

Sonja Bašić

## Henry James between Old and New

An Interpretation of *The Wings of the Dove*

### I

In his attitude to reality and art Henry James is an example of meeting extremes, of "fire and ice". He contrasts an intense spirituality with an insistence on "the conspiracy of aspects";<sup>1</sup> he juxtaposes the most exquisite romantic transports with the coldest approach to the mechanics of craftsmanship. Life for him is "inclusion and confusion",<sup>2</sup> a jungle out of which art creates order. Art, James tells us, would be impossible without Life. Yet Life, he also tells us, would be impossible without the shaping power of Art. Art must deal with experience, yet this experience should be freed from its more vulgar aspects.<sup>3</sup> Art must be objective, yet objectivity may only be reached along very subjective paths. His *Notebooks* and *Prefaces* show us unashamedly and proudly how his novels and tales were "made". They are full of drily technical matters<sup>4</sup> — names of people and places, skeletons of motifs and plots often derived from conversation, notes

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<sup>1</sup> Henry James, *Notes of a Son and Brother*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914. On page 434 James tells us what he felt as a young writer: "Seeing farther into the figurable world made company of persons and places, objects and subjects alike... the whole conspiracy of aspects danced round me in a ring".

<sup>2</sup> "Life being all inclusion and confusion, and art being all discrimination and selection." Preface to *The Spoils of Poynton*, *The Art of the Novel*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons/ 1934, p. 120.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. "Preface to *The American*", *The Art of the Novel*, p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> F. H. Dupee, *Henry James*, New York, William Morrow and Company Inc., 1974. On page 24 Dupee complains: "Again, do not these prefaces make the writing of fiction sound too much like a problem in mechanics?".

on ficelles and confidantes, and on ways in which the parts of his stories may be made to hang together. Yet these coexist with the most exalted pronouncements on the role played by the "crucible of the imagination", the "rare alchemy" and "almost mystical" quality of the creative process.<sup>5</sup> At the heart of all these contrasts lies what has often been described as the struggle between the realist and romantic principles both as they are expressed in his criticism and as they are reflected and embodied in his fiction.

"The interest is greatest", James tells us in his preface to *The American*, "when the writer commits himself in both directions; not quite at the same time or to the same effect, of course, but by some need of performing his whole possible revolution, by the law of some rich passion in him for extremes".<sup>6</sup>

In James's probably most famous definition of these two "directions", in the same preface, they are allowed to coexist peacefully and are defined very simply, even deceptively thus:

The real represents to my preception the things we cannot possibly not know, sooner or later, in one way or another... The romantic stands, on the other hand, for the things that, with all the facilities in the world, all the wealth and all the courage and all the wit and all the adventure, we never *can* directly know; the things» he is in the position of trying to save the very concept of fuge of our thought and our desire.<sup>7</sup>

The rhetoric, the images, as well as the meaning of this passage tell us that, at least at the moment he was writing this, James thought more highly of what was romantic than of what was real. Yet, perhaps reminding himself that he is not "really" a romantic either, he subsumes both approaches under the higher and more modern concept of "art". These two attitudes are embodied in convention and technique, they are described as "drugs" used by the writer so "the way things don't happen may be artfully made to pass for the way things do".

The book resembles a balloon, fastened to reality by means of a rather long cable. "The art of the romancer is, 'for the fun of it' insidiously to cut the cable, to cut it without our detecting him".<sup>8</sup> So art expresses the "beautiful circuit and subterfuge of our thought and our desire", but it is also, as the moderns have never tired of stressing, an artifact.

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<sup>5</sup> "Preface to *The Lesson of the Master*", *The Art of the Novel*, p. 230.

<sup>6</sup> *The Art of the Novel*, p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> *Ib.*, pp. 31—32.

<sup>8</sup> *Ib.*, p. 34.

At the back of all the problems facing a craftsman of the novel lies the question: What is a novel and what is its relationship to life? And the question always seems to lead James back to the contrast between reality and romance which for him usually took the form of the dichotomy between outwardness and inwardness of experience.

"The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life."<sup>9</sup> Novel writing is "the beautiful business of the picture of life"<sup>10</sup> combined with the "search for form".<sup>11</sup> Yet it must not be limited to the "fatal futility of Fact"<sup>12</sup> or the mere "rough-and-tumble" of depicting "the conditions of the people".<sup>13</sup> A "sense of reality" is essential: the novel must deal with humanity, it must reflect experience. Yet "humanity is immense and reality has a myriad forms" and "experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind...".<sup>14</sup> James, as we know, is less interested in the world outside than in the mind in which it is reflected, in the consciousness which experiences it. The consciousness is the storehouse of impressions and the novel reflecting it is "in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life"<sup>15</sup> or, better still, "the sum of the feeling of life as reproduced by innumerable natures".<sup>16</sup> Giving all this a subtle twist he stresses in the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* that "the artist's prime sensibility is the soil out of which his subject springs".<sup>17</sup> The weight has been subtly shifted to the side of the "prime" sensibility which is a function of the artist's consciousness, and therefore synonymous with imagination and creative energy which after all seems to be the true centre of reality. There is a continual shifting

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<sup>9</sup> From James's essay "The Art of Fiction" reprinted in *Henry James: The Future of the Novel*, ed. Leon Edel, New York, Vintage Books, 1956, p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> *Notes of a Son and Brother*, p. 483.

<sup>11</sup> "The Art of Fiction" *The Future of the Novel*, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> "Preface to *The Spoils of Poynton*", *The Art of the Novel*, p. 122.

<sup>13</sup> From James's late essay "The New Novel" quoted in F. W. Dupee: *Henry James*, p. 198.

<sup>14</sup> "The Art of Fiction", *The Future of the Novel*, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> *Ib.*, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> From James's review of Kipling quoted in *Theory of Fiction: Henry James*, edited with an introduction by James E. Miller, Jr, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1972, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> *The Art of the Novel*, p. 45.

in James between the world of facts and objects, the "figurable" world, and the world of ideas and images, the figured world. Often this inner world is invested with "almost mystical" qualities.

In "The Art of Fiction" James said: "The air of reality (solidity of specification) seems to me to be the supreme virtue of a novel".<sup>18</sup> In *Notes of a Son and Brother* he speaks of "the field of exposure crammed with those objective appearances that my faculty seemed alone fitted to grasp", of his "appetite for the illustrational", for "spontaneity of life... active observation and contact".<sup>19</sup> Yet, describing a visit to wounded soldiers during the Civil War in the same book, James does not remember "the facts of the case" (the italics are his), but "the prodigiously subjective side of the experience thanks to which it still presumes to flush with the grand air of an adventure... an emotion — though the emotion, I should add, appeared to consist of everything in the whole world that my consciousness could hold"<sup>20</sup> For James, the converse was also true: what his consciousness could hold was life to him, was reality, was all that mattered.

This is an extremely idealistic and subjective stand. Facing it we tend to forget that on other occasions James underlines that the initial impulse for his writing comes from the outside. Talking about the Civil War in which, as we know, he did not take part owing to his mysterious hurt, he says, characteristically: "The case had to be in a peculiar degree, alas, that of living inwardly -like so many of my other cases; in a peculiar degree, that is, to the immense and prolonged outwardness, outwardness naturally at the very highest pitch, that was the general sign of the situation".<sup>21</sup> He also adds that the "alas" is a thing of the past and that the inwardness of the experiences is "at present a thing exquisite to me, a thing of the last refinement of romance".<sup>22</sup> He also lets us know that his autobiography, from which we have been quoting, was not to be considered a classical autobiography, but the record of the progress "of the imaginative faculty under cultivation. The personal history, as it were, of an imagination" and of a "strong imaginative passion, passion strong enough to be, for its subjects or victim the very interest of life... as fine a thing as possible to represent".<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> "The Art of Fiction", *The Future of the Novel*, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> *Notes of a Son and Brother*, pp. 171, 172, 173.

<sup>20</sup> *Ib.*, pp 309—310.

<sup>21</sup> *Ib.*, p. 243.

<sup>22</sup> *Ib.*, p. 244.

<sup>23</sup> *Ib.*, p. 369.

Life, although comprising the outwardness is mainly, predominantly, the inwardness. What matters is consciousness and along with it the "deep well of unconscious cerebration"<sup>25</sup> to which the tone and emotional pitch, if not the letter of his pronouncements, so often seem to give precedence over the world outside. What he was after was paradoxically what he himself calls "the real thing, the romantic life itself".<sup>25</sup>

When it came to questions of art and life James also seemed to want it both ways. Art is both a "direct impression of life" and the fruit of "absolutely premeditated art"<sup>26</sup> The job of the novelist is "putting people into books", yet James does not know what to admire most "for support of one's beautiful business of the picture of life, the relation of 'people' to art or the relation of art to people".<sup>27</sup> In a letter to H. G. Wells written late in life James, however, exclaimed: "It is art that makes life, makes interest, makes importance... and I know of no substitute whatever for the force and beauty of its process".<sup>28</sup>

The outside world, as registered by the realists, whom James respected and often professed to follow, (as his essays on the French realists show us), has an objective existence, yet is given new life in the "crucible" of the artist's imagination. There it exists primarily as an intensely subjective experience invested with all the wonder and mystery of the romantic approach. But as well as being a romantic visionary the artist is a craftsman; he follows rules and methods which coldly objectify his vision and give it a separate existence as work of art. "The execution belongs to the author alone; it is what is most personal to him and we measure him by that."<sup>29</sup> The no-nonsense professional approach to the craft, the execution, is both strongly stressed in James's critical writings and clearly felt in his fiction. It is this aspect of novel writing that seems to be in the foreground of both his *Notebooks* and *Prefaces*. James affirmed: "Strenuous selection and comparison are... the very essence of art... Form is substance to that degree that there is absolutely no substance without it... I delight in a deep breathing economy and an organic form".<sup>30</sup>

<sup>24</sup> "Preface to *The American*", *The Art of the Novel*, p. 23  
1964, p. 82.

<sup>25</sup> *The Wings of the Dove*, New York, The New American Library,

<sup>26</sup> "Preface to *The Tragic Muse*", *The Art of the Novel*, p. 84.

<sup>27</sup> *Notes of a Son and Brother*, p. 483.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Vol. II, p. 1402, *American Literature: The Makers and the Making*, Brooks-Lewis-Warren editors, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1973.

<sup>29</sup> "The Art of Fiction", *The Future of the Novel*, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted from James's letter in *Theory of Fiction*, p. 18.

This quotation may be used to clinch the two dichotomies in James that we have discussed so far — that of realist vs romantic and imitator vs artificer — and to introduce two others: that of the traditionalist facing the modernist, and of the artist facing the theorist.

Organic form was a romantic concept but, as twentieth century critics have argued, it survived through *symbolisme* into modernism and it probably helped James to bridge the gap of realism that lies between them. The importance which James gives to form in the above quotation also points towards modernism. The passage, further, exhibits James as a theorist. What could be theoretically clearer and more modernist than the statement that "form is substance to that degree that there is absolutely no substance without it"? Yet after the theoretical distinction we hear the artist who often meddles with the critic (which perhaps is the reason why Eliot did not consider James seriously as a formal critic), and it is the artist who introduces the lovely metaphor revealing the emotion of the practitioner. It is the artist who "delights in a deep breathing economy". This is hardly any help in the field of critical theory. But it tells us something of the fire and the ice.

## II

The complexities of James's attitudes towards the romantic and the real are directly relevant to some structural aspects of *The Wings of the Dove*, particularly to the presentation and motivation of character.

In his study entitled "James and the 'Man of Imagination'"<sup>31</sup> dealing mainly with *The Ambassadors*, Professor Charles Feidelson draws our attention to the "problematic interplay between these romantic premises and the premises of a 'realistic' social novelist".<sup>32</sup> He persuasively argues that James's conception of the imagination is not psychological but ontological and therefore romantic, and theoretically incompatible with a realistic stand.

For the central character as well as the authors of such books as *The Ambassadors* the problem is to shadow forth the Romantic hero within the weird disguise of a late-nineteenth-century social type... The character does not simply want to shuffle off the objective self he has always been; he wants to remain a "character" — for Strether a rigidly "moral" character. But he seeks out to live his "real" life as an

<sup>31</sup> Published in *Literary Theory and Structure, Essays in Honor of William K. Wimsatt*, Brady-Palmer-Price editors, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1973. I am greatly indebted to Professor Feidelson's presentation of the realist and romantic aspect of James which furnished the theoretical basis for my discussion of James's use of the real and the romantic in *The Wings of the Dove*

<sup>32</sup> *Ib.*, p. 336.

imaginative life, achieving the full measure of his actual identity by the promptings of a virtually metaphysical being within him.<sup>33</sup>

The subjective aspects of experience, "the dizzy heights of self-awareness" coming from within, are of the greatest importance to James. Yet "having postulated a 'man of imagination' he tried to discover him by means of 'other signs and conditions', the characterizing marks of an objectively determined social 'man'"<sup>34</sup> Feidelson points out that the real world for James too often lacked "meaning" and could not give him worthy "subjects", and continues:

Therefore the novelist, as the prefaces picture him, cannot depend on the resources and the discipline of the «real» to see him through. Instead of simply rendering the «saving sense in things» he is in the position of trying to save the very concept of «sense». Confronting the «fatal futility of Fact», the sheer senselessness of «clumsy life at her stupid work», he takes it upon himself to rescue hidden nuggets of «latent value» from the flux and to lend them significant shapes that they somehow suggest but would surely never have attained in actuality.<sup>35</sup>

According to Feidelson it will often seem that James's "ultimate motive all along has been a militant romanticism, an underlying animus against that 'real' which he professes to rever"<sup>36</sup> — yet this 'real' remains present, locked with romanticism in an ambiguous embrace.

The clash of these two "directions" certainly underlies the conception and execution of *The Wings of the Dove*, especially as it relates to the worlds represented by Milly and Kate. The clash has been present in literature since the earliest times. The two polarities it represents are connected, for instance, with the distinctions Erich Auerbach makes in the first chapter of *Mimesis*. Couldn't Kate be considered as a descendant of the Homeric hero, clearly outlined in time and place, documented in detail, externalized, and Milly as the biblical heroine of whom no details are given, whose history is mainly spiritual and who is emblematic in terms of a creed? They also embody Auerbach's distinction between the complication of history and the simplification of legend, and remind us of the problem of having different styles coexist within one work and of "the rule of the separation of styles which was later almost universally accepted and which specified that the realistic depiction of daily life was incompatible with the

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<sup>33</sup> *Ib.*, p. 338.

<sup>34</sup> *Ib.*, p. 337.

<sup>35</sup> *Ib.*, p. 341.

<sup>36</sup> *Ib.*, pp. 337, 351.

sublime and had a place only in comedy or, carefully stylized, in idyll".<sup>37</sup>

The romantic and realistic approach in *The Wings of the Dove* can rarely be seen in pure opposition because James, the refined and complex craftsman, uses or at least anticipates several modes, and all of them are densely and ambiguously intertwined throughout the novel. It can still perhaps be seen in its purest state in the stylistic devices used in presenting Kate and Milly and some characters related to them in the novel.

When approaching a writer who believes that the interest of his novel is greatest if he commits himself in "both directions", trying to depict not only what we "cannot possibly not know" but also what we can reach only "through the beautiful circuit and subterfuge of our thought and our desire", the critic will try to establish how this belief has been reflected in the domain of language and style. Do the two "directions" require different conventions? Will some stylistic devices be better suited to the purpose than others? Had some of them better be suppressed because they are incompatible with the reader's "suspension of disbelief"?

Numerous critics have noticed and discussed the differences between Kate and Milly as characters and ideas. As opposed to Kate's more materialistic, realistic and socially dense context, critics have stressed Milly's "wildly romantic personal background", her contribution to the heroic and legendary qualities of the novel, her representing the intrusion of the otherworldly into the wordly,<sup>38</sup> her sacrifice and love as Christian symbols, and her death as Wagnerian Liebestod.<sup>39</sup> Milly has been pronounced a formidable character, and a lifeless one. F. R. Leavis is extremely irritated by her; Edmund Wilson thinks "she is quite real at the core of the cloudy integument

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<sup>37</sup> Erich Auerbach *Mimesis*, Princeton University Press, 1953, p. 22.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Dorothea Krook, *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James*, Cambridge University Press, 1962. On p. 210. Krook mentions that Marius Bewley finds Milly "stupid" while Leavis found her both stupid and "embarrassingly sentimental". On p. 214 she speaks of Milly's sickness as both "real" and symbolic, physical and spiritual. On the one hand it is a real sickness of the body, which saps her physical resistance; on the other, it is a sickness of the spirit... of the lonely, loveless condition to which she is condemned in spite of (or because of) her fabulous 'luck'".

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Oscar Cargill, *The Novels of Henry James*, New York, Macmillan, 1961. On p. 351 he quotes F. R. Leavis's complaint in *The Great Tradition* that "the fuss the other characters make about her as the 'Dove' has the effect of an irritating sentimentality".



with which James has swathed her about".<sup>40</sup> Yet most critics talk of Kate and Milly as if they existed on the same level of realistic presentation, and the critics who indicate that there are two levels do not analyze how these are reflected in the form and style of the novel.<sup>41</sup> The problem, however, involves aspects of motivation, tone and point of view which may contribute to a better understanding of *The Wings of the Dove*. What follows is an attempt to analyze the way in which these two levels of reality function, and clash, in the first part of the novel, and the way in which, as the novel progresses James succeeds in minimizing the discrepancies and achieving some kind of fusion.

The introductory chapters of *The Wings of the Dove*, dealing mainly with Kate, are a triumph of James's command of the realistic mode. They deal with manners, morals, class and money — the classical themes of the traditional novelist.<sup>42</sup> Kate is placed in the context of family and society and motivated by great vitality, ambition and love. Her story is convincing and logically presented; it hangs together beautifully. From the outset it aspires to a higher level of seriousness and dramatic intensity, which is achieved by liberating the descriptions from what James called the more "vulgar communities" and by presenting extreme situations and choices. Kate is grand in her beauty and strength and Mrs. Lowder is heavy with her signs and symbols. Marion is abjectly vulgar, Kate's father seems absolutely selfish, Aunt Maud wants complete control over Kate's fate, Kate pledges herself to Densher for ever. This heightened realistic manner will be developed throughout the novel and will have to be distinguished from the tone of "social comedy"<sup>43</sup> which will also be used.

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<sup>40</sup> Quoted by Dupee in *Henry James*, p. 221.

<sup>41</sup> E. g. in Stephen Spender's *The Destructive Element* and F. O. Matthiessen, *Henry James: The Major Phase*. Matthiessen believes, for instance, that "*The Golden Bowl* forces upon our attention too many flagrant lapses in the way things happen both in the personal and in the wider social scene", but believes that "*The Wings of the Dove* is his superlative example — perhaps the superlative example in our literature — of what can be liberated through the beautiful circuit and subterfuge of thought and desire" (p. 104). He also says: "But the more one scrutinizes the technique of this novel, the more one perceives that, despite James' past-masterly command over the details of realistic presentation, he is evoking essentially the mood of a fairy tale" (p. 59). Matthiessen does not specifically deal with the details of James's presentation of the real and the romantic.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Lionel Trilling's "Manners, Morals and the Novel", *The Liberal Imagination*, London, Secker and Warburg, 1964.

<sup>43</sup> James's use of social comedy is mentioned in his chapter on *The Wings of the Dove* by John Goode, editor of *The Air of Reality: New Essays on Henry James*, London, Methuen, 1972.

As soon as Milly is introduced in Chapter V we notice that James is bringing another, "romantic", approach into the novel. We also become aware of the difficulties faced by James in tying in the vision of Milly with the presentation of Kate and Aunt Maud, and in encompassing them within the same stylistic medium. Milly is presented as fabulously rich, absolutely alone, frighteningly free from obligations, and her background is as conspicuously bare as Kate's is filled with detail. James here avoids "solidity of specification" for obvious reasons: Milly is being built up as symbol, idea, existential state, mythic theme. In order to achieve this end James relies very heavily on hyperbole. As he himself explained in the preface to the novel, he wants to put Milly extremely high, so that her tragic fate might produce immense reverberations. As this aim is on the whole incompatible with the realistic mode, Mrs. Stringham is introduced as the ironically conceived reflector. Here, however, James encountered some difficulties. One of them is his insistence that what we are told is Mrs. Stringham's view: "Such had been the intimated attitude of Mrs. Stringham", "as she was quite aware", "she knew, the clever lady".<sup>44</sup> These interpolations and reminders are, of course, James's way of showing that he is using his "point of view" technique. But in this case they seem too overt and clumsy, they become tiresome. (It would suffice to compare it with the same technique in *The Golden Bowl* where it is executed much more unobtrusively and subtly). The second and more important difficulty we encounter in the presentation of Mrs. Stringham is our uncertainty as to how much—especially in the light of later developments of the story—we are supposed to distance ourselves from her views. In spite of relegating so much of the responsibility for an exalted view of Milly to Mrs. Stringham, James at the same time *does* want us to accept Milly as quite exceptional. The latter view is later supported by the sublimity of her symbolic sacrifice and spreading of wings causing Densher's transformation. And, what is perhaps even more important, the view is supported by Kate, the lucid and level-headed Kate, whose judgement on the whole we are supposed to trust irrespective of her moral failure. Perhaps aware of this problem James changes the tone of his approach to Mrs. Stringham. As the novel progresses and the element of social comedy almost disappears, there is less and less room in it for jocular remarks about "the poor lady from Boston". She remains "Susie of the earth", but her veneration of Milly is used to support the "portentous" effect James was after, and is to be understood as a legiti-

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<sup>44</sup> *The Wings of the Dove*, pp. 79, 80, 84.

mate attitude towards the morality about life and death which is enacted before our eyes.

James's awareness of the difficulty of making Milly come alive within a realistic context- the difficulty of integrating social comedy into a novel that was both a moral allegory and a dramatic "poem" — is also felt, I think, in the authorial intrusions which are very prominent in the early Milly chapters. In one of them he even goes as far as to tell us what technique he is going to adopt in presenting Milly, a consideration which certainly belongs to a preface and not to the novel as James conceived it. "We shall really ourselves scarcely otherwise come closer to her" James tells us, than by feeling the other characters' impressions "and sharing, if need be, their confusion". Probably dissatisfied with the way he has so far presented Milly's "type, aspect, marks, her history, her state, her beauty, her mystery", he intrudes into the story again just a few pages later telling us: "They are things that will more distinctly appear for us, and they are meanwhile briefly represented by the enthusiasm that was stronger on our friend's part than any doubt".<sup>45</sup> Such sentences taken in isolation sound very old-fashioned.

These examples show James's search for the right medium that would enable him to recreate his exalted memory of Minnie Temple, his vision of sublime youth pathetically clinging to life in the face of death. They also indicate that James certainly shares some of Susan's responsibility for comparing Milly to a leviathan or for saying that her smiling "was a public event" and not smiling "was a chapter of history".<sup>46</sup> F. R. Leavis was at least partly justified in being irritated by the fuss the other characters made about Milly as the "Dove".

The reader's or critic's sense at this point that he is being imposed upon, that too much is being asked from him, springs from James's inability to fit Milly into the realistic convention of the novel's opening chapters and his having to resort too often to hyperbolic statement about her greatness which he cannot quite render by more persuasive literary means.

This difficulty can perhaps best be observed in Chapter VII where Milly is seen at Mrs. Lowder's dinner party. After the dizzy flights of the previous alpine chapters we are asked to descend to the social again. There we are directly confronted with the difficulty of making a romantic heroine function in a certain type of realistic medium. (The problem is

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<sup>45</sup> *Ib.*, pp. 89, 95.

<sup>46</sup> *Ib.*, p. 90

comparable to the one Eliot was facing when creating his drawing room saints in *The Cocktail Party*, for instance.) In spite of its opulence and social brilliance, Aunt Maud's dinner is a drop from Milly's alpine promontory. The rarefied atmosphere of Milly's strangely empty American background, her fabulous wealth conferring on her the status of a princess, and her first awesome intimations of death had all struck more momentous chords. Earlier in the novel Milly had professed, rather vaguely, her aim in life as "having people", and people now she is "having". She is talking "to the gentleman on her right", who as James informs us "was, by the same token, the gentleman on her hostess's left" — a very precise observation of status and place which might be relevant in a realistic rendering of high society, yet is out of place in a romantic allegory about life and death. On this occasion, in no way momentous, Milly sees "how she was justified of her plea for people and her love of life... she thrilled, she consciously flushed, and turned pale with the certitude, — it had never been so present — that she should find herself completely involved..."<sup>47</sup> There is an obvious disparity between the intensity of Milly's excitement and the occasion that prompted it. This may be an indication that James was unable to motivate Milly "socially". It also reminds us of those critics<sup>48</sup> who interpret James's late novels as reflecting the aimlessness and decadence of a refined society and stress the pathetic situation of a generous character like Milly who is forced to live in it. The problem is complex. Such a society, such a way of life was the only one James was capable of showing. It is in this society, moreover, that both Strether and Maggie manage to achieve their victories, as limited and ambiguous as they may be. It is true, on the other hand, that on the whole, James's presentation does not preclude a negative view of this society's empty rituals and often shows it as evil and diabolical. This question, however, does not primarily concern us here. From our point of view it is much more important to notice that half-way through the novel James abandons all attempts to surround Milly with "society". He drops the tone of social comedy and proceeds to develop his drama on a more and more sparsely

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<sup>47</sup> *Ib.*, p. 109.

<sup>48</sup> E. g. Spender and Goode in the works we have quoted. Dupee also comments on this in *Henry James*, talking about *The Golden Bowl*. "In all James's talk of American Princesses is there not some irony at the expense of these girls who can reign over no more than their small households...? Maggie certainly demonstrates the potentialities of the private life; but such is James's impartial realism that she might also confess, with Maria Gostrey of *The Ambassadors*, that 'the superiority you discern in me announces my futility'" (p. 233).

populated stage, which allows for more dramatic starkness and poetic symbol forming necessary to make Milly real in spite of her "cloudy integument".

The problem James faced by wishing to combine a non-realistic, "wildly romantic" theme with a realistic story can also be clearly traced in his presentation of Sir Luke Strett who is a minor character and therefore more easily analyzed. Sir Luke is the great, godlike physician who does not come to life on the novel's realistic plane at all. One of the main reasons for this probably lies in the fact that — feeling that death cannot be approached directly —<sup>49</sup> James remains absolutely vague about the illness Milly is supposed to suffer from. Consequently Sir Luke cannot be shown acting as a doctor and can only be represented in a more generalized or symbolic role of healer, protector, friend. James does this from the very beginning. Sir Luke's office — his "brown old temple of truth" — is "soundless", situated "far back" in the fine old house (just as the Bronzino is "deep within" the great house at Matcham). Milly's impression of him is "strange and deep", also like a "kind dim smile".<sup>50</sup> Their intercourse on the professional or social plane, however, lacks "solidity of specification", and this makes much of it unconvincing, their dialogues in particular.<sup>51</sup> Milly and Sir Luke do not function successfully on the realistic level of the story. On the level of social comedy they do not function at all. Sir Luke's urging Milly "to live" cannot be taken as practical advice. When Milly tells him about her absolutely free and lonely state, we try to conceive of this state within the context already filled in by James in earlier chapters; the sense we have begun forming about it, the sense which prevails in respect to Milly in the book as a whole is *not* based on realistic descriptions. So when, retorting to Sir Luke's injunction "to live", Milly says: "When you talk of 'life' I suppose you mean, mainly, gentlemen",<sup>52</sup> the reader's exasperation is justified. In the light in which the two characters have been predominantly set in the book, the remark is wrong and shows a failure of tone.

A similar failure of tone, and lack of any specification whatever also cause our dissatisfaction with Chapter XXII which is perhaps the worst chapter in the whole novel. The conversation between Milly and Susan at the beginning of the

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<sup>49</sup> "... for the way grew straight from the moment one recognized that the poet essentially can't be concerned with the act of dying". "Preface to *The Wings of the Dove*", *The Art of the Novel*, p. 289.

<sup>50</sup> All these expressions occur on pp. 170—173 in descriptions of Milly's first and second visit to Sir Luke.

<sup>51</sup> *The Wings of the Dove*, Ch. XXII

<sup>52</sup> *Ib.* p. 307.

chapter is too vague. The dialogue between Susan and Aunt Maud which follows and in which Susan relates her interview with Sir Luke, culminates in the vacuity of the following exchange:

"He had wished it himself?" (asks Mrs Lowder)

"I think he was glad of it. Clearly indeed he was. He stayed a quarter of an hour. I could see that for *him* it was long. He's interested," said Mrs. Stringham.

"Do you mean in her case?"

"He says it *isn't a case.*"

"What, then, is it?"

"It isn't, at least," Mrs. Stringham explained, "the case she believed it to be — thought it at any rate *might* he — when, without my knowledge, she went to see him. . . She's wrong — she hasn't what she thought."

"And what did she think?" Mrs. Lowder demanded.

"He didn't tell me."

"And you didn't ask?"

"I asked nothing" said poor Susie.<sup>53</sup>

We can talk, for instance, about Kate wanting money, because the want motivates her within her context. It seems wrong on the part of the critic, however, even to mention that Sir Luke was "boarding the train" because, when we have summed him up, we cannot really imagine him doing it. James makes him take a train because within the convention of the novel he cannot make him depart on a cloud, which would be more appropriate. Critics have remarked that Sir Luke Strett acts more like a modern psychiatrist than a traditional doctor and this is true as far as it goes. They have also speculated about the kind of illness Milly had. Was it lungs? (It is possible that Kate talking to Densher about it had been misinformed or had just lied.) Was it mental illness? Had she thrown herself out of a window like James's friend Fenimore Woolson?<sup>54</sup> Yet such speculation is irrelevant because the fact that Milly's illness remains unspecified is a *donnée* of the novel. It is one of its structural elements which detach it from the realistic convention. It is therefore as vain to talk about the kind of illness Milly had as it is to speculate how many children had Lady Macbeth.<sup>55</sup> It is also wrong, when reviewing the story,

<sup>53</sup> *Ib.*, p. 294.

<sup>54</sup> The article "Love by the Doctor's Direction" forwarding this thesis is discussed by William Stafford in his review of James criticism in the 1972 annual of *American Literary Scholarship*, Durham, North Carolina, Duke University Press, p. 112—113.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Stephen Spender, *The Destructive Element: A Study of Modern Writers and Beliefs*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1935. On p. 69. Spender writes: "Milly has one way out. When she is ill, she goes to a doctor who, by what should have been a stroke of the greatest fortune, happens to be a psychologist of genius as great as James himself. He tells

to talk in one breath about Marion's household, Lionel Croy's morality, Milly's illness and Sir Luke's prescriptions as if they belonged to the same level of reality because in *The Wings of the Dove* James operates on two levels of reality, he moves in two worlds. Kate presides in one, Milly dominates the other. Most of the characters are rooted in the "lower" level. Susan has glimpses of the other world but is never shown penetrating it in spite of her love, Sir Luke remains consistently in Milly's sphere. Densher, who in a symbolic reading of the novel may be considered a knight on a quest or undergoing an ordeal,<sup>56</sup> is the only character that moves from one level to the other.<sup>57</sup> This reading of the story necessarily conditions our stylistic interpretation. It tells us why Milly as a character tends to be an unconvincing literary creation on the level of realistic description which, to use Matthiessen's term, sounds "past-masterly" when applied to Kate in the early chapters. (Only think how inflated Milly would appear in one of Jane Austen's novels which are so justly praised for their perfectly unified tone). Whenever James attempts to make her function in a specific social group as at Mrs. Lowder's dinner party, and especially when he deals with her story in the tone of social comedy, he is less successful.

These failures of tone, however, seem to be more apparent in the first half of the novel, and the argument we have offered above consequently requires further clarification. The "two worlds" we have spoken of remain distinct as subjects and themes. Yet in the second part of the novel they seem to be drawn together, sometimes even fused by James's pruning and

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her that she has the power to get well; in order to do so she must choose to live. In her case, living means that she must have a lover". Resumés like that do not help us with Milly's story because they do not make sense on the realistic level. They only make sense if we stress that they are elements of a highly artificial and only partly successful scaffolding helping James to erect a structure which will be true to human nature, not necessarily to human circumstances.

<sup>56</sup> It would have been interesting to see what Northrop Frye might do with Densher in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, but he does not deal with this novel.

<sup>57</sup> Densher is admitted to Milly's sanctuary, experiences her "divine" grace (which is mysterious and cannot be shown!), and is consecrated. From that point of view his weakness and passiveness need not perhaps be regarded as human shortcomings which he must atone for by losing Kate. We may consider him as a being "wisely passive", a kind of "holy fool" humble enough to wait and "be" until he sees the light. James gives us elements for such a reading: from the beginning Densher knows he will never be rich, at the end there is nothing he wants for himself etc.

heightening his style. It is roughly after the Matcham chapter that James more or less discards social comedy, the one aspect of realistic narrative that this novel cannot accommodate. He subsequently concentrates on the three main characters who rise in profile against a stage which is becoming increasingly bare socially. The respective levels of reality, so far apart at the beginning, are now brought closer together by James's use of poetic imagery, moral drama and psychological analysis. Owing to his command of these stylistic devices, avoiding the failures of tone we noticed in the early part of the book, he persuasively shows Kate and Densher gradually rising in stature through their suffering and sense of the approaching crisis and, conversely, Milly being humanized by the pathos of her situation and the use of Densher as reflector. (While Susan sees her as a princess Densher can, at least in the beginning, see her as "little Miss Theale"). This tightening is perhaps also due to the fact that James had to force himself to finish the book by foreshortening and concentrating on essentials. As he reaches the end of the novel his dramatic dialogues and his narrative have been stripped of most of the circumstantial "solidity of specification". Moreover, the intensity created by the moral issues involved and the poetic thrust of the imagery are in the end capable of supporting the dizzy heights of Milly's story without having to resort to irritating hyperbole or mere stating, the main dangers that James was facing on the romantic side. This romantic side is to be found in the exalted spirituality of emotion and personal vision which we have discussed; also those spectacular, extreme aspects of the plot and theme which are stressed by Dorothea Krook.<sup>58</sup>

This romantic side is necessary to the novel. Only a romantic spirit can encompass the idea of Milly as the critics have elaborated it: Milly as symbol of sainthood and innocence, a state of mind, a dark existential terror, a moral catalyst, the legend of big money, an otherworldly standard by which humans are measured. From the point of view of the critic who expects realistic verisimilitude and character motivation conceived as part of human experience which "we cannot possibly *not* know", the novel may sound unconvincing (as it occasionally does even to the most well-disposed Jamesian). We have tried to show that this tends to happen when some realistic devices run counter to the romantic and elevated spirit of the novel. Some other problems the critic faces in the novel however, result from other causes. They result from the fact that a novelist born in the first half of the nineteenth century was trying to write a modern poetic novel.

<sup>58</sup> Dorothea Krook, *The Ordeal of Consciousness*



### III

Critics have suggested that James's conception of the imagination was the quality which, in the last analysis, sets him apart from the realist tradition he otherwise so wholeheartedly embraced. This romantic sensibility certainly has aspects leading back into the tradition of American transcendentalism and a more general romantic tradition of fanciful melodramatic plots, Gothic tales, horrors and extasies incompatible with realist tenets. Yet we should not forget the thesis that the romantic conception of the imagination was, on the whole, retained by the modernists. And it is in particular the fact that James tended to combine such a conception of the imagination with a revived "classical" awareness of the artist as artificer and the work of art as something strictly following formal rules which makes him an eminently "modern" theorist of the novel.

Before discussing his "modernist" traits we should perhaps remind ourselves of James' "estheticist" side. As a realist he urged Edith Wharton, for instance, to stick to a concrete, particular and not too narrow awareness of "the American subject . . . don't pass it by — the immediate, the real, the ours, the yours, the novelist's that it waits for".<sup>59</sup> Yet owing perhaps to the singularly "unattached" state into which he was placed by his upbringing, and in which he remained owing to his nature and his idiosyncrasies, he tended to limit his own writing to the rendering of the personal relationships and inner lives of select and refined narrow social circles. Although denouncing mere esthetes of d'Annunzio's type, he does insist a little too much sometimes on "the fine private luxury" of his emotions.<sup>60</sup> Stressing that the style must never be an end in itself<sup>61</sup> he does exhibit at times a preciousness in contradiction with what he preached. Donald Stone has pointed out that James often seems to transform "Pater's dictum that the world exists at best as an aesthetic spectacle into a formula for the author of novels and the hero of fiction." Stone also believes that for Meredith, for instance, "the novel existed for the sake of the world, while for James the world existed

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<sup>59</sup> In a letter quoted in Leon Edel, *The Master*, Philadelphia, New York, Lippincott, 1972, p. 203.

<sup>60</sup> In *Notes of a Son and Brother* James remembers having had the picture of his father and brother together before his eyes in the past and has a feeling about it now: "... the fact of rarity and beauty I must have felt, or in any case at present feel... What was the whole passage, but a vision of the fine private luxury of each -with the fine private luxury of my own almost blurred image of it superadded?" (p.265).

<sup>61</sup> Cf James E. Miller, *Theory of Fiction*, p. 19.

for the sake of the novel".<sup>62</sup> It is difficult sometimes to say where a sense of the beauty of artistic perfection stops on James's page and where a feeling of its self-sufficiency begins. The notion of the artificiality of art connects James both with the fin de siècle esthetes and, for that matter, with the Parnasian idea of the impersonal perfection and isolation of "the tower of art". When, towards the end of his life James started putting his papers in order and burned thousands of private letters, he did it with the wish "to frustrate as possible the post mortem exploiter "and" in the tower of art, the invulnerable granite, stand, without sally, the siege of all the years".<sup>63</sup> He believed that intense inward experience must be rendered by an "absolutely premeditated art" and it was this belief and this shift from the outer world to his own inner world and to his own artistic standards that led the same critic to claim that James has "successfully salvaged the writing of fiction . . . for the modern world".<sup>64</sup>

Romantic vision, "les splendeurs et misères du monde", the esthete's luxury of beautiful behaviour, the modernist duality in conceiving of art both as something that is "made" and that yet has organic form, dreams of retreating into the tower of art, into Axel's castle, all of these went into the making of Henry James. The perspective of romanticism and realism will not suffice, therefore, in our attempt to place *The Wings of the Dove* in the development of the novel as form. What we need for this is the perspective of modernism, the literary movement which James's novel precedes and anticipates, and we might, therefore, continue our exploration with the thesis that the clash between the realistic and romantic principle in this novel both underlies and is partly transcended by two of James's major novelistic devices — the psychological approach and the use of poetic imagery and symbol, both of which bring him to the threshold of modernism.<sup>65</sup>

Psychology was, of course, already overwhelmingly present in the novels of a traditional novelist such as George

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<sup>62</sup> Quoted from his book *Novelists in a Changing World: Meredith, James and the Transformation of English Fiction in the 1880's* discussed by William Stafford in the 1972 annual of *American Literary Scholarship*, p. 104.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Leon Edel, *The Master*, pp. 142, 144.

<sup>64</sup> Same as 62 above

<sup>65</sup> The term "modernist" is here used rather loosely to denote the qualities pertaining to the generation of Proust and Joyce as relating to presentation of character and use of "poetic" language, and as discussed by Leon Edel, Stephen Spender, Irving Howe, Lionel Trilling, Edmund Wilson among others.

Eliot, and was to be even more so in a modernist like Proust. The symbolic use of the storm Densher witnesses in Venice may be considered "Shakespearean" and therefore traditional.<sup>66</sup> Symbolic whiteness may be discussed as a pivotal image in traditional novels like *Moby Dick* and modernist ones like *Women in Love*. Yet it is by studying the specific twists and turns that James will give to these two novelistic devices that we shall be able to throw further light in this essay on the extent of James's modernist awareness and the degree to which it is reflected in *The Wings of the Dove*.

Hugh Kenner reminds us that Ezra Pound called Mauberley "an attempt to condense a James novel", and suggests that without James's great sensibility "which brought in a generation" poems like "Mauberley" and "Prufrock" would be unthinkable.<sup>67</sup> In James's writing Kenner stresses the "impalpabilities, tones and airs, surface and absences (which) inaugurate a poetic of the mute — of eschewals and refrainings, working round the margins of a voiceless theme, voiceless because not yet public, yet specified, not resolved by its aperceivers to agent, action, acted-upon", adding that it is the effort to articulate all of this which characterizes James's late style. With relation to James he also, so aptly notices that James's mind "holds converse with particulars . . . mute mental particulars, the act of perception and the act of articulation inextricably one", while "in his Prefaces he hugs secrets, talking round the overwhelming question" of meaning which always tends to remain enigmatic.<sup>68</sup>

James's awareness of what happens in the chamber of consciousness — the mind which relives and orders impressions — has been stressed by most critics. It seems to me, however, that insufficient attention has been paid to the elements stressed by Kenner: the "impalpabilities", the "mute mental particulars" registered by his immense sensibility. These mute mental particulars are whatever is unutterable or just unuttered: the hidden, mysterious sources of human consciousness, the springs of his will and causes of his actions, the wells of "unconscious cerebration", all of them vital aspects of human experience and of the creative process.

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<sup>66</sup> "When James did make a thematic use of symbols, it tended to be in the fashion of earlier poetic drama . . . in a work like *The Wings of the Dove* . . . he even made a Shakespearean use of storm and calm". F. O. Matthiessen, *Henry James. The Major Phase*, London etc, Oxford University Press, 1944, p. 73.

<sup>67</sup> Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1971, pp. 15, 16.

<sup>68</sup> *Ib.*, pp. 18, 23.

A recent article draws our attention to the presence of "the unutterable" in James: "Whenever the characters in James's late novels talk, the 'awfully unutterable', makes itself insistently felt, a hidden pressure which the reader feels so intensely just because it is hidden. Adultery, theft, deception, betrayal, even the fact of mortality itself — all go unspoken and unnamed.<sup>69</sup> James's readers recognize this "hidden pressure". It is the pressure of something which is unnamed because hidden — but also because voiceless, and voiceless because still impalpable, inarticulate, unspecified. It might be represented by the *dimness* which James mentions so often in his writing. James E. Miller quotes a very telling example from *The Middle Years*:

He dived once more into his story and was drawn down, as by a siren's hand, to where, in the dim underworld of fiction, the great glazed tank of art, strange silent subjects float.

and comments:

It may well be that this conception of the mysteriously operating imagination, on both conscious and unconscious levels, was what separated James from the other realists of this time.<sup>70</sup>

Professor Feidelson quotes two further examples, the first from *A Small Boy and Others*, the other from James's *Notebooks*:

The "first" then... began long ago, far off, and yet glimmers at me there as out of a thin golden haze, with all the charm, for imagination and memory, of pressing pursuit rewarded, of distinctness in the dimness, of the flush of life in the grey, of the wonder of consciousness in everything.

The wonder of consciousness in man or child is equated with the creative process in the artist. Both in life and art he creates a subject out of his sensibility, out of his memories of the past overlaid with his impressions of the present:

The great question of *subject* surges in the grey dimness about me. It is everything — it is everything.<sup>71</sup>

James certainly loved the word, and often used it in *The Wings of the Dove*. Kate and Milly in Venice are seen "in the twilight that gathers about them, in the likeness to some dim scene in a Maeterlinck play". In the troubled dark hours preceding Milly's death Densher seeks refuge "in the dim void of the club library" and meets Kate "in the dim air of

<sup>69</sup> Ruth B. Yeazell, "Talking in James", *PMLA*, Vol. 91/ 1, 1976, p. 66.

<sup>70</sup> James E. Miller, *Theory of Fiction*, p. 5.

<sup>71</sup> *Literary Theory and Structure*, pp. 346, 341.

december". The word and its quality fit into the atmosphere of "the gathering dusk" of Milly's world, "the chill of the losing game".<sup>72</sup> On two adjacent pages James speaks of the "high, dim charming, ambiguous oddity" Susan sees in Milly, and of "the dim depths of the merely relative".<sup>73</sup> These instances and many others, in which the use of the adjective is not charged with any especially meaningful intensity, do, however, create a pattern of their own which brings out with greater force the use of the word in several crucial situations in the novel. One of them occurs during Milly's reception at Palazzo Leporelli. There all the ambiguous symbolism of Milly as Dove is rendered in the poetic passage in which Densher remembers:

that doves have wings and wondrous flights, have them as well as tender tints and soft sounds. It even came to Densher dimly that such wings could in a given case — *had* in fact, in the case in which he was concerned — spread themselves for protection... wasn't he in particular nestling under them to a great increase of immediate ease?<sup>74</sup>

The remaining two examples which we shall quote here both relate to the dramatic and tragic stages of Densher's estrangement from Kate and a feeling of revulsion which he does not allow to come to the surface. James here is careful *not* to stress that Densher is aware of what is happening as he does on innumerable occasions when awareness crystallizes in his consciousness. This is also one of the numerous instances in the narrative where James presses least on the point of view of his central consciousness and reverts instead to the role of omniscient narrator. It is he, actually, who tells us of Densher's "sense" of Kate's presence and of his horror almost, of her lucidity, adding:

They made in him a mixture that might have been rage, but that was turning quickly to mere cold thought, which led to something else and was like a new dim dawn.<sup>75</sup>

At the very end, in the closing paragraphs of the novel, the word "dim" occurs again, in a passage which, like the previous one seems replete with indefinite "somethings", which on the threshold of the final clarification — the great "distinctness in the dimness" — is heavy with imponderables:

It had come to the point, really, that they showed each other pale faces, and that all the unspoken between them looked out of their eyes in a dim terror of their further conflict.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *The Wings of the Dove*, pp. 314, 467, 327, 328.

<sup>73</sup> *Ib.*, pp. 84, 85.

<sup>74</sup> *Ib.*, p. 369.

<sup>75</sup> *Ib.*, p. 458.

<sup>76</sup> *Ib.*, p. 494.

In our exploration of James's psychological awareness the dimness will not only symbolize the magma out of which the divine, romantic imagination brings forth works of art. It also points towards his acute sense of the mystery of life and art (including their less glamorous aspects), the enigmatic aspect of experience, the general ambiguity of both the appearances *and* the interpretations man imposes on them, in order to create meaning and make possible his survival in the midst of chaos. It will, finally, represent the underworld of the unutterable, unspoken and unrealized psychic forces exercising hidden pressure upon the consciousness — James's awareness of the subconscious.

James's awareness of the subconscious is one of the themes of Stephen Spender's *The Destructive Element*, a pioneering study of James as modernist. Spender points at the contrast between social, conscious, exquisite appearances and the characters' "unconscious desires". He stresses, for instance, the fact that Kate and Densher "have to a quite abnormal degree a realization of their unconscious motives".<sup>77</sup> One cannot quarrel with that statement; yet one wishes to go further and explore the various devices James employs in showing us how these "unconscious motives" finally evolve into consciousness and even more, the devices he uses in rendering the amount and sheer force of what remains hidden, submerged to the very end, and what consequently is never realized.

*The Wings of the Dove* illustrates one of James's paradoxical aspects: he strove so strenuously towards clarity, towards "distinctness", yet the novel is pervaded by dimness, uncertainty, passivity, deception and self-deception. These elements are finally only partly overcome by Densher, for instance, through a mystical transformation which was "too sacred to describe" and a psychological process which also mostly remains hidden from us. The immense complications of James's psychological analyses and the enormous difficulty with which the complex web of experience is unraveled seem to indicate that James was often more interested in complication as a stylistic device quite apart from the solution it is supposed to lead to. The search for clarification is, moreover, a widening gyre, skirting an abysmal gulf of imponderability within human nature and within the mind. This is why "bewilderment" and "muddlement" are so important in James's presentation of character. Considering both the romantic mystery and the sheer psychological complication of the human

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<sup>77</sup> Stephen Spender, *The Destructive Element. A study of Modern Writers and Beliefs*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1935, p. 71.

mind, he thinks that verisimilitude will depend to a great extent on the correct proportion of intelligence and bewilderment in a character: "the great thing is indeed that the muddled state too is one of the very sharpest of realities, that it also has colour and form and character". In short, like any other contrast, it is to make final lucidity shine all the more.<sup>78</sup>

The dimness that pervades James's novel is the dimness out of which the modernist novel was being born — the dimness of the unrealized, impalpable themes and sensibilities James was ushering in. It stands for a half suppressed or half conscious awareness of the "abyss" of the subconscious, the rigorous inwardness of the psychological voyage which was soon afterwards to find its form in the stream of consciousness technique. Although James may produce the most vivid dialogue and very concrete imagery, the stress of the novel is on the "feel" of life and on the ambiguous suggestiveness of the "conspiracy of aspects", of emotions and desires as they pass through the mind. The process of representation is, moreover, so subtle that it undermines our certainties about reality and personality, about the validity of social rituals or moral principles and surrounds the clearest of analyses with a dim atmosphere of suggestion, ambiguity and nuance.

#### IV

Throughout the novel James takes great pains to let us know, too often and too directly at times, that what is being told is being filtered through a character's mind although this often cannot be distinguished from what the author is actually telling us over the character's shoulder.

Here are some random examples from Chs. XV—XVII: "Milly was afterwards aware of having really, all the while—done nothing... If she was most aware only afterwards, under the long, discurtained ordeal of the morrow's dawn..." and "The idea of the National Gallery had been with her... It had been in her mind... It was perhaps only afterwards that the girl fully felt the connection...", and the point when Densher reviews his previous meeting with Kate: "He was aware later on... He was to try afterwards and try in vain to remember... What was in retrospect more distinct to him was the process... He would have described their change — *had he so far faced it as to describe it*" (italics mine)...<sup>79</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Quoted from James's Prefaces by R. P. Blackmur in his Introduction to *The Art of the Novel*, pp. 24, 25.

<sup>79</sup> *The Wings of the Dove*, pp. 196, 210, 220, 223, 224, 489.

The examples are extremely frequent, and add up to a very awkward technique. This is the awkwardness with which the author must pay for his self-imposed rules creating the illusion that he is revealing only those things that are being ordered by the mind after they have been experienced. In the last examples James is telling us about something that has not yet emerged in the character's consciousness and his technique lags behind his awareness. He is telling us in clear expository prose, in a rationally constructed conditional clause, something that belongs to the "mute" undercurrent. This is something he does more successfully elsewhere by using images and we shall explore it a little further on.

It is curious to notice that James expressly only labels Milly "as seeing things afterwards": "Milly was forever seeing things afterwards", he tells us.<sup>80</sup> Yet Densher is shown doing exactly the same. The "seeing afterwards" does not seem to characterize a person's type, as has, for instance, been suggested by those critics who think that Milly is stupid; it is, rather, a structural element of the point of view technique. It is simply stating that the sensitive receptor is reviewing something in his memory. The more sensitive he is, the more reviewing he does. At the very moment an incident occurs, the character has no time to "be conscious". This moment is often filled with automatic social gestures and phrases, while everything else going on beneath the surface remains hidden and mute until some of it can later be sorted out. (A very good example of this is the scene in the National Gallery.) The point of view technique does not actually allow the writer to show an incident at the moment it happens. Someone's remark that most of what happens in *The Wings of the Dove* is either anticipated or remembered is, therefore, very apt. In the novel this device is paradoxically applied even in the most »dramatic« of dialogues — the dialogue between Susan and Densher in Venice, which Percy Lubbock has made famous by his analysis in *The Craft of Fiction*. And even this scene is introduced by the following sentence: "They came to it almost immediately; *he was to wonder afterwards* (italics mine) at the fewness of their steps".<sup>81</sup>

As far as it is analytical and expository James's way of presenting the mind is traditional. Its extreme refinement — the reflection of an extreme sensibility "which brought in a generation" makes him the precursor of the later masters of nuances, writers such as Proust and Virginia Woolf. All this

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<sup>80</sup> *Ib.*, p. 114.

<sup>81</sup> *Ib.*, p. 403.



is clearly shown in the presentation of Milly's mind at lunch with Densher, Susan and Kate:

It was at this point that she saw the smash of her great question as complete, saw that all she had to do with was the sense of being there with him. . . Whatever he did or he didn't, Milly knew she should still like him — there was no alternative to that; but her heart could none the less sink a little on feeling how much his view of her was destined to have in common with — as she now sighed over it — *the view*. It anticipated and superseded the-likewise sweet-operation of real affinities. It was this that was doubtless marked in her power to keep him now- — this and her glassy lustre of attention to his pleasantness about the scenery in the Rockies. She was in truth a little measuring her success in detaining him by Kate's success in "standing" Susan. It would not be if she could help it, Mr. Densher who should first break down. Such at least was the form of the girl's inward tension; but beneath even this deep reason was a motive still finer. What she had left at home on going out to give it a chance was meanwhile still, was more sharply and actively, there. What had been at the top of her mind about it and then been violently pushed down — this quantity was again working up. As soon as their friends should go Susie would break out, and what she would break out upon wouldn't be — interested in that gentleman as she had more than once shown herself — the personal fact of Mr. Densher. Milly had found in her face at luncheon a feverish glitter, and it told what she was full of. She didn't care now for Mr. Densher's personal fact. Mr. Densher had risen before her only to find his proper place in her imagination already, of a sudden, occupied. His personal fact failed, so far as she was concerned, to be personal, and her companion noted the failure. This could only mean that she was full to the brim, of Sir Luke Strett, and of what she had from him. What *had* she had from him? It was indeed now working upward again that Milly would do well to know, though knowledge looked stiff in the light of Susie's glitter. It was, therefore, on the whole, because Densher's young hostess was divided from it by so thin a partition that she continued to cling to the Rockies.<sup>82</sup>

Milly realizes she "likes" Densher. She also notices that he is kind to her, yet qualifies the interest as too impersonal. He shares too much the "view" of the others, sees her through their eyes, as she sees Kate through his. Distinguishing between general and more personal kindness, she also dimly sees that he has somehow been "caught": she wonders a little at her power to keep him and at Kate's unexpected patience with Susan. Yet her feelings about her relation to Kate and Densher are overlaid by her relation to Susan as she appears after seeing Sir Luke. In Susan's failure to be absorbed by Densher she senses Susan's absorption in her own case. Milly's delight in being with Densher, her vague suspicion of Kate, her submerged fear of the doctor's verdict move in and out of focus. James catches the most delicate nuances of behaviour, motivation, feeling. He moves mainly on the level of conscious-

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<sup>82</sup> *Ib.*, pp. 215—216.

ness, and there his method is by way of subtle analysis. The mute undercurrent is strong as well, and it tends to be expressed in images: the "smash" of Milly's feelings, reasons "beneath other reasons, things "at the top of her mind ... violently pushed down", then "working up" again... The dim underworld of things "half-realized" is always there, although he sometimes misnames it "consciousness":

He was afterwards to say to himself that something had at that moment hung for him by a hair... "Oh, I know what one would do for Kate!" it had hung for him by a hair to break out with that, which he felt he had really been kept from by an element in his *consciousness* (italics mine) stronger still. The proof of the truth in question was precisely in his silence: resisting the impulse to break out was what he was doing for Kate. This at the time moreover came and went quickly enough.<sup>83</sup>

Densher only "feels" that a thought was in his mind; and anyway, it "came and went quickly enough". This indicates that he is "bewildered", wavering all the time between the limited clarity of consciousness and the dimness of whatever surrounds it.

James's awareness is that of a modern psychological novelist, but technically he is mainly describing and analyzing states of thought and feeling which the stream of consciousness will later try to reveal directly. By superadding imagery to refined, complex logical structures, to passages of what he himself called "descriptive psychology",<sup>84</sup> he tries to achieve effects which the modernist writer will render through a string of associations, a pattern of seemingly disconnected images or a symbolic scene.<sup>85</sup>

Great refinement and a great awareness of subconscious forces are also found in the scene in which Densher learns about Milly's death.

<sup>83</sup> *Ib.*, p. 277.

<sup>84</sup> F. W. Dupee, *Henry James*, p. 131.

<sup>85</sup> Discussing "The Beast in the Jungle" Dupee proposes that it "is his ultimate artist fable, and it anticipates such ironic artist fables as Franz Kafka's 'The Hunger Artist' and Thomas Mann's *Tonio Kröger*, as well as the tragic personal strain in the poetry of Yeats: "I have no child, I have nothing but a book..." But James's tale belongs to our time chiefly by reason of its broader implications. Like Eliot's early poetry on which it seems to have exerted a direct influence, like much of the work of Joyce and Lawrence and Kafka and Mann, "The Beast in the Jungle" is preoccupied with the general failure of being...". Mar-cher" passes, so to speak, into a condition of nightmare, falls out of the world into the universe. Yet there is a difference between James's method of representing this experience and the method which is in some sense characteristic of all the later writers; and the difference of me-

Aunt Maud "beamed on him dimly, and he saw her face was attuned. It made him, with what she had just before said, know all, and he took the thing in while he met the air of portentous, of almost functional, sympathy that had settled itself as her medium with him and that yet had now a fresh glow. "So you have had your message?"...

"Yes, my message."

"Our dear dove then, as Kate calls her, has folded her wonderful wings."

"Yes, folded them."

It rather racked him, but he tried to receive it as she intended, and she evidently took his formal assent for self-control. "Unless it's more true", she accordingly added, "that she has spread them the wider."

He again but formally assented, though, strangely enough, the words fitted an image deep in his own consciousness. "Rather, yes—spread them the wider."

"For a flight, I trust, to some happiness greater—"

"Exactly. Greater", Densher broke in; but now with a look, he feared, that did, a little, warn her off...

He heard the door, behind him, sharply close again and the vehicle move off in another direction than his own.

He had in fact, for the time, no direction; in spite of which indeed, at the end of ten minutes, he was aware of having walked straight to the south. That, he afterwards recognized, was, very sufficiently, because there had formed itself in his mind, even while Aunt Maud finally talked, an instant recognition of his necessary course.<sup>86</sup>

With appropriate irony Densher is exposed to Aunt Maud's clichés, which "fitted an image deep in his own consciousness" as well. Densher feels a "thump in his chest", he is dazed. He talks to her, "automatically", echoing her remarks three times. All the time he functions on the conscious plane as well. He is impressed by Kate's having left her out, thinks about it, is able to observe Aunt Maud's reaction. Yet after leaving her he walks away without noticing where he is going. His consciousness is shown as utterly confused, lit only by "instant recognitions". (It is remarkable how often James's reflective characters act on an impulse, and how often we are told of their moments of divination and vision.)

The narrative itself, however, is not disordered, because we are exposed to the situation at the moment when Densher

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thod signifies a difference between the speculative sophistication of the later writers and James's comparative innocence in this respect. The quality of nightmare enters James's story principally by way of his metaphors. The Beast of Marcher's fate is a figurative beast... Among the writers of Joyce's and Kafka's generation the beast springs to life and devours us... For all its richer implications, 'The Beast in the Jungle' is a genre tale belonging to the tradition, partly of Hawthorne, partly of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Henry James, pp. 157—158.)

<sup>86</sup> *The Wings of the Dove*, pp. 462, 463, 466.

tries to piece it together — “afterwards”. The subconscious again pushes at the conscious structure indicating that some momentous change is taking place in Densher. Although at the end of the novel we shall face the final outcome of this change, we are never clearly told how it had developed in Densher’s consciousness. “Something” had happened to him. “too sacred to describe”, which perhaps was mystical. Yet, in the course of his meetings with and separations from Kate in London after his return, a process had been going on in his mind which was psychological.

In the final chapters of the novel the refinement of James’s analytical activity at moments gives place to extraordinary dramatic intensity. Such scenes have a kind of stark economy which in late James tends to exist side by side with the most meandering, overflowing instances of decription or analysis. Densher’s and Kate’s last meeting with which the novel closes is such a great dramatic scene — powerfully modern in its profound ambiguity. With due respect to critics who have extensively discussed the ambiguous meanings of Kate’s and Densher’s closing statements,<sup>87</sup> it seems to me that we are not required to solve the ambiguity of this final scene, but simply to acknowledge it. We must also acknowledge the importance James gives to the irrational processes which are a living source of this ambiguity :in the course of the last chapter Densher feels “the presence, as in the air, of something he couldn’t as yet have named . . .” He was aware of “something deep within him that he had absolutely shown no one”, yet all he feels is “confused and obscure”.<sup>88</sup> Personality and character, as it appears in James’s late novels, is all but triumphant. Will and consciousness are shown as threatened by disruptive forces both inside and outside him. The weak and passive sensitive protagonist of the novel, so subtly suited to receive and register impressions and reflect the author’s growing uneasiness concerning the strength of human moral potential and man’s capacity to resist evil is a predecessor of Prufrock and Mauberley, the modern hero who does not act, but is acted upon.<sup>89</sup> James is clearly a figure of transition in

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<sup>87</sup> Is Densher really in love with Milly? Does he delude himself when thinking that he can still marry Kate? Is their parting a final farewell?

<sup>88</sup> *The Wings of the Dove*, pp. 493, 487, 490.

<sup>89</sup> Cf Irving Howe, ed., *The Idea of the Modern in Literature and Art*, New York, Horizon Press, 1967. cf. also Georg Lukács’s analysis in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (London, Merlin Press, 1963). One might venture to analyze James’s passage from the more crowded social scene in his earlier work to the emptiness of the social stage in his

this aspect as well; the disruptive forces are felt, yet personality can still assert itself. After James character will tend to be somehow "reduced" in so many leading writers: to a halo of refined impressions in Virginia Woolf, to chemisms in Dreiser, to compulsions in Faulkner, to the mediocrity of Bloom, the cold detachment of Stephen, the suicidal stoicism of Nick Adams...

James's psychological refinement may be considered as both containing and transcending his unresolved conflict between the realistic and romantic principle by moving towards modernist awareness. It is James the traditional realist and admirer of George Eliot who is responsible for the intense psychological interest in human relationships reflecting his moral and social awareness and as represented in aspects of dialogue and the profusion of elaborate analysis. It is James the romantic who at the same time tends to exalt the individual intelligence and sensibility and present consciousness sometimes as nearly godlike, capable of mystical transcendence. Yet he is a modernist in the freedom and extreme refinement of the ambiguities he creates — which implicitly mark the tragic limits of the very consciousness he is trying to exalt and are symbolized by the "dimness" which pervades the novel.

We frequently encounter the critical opinion that James marks "the beginning of the practice and theory of the modern psychological novel... leading ultimately to the interior monologue and stream of consciousness as they emerge full-blown in the 1920s after James's death".<sup>90</sup> Our exploration of the problem has led us to the conclusion that, as far as James stresses the working of the mind and especially the presence of hidden and subconscious forces, he *does* have the awareness that will "lead" to the stream of consciousness. We have tried to show, however, that as far as his *method* is concerned, his novel tends to describe mainly from the outside and mainly in retrospect the voyage of the mind in syntactically ordered language. It does not present the disordered flow of the mind creating the illusion that it is winding and unwinding directly before the reader's eyes.

The point reached by James both in the conception and presentation of "characters" is the point of the final refinement

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late work (noticed by Dupee among others) in terms of Lukács's discussion of the change from a developmental to a static world view (p. 19), from belief in meaningful objective reality to "the assumption that the objective world is inherently inexplicable" (p. 25), from accidental loneliness (assuming that around the hero other people are able to achieve significant relationships) to existential loneliness.

<sup>90</sup> James E. Miller, *Theory of Fiction*, p. 11.

of traditional humanism and individualism about to disintegrate and discover new sources of energy in the primitive, in myth or new philosophical systems. In James's utterly refined rendering of an utterly refined "man of imagination" there is enjoyment, even complacency /look how beautifully sensitive and clever we all are, he sometimes seems to be saying/, yet also a bitter sense of defeat. In spite of triumphs of intelligence and sensibility, human nature is increasingly viewed in the light of James's "imagination of disaster". Both morally and psychologically human nature remains unfathomable. The literary techniques used by James to present such characters also marks an apotheosis and impasse: we feel that the syntactically ordered analytical refinement can go no further without becoming unmanageable and ultimately incomprehensible. In spite of his modernist awareness James's manner is an infinitely nuanced and sensitive, yet basically realistic psychological analysis.

His writing has been compared by Stephen Spender to a circuitous passage by the North-West route.<sup>91</sup> Looking at a page of James we know that a new path through this labyrinth of language had to be found. Modernism offered some solutions: the logic of grammar sometimes gave way to the logic of impressions and emotions; high seriousness was exploded by the grotesque or modified by parody; a new sensibility accounted for by a more direct recourse to the pictorial, the musical and poetic; the ponderous tone subdued by greater recourse to irony. New ways of rendering characters in novels were added to those explored by romancers, traditional realists and fin de siècle esthetes.

We should probably agree with Hugh Kenner that there is a "gulf" between James and the modernistic generation. Careful analysis should, however, be able to locate and define some of the dim lights beckoning from one shore to another

## V

James himself has told us: "A psychological reason is, to my imagination, an object adorably pictorial".<sup>92</sup> And there is enough stressing — everywhere in his critical and autobiographical writings — of the illustrational and the concrete to assure us that a study of James's use of images both in the role of vivid concrete presentation and in their figurative and symbolic extensions will be central to our understanding of his art.

<sup>91</sup> Stephen Spender, *The Destructive Element*, p. 196.

<sup>92</sup> "The Art of Fiction", *The Future of the Novel*, p. 23.

A critic has remarked that for the later James pictures had become more important than "fine motives". But what kind of pictures? Pictures that illustrate and embellish, deepen and refine, allegorize and symbolize like those of many writers of the past? Or those that tend to take the story over and become the pillars of its structure like those of the modernists? Duppe argues that James's use of images is not modernist because he bases them on the comparison of two worlds — the "figurable" and figured, while among the writers of Joyce's and Kafka's generation the "as if" becomes "is".<sup>93</sup> Matthiessen argues against regarding his as a "symboliste" because symbolism tends to create self-contained, closed patterns of imagery which insist on their musical existence in a sense that James does not.<sup>94</sup> Other critics have, however, pointed out that he did make use of imagery in ways pointing towards modernist attitudes and techniques. Spender talks about his "dream images" of the subconscious, Roy Fuller reiterates the belief that with James the modern novel has "annexed the 'poetic' areas of life as those more mundane traits" of tradition.<sup>95</sup> Hugh Kenner rather extravagantly suggests that W. C. Williams's slogan "Say it, no ideas but in things" might also apply to James's search for the illustrational and concrete.<sup>96</sup>

In our approach to this aspect of James we may begin by noticing that whole clusters of images in *The Wings of the Dove* follow the realist-romantic dichotomy which we have discussed. When used in connection with Kate or Mrs. Lowder, the imagery tends to develop almost entirely on the "as if" level. The "things" that in Mathiessen's phrase give "allusive and beautiful extension" to the development of Milly's theme, on the other hand tend to be more symbolic.

We can observe this in the use he makes of houses, a central Jamesian symbol in other works as well. The house in Lancaster Gate symbolizes Mrs. Lowder as "Britannia of the Market Place", but its effects are based primarily on "solidity

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<sup>93</sup> F. W. Dupee, *Henry James*, p. 158.

<sup>94</sup> F. O. Matthiessen; *Henry James: The Major Phase*, pp. 71—72: "Yet James was no symboliste... he was unlike the symbolist poets in that the suggestiveness of music was not his chief concern... He did not, like Mallarmé, start with his symbol. He reached it only with the final development of his theme, and then used it essentially in the older tradition of the poetic metaphor, to give concretion, as well as allusive and beautiful extension, to his thought".

<sup>95</sup> Quoted by W. Stafford in *American Literary Scholarship*, 1973, p. 129.

<sup>96</sup> Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era*, p. 18.

of specification" relating to the profusion of rich, ugly things, vulgar and particularized. The realistic description reflects the character of the owner, her taste, power and material position in society. Palazzo Leporelli, on the other hand, in spite of the "Baedeckers and photographs of Milly's party dreadfully meeting the eye" is an "apartment of state" to be used as foil for Milly as Princess. The charm and glitter of the sunshine and surrounding water contribute to its beauty as a work of art making it become a poignant symbol of the Life which it will be so dreadful for her to lose. It is presented to us in Chapter XXIV. Milly is seen to "sink into possession" of its warmth and magnificence. Thoughts, feelings, aspects of the house are used throughout to express Milly's state:

Palazzo Leporelli held its history still in its great lap, even like a painted idol, a solemn puppet hung about with decorations. Hung about with pictures and relics, the rich Venetian past, the ineffaceable character, was here the presence revered and served: which bings us back to our truth of a moment ago — the fact that more than ever this October morning, awkward novice though she might be, Milly moved slowly to and fro as the priestess of the worship. Certainly it came from the sweet taste of solitude, caught again and cherished for the hour; always a need of her nature, moreover, when things spoke to her with penetration. It was mostly in stillness that they spoke to her best. . . . She made now, alone, the full circuit of the place, noble and peaceful while the summer sea, stirring here and there a curtain or an outer blind, breathed into its veiled spaces. She had a vision of clinging to it; that perhaps Eugenio could manage. She was *in* it, as in theark of her deluge, and filled with such a tenderness for it that why shouldn't this, in common mercy, be warrant enough? She would never, never leave it—she would engage to that; would ask nothing more than to sit tight in it and float on and on. . .<sup>97</sup>

Here psychology has become truly "pictorial": thoughts and emotions have been translated into images while images vibrate with emotion. These certainly must be among the passages Dupee had in mind when saying that in *The Wings of the Dove* "at its greatest the writing reaches some kind of high-water mark in English prose".<sup>98</sup>

In their perfect fusing of image and expression, of "things" and words, in their supreme conscious craftsmanship such passages are to be considered modern in the wider sense that would include the theory and practice of someone like Gustave Flaubert. And the extreme consciousness of poetic texture, the tendency to dwell on it, to give it such a vital role clearly points even at modernist developments in the narrower sense. I think I find even clearer intimations of these developments

<sup>97</sup> *The Wings of the Dove*, pp. 309, 312, 317, 320.

<sup>98</sup> F. W. Dupee, *Henry James*, p. 216.



in the famous scene in front of Bronzino's portrait at Matcham. In this scene the house itself, although very important as background, is "done" with the most tenuous strokes and with surprisingly few details. It is a place of "long vistas" and "midsummer glow", where Milly has a vision of her apotheosis and the disaster that will follow. Yet all of this is not spelled out at all; her feelings and thoughts are only obliquely rendered in her apparently irrational reaction to the painting which is an objective correlative for both her ecstasy and dread. The scene resembles a modernist epiphany: it is unexpected and not quite motivated, it eschews analysis and elaboration and is in the end engulfed by the triviality of Lord Mark's misplaced comment and the "social comedy" of Lord and Lady Aldershaw. In its vividness, condensation and strangeness the scene foreshadows the symbolic realism of the modernist generation.

The passages describing Milly at Palazzo Leporelli may also serve as examples proving that it was mainly owing to his great image-forming, poetic gift that James surmounted the difficulty of unifying two conflicting planes of reality, and making Milly real in spite of the "cloudy integument" she is surrounded by.

They were at the window, pausing, lingering, with the fine old faded palaces opposite and the slow Adriatic tide beneath; but after a minute, and before she answered, she had closed her eyes to what she saw and, unresistingly, dropped her face into her arms, which rested on the coping. She had fallen to her knees on the cushion of the windowplace, and she leaned there, in a long silence, with her forehead down. She knew that her silence was itself too straight an answer, but it was beyond her now to say that she saw her way.<sup>99</sup>

James has absolutely no need now to exasperate us by saying that Milly's not smiling was "a chapter of history". In this scene she is less than a leviathan — a mortal being tragically dying, yet intensely present to us. It is thanks to the patterns of images and symbols, the poetic language, that Milly becomes convincing after all that James has stated, often so unconvincingly and irritatingly at the beginning. In the heightened poetic atmosphere we even find it possible to suspend our disbelief when James describes her as "divine in her trust, inscrutable in her mercy" and tells us that intercourse with her consisted of "transcendental motions, not the less blessed for being obscure". It is an atmosphere that James has been building up gradually, and which clearly prevails only in the second part of the novel.

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<sup>99</sup> *The Wings of the Dove*, p. 321.

It should especially be stressed that James's psychological insight cannot actually be separated from the images that heighten and extend its meaning. Sometimes the imagery even tells us things that the consciousness cannot realize. Here is a passage describing Densher's feelings upon renewed acquaintance with Milly in Venice:

This spectacle had for him an eloquence, an authority, a felicity -he scarce knew by what strange name to call it-for which he said to himself that he had not consciously bargained. Her welcome, her frankness, sweetness, sadness, brightness, her disconcerting poetry... her whole attitude had, to his imagination, meanings that hung about it, waiting upon her, hovering, dropping, and quivering forth again, like vague, faint snatches, mere ghosts of sound, of old-fashioned melancholy music... Behind everything, for him, was his renewed remembrance, which had fairly become a habit, that he had been the first to know her.. Its influence was all there, was in the high-hung, rumbling carriage with them, from the moment she took him to drive, covering them in together as if had been a rug of softest silk. It had worked as a clear connection-with something lodged in the past, something already their own...

All of which... sharpened his sense of immersion in an element rather more strangely than agreeably warm- a sense that was moreover, during the next two or three hours, to be fed to satiety by several other impressions. ...he felt her as diffusing, in wide warm waves, the spell of a general, a kind of beatific mildness. There was a deeper depth of it, doubtless, for some than for others; what he, at any rate, in particular knew of it was that he seemed to stand in it up to his neck. He moved about in it, and it made no splash; he floated, he noiselessly swam in it; and they were all together, for that matter, like finishes in a crystal pool.<sup>100</sup>

Apart from and below Densher's conscious musings, and much in advance of the final denouement, which in Kate and Densher's last dialogues will remain rather enigmatic, the images tell us their own story. They contain all the force of Milly's impact on her seemingly unwilling visitor. Densher feels immersed in the warm liquid of her mildness "up to his neck" and is beguiled by her apparition at the party. It is only at this late moment that James lets Densher remember his *sense*, while driving with Milly at the beginning of their acquaintance, of the "high-hung, rumbling" carriage "covering them in together, as if it had been a rug of softest silk". Even at this late moment in the story, when Densher senses and feels so much, he will not be allowed to show us whether he has consciously been able to follow these hints to their logical conclusion: we shall never know how much of it Densher ever clearly realized. Yet the images tell us that the feelings are there, they are presented to us in all their vividness, poetic strangeness and ambiguity.

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<sup>100</sup> *Ib.*, pp. 346-347, 365.

## VI

In has been stressed by critics such as Leon Edel in his book *The Psychological Novel* that the attempt to present experience as flowing through the mind naturally led writers to rely on images to an extraordinary degree. This was the way in which modernist writers transformed the psychological analysis of realism into an impressionist or symbolist picture of the mind. The rational logic of consciousness becomes superseded by the irrational logic of symbols which try to include the "mute" subconscious. In James both approaches are often present although the latter only in germinal form. We find them in one of Densher's musings towards the end of the novel:

The thought was all his own, and his intimate companion was the last person he might have shared it with. He kept it back like a favourite pang; left it behind him, so to say when he went out, but came home again the sooner for the certainty of finding it there. Then he took it out of its sacred corner and its soft wrappings; he undid them, one by one, handling them, handling *it*, as a father, baffled and tender, might handle a maimed child. But so it was before him in his dread of who else might see it. Then he took to himself at such hours, in other words, that he should never, never, know what had been in Milly's letter. . . . The part of it missed for ever was the turn she would have given her act. That turn had possibilities that, somehow, by wondering about them, his imagination had extraordinarily filled out and refined. It had made of them a revelation the loss of which was like the sight of a priceless pearl cast before his eyes—his pledge given not to save it—into the fathomless sea, or rather even it was like the sacrifice of something sentient and throbbing, something that, for the spiritual ear, might have been audible as a faint, far wail.<sup>101</sup>

This passage certainly isn't a stream of consciousness in any modernist sense, but rather consciousness dramatized and presented in syntactically very well ordered sequences. This dramatization is overlaid with and to a high degree realized by means of images. The images cannot without danger be extracted from it for closer inspection, yet we should ask ourselves, in view of Dupee's or Matthiessen's opinions quoted earlier: are these images only functions of James's style subordinated to narrative, characterization, plot and the general progress of the story, in other words, are they "as if" images? The answer will be : yes, the images are functions of the narrative, they illustrate and enhance it and are therefore subordinated to it as they should be in a traditional novel. Yet in their density and elaboration they tend to create self-contained patterns not unlike those we find in *Mrs. Dalloway*

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<sup>101</sup> *Ib.*, pp. 490—491.

or *The Portrait of the Artist*. The image of the "sentient, throbbing, wailing" feelings of regret tend, moreover, to transform "as if" into "is".

It is thanks to these patterns that certain scenes and passages in the novel linger in the mind and claim independence, at it were. If we try to analyze these scenes we notice that they are based on a structural conflict: the narrative is pushing forward chronologically, and logically, towards new insights, developments and surprises, while the patterns of images tend to create the "spatial form" of the modernist poetic novel. After having read a James novel we notice that James has moved his characters from one point to another in terms of time and awareness. So there *has* been action, movement and change. Yet while reading the novel we are very often immersed in a situation which appears nearly static and in which the concentric circles of refined complication and the web of images seem to conspire in arresting the action, creating moments of self-reflexive stillness. On the level of meaning this stasis often occurs at moments of intense emotional crisis and revelation, which at times tend to be mystical. On the level of style it is achieved through intensely patterned images and symbols which create moments of arrested movement and symbolic reverberation, scattered like islands in the stream of the narrative. Such islands, which seem to be singled out by their poetic or symbolic quality, are Milly's watch on the Alps, her vigil in the park and epiphany at Matcham, the party she gives in Venice, her sense of Palazzo Leporelli before and during Lord Mark's visit there, the storm in Venice, certain stages of Densher's moral progress (his sense, for instance, that he has sacrificed "something sentient and throbbing, something, that for the spiritual ear might have been audible as a faint, far wail"). The poetic quality of the language allows us to relate James to the "symbolistes". When this poetic quality is added to the numerous other aspects of the James that we have discussed: his ambiguity, his growing sense of void and disaster, his inwardness and his "artificiality", we are allowed to relate him to the modernist movement as well. This link with the symbolistes and modernists is, on the other hand, another link with his romantic background out of which the symbolistes and post-symbolistes developed. It is James's grasp of the poetic resources of the novel that therefore enables him both to encompass his realist and romantic heritages and transcend them by reaching towards a modernist synthesis.

The "slowness" of *The Wings of the Dove* is not only the result of its poetic reverberations. It also partly results from

James's effort to recapture lost time by making it meaningful and therefore real, by memories of the past which in the mind are transformed into a timeless present. It results from the writer's tendency to dwell inside the mind which is so much richer and as a result so much slower than the world. This pull forward neutralized by the pull backward which seems to arrest time also characterize James as a threshold figure.

The tendency of images to "take over" may also be observed in the dialogue between Susan and Densher in Chapter XXXI. In this chapter character is incident and incident character; yet at the same time they are neither. There are moments when both incident and character are translated into images, tones and rhythms which seem to assert themselves as linguistic entities escaping direct moral, social, intellectual or psychological references. The situation certainly reflects a psychological state — Densher is dumb with pain; a moral state — he is tortured by remorse. It also marks a further step in the development of the plot, it is therefore an incident: Susan is made to realize that Densher will not lie to Milly. Yet the lengths of refinement to which James goes in the (so very slow) progress of the scene makes the fine embroidery of subtle motives extraordinary. In my edition of *The Wings of the Dove* it takes James six pages to hint at Susan's purpose, four more pages to mention it and another six pages to formulate it fully. Densher's state of helpless shock, paralyzed will, awareness of death, arrested vitality and frustrated love are conveyed by means of images, halting rhythms and prolonged pauses (a whole machinery of devices is used to slow down the action and create a suggestive stasis). The intensely elaborated structure of language seems to clamour for attention as an art object, beautiful and disinterested in the first place.

In James's *Notebooks* and *Prefaces* it is craft and craft and craft again. We cannot help but connect our knowledge of this with our experience of scenes like the one we have just discussed, and conclude that means stressed at such length will at times tend to become ends. Contemporary James criticism tends to blow up the moral and social significance of James's writing, the later as well as the earlier. The reader is certainly aware of these issues, especially when reflecting upon the novel "afterwards". Yet in the process of reading James tends to divert and waylay us so that we often lose sight of the overall patterns of meaning and of the progress of the action. The scene enacted between Densher and Susan, for instance, is even further complicated by the writer-artificer. The dialogue, as he conceives it, is obviously and unmistakably

a game of hide and seek full of misunderstandings and confusions (perhaps willed, someone has suggested, as they are in Faulkner?) which seem to be elaborated by someone who is enjoying his game. They do have their serious purpose: they show us how extremely difficult it is to explain and understand human behaviour. Yet in them we also detect the modernist author at play simply "for the fun of it". Such complications, elaborations, games, often show the author as more absorbed by the artifact he is creating than the human moral problem he is ostensibly solving. In this respect James might be viewed both as influenced by the fin de siècle seekers for beauty (merging with the modernist insistence on craft) and pointing towards modernist self-consciousness and the mannerism of *Ulysses*; the tendency is to create a style that not only parodies the style of others, but exaggerates its own until, in Borges' words, it becomes "its own caricature".

James's overriding, openly expressed "rage for order" his insistence on the "beauty" of the "picture on life" he is creating are a further sign that he was striving to transcend the realist-romantic dichotomy and, trailing estheticis clouds, to find a symbolist, modernist way of expressing a world of "signs and tokens . . . images" with the tools of an "absolutely premeditated art". What classifies him supremely as a transitional figure in his late novels, however, is the fact that his classicist and formalist quest for clarity paradoxically coexists with a sense of engulfing "dimness". The web of consciousness in woven from the "deep well of unconscious cerebration". The most responsible and articulate human relationship is surrounded by often threatening impalpabilities, uncertainties, mists.

While in *The Ambassadors* James's sense of order and form has triumphed over life disordered and unkempt perhaps with a vengeance, this dimness pervades his other two late novels. In *The Wings of the Dove* the great moments, whether pictorial or dramatic, are often mysterious, irrational: Kate pledging herself to Densher "for ever", Milly's crisis on the promontory, her tears in front of the Bronzino, the magic of her appearance in white, the final slow transformation of Densher under her influence. Consciousness seems unable to process these events and situations like a computer unable to work with insufficient data. By the time James had written *The Wings of the Dove* his voyage inward had reached the very gates of the irrational; on his voyage through society he had also encountered forces which could not be explained by maners and morals alone. The moralist who on the conscious level was still, with some lapses of belief, erecting personal relationships into a meaningful and satisfying creed, felt that his

imagination of disaster was taking over and that destructive and disruptive forces were attacking the ideal of a humane responsible individual. The esthete who had been trying to ally morality and beauty was becoming more and more aware of the ambiguities inherent in both concepts. The chronicler was turning metaphysician. The storyteller interested in action — even if inward — and its progress found himself arrested more and more frequently in reverberating states of mind and sensibility. The historian of manners was finding fewer and fewer people on his social stage. The pragmatist was rediscovering mysticism. The conscious artist was asserting the value of his art against the void and against confusion. A writer who had so long been anxious to please his public had finally renounced popularity and begun writing for an inner circle — or just himself. A nineteenth century writer was “hugging the shores” of modernism.

James shows great awareness of the complexity of consciousness. The infinitely intricate workings of the mind taking stock, exploring, analyzing and defining human behaviour, its mysterious sources and often momentous consequences mirror a sensibility trying to encompass “everything”: rational analysis, moral discrimination, the “destructive element” of the subconscious and perhaps a Swedenborgian vision of bliss. James also shows great awareness of craftsmanship. *The Wings of the Dove* is the work of a conscious stylist who elaborates and perfects, a symbolist and allegorist bent on enriching poetic texture. Elaborating, he often exaggerates and distorts: apart from obvious realistic traits we are aware of the utter strangeness of his three late novels which can only partly be attributed to James’s idiosyncrasies. Everything in these novels is out of focus, magnified, distorted, overlaid with grotesques and arabesques of both conception and style which make them obviously artificial: angelic girls, godlike doctors, society hostesses looming large like primitive deities, fathers, and daughters innocently yet monstrously in love with each other, friends who are experts in vicarious living, young men passive beyond belief, sterile old men having affairs with cities. There are links with reality, to be sure, but they are on the whole tangential tortous, indirect — “dim”. The characters are lonely, surrounded by emptiness or fear; any attempt at direct presentation is diluted by frequent interpositions of reflectors. We watch them as they are being watched by the reflector who is watching himself watching. Persons, situations, emotions, are analyzed so elaborately that they disintegrate before us during the process. While we read we usually cannot see the forest for the trees and this is probably why critics who

deal with a James novel so often ignore the trees for the forest. So much James criticism consists of generalization a *posteriori* instead of recreating the painful process of reading him page by page. The artificiality and distortion enable us to look at James as (among his many other affiliations) a link between Poe and Kafka.

All the qualities we have summarized so far are signs of a modern sensibility in search of a new literary form. Yet in so many of his aspects James is the traditional Victorian novelist. He embraced realism, yet remained strongly romantic and idealist in his leanings. He was deeply and ponderously morally aware, preoccupied with telling "interesting" stories and creating characters which would be both picturesque and true to life. He thought very highly of Hawthorne, was influenced by George Eliot, was not really able to appreciate the French realists and naturalists of his time, considered the novels of Tolstoy and Dostoevski "fluid puddings" and turned away from them backwards to Balzac, or sideways to the serene gentility of Turgenev. In so many ways aware and even anticipating the new, James's late novels are still in many ways traditional. They have a chronologically ordered plot, a beginning and end. Personality still exists massively structured above ground in spite of subterranean rumblings. Rationality and intelligence are assailed and endangered, but not really defeated. The syntactical order of the sentence reflects the degree of meaning still available to the human mind however difficult and precarious the achievement. There is also a strong belief in the meaningful content of the fiction, an unashamed pleasure in the refinement of a cultivated elite and a basic belief in humanistic, individual, spiritual values existing in spite of the disruptive forces. (This last statement in perhaps most easily challenged, however, just because James is such an extreme example of a threshold, borderline figure perched so triumphantly and so precariously between two ages of the novel.)

The awareness needed to bring in the "new" often coexists, even clashes with the "old", as we have tried to show. We find in late James a refinement and complexity leading to disintegration and ambiguity, the sensibility embracing the poetic, the awareness of the "abyss" of loneliness and futility, the inwardness, the craft which both asserts life and recreates it when it is unsatisfactory or meaningless. Yet the new awareness is too often couched in old forms; modernist tendencies are on the whole not transformed into modernist techniques. James's central preoccupation — the immense web



of consciousness, mainly in the field of sensibility and as reflecting personal relationships, is too often analyzed in extenso by the psychological realist and too rarely presented by the imagist and symbolist. When images and symbols are used, and they are used in profusion, they are used too often in addition to, or at best as part of, the analytic process; and too rarely as the novel's essential structural element which would enable James to fuse the realistic and symbolist approach into a new modernist synthesis. The sheer amount of poetic texture tends to be superimposed on psychological analysis and the other elements of the traditional Victorian novel such as plot structure, insistence on complication and development of incident and character, which creates a sense of surfeit, a sense of there being, in the words of a student of mine, "too much of everything".

James, as we know, still believes in the necessity of having a story, a plot. It is idiosyncratic, often reduced to nuances and greatly internalized, yet it is developed and graded for suspense as in a Dickens novel: intrigue, deception, danger of exposure, pursuit and flight, changes of heart, conflicts between heroes and villains. It is all there, only transformed into images of the mind, internal action, emotion and thought, which are supposed to kill as a dagger may. In the end we might try to remind ourselves of all the richness which may add up to a sense of surfeit. Here are some of the complications of the thick plot: — Both Milly and Kate know and love Densher. Rather early in the novel Milly learns from Susan who in turn had it from Maud Lowder that Kate and Densher are acquainted. But she is led, through several distinct stages (and each of them offers a possibility that the secret will become known through confession, betrayal or accident), to the tragically wrong conclusion. The stages of the suspense consist of Milly waiting for Kate to mention Densher; Milly finding them together in the National Gallery, yet failing to see through them; Susan finding out the truth but being persuaded by Aunt Maud to hide it; Aunt Maud lying to Milly and thereby, for the time being, keeping Milly in the dark. This complication is further complicated by Kate and Densher's plot to "square" Aunt Maud's plot to throw Densher on Milly; Kate doing the same for different reasons; Lord Mark's design to get Milly and his revenge when he is rejected; Susan's unsuccessful attempt to make Densher lie to Milly in the end. All this is complicated still further by Densher's moral progress, the final outcome of which is withheld from us to the very end. Let us admit that the plot is nearly as intricate as it can possibly be. James's greatness in building it up lies in his ability, after we have "accepted" the

characters and their worlds, to present all the stages of the plot as psychologically motivated and leaving practically nothing to accident or chance. Everything is prepared and accounted for, interlocked, linked together, enmeshed. The psychological complication consists of inward processes some of which are analyzed to the smallest detail while others remain hidden. James's sensibility and discriminating intelligence often try to catch the most tenuous psychological or moral nuances. Milly asks Kate, for instance, to accompany her to the doctor to prove that she does not "horribly blame her" for her reserve; she is aware of seeing Kate as she supposes Densher sees her, and notices that he sees her not so much in her own right, but as she is seen by Kate, Susan or Aunt Maud. In the scene in which Kate is out to destroy Milly's "residuary innocence" there is a whole range of shade in the "honesty" with which she approaches Milly, also many shades in the "orgies of reticence" with which James approaches the themes of illness and death. The sheer weight of so much plot and so much moral and psychological refinement (which are aspects of the novel in many ways opposed to each other, especially when they are taken to extremes) is, to repeat James's own term, "ponderous" indeed. Yet this complicated plot, these labyrinths of psychological analysis are overlaid by a decided attempt at a poetic and symbolic encompassment of the theme. The symbolic tangents are incredibly thick: Milly as princess and dove, Kate as panther and woman, Aunt Maud as Britannia of the market place, Sir Luke as magician and god. Vivid, romantic, "poetic" moments are numerous and full of reverberations: Milly facing the precipice, Kate pacing beautiful and dangerous, Densher struggling with the evil let loose in the great "drawing room of Europe", Milly in white with her pearls, or in her monastic, "inveterate" black; the feeling of suspension in air or submersion in water, of being smothered under Persian carpets or covered as if by softest silks while sinking into the protective womb of carriages. All these images with their mythic, Christian and Freudian suggestions carry much of the novel's weight.

The novel is somehow made to carry more than it can not only with regard to its meanings and themes. There seems to be intelligence and refinement in excess of many situations that prompted them; and, above all, there seems to be an excess, an orgy of formal approaches and devices, of various stylistic and structural strands, which often fuse badly because they are incompatible. In *The Wings of the Dove* we find the complex melodramatic plot of romance and the social and

moral interest stemming from realism; an esthete's sense of beautiful style and the practice of "absolutely premeditated art"; the symbolism pointing backwards towards Hawthorne and Melville and forwards towards Joyce or Virginia Woolf; and a dominant psychological element which is rooted in the moral awareness of someone like George Eliot and just stops short of breaking the dam of traditional narrative and overflowing into stream of consciousness. These are only some of the reasons why we may regard Henry James as the supreme example of the unclassifiable genius.

