Looking From the Other Side: Gaze, Gender, and "The Aspern Papers"

Keiko Miyajima

Since the publication of Henry James's books a century ago, there have been many critical arguments concerning the topic of "vision"—artistic, technical, moral, and cultural—in his fiction.[1] To be sure, his works frequently demonstrate the conspicuous function of eyes, as he explored the point of view technique throughout his career. Many of James's characters have been almost obsessed with the act of looking, as was James himself. For him, the essence of an artist lies in his or her superiority of vision. As his preface to the New York Edition proclaims, a Jamesian artist is notably the man with "the acuter vision": a figure who watches from behind the windows of the house of fiction "with a pair of eyes, or at least with a field-glass," and who is "addicted to seeing 'through'—one thing through another . . . and still other things through that." [2]

Indeed, as Mark Seltzer argues, power for James may depend upon the panoptic privilege of "seeing without being seen," the pervasive, imperialist technology of surveillance.[3] And yet, as a realist novelist who traversed the beginnings of modernism in America and England, James was also aware that there are "arbitrary limitations of our vision," to use his own phrase. In the universe according to James where "relations stop nowhere," one cannot see, know, and explain everything sufficiently and succinctly; or, one may see "more where the other sees less," one may see "black where the other sees white."[4] The novel, as a form to represent the air of reality, should reflect this sense of cognitive crisis. By endowing some of his characters with the central point of view and voice, James gives them narrative authority; but at the same time he limits them within the confines of consciousness. By doing so he puts an emphasis on the unreliability of the narrators, of both voice and vision.

More recently, some literary critics have focused on the function of gaze in terms of gender, drawing their root from feminist film criticism.[5] To ground my argument on James's tale in relation to "vision" and gender, I would like to review briefly some film criticism, since vision—gaze or spectatorship—has long

been the central issue for these feminist film critics, as it raises significant issues of sexual difference. According to Laura Mulvey's pioneering essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in classic Hollywood cinema that habitually foregrounds images of woman as the object of gaze, speculation and desire, spectatorship includes two levels of looking: intradiegetic and extradiegetic. Usually the woman-as-object functions to unify these two levels in diegesis: when she performs within narrative, "the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude." As a bearer of the spectator's look, the male protagonist can take an active role to forward the story, being "free to command the stage . . . of spatial illusion in which he articulates the look and creates action," while the woman-object is circumvented by his voyeuristic and fetishistic device that suspends her castrating threat.[6] Although her essay has been criticized for ignoring the question of female spectatorship, her insightful analysis is worth consulting as an exemplary grounding for feminist film theory. It makes clear that the male gaze, embedded in the screen and thus implicitly extended to the audience, works together with the cultural code of looking in order to sustain the overall patriarchal unconscious, in the way Freud dichotomously structured voyeurism as spectator/spectacle, the active side of the looker and passive side of the looked, and hence, the masculine and the feminine. In the narrative cinema structured as such, woman is nothing but a sign, whose function is to carry the meaning for the male subject, not to create the meaning for herself. Mary Ann Doane further elucidates the question of the female gaze, suggesting that woman is prevented from "reversing the situation and appropriating the gaze for her own pleasure" by the "system of aligning sexual difference with a subject/object dichotomy."[7] In like manner, Stephen Heath examines the cinematic gaze from Lacanian theory, that any vision is not given but constructed: just as language, vision signifies itself, in the symbolic construction of the phallocentric subjectivity, against the fear of lack—woman's body. In the signifying process where the privilege of sign/vision is founded on a difference in nature to be seen, "[i]f the woman looks, the spectacle provokes, castration is in the air, the Medusa's head is not far off; thus, she must not look, is absorbed on the side of the seen, seeing herself seeing herself, Lacan's femininity." [8]

In classic works of literature likewise, women are recurrently fashioned as a spectacle, the object of predominant male desire and spectatorship. Since gaze in films and focalization in novels are similar in their function, they may also

resemble each other in their potential for carrying connotation of gender. Viewed in the light of spectator theory traced above, male subjectivity and its privilege of vision in narrative are secured on the premise of the objectification of women and forestallment of the female gaze: then, a returned look from woman can be a critical threat to the gender-based point of view—questioning, even destabilizing, the monolithic system of "gaze" at large.

The issue of gender in James's fiction has been the concern of many critics for several decades. Most vehemently discussed is his description of women, along with his own trouble of gender identity.[9] Evaluative readings of James's "feminism" being much debated, the preoccupation with "the feminine" in his writings is mostly admitted by critics.[10] In her discussion on women in the Jamesian eye, for example, Millicent Bell suggests that temperament and upbringing excluded James from the male preoccupations with the public sphere of 'downtown,' and as a writer, his time was spent at home, a private sphere associated with women and their culture under Victorian gender separatism. As a result, he became intimately acquainted with women's lives, to the exclusion of the male experience. And thus, while being allied to the patrilineal culture and androcentric literary tradition, he was also aware that "women's lives and women's feeling were the locale of a different but equally important mode of being than men were accustomed to recognize."[11] Granting certain qualifications, we can say that James's sympathy to Victorian women and their situation, along with ambivalence to his own gender and sexuality, make his writings unique among the novelists of his kind.[12] My reading of "The Aspern Papers" will explore the possibility that he enunciated a position of his own, in particular by exposing, and thus questioning, the implications of gender and its imbalance in both vision and art.

"The Aspern Papers," a first-person narrative about the value and ethics of art and artist, is also about spectatorship, that is, about seeing and being seen. By tracing how the narrative raises some of these issues in a way that is similar to the cinematic experience described above, we will elicit the formation of the gaze as a means to power, to the male advantage. We will also examine the gradual disclosure of its uncertainty, even vulnerability to others' gaze in the narrative process, especially at moments when women return their eyes.

The story is told by a literary historian and journalist in search of the "sacred" materials to reconstruct the complete life of his god, Jeffrey Aspern (47).[13] As a literary historian, his mission is to fill the gap of the poet's romantic past by supplementing letters addressed to his mistress, Juliana

Bordereau, who now lives a sequestered life with her niece, Tina, in a forbidding Venetian palazzo. As a writer and narrator, he must also reconstruct the past through narrating his story—the history of his experience in retrospect.

It should be noted that women in this tale are not the immediate object of the narrator-spectator's erotic/scopic desire, though the object of his speculation. Navigated by homosocial and homoerotic undercurrents as William Veeder analyzes, it is the story in which the ultimate destination of the narrator's fetishistic desire is a male idol, a dead artist who is at once everywhere and nowhere in the narrative.[14] While I do not claim that the gaze is solely a heterosexual construct, nevertheless, the way the narrator aligns the structure of seeing/seen with sexual difference bears a close analogy with gender-based machinery of gaze and its essential voyeurism. If not an erotic object, women are certainly the object of the narrator's gaze; for, his success at both his detective-like quest and storytelling depends on, before anything, his ability to posit the Bordereau women on the side of being seen as a codified spectacle he aims to decipher, in search of the sealed, secret, sacred presence of the poet, by his scrupulous surveillance.[15]

Aspern, a pioneering American poet with the ability "to feel, understand and express everything"(78), embodies the ultimate triumph of language and vision for the narrator, who also engages in the business of writing. A devoted biographer keeping perpetual company with the great poet—the narrator's "prompter"—, he endorses his narrative as a sole possessor of vision, words and glimpses. Sensing a "mystic companionship, a moral fraternity with all those who in the past had been in the service of art"(73), he obviously aligns himself with the historical greatness of artists through hero-worship and identification. Art and morality should relate to each other through this fraternal communion: the value system is thus established at the outset. And it is through this identification that the narrator formulates his narrative, as Susanne Kappeler explicates, after the fashion of the archetypal folktale cast in the ethical opposition of heroes and enemies: the narrator envisions his activity as if it were a quest staged in the historical city of Venice, and himself a romantic hero in search of the holy grail.[16]

Accordingly, the narrator often describes his deed in military terms, and even employs his "horticultural passion" in the Bordereau's garden to advance on Juliana and Tina, as a war-like assault: "I would batter the old women with lilies—I would bombard their citadel with roses. Their door would have to yield

to the pressure when a mound of fragrance should be heaped against it"(74-75). Similarly, in reply to Juliana's comment on the "unmanly" appearance of horticulture, the narrator, defending the gender of his act, asserts: '"there is nothing unmanly in [growing flowers]; it has been amusement of philosophers, of statesmen in retirement; even, I think, of great captains'"(92). This kind of martial locution depends on the binary opposition between hero and enemy, subject and object, light and darkness, in and out and such, in which the narrator always allies himself to the former. Adding to that, these oppositions take on a trait of gender division often seen in traditional folktales or myths, in which heroes fight their way against the obstacles of witches, Sirens, Circes, Medusas and Sphinxes. He sees himself as a manly minister and militant, while Juliana, at once a bridge and barrier between him and the poet, is called a greedy "old witch"(139). Like a private eye whose moral purpose is to expose others' secrets under the public light, he aspires to publish the papers revealing a woman's long-nurtured memory of love. The poet's public value and the narrator's literary ambition are thus equally built on the sacrifice of female privacy and interiority.

The narrator thus seeks the possibility of obtaining the papers without risking any danger of personal involvement. In this manner he epitomizes the position of a journalist—a professional seer—in "the age of newspapers"(48); and, under the disguise of an innocent lodger, seeing through without being seen through becomes the measure of his power. The narrativization of his experience as a professional journalist is intertwined not only with the gendered subject-position but also his spectatorial gaze, which is clearly charged with power at once epistemological and sexual. Throughout the tale, his eyes ransack every nook in the palazzo, to read those signs hidden from him and the world. When he at first views the palazzo he plans to invade, we are told that he "lay[s] siege to it with [his] eyes" while considering his "plan of campaign"(46). As to Juliana, he says to himself that he is ready to pay any price "to have a glimpse of some view"(68) of, as he voyeuristically imagines, her reading, fondling and kissing the papers every night. Later on, when he first had a chance to enter Juliana's bedroom, he stealthily "turn[s] [his] eyes once more all over the room, rummaging with them the closets, the chests of drawers, the tables"(116) in search of the dying woman's secret. Thus, his eyes function as an aggressive weapon, assaulting the female interior as if it were under military siege.

It is in this context that the narrator expects women to function as a means

for both his god and himself. He sees that women have no value except to give him the full vision of Aspern's figure, hardly counting their individual subjectivity. For example, he does not see Juliana except in relation to the poet. The narrator feels nearer to him before Juliana, who is no other than the poet's "relic," because "[h]er presence seemed somewhat to contain and express his own"(60, 59). A poet's muse, Juliana is for the narrator a mediator between Aspern and himself, as she was between the poet and poetry. Similarly, the narrator regards Tina primarily as a possible vehicle to gain her aunt's letters. He sees Tina a "plain" non-entity, but finds charming when he notices her "absence of the habit of thinking of herself"(102), that is, her potential function to reflect his own will. Furthermore, at the beginning of the tale he comments on Mrs. Prest, whom he takes "into [his] confidence"(45) as the first "footing"(50) for his project, by generalizing: "It is not easy for women to rise to the large free view of anything, anything to be done, . . ."(46). He observes on her "despondent view" about his prospect, that "so little are women to be counted on"(59). In particular, Aspern, with eyes "so wise and so deep"(134) that had been phrased in the original text as "full of vision"(*Norton* 180), is "no doubt not a woman's poet"(48), far beyond the reach of women's understanding. Art, creativity, and the eye to evaluate them are thus clearly gendered as male: then, the ideal audience of his own story is also gendered correspondingly. The reliable larger view implicates gender likewise: vision or view, for the narrator, is not woman's but man's occupation. Nevertheless, the development of the story is foreshadowed when his former generalization continues as follows: ". . . but [women] sometimes throw off a bold conception—such as a man wouldn't have risen to—with singular serenity"(46). Indeed, the story is headed toward unexpected shifts of angle in the interplay of gaze between self and other, man and woman.

Although the narrator's optical weapon has the advantage of negating the other, his quest is often impeded by Juliana's baffling, mystifying mask over her eyes. The mask serves as a defensive barrier, expressing her right to privacy to prevent the violation by the eye of the narrator. Viewed in this light, as John Carlos Rowe points out, Juliana's name, Bordereau, suggests a border that limits the narrator's purpose, rather than a vehicle for it.[17] In like manner, the defensively shuttered windows of the palazzo appear to him "eyes consciously closed"(74). This suggests not so much Juliana's passive blindness as her advantageous point of view. Instead of allowing penetration, she rather makes him feel from behind the mask she "look[s] at [him] with great

penetration"(61). Nervously, he says, "the old woman remained impenetrable and her attitude worried me by suggesting that she had a fuller vision of me than I had of her"(62). Thus, Juliana's ability of averting, even reversing the vector of gaze annoys the narrator, in particular with her mask's connotation of seeing without being seen.[18]

Despite the narrator's art of storytelling in heroic terms, as the narrative gradually discloses the embedded, increasing presence of the other's gaze there appears another side to his actions—his indecency. Juliana's defensive look calls into question his narrativization of himself, indicating another view of his deed. For Juliana, the letters from Aspern are inviolately invaluable because they contain precious moments of love, not a public monument of art for sale. For all his sincere loyalty to the poet, the question about the narrator's morality increases toward the climax of the tale, when at last Juliana catches him invading her room. In this dramatic scene, with the famous words '"Ah, you publishing scoundrel!,'" her eyes meet him for the first and only time. "[H]er extraordinary eyes," glaring at him like "a flood of gaslight," make him feel horribly ashamed (125). Medusa-like, Juliana's naked, direct eyes invalidate the potency of the invasive seer. Her returning look paralyzes the male subject with horror and shame: this is the first acknowledgement of his own suspicious intentions. By feeling a sense of shame he at last becomes aware of the other's view over his. Admitting to his treachery, nevertheless, he adheres to his position and mission. Hardly regarding his responsibility for Juliana's subsequent death, he returns to Venice to ask Tina for the papers.

From the start, the narrator judges Tina as a convenient vehicle willing to serve his intention. In contrast to Juliana's veiled impregnability, Tina's face looks "candid" and "clear"(56). With "her extreme limpidity"(99), that is, her sheer transparency easily seen through, she impresses him as "a perfectly artless and a considerably witless woman"(86). And her "pliability," a frequent word used to describe her, invites the narrator to make use of her.

'"Nothing here is mine'"(55), thus Tina says to the narrator at their first meeting. From this point, the narrative emphasizes her lack of property—physical, mental or material—a lack or absence that is culturally and psychologically attributed to the 'feminine.' At first sight, for example, the narrator identifies her in negative terms: she is "not young," "not fresh," her hair "not dressed" and her hands "not clean," and her eyes, though they are large, "not bright"(56); just as he identifies Juliana exclusively in terms of loss of former beauty, youth, and divinity as the poet's love. Such identification by

what she is not and such adjectives as "help*less*," "art*less*," "wit*less*," "*ir*responsible," "*in*competent" and "*in*nocent" reinforce the impression of Tina's lack of importance, absence of her individuated subjectivity, her liability to others' signification, and even her dependence on others' direction. Thus, he sees her as a selfless, innocuous medium, actor or ventriloquist's puppet for the will of others. Accordingly, she appears in his narrative "a comedian," "a piece of middle-aged female helplessness," who is "of a yielding nature and capable of doing almost anything to please a person markedly kind to her"(95, 131, 99-100). Even while she is under Juliana's direction, Tina is still a plain blank page onto which he can inscribe his "plot"(120).

Tina's selflessness, or her self being defined by what she lacks, is thus accentuated throughout the narrative. For example, when the narrator opens the long-shuttered windows of the palazzo, we are told that she only watches him "in practical submission"(57), suggesting her docility for his campaign. In particular, it is analogized to the limitations of her sight. In chapter 3, when the two look out of "good many windows," it strikes the narrator that, even while she is native to the land, "[s]he was evidently not familiar with the view—it was as if she had not looked at it for years"(67). These passages underline the image of Tina as a character of metaphorical sightlessness, of blind submission, easily becoming a comedian for the narrator's staging of conquest. As it were, her "honest eyes"(68) are transparent, malleable mirrors just to reflect his purpose, not her own.

However, under such expectations, the possibility that Tina has her own subjective eyes should be threatening to the narrator's prospect. Indeed, as he himself notices at one point, she sometimes observes him with the "air of timid but candid and even gratified curiosity"(69). At times her large eyes, looking straight into the narrator's, "embarrass[]"(82) him; and at other times their movements, suggesting her own perspective, make him feel "rebuked"(116). In response to the narrator's cultivation of the garden, she now reveals an "insatiable appetite" for flowers and, as if awakening from a long sleep, utters a murmur of ecstasy during their excursion onto Venetian waters, and also displays impatience for sightseeing. While taking her around the streets, the narrator observes, "her spirit revived at the sight of the bright shop-windows"(98). Such responsiveness to visual pleasures is certainly a sign of her potential to have her own vision, desire and will, and thus to take an active part in the story. It is the narrator who is totally blind to the possibility that she could have her own passion and prospect to cultivate. Because he sees in

her a tractable puppet, what surprises him most and provides the greatest narrative irony is this "unexpected backlash of a displaced signified" to use Nancy Miller's phrase, that she should develop a romantic plot of her own.[19]

When the narrator returns to Venice after Juliana's death, Tina begins to present herself as a desiring subject in his narrative. "[W]ith an extraordinary expression of entreaty in her eyes"(132), she declines to give him the papers, and instead holds them as a negotiating point in exchange for marriage. This proposal attests to the fact that it is the narrator who has been the object of Tina's look, and again, such a reversal lessens his ability to use others in his plot. Falling into an impasse between the logic of male narrative and the presentation of female desire, the narrator is at a loss for what to do. To avert Tina's eyes, which no longer reflect his desire but hers, he consults the portrait of Aspern for some vision or direction: "I looked at Jeffrey Aspern's face in the little picture, partly in order not to look at that of my companion, which had begun to trouble me, even to frighten me a little." But his prompter's "delightful eyes" only look at him with "mockery," and seem unsatisfactory to the narrator for the first time, not giving him any inspiration but an urge to leave (134).

The spiritual connection with the poet having thus tumbled down, the rest of the narrative only reflects the narrator's uncertainty of position in its conspicuous lacunae that disrupt the surface of his art, his retrospective telling itself. After rushing to his gondola, he wanders about Venetian waters in a confused state of mind "far from remembering clearly the succession of events and feelings during this long day of confusion"(138). He thus loses control of retrospective writing when he confesses thus: "I forget what I did, where I went after leaving the Lido and at what hour or with what recovery of composure I made my way back to my boat." He cannot tell his gondolier where he should go, nor can remember, nor can get into order the flow of time. At last, before a statue of a historic military hero, the narrator finds himself "staring at the triumphant captain as if he had an oracle on his lips." But this heroic statue of Bartolommeo Colleoni, "look[ing] far over my head" without giving the narrator any vision just as Aspern, "couldn't direct me what to do, gaze up at him as I might"(139). Here, the narrator's spiritual fraternity with historical heroes gets completely disconnected. This suggests that even his gender is in vacillation; for, as we have seen, it is through his identification with those 'great men' that he has been the subject of this heroic mission. Thus, in void of a purpose and the ground for identification, the narrator continues his wanderings through

the waters.

At a loss for direction and time, the narrator is losing the ground in his own narrative coherence, in failure of spatial and temporal equilibrium. As he wanders adrift on slippery waters, this instability culminates at the moment when he is struck with the city's extraordinarily "queer air of sociability, of cousinship, of family life." Here, as if in response to his psychological insecurity and desperate need for a place for himself, the city appears to him an embracing bosom, "an immense collective apartment" and a "splendid common domicile, familiar, domestic and resonant." While he sees in those images a sense of domestic familiarity, however, he also finds in them an unfamiliar, quaint aspect of theatricality. To his eyes, the city "also resembles a theatre, with actors clicking over bridges and in straggling processions, tripping along fondamentas"(140). These passages make clear that the seemingly pleasant, domestic landscape emerges before the narrator's eye also with an unnatural, artificial panorama of performance. It is this contradictory, confusing nature of sociability at once close and distant, that makes the air queer—at once private and public, inside and outside, familiar and foreign, natural and unnatural. When the narrator loses his prompters—Aspern and the military captain as his heroic models—his identity fluctuates, and this pervasive, queer air of performativity emerges all over the vista. This consequence suggests that both the narrator's subjectivity and identity, especially his gender identity, are nothing but artificial constructs by way of the mimetic identification and repetition performed by the narrator as such. In this sense, Tina's unexpected proposition of female desire has triggered the narrator's gender panic, exposing queerness (that is, fictitiousness and unnaturalness) in the 'natural' construction of male identity and subjectivity, and by extension of the very patriarchal, and hence homosocial, socio-historical continuum itself, that surrounds and sustains them. Thus, by the end of the narrator's visionary wandering through Venice—the "city of exhibition"(48)—the whole scenery transforms itself into a vast stage of martial comedy:

> As you sit in your gondola, the footways that in certain parts edge the canals assume to the eye the importance of a stage, meeting it at the same angle, and the Venetian figures, moving to and fro against the battered scenery of their little houses of comedy, strike you as members of an endless dramatic troupe. (140)

Narrated and described in the present tense in which "you" displaces "I," this watery theater dissolves territorial boundaries between subject and object, the seer and the seen, and the narrating present and the narrated past, confounding these terms inside out, to and fro. Having entered this Venetian theater under an assumed name whereby neither his "*nom de guerre*"(52) nor his real name is given, he cannot help but displace a stable identity for himself. Adrift in this engulfing whirl of estrangement, he is no longer a privileged seer in the drama, acutely embarrassed by the eyes of his gondolier.

As we have seen, the reciprocal watchfulness has charged every relationship in the novella: then, this sense of ubiquitous theatricality exposes an indifferentiating interchange of audience and stage as simultaneous subjects and objects of spectatorship, decentering their hierarchy. Thereby everyone is at once spectator and spectacle, and there is no privileged position as the unseen seeing. Such a loss of centeredness reveals that both in Venice and in the Bordereau palazzo the narrator has been none other than one of the actors in comedy, not only a subject but also an object of gaze—the gaze of the "prying" servant, the "eye[ing]" doctor (117), the gondolier, Juliana, and above all, Tina—or including, even, that of the reader. Toward the ending, this destabilizing tendency gives another turn to dismantle the hierarchy of seer/seen, even of narrator/narrated he is attempting to impose on his narrative.

The next day, when the narrator "open[s] [his] eyes"(140) with revived, renewed passion for the papers, he returns to the Bordereau mansion. But here, the unstableness of his vision becomes more prominent than ever. In his eyes, Tina transfigures herself into the "angelic . . . beautified . . . younger" person (141). Her transformation in his vision at their last interview is the most remarkable instance of the relativity that infiltrates his view throughout the narrative. This transfiguration, or to use the original phrase in the 1888 text, this "optical trick"(*Norton* 186), is revised in the New York Edition as the "trick of *her* expression" and the "magic of *her* spirit"(141; emphases added). These possessive pronouns allow us to see that this metamorphosis is less by the projection of the narrator's renewed desire for the papers than by the adjustment of his vision, however momentary, affected by the expression of Tina's spirit, her interiority. That is to say, what causes this trick in the narrator's eyes is her strength to forgive, or more probably, her capacity for self-representation in the other's vision/narrative, both of which are far from the inward "inefficiency"(65) the narrator at first envisages in her. We may say

that the art of feeling, understanding and expressing—the art indispensable for creation—is now on her side. Thus, she takes an initiative in the story, while the narrator can do almost nothing but repeat "Miss Tina's own voice" mechanically:

> "Good-by—good-by?" I repeated, with an inflection interrogative and probably foolish.
> . . . . And now she had the force of soul—Miss Tina with force of soul was a new conception—to smile at me in her abjection.
> "What shall you do—where shall you go?" I asked.
> "Oh I don't know. I've done the great thing. I've destroyed the papers."
> "Destroyed them?" I wailed.
> "Yes; what was I to keep them for? I burnt them last night, one by one, in the kitchen."
> "One by one?" I coldly echoed it.
> "It took a long time—there were so many." The room seemed to go round me as she said this and a real darkness for a moment descended upon my eyes. (141-142)

Here, we may say that both vision and voice, swooning into darkness, have left the narrator and shifted to Tina. It is quite noticeable that, from the beginning, the Aspern papers have existed exclusively in Tina's narrative realm. She admits she had seen the papers, touched them, transferred them, taken them in hand, and now has burnt them; but all that is solely on her words. What the narrator actually touches is only a small portrait of Aspern. The reader cannot ascertain, through the narrator's voice and view, the presence of the papers—the origin and objective of his narrative. Instead, while the narrator furtively scrutinizes Juliana's bedroom, we are told she "at once noted [his eyes'] direction and read . . . what was in them"(116). Here, Tina notices him staring hard at the secretary, "reads" his eyes and hidden desire behind them. Later on she says she has transferred the papers to it, and after Juliana's death avows she has them in her hands. In other words, it is Tina who has mainly narrated the story of the Aspern papers and their whereabouts, which enables her to veer the vector of the narrator's gaze and desire. As it is, the narrator's prospect ends in failure, and so does Tina's to marry him. But while the narrator still fails to get hold of the story, being too bewildered by confusion and too agonized by his loss as ever to get a detached insight or hindsight, Tina

can embrace herself, negotiate her past and present experience, to provide the story with an end. Even in her failure she can smile at the narrator with the force of her soul, rather triumphantly.[20] She takes her leave of their story, now as an individual agency, to make a step toward, and even beyond, the ending.

Significantly, when she leaves the narrator's view, Tina does what she did not the day before: She gives him "one look." "I have never forgotten it and I sometimes still suffer from it, though it was not resentful"(142), the narrator confesses. Her "look," different from the monolithic formation of "gaze," opens up a space for otherness in the consolidating device of spectatorship. This returned look from Tina, which still haunts the narrator as ever, invites us to go beyond the given narrative perspective, to look at the story from the other viewpoint rather than from its focal center. She may leave like a pathetic comedian, but in her large eyes she possesses an ethical vision, independent of the narrator's: the privacy one wants to preserve must be preserved. Her look thus advocates, if silently, a right to preserve—or create—one's inviolate territory of selfhood, the territory not only for one's self but also for the other's. In other words, by returning the look to the narrator, she recasts the gaze as something neither oppositional nor voyeuristic; and at the same time as a female subject's self-empowering property. She does take action, does "the great thing," that is to declare the sacrilege, to burn the "sacred relics" in the kitchen—women's sphere—and by doing so becomes an agency of a story and, quite probably, of a life. As she says earlier "'I don't know how the days pass. We've no life'"(69), Tina has been long entrapped with her aunt in the past and memory of the dead. Then, when she makes the decision, she releases herself from the past to live in the present.

In contrast, the narrator, who has failed to redeem the papers from the past, seems also to be failing in retrieving meaning from his own past and narrative. Of course, he knows that his quest has failed. The only material he has possessed, Aspern's portrait now hanging above his writing-table, can only give him a sense of loss; that is, his look entails his own lack—or castration. As many critics have argued, however, it remains dubious whether the narrator really knows the nature of his loss.[21] He concludes the narrative thus: "When I look at [the portrait] I can scarcely bear my loss—I mean of the precious papers"(142). His words sound insufficient to carry conviction fully to the reader, even implying his lack of insight to the end, which in turn suggests his inability to write fully. Such a view expands when we consider the fact that James revised this last sentence from the original text that ends thus: "When I

look at it my chagrin at the loss of the letters becomes almost intolerable"(*Norton* 137). This revision of the original conclusion, as Wayne Booth has pointed out, indicates James's emphasis on the tale's irony to accentuate a double meaning, which suggests that, while the narrator confirms his own words with "I mean," there is the possibility of other meanings—that he has lost something more precious than the papers.[22] Perhaps what the narrator has lost is not only the Aspern papers but his integrity, his possible emotional life, and his own literary authority, either visionary or moral, which must have been the ability to feel, understand and express everything. His sight may get a vague glimpse of the real nature of his loss, but falls short.

According to Booth, James's tales told by unreliable narrators embrace a "double focus" or double subject, that is, an "incompletely resolved" chasm between the narrator and the story, much as that between the author's original intention and the written text[23]: as a result, the narrative told with the upfront intention of the narrator implicitly betrays another story, another subject. Indeed, the textual sleight of hand in the subtle composition of narrative ethics and aesthetics in "The Aspern Papers" renders the moral vision of the narrator highly complex. One should never ignore the narrator's cogent loyalty to the duty of recovering the lost literary manuscripts, his faith in art as a public property, and his inadvertent but consequent role as a conveyer of the present life to the desolate garden and Tina. However, if the narrated world is constructed for the reader by the process of signification, structured as the subject against the object and enacted by the center of consciousness, then this narrative, more radically in its revision, simultaneously signifies another in its margin while it tells the narrator's tale. Or, his telling *shows* a different story—a story seen from the outer sphere of its focus. In this manner the text questions the very subject and male gaze it authorizes, splitting apart the intradiegetic vision and the extradiegetic view, and even inviting a radical destabilization of the narrative and cultural complicity among gaze, gender and power. As a result, what the narrator means in narrating tacitly evades his writing, and the text demands that the reader look beyond his ken, to think whether his subjectivity, moral vision and human insight are reliable or not, just as his recurrent word "confidence" continues to evoke to us its two sides of meaning—faith and fraud, trust and trick.

Power of art in James may ideally lie in the position of supreme vision, of seeing without being seen; but at the same time, his novels also show frequently how it in turn can make a spectacle of itself. As an eminent

instance, this novella makes the reader aware that there can be another view to the story. In particular, looks cast from women often call our attention to the reverse of action and narration, decentering the tale's focus, so that they threaten the narrator's univocality and single-focus. "The Aspern Papers" is elaborated in such simultaneous construction and deconstruction of *the* view, much as in the narrator's successive approaches and discontents of vision. In this sense, the text offers a critique of its own ideology.[24] Then, we may say that in this tale James has elaborated a position for himself, to make a step toward the consummate performance of a nineteenth-century male novelist who traversed the masculine and feminine spheres[25]—toward the moment when Maggie Verver, the heroine of his last novel, *The Golden Bowl*, finally obtains her vision to negotiate the story of her own will and desire. He thus presents in this tale the possibility of double vision, inviting us to look from the other side of gaze and gender.

Notes

1 See, for example, Laurence B. Holland, *The Expense of Vision: Essays on the Craft of Henry James* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1964) for detailed readings of Jamesian vision in search for the reconciliation between art and morality. For an overview on the technical use of visual arts and their thematic importance in James's fiction, see Adeline R. Tintner, *Henry James and the Lust of the Eyes* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1993). For a more literal analysis on the vision of Jamesian observers and their ontological insecurity in capitalist society, see Carolyn Porter's *Seeing and Being: The Plight of the Participant Observer in Emerson, James, Dams, and Faulkner* (Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1981). On the obsessive vision in correspondence to the nineteenth-century consumer culture, see Jean-Christophe Agnew, "The Consuming Vision of Henry James, " in *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980*, Richard W. Fox and T. J. J. Lears (eds.), (New York: Pantheon, 1983): pp. 65-100. Mark Seltzer considers the intricate relation between vision and power (i.e. surveillance) in James's fiction in *Henry James and the Art of Power* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984). For a discussion of the relations of seeing and male homoerotic currents, see Michael Moon, "Sexuality and the Visual Terrorism in *The Wings of the Dove*," in *Criticism* 28 (1986): pp. 427-43. For the interrelation among gaze, power and pleasure in the making of subjectivity, see Beth Newman, "Getting Fixed: Feminine Identity and Scopic Crisis in *The Turn of the Screw*" in *Novel: A Forum on Fiction 26* (1992), pp. 43-64.

2 R. P. Blackmur (ed.), *The Art of the Novel* (New York: Scribner, 1962): pp. 155, 46, 153-54.

[3] Seltzer, p. 41.

[4] Blackmur, pp. 66, 5, 46.

[5] For example, see Nancy K. Miller, "Performances of the Gaze: Stael's *Corinne, or Italy*" in *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing* (New York: Columbia UP, 1988), and Perter Brooks, "The Body in the Field of Vision" in *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993). Beth Newman also begins her discussion on *The Turn of the Screw* by drawing Laura Mulvey's feminist film theory.

[6] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in *Screen* 16 (1975): pp. 12, 13.

[7] Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator" in *Screen* 23 (1982): p. 77.

[8] Stephen Heath, "Difference" in *Screen* 19 (1978): p. 92.

[9] See Elizabeth Allen, *A Woman's Place in the Novels of Henry James* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984); Virginia C. Fowler, *Henry James's American Girl: The Embroidery on the Canvas* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1984); John Carlos Rowe, *The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1984); William Veeder, "Henry James and the Uses of the Feminine" in Laura Claridge and Elizabeth Langland eds. *Out of Bounds: Male Writers and Gender(ed) Criticism* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1990), pp. 219-251. For James's troubled gender (and sexual) identity and identification, see Veeder; and Richard Hall, "An Obscure Hurt: the Sexuality of Henry James: Part II," *New Republic* 28 (1979): 25-29.

[10] For example, Veeder argues that James's frequent "uses of the feminine" and cross-gender identification as a defensive, compensatory and therapeutic device serve in order to circumvent the psychic and cultural forces of castration.

[11] Millicent Bell, "Woman in the Jamesian Eye," in The Mercantile Library's lecture series (New York, 1995): p.8.

[12] Most famously, William Dean Howells comments on James that, he is "so supremely gifted in divining women and portraying them," that even his male readers are "of a more feminine fineness, probably, in their perceptions and intuitions, than those other men who do not read him"(126). See Howells's review, "Mr. Henry James's Later Work," *North American Review* CLXXVI (1903): 125-37.

[13] Page references in parentheses are to the Penguin Classics edition, *The Aspern Papers and The Turn of the Screw* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), reprinted from the New York Edition of 1907. Citations from the 1888 original text are to the Norton Critical edition, *Tales of Henry James* (New York: Norton, 1984), and will appear in parentheses with *Norton*.

[14] William Veeder, "The Aspern Portrait" in *Henry James Review* 20 (1999): 22-42.

[15] A similar and more complex structure of gaze and gender can be seen in another first-person narrative, *The Turn of the Screw* (New York: Norton, 1966). Here, the subject of vision and voice is a woman; but considering the fact that the governess-narrator describes herself as a "sea-captain" commanding "at the helm" of a drifting

ship (10), who desires to succeed "where many another girl might have failed"(28), the gender of her task is rather tilted toward the masculine. Therefore, as Beth Newman suggests, the governess's double, crisscrossing desire to take at once the masculine and the feminine positions of scopic structure—to see (and govern the children as a "supreme authority"[5] at Bly) and to be seen (and recognized by her "master" in London)—makes her narrative all the more controversial.

[16] For the detailed structuralist analysis of this tale in terms of folkloristics, especially of a quest romance, see Kappeler, *Writing and Reading in Henry James* (New York: Columbia UP, 1980): pp, 14-57.

[17] Rowe, p. 114.

[18] In this sense, the function of Juliana's mask is similar to that of women's glasses in film, as a device of looking. According to Doane, a figure of woman wearing glasses is significant as a symbol of "active looking," of seeing rather than being seen. See Doane, p. 83.

[19] Nancy K. Miller, "Novels of Innocence: Fictions of Loss," in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 11 (1978), p. 333.

[20] Several critics have also given evaluative readings of Tina's subjectivity independent from the narrator, which tends to be dismissed in the critical history of this tale. See Millicent Bell, *Meaning in Henry James* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991) p. 203; Joseph Church, "Writing and the Dispossession of Woman in *The Aspern Papers*," *American Imago* 47, pp. 23-42; Barbara Jensen-Osinski, "The Key to the palpable past: A Study of Miss Tina in *The Aspern Papers*," *Henry James Review* 3 (1981); Rowe, pp. 116-18.

[21] See, for example, Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1961); Kenneth Graham, *Henry James: The Drama of Fulfillment* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1975); Daniel J. Schneider, "The Unreliable Narrator: James's 'The Aspern Papers' and the Reading of Fiction," *Studies in Short Fiction* 13 (1976), pp. 43-49.

[22] Booth, pp. 354-64.

[23] Ibid., pp. 354, 339-46.

[24] As an extension of such double-edgedness of the text's critique, Rowe also reads this tale in the feminist grain, that through the "androgyny of the author," the tale involves "a critique of the ways that literature may be said to serve the phallocentrism of patriarchal culture"(91, 114).

[25] According to Leon Edel's biographical inference about the novelist's gender and sexual identity, James was not decidedly homosexual nor heterosexual, even nor bisexual. He was, Edel concludes, in "auto-eroticism," having no relation with women nor with men for his life (see his introduction to *Henry James Letters* vol. IV [Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984], p. 15.) Edel also states that during James's "treacherous" period of writing, a kind of "confusion of the author himself" in gender appears in some of his works as a "spiritual transvestite," which is seen exemplarily in *The Turn of the Screw*, written, in "disguise of femininity," ten years after the

publication of "The Aspern Papers." Whether we call it confusion or consummation in James's art, we can certainly observe in these two novellas the doubleness of male/female subjectivity, along with the doubleness of subject, reading and interpretation. See Leon Edel, *Henry James: The Treacherous Years, 1895-1901* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1953): pp. 196-200, 240, 250-51.