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## H. JAMES: THE WINGS OF THE DOVE

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## LITERARY BACKGROUND

In its early days, American literature was little more than English literature transplanted on new ground; the New Continent was too immature for the production of original works. As Henry James was to put it much later: “it takes a great deal of history to make a little tradition, a great deal of tradition to make a little taste, and a great deal of taste to make a little art”. Likewise, N. Hawthorne had stated a few decades before:

“No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land”.

In Europe, literature was the product of a sophisticated civilization; in the early days of the settlement, conditions were not favorable to the flowering of belles-lettres and there was little encouragement to the writing of literature; pioneering engaged all the colonists' faculties and efforts. What little literature eventually emerged in the formative years of colonial growth had no distinctive American quality and was represented by minor genres such as diaries, chronicles and local histories.

### *The American Renaissance*

After the first slow phase of germination came the flowering of American literature; by the middle of the century, a group of New England authors (Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville and Whitman) took the lead in American letters and produced in the space of twenty years (1840-1860) some of the finest and greatest works ever written in the land and in the world. Hence, the name of *American Renaissance* that the famous critic F.O. Matthiessen gave to those two brilliant decades.

The third major figure of the American Renaissance, Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) never was a convert to Transcendentalism, though he was once enough of a sympathizer to take part in the Brook Farm experiment. He did not share Emerson's optimism and rejection of the past; on the contrary, he was closely associated with the New England past through the traditions of his own family which included a judge in the notorious Salem witchcraft trials of the XVII<sup>th</sup> century and was obsessed by the traditional view of Sin as rooted in New England conscience. Much of his work is devoted to the probing of the darker regions of the human mind; his romanticism was not primarily that of an advocate of the new faith in Man's divine essence but rather, that of an artist for

whom evil did exist and who found in Man's sense of sin a rich field for psychological studies. He published short stories: *Twice-Told Tales* (1837), and novels:

— *The Scarlet Letter* (1850): the story of a woman found guilty of adultery and condemned to wear in public the scarlet letter “A” as a sign of her sin.

— *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851): the working out of an old curse visiting the sins of fathers upon the children of several generations.

— *The Blithedale Romance* (1852): whose setting is a Transcendental community like Brook Farm.

— *The Marble Faun* (1860): a modern version of the Garden of Eden with the Miltonic thesis of the “fortunate fall” through which humankind can be elevated to a new and greater estate than that of innocence.

We owe N. Hawthorne the categorization of American fiction into *romances* and *novels*. The main difference between *the novel* and *the romance* is in the way in which they view reality. The novel renders reality closely and in comprehensive detail; it attaches great importance to character, psychology and strives after verisimilitude. Romance is free from the ordinary novelistic requirements of verisimilitude; it shows a tendency to plunge into the underside of consciousness and often expresses dark and complex truths unavailable to realism. In the Introduction to *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne defined the field of action of romance as being the borderland of the human mind where the actual and the imaginary intermingle. The distinction is still valid and may account, as some critics have argued, notably R. Chase in *The American Novel and its Tradition*, for the original and characteristic form of the American novel which Chase actually calls “*romance-novel*” to highlight its hybrid nature.

### ***The XXth century: The beginnings of the modern era***

At the turn of the century, a group of *litterati* dissatisfied with social and cultural conditions in the States, turned to Europe to find what was still lacking in their own country: a cultural tradition, a sophisticated civilization, a social climate favorable to literary creation. They consequently often settled in Europe, whether in France, Great Britain or Italy and were given the name of “*expatriates*”.

Henry James (1843-1916) was the first to make the pilgrimage back to Europe. Though American-born, he became a British subject in 1916. His literary production is usually divided into three periods showing an increasing complexity in subject matter, style and above all technique. The first group deals mainly with the “international situation” *i.e.* the confrontation of the New World with the Old: *Roderick Hudson* (1876), *The American* (1877), *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), one of James's most successful novels.

The second group was devoted to the delineation of American and European societies but also to the subtle exploration of the submerged energies and passions which mould and direct these

societies: *The Bostonians* (1886), *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), *What Maisie Knew* (1897), *The Spoils of Poynton* (1896).

The third group comprises three incomplete novels posthumously published and generally considered as James's masterpieces: *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903), *The Golden Bowl* (1904).

James also tried his hand at short-story writing: *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), *The Lesson of the Master* (1892), etc. James's only disciple and literary heir was a woman, Edith Wharton (1862-1937), who expressed her pessimistic view of the world in *The House of Mirth* (1905), *The Custom of the Country* (1916) and *The Age of Innocence* (1920). Two other outstanding women, at the extreme pole from James or E. Wharton, left their stamp on the literature of their time: Willa Cather (1873-1947) and Ellen Glasgow (1874-1945).

### **MEN AND WOMEN IN *THE WINGS OF THE DOVE***

A fundamental question not only in *The Wings* but also in the whole of James's fiction as witness the following quotation from critic N. Blake:

La différence des sexes surtout en Amérique est telle que James se persuade que la scène américaine, c'est surtout la scène de la femme. L'homme n'intervient que de façon "occulte", "secrète", "pratiquement désavouée". L'Amérique, dès *Un Épisode international*, est une société de femmes située dans un monde d'hommes. Et James trouve une image significative: "les hommes fournissent, pour ainsi dire, toute la toile, les femmes toute la broderie.

Since H. James is "l'écrivain de la femme", I'll deal first with women. There are five of them forming two couples pairing an elderly or middle-aged woman with a young one: Kate Croy + Mrs Lowder/Milly Theale + Susan Shepherd; Mrs Condrip is so to speak the odd woman out. First of all, there are those I might call "les comparses" *i.e.* Mrs Lowder and Susan Shepherd. The former is a domineering character, a born plotter, who "loves handling everyone" (248); having made a great marriage, she represents the epitome of the upper middle-classes and London life in Victorian times (cf. 60: "Mrs Lowder was London, was life"). As "a loyal apostle to money" her power is based on wealth – she's likened to "the Britannia of the Market Place" (37) and her house is compared to "a counting-house" (*Ibid.*). Her symbolical status is strengthened by her characterization as a predatory animal; she is said to be "a lioness" (37) and she stands in sharp contrast to Milly in that she is likened to birds of prey: "a vulture...with her wonderful gilded claws" (60) or "an eagle...with a gilded beak and with wings for great flights" (*Ibid.*). As her first name, Maud, suggests – etymologically it means "Might + battle" – "she has something in common with a projectile, of great size, loaded and ready for use" (110), in short, "she is on the scale of the car of the Jugernaut" (69, *i.e.* an irresistible, destructive force from the Hindi Jagannath, lord of the world, a title for Krishna. Votaries were said to cast themselves under the wheels of the massive cart on which his image was dragged in procession at Puri, India). An imperial character, Mrs Lowder, queens it over other people whom she uses like pawns on a chessboard and even if she evinces a genuine

fondness for her niece, Kate Croy, she considers her basically as an asset, "an investment" (65) that is to bear interest in the form of a marriage above her station *i.e.* to Lord Mark. Susan Stringham, Milly's travelling companion, is poles apart from Mrs Lowder whose acquaintance she made in their schooldays: "she is the woman in the world the least formed by nature for duplicities and labyrinths" (76). She comes from Burlington (Vermont), "the real heart of new England" (77); she's a widow and a contributor under the pen-name of Susan Shepherd (which emphasizes her function as a guardian angel, while her first name "Susan" etymologically, "Lily", stresses her benevolent nature) of short stories to the best magazines. She plays the part of "attendant fairy" to Milly Theale (134) who represents for her "the romantic life" (78). Her boundless devotion to Milly will lead her to make two covenants for the sake of her "princess", first with Mrs Lowder to ask the formidable match-maker to "put Densher in Milly's way" (248), which Mrs Lowder agrees to do as a way of distracting Densher's attention and attentions from Kate (cf. 249: "I'll help...Kate"; Susan herself is to deny to Milly that Kate cares for Densher) and secondly with Densher himself: after Lord Mark let the cat out the bag *i.e.* revealed to Milly that Densher is in love with Kate, she begs Densher to withhold the truth from Milly, p. 344: "What I believe...denial". Milly Theale and Kate Croy, the heroine and anti-heroine (or villainess) of *The Wings* are, so to speak, the obverse and reverse of the same medal; they share certain characteristics (charm, beauty, youth etc) but differ in many respects: the contrast between K. & M. is, as a critic put it, "one of quantity against quality, of blood against nerves, of robust health against haggard delicacy" (F. O Matthiessen). So, "Kate, la belle dame noire est la soeur et le double négatif de Milly [...] Kate [...] la noire, l'oiseau de proie (Kate-kite: le milan), qui fascine la colombe, Kate la beauté et la valeur, la femme" (N. Blake). This is another instance of the well-known opposition in American fiction between an innocent heroine who is fair (actually Milly is a red head) and a worldly girl who is dark. In *The Wings of the Dove* as in Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*, the Fair Maiden and Dark Lady come clearly to stand for American innocence and European experience. This conventional moral color-scheme is an integral part of James's deepest symbolism and it crops up repeatedly in his characterization: the portrait of Kate, the dark counter-virgin abounds in connotations of "darkness": cf. "She readjusted the poise of...impression she produced" (22). Unlike Milly, Kate is not a "sheltered flower" (50), she represents "the contemporary London female, highly modern, inevitably battered, honourably free" (50). She is "the wondrous London girl" (111) just as her aunt is English life; she is also "hideously intelligent" (60), "masterful" (233), so much so that one might blame her for a certain callousness, a reproach her father levels at her when he says that she belongs to "hard hollow people" (29). But such harshness is attributable to "her pure talent for life" (281) and her own acquisitiveness ("What a person she would be if they had been rich..." 397). Note by the way the fact that her last name, Croy, is supposed to mean in a Scottish dialect, the legal penalty paid, whether in goods or cash, for murder ("le prix payé à la famille de la victime pour compenser un meurtre", N. Blake, 142). Kate's

lust for money is fuelled by the example of her father's failure and shabby-gentility and also by the life of her sister, Mrs Condrip who stands for (lower?) middle-class respectability and serves as a foil to Kate: her fate is a constant reminder of the consequences of lack of money. Like Mrs Lowder, Kate considers life to be a game and people to be pawns; hence the trap that she lays (232) both to deceive her friend Milly and to outwit her aunt, but she is a victim of her own cleverness which has "grown infernal" (193). She succeeds too well (396) and overreaches herself. However, Kate is the motive power of the plot, she is "the agent", "the actor" in the original sense of the word, whereas Milly is "the patient", "the sufferer". Milly Theale strikes one at once as an exceptional being, somewhat larger than life as both her physical and moral portraits make quite plain: "anomalously", "exceptionally" (76) etc. She is said to be the "first young woman of her time" (273), "the potential heiress of all ages" (79); she is likened to "a great new steamer" (81) "a leviathan" (81) dwarfing all those who come close to her. As a "pilgrim from Boston" (111) or "the last fine flower of an old New York stem" (5), Milly represents :

la jeune fille américaine [qui] possède le double attribut de l'audace et de l'innocence, de la spontanéité et de la naïveté. Importée en Europe, au coeur de la fameuse situation internationale, elle contraste sérieusement avec ses soeurs anglaises, moins idéalistes, plus conventionnelles. Elle débarque en Europe toute neuve, page blanche qui ne demande qu'à s'écrire, identité provisoire qui attend de se constituer en essence. Là, elle devient le point de mire de tous les regards, l'objet de tous les désirs. Le sujet de toutes les conversations également, car ce qui séduit d'abord en elle c'est la contradiction qui la fonde...: comment peut-elle être à la fois l'héritière de tous les âges et la dépositaire de tant d'innocence? (*L'Arc*, p. 66).

Such a paradoxical nature is the essence of Milly and it is reflected in her name: Milly is short for Mildred which combines two notions: "mild + strength"; note also that a critic suggested that the name "Theale" is an anagram of the Greek word "*Alathea*" meaning "truth". If Kate is "the chosen daughter of the burgesses" (originally, the inhabitants of an English borough) (p. 111), Milly is "a wandering princess" (111); the reversal is worth noting: aristocratic connotations are thus attached to the representative of the New World and not to that of the Old. Milly actually is the very embodiment of paradox as witness the description of her face (84) fraught with contradictions and so is her status i.e. "an angel with a thumping bank-account" (214). For Milly wears "a crown of gold" (78) and "has everything" (91) yet "you hadn't...in order to get at her nature, to traverse, by whatever avenue, any piece of property" (125). Having everything, Milly is thus in an ideal position not only to give everything but also to lose everything, to end up with nothing, the common fate of most Jamesian heroes, and yet to be eventually the richer for the loss of everything because one is radically changed in the process; it's like a game in which the loser takes all (a sort of "qui perd gagne"). Hence Milly's tragic nature "she have it all or she'll miss it all" (215) there is no middle ground; in the same way, being all of a piece, Milly "won't die or live by inches" (215). Note also another expression of her paradoxical nature in her statement: "Since I've lived all these years as if I were dead, I shall die, no doubt, as if I were alive" (127). However, in spite of the cynicism of such

a remark, Milly has a great capacity for life and for love and she's determined "not to miss everything" (p. 271). Her infatuation with Densher will afford her "the peace of having loved...Of having realised her passion" (p. 364), after all, as the saying goes, "tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all". It may sound cold comfort for us, ordinary mortals, but it makes a world of difference to Jamesian heroines. Besides, it would be wrong to assume that Milly's life results in failure – unless it be "a splendid failure"; even if the cause of her death is the realization that there was nothing between Densher and herself she wins a sort of posthumous victory over Densher and Kate: Densher is in love with her memory (403) and Milly's "abnégation passionnelle, sa rigueur et sa retenue plus qu'humaines retournent le piège pour transmuier l'âme des comploteurs et placer ceux-ci, de vive force, face à une exigence qu'ils n'ont pas osé bafouer jusqu'au bout (ce faisant elle leur rend, en dépit d'eux-mêmes, un sens du devoir envers eux-mêmes tout aussi intransigeant que le sien propre)" (*L'Arc*, 49).

As far as men are concerned, there's one protagonist, Merton Densher, and several "*ficelles*" (James's coinage for minor characters): Mr. Croy, Kate's father, a gentleman who has seen better days and whose reputation is surrounded with an aura of scandal. He's obviously down on his uppers and doesn't object to turning Kate over to Mrs Lowder "who'll do for her handsomely" (27); Lord Mark is higher up in the social scale; a paradoxical character both "old and young" (101), "clever and void" (115), a perfect embodiment of the British aristocrat. He's obviously attracted to Kate but wouldn't mind marrying Milly and her thumping bank-account. Lord Mark plays the role of the villain since he's the one who reveals the plot to Milly to avenge himself for being turned down (328). Note, by the way, that there is a bit of humour in the depiction of his characteristic mannerisms or idiosyncrasies; cf. use of "ho" (265). The role of the villain is offset by the presence of Sir Luke, the doctor, who plays a positive part. He's almost as mysterious a character as Milly and the nature of the disease affecting her but he apparently exerts a great influence over Milly who complies with his advice, whether medical or other. I'll revert to Sir Luke when I deal with the religious dimensions of *The Wings*. The true male protagonist of the novel is Merton Densher. From his physical and moral portrait to be found on p. 46 and 70 (note the recurrence of words ending in "ISH" in Densher's delineation) the reader can derive some interesting features: first of all, Densher is a perfect embodiment of "the international theme"; he's half a Briton (the son of a British chaplain) with a cosmopolitan background (thanks to his migratory parents he attended Swiss schools and a German university and later took a trip to the USA where he met Milly) and there are so many foreign things in him that Kate considers him as if "he were a map of the continent or a delightful new Murray" (71). However, in his various peregrinations, Densher has "passed through zones of air that had left their ruffle on his wings – he had been exposed to initiations indelible. Something had happened to him that could never be undone" (71). He is thus "an interesting mixture" but there's in the description of the alloy composing his nature a slight suggestion of some

flaw, hence perhaps "his weakness for life" (48) which leads him to aid and abet Kate, to enter into her views because of the immediate profit he hopes for viz. Kate's surrender. But he is, so to speak, hoist with his own petard: under Milly's influence he undergoes a change of heart (cf. top of page 319). One isn't sure, despite Kate's accusations that he's fallen in love with Milly (360) but he's obviously been deeply affected by "the beauty with which he's been loved" (392); cf. also (372) "Something has snapped, has broken in me..." Densher is a different man from what he used to be; Milly has played the role of a catalyst modifying the alloy Densher is made of: cf. "He had been, to his recovered sense, forgiven, dedicated, blessed" (370). Densher is thus touched if not by the Holy Spirit, though one might contend that Milly's act of kindness is tantamount to the "irruption of the divine order into the natural", at least by its symbolic embodiment, the Dove. Densher's story is in a way the story of his conversion from the worship of Kate to the worship of Milly; as a critic puts it "he emerges from the conflict having decisively chosen his higher self and renounced the acquisitive self". At this stage in the presentation of the main characters of *The Wings of the Dove* an observation is in order: much of their significance stems not so much from their individual personalities as from their mutual relationship and the influence they exert upon each other; actually each character is what he becomes through his contacts with the others. Kate and Densher – but the other characters as well – are changed by Milly's presence cf, p. 301: "Milly [...] brought them somehow into relations with something that made them more finely genial..." and "he felt her diffuse in wide warm waves the spell of a general, a beatific mildness" (*Ibid.*). Consequently, *The Wings*, as a critic put it, is a drama of mutual initiation: for Densher, it takes the form of an education of his conscience since he's faced with moral choices; and so is Kate hence her final admission: "we shall never be again as we were!". As far as Milly is concerned, her trip to Europe is also an initiation, Columbus's journey in reverse, "the exposure of American innocence to a knowing Europe" (521). Milly is introduced to the intricacies of English social life and organization; she gains some acquaintance with the complex pressures operating in the complex world of Lancaster Gate. But to a certain extent her initiation also takes the form of an "education of the eye" (R. W. Emerson): Milly learns "the art of seeing things as they were" (p. 168) which is, incidentally, the very cause of her death. Milly's is also an artistic and above all, a sentimental education enabling her to know "the peace of having loved...of having realised her passion" (p. 364). So *The Wings* is not exactly a portrait, a novel of characters. It is rather a novel in which relations are the centre; it is a "novel of relations" i.e. a novel whose characters act upon and react to one another. It is also a novel "in which the moral conflicts are resolved entirely in terms of new appreciations on the parts of the characters" (Leo Bersani).

## MAIN THEMES IN *THE WINGS*

### **MONEY**

As a starting-point I'd like to quote M. Zérafra's opinion that « il est permis de représenter la pensée de James comme motivée et polarisée dans ses effets théoriques, techniques, poétiques et même scripturaux, par l'opposition ou par le dilemme, entre Avoir et Être » (60). Hence the importance of money in the universe of *The Wings of the Dove* where the characters (125) "appear all to think tremendously of money" and, as Lord Mark puts it, "Nobody here does anything for nothing" (106). "Having" and "being" thus form a fundamental antithesis enabling one to categorize the characters into two classes *i.e.* those who, like Milly, have everything but feel they are not complete and strive to reach a higher state of being, and those whose sense of being is undermined by the painful awareness of not having enough *e.g.* Kate Croy: "what a person she would be if they had been rich" (397) and Lord Mark with "his confessed, his decidedly proclaimed want of money" (388). So money is the controlling force in *The Wings* and the acquisitive drive is the motive power, the *primum mobile* in the society depicted by a novel which, among other things, is a reflection on the notion of "value", for "le déchirement de la conscience moderne naît pour James de la permanence du Beau dans un monde aliéné par l'argent" (*L'Arc*, 31), money, the supreme value endowed with permanence in a fleeting, transitory world *cf.* "She [Milly] mightn't last, but her money would", p. 267. However, the status of money in James's is ambiguous if not paradoxical because if acquiring money is morally despicable, the possession of it is the requisite for the good life that all Jamesian characters strive for, but money destroys those who are associated with it, for possession is always impure. Be that as it may, in *The Wings*, "l'arithmétique d'une économie monétaire contamine les domaines intérieurs" (*L'Arc*, pp. 57-9; *cf.* photocopies): feelings are expressed in financial or monetary terms reminiscent of the notions of "emotional currency" or even "emotional bankruptcy" used by W. Faulkner and F. S. Fitzgerald in their own denunciation of the role of money and of business ethics in the society of their time. Likewise in James's fiction, "l'argent sert à consacrer la possession" (*Cistre*, 27) and above all the possession of woman who is seen as a commodity; woman is an object and, as in ancient Rome, marriage (Latin: "coemptio") is tantamount to an act of selling ("emptio"): love is replaced by "*le commerce amoureux*", a sort of "emotional bargaining"; see for instance the way in which Kate's physical surrender is described: "The force of the engagement, the quantity of the article to be supplied..to interfere" (p. 313). Thus the narrative is punctuated by a series of deals and bargains that the different characters make with each other (*cf.* the interview between Kate and her father, the covenant between Kate and Densher and so on). An interesting aspect of the question of money is that the two female deuteragonists also embody opposite notions of value: if Kate stands for "market value", Milly represents, even if paradoxically enough, she "dreams of possessing and being possessed" (she differs from Kate in the price she's willing to pay in order to achieve this aim) "the real thing" *i. e.* a kind of value based on what one

might call in French, "*l'économie du don*" i.e du "don de soi"; thus *The Wings* presents three varieties of love: love, lust or sexual love, and the variety known in French (there's no English equivalent for it) as "*l'oblativité*" i. e. self-sacrifice, self-denial or abnegation. Milly is said to "have the imagination of expenditure" (p. 114) in both the literal and figurative sense, whereas the others have the imagination of thrift or hoarding, and Milly's passionate self-abnegation radically changes the souls of the plotters she's surrounded with. Thus, possession assumes two forms; it is either financial or sexual, which last leads us to the question of sex in *The Wings*.

## **SEX**

Though there is no direct reference to sex, it is omnipresent in James's fiction ("James ne couche les femmes que sur le papier"), but inasmuch as "the names of things, the verbal terms of intercourse, [are], compared with love itself, horribly vulgar" (p. 189), "l'acte sexuel se dit...presque exclusivement par détours... Dans ces romans si verbeux, tout se dit en fin de compte en silence. Le roman jamesien, c'est le triomphe du non- dit" (Cistre, p. 65). See for instance the way in which sex is referred to by Susan and Mrs Lowder after Milly's visit to Sir Luke: "The point is will it cure? - Precisely. Is it absolutely a remedy--the specific?...Yes, my child; but not by the doctor's direction" (p. 247); or again the famous scene between Kate and Densher: "if you'll only come to me...arrange it" (p. 294) and (p. 311): "if you decline to understand me I wholly decline to understand you" etc. This is the crux of the matter: sex in James's universe is not something stated but rather something understood. But the fact that love is never dealt with directly is more than compensated for by an unmistakable "érotisation du discours"; in James's fiction sex never pertains to "showing" but to "telling" obliquely and discourse becomes, so to speak, a substitute for sexual intercourse (cf. "the verbal terms of intercourse" p. 313). Sexual intercourse does take place between Kate and Densher, and Milly dies a virgin, but as usual with James the satisfaction of desire involves an immediate penalty:

"tout succès charnel aboutit en effet à une dissipation de conscience, tandis que tout échec accepté et surmonté, toute absence reconnue et explorée, tous les états de manque cultivés mènent à une intensité prolongée: telle est la formule du monde jamesien" (J.J. Mayoux, 100).

Cf. also Freud's opinion that "la frustration est la seule mesure éducative". James's main subject is the growth, the emergence of conscience in an individual, and conscience evolves out of suffering and deprivation. It is however worth noting that Milly's heroic gift at the end of the narrative is perhaps calculated to possess Densher beyond death, and that financial possession might be seen as a substitute for physical possession.

## **SPIRITUAL & WORLDY DIMENSIONS.**

The definition of *The Wings of the Dove* as "a poetic drama of the inner life of the soul" supports Jean-Jacques Mayoux's contention that James is "un mondain mystique" (115). Besides, *The Wings of the Dove* belongs with *The Ambassadors* and *The Golden Bowl* to what is sometimes

called H. James's spiritual trilogy. There runs throughout the novel a strong religious vein which manifests itself through various phrases, images and symbols, the most obvious of which being that of the Dove, a biblical and spiritual bird par excellence. Psalm 55 is often cited as the source of the novel's title, but there are other interesting biblical references in the novel; for instance it is worthy of note that Sir Luke, the famous surgeon who tends Milly, is the fictitious counterpart of one of the four Evangelists *viz.* St Luke who was also a physician (cf. also Lord Mark). Sir Luke is moreover likened to "a priest" by Milly p. 145. Some characters are seen as "pilgrims" (346), Milly wears dresses of "a monastic black" (301) as befits "a priestess of the worship" (260); her Venetian palace is "the ark of her deluge" (264) and the stay at Matcham is "pure manna from Heaven" (169). All these references are indices of the light in which Milly's passage on earth is to be interpreted: it actually manifests "the irruption of the divine order into the natural" (551), as proof thereof the fact that Milly diffuses "a beatific mildness" (301-3) transmuting people as if they had been touched by divine grace. Milly's symbolic status as a sort of Saviour is strengthened by the episode described in Book Third, the Alpine scene which many critics have interpreted as a fictional counterpart of the second temptation of Christ in the desert and the two episodes at Matcham and in Venice, the scenes of her apotheosis and transfiguration. As to the moment when Milly gives away all her fortune, it is appropriately, Xmas Eve, "the season of gifts" (392). In view of all those religious denotations and connotations, one can maintain that "Milly is too innocent to live in the world of experience and that her death becomes a sacrifice assuming symbolical if not mystical dimensions" (Cistre p. 146); she brings spiritual renewal to others by an act of abundant sacrifice, by making the superior choice of renunciation so that the contrast between Milly and Kate is between an ideal of spiritual love and an ideal of practical intellect. But there are grounds for taking a less ethereal view of the "angel with a thumping bank-account"; Milly may be a dove but she is far from being as "impossibly without sin" as Kate makes her out to be, and the dove can sometimes display "the wisdom of the serpent" (p. 141). Actually, Milly's story involves not only innocence but also evil and seduction (on the denotations and connotations of the term, cf. *L'Arc*, p. 68) and as such it is amenable to a different type of interpretation from the one I have just suggested; what I have in mind is of course N. Blake's reading of *The Wings of the Dove* (cf. Cahiers Cistre pp. 143-45). Ms Blake is not the only critic to maintain that Milly's disease is not organic but primarily mental or psychosomatic; others, stressing the similarity between the interview with Sir Luke and "a comparatively modern therapeutic session", maintain that Milly is suffering from sexual repression, a common cause for hysteria, a slant supported by James's own definition of *The Wings* as "some complicated drama of nerves". It is true that, as is often the case with hysteric women, Milly Theale, in the words of a critic, "is depicted as requiring large doses of masculine attention simply to keep her alive", which, by the way, accounts for the fact that in the novel sexuality is conceived of as being restricted in large part to gazing, hence once more, the motif of seduction and "eye-games". It is I think in this respect that

one can say that Milly, the dove, practiced the wisdom of the serpent, that wisdom by which she knew that her power over other people, and particularly Densher, the object of her desire, waxed in proportion as her presence waned.

## **PLACES**

An essential element in James's fiction so much so that his name is associated with "the international situation" that provided the subject of his early works. What is "the international situation"? The phrase refers to "the mutual interrogation of America and Europe" (*R. Hudson*, p. XXII), to the interplay of contrasted cultural traditions. The confrontation of a distinctively American outlook with a distinctively European outlook which lies at the heart of nearly all of James's novels was his great discovery for the American novel. How can such fascination for the clash of two cultures be accounted for? H. James was an American, of Irish antecedents, but America seemed to him a continent too immature for the production of great literature, while Europe was ancient and ripe with tradition. James repeatedly claimed that "*the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep; [...] it takes a great deal of history to make a little tradition, a great deal of tradition to make a little taste, and a great deal of taste to make a little art*". No wonder then that James turned to the Old Continent for what was lacking in the USA, *i.e.* tradition and culture, but that pilgrimage in reverse was also the spiritual journey of an author in quest of selfhood; cf. M-H Bergeret in Zéraffa:

C'est cette quête de soi que la critique a pris pour la fascination de l'Europe, qui n'en est qu'une des formes, un objectif-corrélatif intermittent et superficiel. Le voyage n'est pas le déplacement dans l'espace du personnage qui en découvre, en inventorie ou en reconnaît les spécificités concrètes; ce n'est que l'espace absorbé par la conscience individuelle et transmuté en dimension intérieure dynamisée qui permet au personnage de faire le tour de lui-même – de se chercher et peut-être de se découvrir.

Thus there's more to the international situation than meets the eye and a French critic, H. Cixous, rightly puts the reader on his guard against too simplistic an interpretation of James's voluntary exile:

« [I]a situation internationale, expression inexacte, comme l'est l'idée du cosmopolitisme, qu'il faut réduire à l'opposition Europe (corps, objet, matière, mère, origine désirée, traversée de part en part, méprisée parce qu'elle est réduite à ses monuments, ses ruines, ses collections, ses os, parce qu'elle est cynique et desséchée, qu'elle a besoin du sang de ses enfants) et l'Amérique (âme, sujet, spiritualité, noblement dépouillée en ses puritains, avide, trompée). Et James qui n'est ni Européen, ni Américain, se vit comme fils amoureux et trop lucide, désireux de régresser vers une enfance où la lucidité n'entraîne pas encore l'obligation du choix ».

All that may be a little bit complex, but the importance of place cannot be overlooked. As far as *The Wings* is concerned, the theme of the international situation is embodied in the confrontation between Kate Croy and Milly Theale who represent the two countries of James's imagination: America, the Pale Lady, the boring paradise, and Europe, the dark lady, seductive, sensual, the enchanting hell. Milly's fate – which is by the way an ironic comment upon "the remedial properties of Europe" (p. 90) *i.e.* the notion that Europe is "the great American sedative", the place were life-

weariness Americans can restore their strength and recover a taste for life – illustrates "the disabling effects upon the American mind of the simplicities and freedoms of the American life, and their effect in particular of placing Americans at a severe disadvantage in their intercourse with the English and the Europeans" (*Wings*, 536). After those necessary preliminaries bearing on the general framework of the "international theme", I'd like to revert to places in particular, for *The Wings* takes its heroine (and its reader) on an instructive journey through both a "geographic" and "social" map, in other words Milly's journey in space is also an initiation into the intricacies of "the social atlas" and the complexities of the self (see for instance the textual analysis of the Alpine scene). Consequently the symbolic and social values of the places Milly traverses differ widely. First of all there is London, presented as "life", but what kind of life? Chiefly a life given over to materialism and the spurious, superficial values of social life as represented by Mrs Lowder and Lord Mark, but London, to use the Proustian phrase, has "différents côtés": there's Lancaster Gate, the temple of bourgeois respectability and success, then there's Chirk Street and the shabby-genteel dwelling-place of Lionel Croy, but as a critic aptly remarked, Lancaster Gate is but a "glorified" Chirk Street, the dreary, lower-middle-class surroundings of Mrs Condrip's house in Chelsea clearly belong, as Milly realizes (123), "in quite another geography" and are not to be found on the same social map as Lancaster Gate. It is worth noting that those urban locales stand in sharp opposition to the green spaces – whether it be Hyde Park or any other garden – where Kate and Merton shelter their love from the scrutiny of Mrs Lowder; or again Regent's park where Milly after her visit to Sir Luke experiences an intense thrill of joy at being alive with a definite purpose in view (p. 153). This "rural" dimension culminates in Matcham, the country-seat whose name suggests the "matching of life and art" and where Milly, reaching at once the best that English culture and society can offer, and "the high-water mark of the imagination" sees life as a vivified painting and becomes herself subject to an artistic analogy, an analogy that is carried to its extreme in Venice. Venice is the *terminus ad quem* of Milly's international pilgrimage from New York to London via Switzerland – the locale of the confrontation with and temptation of "abysses". Venice, which in the words of H. James, "was both model and painter, and [where] life was so pictorial that art couldn't help becoming so" (*Wings*, 461), is an appropriate setting for Milly's apotheosis and death, for the great Renaissance republic of trade and commerce is now in decline. It is a city of decay, offering a kind of openness and freedom impossible in New York or London; it is a milieu which allows Milly a certain free-play, an imaginative range beyond the rigid systems of Lancaster Gate. As a society in which eastern and western cultures meet and mingle, Venice is the perfect setting for Milly's incarnation as "a symbol of differences". As the city of death (James called it the "most beautiful of tombs"), the vast cemetery of past culture, it is the appropriate backdrop for Milly's disappearance... In Venice Milly becomes the author of her own composition, her own art. Like the Jamesian novelist, she becomes increasingly "vague and disembodied" until she is finally present only through the interpretive consciousness of

others". By reshaping her life as a work of art she accepts or reconciles herself to her own physical mortality in exchange for a spiritual or artistic "immortality", at least in the memories of those she leaves behind. Thus Milly wills herself into becoming a sort of symbol, but she is also, in a way, a victim of "the spirit of place" so that one can maintain with critic J. A. Ward that "the gray of a London dominated by materialism and the black of a Venice traditionally malign combine to kill" the white dove. (*Wings*, 533).

## **L'ART DE H. JAMES : STYLE ET ÉCRITURE**

H. James a été non seulement un grand praticien mais aussi un remarquable théoricien du roman; il a ainsi, dans ses préfaces et dans ses études, notamment *The Art of Fiction*, fait de nombreuses observations sur l'art du roman et la technique romanesque. Il convient cependant de noter que les préfaces ont dans la majorité des cas été écrites bien après la publication des oeuvres et que les remarques qu'elles contiennent révèlent parfois un certain décalage par rapport aux textes et aux problèmes qu'elles se proposent d'éclairer: disons en un mot que la théorie ne se reflète pas toujours dans la pratique de même qu'il peut y avoir, comme l'auteur le reconnaît, un hiatus entre un projet de roman et sa réalisation effective ; cf. p. 9 : « Yet one's plan, alas, is one thing and one's result another ». Cela ne diminue en rien l'intérêt de ces divers textes, mais invite à la prudence : toutes les observations de James ne sont pas à prendre au pied de la lettre. Dans le cas qui nous occupe, les deux sources d'informations incontournables sont naturellement *The Art of Fiction*, credo littéraire de H. James, et la préface de *The Wings* où l'auteur évoque un certain nombre de problèmes liés aux divers thèmes et personnages mais surtout à la composition et à la structure du roman : ce sont naturellement ces dernières que nous prendrons en considération dans cette étude dont l'objet est moins de présenter un relevé exhaustif des particularités du style et de l'écriture de H. James que d'expliquer et de légitimer certains aspects essentiels. Dans la préface de *The Wings*, comme dans *The Art of Fiction*, James recourt pour qualifier son art à des images tirées de trois domaines essentiels: "architecture", "painting" and "the drama" auxquelles s'ajoutent les notions de "indirection" et de "reflection". Ce catalogue, moins disparate qu'il n'y paraît, présente en fait, à l'analyse, d'intéressantes convergences. C'est par rapport à une conception architecturale de l'oeuvre ("the house of fiction") visant notamment à la solidité et à l'équilibre des blocs narratifs que James dénonce comme étant le défaut majeur de la composition du roman "the regular failure to keep the appointed halves of my whole equal" (p. 13). En effet, entre l'ampleur du début et les raccourcis de la fin se produit un évident déplacement du centre du roman (situé par James tantôt au livre V, tantôt trop près de la fin). Mais la métaphore architecturale est redoublée par l'allusion au "use of windows and balconies" (p. 16) directement lié à la question du point de vue puisque l'objet du roman est notamment de construire "the whole bright house of her [Milly's] exposure", en d'autres termes d'évoquer Milly "à travers les fenêtres successives de l'intérêt que lui portent les autres" ("through the successive windows of other people's interest in her", p. 16). Formule capitale qui définit donc

un principe de composition et d'exposition trouvant sa traduction dans l'utilisation de ce que James a appelé "indirection" et d'autres "indirect approach" *i.e.* "all the events and actions are represented as they unfold before, and filter to the reader through, the particular consciousness of one of his characters" (M. H. Abrams; *A Glossary...*). Ce qui revient à dire que l'auteur "presents the reader not with a narrator's objective account of the characters but with the characters' subjective and therefore partial, colored and often warped accounts of themselves" (R. C. McLean, "Love by the Doctor's..."). Ces personnages dont la conscience joue le rôle de miroir réfléchissant sont bien, ainsi que les a baptisés James, des "reflectors". D'où, conséquence stylistique importante, la fréquence du recours au style indirect libre avec un effet caractéristique de bivocalité (entrecroisement de la voix du narrateur, qui n'est jamais totalement absent cf. les multiples modalités et indications de régie par lesquelles le narrateur assure la gestion de son texte, et de celle du personnage) pour exprimer les pensées du "réflecteur". Notons au passage qu'il convient de ne pas limiter cette fonction de "réflecteur" aux seuls personnages; les objets, les éléments du décor peuvent aussi à leur manière jouer ce rôle et dénoter ou connoter une situation, un état d'esprit ou tout autre aspect de la diégèse (cf. l'analyse de la première page du roman, excellent exemple de ce que K. L. Komar a appelé "characterization by environmental implication", texte 12, p. 474). Autre particularité ayant trait aux principaux réflecteurs de ce roman Kate, Densher et Susan "the centers in *The Wings of the Dove* are both acting in the drama and organizing their involvement in it into coherent artistic patterns; they live their experience as if they were writing about it" (L. Barsani, "The narrator as Center...", p. 134), impression qui se manifeste à travers une omniprésente métaphore littéraire par laquelle les personnages s'éprouvent comme phrase, texte, parenthèse, image etc. Dans la préface de *The Wings*, la question du point de vue est abordée sous un autre angle: James utilise un autre image que celle des "balconies and windows", source du motif de la vision en surplomb: il s'agit de celle d'un point central que l'on approche "by narrowing circumvallations" à partir d'un "outer ring" (p. 7). Ce mouvement, qui va du large à l'étroit, du lointain au proche non pas directement mais après maints tours et détours ("to approach circuitously", p. 16) explique en grande partie le déséquilibre des masses narratives composant l'oeuvre (rappelons entre autres que Milly n'apparaît qu'au Livre III du volume I), mais se traduit aussi par un effet original faisant du roman "a progression from an anticipation of Milly Theale to a recollection of her" (J. Ward, "The Search for Form", p. 193). En effet, l'apparition de Milly est pour ainsi dire présumée par la situation où se trouvent Kate et Densher et les hypothèses qu'ils échafaudent pour s'en sortir; comme l'écrit James: "They are laying a trap for the great innocence to come. If I like [...] my eager heroine" (p. 14).

Autre conséquence de cette "circuitous approach" qui permet d'aborder le sujet en décrivant des circonvolutions et d'en voir ainsi l'avert et le revers, les images chez James, comme il le dit lui-même "have sides and backs" (p. 9) ; ceci est à mettre en parallèle avec ce qu'écrit S. Gorley Putt (*A Reader's Guide*, 91) :

For James, the poetic imagination was to be very largely a matter of seeing things from both sides: from the early tales to the final Prefaces his writing is full of images invoking the obverse and reverse, the back and the front, the passive and the active, the efficient and the visionary, the romance and the disillusion. [...] That complete honesty of the double vision in James's work...helps to explain the tortuosities of the high style where he makes the reader dizzy by his conscientious efforts to be fair all round, to take every possible aspect into consideration.

Ce désir de rendre justice à la complexité des situations et des motivations, mais aussi à la nature duelle des personnages et à la diversité des relations qui se nouent entre eux conduit James, selon le critique précédemment cité, à frapper "the geminian notes of antithesis or parallel, dissonance or assonance, contradiction or compensation" (p. 87). Un terme n'est pas plus tôt posé qu'on voit apparaître dans la même phrase son opposé (cf. exemples tirés des commentaires) et la multiplicité des formes duelles créées par le rapprochement ou la fusion des deux termes d'une polarité est facteur d'incertitude et d'indécision; c'est aussi la preuve que James a pour objectif non pas le réalisme mais ce qu'il appelle "the intensity of an illusion". Le rôle d'un artiste tel que James est bien de faire voir le multiple, et non pas d'imposer l'unité. Cependant cette "double vision" est quelques fois contrecarrée par un principe opposé, qui consiste à ne pas tout montrer, à ne pas tout dire. On a maintes fois insisté sur le fait que James est un remarquable illusionniste pratiquant avec talent l'art « d'exposer pour refouler, de montrer pour cacher » et de broder son discours autour de multiples non-dits: le texte de *The Wings* tourne ainsi autour de « pivots obscurs parce que non représentés » (Labbé, 90) tels l'union charnelle de Densher et de Kate, les révélations de Lord Mark à Milly, la dernière visite de Densher au palais Leporelli, etc. de sorte que :

laissées à l'imagination du lecteur et parfois des protagonistes, ces ellipses qui trouent le récit de brusques suspensions et de silences se transforment peu à peu en d'invisibles mais inépuisables matrices de significations, analogues, par leur dialectique de la plénitude et du vide, aux abîmes dont les gouffres, les tourbillons et les naufrages de la préface offrent autant de réfractions mélodramatiques (Labbé, p. 90).

Ces ellipses mettent à l'épreuve une vertu que James juge essentielle: "the power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern". Les deux autres métaphores the picture and the drama représentent "the two rival techniques of the novel" (L. Edel). Par "picture", il faut entendre "narrative from a point of view" et par "drama", "direct representation". Pour préciser davantage ces deux notions, rappelons que pour le théoricien P. Lubbock "a scene is pictorially depicted when it is the reflection of events in the mirror of somebody's receptive consciousness". Donc le roman – en tant que portrait ou tableau – est construit à partir d'une conscience centrale et d'une sorte de soliloque sinon de théâtre intérieurs. Ajoutons que "picture" équivaut aussi par certains côtés au "sommaire", c'est-à-dire « un raccourci de plusieurs moments tel qu'il s'effectue dans la conscience d'un personnage » (C. Verley, 27). Le deuxième principe, à l'origine de la scène romanesque, consiste à effacer les marques de l'instance narrative pour donner d'emblée la parole au personnage = discours immédiat, émancipé de tout patronage narratif ("Dramatize, dramatize" écrivait H. James dans ses *Carnets*). Donc par opposition à

"picture" (a non-scenic rendering of some character's consciousness of a situation), "drama renders scenically the character's speech and behaviour". Cette opposition recoupe celle qui existe entre les deux modes de régulation de la distance narrative que sont "showing and telling", principes associés au nom de H. James qui s'en fait le théoricien. Cette opposition est en réalité très ancienne puisqu'elle remonte à Platon qui distinguait entre "diegésis" (récit pur, c'est-à-dire non mêlé d'éléments mimétiques) où le poète parle en son nom sans chercher à nous faire croire que c'est un autre que lui qui parle, et "mimésis" (imitation à la manière du drame) où le poète s'efforce de donner l'illusion que ce n'est pas lui qui parle. Dans cette perspective le récit pur sera tenu pour plus distant que l'imitation : il en dit moins (condensation) et de façon plus médiate (indirection). Cette opposition neutralisée par Aristote a resurgi dans la théorie du roman à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle chez James et ses disciples sous les termes de "showing" (montrer) vs. "telling" (raconter). Cependant, un théoricien aussi averti que G. Genette fait remarquer que la notion de "showing" est illusoire, car aucun récit ne peut montrer ou imiter l'histoire qu'il raconte : le langage signifie sans imiter à moins bien sûr, que l'objet signifié (narré) ne soit lui-même du langage ; en conséquence, la mimésis verbale ne peut-être que mimésis du verbe. H. James à la suite de son expérience de dramaturge a voulu précisément dramatiser l'action au maximum, d'où l'accent mis sur la notion de "showing" dont les deux préceptes cardinaux sont pour lui, la prédominance de la scène (récit détaillé) et la transparence du narrateur. Ces données étaient déjà présentes dans les remarques de Platon : plus grande quantité d'information narrative et absence (ou présence minimale) de l'informateur *i.e.* du narrateur : "showing" = maximum d'information et minimum d'informateur. Donc pour James, la meilleure forme narrative est un « récit focalisé, raconté par un narrateur qui n'est pas l'un des personnages mais qui en adopte le point de vue » (Genette, p. 189). Ainsi le lecteur perçoit l'action filtrée par la conscience d'un des personnages, mais il la « perçoit directement telle qu'elle affecte cette conscience en évitant la distance qu'entraîne inévitablement la narration rétrospective à la première personne » (Friedman).

Passons à présent du niveau des principes théoriques à celui de la phrase de James. Comme l'ont montré les divers exemples cités lors des commentaires, sa structure est en grande partie déterminée par des oppositions binaires ("the famous law of contraries", 47) par exemple : *old/young* p. 101 ; *speech/silence* p. 84 ; *die/live* p. 127; *backward/advanced*, p. 235, etc. En outre la phrase jamesienne se caractérise par une syntaxe d'enchâssements et d'incises: cf. p. 142 et 145 (phrases soulignées) et cette syntaxe que E. Labbé a qualifiée de « pantelante » à cause de ses multiples ajouts, excroissances et méandres labyrinthiques traduit effectivement un évident refus de la fluidité : la phrase de James laisse apparaître comme les anneaux dans l'aubier d'un arbre les diverses étapes de sa croissance et de sa formation. La langue est également très riche et parfois très complexe du fait de sa nature quelque peu hybride sinon cosmopolite: cf. l'opinion de T. S. Eliot : "H. James is an author who is difficult for English readers, because he is an American; and who is

difficult for American readers, because he is a European, and I do not know whether he is possible to other readers at all". En fait, la langue de James, une variété d'anglais unique en son genre, traduit "his ambition of appearing to write from a sort of detached equipoise in Mid-Atlantic" (M. Swan, p. 18). Enfin, dernier point méritant d'être rappelé, l'art de James peut se définir selon Chase comme étant "an assimilation of romance into the substance of the novel", et à ce propos il convient de rappeler la définition que James a donné du "romance" par opposition au réel :

Le réel représente à mes yeux les choses que nous ne pouvons pas vraiment ne pas connaître, tôt ou tard, d'une façon ou d'une autre [...]. Le romanesque, d'autre part, représente les choses qu'avec toutes les facilités du monde [...] nous ne pouvons jamais connaître directement, les choses qui peuvent nous atteindre seulement à travers les beaux circuits et subterfuges de notre pensée et de notre désir.