“A conscious memento”: The Literary Afterlives of Henry James’s Lamb House

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In 1896, the novelist Henry James became captivated by Lamb House, a Georgian, red brick house at the top of a cobbled street in Rye with a unique, bow-windowed “garden room”. Restoring and decorating it sympathetically, it became his main home for the rest of his life, a comfortable retreat where the observer of society could himself entertain guests. The house and garden feature in subsequent novels, and he worked in the garden room, revising his novels and tales for the New York Edition, a re-examination of his whole career. After James’s death, his friend E. F. Benson moved in, using Lamb House as the inspiration for Mallards in his comic Mapp and Lucia novels (1920-1935). In 1940, the garden room was obliterated by a bomb, which nearly destroyed the house. However, what Edith Wharton called “the centre of life at Lamb House,” still survives in various recreations and re-imaginings, from the novels written by its inhabitants to memoirs and fictions by more recent writers and television adaptations. James utilized the distancing and memorializing effects of nostalgia in his own work, to create a living, modernist interaction with the past, the “conscious memento.” Thus fictional representations and the writing of place can be part of intangible heritage, enabling the survival of architecture beyond its physical presence.

Keywords: Henry James; E.F. Benson; interior design; intangible heritage; iconoclasm

In *Italian Hours* (1874) Henry James (1843-1914) wrote that “In places that have been lived in so long […] the past seems to have left a sensible deposit, an aroma, an atmosphere” (James 1909: 415). He articulates the aura of intangible heritage, for fictional representations and the writing of place can be a method of remembering

destroyed architecture, enabling its survival beyond physical presence. The destruction of a unique space raises issues of fetishisation, iconoclasm, memorials and authenticity in the material world. James's own home is a particularly historic location. Throughout his writing, James utilised the distancing and memorialising effects of nostalgia to create a living interaction with the past, based around the physical object, the "conscious memento" he describes in *The American Scene* (James 1907: 228). As Bill Brown has examined, the "thing" in James has a fetishistic power enabling multiple interpretations and adding a "metaphysical potency" to our relationship with material culture (Brown 2002: 230). This aura is increased by iconoclastic acts, even when he is writing comically, a mode also utilised by E. F. Benson (1867-1940).

This paper was first presented at the panel "Beyond Restoration: Architectural Revival, Survival and Memory," at the Annual Conference of the Association of Art Historians (2016), partly as a response to the first fire at the Glasgow School of Art in 2014. Since then, the building has suffered an even more devastating fire, making the discussion around issues of reconstruction and authenticity even more pertinent for Scottish heritage. For anyone familiar with the building, its destruction has been a profoundly shocking experience, provoking the question, how can a building have this power? "The Mack" was a working art college as well as a beautiful *gesamtkunstwerk*, the epitome of the Glasgow Style, internationally known as Charles Rennie Mackintosh's "masterwork" (Buchanan 1989). Completed in 1909, the library was perhaps the most enchanting space within it. A hushed, dark sanctuary crafted from wood, glass, light and shade; an emotive space, with the scratched evidence of a century of students using the space for writing, reading and passing the time. In this culturally significant building the tangible heritage was obvious, but it is the power of the intangible aura that makes Glaswegians mourn its loss, and debates around its

reconstruction so angry. As Laurajane Smith has stated, “Heritage is a cultural process or embodied performance” where events, social networks and relations generate “a sense of belonging and identity” which is “actively and continually recreated and negotiated” (Smith 2011: 23). After a cataclysmic destruction, a replica or memorial can only regain a sense of authenticity or aura through those recreations and negotiations: models, photographs, written descriptions, retelling stories. Though its destruction was far less cataclysmic, Lamb House has inspired many afterlives, primarily in the writings of two of its occupants who were authors and stories in which they utilised the language of fetishism and iconoclasm.

Lamb House, Rye in Sussex is a potent location for exploring questions of iconoclasm, aura and authenticity in the reconstruction of destroyed heritage (Fig. 1). Partially destroyed in World War II, it was occupied at different times by James and E.F. Benson, both writers, friends and “bachelors of a different sort”, in John Potvin’s term (Potvin 2014). A personal and literary legacy extends from James to Benson through Lamb House, bound up in the aura of that location. In particular, the garden room was a unique space in which they both wrote, James used as a library and Benson as a music room. James anthropomorphised Lamb House in his letters, and it became a character in his novels, just as it did for Benson. They both describe it as having a certain power, Benson writing that “Rye has a spell, and I had come within the circle of its enchantment” (Benson [1940]: 6). This metaphysical potency has remained to the present day, despite its partial destruction and change of use from a home to a heritage attraction, through the stories that have been told about it.

Born in America, the novelist Henry James spent much of his life travelling in Europe. Novels like *The Portrait of a Lad*y (1881) explore the differences between the old world (Europe) and new (United States), linking issues of national, social and

personal identity with cultural concerns of aesthetics and morality through the metaphor of the "house of fiction" and its material culture. He settled in London in the 1880s, becoming a welcome guest at the dinner tables of literary, artistic and political society, but a decade later was looking for his own country retreat where he could write and entertain. He spent the summer of 1896 bicycling around Sussex house-hunting. When visiting his friend Edward P. Warren (1856-1937), he saw a watercolour the architect had painted of a picturesque, bow-windowed, brick building (Fig. 2). On finding its original, the "garden room" of Lamb House, James became captivated by the building. In letters he describes the way Lamb House came into his possession as a series of fateful events. Once he had "lost his heart to it", as he wrote to his sister-in-law, he kept walking over and making "sheep's eyes at it" (James 1984: 63). The next summer, it was available to let, and at once he was "fairly confronted with the possibility and so brought to the point […] a little like a blow to the stomach" (James 1984: 56). On purchasing the twenty-one-year lease, he described the momentous event to A.C. Benson (the older brother of E.F. Benson) in terms more commensurate with a sexual conquest: "But it is exactly what I want and secretly and hopelessly coveted (since knowing it) without dreaming it would ever fall. But is *has* fallen –" (James 1984: 57).

Rye is an ancient and pretty town, where cottages line steep cobbled streets, and former smuggler's inns are hung with hops inside and Tudor timber framing outside. Lamb House stands prominently at the top of West Street, the summit of the town's hill, a red-brick Georgian house with an unusually high, canopied door. The house was built in 1722-3 by James Lamb, a vintner, who incorporated an older building into his elegant new home (Oswald 1955: 397). The Lambs were an old Rye family who virtually ruled the town throughout the eighteenth century, with a Lamb appointed as mayor during seventy-five of the 116 years of the Georgian era, a role later filled by both Benson and

his fictional creation, Lucia. The house also has royal connections, for in 1726 George I was forced into Rye Harbour during a storm and spent several nights in Mayor Lamb's newly built house. He slept in a wood panelled corner room with a view of the church, thereafter called the King's Bedroom and where James himself slept. On moving in, James wrote to his sister-in-law, "it is the very calmest and yet cheerfullest that I could have dreamed" and "the house itself, though modest and unelaborate, full of a charming little stamp and dignity of its period […] without as well as within." James would decorate the interior in a spirit of enthusiastic authenticity for the house's Georgian origins, writing that he was keen to "'pick up' a sufficient quantity of ancient mahogany-and-brass odds and ends – a task really the more amusing, here, where the resources are great, for having to be thriftily and cannily performed" (James 1984: 62). He created a comfortable, domestic retreat where the observer of society could himself entertain guests.

The works were overseen by Warren, who was a fashionable architect in the Queen Anne style. Based on seventeenth-century Flemish buildings and Georgian homes like Lamb House, architects like Philip Webb and Richard Norman Shaw designed buildings characterised by red brick and white stucco, which became *the* urban style in Chelsea and St John's Wood 1870s-1890s. Inside, the aim was to achieve a modern atmosphere of "sweetness and light", as Mark Girouard has famously described, more domestic than Gothic Revival style, using an eclectic mix of antiques, Georgian furniture and light, tertiary colours (Girouard 1977). Warren was also known for his sensitive and invisible restoration of old buildings, making him the perfect consultant to update Lamb House for modern living in a style appropriate to its original architecture and history (Oliver 1937). He removed wallpaper that had been pasted over wooden panelling and painted the walls in light tones. He let more light into the house by adding

two pairs of French doors to the garden from the parlour and dining room, where he also created an apsidal recess with a circular leaded window, lighting the sideboard below. In several rooms he installed eighteenth-century style basket grates with marble surrounds and old blue and white Dutch tiles. Warren's wife Margaret supervised the ordering of many expensive curtains, and James enthusiastically went antique hunting, writing to his collector friend Lady Wolseley in 1899 that "I'm *looking* for the right – the real good old polygonal lantern" to replace a "hideous little 'gaselier'" in the hall (James 2012: 105-6). A photograph of 1906 shows that he had indeed found one (Fig. 3). The three floors gave James plenty of room for visitors, his staff of four, and most importantly, to write. He worked in the garden room of Warren's watercolour in summer, and in the colder months in the green-painted parlour, surrounded by photographs of family and friends. After a visit in 1900, A. C. Benson wrote in his diary that "The place has been carefully done up, and is very clean, trim, precise, but all old and harmonious" (Lubbock [1926]: 46-7). James had created his own perfect country retreat, in appropriate, if unadventurous, good taste. In 1907, a decade after he moved in, James described his "fit" with Lamb House: "I have lived *into* my little old house and garden so thoroughly that they have become a kind of domiciliary skin, that can't be peeled off without pain" (James 1984: 482).

James's friend and fellow writer Edith Wharton identified the garden room as "the centre of life at Lamb House" (Wharton 1934: 246). Alongside the kitchen garden and set at right angles to the main house, there was an elevated structure which had been built about twenty years later than the main house as a banqueting room (Fig. 4, 5). James sent a photograph to Lady Wolseley of "the 'banqueting hall' with its porch & steps muffled in greenery [...]. You see it's a hall not absolutely like Westminster or the Royal Hospital" (James 2012: 105). His mock exaggeration belies the importance of

this room, which became his “most commodious and picturesque detached study and workroom” (James 1984: 63). Every morning interruptions were forbidden, as he walked up and down, dictating novels like *The Golden Bowl* of 1904, and his style became more “like free, involved, unanswered talk”. His amanuensis, Theodora Bosanquet, describes how “he liked to be able to relieve the tension of a difficult sentence by a glance down the street” out of the bow window, from which he could see along West Street in one direction to the High Street, or the other way to the church at the end of the lane (Bosanquet 2016: 727-8). Wharton describes a visit in her autobiography:

> From the moment when I turned the corner of the grass-grown street mounting steeply between squat brick houses, and caught sight, at its upper end, of the wide Palladian window of the garden-room, a sense of joyous liberation bore me on. There HE stood on the doorstep, the white-panelled hall with its old prints and crowded book-cases forming a background (Wharton 1934: 244-5).

For his friend and fellow writer, James, the house and its intelligent, sympathetic decoration, are one. Wharton wrote extensively on interior decoration, espousing restraint, proportion and suitability in *The Decoration of Houses* (1897). She had designed her own home according to these principles, in the eighteenth-century style she most admired, and was bound to admire James’s similarly “Palladian” home. But James felt a profoundly personal connection with Lamb House. In his letters, he often ascribes emotions to the building, for example, after a fire in 1899 which destroyed several chimneys he wrote to Warren that “Lamb House aches in all its old timbers, & flushes in all its new bricks, for your presence”. Elsewhere Lamb House glows, yearns, needs hugs, or its “bricky face” blushes (James 1899). This anthropomorphisation of things and houses has implications for the fetishisation of objects, which in turn allows

for shocking, iconoclastic acts, which James explored in his fiction. By blurring the boundaries between people and things, spaces and emotions, James opens up a metaphorical gap where important and strong emotions of love, loss, hate and acquisition can circulate, the "metaphysical potency" of the thing, as Brown has noted (Brown 2002: 230).

The Spoils of Poynton is a short satiric novel of 1896, written while the concerns of house-hunting were uppermost in James's mind. It is about perfect taste and who deserves to own a beautiful collection of antiques, housed at Poynton Park. The moral issues around "The House Beautiful" (the original title of the story) had been part of a widespread aesthetic debate for the previous twenty years, and James often examined the figure of the collector and beautiful houses in this context. The novel opens with Mrs Gereth and young Fleda meeting at Waterbath, the home of the Brigstocks. As with so many descriptions of the house in bad taste in fiction and advice manuals, we are given the horror in great detail: "The house was perversely full of souvenirs of places even more ugly than itself and of things it would have been a pious duty to forget. The worst horror was the acres of varnish, something advertised and smelly, with which everything was smeared; it was Fleda Vetch's conviction that the application of it, by their own hands and hilariously shoving each other, was the amusement of the Brigstocks on rainy days" (James 1987: 37). This obviously brings up issues of class and demonstrates James's comic hyperbole, but also the embarrassment of a tasteless room, and the physicality it evokes, let alone the wonderful image of Brigstocks dripping varnish from their sticky, uncultured hands. In contrast, Mrs Gereth's own house Poynton is in perfect taste, filled with spoils she has looted from around the world and recontextualised in her own collection. As previously commentators have noted, the treasures are often described in terms of touch (Otten 1999; Brown 2002). Mrs Gereth

“left her guest to finger fondly the brasses that Louis Quinze might have thumbed, to sit with Venetian velvets just held in a loving palm”, and she has an intimate relation with them: “blindfold, in the dark, with a brush of a finger, I could tell one from another”. This haptic interaction is part of her fetishisation of objects above people, for instead she humanizes the things, and when she is forced to leave them it is like “an amputation” (James 1987: 48, 53, 79). Brown has discussed how the aura of the things is enhanced by the lack of specific description (Brown 2002: 227). However, they also have a religious aspect, which facilitates the iconoclastic turns throughout the novel. The spoils provoke a religious response in Fleda; she “dropped on a seat with a soft gasp and a roll of dilated eyes” a “sign of her submission to perfect beauty”, for that is the God at Poynton (James 1987: 47).

Rambelli and Reinders explain that “Iconoclasm is rarely a single act which totally obliterates the object,” listing the many ways in which icons “have been painted over, defaced with slogans, hung upside down, had horns attached, thrown in pig sties, beheaded, dragged around in the streets, buried”. Religious icons can also be damaged “through repeated devout touching. All of these behaviours are reactions to the icon, whether worshipful, hostile, curatorial or carnivalesque. In many cases, the history of an icon includes repeated and overlapping moments of contestation, appropriation, damage, restoration, and amnesia” (Rambelli 2013: 39-40). These acts transgress social norms, and through love or hate, due to the perceived worth or aura of the object, the boundary between viewer and subject and blurred. Haptic interaction, touch, is an important element of the power of an object. The state-sanctioned iconoclasts of the Reformation concentrated on destroying the aspects of religious practice that gained power through the senses – relics, statues, icons, incense, music – which comprised the sensuous Catholic performance that clouded any direct relationship with scripture

(Ashton 2003: 9). In *The Spoils of Poynton*, the significance of the "things" is made up in layers as they are touched, anthropomorphised, fetishised and sanctified. By making use of the visual language and ideologies of iconoclasm in a comic context, both James and Benson reveal how things can stir great passions. Benson's more sustained use of comedy allows him to camouflage the importance of debates beneath discussions of jumble sales.

By the terms of her husband's will, the spoils must go to her son, who is unable to appreciate their beauty. Mrs Gereth thinks of herself as a martyr, saying "Oh he may burn me alive!" and that she'd rather "deface them with my own hands" than relinquish them (James 1987: 109, 53). She steals them and crams them into the tiny dower house she has been allotted. But this is an iconoclastic act too far, for with this theft "there was a wrong about them all that turned them to ugliness". Removed from the *gesamtkunstwerk*, the total work of art affecting all the senses, "the parts of [Poynton] now around her seemed to suffer like chopped limbs" (James 1987: 85). In the debate between aestheticism and vulgarity, neither wins. The spoils are never in the right place to be appreciated for their beauty, and are contested over in terms of monetary gain and in ignorance of human compassion. Fleda reflects that "the age of Louis Seize suddenly struck her as wanting in taste and point" (James 1987: 103). When Mrs Gereth eventually returns the spoils to Poynton, they are destroyed by fire. Brown describes the fire as an "act of purification" in which realism is consumed. The paucity of description and final absence of the things enables their reification, and they "attain their value outside the circulation of commodities […] displacing the physicality of objects with their effects." (Brown 2002: 228, 230). Perhaps if they are truly, transcendentally special it is morally right that no-one should have them, but also it is the extreme event, like destruction, that throws our relationship with things into sharp relief.

The fire at Poynton is the final iconoclastic act of the novel, an accident which also demonstrates the destructive nature of love or even fetishistic obsession. As Rambelli and Reinders state, artworks, religious icons or historic sites can be disfigured unintentionally by physical manifestations of adoration. Oscar Wilde wrote in *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898), "Yet each man kills the thing he loves" and Mrs Gereth's love for her *gesamtkunstwerk* destroys human relationships throughout the novel, as well as her things. Although outwith his control, the history of Wilde's tomb demonstrates several types of iconoclasm related to changing public perception of both the playwright and the sculpture. The genitals of the demon-angel (carved by Jacob Epstein in 1912) were at first covered, then graffitied, burnished by touch and kisses, then stolen. To prevent further damage, the tomb is now inside a huge glass box. The modern pilgrims were steadily destroying it, but now they are kept at a distance, conservation having changed the interaction and (however minimally) the aesthetic effect of the sculpture (Barber 2013: 132; Willette 2016).

During his lifetime. James's proxy also suffered at the hands of an iconoclast and his reaction exemplifies his joy in blurring the boundaries between people and things. John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) was commissioned to paint James's portrait as a seventieth birthday gift from his friends and admirers (Fig. 6). It was exhibited at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition but on the opening day, May 4, 1914, suffragette Mary Wood used a meat cleaver to hack at the painting three times, crying "Votes for Women!" A photograph from the RA archives vividly shows the damage inflicted (Fig. 7). Wood was apparently unaware of James's literary reputation, and paradoxically she chose a target known for writing female characters who so often reach beyond their limiting social situation. Perhaps she picked this great white male in his well-filled waistcoat as a representative of the establishment and "the social stagnation that the

suffragette movement was challenging," as Helena Bonnett suggests. Such iconoclastic attacks on paintings raise slippery issues of ownership, public and private, symbols and the value of art, for she told the Magistrates Court that "if a woman had painted it, it would not have been worth so much" (Bonnett 2014). The most powerful images and objects can inspire both outrage and praise. The gap on the closely hung wall apparently drew amazed crowds, and the attack (and eight others like it in the period March-July 1914) made headlines, demonstrating the social importance, symbolic power, and intense sense of disruption, horror and incomprehension that such incidents can provoke in their witnesses (Fowler 1991: 117, 125).

After the incident, James's finely tuned appreciation of the metaphysical aura of things allowed him to play with the event. Writing to a friend, he apologised for sending "cold-blooded" typescript, but he had already dictated replies to "390 kind notes of condolence":

> Yes it was a nasty one, or rather a nasty *three* – for she got at me thrice over before the tomahawk was stayed. I naturally feel very scalped and disfigured, but you will be glad to know that I seem to be pronounced curable – (James 1984: 712).

James crafted his epistolary style as carefully as his novels, and here Wood's hatchet inspires him to describe an attack by Native American hordes. James's defence is to merge himself with the portrait, comic hyperbole enabling a projected self.

James might have written in jest about feeling maimed by the attack on his portrait, but this was put into perspective just three months later, on August 4, 1914 when war was declared. He wrote to novelist Rhoda Broughton: "Black and hideous to me is the tragedy that gathers, and I'm sick beyond cure to have lived on to see it." In "anguish" he writes that the vandals approach like an unstoppable "tide" of

"unthinkable massacre and misery." His solace is to imagine the future as "a blessed little Chelsea drawing-room – it will be like the reopening of the salons, so irrepressibly, after the French revolution" (James 1984: 713-4). This interior space untouched by the iconoclasm and destruction typical of war, is made holy (blessed) and populated by the social networks that invigorate intangible heritage. James was able to purchase Lamb House outright in 1899 and it was his main home for the rest of his life. That same year he published *The Awkward Age* in which Mr Longden's home is a recognisable portrait of Lamb House. A refuge from the modern, amoral city, where "the look of possession had everywhere mixed with it, in the form of old windows and doors, the tone of old red surfaces, the style of old white facings, the age of old high creepers, the long confirmation of time" (James 1908a: 336). James's right to possess this slice of English history was confirmed by the way he became part of Rye society, supporting local charities, dining with the leading citizens, and in 1903 preserving its heritage by buying two "little old-world whitey-grey cottages" at the end of his garden to prevent their destruction (Edel 517-8, 570). By creating his own rural retreat to suit his lifestyle and requirements, James (and later Benson) accords with Potvin's description of "bachelors of a different sort", creating interior spaces which privilege the domestic over the erotic, the rural retreat over the urban, in a society where private life was denied to single men. James chose his own antiques and surrounded himself with photographs and artworks of and by friends, like the terracotta bust in the dining room of Count Alberto Bevilacqua by his close friend Hendrik Andersen (1872-1940). Homes like Lamb House "are the resulting matrix of aesthetic, cultural, social, psychological and memorializing registers in the life of queer men" and "mark the domestic as a site for the enactment of a difference" (Potvin 2014: 14, 43). I would add

to this the pride he had in the history of Rye and his home in particular. Edith Wharton describes his joy and love for his home:

> some of my richest hours were spent under his roof. He was very proud of his old house, the best of its sober and stately sort in the town, and he who though himself so detached from material things tasted the simple joys of proprietorship when, with a deprecating air, he showed his fine Georgian panelling and his ancient brick walls to admiring visitors. (Wharton 1934: 246)

Unfortunately, James died in 1916, in the midst of war, but Lamb House was not long without another occupant who would also immortalise its "bricky face" in print and popular culture. In 1922 his friend E.F. Benson came to live at Lamb House, a prolific writer of comic novels like *Dodo* (1893), biographies including *Charlotte Bronte* (1932), memoirs, and ghost stories, often about uncanny rooms. He describes how he came to rent the house:

> With Henry James's death I supposed that Lamb House itself would concern me no more, but in the preordained decrees of fate, or alternatively, in the fantastic hazards of a fortuitous world, it began at once to concern me more closely. […] Then Fate began to act with that capricious consistency that shows she means business (Benson [1940]: 142).

Both bachelors describe coming to live in the house with the emotional importance of finding a life partner. As he was under a furnished lease, most of the furniture had belonged to James, but Benson brought many of his own books and was also a passionate antique collector. He followed James's working practice, writing in the garden room in the mornings, where he also put his Bechstein grand (Reavell 1991: 21). When the weather was warm he wrote in his high-walled Secret Garden surrounded by flowers, with a bust of Augustus on a plinth in the centre, a remembrance of his studies

in classics and archaeology at Cambridge, emphasising the sanctity and seclusion of this space (Fig. 8).

Between 1920-1935 Benson wrote the books for which he is now most famous, the Mapp and Lucia novels, set in a Rye barely disguised as Tilling (named after the nearby river Tillingham). In these comic tales, the position of Queen of Tilling society and the house that accompanies it, Mallards (a faithful rendering of Lamb House), is as violently fought over as the spoils of Poynton. Elizabeth Mapp is the original owner of Mallards, whose wide smile and cooing voice belie her fierce curiosity and need to win. By letting the house one summer, she brings Lucia to the town, with her shingled black hair and self-proclaimed talents in playing piano and speaking Italian, with her flamboyantly dressed companion Georgie Pillson, who embroiders and collects *objets*. They join an oddball group of Aesthetic, avant-garde, camp and Imperialist characters: quaint Irene, the trouser-wearing painter of wrestling nudes; Major Benjy, who starts each day with a call of "*Quai-hai*" to summon his breakfast; Mr Wyse in his velvet knickerbockers, and his wife Susan who never goes anywhere without her furs and Rolls Royce, even to visit her neighbours. Benson uses military hyperbole to comic effect: "deadly war" is fought at jumble sales and games of bridge, the town is always "seething with duels" and dinner parties are likely "to prove a scene of carnage" over who can actually speak Italian, or the recipe for "the famous dish of Lobster à la Riseholme", with its mystical first words, "take two hen lobsters" (Benson 1935: 12; Benson 1935a: 292, 441). Social rites are their battleground, but it is the house based on Lamb House that is the centre point of the stories.

Mallards has a recognisable "dignity and charm […] with its high-walled garden, its little square parlour, and, above all, with its entrancing garden-room". This has "always been a highly strategic position" – for spying on neighbours (Benson 1935:

8, 186). When Georgie first ventures out with his new goatee beard after a secret, disfiguring attack of shingles, it is “under the guns of the garden room window”, that is, Mapp and her opera glasses (Benson 1935a: 348). Yet if personality is reflected in interior decoration, Mapp’s inability to live up to this house is expressed by the way it drips “with feminine knick-knacks, vases and china figures, and Tilling crockery pigs”. With her sense of aesthetic superiority, Lucia decides it “ought to be the centre of nodal life in Tilling. […] [and] felt very strongly that [Mapp] was not the right person to live there, and she was equally strongly convinced as to who the right person was” (Benson 1935a: 296, 297). She offers to buy Mallards, but Mapp’s immediate response echoes Mrs Gereth: “Never! I would sooner burn it down with my own hands”. This is exposed as empty rhetoric when the reality of cash eventually wins her over, and after a tense game of “Bluff”, Lucia takes possession (Benson 1935a: 389, 395). She redecorates with perfect taste and sympathy, just like James and Benson, drawing attention to its Georgian “proportions,” with fresh white paint on the hall panelling, and apple-green in the dining room. She transforms a cupboard, once a “simulacra of book-backs” where Mapp had hoarded bags of sugar during a shortage, into a real bookshelf for her classical works. Initially Mapp wallows in the “shock” of the “desecrated” Garden Room, but once she had “sufficiently impressed on everybody what a searing experience it was to her to re-visit her ancestral home, and see the melancholy changes that had been wrought upon it, […] under the spell of the nectar her extreme acidity mellowed”– the iconoclastic shock is salved by wine (Benson 1935a: 407). The house becomes Lucia’s centre of operations in her campaign to become a “great benefactress to the town, a notable figure, a civic power”, and finally, after many more “intrigues” she is elected Mayor, like many previous occupants of Lamb House and Benson himself in 1934 (Benson 1935a: 305).

Just ten days after delivering his last manuscript to his publisher, Benson died, on February 29, 1940. The Battle of Britain began in July and, as James had dreaded in 1914, the destruction of war came to Lamb House. On August 18, 1940 a German bomb destroyed the garden-room, including James's library, writing table and Benson's piano (Fig. 9). The bomb blew out the windows of Lamb House, and though no-one was hurt the structure was weakened so that it remained uninhabitable until after the war. The destruction of war is iconoclasm on the grandest scale, where ownership of land is fought over, obliterating buildings, cultures and individual lives. Siân Jones has described how authenticity "is not inherent […] Rather, it is a quality that is culturally constructed". When we examine how "people experience and negotiate authenticity, it is networks of relationships between objects, people, and places […] that gives [historic buildings] substance and life", or an object's "aura." What is important is "the unique experience of an object, and crucially […] the web of relationships it invokes with past and present people and places", combined with physical contact or experience of the materiality of the object (Jones 2009: 135-7). The stories that James and Benson tell about their home are a way of invoking these experiences, and can enable the reconstruction of intangible heritage. The garden room has been reconstructed in fiction, memoir, drawings, paintings, photographs, a scale model, and even a framed fragment of a vase from the wreckage. Warren later made James a gift of the original watercolour of the garden room, a self-referential reminder of how he chanced upon his home, which hung in the drawing room (James 1984: 3). Mrs James, widow of James's nephew, presented Lamb House and garden to The National Trust in 1950 and it was restored. Unfortunately it was deemed too expensive to rebuild the garden room, and now a line of bricks marks its location (Fig. 10). Mrs James sold the contents of the house in May 1949, and the National Trust has been gradually collecting suitable

furniture, artworks and Jamesian mementoes. Today the downstairs rooms of the house are furnished with antiques to match photographs taken during James's occupancy: blue and white china and Georgian furniture. On the walls are several paintings and drawings of the house and Rye, some from later tenants like Beatrix Potter and Robert Norton, who was a great friend of Edith Wharton and took on the lease for a short time after James died. In the Mapp and Lucia novels, the house and street are often immortalised in watercolour by the main characters, as well as tourists, with varying success.

In 1904, when James returned to America for the first time in twenty years, he undertook a tour, returning to the cities of his youth, as well as taking in new sites like Asheville, the vast Vanderbilt mansion, and Wharton's home The Mount. This resulted in a series of essays published as *The American Scene*, wherein he reflects on changes in society, manners, architecture, and the monstrous mass of the modern city, punctuated by the loss of buildings from his youth and his fears for the destruction of others. Visiting Washington Square where he was born, he finds that the house has been demolished, his "view of the past" blocked by a "high, square impersonal structure, proclaiming its lack of interest with a crudity all its own". He calls this a "melancholy" snub to the "backward reach" – a reach of the imagination, the mind's eye – which has the effect for him of "having been amputated of half my history". He writes of a personal idol smashed: "the inner sense had positively erected there for its private contemplation a commemorative mural tablet, the very wall that should have borne this inscription had been smashed as for demonstration that tablets, in New York, are unthinkable" (James 1907: 91). Today, three tablets are attached to the exterior walls of Lamb House, commemorating James, the Benson brothers and the garden room. On returning to Boston, where his family spent the Civil War, James anthropomorphises the

familiar buildings whilst so much around them is being redeveloped for the State House:

> Ashburton Place that I anciently knew […] the pair of ancient houses I was in quest of kept their tryst; […] looking at that hour as if their old still faces had lengthened, their shuttered, lidded eyes had closed, their brick complexions had paled.

James feels the "intimate vibrations" of the years spent there, when he first began his literary career, and makes an effort "to recover on the spot some echo of ghostly footsteps […]. The place itself was meanwhile, at all events, a conscious memento, with old secrets to keep." By being in the location, he can meditate on his own, more youthful footsteps, creating a "conscious memento" of the place from its aura and his own life story. However, returning a month later

> to see if another whiff of the fragrance were not to be caught, I found but a gaping void, the brutal effacement at a stroke […] of the whole precious past. […] If I had often seen how fast history could be made I had doubtless never so felt that it could be unmade still faster. It was as if the bottom had fallen out of one's own biography, and one plunged backward into space without meeting anything (James 1907: 228-229).

It takes a catastrophe to fully realise the importance of heritage, and how fleeting it can be. James's destroyed portrait, Wilde's tomb, the bombed garden room or the empty shell of the Mackintosh building are evidence of Walter Benjamin's "one single catastrophe", encompassing layers of history, yet driving "irresistibly into the future" (Benjamin 1974). As David McWhirter has discussed, this shock is part of James's response to modernity, the violent "sense of rupture" also enables "moments of charged, yet rather chilled, contemplation" as he examines the tangible and intangible layers of history (James 1907: 230). James is able to utilise the past, respond to its loss and move

on, by using melancholia and the reiteration of nostalgia as a way of remaining involved in the world (McWhirter 2014). He wrote to Henry Adams in 1914 about creativity as he grew older: "I still find my consciousness interesting – under *cultivation* of the interest. […] Hence the reactions – appearances, memories, many things go on playing upon it with consequences that I note […] it is still an act of life" (James 1984: 705). So, in Ashburton Place, he joyfully writes: "There was at least the gain, at any rate, that one was now going to be free to picture them, to embroider them, at one's ease – to tangle them up in retrospect and make the real romantic claim for them" (James 1907: 228).

This creativity, made possible through romantic imagination, is also evident in the photographs James commissioned for the frontispieces of the New York Edition of his novels and tales. He specified the exact locations to photographer Alvin Langdon Coburn (1882-1966), but they are emphatically *not* illustrations of the novels. The sites were familiar to James from repeated visits, as well as metaphorically associated with his novels. A house in St John's Wood is near where James stayed as a little boy and later where he had thought of buying a house, often walking past to remember friends long dead. A bench on Hampstead Heath is where he sat in the 1880s with George Du Maurier (who died in 1897, the year James signed the lease for Lamb House). The photograph of Lamb House for *The Awkward Age* was the closest to direct illustration as it is the house described in the volume, yet the prominent bay window of the garden room no longer exists and the whole image has a sepia, nostalgic blur (Fig. 11). On the same visit to Rye, Coburn photographed the interior in more realist style, presumably as a record for James (Fig. 3). Coburn's impressionistic images are intentionally out of focus, giving them a romantic, nostalgic aspect to us, but these photographs are

simultaneously of the moment they were taken. They are modern, contemporary artworks tangling “retrospect” with “an act of life” (James 1984: 705).

Lamb House and its literary inhabitants have cast their spell on other writers, resulting in several twenty-first century recreations and re-imaginings, including Colm Tóibín’s *The Master* (2004), and Michiel Heyns’ *The Typewriter’s Tale* (2005). The writers met in Lamb House in 2002, quite by chance, when they were researching their own novels. Tóibín describes how they were “very careful with each other, no one wishing to say exactly how close to finishing” their own book. The tenant showed them round his private quarters upstairs, and it was Tóibín’s turn to hear “some echo of ghostly footsteps” as he walked through “the house where [James’s] old ghost, quiet and refined, and dedicated still perhaps to art at its most pure and life at its most complex, walks proudly now that his reputation as an artist continues to grow.” This process inspired and reassured him: “I now had what I was searching for – the two objects over the mantelpieces, the view, the height of the upstairs rooms” (Tóibín 2010: 19-20). Tóibín’s process took in all the physical aspects of the space: specific items created by his friends that James had handled and placed, like Andersen’s bust; the way the house is placed in the landscape at the top of the hill; and the internal space James occupied and breathed, making these mementos conscious.

In 2014 the garden room made a temporary physical reappearance. When the Mapp and Lucia novels were first televised in 1984, only the exteriors were shot on location, but thirty years later, greater authenticity was called for by the BBC. For exterior shots of Benson’s “magic casement to anyone who was interested in life”, the garden room bay window was recreated in almost the same spot, hanging on the rebuilt garden wall near the front door (Benson 1935: 79). The interior set for the garden room was built a just few feet from its original spot, extending from the dining room.

Unfortunately, the set designers built the exterior shell in a simple neo-classical style with large windows, with no attempt to replicate the unique, brick and pitch-roofed "banqueting hall." For actor and writer Steve Pemberton, being in the actual location was of the utmost importance: "I'm just pinching myself every day, that we are here in Rye in Benson's house and garden, but also that I've not only had the opportunity to play this character [Georgie Pillson] but adapt the scripts as well!" (BBC 2014). The aura of place and time could be grasped by the actors making the characters come alive, re-enacting stories written over a century before on that very spot.

John and Patricia Carman's methodology of battlefield archaeology is a useful way of thinking about places that have changed over time, although their Bloody Meadows project demonstrates an extreme of repurposed land use. "To study them is to stand in a place today, dreaming of an event of yesterday, an event that has passed and is gone." Yet this is not mere passive looking, for by "walking through the space with a keen eye to the different periods of history" is a kind of "time travel", a "real journey". Their approach to lost places is phenomenological, and subjective:

> Places have histories that are evident in the experiences of them, and it is in experiencing them as places that the histories become evident. The place has meaning because it has a history and that history is manifested in the material evidences of its past which testify to interesting and different pasts. These material things create the drama of the place which is the experience of its history in the present. (Carman 2012: 104)

James understood this multivocal view of the past, and that is what comes alive through the stories we tell, when visiting historic houses, writer's rooms, libraries, and other spaces that are important aesthetically, as well as for what happened there. In the preface for *The Aspern Papers* he wrote:

> I delight in a palpable imaginable visitable past – in the nearer distances and the clearer mysteries, the marks and signs of a world we may reach over to as by making a long arm we grasp an object at the other end of our own table. (James 1908: ix-x)

The reiteration of stories set in the house, reimagined on screens small and big in ways the authors would not have imagined, the watercolours and models, the visits made to the house by daytrippers, writers and researchers, are a continual negotiation of new networks of relations, that "form of magical communion, in a contagious sense, through personal incorporation into that network" (Jones 2009: 142). The aroma and feel of the past inspires collectors like Mrs Gereth, appreciators like Fleda, enthusiastic amateurs like Lucia, and these in turn inspire new stories in many creative forms. Places affect us, just as we affect them: changing, redecorating, reinterpreting, adding layers and the aura of lived history to the conscious memento. The past can be reached, interpreted and made meaningful for all of us, if we just use that long arm.

Geolocations: Lamb House, West Street, Rye, East Sussex, N31 7ES, UK. Glasgow School of Art, 167 Renfrew Street, Glasgow G3 6RQ, UK

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Figures

Figure 1 Lamb House, Rye. Photograph © Ailsa Boyd, 2011.

Figure 2 [Lamb House, Rye: the garden front]. Graphite and watercolor drawing, by Edward P. Warren, 26 September 1895. MS Am 3199. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Figure 3 Lamb House interior. Photograph by Alvin Langdon Coburn, July 3, 1906. Digital positive from original negative, George Eastman Museum, gift of Alvin Langdon Coburn 1978.0051.0163 © The Universal Order.

Figure 4 Lamb House, exterior back. Photograph by Exemplar, before 1899. Courtesy of Ailsa Boyd Collection.

Figure 5 The interior of the Garden Room at Lamb House. Photograph by Nathaniel Lloyd, c.1912. © National Trust / Charles Thomas.

Figure 6 John Singer Sargent, *Henry James*, oil on canvas, 1913. NPG 1767 © National Portrait Gallery, London.

Figure 7 Detail of the portrait of Henry James O.M. by J.S. Sargent R.A. after being damaged by a suffragette, May 1914. Unidentified photographer, silver gelatin print mounted on card, 1914. © Royal Academy of Arts, London.

Figure 8 E. F. Benson in the secret garden at Lamb House. Unidentified photographer, 1930s.The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford MS Photogr. C.563 © The Tilling Society.

Figure 9 Ruined Garden Room, destroyed by a German bomb. Unidentified photographer, 1940. © National Trust

Figure 10 Garden at Lamb House, Rye, showing location of the Garden Room. Photograph © Ailsa Boyd, 2011.

Figure 11 *Mr Longdon's*, Photograph by Alvin Langdon Coburn. 1906. Frontispiece of Henry James. 1908-9. *The Novels and Tales,* 24 vols. London: Macmillan. Vol. IX, *The*

Awkward Age. Digital positive from original negative, George Eastman Museum, gift of Alvin Langdon Coburn 1978.0051.0156 © The Universal Order.