughter's *physique*, the rumour of her engagement, were not included in the 'Jottings', with the certainty of being extensively copied" (James, 97). Bypassing the realm of privacy, Selah equates the publishing of private information as a transposition of her body into the medium. Noting the amount of times the message would have to be copied, Selah's statement shows his own perversion in his conception of the dissemination of a body. This conception of the publication of stars' private lives is reminiscent of Pardon's own method of "condensing" women into the space of the page.

Selah exhibits this odd mixture of sending the body across media in his own desire to enter bodily into the paper: "He was always trying to find out what was 'going in'; he would have liked to go in himself, bodily, and failing in this, he hoped to get advertisements inserted gratis" (99). While this statement at once reinforces the transposition of the body across print media, the strange violence of the image of Selah actually entering in bodily into the machinery of the printing press is disturbing. One is so desperate to disseminate the details of one's private life across the public sphere as the sacrifice one's living body to the cause. We see in this violent

image, unlike other people of the press, a mortal desire to enter into and make oneself known in the world of publicity. With many traditional modes of communication, such as Ransom's scholarly journal, becoming increasingly inaccessible and irrelevant, the desire to move bodies or affect the public consciousness reaches a desperate level. While the body and its privacy was traditionally conceived as a refuge from a public, it seems that the only way to make a mark anymore is to give oneself over completely.

### **Communicating with the Celebrity**

Prior to the mass mediation of Verena's body, Olive and Ransom gain more intimate contact with the body of the star. While the mass public harbors a particular relation to the star once it has been disseminated across mass channels, the nature of Olive and Ransom's privilege to Verena's body carries a different charge. Although they remain a part of Verena's public, Olive and Ransom's access to Verena's body allows the reader to analyze the mechanisms of control and influence built into the construction of the celebrity's body in the world of publicity. The quasi-hypnotic power the two characters have over Verena allow her to use her public body to their own instrumental means. Although Olive and Basil each make shows of desire for Verena, the ways in which their love is manifest are drastically different. While Olive uses Verena instrumentally to forward her cause of woman's suffrage, Ransom, maintains a more liminal position between part of the mass and a direct connection with the star. Olive more explicitly takes Verena under her power in order to propel her own ideas of progressivism into the public sphere—in the ideas she imparts, Verena is merely a surrogate to her suitor. Ransom's relationship, however, takes on more the form of the obsessive fan, trying to break into the pre-imagistic world of the celebrity. His love must be materialized in Verena's body proper. The two

characters' relationship to Verena's body carries a certain resonance in that it is influential to how she subsequently moves her audience and also violent in the direct effect it has in cutting through the broadcasted noise of her publicity. Here, I will analyze these particular engaged relationships with the body of Verena Tarrant and their various consequences. I hope to demonstrate the shift that occurs between the nature of Verena's relationships with the two protagonists and their larger implication in a mass' relationship to a celebrity. While Ransom's relationship with Verena follows the trajectory from a broadcasted to a dialogic communication, Olive's is the inverse, stemming from dialogic before become broadcasted. In the inverse trajectories of modes of communication with the star, the two characters demonstrate ways in which individuals can situate themselves in public and private in relation to the celebrity.

In Verena's first appearance in the novel, she is put under a mesmeric trance by her father. From that scene, mesmerism becomes an important underlying theme, one that tempers Verena's "inspired" style of speaking and subsequent dialogic relationships with Olive and ransom. While the act of mesmerism itself isn't induced after Verena's initial appearance, its residue remains in Olive and Basil's control and production of Verena's voice and body.

In her debut, Verena is put into a mesmeric trance in front of a group of women at Miss Birdseye's home. Necessary to the "drawing out" of her speech are a series of "passes" her mesmerist father undergoes on Verena's body. Throughout the event, Ransom, a spectator in Miss Birdseye's home, is disturbed by Selah's motions over his daughter's prostrate body: "He grew more impatient at last, not of the delay of the edifying voice..., but of Tarrant's grotesque manipulations, which he resented as much as if he himself had felt their touch" (James, 55). Selah's "familiar" manipulations with Verena's body disturbs Ransom who is not used to

witnessing such intimate acts performed in a public setting.<sup>5</sup> Witnessing Verena engaged in this public display of intimacy viscerally repulses Ransom, both for the intimacy Verena's body is subjected to in public, and for the incestuous nature of Selah's "manipulations." This intimate transgression disturbs Ransom to the extent he feels his own body implicated in the transaction. In Selah's drawing out of Verena, Ransom imagines a transfer of Selah's touch to his own body. Selah's intimate transgression of Verena's body, at once between father and daughter, public and private, and Selah and Ransom, delivers to Ransom's body a confusing erotic charge: "They made him nervous, they made him angry, and it was only afterwards that he asked himself wherein they concerned him, and whether even a carpet-bagger hadn't a right to do what he pleased with his daughter" (James, 55).

The anxieties Ransom feels in this instance can be mapped onto his inexperience with and misapprehension of broadcasted intimacy. Although Ransom feels a connection to the message of the performance, he feels a dissonance with the instestuousness and homoeroticism he feels wrapped up in it. Ransom's misapprehension leads him to dismiss the performance as strange and perverted without questioning why he feels so.

Extending from Basil's initial sense of connection in Miss Birdseye's parlor, Basil consistently mistakes Verena's broadcasted gestures for intimate interactions. Even when Basil Ransom witnesses Verena smiles at him and Olive after her first lecture, he can't help but notice that the gesture is designed to please a large audience in an undirected display:

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<sup>5</sup> While mesmerism was a popular form of entertainment throughout the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the spectacle had never gained traction in the South where such displays of the female body in public were frowned upon.



she smiled with all her radiance, as she looked from Miss Chancellor to him;  
smiled because she liked to smile, to please, to feel her success—or was it  
because she was a perfect little actress, and this was part of her training? (63)

While Ransom recognizes Verena's attempt at mass appeal, he later feels personally connected to her silent smile that comes in lieu of a verbal meeting: "So he only smiled at her in silence, and she smiled back at him—a smile that seemed to him quite fore himself" (63). Recognizing that Verena's display is merely a public attitude and not a private interaction, Ransom believes that Verena's smile carries something more intimate for him but not for others. This misapprehension of Verena's broadcast is caused by Ransom's desire to connect dialogically with the star and to break out of the place of the mass subject. While it is Ransom's place in the public in the first place that allows him to come in contact with Verena, he at once believes that they have a personal connection, and has a desire to possess her bodily.

At one moment, Ransom hopes to acquire one of the novelty photos that are circulating with Verena's image:

and when he said that he should go and buy one of the little pictures as soon as he returned to town, contented herself with replying, 'Well, be sure you pick out a good one!' He had not been altogether without a hope that she would offer to give him one, with her name written beneath, which was a mode of acquisition he would greatly have preferred... (228)

In this passage, Basil makes the distinction between the detritus of publicity, and a discrete object handled by the celebrity. The act is significant because it at once shows Ransom's attempt to break out of the mass public and his disregard for the circulated image of Verena. Even though

the photo would remain a tchotchke, the exchange for Ransom would signify his stepping out of the public.

In Olive's relationship with Verena, we find the opposite form of communicative relationship that is established between Ransom and Verena. While Verena's communications with Ransom initially take the exclusive form of broadcast, Olive's role as Verena's manager and friend necessitates a dialogic relationship between the two. Olive's relationship demonstrates her influence on Verena's broadcasts a successful attempt at engaging a star dialogically.

While Ransom's discomfort in Miss Birdseye's home is caused by a misapprehension of the nature of Verena's broadcast, Olive perturbation stems from seeing Selah in a dialogic relationship with Verena body. While to have a male performer so intimately involved in a suffragist's speech inherently undermines the suffragist argument, Olive is also jealous of Selah's role in "setting off" Verena. Disgusted by his low class role of mesmerist and his questionable association with the girl, Olive wishes to possess Verena for herself, both for making her a beacon for the cause and for the intimate relationship it would grant her. Relinquishing Selah's control over his daughter as her manager and proprietress, Olive enters into an intimate dialogic relationship with the girl.

Once she "does without" the mesmeric control of her father, Verena maintains a mesmeric relationship under the tactful management of her new "handler." Early in their relationship, Verena identifies Olive to her parents as someone with the capacity to further her career in the public world: "What Verena wanted was some one who would know how to handle her (her father hadn't handled anything except the healing, up to this time, with real success), and perhaps Miss Chancellor would take hold better than some that made more of a profession" (94). The fluidity with which the narrator refers to Verena's "handling," as both the act of

mesmerism and as the business of promotion, demonstrates the similar role each takes in Verena's public coming out. In "taking hold" of Verena's career, Olive must effectively handle the girl both in the lecture circuit business and the business of "setting [her] off." This overlap of roles endows Olive's role of manager with a distinctly erotic tenor; to control the circulation of the speaker's image is to extend an influence over her body and voice.

This eroticism is drawn out in the women's description of their relation to one another. Early in their relationship, Olive would often inspire Verena with private displays of eloquence about her devotion to the cause. After a particularly spirited moment from Olive, Verena responds to her friend:

'Do you know, Olive, I sometimes wonder whether, if it wasn't for you, I should feel it so very much!'

'My own friend, Olive replied, 'you have never yet said anything to me which expressed so clearly the closeness and sanctity of our union.'

'You do keep me up,' Verena went on. 'You are my conscience.'

'I should like to be able to say that you are my form--my envelope. But you are too beautiful for that!' (149)

This statement is indicative of the complementarity the two women share early in their relationship. When Verena first goes under Verena's wing, the two openly recognize to others the role the two play in the constitution of Verena's argument and Verena's constitution in public. However, the statement also demonstrates the distinctly erotic nature of their "complementary" dialogic relationship. While we see in Verena's statement her dependence on Olive for her enthusiasm for the cause, we also see the penetrative nature of this transfer of ideas. In order for Olive's ideas to enter into the public sphere, they must first enter into Verena's body.

While Verena's body is at once the "medium" through which the ideas are spread into the public, Olive calls attention to Verena's body as the "form" to Olive's "consciousness." Beside the engulfing language of this arrangement, Olive's own term, "envelope," is particularly vaginal. The act of projecting her own consciousness into Verena's body through teaching her imbues their dialogic relationship with a particular sexual tenor.

Throughout the course of *The Bostonians*, we witness an inversion in the modes of communication employed in Verena's relationships with Olive and Ransom. While Verena is initially resistant to Ransom due to Olive's reservations to his character, and thus treats him as any other fan, later in their relationship, she is wooed by his masculine presence and florid language during their extended engagements. Verena begins to share secrets of Ransom's visits with him and a rift grows between her and Olive. As Verena is put deeper under Ransom's spell, she is drawn further from Olive, though is still engaged as a public speaker. As their mode of communication shifts to broadcast, Olive's presence drifts further into the public sphere. As their dialogic relationship dissolves, Olive slips into the place of the public figure, with her body exposed to a waiting mass public.

In the final transfer of mesmeric power, Verena starts to fall for the body and rhetoric of Basil Ransom. Verena feels herself slipping under Ransom's influence when he takes her to Central Park in New York:

"she listened, in the warm, still air, touched with the far-away hum of the immense city, to his deep, sweet, distinct voice, expressing monstrous opinions with exotic cadences and mild, familiar laughs, which, as he leaned towards her, almost tickled her cheek and ear...yet there was a spell upon her as she listened; it was in her nature to be easily submissive, to like being overborne." (316)

In this passage, the corporeality of Basil's voice seems to cut through the stir of the city to affect young Verena. Despite what should otherwise be bitter repugnance for Ransom's conservative ideas, Verena is allured by the body of Ransom's voice in the exoticness of his accent. Much as Ransom's previous attractions to Verena stemmed from the sound of her voice over its content, Verena falls for the body of Ransom's voice, which he only can reveal in private. Ransom finds pleasure in this sudden penetration of Verena in a dialogic relationship: "If he didn't want to take up the subject, he at least wanted to take her up—to keep his hand upon her as long as he could" (307). Ransom finds himself in a new place of privilege in Verena's world and will use this power to use her to his full advantage. In the shift to Ransom's dialogic relationship with Verena, James' language takes on again the vocabulary of mesmerism. As he finds himself putting her "under [his] spell," she can no longer resist his desires, even as they are against her interests.

However, unlike Olive's dialogic relationship, Ransom's intimate and bodily connection with the orator promotes the dissolution of her status as public figure. While earlier in the novel, Verena's self-continuity between public and private selves marks her naturalness as a public figure, Ransom's antiquated conception of the private-public distinction makes Verena doubt her public attitude:

"It isn't you, the least in the world, but an inflated little figure (very remarkable in its way too), whom you have invented and set on its feet, pulling strings, behind it, to make it move and speak, while you try to conceal and efface yourself there. Ah, Miss Tarrant, if it's a question of pleasing, how much you might please some one else by tipping your preposterous puppet over and standing forth in your freedom as well as in your loveliness!" (325-326)

Ransom's distinction between Verena's private and public selves changes the constitution of Verena's character from being fully public, to being divided between the public and the private. When Ransom convinces Verena she is merely putting on a show, she must align her 'real self' with Basil's antiquated ways. In reducing Verena's audience from an unnumbered mass to "one" individual, we see Ransom's success in breaking out of the mass public and converting Verena to the domestic sphere.

When Ransom forcibly removes Verena from the Music Hall at the end of the novel, we witness both the realization of his bodily desire for Verena and the projection of his own aims into the public sphere. In an act absent of language, preventing Verena from delivering her speech on stage, Ransom more powerfully projects his antiquated argument into the public sphere than through his preferred "traditional" modes. Not using the tools or mediums of his age, Ransom uses his dialogic relationship to the celebrity to remain hidden from public view while transferring his misogynistic ideas into the public.

Parallel to Ransom's dialogic seduction of Verena is Olive's embrace of a broadcasted relationship with Verena. While Verena continues to use her gift to take on more followers, Olive pushes harder and harder to control the content of her speech. By the time the two are preparing for the monumental *Music Hall* performance, Olive has Verena memorizing her speeches word for word, pre-fabricating the message and content of Verena's performance. Where Verena's initial speeches under Verena's management would still resemble an act of mesmerism, Verena's later appearances are much less "inspired." This effort to funnel her words directly through Olive, while at once projecting her words more exactly into the public sphere, does not implicate Verena's body to the same degree.

As much as Verena serves as a mouthpiece to the larger suffragist movement, Verena's public body provides a surrogate to Olive's staunchly private one. Only at the end of the novel, when Verena is whisked away bodily by Basil Ransom does Olive take the stage to the full audience at the *Music Hall*. In this final bodily swap, Olive enters the role in which she was commanding from behind as a spectator and admirer. In this act, Olive finally makes manifest the desire of the mass subject to fully occupy the body of the celebrity.

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