

**Crafting the Reader's Experience:
Dramatization and Re-constructing Reality in Henry James' *The Aspern Papers***

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Abstract

This essay examines the narration style in Henry James' novella, *The Aspern Papers*, by examining the varied linguistic structures that dominate the narrative. It attempts to reveal some of the stylistic choices that intensify and dramatize the retelling of the story by the unnamed narrator. This study adopts quantitative and qualitative approaches in gathering and analyzing the examined linguistic and literary content. The essay finds that in *The Aspern Papers*, the notorious narrator receives the sympathy of the reader instead of his two female victims, Tina and Juliana. The study highlights that the narrator manipulates language structures by choosing certain linguistic constructions in the story bringing the reader into the narrator's disposition instead of sympathizing with his victims.

Keywords: Narration, Henry James, linguistic choices, narrator, sympathy.

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صناعة تجربة القارئ: التهويل وإعادة

سرد الحقيقه في قصة أوراق "اسبيرن" للكاتب "هنري جيمس"

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ملخص

يتناول هذا البحث الأسلوب القصصي للكاتب الأمريكي "هنري جيمس" في قصة أوراق "أسبرين" من خلال تفحص أبرز التراكيب اللغوية التي تكون القصة. ويهدف هذا البحث الى إظهار التراكيب اللغوية المستخدمة في القصة والتي تهول وتضخم إعادة سرد الأحداث من قبل الراوي المجهول. وتتبنى هذه الدراسة أساليب بحثية نوعية وكمية في جمع وتحليل البيانات اللغوية والأدبية. وقد أظهرت هذه الدراسة أن إعادة سرد أحداث قصة أوراق "أسبرين" تمكن الراوي المتلاعب من الحصول على تعاطف القراء بدلا من ضحيته بطنتي القصة "تينا وجوليانا". تخلص هذه الدراسة إلى أن الراوي يتلاعب في السرد القصصي من خلال اختيار تراكيب لغوية معينة في القصة لكسب تأييد وتعاطف القراء بدل من "تينا" و "جوليانا".

الكلمات المفتاحية: السرد القصصي، "هنري جيمس"، تراكيب لغوية، الراوي، تعاطف.

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1. Introduction

No scholar of nineteenth-century American literature contests the literary talent of Henry James. In fact, literary critics and scholars maintain that James has a unique style of writing which secures him a salient place among the towering literary figures of the time. For example, Hoover (2007) maintains that James is “an exceptionally self-conscious stylist” (p. 174). As is the case in great literary works, the meaning in James’ works is communicated through the careful construction of the language of his narratives. Commenting on style, Traught and Pratt (1980) assert that style “results from a tendency of a speaker or writer to consistently choose a certain structure over others available in the language” (p. 29). Unmistakably, James is one of those writers, he carefully constructs meaning in his stories not through the course of events only, but by means of his linguistic ability as well. In *The Aspern Papers*, for example, Schneider (1976) argues that the meaning lies in “basic structural oppositions, contrast” and “polarities ... in the total pattern of oppositions as understood and evaluated by the author” (p. 48). In other words, James crafts the reader’s experience in his works through stylistic and linguistic choices: he lets his work elicit the reader’s emotions, feelings, and perceptions without directly interfering to give a moral lesson or some other kind of ethical teaching. James, actually, employs his linguistic abilities and style to create a text that might balance the reader’s experience rather than directing or constructing it. Miller (1997) also notices, “in each story by James, the characters behave in a certain way and the story comes out in a certain way” (p. 195). Schneider’s and Miller’s observations invite us to consider James’ fiction beyond the plain meaning driven by the plot alone.

The Aspern Papers is a short novella, yet the narrator constructs the retelling of the story in such a way that it elicits the reader’s emotions and perception. The narrator, who is also the protagonist, tells about his experience during his enterprise to secure Aspern’s poems. In the process, the reader is brought as intimately as possible to the narrator, causing the reader to feel the narrator’s frame of mind. The narrator’s stylistic choices are geared towards intensifying and dramatizing a make-believe dilemma and struggle. In *The Aspern Papers*, the narrator’s voice is intimate and it demands the reader to listen attentively as the narrator retells his story, a story that he claims to fail to understand. Paying close attention to the narrator’s voice one can notice that the narrator is interested in making the reader’s emotions match his. As I argue, the narrator manipulates the situation to blur the difference between the victim and the offender, and in which the way he does, so he twists the reader’s perception of reality. The

unnamed narrator, though clever, pretends that he cannot decode the contradiction in Juliana and Tina's characters. We are told that he has heard that Tina and Juliana "have the reputation of witches" (James, 2001, p. 5), and they will lead him to his ruin (p. 22). The narrator even seeks Aspern's picture seemingly looking to find his way out of the maze that he claims that he is forced into experiencing, he says, "I looked at Jeffery Aspern's face in the little picture ... consulted ... Aspern's delightful eyes with my own: I asked him what on earth was the matter with Miss Tina ... he might have been amused at my case (73). Moreover, the narrator always talks about his loss rather than the damage he does to Tina and Juliana. He even ends the story with a statement of loss, he says, "I can scarcely bear my loss" (80). By ending the story by talking about his loss, the narrator aims at leaving the reader with a lasting impression that he, the narrator, is the victim. A victim who is unjustly punished as he is forced to relive the experience every time he recalls his loss.

This essay reveals some of the most dominant stylistic and grammatical choices in *The Aspern Papers* used to make the reader empathize with the narrator regardless of his declaration that "hypocrisy" and duplicity" are his "only chance" to "arrive at [his] spoils (James, 2001, p. 6). After a close examination of the story, I noticed that parentheticals, personal pronouns, verbs of perception, and the grammatical passive voice are one of the most dominant stylistic choices used throughout the story. These structures have the effect of creating empathy for the narrator and dramatizing the situation. Similar to what he has done with Juliana and Tina, the narrator re-narrates his story using the mentioned structures heavily to outsmart the reader. He aims at aligning the reader with his own version of reality and in the process of re-telling the story he manipulates the reader who is the witness, jury, and judge.

2. Literature Review

For the most part, previous literature on *The Aspern Papers* focused on the plot of the novella and representations of Henry James as an author, and as a person in the work, paying little attention to the linguistic world of the narration. For example, Bell (1981) explores the purpose of irony in the plot of *The Aspern Papers* and he argues that "James uses irony as an artistic means for highlighting an unqualified moral value: the responsibility of being a human" (p. 282). Scholl (2013) asserts that Henry James has constructed the plot in the novella in such a strategic way that it "repeatedly alter[s] and shift[s] the dynamics of power" in the story (p. 72). According

to Scholl, this shift of power enables Tina to emerge victorious while the narrator is left disappointed. Salter (2014), through focusing on stylistic and linguistic choices, shows that Henry James in *The Aspern Papers* uses his linguistic abilities as a means to depict and examine Italy, the country where the story takes place. Salter argues that “an emphasis on stylistic surface illustrates how contemplations of Italy dramatized a distinct struggle of James’s writing career: how to balance the perceived necessity of plot ... with the rich surface of style, understood to represent an embrace of extra-temporal spectacle” (p. 241). Bauer (2017) argues that Henry James, in his works, “repeatedly demonstrates how modern patriarchal masculinities fail to establish themselves as stable identities” and that in *The Aspern Papers* James “turns traditionally gendered power relations upside-down” when he let two female characters in the novella control most of the strings of the plot (p. 20). Tsimpouki (2018) reads *The Aspern Papers* as a depiction of what so-called the “archival drive” (p. 147). Tsimpouki argues that the anonymous narrator’s hysterical efforts to salvage Aspern’s poems embodies the Derridean conception of the “archival fever” (p. 167). Tsimpouki also explains that when Tina burns the poems the reduction of Aspern’s papers to ashes this reconstructs the past because the “erased archive allows for the formation of a different archive [Nevertheless] consisting of narrative appropriations, ambiguities, unanswered questions, and second-guesses” (p. 168). Sommer (2020) reads *The Aspern Papers* as a work that was inspired by the idea of the private literary archive. According to Sommer, the archive, especially the private one, creates a tension between what can be seen and touched and what remains invisible as certain entities control the process. As Sommer argues, Aspern’s poems “become auratic - to James’s protagonist as well as to his readers – precisely because they never surface in the text itself, neither as material nor as textual objects” (p. 385). Buonomo (2021) draws a close connection between the narrator in *The Aspern Papers* and the narrator of Edger Allan Poe’s *The Tell-Tale Heart*. Buonomo argues that in constructing the narrator of *The Aspern Papers*, Henry James “foreshadows” the narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart” in the sense that both “narrative voice [s]” in the two stories are “simultaneously lucid in stating” their “designs ... and obsessions” and guilt (p. 4). More recently, Boyce (2022) explores *The Aspern Papers* in terms of the sensory and intellectual pleasure some individuals get from interacting with past literary figures. Boyce argues *The Aspern Papers* is a novella that shows sympathy for those who seek connection with the dead (p. 78-79).

Unlike previous scholarship on *The Aspern Papers*, this paper focuses on the unique attributes of parentheticals, personal pronouns, verbs of perceptions, and grammatical passive voice in the novella. I argue that these linguistic and grammatical choices are essential to pull the reader into the world of the narration and provide substance to the version of the story desired by the narrator. The narrator uses these writing styles to reveal specific information and create a psychological profile for himself. His thought process and emotional patterns become reality, and the reader is forced to share in his experiences. Without this style of storytelling, the content would be changed in many ways. It would compromise both the perceptions conveyed by the narrator and those taken on by the reader. The dramatization and empathy would vanish in the absence of these styles. The reader's ability to sympathize with the narrator would also disappear.

3. Discussion

Jeffrey Aspern is an American poet who passes away leaving several love poems with his now old-aged lover Juliana. Juliana is an American expatriate who lives in Venice, Italy in a big house with her spinster niece Tina who both seem to struggle financially. The unnamed narrator is an American editor who works for a publishing magazine in England. He and his "English fellow worshiper," John Cumor, both worship Jeffrey Aspern whom they consider their "god" (James, 2001, p. 2-3). Cumor has written to Juliana asking her to give him access to the poems, but she declines his request and offer. Accordingly, the unnamed narrator takes it upon himself to obtain the "literary remains" (6) of Aspern from Juliana and Tina by deceit. He uses his knowledge of the poor financial conditions of the aunt and the niece to take up rent with them so he can obtain the poems even through theft. In the process, the narrator plays a lover to Tina in hope that she would help him put his hands on the letters. One night while he is trying to steal the papers, he is discovered by Juliana who dies from the trauma. The narrator flees the house, but he comes back after several days to finish his project. When he returns to the house, the narrator finds that things have changed between him and Tina who tells him that she burnt the papers and there were so many of them. The narrator goes back to England, but he insists that he is haunted by the experience and his life has changed in several ways. Of course, the experience must haunt the narrator as his plot causes the death of a character and the disruption of another character's world. To deal with his guilty conscious, as this study shows, the narrator retells the events of the story, yet he chooses certain language structures to

convince the reader, and himself along the way, that he is a victim as well.

To show exactly how the narrator uses linguistic structures in *The Aspern Papers* to distance himself from his confessed duplicity, the essay is divided into three focused sections: parentheticals, personal pronouns and verbs of perceptions, and grammatical passive voice. Each section will list several relevant examples for discussion in hope of pointing out some of the linguistic structures used by the narrator to construct his own reality and present himself as the victim in the story. I listed several examples under each section to give the reader an idea about the frequency of the discussed structures. I do not intend to discuss all the listed examples; however, some of the listed examples will be discussed to reveal their linguistic and literary content. Also, in conducting this study, I used a quantitative method to locate the linguistic data while I used a qualitative approach to discuss the literary context of the text.

3.1. Parentheticals

The discussion in this section will depend on Arthur L. Palacas' (1989) article "Parentheticals and Personal Voice." Palacas defines parentheticals as a "linguistic strategy for projecting the reflective mentality." He makes an analogy between parentheticals and dramatic asides, claiming that they both give the audience or the reader "the secret thoughts of the character" and "access" to the character's "self" (p. 510). In other words, parentheticals have the effect of projecting the speaker as innocent as they can indicate vulnerability. Palacas also shows that parentheticals "are structurally unattached and are added into a sentence from outside" (p. 512). Just as dramatic asides allow a character to interrupt the flow of a play to talk directly to the audience; parentheticals are used as a break for the narrator or writer to talk directly to the reader. Moreover, Palacas gives several reasons why a writer should interrupt the flow of a sentence by using parentheticals. He mentions that "whatever the strategy, the reflective voice implies a self, a first-person, expressing reflection for the benefit of the implied second-person, listener/reader, thus drawing the latter into the communicative event" and that makes the "writing more personal and engaging" (p. 516). Parentheticals make the sentence more personal, which in turn generates empathy between the reader and the speaker. In this section, I will focus on one type of parentheticals referred to as "equivalents." As defined by Palacas, an equivalent parenthetical is "a paragrammatic structure that duplicates the grammatical role of an equivalent to, elaboration on or replacement for the immediately preceding structure" (p. 517-18). An equivalent parenthetical "represents the author's considered revised version"

of the sentence or phrase that precedes it (p. 518). Table (1) below shows some examples of equivalent parentheticals in *The Aspern Papers*:

Table (1) Examples of Equivalent Parentheticals from the Text

1	It was certainly strange beyond all strangeness.
2	We had to deal with phantoms and dust, the mere echoes of echoes.
3	And now I appeared to show it all as a bribe—a bribe to make her turn in some way against her aunt.
4	I had been exceedingly careful; to which my companion rejoined that Miss Bordereau had assured her she had had a scene with me—a scene that had upset her.
5	If I did not leave them alone she meant me to come for a purpose—a purpose now indicated by the quick, fantastic idea that to oblige me she had unlocked the secretary.
6	The shock I had given her—the shock I may also say she had given me
7	Something had troubled her—something in particular that affected her relations with me.
8	But I had to make the best of it, had, in writing to Miss Tina, to minimize it.
9	I touched the button with my hand—a mere touch would tell me.
10	After all they were under my hand—they had not escaped me yet.

In addition to making the “writing more personal and engaging,” parentheticals imply a pause, a time that the narrator takes for revision. This revision, or more precisely the repetition in the revision, is a deliberate style used to craft and manipulate the reader’s experience in the text. The purpose is to intensify and dramatize the situation. The reader is brought closer to the narrator’s world causing the reader to empathize with the narrator. When the narrator does so, he constructs a level of intimacy and closeness with the reader allowing the reader access to more details. The reader also feels superior and important; he/she is recognized and brought into the

communicative world of the narration. An example sentence would be: 1) “It was certainly strange beyond all strangeness.”

In the sentence above, the narrator talks about how he is in distress to find Aspern’s poems and that all the research was brought to a dead end. Also, what the narrator here expresses indirectly is that there is a high level of attachment to Aspern’s papers to the point it can be referred to as spiritual. The use of the parenthetical, “beyond strangeness,” is meant to reemphasize and amplify the state of desperation and bewilderment which is a narrative that has the potential of touching the reader. Moreover, the parenthetical presents a hopeless situation which by default indicates likely desperate measures. The presentation of the situation here as not only strange but “beyond strangeness” prepares the reader to take on the narrator’s disposition and, at the same time, accept and excuse his duplicity and trickery. Also, it is noticeable that the narrator does this presentation very early in the story to create an intensity to force the reader to collude with him.

One of the narrator’s methods to get sympathy from the reader is by creating an atmosphere of mystery in the novella. This is, most often, achieved through systematic repetition in which the narrator presents himself to the reader as a person who fails successively to understand what’s happening in the story. For instance, in the second example in the table above, 2) “We had to deal with phantoms and dust, the mere echoes of echoes.” This has the effect of creating a level of solidarity between the narrator and the reader as the reader tends to have empathy with those who are frustrated by experiencing loss. It is worth stating that the narrator understands that the reader can relate to the sense of loss from personal experience.

The sense of mystery, which is generated through such sentences as in number 2, is carried out and enhanced whenever the narrator uses a parenthetical to distance himself from an event where he is its agent and manufacturer. Example number 4 in the table above explains the matter: “I had been exceedingly careful; to which my companion rejoined that Miss Bordereau had assured her she had had a scene with me—a scene that had upset her.” The narrator in this sentence describes a conversation with Tina during which he confesses to offering Juliana money in exchange for Jeffery Aspern’s portrait. Juliana suffers from severe depression from the thought of selling her lover’s portrait. The narrator uses the parenthetical, “a scene that had upset her,” to distance himself from the encounter with Juliana. In other words, by leaving himself out of the last part of the sentence, the narrator

shifts the agency of the action on the “scene,” not the narrator. This helps create a sense of mystery in the story and sympathy for the narrator as someone who is neither in control of the events in the story nor is he aware of the happenings.

Dramatizing the situation is another technique the narrator uses to establish closeness to the reader. For example, sentence number (3) “And now I appeared to show it all as a bribe—a bribe to make her turn in some way against her aunt.” Here, the narrator talks about the time when he takes Tina on a ride in his gondola in Venice. The narrator communicates with the reader his real intention and inner thoughts. The revision is considered his sound inner self that condemns his process of manipulating Tina. The narrator, now and then, does not shy away from announcing his intentions to the reader, yet he uses such techniques to protest his processes to show the moral struggle. The tension that such sentences create forces the reader to reconsider their evaluations of his methods and his morality positively. He aims at projecting problematic situations during which the reader forgets about the bigger image and focuses on the narrator's so-called moral struggle. The parenthetical also pulls the reader deeper into the narrator's inner thoughts, personalizing his experience. The purpose of this parenthetical equivalent is to expose the narrator's disposition to the reader and create an understanding of his character. The sentence above could be rewritten without the parenthetical as follows: (3b) And now I appeared to show it all as a bribe to make her turn in some way against her aunt. The general meaning would be the same. Yet, without the parenthetical equivalent, surely the feelings and emotions it creates within the reader would be different. In the simpler, shorter sentence, the dramatization and empathy vanish, and the text no longer evokes the same intensity of feelings in the reader. The shorter sentence loses its intensity as the absence of the parenthetical means that the reader spends less time reflecting on the situation as the word “bribe” is not emphasized here. The parenthetical in the original sentence invites the reader to relive the narrator's experience. As a result, in the absence of the parenthetical, the reader is less involved in the narrator's version of the story. The discussion above is also true for all the examples listed above in Table (1). For each of them, if the parenthetical equivalent were to be removed, the reader would be left with a minimum emotional connection to the narrator. The narrator depends on establishing emotional connectedness with the reader because the reader is the entity whose judgment can help the narrator carry less guilt regarding his actions.

3.2. Personal Pronouns and Verbs of Perception

Different types of literary repetition occur in *The Aspern Papers*; however, this paper will focus only on two types of repetition: personal pronouns and verbs of perception. Personal pronouns are words such as *I*, *my*, and *me*. Verbs of perceptions include words such as *see*, *think*, *feel*, *look*, and *appear*. They are “mental processes” that reflect “something that goes on in the internal world of the mind” (Thompson, 2013, p. 92). In Table (2), I list several examples from the story that collectively form a cluster of repeated words. The table aims to give a visual image of the repeated words and their occurrence in the sentences.

Table (2): Examples of Personal Pronouns and Verbs of Perception

1	I, saw, my	For a minute she made no answer, and I saw that my proposal failed to meet with her approbation.
2	I, saw, me	As I stood in the sala again I saw that Miss Tina had followed me.
3	I, saw, my	I saw that I only mystified her; for I had no wish to have it on my conscience that I might pass for having made love to her.
4	I, watched, saw	I watched her well as I pronounced that name but I saw nothing wonderful.
5	my, I, saw	My companion hesitated—I saw she was blushing.
6	I, thought, saw	I thought I saw what was coming.
7	I, saw, me	I saw that she was now quite full of a particular reason; it threw her forward--made her seize me, as I rose to meet her, by the arm.
8	I, thought	I thought I saw her smile ingenuously.
9	I, saw	I almost let my luminary drop and certainly I stepped back, straightening myself up at what I saw.
10	I, thought	I thought there ought to be some little form.
11	I, my, thought	but I grant that in my heart I thought the old woman capable of any weird maneuver.
12	I, me	When she pushed forward the heavy door behind me I felt that I had a foot in the citadel.
13	I, felt, my	I felt an irresistible desire to hold in my own for a

1	I, saw, my	For a minute she made no answer, and I saw that my proposal failed to meet with her approbation.
		moment the hand that Jeffrey Aspern had pressed.
14	I, felt, me	I felt that she was looking at me with great attention.
15	I, looked, my	I looked at the place with my heart beating as I had known it to do in the dentist's parlor
16	I, looked	And as I looked again at the old woman's wrappings I could imagine that she had not wished to allow people a reason to say that the great poet had overdone it.
17	me, appeared	It appeared to me that no man could have walked straighter in the given circumstances.
18	my, appeared	The other idea that had come into my head was connected with a high blank wall which appeared to confine an expanse of ground on one side of the house.
20	I, me, appear	I had scarcely said this, however, before I became aware that the speech was in questionable taste and might also do me the injury of making me appear too eager, too possessed of a hidden motive.
21	me, appeared	All the more that it appeared to me I had been extremely encouraged to leave it out of account.

Looking at Table (2) above, it is easy to notice that the personal pronouns *I*, *me*, and *my* are the most frequently used pronouns in the story to refer to the narrator. Throughout the story, the pronoun *I* occurs 1,622 times, the pronoun *my* occurs 469 times, and the pronoun *me* occurs 1,441 times. In addition, but much less used, the pronoun *they* occurs only 135 times. Juliana is mentioned 19 times and Tina 187. Whenever the pronoun *I* occurs in the story, most of the time it is the subject of the sentence. The object pronoun *me* and the possessive pronoun *my* often occur in sentences where the subjective pronoun *I* is the subject of the sentence. Looking at Table (2), it is clear that many sentences feature a combination of the personal pronouns (*I*, *me*, *my*) and verbs of perceptions (*felt*, *thought*, *saw*, *appear*, *felt*). This technique is used quite frequently in the story. In his book *Functional Syntax: Anaphora, Discourse, and Empathy*, Kuno (1987) defines empathy as “the speaker’s identification, which may vary in degree, with a person/thing that participates in the event or state that he describes in a sentence” (p. 206). The speaker’s syntactic position in a sentence is very

important for empathy, regardless of whether the speaker is the subject or the object of the sentence. Kuno explains that if the speaker of the sentence is also the subject of that sentence, then empathy is generated for that character (p. 207-12). In other words, occupying the subjective position in a sentence will win the reader's empathy. In *The Aspern Papers*, it is easy to notice that the subject pronoun *I* is frequently used along with the object pronoun *me* and the possessive pronoun *my* in the same sentence or paragraph. Logically, it can be concluded that if the subject of the sentence will easily win the empathy of the reader, as Kuno illustrates in his perspective of empathy, then any combination of a reflective pronoun that is used in the same sentence or paragraph with the subject pronoun *I* will definitely win the reader's empathy as it is already initiated. One can argue that the meaning(s) in the sentence that includes that kind of combination will be defined by the perspective of the subject. Table (2) above also shows that verbs of perceptions are frequently used in the story: "I saw/see" is used 34 times, "I felt/feel" 38, "I thought/think" 44, "I looked/look" 14, and "appear/appeared" 34. The verbs frequently occur in the same sentences as the subject pronoun *I*, the object pronoun *me*, the possessive pronoun *my*, or a combination of these three pronouns. However, verbs of perception are mostly used with the subjective pronoun *I*. The subject *I* is paired with verbs of perceptions in 146 sentences. Verbs of perceptions have to do with both mental and physical perceptions; they indicate personal experience and how that experience is perceived. They put the reader into the character's mind. This allows the reader to feel as if he is in the middle of the drama. This is necessary in the story so that the reader can live in the narrator's world. In *The Aspern Papers*, these verbs play a key role in conveying the narrator's personal experience and perception. As Hewish (2016) observes, the nameless narrator in *The Aspern Papers* "holds an obscured centrality in the work" (p. 254). The centrality of the narrator that Hewish points out comes from the fact that the narrator is almost always the subject of the sentence. Again, if we accept Kuno's perspective on empathy, then the narrator strategically uses verbs of perception so that the reader has no choice but to empathize with his personal experience and point of view. Verbs of perception are also used to dramatize the situation as they work like a dramatic soliloquy. Verbs of perceptions enable the character to think aloud, exposing his inner self to the reader: the reader sees what the character sees, hears what the character hears, and thinks what the character thinks. That's to say, the reader perceives what the character perceives. The narrator's sentences can be rewritten without using verbs of perception. The meaning remains the same, but the reader is no longer drawn into the narrator's

experiences. The sense of empathy and dramatization vanish. For example, sentence (1), "For a minute she made no answer, and I saw that my proposal failed to meet with her approbation," could be re-written as "For a minute she made no answer and then shortly declined the proposal." The reader would recognize what the narrator is talking about since it is obvious in the context. The narrator describes a moment when he desires to shake Juliana's hand, but she does not seem eager to do so. Similarly, sentence (16), "I felt that she was looking at me with great attention," can be stated simply as "She was looking with great attention." This sentence can be rewritten in many frames without losing its original meaning. I tried to eliminate the personal pronouns – mostly the subjective pronoun I– and all verbs of perception such as saw, felt, appear, look, and thought. The rewritten sentences still convey the same messages, but, of course, they feel different from the narrator's sentences because they lack the same emotion as the originals. The original sentences are loaded with stylistic word choices that arouse the reader's emotions. It is the narrator's style and word choice that causes the reader to empathize with him. The presence of the personal pronouns, alongside verbs of perception, makes the reader experience an emotional connection with the text. As mentioned earlier, Kuno's empathy perspective explains that the subject of the sentence will receive empathy. So by including personal pronouns, the reader's emotions are already directed to the narrator. Also, verbs of perception relate the personal experience as *seen*, *heard*, *felt*, *thought*, and *appeared* from the narrator's point of view. So the narrator uses two stylistic choices to ensure that the reader will empathize with him. Without this style, the effect of empathy would vanish. In the examples discussed above, as well as with many others throughout the text, the narrator uses personal pronouns, reflexive pronouns (both objective and possessive), and verbs of perception to create a story that emotionally connects the reader with him.

3.3. Passive Voice

The passive voice structure is simple: subject + auxiliary (be) + main verb (past participle). Despite its simple structure, passive voice is less common than active voice. Active voice is the normal voice or the dominant grammatical structure found in everyday usage. However, passive voice, according to Traugott and Pratt (1980), is a stylistic "deviance" because it is a "style [that] departs from linguistic norms" (p. 31). When the subject is the agent or doer of the action, the verb is in the active voice. Yet when the subject becomes the patient, target, or undergoer of the action, the verb is said to be in the passive voice. In other words, when a sentence construction

is changed from active voice to passive voice, the subject and the direct object switch grammatical roles. The direct object gets promoted to become the subject, and the subject gets demoted to an (optional) complement. Taugott and Pratt discuss Jan Mukarovsky's conceptions of the differences between ordinary languages and poetic languages. In Mukarovsky's terms, as Taugott and Pratt explain, the grammatical active voice structure can be described as the normal "background" (p. 31). Backgrounding is a sentence structure that is similar to everyday usage, like that of active voice (p. 31). Taugott and Pratt explain that "Everyday usage, according to Mukarovsky, 'automatizes' or conventionalizes language to the point that its users no longer perceive its expressive or aesthetic potential" (p.31). In other words, the active voice is more common than the passive voice, but it is less powerful. In contrast, the passive grammatical structure is in the foreground. Mukarovsky explains "foregrounding" as "bringing to attention" and "making new" (as cited in Taugott and Pratt, 1980, p. 31). It breaks the traditional mold and "de-automatizes" a sentence. As Taugott and Pratt put it, when writers use styles like passive voice, it is like "violating the norms of everyday language" (p. 31), which is a structure that can be catchy and interesting.

The order and arrangement in which words appear in a sentence, phrase, or text are important as well. As the French philosopher Blaise Pascal explains, "Words differently arranged have a different meaning, and meanings differently arranged have different effects" (as cited in Denham and Lobeck, 2012, p. 330). The word order and arrangement that the author chooses will affect how the reader responds to the text. As Thompson (2013) comments, "there is usually a particular reason for choosing a passive clause, whereas an active clause is the natural choice when there are no particular reasons for not choosing it" (p. 92). The passive voice has a word order that creates a sense of mystery in fictional writing. This can be especially powerful when the optional doer or agent is omitted. When this is the case, the omission is also a technique used to engage the reader emotionally. The passive voice highlights the object while it minimizes the importance of the subject. Table (3) shows some examples of passive sentences in the novella and compares them to possible active voice alternatives.

Table (3) Passive Structures and Possible Active Structures Alternative

	Passive Structures	Possible Active Structures Alternative
1	I had been afflicted by the same in talking with her before I took possession.	Talking with her had afflicted me before I took possession.
2	At first I was tempted to send her a reminder.	At first I wished to send her a reminder.
3	I had been called a publishing scoundrel.	Juliana called me a publishing scoundrel.
4	I had been told [that Juliana was still alive].	Someone has told me that Juliana was still alive.
5	I had been brought up in the common forms and a word of recognition now and then would have touched me in the right place.	I had behaved according to the rules and a word of recognition now and then would have the right outcome.
6	I had been struck with the circumstance in talking with her before I took possession	The circumstances of talking with her have struck me before I took possession.
7	I had been let into the house, after pulling the rusty bell wire.	The maid had let me into the house, after pulling the rusty bell wire.

The examples above show how passive structure can evoke more emotions and feelings toward the narrator. Kuno (1987) agrees that “when a passive sentence pattern is used, the speaker is closer to the referent of the new subject than to that of the old one” (p. 205). Kuno goes on to concur that in “a passive sentence, it is easier for the speaker to empathize with the referent of the subject” (p. 207). The passive grammatical structure does a much better job than the active structure in catching the reader’s attention, engaging stronger feelings in the reader, and allowing the reader to empathize with the subject. Furthermore, the passive voice dramatizes the narration. In dramatic asides, a character uses words to speak to the audience. However, the character forgets about the other characters in the play and speaks only to the audience. Asides are meant to separate the character from the action and inform the audience about his thoughts by

marginalizing the other characters. The structure of the passive voice is similar to dramatic asides, in the sense that the passive sentence puts the focus on what would usually be the object in a normal active sentence instead of the subject in that sentence. For example, looking at Table (3), sentence (3a) is in passive grammatical structure and (3b) is in active grammatical structure. Here the narrator talks about the night when he tries to steal the papers. Juliana suddenly appears behind him, and she calls him a “publishing scoundrel” (James, 2001, p. 66). When the narrator re-tells the story he expresses that he is greatly insulted by being called a “scoundrel.” The narrator’s strategy here is to put more emphasis on his insult and cover up his crime. The narrator chooses the passive voice here to distance Juliana who is the real victim (the encounter scares her to death); however, highlighting his experience:

3a. I had been called a publishing scoundrel.

3b. Juliana had called me a publishing scoundrel.

Sentence (3a) is in the passive voice, following the pattern of subject + auxiliary (be) + main verb (past participle). This sentence uses I + had been+ called. The passive voice places the focus on the pronoun I. As you can see from sentence 3b, “I” is not the focus of the sentence anymore, instead, Juliana is. By using the passive voice, the narrator turns the sentence around and highlights the object. This in turn accentuates the action in the passive structure and minimizes the importance of the subject of the active sentence. Passive sentences have a greater impact and effect on the reader. Sentence (3a) catches the reader’s attention and generates more empathy for the narrator as someone struck by some awful incident. To rephrase it, the narrator becomes a passive experiencer who lacks agency in the process, yet he is the focus of the main event.

The last sentence in Table (3), “I had been let into the house, after pulling the rusty bell wire,” can explain the lack of agency discussed above. The narrator spends months planning and plotting his enterprise to the point that he cannot be more prepared for it; yet, he tells the reader that he “had been let into the house” to tone his conspiracy. In fact, he is the one who asks the maid to be admitted into the house. He follows the maid “up the high staircase—stonier still, as it seemed—without an invitation” (James, 2001, p. 8) The narrator comments on the encounter, “I think she had meant I should wait for her below, but such was not my idea, and I took up my station in the sala” (p. 8). Yet the narrator’s sentence gives the reader the impression that he had no agency in the process. The passive grammatical sentences in the novella are just one type of technique that the narrator uses to distance himself from his duplicity, making the reader sympathize with

him and dramatize the situation. Passive voice can be used as a segue way to thematic roles. The narrator uses these techniques to present himself as the observer, patient, and experiencer who has no grasp on the overall plot. He aims at presenting himself as the victim who is manipulated unknowingly in hope that he would become the most memorable character in the story.

4. Conclusion

As Leonardo Buonomo (2021) illustrates, the narrator in *The Aspern Papers* is driven by a “desire to unburden” himself and that the urge to do so “coexists with an irrepressible need to justify, or at least to try to justify ... [his] actions, which ultimately makes” the retelling of the story “more human and compelling” (11). The overwhelming urge that the narrator has is rooted in a sense of guilt as his duplicity leads to the death of one of his victims (Juliana) and the heartbreak of another one (Tina). The way to unburden himself is through confession and sharing his guilt with the reader in a compelling way. As guilty as he is, the narrator is forced to tell the events almost exactly as they happen; yet he manipulates the language structures and chooses certain styles to align the reader's experience with his. As a result, the text of *The Aspern Papers* is manipulated and dramatized to win empathy for the narrator. He uses parentheticals to bring the reader closer to his inner self hoping that he will be judged positively to ease the guilt he carries around. As if the narrator wants to communicate to the reader that he is being punished and that his two victims should be blamed for his suffering. The personal pronouns and verbs of perceptions establish what can be described as an emotional connection and approximate closeness with the events as perceived and reflected on by the narrator, therefore making the narrator's version of the story more realistic and more identifiable. Finally, the grammatical passive voice, on the one hand, places the narrator in the center of the events making him more memorable and more relatable. On the other hand, the structure distances Juliana and Tina from the reader. All these linguistic stylistic choices are essential components of the story as they create a solid psychological profile and alibi for the narrator. They are interwoven together to create a powerful emotional connection between the reader and the narrator creating an undercurrent structure that generates more meanings than the events and actions do in the story.

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Crafting the Reader's Experience: Dramatization and Re-constructing Reality in Henry James' *The Aspern Papers* Ali Mohammad Alnawaiseh

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