At certain points in the *Principles of Psychology*, the self seems to exist in the marks it makes, in the writing of its own hand. An “extensive work in manuscript,” for example, is so “intimately” part of one’s self that “few men . . . would not feel personally annihilated” if it were “suddenly swept away” (281). But at other points, persons feel themselves somehow present not just in papers they have written, but also in papers they have read or owned or even just touched. Characterizing secretiveness, which he classifies as an instinct, James notes that some persons will never leave anything with their name written on it, where others may pick it up—even in the woods, an old envelope must not be thrown on the ground. Many cut all the leaves of a book of which they may be reading a single chapter, so that no one shall know which one they have singled out, and all this with no definite notion of harm.

Even when such “habit[s] of concealment” seem the product of conscious calculation, James suggests, their “motive is far less often definite prudence than a vague aversion to have one’s sanctity invaded and one’s personal concerns fingered and turned over by other people” (1049–50). And in these cases, at least, to have one’s personal books and papers “fingered” by others is to suffer a physical intrusion of sorts: the physical motions involved in the acts of reading a person’s papers and of intruding upon a person’s body cannot quite be kept discrete here. Indeed, so tightly does the passage bind together persons with their papers that it isn’t even immediately clear if the reason the envelope must not be discarded in the woods
is that it is somehow a part of one's self, as if writing's ability to betray bodily presence somehow makes writing part of the body. Perhaps the point where the hand grasps the page, then, is a point at which the edges of the body shade into other objects, raveling out into what is adjacent to them. Acts of reading and writing tend to happen close to the body; perhaps that is why it seems possible to imagine here that bodies and papers can lend each other their qualities or attributes, compromising each other's physical integrity as they do so. Are our bodies “simply ours, or are they us?” James asked earlier in the *Principles*; here this equivocal status of the body seems to transfer itself to the objects lying alongside that body, which passes along its ambiguities to anything it touches (279).

Inasmuch as it can be linked with other passages in the *Principles* that treat of reading and writing—which attempt to diagram the relations between the psyche that composes, the body that writes, and the language that materializes itself in writing—this meditation on secretiveness is fairly typical of James's concerns. Yet what makes the passage worthy of note is not so much the role it plays in any of the *Principles*’ major arguments, but the extent to which it reflects a preoccupation characteristic of late-nineteenth-century English and American culture. Indeed, the possibility I want to explore is that in the last two decades of the century, strands of that culture are committed to the metonyms, the displacements, the curiously fluid logic—the curiously fluid *materiality*—with which this passage treats the relationships between bodies and papers, persons and texts, selves and writing: committed, that is, both to the difficult work of stabilizing these displacements and to ordering large segments of experience by means of them.

These commitments become clearer when we move from the psychological analysis of secretiveness to the concurrent legal analysis of privacy. Published in the *Harvard Law Review* in 1890—the same year the *Principles* appeared—Samuel Warren and Louis Brandeis’s “The Right to Privacy” argues that embedded within the common law is the right “to be let alone,” a phrase Warren and Brandeis take from a standard text on tort law and subsequently reinterpret as “the immunity of the person.” This right to one's own person is fundamental, but how the law defines the person to be protected changes over time. Protections afforded by law once stopped with the body, “serv[ing] only to protect the subject from battery.” Then “came a recognition of man’s spiritual nature, of his feelings and his intellect,” and with it the development of those areas of law designed to protect a person's reputation—the law of slander and libel—and a person's feelings—laws governing threats, nuisances, and interferences with the family. Thus, Warren and Brandeis conclude, “regard for human emotions soon extended the scope of personal immunity beyond the body of the individual” (193–94).
In articulating the legal right to privacy, Warren and Brandeis would push this extension further, past the body and past the emotions, to one's papers. Reviewing cases in which private papers have been protected, Warren and Brandeis argue that even when these decisions appeal to copyright law or other laws governing ownership of intellectual property or breach of contract, they are really based on the common-law principle that upholds the inviolability of the person. One's papers are private not because they're owned by one's self but because they are legally part of one's self. Indeed, the rhetoric of “The Right to Privacy” implies that one's papers are as much a part of one's self as one's body is, or at least the thoughts rendered material upon them are: “the protection afforded to thoughts, sentiments, and emotions, expressed through the medium of writing... is merely an instance of the enforcement of the more general right of the individual to be let alone. It is like the right not to be assaulted or beaten” (205). To be traced in the history of the law, then, is a path that leads from the law of battery—and the right to one's own body—to the law of privacy—and the right to one's own writing. The growth of the legal definition of the person thus ends by folding together body, mental life, and papers.

These formulations are partially dictated by the logic of the law: legal traditions and precedents account for some of the emphasis on writing here, and for some of the effort to merge papers and persons. Yet as the Principles of Psychology suggests, such formulations are not confined to the realm of law. And as Warren and Brandeis indicate, problems of the boundaries of the person and of the sanctity of those boundaries had, by 1890, been constituted as a topic of public discussion. Seeking “to protect the privacy of private life” against a press that is “overstepping in every direction the obvious bounds of propriety and of decency” so that it may satisfy the “prurient taste” of its readers, Warren and Brandeis take it nearly for granted not only that protection of the person must be extended, but also that invasiveness will be recognized as something deeply characteristic of their own time; they assume, in other words, that the matter that crystallizes in and is epitomized by the relation of person to paper has already achieved legibility as a matter of wide concern (215, 196).

In characterizing its time as “the age of newspapers and telegrams and photographs and interviewers,” Henry James's The Aspern Papers (1888) invokes and contributes to this legibility (12:8). James's fascination with the problems of privacy and publicity is well known and fairly explicit; he himself recognizes it as crucial to his project, writing in his notebook in 1887 that “one sketches one's age but imperfectly if one doesn't touch on... the invasion, the impudence and shamelessness, of the newspaper and the interviewer, the devours publicity of life, the extinction of all sense...
between public and private.” But what makes The Aspern Papers a most pertinent text to consider here is the extent to which its concern for privacy entails a concern for papers, and further (and more hyperbolically), the ways in which it edges toward equating the act of reading with the act of physical intrusion. Such equations are most obviously rendered in the story’s broad outlines: the papers of the tale’s title are part of the trail left behind by an affair between the late poet, Jeffrey Aspern, and the now-aged Juliana Bordereau, who keeps herself shut up with her niece in a crumbling Venetian palace. For the Aspern-obsessed man of letters who narrates the tale, reading these “personal, delicate, intimate” papers necessitates a “horribly intrusive” act of virtual home-invasion, of infiltrating the house, creeping into the sitting room, and rifling through the cupboards (12:11, 17). A story of reading, then, is synonymous with a story of privacy’s violation.

This much occurs on the level of plot. But on a less schematic, far more microscopic level, a whole grammar and vocabulary operate to associate papers with the body and to define privacy in terms of that association. Thus committing to paper the details of another’s life is treated as an act of “pry[ing]” (12:65). Thus to subject someone to close scrutiny is to have “turned [him] over”—as if he were pages (12:69). Thus it’s not just bodies that have the capacity to “transmit” the touch, to relay knowledge of other bodies (though this is odd in itself: it’s as if by touching my body you also touch the bodies I’ve touched); “esoteric knowledge” of others’ sexuality also “rub[s] off on” one in the process of handling papers like the love letters of Jeffrey Aspern and Juliana Bordereau (12:8, 44). As in the passage from William James’s Principles, the tale’s concern with violated privacy, with “fingering another’s personal concerns,” leads it to literalize the metaphor embedded in that phrase: the act of the invading eye materializes in the act of turning pages. And as in the Principles—and, more notably, as in Warren and Brandeis—in The Aspern Papers privacy is construed as a problem of the relation, the ontology, even, of bodies and their papers.

This tendency to associate bodies and papers and to understand in terms of each other the protections afforded to each is not exactly new at the end of the nineteenth century; the fourth amendment to the U.S. Constitution (to think of just one area of the realm of law) guarantees “the right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures.” But the fact that, with the 1886 Supreme Court case Boyd v. United States, fourth-amendment jurisprudence very nearly shares its point of origin with the other narratives of search and seizure I am considering here indicates that a newly intensified pressure is being brought to bear upon these associations of bodies and
papers: in large part the issues that converge in Boyd hinge on whether compelling a person to produce his papers should be considered just as much an intrusion as rifling through his drawers; on whether “the eye” can “be guilty of a trespass”; on whether doctrines protecting “the sanctity” of the home and “the privacies of life” extend protection to one’s papers. Staking out a right to privacy thus entails scrutinizing impulses like the ones present in the Principles of Psychology, holding steadily visible the elusive—and formative—relation between the materiality of writing and the physicality of the body.

Insofar as texts like “The Right to Privacy” and The Aspern Papers do render visible this relation, they offer a somewhat unusual opportunity to examine quite closely a matter of much interest to contemporary criticism. The body has emerged as the favored subject of literary thematics as contemporary criticism tends to prioritize them; the body is now one of those things we pay attention to when we read. Likewise, for recent accounts of the social shaping of the body, the act of writing has become chief metaphor and model; we tend to think of bodies and their sexualities, subjectivities, desires, classes, and diseases as both malleable within the field of writing and as decisively formed—subjected to restriction—within that same field. The body has thus become a cultural and historical index crucial to the way we read now; in the process of writing, “language [is] inscribed by history on the bodies of living beings,” as Stephen Greenblatt influentially puts it in Renaissance Self-Fashioning.

Writing writes bodies just as much as bodies produce writing, then, but these relationships are not stable and unchanging ones; rather, they shift and slip and develop over time, sometimes coming to the foreground and sometimes receding from view. The end of the nineteenth century is one point at which they come to the fore in fairly decisive ways: in social, legal, and literary commentary, the “materials of the writer”—and of the reader—“come also to be ways of inhabiting and conceptualizing the body,” to use Jonathan Goldberg’s formulation. Further, texts like “The Right to Privacy” rather consciously invest a good deal of their energies in arranging this relation, in forming and shaping the range of implications bodies and writing have for each other. As the interests of contemporary criticism suggest, these implications are still at work, still forming our conceptions of the texts we read and the bodies with which we read them. Indeed, one reason for retracing this episode in the history of the point where the hand grasps the page is to see something of how that point came to be so formative and generative and interesting in the first place. In an essay on the use of words within paintings, Meyer Schapiro suggests that by collecting representations of print, one can uncover and “reconstitute” a culture’s “beliefs about the senses and language.” That is what I aim to do here: to
uncover a set of associations and assumptions that govern James’s conception of writing, associations and assumptions that at least in part govern our own habits of mind.

One fascination The Aspern Papers shares with the texts that surround it in James’s career is its fascination with writing itself—a fascination not only with the role of the writer, nor only with the effects of reading, but also an absolutely concrete interest in writing as a material thing. An extraordinary passage in The Princess Casamassima (1886) suggests how intense this concentration can be in James and gives at least a glimpse of its associations and consequences. At the start of his holiday at Medley Hall, Hyacinth Robinson experiences a moment of overwhelming desire while exploring the great house’s library:

It was an old brown room, of great extent—even the ceiling was brown, though there were figures in it dimly gilt—where row upon row of finely-lettered backs returned his discriminating professional gaze . . . there were alcoves with deep window-seats, and arm-chairs such as he had never seen, luxurious, leather-covered, with an adjustment for holding one’s volume; and a vast writing-table . . . furnished with a perfect magazine of paper and pens, inkstands and blotters, seals, stamps, candlesticks, reels of twine, paper-weights, book-knives. Hyacinth had never imagined so many aids to correspondence, and before he turned away he had written a note . . . in a hand even more beautiful than usual—his penmanship was very minute, but at the same time wonderfully free and fair—largely for the pleasure of seeing “Medley Hall” stamped in crimson, heraldic-looking characters at the top of his paper. In the course of an hour he had ravaged the collection, taken down almost every book, wishing he could keep it a week, and put it back quickly, as his eye caught the next, which appeared even more desirable. . . . Altogether, his vision of true happiness, at that moment, was that, for a month or two, he should be locked into the library at Medley.9

There may not be another passage in all of James that focuses more intently on the materials of reading and writing, nor one in which the attraction toward paper things is more sensual, nor one that more thoroughly extends the processes of reading and writing to everything it details; here even the ceiling is brown like a calf binding and inscribed like the gilt lettering on a book’s spine. The language of handcraftedness and its way of folding together body and object (the subject of chapter 3 above) are here focused on the matter of reading and writing. Furthermore, there may not be another passage in James that points more clearly to the ways in which two
crucial Jamesian preoccupations intertwine. On the one hand, Hyacinth exemplifies James’s interest in what he would come to call “my usual narrator-observer.” As a spectator, Hyacinth is “condemned to see . . . things only from outside” (as James puts it in the New York Edition preface) and so develops a voyeuristic, even prurient, relation to a world that excludes him (LC 2:1087). Thus, the longing he feels toward the paper world of Medley Hall reflects his exclusion from the class that uses monogrammed stationery as a matter of course; and his marginal relationship to the objects in the library follows the same logic as his voyeuristic relation to the world of lived sexuality in which he spies on scenes of seduction between Paul Muniment and the Princess and between Captain Sholto and Millicent.

All this has been a focusing concern for much recent discussion of James and consequently is fairly well known. What is less often recognized is what the quoted passage makes nearly inescapable: for James, a concern for the observer entails a concern for the materials of reading and writing. This seems obliquely reflected at the start of the passage when “the finely-lettered backs” of books seem to “return” Hyacinth’s “discriminating professional gaze.” Because this line casts the act of reading in the language of observation, it has the effect of suggesting that the two are equivalent. And since the books seem to Hyacinth to meet his gaze, they apparently operate as if they were human faces, their lettering miming a facial reaction to the observer’s attention.

Then, too, the “professional” quality of Hyacinth’s “discriminating” gaze, along with his expert appreciation for the library’s amazing array of writing paraphernalia, implies a close tie between his role as observer and his occupation as bookbinder, between looking and the materials of writing. This connection seems all the more important to make when we realize that James’s fictions routinely make it. Not only are there figures like reporters (in “The Papers” or The Reverberator, for example) and novelists (“The Lesson of the Master,” “The Middle Years”) whose professions require that they write what they observe; there are also those observers with other sorts of “knowledge occupations,” to use a term from economic theory. Lambert Strether of The Ambassadors, who edits the Woollett Review, and the literary reviewers of “John Delavoy” and “The Figure in the Carpet” are obvious examples here, but less obviously the category includes the docent of Shakespeare’s early home in “The Birthplace” (who at the tale’s beginning is a librarian) and the clerk of “In the Cage,” an “intense observer” whose relation to paper is as intimate and immediate as Hyacinth’s, a woman who sells stamps and converts handwritten messages into telegrams, who weighs envelopes and counts words (11:426).

In emphasizing the Jamesian observer’s involvement with papers, I am
suggesting that a fascination with bodies and a fascination with writing coincide, that writing fascinates because it somehow reveals bodies. Yet regarded from a certain point of view, these are interests which we might expect to resist becoming intertwined, which might just as easily be kept separate from each other. Inasmuch as the body is what is absent in—indeed what absents itself from—writing, it might appear more logical to argue for an opposition between the two rather than for the sort of simultaneity outlined above. In *On Longing*, her essay on narrative’s relation to the body and its objects, Susan Stewart clarifies this absence, arguing that “what disappears in writing is the body and what the body knows—the visual, tactile, and aural knowledge of lived experience.”

The body disappears in writing: this principle would lead us to expect that papers are not revealing enough to serve the purposes of the voyeuristic gaze, the gaze which seeks to know others’ bodies. But as Jamesian observers seem intuitively to grasp, this principle is open to resistance of several different kinds. Most obviously, they seek to observe the body before it has detached itself from writing, as “In the Cage” exemplifies, or as the observers of “The Private Life” also demonstrate when, acting on their “insane desire to see the author,” they steal into a playwright’s darkened study to find him hunched over his writing table (17:251). Then, too, Jamesian observers are drawn to situations in which the authorial body makes a sudden, thrilling reappearance, as in the several stories in which novelists are among the guests at parties in great country houses, and to texts that seem less than thoroughly mediated, that seem to offer some sort of bodily trace, like the galleys an author has worked over or letters that offer a glimpse of the author’s own hand.

These examples suggest that bodies can be read back into papers, and that such acts of reading complete the meanings of texts. When the voyeuristic gaze trains itself on papers, it seeks to discover a secreted body, seeks to reattach bodies to the papers they’ve all but detached themselves from, as *The Aspern Papers* makes clear. Thus, for the editor, close reading inevitably leads to collating bodies and texts; to see most deeply into Aspern’s poems necessitates “opening lights into his life,” reconstructing his life as a body (12:6). In this respect, it makes a certain amount of sense that the act of reading Aspern’s poetry widens into a fascination with Aspern’s portrait, with his papers, with the living body of his lover. For by the logic of *The Aspern Papers*, the meanings of texts remain incomplete until the bodies they stem from and refer to can be reattached to them.

This is why Miss Bordereau represents such a rare opportunity for the editor; whereas his previous sources have been disembodied “phantoms and dust, the mere echoes of echoes,” she offers the chance not only “to look into a . . . pair of eyes into which [Aspern’s have] looked,” but also “to
feel a transmitted contact” in a hand Aspern’s has touched (12:8). Meeting her for the first time, the editor marvels at finding himself “face to face with the Juliana of some of Aspern’s most exquisite and most renowned lyrics,” an experience that not only gives Aspern’s poems a body but also a voice, an “individual note” that “had been in Jeffrey Aspern’s ear.” All this comes early on in the tale; much of what follows is taken up with the editor’s further efforts to see Juliana, who usually keeps herself shut up in her rooms, and more particularly, his efforts to touch her hand, which she will not give him, and to see her eyes, which she keeps veiled. Much of what follows, in other words, details the editor’s efforts to know the secrets of Miss Bordereau’s body, a body which seems “somehow to contain and express” Aspern’s own, and which seems to bring the editor “nearer” to the poet than he has ever been before (12:23–25).

For the editor, the pleasures of reading are the pleasures of knowing the body, of reading the body back into writing, of restoring the visual, tactile, and aural qualities the body seems to lose when committed to paper. Indeed, so thoroughly does the tale associate the body with the pleasures reading offers that when it imagines the act of reading, it imagines it as a physical—almost a physiological—process. Of course, reading always is a physical process—a coordination of manual and ocular actions, say—though we don’t usually dwell on that fact, just as we don’t dwell on the fact that reading generally necessitates bringing our bodies into contact with objects that are outside them. The Aspern Papers, on the other hand, seems as obsessed by this physicality of reading as it is by the reproduction in writing of the physical body. Thus the editor imagines Miss Bordereau going through the nightly “solemnities” of “pressing” Aspern’s letters “to her withered lips,” a ritual which he would give “a good deal” to see (12:35). Thus, too, he considers Miss Tina a potential source of knowledge not because she might be able to summarize the contents of the papers, but because she has “seen and handled all mementoes” and so “some esoteric knowledge” has “rubbed off on her.” As we have already seen, the editor imagines Miss Bordereau’s body has the ability to “transmit” Aspern’s touch; these further examples suggest that this is an ability it shares with the papers which (if he could ever get his hands on them) would make the editor’s life “continuous, in a fashion, with the illustrious life they had touched at the other end” (12:43–44). (It is here that the meaning of “Bordereau”—“memorandum, note”—becomes relevant.) The act of reading papers is thus construed along the lines of touching bodies—so much so, in fact, that the acts of touching (or reading) bodies and reading (or touching) papers come to substitute for each other, come to be confused with each other much as they do in the Principles of Psychology’s meditation on secretiveness. In this respect, The Aspern Papers
might be seen as literalizing, and thus exaggerating, the sentiment that the act of reading makes our lives continuous with those of others; here the continuity is construed as a material one.

This extraordinary emphasis on the tactility of reading and this insistence that in the process of reading the body is doubly involved (reading is not only something bodies do, but also something they have done to them) go more than a little way toward suggesting that reading can be an act of intrusion. The various analogues the text supplies for reading further advance this suggestion. As already noted, these analogues align the editor with the forces of publicity in this “age of newspapers and telegrams and photographs and interviewers” (12:8). Similarly, when the editor’s search for information leads him to exploit the ingenuous Miss Tina, he feels “almost as base as the reporter of a newspaper who forces his way into a house of mourning” (12:82). Further, when Juliana discovers him testing the lock on her bureau in the middle of the night, her rebuke—“Ah you publishing scoundrel!”—aligns an act of physical intrusion with the sort of violation we associate with the revelation of secrets, of personal information (12:118).

Now a bureau is a container: kept in a sort of boudoir, it contains the secrets of the body, serving as a “model of intimacy,” a “veritable org[an] of the secret psychological life,” as Gaston Bachelard puts it. In this respect, it resembles a house, which really does contain bodies, and the editor’s attempt to unlock the bureau’s secrets resembles his attempts to gain access to Miss Bordereau’s house and then her rooms. When he passes through the hall that links his own rooms with Juliana’s, the editor customarily lingers there, watching the door that leads to the “treasure.” “A person observing me might have supposed I was trying to cast a spell on it or attempting some odd experiment in hypnotism,” he remarks—a passing comment that itself might seem odd, except that hypnotism in the nineteenth century epitomizes the threat of visual intrusion, and that, since hypnotism or mesmerism is sometimes thought to endow with physical consequences the act of the intruding eye, it repeats The Aspern Papers’ account of reading (12:43). These factors aside, I highlight the remark as one more alignment of reading with an act of intrusion into a receptacle that contains the body. This equation begins to reach its fullest and most literal expression in an edgy conversation between the editor and Juliana. Questioning the ethics of those who write about the lives of great writers who “are dead and gone and can’t, poor darlings, speak for themselves,” as the editor puts it, Juliana asks, “Do you think it’s right to rake up the past?” To which the editor responds, “How can we get at it unless we dig a little?” (12:89–90). The implication of these remarks clarifies itself in an exchange between the editor and Tina after Juliana’s death. Having given
up on the papers, he suggests to Tina that what Miss Bordereau really intended was for Aspern’s “literary remains” (12:12) to be buried with her own corporeal ones:

Miss Tina appeared to weigh this suggestion; after which she answered with striking decision, “Oh no, she wouldn’t have thought that safe!”

“It seems to me nothing could be safer.”

“She had an idea that when people want to publish they’re capable—!” And she paused, very red.

“Of violating a tomb? Mercy on us, what must she have thought of me!” (12:133–34)

The last container of the body that reading threatens, then, is the grave, and if the image seems less than fully developed in *The Aspern Papers*, we have only to remember that, like hypnotism, and like the intrusion within a house, the violation of a tomb is in the nineteenth century a fascinating, repellent, and notorious topos for the invasion of the body’s privacy.  

With these images of the bureau, the house, and the tomb, reading aligns itself with the act of intruding within the body’s containers and wrenching it forth. Not only are these acts of invasion propelled by the experience of reading Aspern’s poetry, but reading itself seems so body-directed, seems so much to take the body as its object, that it comes to seem an invasion in its own right, and bodies appear to be contained within papers as surely as they are contained within houses or tombs. Thus, for at least a moment in *The Aspern Papers*, the whole point of reading Aspern’s lyrics is to discover Miss Bordereau’s body within them, to find their revelation of what she and Aspern once did with each other’s bodies. Along these lines, Aspern’s poems might well be viewed as containers of secret knowledge of the body; the body would then be “as concrete there as a bird in a cage,” “stuck into every volume as your foot is stuck into your shoe,” to borrow Hugh Vereker’s description of the pattern that unites his work in “The Figure in the Carpet” (15:233). But if this remark suggests the body’s presence in writing, it also begins to suggest the difficulty of knowing that body; the figure in the carpet never swims up clear, just as the outlines of Juliana’s career never become specific. The editor notes that while “most readers of certain of Aspern’s poems” have “taken it for granted that Juliana had not always adhered to the steep footway of renunciation,” one would be hard-pressed “to put one’s finger on the passage in which her fair fame suffered injury” (12:48). The implication is that the poems contain a body from which one is excluded; they objectify knowledge of a world that one cannot infiltrate.
This construction of reading does not quite tally with ways of thinking about reading I have identified earlier; more particularly, the implication that bodies have disappeared from writing—and so one must read bodies back into it—conflicts with the implication that bodies are inside writing—and so readers have “to dig a little,” as the editor puts it. But resolving this logical incoherence may not be as important here as recognizing how these conceptions together overdetermine the body’s place in reading, constructing it as a problem and insisting on that problem’s relation to privacy. Indeed, if we momentarily regard *The Aspern Papers* as a sort of gloss to Warren and Brandeis, then it begins to look like the “prurient” readers they found so plentiful—and so worrisome—in late-nineteenth-century America are those who, like the editor, read in order to know the secrets of the body. And though Warren and Brandeis imply that this sort of “prurient taste” is confined to scandal sheets, *The Aspern Papers* begins to suggest that writing is also framed as a bodily problem in the highly literary contexts that might otherwise seem to be yellow journalism’s opposite.

This question of the body’s place in writing is pursued within literary commentary, then, and is pursued within the wider context of a question of the ethics of seeking the sort of knowledge the editor seeks. One thing that has always made *The Aspern Papers* seem a resonant text in James’s career is its tight focus on the figure of the author and, more particularly, on the relation between an author’s lived experience and his or her writing. In James, this relation is always figured as a sort of double question, one in which the boundaries between epistemology and ethics begin to blur. On the one hand there is the question: how do the writing life and the rest of a writer’s life intersect with each other? At the same time James asks: is it right to try to find out? As early as 1872, in a review of a selection of passages from Hawthorne’s notebooks, James’s anxieties on this score show themselves:

> These liberal excisions from the privacy of so reserved and shade-seeking a genius suggest forcibly the general question of the proper limits of curiosity as to that passive personality of an artist of which the elements are scattered in portfolios and table-drawers. It is becoming very plain, however, that whatever the proper limits may be, the actual limits will be fixed only by a total exhaustion of matter. (*LC* 1:307)

The image of ransacking the writing table that these lines suggest is one *The Aspern Papers* would develop in full, while the suggestion that the writer’s “personality” is present in his papers and therefore threatened by the curious reader seems, at least in this context, to forecast the ways in
which William James and Warren and Brandeis would write about persons and papers eighteen years later. As James’s notes and preface reveal, The Aspern Papers is based, first of all, on the attempts of Edward Silsbee, an extraordinarily devoted Shelley-obsessive, to get at the papers of Claire Clairmont, the last surviving member of the Byron-Shelley circle. But as these early comments on Hawthorne suggest, the tale also has points of contact with other authors who have, by 1888, come to epitomize for James questions of privacy and the life of writing. Not only is the tale characteristic of the ways in which James thinks about Hawthorne, but, as Laurence Holland has argued, it is also formed by James’s fascination with George Sand and her affair with Alfred de Musset. Aspern might, then, most accurately be seen as a sort of composite figure that epitomizes James’s characteristic ways of conceiving of authorship.

Although they lurk behind the tale, neither Byron nor Shelley nor Hawthorne nor Sand is mentioned within it. Indeed, the only explicit mention of a real author comes as the editor explains to Mrs. Prest, his confidante in the tale’s beginning, why he finds it so revealing that Juliana refers to her old lover as “Mr. Aspern”:

> It proves familiarity, and familiarity implies the possession of mementoes, of tangible objects. I can’t tell you how that “Mr.” affects me—how it bridges over the gulf of time and brings our hero near to me—nor what an edge it gives to my desire to see Juliana. You don’t say “Mr.” Shakespeare. (12:12–13)

And later, as the editor ponders what Aspern’s poems reveal about Juliana’s past, comes the only explicit mention of an actual literary text:

> It was incontestable that, whether for right or for wrong, most readers of certain of Aspern’s poems (poems not as ambiguous as the sonnets—scarcely more divine, I think—of Shakespeare) had taken for granted that Juliana had not always adhered to the steep footway of renunciation. (12:48)

These references to Shakespeare seem the most passing of allusions, and ought not to make much of a difference in the way we read The Aspern Papers and its obsession with the relation between writing and the body. Yet when we look for analogues to the metaphors with which The Aspern Papers characterizes reading, we find them with an odd frequency and sharpness in the texts that swirl around what came in the late nineteenth century to be thought of as the Shakespeare “mystery.”

This is not surprising inasmuch as Shakespeare might be said to be the
period’s exemplary private character, at least in literary contexts, its most alluringly mysterious, most secret subject, the writer who manages to efface his own personality from his writing most thoroughly, disappearing behind his characters. Thus Walter Bagehot takes the occasion of meditating on “Shakespeare—The Individual” (1853) as the occasion for characterizing privacy itself:

Behind every man’s external life, which he leads in company, there is another which he leads alone, and which he carries with him apart. We see but one aspect of our neighbour, as we see but one side of the moon; in either case there is also a dark half, which is unknown to us. We all come down to dinner, but each has a room to himself.¹⁷

If one accepts this characterization, as many nineteenth-century commentators did, then it seems almost inevitable that reading will take the shape of a desire to penetrate the author’s secret, to peer into the room Shakespeare kept to himself. Which may well be what Virginia Woolf’s Richard Dalloway is getting at when “seriously and solemnly” he says that “no decent man ought to read Shakespeare’s sonnets because it was like listening at keyholes.”¹⁸

In banning the sonnets, Richard recycles what must have seemed by the time Woolf wrote Mrs. Dalloway a cliché of Victorian literary commentary: that in the sonnets Shakespeare gives voice to his own experience and emotions, for once allowing what Bagehot calls his “dark half” to speak. Not all critics believed that, as Edward Dowden argued in his 1881 edition of the sonnets, these poems represent “real feelings and real experiences.”¹⁹ But for personalists and anti-personalists alike, the issue in large part shaped the nature of debate over Shakespeare, determining its characteristic concerns and metaphors. As the quotations from Woolf and Bagehot suggest, these metaphors draw on the language and imagery of privacy, especially imagery that conceives of privacy in terms of domestic space. Indeed, the dominant metaphor of nineteenth-century Shakespeare studies in general, and of studies of the sonnets in particular, may be the one Woolf plays on: Wordsworth’s characterization of the sonnet-form as the “key” with which “Shakespeare unlocked his heart,” an image consistent with and amplified by the comparison of the sonnet to a “narrow room” in “Nuns Fret Not.”

Woolf was not the first to recognize that one possible implication of this image is that reading the sonnets can be a form of voyeurism. In the poem “House” (1876), Robert Browning developed this suggestion in terms peculiarly relevant to The Aspern Papers. One more statement of Browning’s credo of the objective poet, “House” begins by mockingly toying with the possibility of writing a self-revealing poem:
Shall I sonnet-sing you about myself?
Do I live in a house you would like to see?
Is it scant of gear, has it store of pelf?
“Unlock my heart with a sonnet-key?”

Having invoked the standard Wordsworthian image, the poem turns to literalizing it, sketching a tableau in which an earthquake has left the interior of a house open to view. A crowd gathers before it, “feast[ing]” its eyes on the late occupant’s domestic arrangements and idiosyncrasies—noticing, for example, that he smoked (“no wonder he lost his health!” the crowd concludes); that he seems not to have bathed before he dressed; that, as “the neighbours guessed,” “His wife and himself had separate rooms” (31, 22–28). “House” thus turns a mode of reading into an act of ocular invasion, an invasion in which the secrets of the body are not only revealed but are turned into spectacle. Further, the poem turns a poetic form into a physical space that contains evidence of the body’s activities; the physical dimensions of the sonnet make it participate in what Bachelard calls the “homology between the geometry of the small box and the psychology of secrecy.”

This homology is relevant to the status of Shakespeare’s sonnets because two questions that dominate—and sometimes titillate and sometimes unnerve—readings of the sonnets toward the end of the century are whether the poems represent actual bodies and whether the actions the poems represent are the actual experiences of the bodies represented. Not only does criticism of the time increasingly pursue the identities of the Dark Lady, the Fair Young Man, and the Rival Poet, but it comes to think of the poems as somehow containing Shakespeare himself; it’s as if reading writing so tied up in experiences and representations of the physical body is equivalent to knowing the body that wrote what one is reading. When the narrator of Oscar Wilde’s The Portrait of Mr. W. H. (1889) claims that in reading the sonnets with the Willie Hughes theory in mind he has his “hand upon Shakespeare’s heart, and [is] counting each separate throb and pulse of passion,” he expresses feelings that appear in the wholly un-ironic criticism of his real-life predecessors and contemporaries. Likewise, when Samuel Butler, in Shakespeare’s Sonnets Reconsidered (1899), insists that in the sonnets “we look upon” the poet “face to face” even as we also look “over [his] shoulder” to read the poems that are actually “a very private letter,” he speaks for assumptions present in mainstream criticism even if his bizarre thesis that Mr. W. H. worked as a cook at sea is anything but.

The intensity of this emphasis on the authorial body may seem extraordinary in later nineteenth-century writing on Shakespeare’s sonnets, but
the habits of reading it reflects are not so unusual. Inasmuch as deducing biographical, lived experience from texts is a main critical project of the time, Shakespearean studies epitomize the assumptions that govern nineteenth-century literary commentary in general. As Marjorie Garber demonstrates, conceptions of authorship in the nineteenth century are routinely referred to Shakespeare; the question of what an author is is defined through Shakespeare even as it gives definition to Shakespeare himself.24 This is true not only of the controversy over who wrote Shakespeare, which begins to attract attention in the middle of the century. It is also true of questions about the body’s presence in Shakespeare’s writing, particularly the sonnets, as the remarks of Wilde and Butler suggest. That the sonnets themselves conceive of persons living on through writing—and thus, in a sense, living within it—may have seemed to underwrite this emphasis on the body in writing. But we should also consider this emphasis as part of what Foucault identifies as an “intensification” of the body in the nineteenth century: a growing tendency to determine meanings and to specify individuals through recourse to corporeality.25

This discourse surrounding and reconstituting the sonnets is not, of course, one that merely constructs and worries over a general corporeality, a universal state of embodiment (indeed, it is one of those episodes that reveals the emptiness of “the body” considered as an uninflected abstraction). As Eve Sedgwick observes in *Between Men*, Shakespeare’s sonnets “have been a kind of floating decimal in male homosexual discourse,” a point where gay male critics have sometimes and prominently found the English literary canon reflecting same-sex desire and a point where critics with a deep and insistent lack of interest in sexuality have been forced to confront the issues of embodiment and sexual desire they have worked to exclude from their projects.26 In Wilde’s *Portrait of Mr. W. H.*, male same-sex desire is mediated through debate on the sonnets, mediated through lyric scholarship; in the narrator’s characterization of reading as equivalent to placing his “hand upon Shakespeare’s heart, and counting each separate throb and pulse of passion,” contact with the textual artifact substitutes for direct physical expression with the sonnets’ other readers, Cyril Graham and Erskine. As William Cohen notes, Wilde “embeds” his theory of the sonnets “in a nested series of narratives, where it is exchanged through successive pairs of desiring men.”27 As in *The Aspern Papers*, where reading is conceived both in terms of a hauntingly spiritual connection and in terms of a tactile physicality, in Wilde and the discourse around the sonnets more generally reading is pulled in opposite directions, simultaneously construed as something that looks a lot like a sexual act and something purely cognitive.

Given both these tensions and this insistently corporeal impulse in the debates circling around Shakespeare, it is not surprising that the desire to
see Shakespeare “face to face,” as Samuel Butler put it, received in the mid-1880s a most literal construction. In 1883, five years before *The Aspern Papers*’ publication, a pamphlet by C. M. Ingleby, a life trustee of Shakespeare’s birthplace at Stratford, ignited a small controversy by renewing earlier calls for a new approach to Shakespeare studies, one best summarized by Ingleby’s long title: *Shakespeare’s Bones. The Proposal to Disinter Them, Considered in Relation to Their Possible Bearing on His Portraiture: Illustrated by Instances of Visits of the Living to the Dead.* As his title suggests, Ingleby calls for exhumation as a means of determining, through an examination of Shakespeare’s skull, which of the portraits of the poet most resemble him. Other disinterment advocates hoped as well that an examination of the skeleton might reveal whether Shakespeare was lame, an implication many readers saw and took quite literally in Sonnets 37 and 89. As it does in *The Aspern Papers*, reading here becomes a matter of seeing the body and of (very respectfully, Ingleby’s tract emphasizes) touching it. And as the examples of the portraits and of Shakespeare’s lameness further imply, one conviction that motivates would-be resurrection men like Ingleby is that it is the body that resolves not only the ambiguities of graphic representation, but also those of language itself. Or, rather, the body resolves such ambiguities because it is itself a superior language: a bone contains a “message,” “an intelligible language”; a skull requires no interpreter but rather “sp[eaks] for itself.”

What eventually quashed Ingleby’s proposal—which did have its supporters, and which was considered in an 1884 meeting of the Shakespeare Trust—was an international outcry against disturbing the sanctity of the poet’s grave. Ingleby had anticipated such objections, arguing that since a respectfully conducted scientific investigation was hardly the same thing as grave-robbing inspired by “morbid curiosity,” the malediction engraved upon the tomb (“Blessed be the man that spares these stones, / And cursed be he that moves my bones”) hardly applied. But the examples—the “instances of visits of the living to the dead”—Ingleby gathers together to establish a precedent for exhumation under such circumstances do little to gain support for his proposal. Ingleby follows the odd rhetorical strategy of arguing for the exhumation of Shakespeare by devoting a quarter of his short book to examples of how the job ought not to be done, detailing oddly harrowing stories of the posthumous careers of the famous: Swedenborg becomes the target of souvenir-hunters, one of whom carries away the cartilage of an ear; a skeleton purported to be Milton’s is displayed for a small fee; Cromwell’s embalmed head makes such a quixotic journey that it isn’t quite possible for Ingleby to say where it has finally come to rest.

Henry James was hardly unaware of the controversies swirling around
Shakespeare; indeed, it seems unlikely that any literary person of the time could escape them. And like Emerson before him and like his contemporary Mark Twain, James was not always immune to the efforts of others to question Shakespeare’s authorship of Shakespeare. When, in 1877, he made his second visit to Stratford, James wrote of the “torment” of Shakespeare’s “unguessed riddle,” as well as of the charms of being on the spot where “the greatest genius who has represented and ornamented life” had walked.30 Much later he would happen upon a new book proving that Bacon wrote Shakespeare; shortly after that he would confess that he was haunted by the conviction that the divine William is the biggest and most successful fraud ever practiced on a patient world. . . . I can only express my general sense by saying that I find it almost as impossible to conceive that Bacon wrote the plays as to conceive that the man from Stratford, as we know the man from Stratford, did.31

But if James was not quite immune to the ideas of “maniacs who embrace some bedlamitical theory of the cryptic character of Shakespeare,” as “The Figure of the Carpet” calls them, this did not quite keep him from coming to define himself and his own privacy in Shakespearean terms (15:244). Especially when he considers that the searching lights and prying fingers that were taking Shakespeare as their object might eventually be turned on himself, James takes Shakespeare’s impersonality as exemplary. When, in 1914, he gives instructions to the nephew who would become his literary executor, James not only adopts Shakespeare as his model, but further, he replays the whole association of writing and the body that The Aspern Papers and the Shakespeare controversy both establish:

My sole wish is to frustrate as utterly as possible the post mortem exploiter . . . and I have long thought of launching, by a provision in my will, a curse no less explicit than Shakespeare’s own on any such as try to move my bones. Your question determines me definitely to advert to the matter in my will—that is to declare my utter and absolute abhorrence of any attempted biography or the giving to the world . . . of any part or parts of my private correspondence.32

The injunction to keep papers private is here conveyed by relating those papers to the body, by speaking of them as if they were body—whether hidden in the grave or dismembered and scattered as “parts.” In constructing papers as such by way of reference to Shakespeare, James not only relies on the general image of Shakespeare that emerged in the nineteenth century; he also relies, more particularly, on a relationship that he had worked
out eleven years before in his study of prurience at Stratford-on-Avon, "The Birthplace," a story which revisits The Aspern Papers' linkage of intrusion into a house with investigation of the life of the author. The tale centers on a young couple, Morris and Isabel Gedge, who become the new caretakers of the national "shrine," "the early home of the supreme poet, the Mecca of the English-speaking race." The poet, obviously Shakespeare but never named, is simply referred to as "Him"—as if his name were too venerable to pronounce. The new docents, blessed with a modicum of taste and discernment, believe that as holders of "the key" of "this transfigured world," their role is to correct and circumvent the assumptions of "vulgar" tourists (17:134–36). But the vulgar, it turns out, want to hear not just what Morris regards as the very few known "facts" about the author; they want, instead, "everything . . . they want to see where He hung up His hat and where He kept His boots and where His mother boiled her pot" (17:138, 177). They want, in other words, an embroidered account of what is most "personal" rather than skeptically revisionist history. Gedge's style of presentation does not exactly meet these desires, convinced as he is that Shakespeare "covered His tracks as no other human being has ever done" (17:165). Indeed, he finds the tourists' intrusions upon the Birthplace as akin to "kill[ing]" Shakespeare not just because such intrusion pries into his life, but also because it substitutes his life for his works (17:180). As in Browning's "House," then, reading Shakespeare's body back into his writing is equated not only with intruding within a house, but also with subjecting its occupant to violence.

When faced with the prospect of being fired by the Birthplace's governing committee, however, Gedge manages to "strangle" his own "critical sense," and evolves an extraordinarily showy routine that makes him so celebrated that the committee doubles his stipend (17:189, 188). Whereas before his conversion he holds that one should "let the author alone," his new style of presentation promises that in the Birthplace, "the whole tenor of existence" is "laid . . . bare"; here one experiences absolute "intimacy" with "Him" (17:180, 194–95). Whereas before his conversion Gedge insists that "the play's the thing," now the Shakespearean writing that matters most, that means most fully, is not anything so mediated as the collected works but instead is the mark made directly by the body. As Gedge informs the breathless tourists: "It is in this old chimney-corner, the quaint inglenook of our ancestors—just there in the far angle, where His little stool was placed, and where, I dare say, if we could look close enough, we should find the hearthstone scraped with His little feet" (17:180, 195–96).

As this climactic tableau in "The Birthplace" suggests, reading and seeing, writing and bodily identity, all give off on each other, becoming fluid
and protean. The turning matter I have described in previous chapters comes to be a way of imagining what a text is and how readers interact with it. These ontological blendings characterize the thinking of both James’s Shakespearean tourists and of social conservatives, like Warren and Brandeis, who regard with anxiety the prying masses James’s tourists exemplify. For in seeing writing as a bodily function or extension or trace, James’s Shakespearean tourists assume a relationship that Warren and Brandeis delineate at length. Relying on the analogue of intellectual and artistic property, Warren and Brandeis argue that common-law doctrines of intellectual ownership are themselves but “instances and applications of a general right to privacy” (198). What allows Warren and Brandeis to put the matter in this odd way is the assumption that my ownership of, say, this book is not a matter of my owning the pages on which it is printed; rather, my ownership is of its intellectual and rhetorical content. My common-law publication right, then, is a right to decide which of my thoughts and expressions will become public and which will not. And there’s no significant difference, according to Warren and Brandeis, between expressing my thoughts “in writing” and expressing them through the body “in conduct, in conversation, in attitudes, or in facial expression”; from the point of view of privacy law, these all amount to the same thing (206). In rendering immaterial the material through which ideas and emotions are conveyed, then, the right to privacy subsumes the difference between bodies and papers, understanding in identical terms the protections afforded to each. To construe writing as body is at once to claim for it a high degree of protection and to suggest that the boundaries of the body are fluid, unstable, capable of shading into the objects that exist around and alongside the body.

This instability is central both to the way Warren and Brandeis try to protect privacy and to the way they imagine privacy’s invasion. Part of what makes late-century social conservatives uneasy about the dissolving boundary between public and private is their conviction that such dissolutions have come to characterize large segments of American society. Running alongside the strong fear of invasion that shows itself in documents like “The Right to Privacy” and “The Birthplace” is a fear that many Americans want to be invaded, that they want to give up their privacy—and their selves—to the forces of publicity that Warren and Brandeis critique at the beginning of their article. James’s friend E. L. Godkin, in an 1890 Scribner’s Magazine essay on reputation that partially anticipates Warren and Brandeis, notes that while it causes some people “exquisite pain to have their private life laid bare to the world, others rather like it”; “the passion for notoriety . . . has been fostered to such an extent” by the “wide diffusion of printed gossip that there is a large number of people
who . . . put themselves in the way of having their private life explored in the press.”

These people who “rather like it” are ones who are “all self-advertisement,” as James puts it in the long 1903 tale “The Papers.” They are people who so thoroughly define themselves on the basis of being “paragraphed . . . and . . . published” that, at least in James’s view, they might be all print, wholly publicity effect (378). This applies most obviously to figures like the star celebrity of “The Papers,” Sir A. B. C. Beadel-Muffet K.C.B., M.P. (whose very name underlines his definition as an effect of the alphabet, of writing), who are “universal and ubiquitous, commemorated . . . on every page of every public print every day in every year” (317). Here an intertextual connection will indicate more fully the extent to which James imagines the publicly disseminated self in emphatically embodied terms. In “The Papers,” Maud Blandy, James’s journalist-heroine, imagines that were the celebrity Beadel-Muffet to attempt a retirement from public life, he would be haunted by the public persona she has, with Beadel-Muffet’s own cooperation, crafted for him: he would be pursued “by the lurid glare that he has himself so started and kept up, and at last literally devoured (like Frankenstein, of course!) by the monster he has created” (324). This image of the outstanding citizen as a dismembered body with a name full of decorative flourishes (including the initials A. B. C.) echoes Poe’s “The Man That Was Used Up,” the tale of Brevet Brigadier General John A. B. C. Smith, a veteran of the Indian wars whose famously handsome body proves to be nothing but discriminately chosen appurtenances. This continuity between bodily and scriptive identity also characterizes figures like the publicity-craving Selah Tarrant of *The Bostonians*, who noses his way into newspaper offices, always trying to find out what was “going in” [to the papers]; he would have liked to go in himself, bodily, and, failing in this, he hoped to get advertisements inserted gratis. The wish of his soul was that he might be interviewed; that made him hover at the editorial elbow.

What James saw as the collapse in America of privacy as a value is registered in examples like these as a crisis in the relationship between bodies and writing; when persons “go into” print to the extent that they seem to be physically constituted of writing, privacy ceases to function. This “scriptively remade body” (the phrase is Jonathan Goldberg’s) typifies not only celebrated subjects of writing like Beadel-Muffet or would-be celebrities like Selah Tarrant; it also comes to characterize the writer, or at least those who engage in certain kinds of writing. Thus it is not only the con-
sciousnesses of Maud and of Howard Bight, the journalists of “The Papers,” which are wholly “furni[shed]” by “the Papers”; this is also true of their bodies. Maud is “really herself . . . an edition, an ‘extra special’”; Howard is “papyery all through” (313, 314, 340). Likewise The Portrait of a Lady’s journalist, Henrietta Stackpole, is “as crisp and new and comprehensive as a first issue before the folding. From top to toe she had probably no misprint” (3:117).

Privacy, as we have seen, depends for its definition on a relation between writing and body. But the metaphor loses its efficacy when it is tugged too far in either direction: body and writing must become neither too detached from each other nor too indistinguishable. James’s clearest exemplum of this uneasy logic comes, of course, in “The Private Life” (1892), a story in which the private self almost literally dissolves before its subsequent recupera-


tion, one that is realized through the body of the writer. Lord Mellifont is “so essentially, so conspicuously and uniformly the public character” that he is “all public” and has “no corresponding private life” (17:246). Celebrated simply for the “tone” he imparts to any event, he is all “style” and no substance—so much so that, in the tale’s extraordinary literalization of the proverb, he disappears when he has no audience (17:227).

In contrast to Lord Mellifont, who “isn’t even [one] whole” person, Clare Vawdrey, a celebrated playwright, has not one self but two (17:245). One is a “bourgeois”-about-town who has all the usual unremarkable foibles; he has “his hours and his habits, his tailor and his hatter, his hygiene and his particular wine” (17:244, 220). The other self, from whom the bourgeois is wholly cut off, is “the genius” who “stays at home” (17:244). So separated are these two lives that they go on simultaneously; at the same time “the bourgeois” socializes in the parlor, “the genius” hunches over a writing table in his darkened room. This conceit carries to a fantastic extreme the division of the self into one half that comes down to dinner and another half that has a room to itself—the division which Bagehot and other nineteenth-century commentators saw as so eminently Shakespearean. It also follows the conception of the artistic personality that Browning outlined in “House,” among other poems—a connection all the more compelling in that James’s remarks about the tale in the New York Edition reveal that Vawdrey is modeled on Browning himself (LC 2:1255). 38

The self—or the part of Vawdrey’s self—that writes is an ambivalent figure. At one point it is suggested that the man who can only be seen in the darkened room is someone Vawdrey gets to do his writing for him; he is thus doubly a ghost writer. Inasmuch as a ghost is neither wholly substantial nor so wholly disembodied that it cannot be recognized as the trace or
outline of a body—inasmuch as it is body and not body—it figures exactly the equivocal, highly generative relation between body and writing that has been my subject.\textsuperscript{39}

This chapter has argued that in the twin discourses by which writing and privacy are figured together, a material model of textuality emerges: a cluster of prevailing metaphors, ones that carry into the act of reading a set of concrete analogues. Governed by the logic of the private dwelling and shaded by the nineteenth-century sexualization of things hidden—and, even more generally, by the intense somatic bias of nineteenth-century thought—the concept of the text becomes that of an intimate space, one with definite borders that are also permeable, susceptible to violation. As is especially evident in the commentary on the sonnet form, the physical dimensions of the text are thought through architecture and architecture's social functions; writing's materiality is confused both with the architectural spaces that bespeak intimacy and with the bodies those spaces protect. If this argument holds, then we can say that few concepts, at least in literary criticism, have effaced their own origins more successfully than that of reading, than that of the text.

As a coda, and as a way of developing still more explicitly the significance of the preceding analyses, I offer the following: In 1964, W. H. Auden wrote the introduction for a Signet Classics edition of Shakespeare's sonnets. Auden opened up his subject with a polemic against biographical readings of imaginative literature; he did so in terms of privacy and, even more specifically, in terms of private papers located within an enclosed architectural space: “A great deal of what today passes for scholarly research is an activity no different from that of reading somebody's private correspondence when he is out of the room, and it doesn't really make it morally any better if he is out of the room because he is in his grave.”\textsuperscript{40} Following in the tradition established by Browning and many other Victorian readers (or nonreaders) of Shakespeare, Auden decrees that Shakespeare's “room” and “grave” must remain sealed against “the desire for truth,” a desire hard to distinguish, Auden says, from “idle curiosity” (89). But if the room, the grave, and “Shakespeare the man” must remain impervious to “desire,” this desire works its way back into the solely textual kind of reading Auden advocates, as he imagines the “shade” of Shakespeare feeling “grateful” for the “loving care” bestowed on his texts by William Empson in an explication of one of the sonnets (91, 90). Nor is that all, for in speculating about the dating of Shakespeare's sonnets—are they the product of youth or maturity?—Auden hesitantly adopts the former, “because the experiences the sonnets describe seem to me to be more likely to befall a younger man than an older” (91). It is hard in such moments to tell whose experiences Auden is talking about, or whose privacy he would protect—his own or
Shakespeare's. It is hard, in other words, not to associate the kind of reading Auden both forbids and practices with his own sexual history, his slowly emergent sense of himself as a gay man. What is clear is that figuring the text as an enclosed and private space—a room or a grave—cannot be disentangled from homosexual reading here, and that Shakespeare's sonnets are still, in 1964, giving that model of textuality its distinctive shape. I would suggest, then, that the material models of reading I have traced in this chapter rework the textual condition, bestowing upon it the shape of the closet. Similarly, the constellation of texts assembled here affirms one of the crucial arguments Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick makes about the closet, which is that the private/public distinction is one of those “contestation[s] of meaning” which is “indelibly marked with the historical specificity of homosocial/homosexual definition, notably but not exclusively male, from around the turn of the century.”