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Mastering the Master in Henry James and Nietzsche

THIS ESSAY ARGUES THAT the central dynamic of Henry James's *The Wings of the Dove* is a struggle between two competing forms of power: what Nietzsche called "master morality" and "slave morality."[1] Both of these forms of power derive from Nietzsche's central conception of "the will to power." For the master moralist, morality is a form of action, a doing or a making, that is expressive of the person. For the slave moralist, by contrast, morality is less a form of action than a mode of reacting to what the person perceives as different or alien:

[1] These terms allude to Hegel's famous discussion of "master" and "slave" in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977) 104–19, in which the two undergo a "fight to the death" that forces each to confront the prospect of his own non-existence. What Hegel's analysis seeks to do is to rise above (*aufheben*) the terms of this struggle for power through a dialectical process in which the "power" of the master is revealed to be hollow and the slave becomes "the master of the master," thereby pointing to a system of human relations whose basis is not the fact of power, but the ideal of equality. Nietzsche's allusion to Hegel's discussion is intended to throw his own conception of power into the sharpest possible contrast with that of Hegel. For Nietzsche, the struggle for power is not primarily a struggle for "existence," or survival; it is a struggle between competing value systems, and that struggle can never be transcended, for our identities are constituted by those values. Nietzsche maintains, therefore, that Hegel's and, more generally, modernity's efforts to place human relations on a basis free of power are themselves a diseased expression of the will to power; they presuppose the perspective of the slave-moralist. Nietzsche, by contrast, proposes to view the issue from the standpoint of the master moralist.

> While every noble [master] morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself, [slave morality] says No to what is "outside," what is "different," what is "not itself"; and *this* No is its creative deed ... slave morality always first needs a hostile external world; it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all—its action is fundamentally reaction.[2]

These two forms of power, I argue, are incarnated in the two heroes of *The Wings of the Dove*, Kate Croy and Milly Theale. Kate is a modernistic, naturalistic, and impoverished hero embodying self-interest, worldliness, and the values of the marketplace. She is "master-moralistic" in that she is acutely aware of the limited and finite character of her own actions, most of which involve a quest for social and economic power. Milly, on the other hand, is an anti-modernistic, idealistic and fabulously wealthy hero embodying self-sacrifice, innocence, and a transcendent ideal of goodness. She is "slave-moralistic" in that she defines herself, or constitutes her identity, "in reaction to" the greed and opportunism of those around her.

Traditionally, critics have viewed this novel as enacting a triumph of Milly's romantic anti-modernism and aestheticism over Kate's opportunism and modernity.[3] This view derives in large measure from a generally accepted account of the plot of the novel

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[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1968) 472–73. Subsequent references are to this edition.

[3] Insofar as James's works were treated as socially, culturally, or politically relevant, he was presented as a modernist whose protest against contemporary social institutions consisted in retreating into his isolated self. Such readings of James became the foundation of the New Critics' successful canonization of James's late works. I have dealt in a general way with New Critical and deconstructionist readings of James in "Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and the Tragic Henry James," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 34 (1992): 403–49; "Crossroads of Skepticism: Wittgenstein, Derrida, and Ostensive Definition," *The Philosophical Forum* 21 (1990): 261–76; "Henry James as Nietzschean: The Dark Side of the Aesthetic," *Partisan Review* 56 (1989): 391–405, "Nietzsche Contra Derrida: Two Views of Henry James's 'The Birthplace'," *The Henry James Review* 11 (1990): 133–48; and a review essay of *The Complete Plays of Henry James*, ed. Leon Edel, *Genre* 24 (1991): 211–16.

that it will be the burden of this essay, in whole and in many of its parts, to challenge. The account I refer to interprets Milly's death from an unnamed illness, shortly before the end of the narrative, as precipitated by her shock on learning of the secret plan of her "friend," Kate Croy, to get her hands on Milly's money. Kate badly needs such money in order to prevent her wealthy aunt, Maud Lowder, from forcing her to marry a vacuous aristocrat, Lord Mark. Kate's plan is to deceive both Maud and Milly by encouraging her lover, journalist Merton Densher, to court Milly—who is in love with him and doesn't realize that Kate is too—so that when Milly dies she will leave her money to Densher. After vacillating for a period of time, Densher complies with Kate's plan, undertaking the courtship of Milly with evident success until Lord Mark, whose insincere declaration of love for Milly has been rejected by her, reveals to Milly that Kate and Densher are lovers. Later, after Milly has died and Densher has fallen in love with her "memory," as Kate puts it, he accuses Kate of having put Lord Mark up to this spiteful deed. In any case, the shock caused by Lord Mark's revelation, most critics have assumed, precipitates Milly's final decline. Nonetheless, Milly does with open eyes what Kate had contrived throughout the novel to manipulate her unknowingly to do: she leaves her money to Densher, thereby giving Kate access to it. Kate's "victory," however, is a hollow one, since her acceptance of the money entails her loss of Densher, who has meanwhile not only fallen in love with the "memory" of Milly, but has become increasingly alienated by what he regards as Kate's morally repugnant behaviour.

This account of the plot of *Wings* assigns to Milly and Kate the roles of hero and villain, respectively. According to three critics spanning three generations of Jamesian criticism, F.O. Matthiessen, Dorrothea Krook, and Mark Daniel Fogel, Milly's bequest of her money to Densher is a bequest to her own worst enemy, Kate;[4] it is a sacrificial act embodying "forgiveness, dedication, blessing," in Densher's words toward the end of the novel.[5] Such an interpreta-

[4] Matthiessen, *Henry James: The Major Phase* (New York: Oxford UP, 1944) xx; Krook, *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1962) 74; and Fogel, *Henry James and the Structure of the Romantic Imagination* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1981) 82.

[5] Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove*, ed. J. Donald Crowley and Richard A. Hocks (New York: Norton, 1978) 370. Subsequent references are to this edition.

tion is supported by the novel's allusions to Milly as a Christ-figure, as well as by the central image of her as a dove. Kate Croy, on the other hand, is no Christ-figure, as traditional accounts have also emphasized. Like a Machiavellian villain in a Renaissance play, her desire propels the main lines of this narrative of guilt and betrayal. Described as possessed of a Carrie Meeber-like "accessibility to pleasure from ... material things" (35), Kate's desire appears to be mainly for money: for power as a "tainted ... destructive force."[6] Although critics, beginning with William Dean Howells in a 1903 review of the novel shortly after its publication, have typically expressed admiration for the portrait of Kate Croy, it has been an aesthetic admiration similar to that for Thackeray's Becky Sharp: one perfectly consistent with moral disapproval—with imputing to her, as F.O. Matthiessen and many other critics have done, "essential evil."[7]

My purpose, in applying Nietzsche's categories of master versus slave moralities to this novel, is not just to throw into question these evaluations of the characters of Kate and Milly, but to use such a re-evaluation to reassess and deepen Nietzsche's distinction betweeen master and slave moralities. Here it should be noted that this distinction has not been one of the more influential of Nietzsche's philosophy. On the contrary, compared to Nietzsche's nominalist critique of language as a "mobile army of metaphors,"[8] or even his notion of "the eternal return of the same,"[9] it has been relatively neglected. This neglect is, in one regard, puzzling, for the distinction between master and slave moralities is the cornerstone of two of his most important works, *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*. In another sense, however, the neglect is not in the least puzzling and is easily explicable in terms of the manifestly unappealing implications of the category of "master morality": that such a type appears to be exploitative in nature. My argument, however, is that just as it misses an essential facet of

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[6] J.A. Ward, *The Imagination of Disaster: Evil in the Fiction of Henry James* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1961) 233.

[7] Matthiessen, *Major Phrase* 79.

[8] "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," trans. Daniel Breazeale, *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870s* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999): 79–100.

[9] *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974) 273–74.

James's novel to regard Kate's behaviour as exploitative, so too it misses an essential facet of Nietzsche's distinction to regard the master moralist as in the main an 'exploiter' and his 'morality' as at bottom a non-morality.[10] For Nietzsche developed the distinction between master and slave moralities with a crucial irony in mind: that under the conditions of modernity it would be the master moralist, rather than the slave moralist, who is the most victimized. The reason for this is that the master moralist gives expression to a concept of power that he applies not just to others but, more crucially, to himself; and that that concept of power, although framed against the relatively simple conditions of pre-modern cultures, is no match for the complex and encompassing workings of a slave-moralistic notion of power that holds sway in modern cultures. In *The Wings of the Dove*, I argue, Kate gives expression to a master moralistic concept of power which, because of the consistency and integrity of her application of that concept to herself, puts her at the mercy of the intrinsicially more hypocritical and self-serving slave morality incarnated in all of the other characters in the novel, including Milly. Implicit in both James's and Nietzsche's work is a cultural critique of modernity that redefines the ways in which both 'victim' and 'exploiter' are viewed.

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[10] Although Nietzsche is not consistent in his terminology, "master morality" is neither 'amoral' nor purely 'relativistic'; it is the positioning of good and bad in relation to one another that is 'relative,' not master morality itself. This is what Nietzsche was getting at, I believe, when he said in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (referring to his previous work): "*Beyond Good and Evil*—At least this does not mean "'Beyond Good and Bad'" (*Genealogy* 491). To be 'beyond' some moral categories (such as those of slave morality) is not to be 'beyond' all moral categories (such as those of master morality). As Nietzsche made clear as early as *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), there can be no escape from moral valuations, however "false" those valuations may be (60). The belief that one can rise above (or below) all moral categories was for Nietzsche naïve and "childish" (*Gay Science* 285); his *Übermensch* is anything but amoral. On the contrary, the central presupposition of his formulation of master and slave moralities is that no one can escape being shaped by some form of morality. The choice is not between morality and amorality, but between different kinds of morality (or immorality).

What is my principal objection to the conventional version of the plot of *The Wings of the Dove* described above? It should be noted, to begin with, that there is something terribly inconsequential about attributing to Kate a plot to deceive Milly, for by any interpretation that plot is not successful, Milly is not so deceived, yet she leaves her money (or so it is assumed) to Densher anyway. We do not, as a matter of certainty, know that Milly left her fortune to Densher, but even assuming she did (which, I agree with most critics, is highly probable), we do not know that Kate accepted Densher's offer to her to take the money in exchange for marrying him, for her accession to Densher's proposal to break off their engagement does not necessarily imply such a consequence. I will in fact argue that the latter consequence is highly improbable, but for the moment I want simply to observe that critics of this novel have taken the odd position of explaining Milly's final actions by attributing to them a 'cause' which, they admit, fails to achieve its intended effect. I do not wish, however, to be taken as denying altogether that such a cause is operative, for in a late James novel, especially this one, to say that the actions effected by characters are overdetermined is an understatement. My argument, rather, is that to the extent there is a plot to deceive and defraud Milly in this novel, the principal author of that plot is Kate's Aunt Maud, not Kate herself, and that Kate, quite as much and perhaps more than Milly, is the 'victim' of that plot. To shift attention from Kate to Aunt Maud in this regard is to do two things. First, it is to sharpen our sense of this novel as cultural criticism, since Maud is nothing if not a cultural icon, in the Arnoldian sense, of aristocratic philistinism. Secondly, it is to emphasize the basic similarities between Kate's and Milly's positions *vis-à-vis* the dominant culture with which they must contend; and to contrast the very different ways they respond to that dominant culture.

Throughout the novel, Kate is consistently characterized as a person who acts by instinct and feeling, not by reason and calculation. Her 'plot' against Milly comes about not as the result of a well-thought-out and long deliberated plan, but as the result of a complex and graduated series of self-interested responses to the situations and people with which she is confronted. Unlike most of the other characters in the novel, Kate never attempts to deny responsibility for her actions or to distance herself from their consequences. This aspect of her personality is striking because she is

subjected to conditions—poverty, social disgrace, the close proximity of a wealthy upper class—that are the classic breeding grounds of what Nietzsche called a "slave moralistic" psychology of *ressentiment*.[11] Kate is invested to some degree, at least in the opening sections of the novel, with elements of that resentment; her "constant perception of the incongruity of things" (56) is a sensitivity to the slights and injustices to which she is subjected as a result of her social position.

But what 'comes out,' in James's story of her, is her remarkable ability to shun, or turn her back on, the forces of such a psychology, a psychology that would allow her to take refuge, as Densher does, in a hypocritical idealism disengaged from the limiting conditions of her social environment. "I am a person, thank God," she says to Densher, "who can do what I don't like." What she doesn't like is the world in which her belligerent Aunt Maud, as well as her "haunting and harassing" father and hectoring sister, have compelled her to take up residence—a world in which people, especially herself, are viewed as commodities to be manipulated and exchanged in the service of others', usually Maud's, far-reaching interests. In the first paragraph of the novel, Kate images herself as an object or possession "chalk-marked by fate ... at a common auction" (21). Shortly afterward, she proposes to her father, with a "sincerity" endorsed by the narrator, to repudiate Aunt Maud's world (31); and is dissuaded from doing so only by her father and sister, who wish to gain access to Maud's money through Kate. As Millicent Bell has stressed, Kate Croy is a character from a plot of naturalism in that she fully acknowledges her complicity with the harsh realities of her social environment.[12] But she also steps outside of that naturalistic plot in that she is invested with the ability to resist the forces of the commodity culture which would victimize her, a resistance that takes shape within that culture. Such a positioning of Kate's struggle gives her a 'narrative' function that contrasts radically with those of the rest of the characters, especially Milly. Although Kate displays a "mastery" (292) in her use of language that causes critics to quote her words more often than those of any other character in the novel, and although she provides the most distinctive and memorable descriptions of the other

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[11] *Genealogy* 472–73.

[12] *Meaning in Henry James* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1991).

characters—including those of Maud as the "Britannia of the Market Place" (37) and of Milly as a "dove" (171)—her discursive powers are rhetorical more than narrative. They are powers, that is, produced by "the mastery of her mere way of putting things" (292) and are displayed more often in dialogue than in free indirect discourse and 'psycho-narration.'

Maud's modernistic sense of self, by contrast, acknowledges no limits. Characterized as "the Britannia of the Market Place—Britannia unmistakeable but with a pen on her ear" (37), Maud is a national symbol, "gregariously ugly" and "abnormally affirmative" (62), of commodity culture. She exercises power not through self-limiting discursive acts, as does Kate, but through acts of pure volition which spontaneously achieve, without the mediation of discourse, the effects she desires. As Kate tries to convey to an uncomprehending Densher late in the novel, Maud is possessed of a "knowingness" such that "when she adopts a view, she—well, to her own sense, really brings the thing about, fairly terrorises, with her view, any other, any opposite view, and those with it who represent it" (287).

As a national symbol of commodity culture, "a complex and subtle Britannia" (37), Maud is possessed of far-reaching 'interests' which cause her to 'strike deals' with both Susan and Densher that exploit not just Milly but Kate as well, and which are hypocritically and 'idealistically' justified by Maud as 'necessary' in this 'corrupt' world. Maud exemplifies, in this regard, commodity culture's ability to absorb the more traditional value of 'self-sacrifice' into itself and transform it into something that bears no resemblance to the original. That is why Maud is able to describe herself as self-sacrificing, as "living for others" (251); she treats her *exploitation* of Milly's sacrificial qualities and Kate's poverty as a form *of* self-sacrifice. This reasoning is also applied by Susan and Densher, but less confidently, to their roles in determining Milly and Kate's fates. Susan and Densher, as many critics agree, are sentimentalists and idealists who act, very often, in bad faith. But Maud is something more: she is a sentimentalist without sentiment, an idealist without ideas, a person for whom making "a new friend … is like changing one's bankers" (134). When Susan, sobbing uncontrollably, announces to Maud the doctor's verdict that Milly is terminally ill, Maud receives the news while sitting at her writing table, "knocking off a note or two" (244).

Maud solipsistically absorbs the public sphere into herself, turning 'reality' into her conception of it and dismissing any element of that reality of which she disapproves—e.g., Kate's love for Densher—to the netherworld of illusion. That is why Kate speaks of Maud as 'terrorizing views' she does not share; the terror she induces in others is a function of the hegemony of her essentially corporate consciousness. In a rare scene which exhibits a slackening of such consciousness, Maud confesses to Susan: "I'm always scared—I may call it so—till I understand" (247). To understand, for Maud, is to know; and to know is to be able to terrorize others rather than be terrorized oneself. That Maud applies the term "scared" to herself only with the greatest reluctance ("I may call it so") is an indication of how all-encompassing is the zone of consciousness with which she envelops the other characters in the novel.

Maud exercises control not just over Kate and Densher, but also over Milly and Susan. In a crucial scene in the first chapter of Book Seventh, a scene which occurs in 'story time' prior to most of the events narrated in Book Sixth, it is revealed that Maud and Susan have held a series of 'councils' in which they have agreed to deceive both Kate and Milly in the interest of 'helping' them—which is to say, in the interest of sacrificing them to the two older women's expectations of them. Those expectations consist, on Maud's part, in seeing Kate "high up and in the light" (65), or married to Lord Mark. On Susan's part, they consist in giving her dying "princess," as she habitually refers to Milly, the happiness which she deserves. Both sets of expectations can be realized by a single means: compelling Densher to court Milly. By that means, Densher will have been eliminated as a rival to Lord Mark and Milly will have been permitted to realize her passion for Densher.

The conversation between Maud and Susan in Book Seventh, chapter one, is crucial because, among other things, it provides Susan with an important piece of information that she had previously lacked: that Kate loves Densher and that her display of indifference toward him has been dissimulated. Maud provides this information to Susan with the greatest reluctance, since doing so violates her "system" of not acknowledging what she calls "Kate's delusion" (i.e., that Kate loves Densher). Armed with her new knowledge, Susan finds herself "of a sudden, strange to say, quite willing to operate to Kate's harm, or at least to Kate's good as Mrs. Lowder with a noble anxiety measured it. She found herself in short not

caring what became of Kate .... Kate wasn't in danger. Kate wasn't pathetic; Kate Croy, whatever happened, would take care of Kate Croy" (249).

What Susan means by saying, or rather thinking, that she is willing to operate to "Kate's harm"—a "harm" which is indistinguishable from "Kate's good" as Maud conceives it—is that she will help to take Densher away from Kate. And the chief means she will use to do this is to not reveal to Milly that Kate loves Densher, for without such a deception, Susan assumes, Milly would never allow herself to be courted by Densher. Here Susan's attributes as a frustrated "romance author" possessed of a "positive need of mind to see Milly as an unspotted princess" (77), come to the fore. Susan, that is, assumes a role, in relation to Milly, that is a romanticized version of the role Maud takes on in relation to Kate. Yet the roles assumed by Maud and Susan are by no means equal in status. This is not just because Maud is far more "unscrupulous and immoral," as Kate describes Maud, than is Susan; it is because her deception of Milly is but an element of Maud's larger scheme to divest Kate of her "delusion." It is Maud, indeed, who first proposes that Milly be deceived and it is she who gives Susan strict orders to enforce such deception: "Kate thinks she cares. But she's mistaken .... You don't know it—that must be your line. Or rather your line must be that you deny it utterly" (248).

What is crucial to recognize in evaluating these scenes between Maud and Susan is how relatively early in the story time of the novel they occur. For what this time frame shows is that although Kate, in the many scenes where she urges Densher to court Milly, *thinks* she is deceiving Maud, in fact she is acting entirely in accord, albeit unknowingly, with Maud's purposes. The place in the novel where Kate first articulates, in anything resembling a clear form, her plot to induce Densher to court Milly occurs in Book Sixth, after Densher's return from America. But as we have seen, the 'councils' between Maud and Susan, although narrated in Book Seventh, actually take place prior to the events of Book Sixth. Moreover, Kate repeatedly reveals that she is in ignorance of, if not the existence of those councils, then their content. She believes that Maud will not have revealed to Susan that Kate in any way reciprocates Densher's love (200); and she even suggests to Densher that he admit to Susan, if it makes him feel better, that he really loves Kate because she is "absolutely certain" that Susan "wouldn't

repeat it ... to Maud or to any one else" (308). Kate reveals here just how profoundly ignorant she is of Maud's machinations, for it is Maud who has told Susan that Kate loves Densher, not Susan who has told Maud. Moreover, Susan, far from refraining to repeat this or other information to Maud, has connived extensively with Maud on these and other matters.

Kate, in sum, underestimates the extent of the powers being brought to bear on Densher to compel him to love Milly, maintaining a faith in Densher's loyalty to her, Kate, that persists even after the reader is made aware that it no longer exists. Susan's narrated thoughts about Kate not being "in danger" and being able to "take care of herself," which are rendered during her council with Maud, are for this reason unfair. As Kate herself says to Densher, "I risk, my dear, everything" (293).

Kate, then, far from dictating the course of the events of the novel, is made highly vulnerable to them; and that vulnerability is a characteristic feature of the "master moralist," whom Nietzsche characterized, in *The Genealogy of Morals*, as "living in trust and openness with himself" in contrast to the "cleverness" and "*ressentiment*" of the slave moralist (474). "A living thing," wrote Nietzsche in an early work, "can only be healthy, strong, and productive within a certain horizon."[13] This idea is a cornerstone of his later conception of the master moralist, and of morality in general: "Consider any morality with this in mind: what there is in it of 'nature' teaches hatred of the laisser aller, of any all-too-great freedom, and implants the need for limited horizons and the nearest tasks—teaching *the narrowing of our perspective*."[14]

Such narrowness, or willingness to accept the conditional nature of all moral judgments, is linked importantly to the kind of values which the master moralist adopts. Slave morality is characterized by its "faith in opposite values" or binary opposition of "good and evil"—an opposition that is absolute and unconditional.[15] Master morality, by contrast, is characterized by the relative oppo-

[13] *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980) 10.

[14] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 291–92.

[15] Nietzsche, *Genealogy* 482.

sition it posits between "good and bad." 'Good' here denotes what a good or noble person 'does'; 'bad' those forms of behaviour which the good person shuns. 'Bad' is thus relative to 'good' in the sense that its conceptual status is entirely dependent on 'good deeds'; it exists only as the negation or shadow of those deeds. Such deeds have no epistemological or psychological basis. On the contrary, the master moralist gains strength from his or her ability to resist those psychological forces within himself that would detach him from the conditions, limits, or 'form of life' in which he lives.

The central value of slave morality, on the other hand, is not good but evil. Good is defined not as an action but, as was mentioned in the first section, a 'reaction' to, or opposite of, evil. Such reactivity is prompted by a spirit of revenge or *ressentiment*—nihilistic in its most extreme form—against the 'actual,' social and phenomenal world, against the world of becoming and acting. The slave moralist creates an idealized, static, 'otherworld' that becomes his standard of goodness and by which the social and phenomenal world may be condemned or negated. That otherworld may take the form of a heaven, as in Christianity, or a transcendent consciousness, as in the modern religion of 'man.' In both cases, 'goodness' assumes idealized forms whose power is not active, associated with deeds, but passive, associated with the negation of the latter.

Such negation follows what I will call a 'psychology of sacrifice' that governs the behaviour of all the major characters in *Wings* with the exception of Kate. Goodness (as embodied, for example, in Christ) is idealized and sacrificed to 'the world'—the world of power relations—not in order to make it a force in the world but to demonstrate the world's iniquities. Only when sacrificed or made absent can goodness, by slave moralistic logic, exert power; its power is passive or proportional to its ability to make us conscious of such absence. Thus, in *Wings*, Milly exerts her greatest force in the novel only after she absents herself from it.

This strange logic is exhibited most strikingly in Densher's attitude toward both Milly and Kate. Thus, at the beginning of Volume II, Densher, referring to his dependence on Kate, says to her: "Don't fail me. It would kill me." Kate positions herself in reaction to this declaration: "She looked at him a minute with no response but her eyes. 'So you think you'll kill me, in time, to prevent it?'" (220)

Kate, whose words are almost identical to those spoken later by Milly to Lord Mark (269), here unmasks the slave-moralistic psychology of sacrifice as it operates in this novel. That psychology dictates that one idealize others, or solipsistically reduce them to an aspect of one's own consciousness, thereby figuratively murdering them, in order to make them conform to the psychological or social uses one has for them. Kate, as we shall see, prevents such a reduction of herself, forcing Densher to choose another 'victim,' or object of idealization: Milly.

The master moralist, by contrast, does not trust any psychology, including his own, that would substitute the activity of self-expression for passive control. His active nature derives from 'the publicity' of his mode of defining himself, his ability to at once draw strength from and limit himself to his social and cultural context. That ability entails a disbelief in what Nietzsche calls, in *The Genealogy of Morals*, the "neutral independent 'subject'":

> Popular morality ... separates strength from expressions of strength, as if there were a neutral substratum behind the strong man, which was free to express strength or not to do so. But there is no such substratum; there is no "being" behind doing, effecting, becoming; "the doer" is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything. (481)

It follows that for the master moralist consciousness "is not in any decisive sense the *opposite* of what is instinctive" (201). Rather, consciousness is an activity or performance which confers meaning, including moral meaning, on its purview. Consciousness is made up of acts "of the value positing eye" (472). It is the medium by which "the self" is formed, not something controlled or manipulated by a pre-existing self: "A thought comes when 'it' wishes, and not when 'I' wish, so that it is a falsification of the facts of the case to say that the subject 'I' is the condition of the predicate 'think'" (214). As we shall see, it is the narrator's presentation of Kate in *Wings* that most testifies to his respect for such 'facts,' for it is her thoughts and feelings, more explicitly than those of any other character, which are deprived of a referential basis in a discrete self—which approach a status purely performative.

Since there is no neutral substratum that may serve as the basis for consciousness—in Nietzsche's view—truth, goodness, and beauty are not founded *on* anything; they are established by deed. What this means is that the 'barriers' between truth and falsity, goodness and badness, etc., are permeable; there is no essential, fixed distinction between the elements of these pairs. Both falsehood and suffering, for example, are posited in and through the same value-affirming acts by which truth and happiness are posited; the former are the shadows of those acts and exist only in reference to them—exist not as opposites but as relative difference. Here we see the basis for Nietzsche's (and James's) tragic affirmation of the value of play-acting, deception, and lying, as well as the value of pain and suffering. Falsehood, immorality, and suffering can be resources for new forms of truth, goodness, and happiness.

Let us return now to the novel to see in more detail how this opposition between master and slave moralities takes shape. Until the analepsis of chapter one, Book Seventh, the narrative seemed to be following a course that would support the traditional view that Kate is the principal agent of Milly's victimization—a view that is encouraged by the conferences between Kate and Densher depicted in Book Sixth, in which Kate describes her own "cleverness" as "infernal" (193). That "cleverness" comes increasingly to resemble, after Book Seventh, a kind of bewilderment. Earlier in the novel, Kate had conjured, to Densher, a "future" that was not "contingent" on Maud, a future in which she would be rich without sacrificing, as Maud required her to do, either Densher or her father and sister (68). At one point in Book Sixth, Kate says to Densher of Milly: "She doesn't see the future. It has opened out before her in these last weeks as a dark confused thing" (213). Yet the same could be said, at least in the closing chapters of the novel, of Kate herself, as when she comments to Densher that "whatever … may be 'in it' for me … is more than I yet know myself" (384).

Kate's failure to guarantee a future for herself and Densher is derailed in the same way that the plot of the novel is derailed; the narrative increasingly invests Kate herself with elements of the tragic, conveying a sense of the doomed nature of her effort to resist the forces of commodity culture which Maud incarnates. Indeed, al-

though Kate's attitude toward Milly is clearly opportunistic, the narrator describes that attitude, without irony, as one of "deep sincerity," "compassionate imagination," and "kindness" (262, 305).

Early in the novel, the narrator maintains that he could "get close" to Milly only by observing her effects on others, but that requirement appears to be even more in effect in the case of Kate, who is largely presented to us in dialogue and through the views of other characters, including especially Densher. This does not mean, of course, that Milly and Kate aren't also described from the extradiegetic level of the author, as is Kate in various sections of the novel, but especially in the first two chapters. But in James's works, such descriptions do not render the characters as centred, essential selves whose actions are psychologically grounded. Rather, in a manner strikingly similar to Nietzshe's critique of the centred subject, it is from the "scene," from "the nexus of social and interpersonal relations" that feelings, perceptions, and thoughts in James's texts seem to arise.[16] What this means is that neither Milly nor Kate's 'actual' motivations, intentions, and purposes are ever unambiguously revealed. Milly and Kate are the loci, so to speak, of the competing cultural values invested in them by the other characters. Like the leaders of rival factions forced to make war on one another, who yet admire and even 'like' one another well enough personally, Milly and Kate enact a 'high fight' (as a similar conflict in *The Golden Bowl* is described), in which the 'enemy' is not the other person but what she is projected to be by the discourses of her respective followers.

What sharply distinguishes Milly's from Kate's narrative functions, however, is that the former are made possible by Milly's ability to project herself into an imaginary future, or undefined "afterwards" and "later," from which she records the events, thoughts, and feelings of the story time's "present" (102). From her ethereal vantage point, Milly attempts to construct a sort of meta-narrative that will exert control over the other characters in the novel by textualizing them: by ordering and unifying the bewildering variety of 'little narratives' with which the mostly British characters of the novel (Milly and Susan are the only two Americans) confront

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[16] See Leo Bersani, "The Jamesian Lie," *A Future For Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976) 128–55; and "The Narrator as Center in *The Wings of the Dove*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 6 (1960): 131–44.

her. The reason that Milly can arrogate such power to herself is not just that she is "forever seeing things afterwards," but that she is also forever anticipating her own death. "Afterwards," after all, can only mean, for Milly, the 'real' otherworld, or death. Milly's otherworldliness is emphasized in the famous scene of the Bronzino portrait, when she 'recognizes' herself as dead, as well as in such comments as "You'll never really know where I am. Except when I'm gone; and then you'll only know where I'm not" (to Susan, 127); and "I think I could die without it's being noticed" (to Kate, 141).

But Milly does not just perceive herself, slave-moralistically, as 'dead' to the modern world; this is also the way in which that world perceives her, at one point holding a "commemorative banquet" (206) for her only one day after her doctor diagnoses her illness as terminal (it is the same day on which Maud and Susan hold their first 'council'). The latter perception accounts for why Milly is so often described as 'strange' and 'queer'; it is a strangeness that puts her at an immense disadvantage in understanding the British mores and manners in which she is enveloped for much of the novel. Milly's 'strangeness,' in particular, prevents her from grasping how a 'good friend,' Kate Croy, can at once genuinely 'like' her and opportunistically make use of her. When Kate attempts to warn Milly of the danger that Maud's world poses to her—Kate is the only character in the novel to do so and characteristically includes herself as part of the 'danger'—that warning scares Milly, but she does not really heed it. Instead, she fictively attempts to 'write herself out' of the plot which she has played a principal role in constructing, using her enormous wealth to give concrete form to her fictive meta-world by renting a fabulous palace in Venice, the description of which is so pervaded by references to Italian artists and European authors, as well as by allusions to the works of Walter Pater and John Ruskin, that the palace seems to resemble an ethereal incarnation, or accumulated product, of the entire history of European civilization (259–60). Into the higher reaches of this aestheticized reality, this purchased history, the "heiress of all ages" (79) ascends, proposing "never, never [to] leave it" (264). Such an ascent, however, enables Milly not to evade the tentacles of Maud's commodified culture but, on the contrary, places her more conveniently within their reach.

It is indeed Maud who benefits most by Milly's death, however one chooses to interpret Milly's final act. For if that act entails a bequeathal of a fortune to Densher, then Densher, at least by Maud's reckoning, has been made rich, and hence acceptable to Maud as a marriage partner for Kate. If, on the other hand, such a bequeathal has not been made, then Kate is quite as vulnerable to Maud's control as she ever was—or rather, much more so, since Densher no longer loves Kate and the latter can no longer rely on Densher's 'support,' as she did in the first half of the novel. As for the implications of the final scene, in which Densher rejects Kate and Kate either does or does not accept the fortune Densher offers to her (assuming he has it to offer), either way, once again, Maud wins. If Kate takes the money, then she has become the 'great lady' Maud always wanted her to be; indeed, the opportunism of such an act would qualify her to occupy a privileged moral position in Maud's Market Place. If, on the other hand, Kate refuses the money, then she has, once again, been deprived of any effective weapons to counter Maud's control of her. Milly's 'sacrificial act,' in sum, leaves behind a devastated social, moral, and emotional landscape in the form of Kate and Densher's estrangement, the return of the well-intentioned if misguided Susan to America, the restoration of Lord Mark to his role as Maud's protégé, and the "haunting," "harassing" figure of Kate's father, Lionel Croy, hovering in the background. Over such a landscape Maud exercises dominion.

In this novel, James has thus rewritten, or iterated, the traditional romance plot, with its selflessness on the part of the hero, not merely with a grim twist, but with a radically different moral colouring. For what Milly's story dramatizes is the loss of efficacy, beginning in the late nineteenth-century, of a set of moral values, including especially the virtue of self-sacrifice, associated with a "culture of character."[17] It is Nietzsche, above all, who was sensitive to such loss of efficacy; he argued that the so-called virtue of self-sacrifice was prompted by a "slave moralistic" psychology of

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[17] Juxtaposed against such a pre-modern "culture of character," in which self-sacrifice and privacy are the ultimate values, is a modernistic "culture of personality," in which the self is publicized and commodified in an effort to make it the locus of its own self-fulfilment. See Warren Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon, 1984).

ressentiment that 'affirmed' nothing, but on the contrary negated, or stood in judgement against, the social and phenomenal world, the world of becoming. As passive, 'goodness' can exert its effects only by being sacrificed; its power is proportional to its ability to make us conscious of its absence in this 'corrupt' world. If Milly is to be regarded as a 'Christ-figure'—and it should be noted that it is above all Maud (and in the second half of the novel, Densher) who places most stress on such an image, even though it originated with Kate—then the 'Christ' whom she resembles is perhaps close to the one portrayed by Nietzsche, a Christ who was made into a 'Christian' by St. Paul and others when the latter 'read' Christ's heroic acts as acts of revenge against a corrupt world.

Unlike Milly, Kate never deceives herself into thinking that she will not have to 'pay.' If she declares, early in the novel, that she will "sacrifice nobody and nothing" (60), she does not include herself in that exclusion; she is referring to Densher, as well as to her father and sister (she has not at this point met Milly). What she does not anticipate, however, is that her sacrifice, the form her payment will take, is, precisely, her loss of Densher. Kate thus advances a security to guarantee her future—Milly's love for Densher—which closes off that future by generating a further payment in the form of Densher's love for Milly. Discounting for the moment the possibility that Kate has been made rich—a possibility which, as we will see shortly, James represents as improbable—Kate's future, at the end of the novel, has taken on a bleak appearance. For not only has she lost Densher and become alienated from Maud, who now treats her as a "maid in the scullery," but she has been compelled to an intimacy with the figure in her life who has caused her the most pain and anguish: her father, Lionel Croy who, along with Kate, has moved into the home of Kate's sister, Marian Condrip. When Kate leaves Densher's apartment, after telling him, in the last words of the novel, "We shall never be again as we were!" it is Marian's home to which she must return, where Lionel awaits her.

What is the source of the influence which Kate's "haunting," "harassing" father (38, 57), has over her? The answer is clear; Kate's intense and quite unmodernistic loyalty to her immediate family, including her sister and father, but not Maud. As she says to Densher early in the novel, "That's all my virtue—a narrow little family feeling. I've a small stupid piety.... My position's a value, a great value,

for them both [for her father and sister] .... It's the value—the only one they have" (59).

Kate's familial loyalty is linked to her esteem for the family name of Croy, whose history is imaged in the second paragraph of the novel as a once "voluminous phrase" that has been diminished, due to her father's disgrace (which is never identified), to a "broken sentence," and threatens now to become "soundless." In the same chapter, Kate dedicates herself to keeping that history audible; she seeks to restore her family name by contriving a new history, which is yet continuous with the old, for that name. The centre of such a new history is herself; all her actions in the novel, including her efforts to deceive Maud and Milly, may in this sense be regarded as ways of realizing this new history by employing her remarkable discursive powers: by developing a more powerful tale, or plot, than that of either Maud or Milly. Kate's 'unmodernistic' loyalty to her family is thus given a highly modernistic means of expression, one which equates the survival of her family with its discursive status or 'history': which views familial tradition not so much as 'invented' than as performatively constituted through acts of language. In one of Densher's few favourable descriptions of Kate in Book Tenth, he links Kate's ability to contrive new forms of discourse for new situations to her "talent for life ... which found in her a difference for a differing time. She didn't give their tradition up; she made of it something new" (397). Kate's discursive performance is situated "in time," as she puts it; it is at once 'timely' and occurs within a this-worldly frame of reference. However great her antipathy for her father, Kate knows that her destiny is linked to his: "My father's dishonour," she says to Densher, "[is] a part of me .... How can such a thing as that not be the great thing in one's life?" (57)

Reinforcing such familial loyalty is Kate's memory of her mother, who had suffered greatly from Lionel's behaviour, a fact of which Kate is acutely aware: "Sometimes, alone, I've to smother my shrieks when I think of my poor mother. She went through things—they pulled her down; I know what they were now—I didn't then, for I was a pig; and my position, compared with hers, is an insolence of success. That's what Marian keeps before me; that's what papa himself, as I say, inimitably does" (59).

Besides the scene at the beginning of the novel, the only other scene in which Lionel is represented occurs just prior to the

end, after Kate has moved out of Maud's home, a move which is explicitly linked to the return of her father. During this scene, Lionel is not dramatized directly; rather, he remains in his bedroom at Marian's home while Kate and Densher talk in the "small" and "dingy" drawing-room. Kate reluctantly describes him to Densher as "in terror .... He wants, he says, to be quiet. But his quietness is awful." In response to Densher's question, "What does he do?" Kate replies: "He cries." Such crying and terror are never explicitly accounted for; when Densher asks Kate for an explanation, she replies that he is not "ill," adding "If you love me—now—don't ask me about father" (392). The only other information we receive which could pertain to Lionel's behaviour is Maud's comment to Densher that Lionel's reappearance at Marian's home was not precipitated by "events at all calamitous," but is simply a "horrid and vulgar" fact: "He's there, the brute," Maud says to Densher. "And Kate's with them" (379). But there is, in fact, a probable explanation for Lionel's behaviour: that Kate has failed to become rich. I say 'probable' because that explanation is consistent with the way Lionel is portrayed—only the lack of money could terrify and make him cry—and because no other explanation is suggested.

These two representations of Lionel naratively enclose the dramatization of Kate's character in this novel. Such enclosure forcefully conveys a sense of Kate's victimization, a sense quite as great as in the case of Milly. "Chop me up fine or serve me whole," Kate jokes at one point (211), referring to Susan's idea of representing Kate in one of her books (a representation which would, without doubt, assign her the role of villain). Kate makes a joke of such victimization, but James's novel does not. From Kate's sister, Marian, who, like Lionel, treats Kate as a means of gaining access to Maud's money and bitterly resents the fact that Kate's "submission to their aunt" (39) is not more thorough-going; to Lord Mark, who pointedly ignores Kate after she leaves Maud's house; to Susan, who feels no qualms about operating to "Kate's harm"; to her "unscrupulous and immoral" Aunt Maud, who by the end of the novel is quite alienated from Kate; to, above all, Densher, there is no character with whom Kate has significant contact who does not try to make her a means of fufilling their own interests. Indeed, as much or more than any other major character in James's late fiction, Kate is subjected to a series of humiliations and disappointments linked to her diminished social status.

Despite Kate's intensity of feeling for her mother, she does not idealize her. On the contrary, her memory of her mother serves as a goad to avoid her fate. Once Kate's father rejects her offer, in the first scene of the novel, to live with him, Kate resolves to fashion a future for herself and her family in which she, not Lionel, calls the shots. What prevents Kate from taking control of her own and her family's future is not her father, but Densher. It is indeed Densher who, more effectively than Lionel, manages to 'disinherit' Kate. His behaviour is not so blatant as Lionel's, but it nonetheless succeeds in dictating Kate's fate in a way that strongly emphasizes her sexual submission to Densher.

Kate, in the first scene with Lionel, had been able to provide an effective counter to what were termed his "penetralia," which Kate is "spared the sight of," by the fact that Lionel had not "received her ... in bed" (23). But she is able to provide no such counter to the intense sexual attraction she feels toward Densher. Although that attraction is a factor from the beginning of their relations, it is given a special prominence in the novel starting in chapter one, Book Eighth, when Densher contrives his plan to force Kate to sleep with him by threatening to leave Venice and give up the courtship of Milly if she does not agree to do so. Kate's motivation for yielding to Densher is linked to the sense of responsibility she takes for her deception of Milly: "Do you want to kill her?" Kate asks Densher in response to his threat to leave Venice. "We've told too many lies" (293–94).

Densher's successful "execution" of his "idea" to compel Kate to sleep with him produces a dramatic change in Kate's personality. Whereas throughout the novel Kate had been characterized as active and energetic—at one point "pacing like a panther"—the very next time she sees Densher, in London, after sleeping with him in Venice, and from that point to the end of the novel, she becomes "passive," "quiet," and "still" in her relations with him, as well as deeply responsive, in an explicitly sexual way, to Densher's "presence" and "touch." Densher, for his part, suffers a marked drop of esteem for Kate after their rendezvous in Venice; his memory of Kate "coming to his rooms" is gradually supplanted by an idealized image of a more spiritual communion with Milly, the link between the two scenes being emphasized by the similarities of language used to describe them. On returning to London, Densher contacts Maud before he does Kate, and despite the fact that the

latter anxiously awaits him, he does not see Kate until three weeks after his return.

In the penultimate chapter of the novel, the fruits of Densher's diminished respect for Kate are dramatized in a scene of sexual violence. Densher has just been accusing Kate of having provided Lord Mark with some new piece of information which, when conveyed to Milly, precipitated her death; Kate has been countering this accusation by denying that she gave Lord Mark any such information (what that information could have been is not indicated), as well as by arguing, quite plausibly, that there is no reason to believe that there was any such extra-medical 'cause' of Milly's death, for Milly was, after all, a dying woman. In the midst of this unpleasant wrangle, Densher's tone momentarily softens:

> She stood there close to him, with something in her patience that suggested her having supposed, when he spoke more appealingly, that he was going to kiss her. He hadn't been, it appeared .... They were still closely face to face, and, yielding to the impulse to which he hadn't yielded before, he laid his hands on her shoulders, held her hard a minute and shook her a little, far from untenderly, as if in expression of more mingled things, all difficult, than he could speak. Then bending his head he applied his lips to her cheek. He fell, after this, away for an instant, resuming his unrest, while she kept the position in which, all passive and as a statue, she had taken his demonstration. (389)

In a scene just prior to this passage, Densher, awaiting news of Milly's death in London, meditates as follows: "The last thing he wished was to be unconscious of [Milly]—what he wished to ignore was her own consciousness, tortured, for all he knew, crucified by its pain" (368). Densher does in fact "know" that Milly is being "crucified"; he, quite as much as Kate, is responsible for that 'crucifixion.' His 'wish' to ignore her own consciousness, yet not be unconscious of her, is a desire to avoid even indirect participation in her suffering while indulging himself in the idealization of her memory. Densher even speaks of Milly's love for him as his "crucifixion" (317). Much in the manner of Maud, he makes his use

of Milly's sacrifice—a psychological use, in contrast to Maud's—his own 'sacrifice.' Kate, quite as much as Milly, is cognizant of the violence that lurks behind the idealization of her by other characters, including Densher. The latter, as he claims, is "dependent" on Kate, but it is a very different kind of dependence than that felt by Kate for Densher. Whereas Densher confesses his inability to live without Kate, Kate confesses that Densher is, for her, an incitement to greater life; she regards him with a "consciousness charged with life to the brim and wishing not to overflow" (354). Her love for him, that is, is an affirmation, not an avoidance of a negation.

Whereas Densher's declared inability to live without Kate suffers a dramatic diminishment after he sleeps with her in Venice, there is no indication that Kate's feelings for Densher, at the end of the novel, are any less intense than those she expressed early on when she declared to him: "I love you as I shall never in my life love any one else.... And I pledge you—I call God to witness!—every spark of my faith; I give you every drop of my life" (74, 72).

But although there is no indication that Kate's feelings for Densher at the end of the novel are less intense than they were at first, there is every indication that they have undergone a change; she has become more vulnerable emotionally to him. Thus, in the final chapter of the novel, she says to him: "The way to pity me—if that's what you want—is to believe in me" (398). As the reader, if not Kate herself, well knows by this time, Densher does not in fact "believe in" her and subjects her to interrogations that are compared to the operations of an "exploring medical hand" cutting open the body of a "patient of courage" (399). Referring to Kate's dislike of Marian's dingy, Chelsea-street home, Kate is described in a late chapter in terms that could easily fit Milly: "Pale, grave and charming, she affected him [Densher] at once as a distinguished stranger—a stranger to the little Chelsea street—who was making the best of a queer episode and a place of exile" (381).

Kate and Milly are similar in that both are made the object of other characters' destructive idealizations of them. What Kate, in contrast to Milly, is successful in avoiding is not the exploitation of herself by others, but her own complicity in that exploitation, a complicity which takes form in Milly's case as a willingness to play the role of a Christ-figure. Kate lacks such willingness; she wishes to avoid succumbing to a psychology of *ressentiment* in which her love would be expressed not as an affirmation but as an avoidance of negation.

That Kate is herself in danger of succumbing to such a psychology of *ressentiment*—a *ressentiment* which, like that of her mother, would take as its principal object her father—is clear not merely in the opening chapters of the novel, but in the closing ones as well. Yet she fiercely resists submitting to that psychology. Thus, a few pages from the end, her conversations with Densher are described as follows:

> She had throughout never a word for what went on at home. She came out of that and she returned to it, but her nearest reference was the look with which, each time, she bade him good-bye. The look was her repeated prohibition: "It's what I have to see and to know—so don't touch it. That but wakes up the old evil, which I keep still, in my way, by sitting by it. I go now—leave me alone!—to sit by it again. The way to pity me—if that's what you want—is to believe in me." (397–98)

Kate's effort to keep quiet about her resentment toward her father signifies not its repression, but an ability to overcome it. That ability is exhibited in fullest form in Kate's relations with Maud, who had been the principal object of her mother's animus. This is what Densher fails to grasp: that Kate must 'play along' with Maud's drama if she is to exert any control over her own fate. Such pretending is dangerous for Kate because Maud's "view" has behind it a sheer force that enables it, "in the face of everything, [to] become the right one" (287). It is a view, in other words, that can be effectively countered only by the force of discourse, by asserting another, contrary view which cannot be absorbed into Maud's logic because it is a parody of that logic.

Kate's discourse gives her a vital narrative function in this novel, one which corresponds not to that of the fictive narrator anxious to retain epistemological control over the materials of her telling, but to that of the traditional storyteller, whose role as prior listener to her familial history—a history of horrors—at once deprives her of epistemological control and grants her a performative role in constructing that tale. In a declaration to Densher which I have previously quoted, Kate says: "I am a person, thank God, who can do what I don't like." This declaration, we note, 'improp-

erly' mixes direct and indirect discourse, committing Kate to a 'self' that is not her 'own,' epistemologically grounded self, but to a self which has an ungrounded conceptual status: a self which is a construction of her own discursive acts, as well as the situation and circumstances in which those acts are embedded. In a similar fashion, the two "we's" of the closing line of the novel, spoken by Kate to Densher, "We shall never be again as we were," do not refer to the same "we," but rather acknowledge the social and cultural status of Kate and Densher's identity as a couple. The latter declaration does not contradict Kate's earlier one to Densher, "I engage myself to you forever," so much as destabilize that "I" by making its status subject to the tale in which it is embedded.

Kate's discourse, in these and other passages, provides a model for James's own discourse as found in his late works. That discourse not only refuses psychological grounding, but forsakes the effort to render characters as centred, essential selves; the late Jamesian text is indeed a narratively empowered 'force field' which is dense with social and cultural typing and which repels any sense of an autonomous consciousness 'speaking for itself' in a private language. In place of discrete minds, what we get in his late works is a great deal of verbal wordplay and compositional artifice that parodies the operations of consciousness by treating our deepest feelings and thoughts as the freely improvised products of a playful, culturally embedded narrative intelligence. Far from effacing himself, the Jamesian author is almost uncontrollably expressive, by which I mean that he imposes on his characters a variety of highly mannered, yet analytic forms of thought without regard to a realistic basis for such imposition. It is indeed from the 'scene' that the Jamesian self seems to arise. Such scenes, although formed of elements that are social and cultural, flaunt causal explanation and psychological motivation. James's late works might in this sense be said to parody the attitude of 'knowingness' he associated with modernity at the same time as they take on its blindness. That blindness, once taken on, becomes a form of seeing. Just as "life," for Strether in *The Ambassadors*, is "wasted"[18] when one exempts oneself from the drama of personal relations by futilely demanding of that drama endless accountability and explanation, so too James, in his fictional works, does not attempt to understand his own

[18] Henry James, *The Ambassadors* (New York: Norton, 1964) 92.

characters so much as to make his own 'muddlement' about them productive. Like Strether, James 'plays along' with the narratives that he has inherited, places himself within them, and shuns the 'knowledge' that would authorize them. This is exactly what Kate does as well in the final scene with Densher. In response to Densher's "I never was in love with [Milly]," Kate says:

> "I believe that now—for the time she lived. I believed it at least for the time you were there. But your change came—as it might well—the day you last saw her; she died for you then that you might understand her. From that hour you did." With which Kate slowly rose. "And I do now. She did it for us." Densher rose to face her, and she went on with her thought. "I used to call her, in my stupidity—for want of anything better—a dove. Well, she stretched out her wings, and it was to that they reached. They cover us."

Is this to be believed? Has Kate, who had earlier referred to Milly as an "angel with a thumping back account," suddenly been converted to Densher's doctrine of Milly's transcendent power and wisdom? Most critics, with qualms, have answered affirmatively, but James's superfluous, or at least melodramatic stage directions, not to mention Kate's histrionic rhetoric, suggest otherwise. Kate, it will be recalled, was the original source of the image of Milly as sacrificial victim; she had imaged Milly allegorically in order to use Milly for her own purposes. In her words to Densher above, she renews this endeavour. Recognizing that Densher's idealization of Milly has caused him to withdraw from her, she 'retells' and alters her original story of Milly in an effort to soothe his ruffled sensibilities and bring him back into the story—Kate's story, not Maud's. Her new version of the story imputes to Milly a power that, in life, Kate 'knows' Milly never had. But her revised allegorization of Milly, although insincere, is not in bad faith. 'Honest hypocrite' that she is, she is willing to commit herself to her own fabrications if they will help to serve as resources for renewed life—if they will prevent her 'history' from becoming soundless. Kate's acceptance of her father's return into her life in the closing chapters testifies to her commitment to keep telling and living that history, whatever its

horrors. As she is throughout the novel, Kate in the closing scene with Densher is not merely a manipulator of events but a participant subject to those manipulations. Her narrative retelling of Milly's story, which has become closely linked to Kate's own, is performed with power and lucidity. However, given the extent of Densher's antipathy for Kate, such a retelling must be regarded as an act of desperation. It does not, in any case, succeed.

Kate's modernity is radically anti-modernistic; its basis is her familial history, her "narrow little family feeling" (59), which yet enables her to self-consciously rewrite and reconstruct that history through the performance of discursive acts. Kate resists the stasis of both pre-modern and modernistic conceptions of the past by her understanding that the past is not so much 'remembered' as performed through acts of remembering. Those acts of remembering demand, as part of their performance, what Nietzsche called the "active" power of "forgetfulness"; one can remember only by selecting. Early in the novel, Kate and Densher's first meetings, when they fell in love, are narrated retrospectively from Kate's much later point of view. In these passages, Kate returns, again and again, to the "beginning" (48) of her love affair with Densher, attempting to place herself at a point of origin that will at once preserve and overcome her own familial history of horrors. That point of origin is, in the end, lost. What is most compelling about James's story of Kate is her acceptance of that loss, combined with her felt sense of its enormity.