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“A garden in the middle of the sea”:
Henry James’s *The Aspern Papers*
and Transnational American Studies

In Henry James’s novella *Daisy Miller* of 1878, a young American girl is traveling in Europe with her mother and her obnoxious younger brother Randolph. Randolph, a precocious child, keeps insisting on the superiority of all things American. He complains that his teeth are falling out from being in “this old Europe” and states that European candy is not as good as American candy, that American men are the best men, and that he hates Rome. According to Randolph, the best place they have seen so far on their trip is the *City of Richmond*, which is the name of the ship that has brought them across the Atlantic to Europe. “It’s the best place I’ve ever seen,” Randolph states. “Only, it was turned the wrong way” (James, *Daisy Miller* 83).

When the United States was founded in the late eighteenth century, many Americans deplored the fact that their politically innovative system did not have an equally innovative cultural landscape to match. Early American writing was very aware of its heavy debt to Europe, and Americans were often caught between acknowledging the superiority of European literature and culture and defiantly insisting on the superiority of their own values. Throughout the nineteenth century, creating and celebrating an American national literature which was no longer a mere product of the transatlantic influence of British or other European literatures seemed to be the most pressing concern of many American writers and critics.

In contrast, recent discussions of new directions in American Studies frequently situate cultural production within transnational frameworks. By choosing to interpret local phenomena within global patterns, such

readings often highlight connections which are not so easily visible within the paradigm of national literature. Because of this shift, we have been spending the last years deconstructing the notion of a uniquely U.S.-American literature to show that the object of our study has always been the product of global influences.

But creating a useful frame for truly transnational readings is extremely difficult. We owe many of our current concepts of the transnational aspects of U.S.-American culture to scholarship in the areas of the black Atlantic, the Native American encounter with Europeans, or immigrant studies. One such conception of the transnational is the borderland, a space which constitutes the actual and the metaphorical division and connection between nation-states (cf. Anzaldúa). While its model is the very concrete borderland between the U.S. and Mexico, the concept of the border has taken on a life of its own and is now used to theorize various forms of global contact. Another current conception of the transnational is the approach of Atlantic Studies, which focuses on the Atlantic world (Europe, Africa, and the Americas) as an oceanic space in which national boundaries cannot be rigidly fixed. American literature, in this view, becomes the product of the dynamic encounter of Native populations, people of African descent, and various groups of Europeans. Ironically enough, even while scholars are drawing on the early history of this interaction across the ocean, we also know that the Atlantic quickly became a space to be dominated, a contested site for competing national interests. Transnational approaches like Atlantic Studies must thus perform two things simultaneously: They must acknowledge that the cultural encounters we are studying were and are frequently marked by hierarchies and violent struggle, often fought along the lines of national interest. But at the same time, the new scholarship on these phenomena must aim to overcome the hierarchical patterns of thought which caused these struggles in the first place. Potentially, such scholarship creates the Atlantic as a space, in William Boelhower's words, of "transit and communication and cargo" (38), a space which Boelhower claims we must read from all its different sides and coasts with a "shuttling mind" and a "crisscrossing perspectivism" (43), our ships pointing in various directions without privileging the worldview of only one of the cultures involved. Like the concept of the border, Atlantic Studies' conceptualization of the ocean as a space with-

out clear national boundaries has been expanded from the Atlantic world to analyze more far-reaching, global phenomena.

It is this concept of the sea as a space of transit and circulation rather than of national borders which I would like to bring to bear on our current rethinking of the vexed relationship between the U.S. and Europe. We have discarded the idea that early American culture was only imitative of British and other European cultures. We have likewise discarded the idea of American exceptionalism. Still, there remain traps to our thinking. As John Carlos Rowe has remarked, the current embracing, by scholars of American Studies, of the transnational paradigm runs the risk of reintroducing the notion of American exceptionalism by claiming that U.S. culture is exceptionally transnational. In Rowe's words, we at times "bolster a new 'American Exceptionalism' which is at once deeply national and yet international in its ambitions" (231).

The question becomes, then, whether and how it is possible to think beyond the national without becoming blind to its persistence, its resilience, and the numerous acts of its reinscription, and how exactly to make the tensions between the national and the transnational fruitful for our study of American culture. In addressing these issues, scholars of ethnic studies have returned again and again to the work of artists whose own lives and whose literary characters inhabit positions in between cultures. But our studies of the so-called mainstream have also resorted to such figures, for example via the person and work of Henry James. Both James's characters and his own life, lived in the tension between Europe and the U.S., highlight the potential, but also the limitations, of early versions of the transnational paradigm. "In many respects," Rowe writes, "James's career as a writer can be summarized as performing . . . transcultural negotiations across the geopolitical boundaries of the United States, England, France, and Italy" (235). But although James begins to imagine his characters' transcendence of national boundaries, Rowe finds they nevertheless often "remain tied to national types" (235), as exemplified in the figure of young Randolph. Like some of his characters, moreover, James's work "has been rightly criticized for its aestheticism, elitism, Eurocentrism, political conservatism, sexism, and racism" (Rowe 230).

Rowe's attempt to envision a transnational James builds on a longstanding tradition in scholarship on James, namely the analysis of the famous 'international theme.' Even if James's work sits squarely

within Euro/American and Eurocentric traditions of thought, Rowe's approach significantly attempts to situate James's writing as a precursor not simply of the international, the mere meeting, mixing, or clashing of national types, but as the beginning of something more global and unstable, something which drifts like the ocean so formative of theories of Atlantic Studies. In this essay, I will argue that Rowe is certainly right, but that we may best get at this aspect of James's work if we focus neither on his own biography nor on his literary characters. Instead, I propose to interrogate the spaces which James creates in his work. In doing so, I want to take up two important strands of scholarship on Henry James and rethink them through space: the 'international theme' on the one hand and Henry James's relationship to the work of Nathaniel Hawthorne on the other.

Reading these two aspects together poses a challenge. Scholars agree that Hawthorne constitutes an important precursor for James. Frequently, critics read this relationship within the framework set forth by Harold Bloom's concept of the "anxiety of influence" (cf. Bell 122). One claim which has been widely accepted is that James tried to liberate himself from Hawthorne's overbearing influence by critiquing Hawthorne's chosen form of the romance and establishing instead his own realist and early modernist literary theories. A second standard claim is that James, who deplored that Hawthorne's work was so rooted in New England and who called Hawthorne's mindset 'American' in the sense of 'provincial,' set himself off against this limited range exactly by privileging the international theme. Lately, scholars have enjoyed turning these gestures around by claiming that James inadvertently falls into the same traps he criticizes in Hawthorne. In his interpretation of the international theme in James's *The American*, Ed Kleiman has argued that James's continual return to the work of Hawthorne must mean that "veiled in a cosmopolitan European setting, a 'national consciousness' strongly akin to Hawthorne's is . . . discernible" in James's work (47).

Such gestures, however, essentially remain within the paradigm of the anxiety of influence. Moreover, they contribute to what John Carlos Rowe has called an "Americanized" (231) Henry James by relating him back to an American national consciousness via Hawthorne. While I certainly do not deny the importance of the U.S. in James's universe, I would like to take the opposite direction here: First, I want to propose going beyond the idea of the anxiety of influence in order to highlight

the more playful relationship to Hawthorne's work that we can also discern in James's writing. Secondly, I want to argue that instead of using Hawthorne to re-Americanize James, we can use James to set Hawthorne adrift in a fashion comparable to Atlantic Studies' conceptualization of the sea and notions of cultural fluidity. In the remainder of this essay, I will approach these two tasks by returning to the idea of transnational spaces in Henry James's novella *The Aspern Papers*.

Published in 1888 and revised for the New York edition, *The Aspern Papers* are told by an unnamed narrator, an American scholar and editor who, together with an English colleague, is researching the biography of the deceased romantic poet Jeffrey Aspern. Their research has revealed Aspern not only to have been a brilliantly gifted poet, but also a man highly favored by—and highly involved with—the ladies. The two discover that Aspern's former mistress, his principal muse Juliana Bordereau, is still alive and resides in Venice with her niece Tina. Under a false name, the American narrator becomes a lodger in the Bordereau women's crumbling old house, hoping to salvage any love letters or other papers Juliana may have received from Aspern. But the aging Juliana proves to be a magnificent opponent: While keeping the narrator in check, she relieves him of a large amount of his money. He retaliates by vaguely romancing the middle-aged niece, Miss Tina, and enlisting her to help him preserve the desired papers. This tug of war continues until the narrator, one night, steals into Juliana's bedroom to "ransack her drawers" (James, *Aspern* 15) in search of the papers. Juliana awakens and drives him away, but dies a few days later. Tina, torn between her loyalty for Juliana and her sympathies for the narrator, offers him the papers if he marries her. The narrator recoils from her in panic, only to return the next morning to negotiate, thinking that perhaps he may pay the price. But in the meantime, Tina has found new strength and tells him that she has burned the papers. The narrator leaves the scene with only one relic, given to him by Tina: a miniature portrait of Jeffrey Aspern. The last sentence of the narrative runs: "When I look at it [the portrait] I can hardly bear my loss—I mean of the precious papers" (James, *Aspern* 96).

The novella has been interpreted as highlighting conflicts over the right to invade an artist's privacy, as a meditation on the role of women, as a story of the ruthlessness of the narrator or his own struggle with the influence of Jeffrey Aspern, and as James's way of relating to the past of

literary romanticism (see, for example, Hartsock; Carton; Reesman). As Gary Scharnhorst points out, the story's source is well-known: "Henry James wrote the nouvelle shortly after hearing in January 1887 that a Boston art critic and retired sea captain named Silsbee had schemed to pilfer the papers of Claire Clairmont, Byron's former mistress, who had settled in Italy with her niece" (211).

James's version of the story seizes on this transnational connection and strengthens it even further. His Juliana is an American who has lived in Europe since girlhood, and his Aspern is an American romantic poet who met her during his visits to the "old world." "I am afraid I must add," James writes in his preface to *The Aspern Papers*, "that the impulse had more than once taken me to project the Byronic age . . . across the great sea, to see in short whether association would carry so far and what the young century might pass for on that side of the modern world" (xxxii). James's remarks have led critics to propose Emerson, Poe, and Whitman as Aspern's real-life models. A small handful, moreover, has intimated that the writer in question could also be Hawthorne (see, for example, McCall 8). Gary Scharnhorst has made the case that James wrote *The Aspern Papers* to come to terms with his ambivalence about his own interaction with Hawthorne's son Julian. While he was writing a book on Hawthorne, James had used Hawthorne's private notebooks, published by Julian to great controversy after his father's death. Although James had condemned the act, he nevertheless relied on the papers and even attempted to question Julian further in a personal interview. Scharnhorst points out the similarity of the themes of ransacking private drawers for the papers of a deceased famous writer as manifested in Julian's actions and James's novella. Moreover, Scharnhorst relates James's many comments on Hawthorne's limited and "provincial" American context to the narrator's following description of Aspern:

His own country after all had had most of his life, and his muse, as they said at that time, was essentially American. That was originally what I had prized him for: that at a period when our native land was nude and crude and provincial, . . . when literature was lonely there and art and form almost impossible, he had found means to live and write like one of the first; to be free and general and not at all afraid; to feel, understand, and express everything. (James, *Aspern* 32-33)

Despite the connections between Hawthorne's and Aspern's national and literary affiliations, what gets lost in this focus on a real-life model for Aspern is an additional dimension on the level of the characters: Aspern, although a traveled man, remains "essentially American." Yet, both the narrator, who has connections everywhere in Europe, and the Bordereau women, who "were believed to have lost in their long exile all national quality" (James, *Aspern* 1), are more clearly situated *between* Europe and the United States. Read through these characters only, this in-betweenness does not seem to amount to much: "We don't seem to be anything now," Tina tells the narrator (James, *Aspern* 12). Seen in this light, one would have to agree with Rod Mengham's assessment that "[i]t is as if the modernist project of an international culture is recognized as premature in 'The Aspern Papers'" (58).

The picture changes, however, if we look at the novella in a larger context, namely as an engagement with Hawthorne's *work*. I am claiming that James, in *The Aspern Papers*, frequently creates links with Hawthorne's novel *The House of the Seven Gables* of 1851. The connections are striking, but they come with a vengeance. In Hawthorne's novel, we have an old house, this one located in New England, Puritan territory and the former site of the Salem witchcraft trials. The house is inhabited by an old woman, Hepzibah Pyncheon, her niece, Phoebe, and a lodger, Holgrave, who, like the narrator of *The Aspern Papers*, has taken rooms under a false name for a not altogether benign purpose. As in James's story, the women live on very little money. While Holgrave, the lodger, does end up seriously "making love to" the niece (Hawthorne, *Gables* 187), James's narrator, of course, only plays with the idea of "mak[ing] love to the niece" (*Aspern* 8). Thus while in Hawthorne's story, Phoebe and Holgrave, through their love, "transfigured the earth and made it Eden again" (*Gables* 314), James's Tina is only "transfigured" for a moment before love fails (*Aspern* 95). Hawthorne's Hepzibah, "clad in black silk," wears a "horror of a turban" wrapped around her head (*Gables* 28, 38), and James's Juliana is "dressed in black and her head was wrapped in a piece of old black lace which showed no hair" (*Aspern* 15). Hawthorne's Holgrave, whose family is said to have cast a spell on Hepzibah's family, has hypnotic abilities, and James's narrator, staring at the Bordereau women's bedroom door, seems to be "trying to cast a spell on it or attempting some odd experiment in hypnotism" (*Aspern* 28). Holgrave and Phoebe often meet in the

garden, where Phoebe asks Holgrave why he is so darkly interested in her family. Tina, sitting in the garden with the narrator, wonders: "Why in the world do you want so much to know us?" (James, *Aspern* 37). Hawthorne provides Hepzibah with a miniature portrait of her beloved brother Clifford. James's Juliana has a strikingly similar miniature portrait of Aspern. Hawthorne's book, like James's story, is about missing papers, in this case, a land deed (the so-called "Indian deed") which could have made the Pyncheon family rich but which is hidden in the house out of their reach. This connection between the two works has been noted by Jeanne Campbell Reesman, who states that "the hidden papers of *The House of the Seven Gables* forecast Aspern's papers" (161). In addition, in Hawthorne's book, the crime for which Clifford was incarcerated, but of which he was probably innocent, involved the "ransack[ing]" of his uncle's "desk and private drawers" (*Gables* 319), while James's narrator steals into Juliana's bedchamber to "ransack her drawers" (*Aspern* 15). Obviously, James is playing with Hawthorne's romance, transferring it to a more modern and cynical age.

All these similarities, however, culminate in the space of the house and its garden. Both Hawthorne's and James's fictional houses are old, crumbling, dark, and situated in parts of town which are no longer fashionable. Both have a garden attached to them, and much of the action between lodger and niece takes place in these gardens. Holgrave introduces himself and his work as a daguerreotypist to Phoebe by saying that he takes care of the garden and makes pictures out of sunshine. He adds: "[A]nd, not to be too much dazzled with my own trade, I have prevailed with Miss Hepzibah to let me lodge in one of these dusky gables. It is like a bandage over one's eyes, to come into it" (Hawthorne, *Gables* 91). In a curious transference from Hawthorne's house to James's heroine, Juliana wears a veil which is described as a "mystifying bandage over her eyes" (*Aspern* 46). Like Holgrave, James's narrator describes the Bordereau women's house as "dusky." And like Holgrave, James's narrator takes rooms with the promise of taking care of the garden.

What is James up to here? I claim that he has seized Hawthorne's house and set it adrift. Although it seems rooted deeply in the New England soil, Hawthorne already situates his house in a larger context: Its seven gables are "facing towards various points of the compass" (*Gables* 1). Similarly, when Clifford and Hepzibah attempt to escape

from its influence, Hepzibah still sees the old house with its gables everywhere she looks: "This one old house was everywhere! It transported its great, lumbering bulk with more than railroad speed, and set itself phlegmatically down on whatever spot she glanced at" (Hawthorne, *Gables* 264). James takes this house on wheels and floats it across the ocean.

This act of dislocation is very much in tune with Hawthorne's own development of the theme of the house. In *The House of the Seven Gables*, Holgrave embarks on a famous tirade against old houses haunted by the (Puritan) past, arguing that houses should never be built for permanence because they embody the heavy weight of history. To Holgrave, the House of the Seven Gables "is expressive of that odious and abominable Past, with all its bad influences" (Hawthorne, *Gables* 189). He passionately declares: "The house ought to be purified with fire—purified till only its ashes remain!" (Hawthorne, *Gables* 189). In the end, after he and Phoebe have declared their love for each other, Holgrave reassesses his harsh criticism. He suggests that houses should be built in stone instead of wood, so that "every generation of the family might have altered the interior, to suit its own taste and convenience; while the exterior, through the lapse of years, might have been adding venerableness to permanence which I consider essential to the happiness of any one moment" (Hawthorne, *Gables* 324).

Not only Phoebe, but also Hawthorne's readers have marveled at this change and found it slightly unconvincing. Yet, this ending already anticipates a new direction in Hawthorne's development of the theme of the house as the embodiment of a disquieting past in his later work. If *The House of the Seven Gables* still associates darkness with the somber history of American Puritanism, Hawthorne's later work has displaced the threat of a shadowy past across the Atlantic. In 1853, Hawthorne moved to Europe, and his experience of the "old world" caused a significant shift in his literary allocation of shadow and light. In his foreword to *The Marble Faun*, a romance published in 1860 and set in Italy, Hawthorne observes that his aim was not to portray "Italian manners and character." Rather, the Italian setting, because of its "[r]uin," afforded him "a sort of poetic or fairy precinct":

No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, not anything but a com-

monplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my own dear and native land. (Hawthorne, Preface 4)

As Dan McCall observes, this is “[a] curious verdict on America at the very eve of the Civil War” (4). But Hawthorne’s sense of “gloomy wrong” was focused on Europe, which failed to impress him in a positive sense. In *The Marble Faun*, Phoebe’s version of ‘Puritanism light’ is developed in Hilda, a “daughter of the Puritans” (Hawthorne, *Marble* 44), who eventually returns to the light and purity of the United States with her future husband, leaving behind the horrors of the past encountered in Europe. Incidentally, in *The Marble Faun*, this ancient and disturbing past is no longer associated with a Puritan house, but with Italian habitations. The narrator remarks on the weight of the past in an Italian village: “The dark and half-ruinous habitations (with their small windows, many of which are drearily closed with wooden shutters) are but magnified hovels, piled story upon story, and squalid with the grime that successive ages have left behind them” (Hawthorne, *Marble* 230). This squalor is contrasted to the “sunny and luxuriant” atmosphere of New England villages (Hawthorne, *Marble* 232), culminating in the narrator’s final verdict on Italian architecture:

All towns should be made capable of purification by fire, or of decay within each half-century. Otherwise, they become the hereditary haunts of vermin and noisomeness It is beautiful, no doubt, and exceedingly satisfactory to some of our natural instincts, to imagine our far posterity dwelling under the same roof-tree as ourselves. Still, when people insist on building indestructible houses, they incur, or their children do, a misfortune analogous to that of the Sibyl, when she obtained the grievous boon of immortality. So, we may build almost immortal habitations, it is true, but we cannot keep them from growing old, musty, unwholesome, dreary, full of death-scents, ghosts, and murder-stains; in short, habitations such as one sees everywhere in Italy, be they hovels or palaces. (Hawthorne, *Marble* 236)

Hilda’s future husband, the American sculptor Kenyon, remarks that in his native land, “each generation has only its own sins and sorrows to bear” (Hawthorne, *Marble* 236). In Italy, by contrast, “it seems as if all the weary and dreary Past were piled upon the back of the Present” (Hawthorne, *Marble* 236). However serious this contrast is taken, Hawthorne’s *House of the Seven Gables* already seems to have a score of

older cousins in Italy. But James, in *The Aspern Papers*, does not merely approach Hawthorne via the shortcut of these Italian dwellings. Instead, he creates a network of associations between New England and various European sites. In *The Aspern Papers*, we hear the echo of Hawthorne's New England house distinctly as James's narrator approaches the Bordereau women's Venetian residence with his expatriate friend Mrs. Prest. This lady remarks:

"I don't know why—there are no brick gables, . . . but this corner has seemed to me before more Dutch than Italian, more like Amsterdam than like Venice. It's eccentrically neat, for reasons of its own; and though you may pass on foot scarcely anyone ever thinks of doing so. It's as negative—considering *where* it is—as a Protestant Sunday. Perhaps the people are afraid of the Misses Bordereau. I dare say they have the reputation of witches." (James, *Aspern* 5)

In one stroke, James has provided us with a floating world, in which Protestantism, as in the Pilgrim fathers' sojourn in Holland, has made its way to the United States, via Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables* with its interrogation of the Salem witchcraft trials, only to set itself down in Venice. Fittingly, Venice is the very city which is described by James as both being full of the past and as being "dislocated" in its watery quality (Preface xxxiii). Ironically, while Hawthorne's development of the theme in *The Marble Faun* associates the gloomy squalor of houses predominantly with Italian Catholicism, James's Mrs. Prest re-connects the gloom to Protestantism.

In *The Aspern Papers*, James takes up Hawthorne's idea of presenting the past in spatial terms, via house and garden. The space James creates is a fluid world similar to, but in extension of, the oceanic realm of an approach like Atlantic Studies. Hawthorne's New England house, as I have argued, is already pointing towards various points of the compass, and in the Pyncheon garden, the leaves whisper hundred-year-old histories "whenever the slight sea breeze found its way thither and stirred them" (*Gables* 219). In James's novella, the narrator claims that what he is looking for is exactly such drifting: "It's the idea of a garden in the middle of the sea" (*Aspern* 17).

In his preface to the novella, James keeps returning to the idea of time rendered in spatial terms and clothes all his relevant metaphors in the language of the sea. James writes that it would be too easy to say

that he “found” his story in the real-life events around Claire Clairmont, unless one meant “finding” in the sense of a navigator, who

comes upon the interesting thing as Columbus came upon the isle of San Salvador, because he had moved in the right direction for it—also because he knew, with the encounter, what ‘making land’ then and there represented. Nature had so placed it, . . . just as history, ‘literary history’ we in this connexion call it, had in an out-of-the-way corner of the great garden of life thrown off a curious flower that I was to feel worth gathering as soon as I saw it. (Preface xxvii)

James’s language links sea and land while presenting to us the irony which shapes his reworking of the romantic theme. As Jane Campbell Reesman observes, Columbus, of course, emphatically did not know what his act of making land represented (150). The navigator’s voyage is further coupled with land and landfall in James’s metaphor of the “curious flower.” As in the novella itself, James here links garden and sea. Moreover, the act of remembering or reconstructing the past is rendered as an oceanic itinerary, linking time and space. In evoking Columbus’s voyage and the image of the beautiful garden in the sea, James retells the story in the vocabulary of the Atlantic world.

Extending Hawthorne’s preoccupation with the presence of the past in *The House of the Seven Gables*, James sets out to explore the recent past in spatial terms. In his preface, he states that he is searching for

the past fragrant of all, or of almost all, the poetry of the thing outlived and lost and gone, and yet in which the precious element of closeness, telling so of connexions but tasting so of differences, remains appreciable. With more moves back the element of the appreciable shrinks—just as the charm of looking over a garden-wall into another garden breaks down when successions of walls appear. (Preface xxxi)

James’s point, namely that the past recedes from our grasp the further we are removed from it, again makes use of the imagery of the garden. But with the ordinary past, and with the ordinary row of gardens, our view into the less recent past is, in James’s words, “mainly a view of barriers” (Preface xxxii). With a garden in the middle of the sea, however, the barriers become blurred in the fluidity of the ocean, where barriers are harder to install and maintain. It is such a fluid transoceanic

past which James creates in *The Aspern Papers*, and the house with the garden in the middle of the sea is its drifting spatial image.

James's use of metaphors of the sea extends even to his remarks about real-life models for Aspern. In his preface, James addresses the concern that a figure like Aspern could not have really existed. In answer to this, James proclaims that Jeffrey Aspern's link with reality lies in the tone of the narrative:

This tone is the tone, artistically speaking, of 'amusement', the current floating that precious influence home quite as one of those high tides watched by the smugglers of old might, in case of their boat's being boarded, be trusted to wash far up the strand the cask of foreign liquor expertly committed to it. (James, Preface xxxv).

Jane Campbell Reesman comments: "[T]he waves are the medium for 'truth,' not the cask itself" (150). If this is so, James has created for us a fluid world in which his house with its garden points to a transnational and transoceanic space that recalls Puritan history in Europe and New England, Americans in Italy, and Venice's own history of Mediterranean and Atlantic trade. James has playfully, 'amusingly,' set the house adrift.

From a contemporary view, there are severe limitations to this vision, of course. Critics have noted that like Hawthorne, James never managed to describe Italy with historical specificity but rather used (or abused) it as a symbolically rich setting (cf. Zorzi). In a similar vein, the imperialist connotations of Columbus's Atlantic voyage are not problematized in James's reading. In his engagement with Hawthorne's work, moreover, James chooses not to focus on the fact that the land on which Hawthorne's house stands was originally not Puritan, but Native American land. Such an alternative reading of *The House of the Seven Gables* has been suggested by Timothy Powell, who sees the displaced "Indian deed," hidden behind the portrait of the Pyncheons' Puritan patriarch, as a symbol of Indian displacement discursively re-enacted by Hawthorne's book (cf. Powell). In this way, James's conceptions of transnational spaces can also figure as examples of the traps of an approach like Atlantic Studies, which must breach the gap between fully acknowledging histories of domination on the one hand and re-envisioning the world as a space of fluid interaction and relation on the other.

In his work on Henry James's *The American Scene*, Alfred Hornung analyzes the geographical parameters of James's journeys between Europe and the United States as circular movements which translate into both a multidimensional narrative structure and a complex sense of national identity. Nevertheless, Hornung argues that the innovative potential of James's narrative is limited by James's discomfort with American industrialization and consumption and with the new immigrants and the multiplicity of ethnic groups he encountered (cf. Hornung). Thus James's refusal to rethink the United States as a multiethnic society served to substantiate what Hornung calls "his European cultural self" (Hornung 98). A similar point could be made for *The Aspern Papers*. But despite the blind spots which we, as contemporary critics, perceive in James's work, James's novella succeeds in encouraging a new way of reading. The relationship between *The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Aspern Papers* is not a relationship in which one text provides fixed clues for the reading of the other, but which opens up ambiguous, drifting, transnational spaces between Europe and the United States. Unlike young Randolph, who assures us that there is a right way and a wrong one to turn one's ship, James's narrator in *The Aspern Papers* tells his gondolier: "Go anywhere—everywhere—all over the place" (93).

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