The Commodification of Kate Croy

in

Henry James's *The Wings of the Dove*

by

Sharon Schwartz

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

This thesis argues that in Henry James's *The Wings of the Dove*, the problematic narrative technique inhibits how the story is transmitted to the reader. Here an intrusive narrator gives the reader his impressions of all of the characters, rather than any factual knowledge. Therefore, the reader cannot come to any full understanding of Kate Croy, and can only interpret her actions. The first chapter of this thesis argues the improbability of any true knowledge of the character of Kate Croy. To see her only as a Jamesian villain who uses Milly to her own advantage is to ignore her creative power as an artist, given her difficult circumstances. All of the characters in the novel participate in the credo of Lancaster Gate society that no one does anything for nothing, and all are users. Kate is used by all of the characters in the novel as they try to possess what they see she has; the sense of life that James has given her in her role as the artist of the novel. The second chapter argues that although the narrator is very credible, the reader hears only of the "impressions" he has gathered, rather than any factual knowledge about any of the characters. The narrator becomes almost another character in the story, a "reflector", giving us his opinions about all of the other characters. The reader must not take the narrator's interpretation of Kate's actions as fact. The third chapter relates how James gives value to Kate's character as an artist, one who creates meaning, and the dangers inherent in adopting a "fixed" position, that of losing one's imaginative and creative skills. For James, this notion of not being able to reshape one's existing circumstances was intolerable, and he depicts, in *Wings*, Kate's value in her ability to try, under very difficult circumstances, for her freedom.

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INTRODUCTION:

> *[N]othing is my last word about anything . . . I shall live to make all sorts of representations of all sorts of things. It will take a much cleverer person than myself to discover my last impression--among all these things--of anything.*
>
> Henry James, *Selected Letters*, 76.

This thesis will argue that the character of Kate Croy, in Henry James's *The Wings of the Dove*, functions as a commodity in her social setting. All the characters in the novel use Kate to their own advantage. James uses her as well, as a "sensible value", one that will sustain the story. It is Kate who, with her strength, imagination and insight about the world she inhabits, tries to create a positive fiction for all who inhabit that world. Through a less-than-omniscient narrator, Kate's value becomes clear to the reader.

Kenneth Graham, in *The Drama of Fulfilment* (1975), suggests that it is vital that the reader "feel the full personal presence and temperament of a woman like Kate Croy since much of the dynamism of the whole plot will flow from her desire to fulfill this personal potential within a complex and challenging social milieu" (165). Yet understanding Kate Croy has been troublesome from the beginning. In a 1902 review of *Wings*, Elia Peattie cites Kate as the "heroine" of the novel who commits an "offense so unspeakable that it becomes almost interesting" (Chicago Tribune, Sept. 13, 18). Seen since as a "Jamesian" villain, Kate has always been "interesting" for the critic. Much past criticism of Kate has labeled her as evil. J. A. Ward (1961) sees Kate as one of James's "agents of evil" of the later novels, who performs a "monstrous crime" (106). Milton Kornfeld (1972) understands Kate as the architect of the plan to destroy Milly. Granville H. Jones (1975) argues that Kate is consumed by her desire for wealth, and would be content to marry whoever inherits Milly's fortune, Lord Mark or Merton Densher (174). Peter Brooks

(1976) reads Kate as having a "tinge of the cold-blooded assassin" in his argument for the novel's melodramatic nature (180). Nicola Bradbury (1979) likens her to Milton's Satan, and Shakespeare's Iago, the ultimate betrayers. Judith Woolf (1991) also views this novel as one about betrayal. She sees Milly as the true heroine, and Kate as user, with the "guile and cunning of the snake in the garden" who betrays her best friend. Ruth Bernard Yeazell (1976), on the other hand, understands Kate as an "artist" whose creative power is in her ability to "reshape the world according to the demands of her imagination" (83). To decide that Kate Croy is simply a hypocrite and a liar, argues Yeazell, is to ignore her power as an artist (83). To label Kate as "user" is to settle for only one impression of her.

This essay will attempt to see the character of Kate Croy as the artist in *Wings* who has this creative ability, and to understand her actions in relation to her "antecedents", her ancestors, her circumstances, and her contemporaries. The first part of this thesis will establish Kate's commodity world at Lancaster Gate and her relationships with the other characters in that world. The second part of this paper will discuss the role of the non-omniscient narrator, whose persuasive rhetoric influences and at the same time inhibits the reader from gaining a full understanding of Kate. The third part will discuss James's concept of literary value, and how he creates Kate's value.

As James writes in his Preface to *Wings*, "the poet essentially can't be concerned with the act of dying. Let him deal with the sickest of the sick, it is still by the act of living that they appeal to him, and appeal the more as the conditions plot against them and prescribe the battle" (AN, 289-90).[1] My hypothesis is that Kate's is not a simplistic characterization. I will argue that Kate, the symbol of "life" in the novel, cannot be "fixed" by the reader in any one role, suggesting that all in life is subject to change. It is how one meets these changes that becomes the focus for the reader in this novel. As Wayne C. Booth (1994) notes, *The Wings of the Dove* was written "to be", "to act", "to teach", and "to make the reader see."

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[1] *The Art of the Novel*, abbreviated AN where cited in this thesis.

CHAPTER 1: Kate as Commodity

We are each the product of circumstances and there are tall
stone walls which fatally divide us.

Henry James, *Selected Letters*, 69.

Critics agree that James portrays a commodity world in his late fiction. Jean-Christophe Agnew argues, in "The Consuming Vision of Henry James" (1983), that James was one of consumer culture's earliest critics, best illustrating this "commodity form" in his later novels (91). Kate Croy becomes the "commodity" in *Wings*, that all will "use" to buy into the world of Lancaster Gate.

Much criticism discusses Kate as user, and in particular as user of Milly Theale and Merton Densher. In her discussion of *The Golden Bowl*, Virginia Fowler (1993) suggests that Maggie Verver uses Charlotte Stant as Kate Croy proposes to use Milly, although Charlotte is a " much more typical bad heroine" than Kate Croy (201). Charlotte, banished to America, is sacrificed by Maggie for the survival of her marriage, as Kate will sacrifice Milly to preserve her relationship with Densher (201). Booth (1994) sees Kate as one "who comfortably uses others", and Milly's story as her gradual discovery of how Kate, Densher, Mark, and Mrs. Lowder "use" her (99, 132, n2). But however conventional criticism denigrates Kate in favour of Milly, this chapter will focus on Kate as a commodity, used by all the characters in *Wings* as they make their decisions to engage in life. It is important to note here that no character in *Wings* escapes commodification, and all of the characters are users, according to their desires: "The worker in one connection was the worked in another . . ." becomes the credo for *Wings* (NY XIX, 179). [2]

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[2] This reference and all other references are to *The Wings of the Dove* printed as Vols. 19 and 20 of the New York Edition of the novels.

In *The Sacred Fount*, James's character states: "I didn't describe to you the purpose of it . . . I described to you . . . the *effect* of it--which is a very different thing" (241). The only things Jamesian characters produce, claims Agnew, are "effects" (84). Effects are results or consequences of actions, impressions produced, and, suggests Agnew:

> A person's effects are always contrivable, alienable, acquirable . . . And in the measure that social life approximates a traffic in effects, the social selves generated therein acquire the durable and resilient features of goods. Over time, the ensemble of a person's effects--the product of the mutual effort to appropriate and to *be* appropriate--congeals into character. Character is, in turn, internalized as a possession, as something to be displayed or interpreted. (84)

In other words, aspects of character, like other cultural commodities, are judged according to their social prestige, and the characters display what they believe are their most valuable social characteristics (McCormack, 2).

All of the characters in *Wings* radiate "effects", and it is in this world that Kate lives. For Mrs. Stringham, and for all of the Lancaster Gate society, Milly's "effect" is produced by her vast wealth, and her wealth becomes what Milly is:

> She couldn't dress it away, nor walk it away, nor read it away, nor think it away; she could neither smile it away in any dreamy absence nor blow it away in any softened smile. She couldn't have lost it if she tried--that was what it was to be really rich. It had to be the thing you were. (NY XIX, 121)

Lionel Croy's evil is never named, but it is the "effect" of his actions that has ruined Kate's family, and that she so intensely feels, as she tells Densher:

> That's all my virtue--a narrow little family feeling. I've a small stupid piety . . . 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, so inimitably does. (NY XIX, 71)

His evil, she fears, may be part of her. Aunt Maud's "effect" is one of power, her massive furnishings at Lancaster Gate a metaphor for her controlling personality. Densher's "effect" is never certain, and he wavers between showing effects of "tolerance as well as of temper" (NY XIX, 49).

Kate's "effect" on those around her is also intensely felt, and, as Densher realizes, impossible to describe. He tells her: "You're different and different--and then you're different again'" (NY XX, 61). She has an "aura", a uniqueness about her that cannot be named:

> More 'dressed', often with fewer accessories, than other women, or less dressed, should occasion require, with more, she probably could n't have given the key to these facilities. They were mysteries of which her friends were conscious--those friends whose general explanation was to say that she was clever, whether or no it were taken by the world as the cause or as the *effect* of her charm. (NY XIX, 5; italics mine)

Kate's lack of "accessories" suggests her "beauty" to be a natural force, one wealth cannot enhance. Her beauty is not "tangible", she is "unknowable", and the "effect" of her, the impressions she makes on all of the characters in the novel, become what all want to possess.

Leo Bersani claims that James's novels are only superficially about the international scene, the innocence of the American and the experience of the European (*Future*, 132). They are really, suggests Bersani, about freedom (132). This chapter will discuss how Kate, as she tries for social and economic freedom, becomes the commodity that in its very

essence, as Agnew notes, inhibits this desire for freedom (67). Each commodity introduces itself as that which we do not as yet possess and what we must in fact acquire to remain full participants in our culture (Agnew, 67). When one becomes an asset, a possession in another's eyes, one incurs a certain loss of self-possession, a paradox, notes Lee Clark Mitchell, that explains why the most self-possessed are so adept at altering their presence for others (192). Kate has " . . . the extraordinary and attaching property of appearing at a given moment to show as a beautiful stranger, to cut her connexions and lose her identity, letting the imagination for the time make what it would of them" (NY XIX, 212). In order to be for her world what it expects, Kate must, Elizabeth Allen similarly argues, conceal her feelings and responses, must hide her identity as subject, and is forced to become "other" (156, 159): "It wouldn't be the first time she had seen herself obliged to accept with smothered irony other people's interpretation of her conduct. She often ended by giving up to them--it seemed really the way to live--the version that met their convenience" (NY XIX, 25-6). Her great skill, suggests Onno Oerlemans, is that Kate is able to make use of all her connections, becoming an object of desire to all of the characters in the novel (192). All of the characters in the novel will try to interpret, and to acquire, Kate's "effect" on them in their desire to fully participate in Lancaster Gate culture. She accommodates to others' views of her, but, unlike Milly, will not give up her own identity: "Kate was accordingly, to her own vision, not a hypocrite of virtue, for she gave herself up; but she was a hypocrite of stupidity, for she kept to herself everything that was not herself" (NY XIX, 34).

In *Wings*, the narrator describes Kate as ". . . just the contemporary London female, highly modern, inevitably battered, honourably free" (NY XIX, 56). We assume, notes Mitchell, even though we are hardly privy to Kate's thoughts, that her actions are voluntarily willed, and she is regularly condemned for the heartless way she manipulates everyone else (187). Kate seems free to make her choices, but her freedom has, as Merle Williams notes, already been circumscribed by her loyalty to her father and sister, and by

her economic dependence on Mrs. Lowder (97). From the beginning of the novel, Kate thinks of herself as trapped in her situation: "'I'm not so precious a capture . . . No one has ever wanted to keep me before'" (NY XIX, 14). Kate has not freely chosen to live with her aunt. She tells Densher:

> The point is, you see, that I don't escape. . . . I wished to escape Aunt Maud. She [Maud] fixed upon me herself, settled on me with her wonderful gilded claws. I never myself got into her car. I was her choice. (NY XIX, 73)

Kate's initial offer to leave her wealthy aunt and live with her destitute father also seems to be a free choice. The sincerity of Kate's offer to her father is not the issue, argues Mitchell, but whether she expects anything to result from her offer (n. 1, 211). Kate acts 'as if' her choice was real, but she knows all along that her father would never risk defying wealthy Aunt Maud, and that her offer will be rejected (Mitchell, 187): "This whole vision was the worst thing yet—as including in particular the interview to which she had braced herself; and for what had she come but for the worst" (NY XIX, 3-4)? But the strongest threat to Kate's freedom, suggests Williams, is the lure of Lancaster Gate, and the possibility that she might become like her aunt, a worshipper of material and social successes (97). Kate

> saw as she had never seen before how material things spoke to her. [she] saw, and she blushed to see, that if in contrast with some of its old aspects life now affected her as a dress successfully "done up" . . . [she] had a dire accessibility to pleasure from such sources. (NY XIX, 28)

From the opening pages of *Wings*, the narrator, in describing Kate's "beauty", uses the language of the market place, suggesting Kate's status as a commodity for the reader: "The impression [Kate produced] was one that remained, but as regards the sources of it no *sum* in *addition* would have made up the *total*" (NY XIX, 5; italics mine).

In his criticism of *The Golden Bowl*, Agnew notes that the Prince is not to *do* anything for the Ververs; he is to *be* something for them; an object of appreciation (93). Mrs.

Lowder uses Kate in a similar fashion:

> That was the story--that she [Kate] was always, for her beneficent dragon, under arms; living up, every hour, but especially at festal hours, to the "value" Mrs. Lowder had attached to her. High and fixed, this estimate ruled, on each occasion, at Lancaster Gate, the social scene . . . As such a person was to dress the part, to walk, to look, to speak, in every way to express, the part, so all this was what Kate was to do for the character she had undertaken, under her aunt's roof, to represent. (NY XX, 34)

As J. A. Ward notes, Mrs. Lowder's main concern is social (105). She has rejected Lionel Croy and Kate's sister Marian, as she cannot use them socially. She chooses Kate because she can. Kate becomes the commodity through which her aunt will extend her social connections into the aristocracy. Agnew suggests that:

> [W]e read clothes, possessions, interiors, and exteriors as representing more or less successful accommodations to a world of goods, and in so doing we rehearse in our minds the appropriation of that social world via the commodity. We consume by proxy. We window-shop. (73)

Kate recognizes her commodity status: "I *am* . . . on the counter, when I'm not in the shop-window; in and out of which I'm thus conveniently, commercially whisked: the essence, all of it, of my position, and the price, as properly, of my aunt's protection'" (NY XIX, 279). One of Kate's attributes is that she is beautiful, and in the market place, beauty sells: "Slender and simple, frequently soundless, she was somehow always in the line of the eye--she counted singularly for its pleasure" (NY XIX, 5). Desirable and therefore marriageable, Kate becomes, for Mrs. Lowder, a "luxury to take about the world" (NY XIX, 213). In her description of Kate, Maud, like the narrator, uses the rhetoric of the market place, reducing Kate to "it", an object that had "from far back, been appraised and waited for" (NY XIX, 213):

> I've watched *it* long; I've been saving *it* up and letting *it*, as you say of investments, appreciate; and you may judge whether, now *it* has begun to pay so, I'm likely to consent to treat for *it* with any but a high bidder. I can do the best with her, and I've my idea of the best. (NY XIX, 82; italics mine)

Sallie Sears rightly argues that Kate is the one piece of solid collateral that her disgraced family possesses (66). Kate's "beauty" has a very different "effect" on her impoverished family than on wealthy Mrs. Lowder; it is entirely economic. She is the commodity through which her family will grab some of the Lowder money: "'But he [Lionel Croy] insists that it's through her and through her only that I may help him; just as Marian insists that it's through her, and through her only, that I can help *her* '" (NY XIX, 70-71). For her father, Kate is "a tangible value" (NY XIX, 9). The more Aunt Maud feels Kate's loyalty to him, he reminds Kate, the more she will "give" to break the connection: "'You must work it'", he tells Kate (NY XIX, 16). Lionel, however, is a "'poor ruin of an old dad to make a stand about giving up. . . . But I'm not, after all, quite the old ruin not to get something for giving up'" (NY XIX, 17). He will end all contact with Kate, will do anything Mrs. Lowder wishes, in order to receive his parcel of money. He cannot forgive Kate for sharing her inheritance with her sister: "She [Kate] should have divided it with *him* " (NY XIX, 24).

Kate is Marian's last hope for a parcel of Aunt Maud's wealth. Even though Kate shares, with her sister, her small inheritance left by their mother, Marian wants more. Kate remembers what Marian was like before her marriage to a poor man. For Kate, there was "no one in the world so pretty as Marian, no one so charming, so clever, so assured, in advance, of happiness and success" (NY XIX, 33). Kate now sees in her sister ". . . a state of the spirit that perhaps marked most sharply how poor you might become when you minded so much the absence of wealth" (NY XIX, 34). Marian has become a penniless widow, but she has also lost her soul. She will have nothing more to do with Kate if she

chooses to live with her father, for that will end Kate's source of income, and therefore Marian's as well. Marian informs Kate, in no uncertain terms, that is is Kate's "duty" to her family to marry whomever Aunt Maud suggests, to remain in her aunt's favour, and to support Marian and her children. Marian seems to care only for Kate's utility: "It was through Kate that Aunt Maud should be worked, and nothing mattered less than what might become of Kate in the process" (NY XIX, 34). Kate experiences, through Marian, how destructive the lack of wealth can be in the society in which she lives. She will try, throughout the novel, to prevent this situation from happening to her and those she loves.

Kate's commodification extends even beyond her blood relatives, as even Marian's sisters-in-law view her as an "object":

> She [Kate] could see how the Condrip pair pressed their brother's widow on the subject of Aunt Maud--who wasn't, after all, *their* aunt; made her, over their interminable cups, chatter and even swagger about Lancaster Gate, made her more vulgar than it had seemed written that any Croy could possibly become on such a subject. They laid it down, they rubbed it in, that Lancaster Gate was to be kept in sight, and that she, Kate, was to keep it . . .
> (NY XIX, 37-8)

Kate's contemporaries use her as well. For Densher, it is her "talent for life", a quality he feels he lacks, that attracts him to Kate. However, he understands "life" as an object he "must somehow arrange to annex and possess", a very different view from that of Kate (NY XIX, 51). Williams describes this talent of Kate's as an eagerness "to express herself in the public context, to be free to adopt and animate a variety of appealing social roles" (104). In Book Sixth, Densher tells Kate:

> life's very interesting! I hope it's really as much so for you as you make it for others; I mean judging by what you make it for me. You seem to me to represent it as thrilling for *ces dames*, and in a different way for each: Aunt Maud, Susan Shepherd, Milly. (NY XX, 49)

Densher tries to possess Kate's creative imagination, convincing himself it is because of his earlier meeting of Milly in America, rather than because of Kate, that he is now in Venice:

> Behind everything for him was his renewed remembrance, which had fairly become a habit, that he had been the first to know her [Milly] . . . It had worked as a clear connexion with something lodged in the past, something already their own. He had more than once recalled how he had said to himself . . . that he was not *there* not just as he was in so doing it, through Kate and Kate's idea, but through Milly and Milly's own, and through himself and *his* own, unmistakeably--as well as through the little facts, whatever they had amounted to, of his time in New York. (NY XX, 185-86)

As Fowler convincingly argues, Densher consistently reduces Kate to the level of object (197): "I wish I could use *you* a little more", he tells Kate, as she becomes a "test" of his power (NY XX, 52). From the very beginning of the novel, Densher thinks of Kate in terms of possession: "Life might prove difficult . . . but meanwhile they had each other, and that was everything. This was her [Kate's] reasoning, but meanwhile, for him, each other was what they did n't have, and it was just the point" (NY XIX, 61-2). For Densher, "possession" connotes the physical (Mitchell, 192). He wants to be "master" of Kate: "He had never, he then knew, tasted, in all his relation with her, of anything so sharp . . . as the vividness with which he saw himself master in the conflict" (NY XX, 230-31). As Mitchell notes:

> the strained use of the word ["possession"] begins to reflect its multiple implications: to inhabit a place or own a thing; to engross one's thoughts or be controlled by a spirit; to display certain attributes or keep a secret; and as a euphemism for sexual intercourse. These manifestations, however, disguise a persistent disjunction between having and owning, identity and control, that is dramatized through the ways in which characters possess

both themselves and each other. (191)

In Venice, Densher blackmails her into coming to his rooms--a "proof of his will"--or else he will have nothing more to do with Milly (NY XX, 178):

> There glowed for him in fact a kind of rage at what he wasn't having; an exasperation, a resentment, begotten truly by the very impatience of desire, in respect to his postponed and relegated, his so extremely manipulated state. It was beautifully done of her, but what was the real meaning of it unless that he was perpetually bent to her will? (NY XX, 175- 76)

As Julie Rivkin notes, Densher's moral preoccupation expresses itself in terms of possession (109). Densher's feelings of "possession" towards Kate are in stark contrast to her earlier pledge of her love for him: "And I pledge you--I call God to witness!--every spark of my faith; I give you every drop of my life'" (NY XIX, 95). Densher does take possession of her "life". After their assignation, Densher commodifies their sexual encounter, and, as Bell observes, he thinks of the relationship in terms of "a commercialism of the emotions" ("Dream", 110): "The force of the engagement, the *quantity* of the *article to be supplied*, the special solidity of the *contract*, the way, above all, as a *service* for which the *price* named by him had been magnificently *paid*, his equivalent office was to take effect --such *items* might well fill his consciousness when there was nothing from outside to interfere" (NY XX, 237; italics mine).

In James's later works, suggests Agnew, emotion takes on a peculiarly restricted form, becoming "submerged and exhausted" in the act of seeing (96). "Seeing" becomes, using Agnew's term, a "commodity vision" that the characters try to possess as knowledge (97). Agnew applies his theory mainly to *The Golden Bowl*, but it also seems appropriate for *Wings*. In *Wings*, it is Milly who has, the reader learns, "the kind of mind . . . made all for mere *seeing* " (NY XIX, 157; italics mine). Milly "sees" Lord Mark as "familiar with everything, but conscious really of nothing. What I mean is that you've no imagination'"

(NY XIX, 162). Therefore he will not be able to offer her the "abysses" for which she has come to London. Milly longs for a "human and personal" adventure in a place where she will be "completely unknown . . . among the completely unknowing" (NY XIX, 135). Kate immediately captures Milly's attention as she recognizes that it is Kate, "the handsome girl offered to her sight . . ." who has the knowledge and imagination to create the exciting possibilities of life that Milly desires (NY XIX, 146): "It's in her [Kate] that life is splendid; and a part of that is even that she's devoted to me'" (NY XX, 128).

Milly "sees", in Kate's "difference", yet another aspect of her "beauty". For her, Kate's "beauty" is in her intuitive understanding of Milly's situation and her desires. Kate will not be sorry for her because of her illness; she will not befriend her only in sympathy. Milly recognizes that

> She [Kate] can care for me--she must feel that--only by being sorry for me; and that's why she's so lovely: to be already willing to take the trouble to be. It's the height of the disinterested. . . . She understands . . . she's better than any of you. She's beautiful. (NY XIX, 164)

James states quite clearly in the preface that Milly will use the other characters in her attempt to grab "as much of the fruit of life as possible" (AN, 291). We are told that Milly, made for "seeing", is also made for "*taking*" (NY XIX, 157; italics mine). As Bell perceptively notes, Milly "plots" against Kate as much as she is plotted against by Kate (*Meaning*, 302). In her search for "the highest pleasure" life can offer, Milly demands of Kate: "'You must help me'" (NY XIX, 260). And Kate does become "entangled and coerced" by Milly in her desire to live. James tells us that Milly is "passionately desiring to 'put in' before extinction as many of the finer vibrations as possible, and so achieve, however briefly and brokenly, the sense of having lived" (AN, 288). Milly has come to London "for life as opposed to learning", with a "plea for people and her love of life", wanting to "get into the current" of Lancaster Gate society (NY XIX, 147, 287).

Milly, the innocent heiress of her New York heritage, understands that Kate, the "handsome English girl from the heavy English house", the "great reality", has experienced "a society constituted from far back" (NY XIX, 154, 149). Feeling her innocence at never having experienced life, Milly compares herself to Kate. She desires to learn ". . . why she [Milly] was so different from the 'handsome girl' [Kate]--which she didn't know, being merely able to feel it; or at any rate might learn . . . why the handsome girl was so different from her" (NY XIX, 153). She is in doubt about her own value and feels "a mere little American, a cheap exotic, imported almost wholesale . . . " (NY XIX, 167). She has, as Kate senses, "no natural sense of social values, does n't in the least understand our differences or know who's who or what's what" (NY XX, 60). As Rowe points out, Milly needs the forms and values of European history and tradition (143). She sees that Kate can provide what she desires, all the "possibilities" of life. Milly will become the consumer of "borrowed experience", using Kate to this end (*Autobiography*, 253-54). Milly

> had never, she might well believe, been in such a state of vibration; her sensibility was almost too sharp for her comfort: there were, for example, more indications than she could reduce to order in the manner of the friendly niece, who struck her as distinguished and interesting, as in fact surprisingly genial. This young woman's type had, visibly, other possibilities . . . (NY XIX, 148)

Milly will try to acquire some form of self-identity through seeing Kate function socially (Allen, 163). She gives Kate "a week of presents, acknowledgements, mementoes, pledges of gratitude and admiration, that were all on one side" in "return" to be told a little about Lord Mark . . ." (NY XIX, 177). As Jonathan Freedman notes, Milly adopts Kate as her new companion, seeking to use Kate's qualities; her refinement, her friendship, and her love, to supply her with the sense of having lived (219). "It was a fact . . . that Milly actually began to borrow from the handsome girl a sort of view of her state. . . (NY XIX,

174-75). Milly does not want Lord Mark for herself, and is quite prepared to sacrifice Kate: "If she [Milly] was to keep herself out she could naturally best do so by putting in somebody else. She accordingly put in Kate Croy--to sacrifice her if necessary" (NY XIX, 163). The use of the word "sacrifice" reminds the reader of Kate's promise to Densher that she will not sacrifice anyone in her design.

As Rivkin argues, Milly knowingly uses Kate, hoping to take her place as Densher's beloved (113). As Milly watches Kate from her balcony, she sees her as Densher does, and both are captivated by her "beauty":

> the image presented to her [Milly], the splendid young woman who looked so particularly handsome in impatience . . . was the peculiar property of somebody else's vision, that this fine freedom in short was the fine freedom she showed Mr. Densher. Just so was how she looked to him, and just so was how Milly was held by her--held as by the strange sense of seeing through that distant person's eyes. . . . The first [effect] was that it struck our young woman as absurd to say that a girl's looking so to a man could possibly be without connexions; and the second was that by the time Kate had got into the room Milly was in mental possession of the main connexion it must have for herself. . . . (NY XIX, 257).

Milly will try to appropriate this "mental image" of Kate in the hope of attracting Densher for herself.

Milly's accidental meeting of the couple at the National Gallery reminds the reader of Strether, in *The Ambassadors*, as he discovers Chad and Mme. de Vionnet together in their boat. Perhaps Milly, like Strether, chooses not to "know" the relation between Kate and Densher. At the Gallery, she sees Kate "literally in control of the scene", and senses that what she must do is to take over from Kate, to capture Densher's attention (NY XIX, 294). She chooses the "text" of "her unused margin as an American girl" attempting to take

control, literally, of the scene (NY XIX, 295). Milly becomes the "American girl", for that is how she believes Densher sees her, innocent, wealthy, and in search of European culture: "She became as spontaneous as possible and as American as it might conveniently appeal to Mr. Densher, after his travels, to find her" (NY XIX, 296). Milly tries to create a story that will attract Densher, even though she suspects that Kate may also be in love. What Milly does know is "that she [Milly] liked him [Densher], as she put it to herself, as much as ever . . ." (NY XIX, 299). Milly, who has read Lord Mark so intuitively, must have some knowledge of Kate's feelings toward Densher. She knows with certainty that Densher loves Kate, but this knowledge does not interfere with her design to win Densher for her own:

> Little by little indeed, under the vividness of Kate's behaviour, the probabilities fell back into their order. Merton Densher was in love and Kate couldn't help it—could only be sorry and kind: wouldn't that, without wild flurries, cover everything? (NY XIX, 298)

For Mrs. Stringham, Kate's "beauty" is different again. As she plots to assure a role for Milly as princess, she will gladly sacrifice Kate to ensure that Milly is "romantically provided for" (NY XIX, 171). "'She's, you know, my princess, and to one's princess . . . one makes the whole sacrifice'" (XX NY, 209). Mrs. Stringham creates a role for the charming Kate in her story, that of handmaiden to Milly:

> The handsome English girl from the heavy English house had been as a figure in a picture stepping by magic out of its frame: it was a case in truth for which Mrs. Stringham presently found the perfect image. She had lost none of her grasp, but quite the contrary, of that other conceit in virtue of which Milly was the wandering princess: so what could be more in harmony now than to see the princess waited upon at the city gate by the worthiest maiden, the chosen daughter of the burgesses? (NY XIX, 171)

Susan discovers, through Aunt Maud, that Kate does love Densher, but agrees to lie to

Milly about this relationship if she is asked. This will leave leave Milly free to love Densher:

> She [Mrs. Stringham] found 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--only convinced at bottom of the predominance of Kate's star. Kate was n't in danger, Kate was n't pathetic; Kate Croy, whatever happened, would take care of Kate Croy. (NY XX, 117)

For Mrs. Stringham, " . . . all the Kate Croys in Christendom were but dust for the feet of Milly" (NY XX, 45).

To fully understand the impact of Kate's circumstances as a "social commodity", the reader must be aware of the social milieu in which Kate is trapped. Peggy McCormack records the society of James's realistic fictions thus:

> Characters (of varying degrees of wealth and talent) respond to this setting [capitalist societies] as if it were an exchange economy in which they survive and hope to prosper by practicing whatever form of commodities transaction they can afford. They do so by displaying their human assets as cultural commodities valuable only when made public or exchanged in social interaction. Society immediately sets prices upon characters' merchandizable assets such as physical attractiveness, mental acuity, culture, title or money itself. (2)

The social world of Kate Croy, as Rowe notes, "is in the throes of radical change and upheaval" (144). Lancaster Gate is a microcosm of the commodity world James deplored. In James, notes McCormack, there are always characters, female "linguistic lawmakers", whose verbal skills are used in battles waged in the drawing room (3). These characters consistently describe human relationships in metaphors directly from the counting house

(McCormack, 3). It is Maud Manningham Lowder, in *Wings*, who represents the emerging market society of London: "Mrs. Lowder *was* London, *was* life" (NY XIX, 32). Her strength is in her power, and she is powerful because she has money. Lancaster Gate is Maud's "counting house" . . . her "toll gate", where everything and everyone is "on the counter, is weighed in the scales for exchange value" (NY XIX, 30). Kate, who recognizes this crucial aspect of her aunt's character, astutely names her "Britannia of the Market Place" (NY XIX, 30). Imagined by Kate as a warrior clad in a helmet, shield, trident, and a ledger, Aunt Maud is ready to do battle. A "florid Philistine", "unscrupulous and immoral", she carries a "reticule for her prejudices as deep as that other pocket, the pocket full of coins stamped in her image . . ." (NY XIX, 31). As Rowe points out, Aunt Maud "represents the modern tendency in the size of her surface as a substitution for an inner depth and quality" (147). She is "ineffaceably stamped by inscrutable nature and a dreadful art, wasn't--how *could* she be?--what she was n't. She was n't anyone. She was n't anything. She was n't anywhere" (NY XIX, 278). Everyone fears her, even Lionel Croy. As John Vernon suggests, she serves the function of "matching the penniless and the wealthy so that the benefits of leisure may not abandon those born into its classes" (188). This is precisely the match she designs for Kate and Lord Mark. As Ward so aptly observes, Mrs. Lowder is "British middle class aspiring towards gentility" (105). Here, culture and the realities of the market-place combine to make the society of Lancaster Gate meaningless.

Williams, in her discussion of the self and society in *Wings*, argues that Mrs. Lowder, in entering wholly into the arrangement of the worker and the worked as Britannia of the market-place, has sacrificed the flexibility of her freedom (95). In becoming Britannia, argues Williams, Mrs. Lowder has confined her imagination to a single track (95). She is determined to fix the tone of all the encounters at Lancaster Gate, most notably in composing the script for Kate's future (Williams, 95). She controls Lord Mark with a promise of wealth if he should marry someone of her choosing, preferably Kate. With Mrs.

Stringham's help, she will initiate the idea of a romance between Densher and Milly in an effort to free Kate for a more suitable choice.

It is the penniless Lord Mark, himself a valuable commodity because of his title, who is the "ambassador", the official messenger, of Lancaster Gate (NY XIX, 152). With surprising insight, he relates to Milly, and to the reader, the reality of what London society has become:

> He explained . . . that there was no such thing, to-day in London as saying where any one was. Every one was everywhere--nobody was anywhere. He should be put to it--yes, frankly--to give a name of any sort or kind to their hostess's "set." *Was* it a set at all, or was n't it, and were there not really no such things as sets in the place any more? --was there anything but the groping and pawing, that of the vague billows of some great greasy sea in mid-Channel of masses of bewildered people trying to "get" they did n't know what or where? (NY XIX, 150)

In *Wings*, James exposes a social class where, as Williams observes, shared endeavour succumbs to personal gain, and in the society of Lancaster Gate, affection is entangled with self-interest (95). It is important to note that all involved "could quite like each other in the midst of it, . . . " and they do. (NY XIX, 179).

Kate's dilemma, as Virginia Llewellyn Smith accurately observes, is not to discover who she is, but to withstand *as* she is under the extreme pressure imposed on her by others: a disposable asset, a line to pull in the Lowder wealth, and an object of desire (187). Kate, in a private moment with Milly, describes her desperate situation:

> You can do anything--you can do, I mean, lots that we can't. You're an outsider, independent and standing by yourself; you're not hideously relative to tiers and tiers of others. . . . We're of no use to you--it's decent to tell you. You'd be of use to us, but that's a different matter. My honest advice to you would be . . . to drop us while you can. (NY XIX, 281)

Kate understands the society in which she lives as a "dreadful monster calculated to devour the unwary, to abase the proud, to scandalise the good" where "nobody . . . does anything for nothing" (NY XIX, 277, 160). Kate's confrontation of herself, as she looks into the mirror in the squalor of her father's Chirk Street house, is one of determination to free herself from her existing circumstances: "Was it not in fact the partial escape from this "worst" in which she was steeped to be able to make herself out again as agreeable to see? She stared into the tarnished glass too hard indeed to be staring at her beauty alone" (NY XIX, 5). Walter Benjamin argues that an actor facing the camera has a feeling of strangeness, much like the estrangement one feels before one's own image in the mirror (580). The image becomes separate, now to be presented to the public. The screen actor knows he will ultimately face the public, the consumers who constitute the market (Benjamin, 580). Kate seems to be preparing herself to face her audience: her father, her aunt, and Lancaster Gate society. Kate sees her beauty as she looks into the mirror, but she also sees a determination not to be "chalk marked for auction". She feels herself to be inventive, courageous in her uncertain future, but she is also the socially exploitable commodity that Mrs. Lowder prizes (Williams, 107). Her way of seeing and knowing the world, and her knowledge of the importance of material things in that world allows her to fully understand her own status as an object of value rather than as a purchaser or appropriator (Allen, 155). Kate wonders if she has "any right to anything but to be as rich and over-flowing, as smart and shining, as [she] can be made" (NY XIX, 71).

Millicent Bell, in her 1993 lecture "Women in the Jamesian Eye", notes that the women of this period were "confined by a plot they had not written, the plot of novels which began with the need of a girl to find herself by finding the right man and ending with her successful arrival at the altar" (Lectures, 2). Bell continues that James's favourite scheme was that of women who found the conventional plot inadequate, who strove to be more free to realize themselves (2). In her position as the favourite niece of Mrs. Lowder, Kate understands that it is within her grasp to benefit all those who rely on her. Kate will not be

confined in the plot written for her by her aunt. She will try to free herself socially, writing her own plot in which she hopes to satisfy everyone. Kate makes her intentions very clear as she proclaims: "I shall sacrifice nobody and nothing and that's just my situation, that I want and that I shall try for everything" (NY XIX, 173). However, in trying to live up to her aunt's expectations, and in trying to please her impoverished family, Kate is reduced to the level of the "worked". Her range of creative choice, her capacity for escaping her situation, is denied her (Williams, 99).

Lastly, but most crucial to the reader's understanding of Kate, is the use of Kate by the narrator. So important is the role of the narrator in *Wings*, that it is the focus of Chapter Two of this work. As Brenda Austin-Smith acutely observes, in surrendering to the romantic notion shared by the other characters in the novel, the narrator contributes to the success of Mrs. Lowder's plan to keep control over Kate by substituting an idealized version of Milly for Kate as the object of Densher's desire (109). Milly tries Densher's view of her as "the innocent American girl", but, as Llewellyn Smith points out, she wants to be more than a "poor little rich girl" (220). Milly wants the "abysses" of life, and will use Kate to get them. It is therefore left to Kate, as is everything else in the novel, to try to create, with Milly's blessing, the role that Milly desires.

CHAPTER 2: Kate's "Effect" on the Narrator

> *"I didn't describe to you the purpose of it . . . I described to you . . . the effect of it --which is a very different thing "*
>
> Henry James, *The Sacred Fount*, 241.

> *"'And, pray, how do you know,' Kate inquired in reply, 'anything about my thoughts?' "*
>
> Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove*, NY XIX, 36.

In his introduction to *The Art of the Novel*, R. P. Blackmur explains James's "indirect approach" to the writing of narrative fiction: "James never put his reader in direct contact with his subjects; he believed it was impossible to do so, because his subject really was not what happened but what someone felt about what happened, and this could be directly known only through an intermediate intelligence" (xviii). This chapter argues that, in *Wings*, this indirect narrative inhibits any absolute knowledge, important in the reader's final analysis of Kate.

James writes, in "The Art of Fiction", that "A novel in its broadest definition is a personal, a direct impression of life: that, to begin with constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression" (*Selected Literary*, 54). This indirect narrative method is always ambiguous because only "impressions", not "knowledge", are revealed. In the choice of a non-omniscient narrator, James tries for the highest intensity of impression, obtained when "a fine mind is subject to bewilderment" (H. James, qtd. in Austin-Smith, 86). An omniscient mind is never bewildered because of its access to complete knowledge, so little impression is produced. Full knowledge blocks the reader from fully experiencing the characters and their possibilities that withholding of information, or gaps in the narrative, allow (Bell, "Narrative Gaps", 100). What is recorded, then, are

the "effects" the characters have on one another, and on the narrator as well. It is this narrative technique of James's, "the deployment of the epistemology of impressions", that creates the reader's response (Hoople, 59).

McCormack suggests that James suits the narrative voice to the kind of protagonist he chooses; a powerful character does not evoke an active, protective narrator, while a more vulnerable protagonist evokes a more active kind of narrative (31). This claim seems especially accurate for *Wings*. The narrator, after elaborating Kate's strengths for the reader, seems to desert her for what he believes to be a more fragile Milly. Janet Holmgren Mckay claims that in the realistic novel, the narrators are increasingly involved with, and affected by, the characters and their stories (36). This involvement results in a loss of authority, and the voices of the narrator and the characters become a representation of multiple perspectives (McKay, 36). It is this very narrative uncertainty that prevents the reader from finding any absolute meaning in the novel. In *Wings*, the reader sees events through the eyes of its three principle centres, Kate, Milly, and Densher. However, it is the narrator's impressions of how these events affect the characters that the reader hears.

As Austin-Smith so rightly argues, the narrator of James's late fiction is non-omniscent, convincing the reader through persuasive discourse rather than through knowledge (71). In Book Second of *Wings*, what the reader believes to be a conversation between Aunt Maud and Densher occurs as follows: "Aunt Maud clearly conveyed it, though he could n't later on have said how. 'You don't really matter, I believe, so much as you think, and I'm not going to make you a martyr by banishing you. Your performances with Kate in the Park are ridiculous . . .'" (NY XIX, 84). Whether she actually speaks these words, or this is only the narrator's impression of what Densher believes she might say, is ambiguous. The narrator then suggests that Densher "afterwards felt that *if she had n't absolutely phrased all this* it was because she so soon made him out as going with her far enough" (NY XIX, 84; italics mine). The narrator's impressions here are in the form of hypothetical discourse, narrative that is presented as quoted speech on the page, though not ever

verbalized (Young, 382). In this narrative confusion, the reader cannot know exactly whose consciousness records the previous passage, Densher's, Mrs. Lowder's, or the narrator's.

The narrator in *Wings*, claims Austin-Smith, seems another character in the story, and is in competition with the other characters for the right to tell the story (72). For instance, it is the narrator who first suggests the dovelike quality of Milly: "... it was just a part that while this process went forward *our young lady* alighted, came back, taking up her destiny again as if she had been able by a wave or two of *her wings* ..." (NY XIX, 160; italics mine). Later, the narrator gives the metaphor of "dove" to Kate for Milly, and it is Kate who is held responsible for labeling Milly. When Kate replies to Milly; "'because you're a dove'", she means to suggest to Milly that she is gentle and sweet, innocent about certain realities of life, and vulnerable to them. It is Milly, through the narrator, who interprets Kate's meaning in the romantic fashion of Milly as princess: "partly as if, though a dove who could perch on one finger, one were also a princess with whom forms were to be observed" (NY XIX, 283).

The main job of represented discourse, argues Donald Ross, is to transmit information about the narrator's attitude toward what he represents (1224). In *Wings*, this becomes evident in Book Third as the narrator introduces Susie Stringham to the reader in a somewhat ironic fashion. As Austin-Smith observes, the narrator distances himself from Susie's point of view, presenting Susie as one who is overcome by the romance of her position as attendant to Milly (82). Although both are writers, the narrator sees himself as superior to Susie, whose "little life" consists of flitting "in and out of the Public Library with the air of conscientiously returning or bravely carrying off in her pocket the key of knowledge itself" (NY XIX, 108). The narrator interprets for us Milly's effect on Susie:

> Milly clearly felt these things too, but they affected her companion at moments--that was quite the way Mrs. Stringham would have expressed it--as the princess in a conventional tragedy might have affected the

confidant if a personal emotion had ever been permitted to the latter.

That a princess could only be a princess was a truth with which, essentially, a confidant, however responsive, had to live. (NY XIX, 120)

The narrator will later adopt Susie's romantic notion of Milly as princess.

The narrator in *Wings* also appears to report what is said or what has happened, telling the reader what a character "might have thought", and this strategy has the force of an actual thought (Bersani, "Narrator", 143). The reader gets Densher's impression, or more precisely, the narrator's, of what Densher imagines Mrs. Lowder *might* say and do: "It was a particular in which Aund Maud *appeared* to offer herself as an example, *appeared* to say quite agreeably: 'What I want of you, don't you see? is to be just exactly as *I* am'" (NY XX, 32; italics mine). As Kate looks into the mirror in her father's rooms, the reader learns only the narrator's impression of what Kate is thinking: "*If* she saw more things than her fine face in the dull glass of her father's lodgings, she *might have seen* that, after all, she was not herself a fact in the collapse" (NY XIX, 5-6; italics mine). The narrator reports only what he believes Densher thinks he might say to Kate: "He had rather avoided, as *we have remarked*, Kate's eyes, but there came a moment when he *would fairly have liked to put it*, across the table to her: 'I say, light of my life, is *this* the great world?'" (NY XX, 44; italics mine). The narrator allows the reader Milly's impression of Kate as well: "Kate wasn't brutally brutal . . . but rather indifferently, defensively. She simplified in advance, was beforehand with her doubts, and knew with singular quickness what she wasn't . . . going to like" (NY XIX, 182). This quick summary of Kate may in all probability be the narrator's impression of Kate, rather than Milly's, and the use of the word "brutal" not once, but twice, influences the reader's impression of Kate.

In Book First of the novel the narrator presents Kate to the reader with much sympathy, and, as Virginia Fowler suggests, the reader should never see her as the "bad heroine" in the complex world of this novel (195). The narrator goes to great lengths to inform the reader of Kate's tragic personal history, placing her in a very realistic situation, but also insisting

that the reader must understand fully her predicament. Hers is a "wasted past":

> Her father's life, her sister's, her own, that of her two lost brothers--the whole history of their house had the effect of some fine florid, voluminous phrase, say even a musical, that dropped first into words, into notes, without sense, and then, hanging unfinished, into no words, no notes at all. Why should a set of people have been put in motion, on such a scale and with such an air of being equipped for a profitable journey, only to break down without an accident, to stretch themselves in the wayside dust without a reason. (NY XIX, 4)

The narrator informs the reader of Kate's history in stark, realistic rhetoric: "the loss of her father, the discomfort of her sister, the confirmation of their shrunken prospects . . .", so different from the romantic vision of Milly's tragedy (NY XIX, 29). Kate's ancestral home is a "vulgar little room" on a "vulgar little street" that tastes of "the failure of fortune and honour" (NY XIX, 3). Her father, Lionel Croy, appears the perfect English gentleman. Dorothea Krook accurately describes him as "an elegant wastrel", handsome in appearance, but with a dark hidden past (196). Kate's father has brought shame and dishonour to the Croy family name. As Llewellyn Smith points out, Kate's haunting first-person account of her father's disgrace captures the reader's sympathy, and we cannot help but compare the effect of hearing the account of Milly's tragic past through the romantic vision of Susan Stringham (189). Just what his sin is, the reader, and Kate, never discover, but it is the effect of this disgrace on Kate that is important.

The narrator uses Kate's consciousness, in Book First, as a medium to reveal her "type". As Austin-Smith observes, Kate's consciousness is dominated by the harsh realities of her world (93). The narrator makes us aware of Kate's difficult situation by using the metaphor of war, with Kate as the warrior ready for battle. Kate is at "her lookout", at Lancaster Gate, the "high south window that hung over the Park", and she is

contemplating her reality, described by the narrator as "the rumble of a far-off siege" (Milly, in Book Third, from her lookout in the Alps, will do the same, with different results) (NY XIX, 27, 29). Kate's self-knowledge, that of her fondness for material things, and her commodity status in her aunt's world, will never lead her to a "general surrender of everything". Her strength is in her determination to somehow overcome her situation.

The narrator seems most sympathetic to Kate's dilemma, as he informs the reader of her desperation to restore some honour and dignity to her family name:

> It was the name, above all, she would take in hand--the precious name she so liked and that, in spite of the harm her wretched father had done it , was n't yet past praying for. She loved it in fact the more tenderly for that bleeding wound. But what could a penniless girl do with it but let it go? (NY XIX, 6)

Because she is a woman without means, the only way to save her family name is to marry for wealth. In order to save her name, paradoxically, she must give it up. The "effect" of her compromising situation, both on the narrator and the reader, is one of compassion.

The narrator renders his impression of Kate's ancestry, her bond of blood; a disgraced father and a materialistic "real aunt" who is "unscrupulous and immoral" (NY XIX, 31,32), to show how these circumstances threaten to confine and limit Kate's identity (Williams, 91). Kate understands, and is fearful of, the part that the bond of blood might play in one's life: "'My father's dishonour'", she tells Densher, "'is part of me'", as she admits to the possibility of "doing something base" (NY XIX,68, 72). We learn that her mother has had an early and tragic death, as did her brothers; that her sister is a widow, that she has nieces and nephews, and that her father is corrupt. The reader hears, from the narrator, of all the tragedy that Kate has experienced in her twenty-seven years. We feel Kate's presence, and her humanness as well.

In allowing the reader valuable insight into Kate's difficult circumstances, the narrator

tries to capture the "effect" of her, to record it for the reader, but cannot. Kate is "life", with all its complex realities, and is beyond knowing. The narrator, like Densher, Milly, and Lord Mark, tries to "know" Kate, to "possess by characterizing", but all are unsuccessful (Ian, 131). The narrator makes use of Kate's "negative capability" emphasizing for the reader that she can never be "known". (Negative Capability occurs "when [wo]man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason . . ." (Keats, *English Romantic Writers*, 1209). Mitchell argues that unlike any other character in the novel, Kate maintains an enviable negative capability "that is reflected in the narrative's preference for analogy at the expense of flat assertion" (196-97). The narrator does not know Kate's plan fully because she herself does not, designing it as circumstances present themselves. The narrator must therefore resort to speculation rather than deliver the absolute "truth" about Kate's plans. Occurrences relating to Kate are treated by the narrator "as if" they were, or could be other: "she *might be* devoured", she "*might be* more free to commit herself" (NY XIX, 30,32; italics mine). Kate, the narrator informs us, will not make the "mistake of trusting to easy analogies" (NY XIX, 31). The narrator is warning the reader against taking his own analysis too seriously.

Kate leaves things unstated, achieving interpretive power by encouraging others to express their desires (Mitchell, 199). It is Kate who interprets Milly's desire to experience life, understands Mrs. Lowder's use of her [Kate] to achieve her social aspirations, and, finally, understands that Densher has fallen in love with Milly's memory. Kate's interpretive ability is also evident in her refusal to answer any question directly. Marian, when she questions Kate about her intention to marry Densher, receives another question, rather than any definite answer: "'Is it your idea that if I should feel so I would be bound to give you notice, so that you might step in and head me off? Is that your idea?'" (NY XIX, 38). As Densher questions her as to her part in Lord Mark's discovery of their engagement, she replies: "'Are you trying to fix it on me that I must have told him'" (NY XX, 376)? In

Book Eighth, Kate and Densher, for the first time, state the terms of their agreement as Kate tries to preserve their relationship: "' Don't think, however, I'll do *all* the work for you. If you want things named you must name them'" Kate tells Densher. He does: "'Since she's to die I'm to marry her?'" (NY XX, 225). He continues to fix the plan: "'So that when her death has taken place I shall in the natural course have money?'" (NY XX, 225). Kate speaks only then: "'You'll in the natural course have money. We shall in the natural course be free'" (NY XX, 225). Perhaps the best example of Kate's interpretive power occurs at the end of the novel as she answers Densher's "As we were?" with the finality of "We shall never be again as we were!" (NY XX, 405). Like Densher, and the narrator, we can only feel the "effect" of Kate, and "the beauty" of what she sees:

> It rolled over him of a sudden, after he had resumed his walk, that this *might* easily be what Kate had meant. . . . These [interviews] *might* take place in other words, on her premises, which would remove them still better from the streets. (NY XX, 14-5; italics mine)

Does Kate really wish to help Milly fulfill her desire to "live", or is she just after Milly's wealth? Or, does she, as she claims, want, and try for both? As Oerlemans argues, "Thus does the suspension of meaning become the achieved meaning of the novel" (187). The narrator, like the reader, never has exact knowledge of Kate's intentions. Kate never wants knowledge of facts, for facts will fix her into a final position, allowing her, argues Llewellyn Smith, to manipulate the unnamed, "leaving the blanks the reader most wants to see filled, forcing the reader to see the truth as reflected in her. Kate understands narrative and plot and, above all, language, and knows how to turn them to her advantage" (189). This narrative strategy allows the reader, and Kate, room for interpreting events as they happen.

By Book Seventh however, the narrator is overcome, as is Mrs. Stringham, by the "effect" of Milly, and it is this reaction of the narrator to her that takes control of the novel. The narrator tries to convince the reader, and himself, of Kate's good faith and sincerity

towards Milly:

> It may be declared for Kate, at all events, that her sincerity about her friend, through this time, was deep, her compassionate imagination strong; and that these things gave her a virtue, a good conscience, a credibility for herself, so to speak, that were later to be precious to her. She grasped with her keen intelligence the logic of their common duplicity. (NY XX, 140)

Yet the earlier remark by the narrator, his impression that "Milly was successfully deceived", suggests his responsibility, in part, for creating the romantic image of Milly as saintly heroine (NY XX, 69). The narrator has become caught up in the "romance" of "our young man's" [Densher's] situation, and begins to desert Kate's story. The narrator, as he presents what he believes are Densher's thoughts of what could develop between Kate, Milly and Densher, seems to take up the very same fiction as Mrs. Lowder's (and perhaps Milly's as well); that of Kate promoting a romance between Densher and Milly:

> It would n't really have taken much more to make him wonder if he had n't before him one of those rare cases of exaltation--food for fiction, food for poetry--in which a man's fortune with the woman who does n't care for him is positively promoted by the woman who does. (NY XX, 81)

Here, the narrator puts forth the "design" for Milly that is attributed only to Kate.

The narrator also becomes overwhelmed, as is Susie, with the "effect" of Milly as princess. The narrator's preference for romance over the realism of Kate's situation is evident in the following passage:

> Certain aspects of the connexion of these young women show for *us* . . . in the likeness of some dim scene in a Maeterlinck play; *we* have positively the image, in the delicate dusk, of the figures so associated and yet so opposed, so mutually watchful: that of the *angular pale princess*, ostrich-

> plumed, black-robed, hung about with amulets, reminders, relics, mainly seated, mainly still, and that of the upright restless slow-circling *lady of her court* who exchanges with her . . . fitful questions and answers. (NY XX, 139; italics mine)

Kate's "effect" on the narrator now turns her into a commodity. He will use her as the "dark" heroine in his story, and he will use her as a "handmaiden" for Milly.

The narrator offers us an entirely different "impression" of Milly from that of Kate. Milly is not introduced until Book Third, and it is Mrs. Stringham's impressions of her, rather than the narrator's, that the reader receives. There are no facts here, only a somewhat romantic view of Milly's situation as seen through the consciousness of Susan Stringham. In other words, it is the narrator's impression of Mrs. Stringham's thoughts about Milly that the reader hears. As a result Milly becomes, for the reader, for the other characters, and for the narrator, the image of a romantic figure that is enforced by all throughout the novel. She is, for Susie, "the real thing, the romantic life itself":

> It was New York mourning, it was New York hair, it was New York history, confused as yet, but multitudinous, of the loss of parents, brothers, sister, almost every human appendage, all on a scale and with a sweep that had required the greater state; it was a New York legend of affecting, of romantic isolation, and, beyond everything, it was by most accounts, in respect to the mass of money so piled on the girl's back, a set of New York possibilities. (NY XIX, 105-6)

The reader compares this romantic history with the realistic presentation of Kate's family disaster. Lack of prehistory, suggests Bell, severs the protagonist (who, in *Wings*, is Milly) from the past in order to make his or her initial innocence as mythical as possible ("Narrative Gaps", 99). The protagonist escapes the requirements of realist precondition and is unfallen as her adventure begins (Bell, "Narrative Gaps", 99). The narator of *Wings*, like Susie, becomes caught up in the "effect" of Milly.

The reader has no direct presentation of Milly's thoughts here. We learn what Milly may be thinking through the narrator's impression of Mrs. Stringhham's impressions of Milly:

> This was the impression that if the girl was deeply and recklessly meditating there, she was not meditating a jump; she was on the contrary, as she sat, much more in a state of uplifted and unlimited possession that had nothing to gain from violence. She was looking down on the kingdoms of the earth, and though indeed that of itself might well go to the brain, it wouldn't be with a view of renouncing them. Was she choosing among them, or did she want them all? This question, before Mrs. Stringham had decided what to do made others vain . . . (NY XIX, 124)

It is not until Book Fourth that we hear from Milly herself. She then becomes, for the reader, a more human character with needs and desires, a different Milly from the romantic version suggested by the narrator.

Characters, states Mary Doyle Springer, "can serve to reveal *other* characters--to make, by their choices and acts, rhetorical judgments on the choices and acts of others" (191). From Book Second on, Kate is present to the reader almost entirely through others' eyes, through others' impressions of her and her actions. In realistic fiction, observes McKay, each character's discourse comes to share the stage with the narrator's voice, but, most importantly, does not supplant it (194). The narrator of *Wings* reads all of the characters, giving the reader only his impressions of how each "sees" the others. How the narrator reads them for us, is not necessarily how they really are, but how they fit in to each others' stories. In Volume Two, we hear about Kate almost entirely through the narrator's interpretation of what Densher believes she may be thinking and feeling. On Densher's return to London, from Venice, he finds Kate looking after her family once again. The reader hears through the narrator's version of Densher's impressions of what he might

suppose Kate to feel:

> She [Kate] had thought 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. If we could really *do* anything it would be another matter.
> (NY XX, 395)

Here again is another example of hypothetical discourse as the narrator reports what Densher might be thinking about Kate. It is not how Kate actually feels or what she says.

In Volume Two of *Wings*, the narrator deserts Kate's story. At the conclusion of Book Sixth, the narrator reports an interesting conversation between Kate and Densher. All Densher has to do is be "kind" to Milly, explains Kate. Densher, who never understands Kate, questions: "'And leave the rest to you?' 'Leave the rest to *her*', said Kate *disappearing*" (NY XX, 95; italics mine). And Kate does disappear. Kate's disappearace will allow Susie, Densher, the narrator, and the reader, to recreate their own version of Milly as divine spirit. One of the reasons the narrator deserts Kate may be the "effect" of her decision to agree to the assignation that Densher demands. The narrator, through Densher, records his distaste: "Yet what he was possessed of was real--the fact that she [Kate] had n't thrown over his lucidity the horrid shadow of cheap reprobation" (NY XX, 201). The "effect" of these damning words is that Kate becomes, for Densher, the narrator, and the reader, the "fallen" woman. The reader does not hear from Kate. Kate's perspective vanishes too soon in a novel devoted to her design, argues Mitchell (189). The reader never learns how Kate feels after her assignation with Densher, or how difficult it is for her to give Densher to Milly. We can only feel, through the impressions of others, how

difficult her situation remains at the end of the novel. Both Densher and the narrator sacrifice Kate for their own story. This sacrifice allows the reader, as it earlier allowed Densher, the freedom to interpret Kate's actions. There is no finality here, only silence, the "softness of her [Kate's] silence--a silence that looked out for them both at the far reach of their prospect" (NY XIX, 97).

Bersani argues that the narrative of *The Golden Bowl*, and in particular the character of Maggie Verver, puts a stop to talk because the world cannot be accurately analyzed, judged, and corrected (*Future*, 87). Shoshana Felman, in her discussion of *The Turn of the Screw* argues in a similar vein. The reader is trapped in the narrative, and this produces what Felman calls "an inescapable reading-effect" (149). The reader looks for answers in the narrative, but finds none. This is true of the narrative of *Wings* as well. For James, this "knowledge", argues Felman, is what constitutes the "vulgar" in narrative fiction:

> the vulgar is the "imputed vice", the explicit, the specific, the unequivocal. The vulgar is the literal, because it stops the movement constitutive of meaning, because it blocks and interupts the endless process of metaphorical substitution. The vulgar, therefore, is anything that misses, or falls short of, the dimension of the symbolic, anything that rules out, or excludes meaning as a loss and as a flight--anything that strives, in other words, to eliminate from language its inherent silence, anything that misses the specific way in which a text actively "won't tell". (153)

The Jamesian text, concludes Felman, actively "won't tell": "the traditional analytical response to literature is to provide the literary question with something like a reliably professional 'answering service'", to answer for the text (152). She then argues that the error James seeks to avoid is "that of a language whose discourse is outspoken and forthright and whose reserves of silence have been cut, that of a text inherently incapable of silence, inherently unable to hold its tongue" (153). Real knowledge is that there are no answers; one must participate in life.

In *Wings*, it is Kate's sister Marian, and her relatives, who have the effect of the "vulgar" as they tell Kate exactly what they expect from her. Kate, on the other hand, "made the point that she was n't underhand, any more than she was vulgar;" . . . as she refuses to state exactly what she is thinking throughout the novel (NY XIX, 49). *Wings* is filled with text that "won't tell". The reader never learns about the "endless" evil of Kate's father; Kate's relationship with her aunt; the exact nature of Milly's illness; Milly and Densher's initial meeting in New York; Kate's feelings as she "lends" Densher to Milly; Lord Mark's "knowledge" about the engagement; Densher's last meeting with Milly; Mrs. Stringham's disappearance at the end of the novel; Kate's reason for returning to her needy family; and if Kate refuses Densher's proposal because he will only marry her without the money, or because she believes him to be in love with Milly. Perhaps the best example of this narrative that "won't tell" is the unopened letter Milly has written to Densher just before her death, and that Kate destroys. The reader, along with Densher, agonizes over the contents of "the sacred script" (NY XX, 386). Although the contents of the letter are lost forever, its value begins to appreciate for Densher, and for the reader, because of its absence, multiplying in possible meanings (Rivkin, 117).

In James, argues Vernon, "intentions are so diaphanous and layered . . . that it becomes nearly impossible to say where they begin or end, or even whose intentions they are" (188). As Emily Schiller suggests, James weaves many types of innocence and evil together into a complex fabric, and as these layers are exposed and betrayed, succeeding ones are revealed and then exposed by still others (197). No character is safe from harm or free from blame. Kate's initial plan is to use Milly's rooms for her meeting with Densher. And it is Densher who demands a meeting-place for the lovers upon his return from America. Mrs. Lowder initiates the romance between Milly and Densher, although it is Kate who is held responsible for this act. Milly herself, as well as Susan, also has this same design. Aunt Maud also issues the invitation to Densher to accompany them to Venice, and it is she who will lie to Milly about Kate's feelings for Densher. The mystery of how Lord

Mark knows of Kate and Densher's engagement, and even why he tells Milly, remains just that. Kate could have told him, for no one else knows of her engagement. As well, Mark could have told Milly not to destroy her, but to spare her any more humiliation. Another possibility is that Lord Mark could have simply guessed at the relationship without any "true" knowledge. Densher only thinks he knows Kate's "plan", and it is his impression that the "design" to use Milly for her wealth becomes the plan for everyone: "She wanted, Susan Shepherd then, as appeared, the same thing Kate wanted, only wanted it, as still further appeared, in so different a way and from a motive so different, even though scarce less deep. Then Mrs. Lowder wanted, by so odd an evolution of her exuberance, exactly what each of the others did . . . " (NY XX, 209).

What many critics label as "Kate's plan" (Marcia Ian, 113, 1984) begins with Milly herself in the Alps. James clearly states in the Preface that Milly's longing to participate in "the fruit of life"

> can take effect only by the aid of others, their participation (appealed to, entangled and coerced as they find themselves) becomes their drama too--that of their promoting her illusion, under her importunity, for reasons, for interests and advantages, from motives and points of view, of their own. (AN, 291)

She remembers her meeting with Densher in New York, and most emphatically tells Susan: "'I want to go straight to London'" (NY XIX, 133). Mrs. Stringham believes she chooses Densher to be Milly's "prince", but Milly has already made this decision. The narrator makes quite clear that Milly will use others to achieve her goal:

> Such a matter as this may at all events speak of the style in which our young woman could affect those who were near her, may testify to the sort of interest she could inspire. She worked--and seemingly quite without design--upon the sympathy, the curiosity, the fancy of her associates, and we shall really ourselves scarce otherwise come

> closer to her than by feeling their impression and sharing, if need be, their confusion. (NY XIX, 116)

The narrator's impression of Milly is that she seems to have no selfish motives, but the narrator also makes clear that all the reader will have are others' impressions of Milly, including his own. Milly's actions, however, suggest that she does indeed have a "design". Milly is warned about the nature of Lancaster Gate society twice, early in the novel, once by Lord Mark, and again by Kate, yet chooses to stay in London because, as she tells Susie, "'I want abysses'" (NY XIX, 186). The idea of leaving her wealth, upon her death, to the man she would marry occurs to Milly long before it is discussed by Kate and Densher (NY XX, 149). She does not tell Lord Mark of her interest in Densher, keeping it a secret from him as he proposes marriage to her. She has learned well the market society of Lancaster Gate, and her plan for Mark, much like Aunt Maud's, is that he should marry Kate. Milly seems not the innocent victim.

In her attempt to define literary character, Springer argues that it is action , even more than speech, deed, or thought, that reveals character:

> Acts, then, even of the most mundane kind, are selected for their *effect* in the fiction--selected to reveal each character as a kind of person on whom we may reassuringly base expectations--and in that sense we have noted that literary characters are ALL types, but types that reflect back clarity on the real world. (When they are stereotypes . . . we are at perhaps the greatest distance of all between art and life, but the human connection in such cases is ease of recognition and the clear light they throw on a human issue). (210; italics mine)

Llewelyn Smith warns the reader of *Wings* "not to ask what she [Kate] is, but to ask instead what does she do for the story" (9). The narrator reveals Kate as a woman of action, and her "effect" on him is one of "life". Kate refuses to marry Lord Mark, insists on having the freedom of choosing her own mate, and proves this by making the ultimate

sacrifice which Densher demands.

The narrator implies that Kate's initial intention, her plan to escape her aunt, is sincere. It is recorded three times for the reader; once as she makes her offer to her father, again as she repeats her intentions to her sister, and a third time as she relates her plan to Densher (NY XIX 10,41,69). Kate wants to convince an objective witness of her good faith: "'I wish there were some one here who might serve--for any contingency--as a witness that I *have* put it to you that I am ready to come'" (NY XIX, 20-1). It is a witness that fixes a bond and confirms an event. For Kate to give up her position in Mrs. Lowder's camp is seen, Schiller perceives, as "stupidly wasteful and supremely selfish" by her family, and she is betrayed by them (198).

In Book Second, the narrator's focus is on Densher, and constitutes a very different presentation of him than that of Kate. James, in the Preface, makes reference to Densher as "a bland Hermes" (AN, 298). The narrator finds him quite bland as well: "You would have got fairly near him by making out in his eyes the potential recognition of ideas; but you would have quite fallen away again on the question of the ideas themselves" (NY XIX, 48). Rather than state in certain terms Densher's strengths, as he did Kate's, the narrator states that because of his youth, Densher has possibilities. Densher seems, for the reader, more like Lord Mark, almost an absence as the narrator records his impressions of the young man, so different from the "effect" of Kate Croy: "The difficulty with Densher was that he looked vague without looking weak--idle without looking empty" (NY XIX, 48). He knows what he isn't, not what he is (NY XX, 83). He is "a man either with nothing at all to do or with ever so much to think about . . ." and "not the sort of stuff of romance that wears, that washes, that survives use . . ." (NY XIX, 89,47). He is right, and the reader begins to question Densher's reliability (Austin-Smith, 72). Densher feels he will never be rich. He only thinks about the "innumerable ways of making money", but cannot act on any of them, being a man who "had thought, no doubt, from the day he was born, much more than he had acted . . ." (NY XX, 294). Money seems of little importance to him, perhaps

because his desire is for "freedom of the mind", a more romantic concept that the narrator prefers (NY XX, 73). Densher accepts this "self" who will never be rich; "he knew it to be absolute", and unlike Kate, is fixed in this position (NY XIX, 51).

For Densher, the narrator notes, it is "appearance", rather than action, that is important. Throughout the novel the narrator focuses on Densher's desire not to "disoblige". We see the narrator portray Densher as a gentleman, a "bon prince" who desires to be perceived as taking the moral stance. Densher, argues Llewellyn Smith, is "the vehicle through whom James returns once more to the difficulty of distinguishing beautiful behaviour from wicked intentions" (207). His behaviour is outwardly beautiful, but his intention to seduce Kate, and to avoid telling Milly about his relationship with Kate, is indeed wicked. Densher's main concern is about himself: will he seem the fool?: "He was glad there was no male witness; it was a circle of petticoats; he should n't have liked a man to see him" (NY XX, 209). He believes "he had done absolutely everything that Kate had wanted, she had done nothing whatever that he had" (NY XX, 177). He feels controlled by her: "It was Kate who had so perched him, and there came up for him at moments . . . a sensible sharpness of irony as to her management of him" (NY XX, 175). He tries to convince himself "that he was not *there* . . . through Kate and Kate's idea, but through Milly and Milly's own, and through himself and *his* own . . ." (NY XX, 186). He must find a way to "test" her loyalty to him, to show her who is in control. Densher believes he has done nothing dishonest, and whatever lies were told, he had no part in it:

> it did n't take him far to remember that he had himself as
> yet done nothing deceptive. It was Kate's description of him,
> his defeated state, it was none of his own; his responsibility
> would begin, as he might say, only with acting it out. The
> sharp point was, however, in the difference between acting
> and not acting . . . (NY XX, 76).

Densher will leave all the explaining to Kate (NY XIX, 98). If he does not speak, Densher

believes, he does not lie.

In fact, Densher does have his opportunity, early in the novel, to act. On his first visit to Milly after her absence from Mrs. Lowder's dinner, he could have admitted that Kate does indeed "like [him] awfully" (NY XX, 76). Instead he argues that it would be "virtually as indelicate to challenge [Milly] as to leave her deluded" (NY XX, 77). He allows Milly, as he does Kate, to do all the explaining and to extricate him from any awkward situations. He blames Kate: "It was sinking because it was all doing what Kate had conceived for him; it wasn't in the least doing--and that had been his notion of his life--anything he himself had conceived" (NY XX, 174-5). His attitude never changes throughout the novel, and he still believes he is not being disloyal to Kate in keeping secret his correspondence with Mrs. Stringham after Milly's death. Kate has not questioned him on this matter; therefore he need not tell her (NY XX, 391). In revealing Densher's inability to "act", the narrator enforces for the reader Kate's strengths.

Densher's circumstances impress the narrator's romantic imagination. He is "foreign", and his mother, an artist, makes her living as a copyist. Her value, claims Rivkin, is derived from duplication rather than originality (97). Densher will duplicate his mother's success as a copyist (Rivkin, 97). Holding his mother's image sacred, Densher will later hold the image of the dead Milly in the same way (NY XIX, 93). He can only deal in "images", not in realities. Throughout the novel he never has an original idea, lacking the "imagination" of the artist (NY XX, 94). Kate, late in the novel, begins to understand this flaw in Densher. She would marry him tomorrow if he could give her "an idea straight *from* you, I mean as your own, given me in good faith" (NY XX, 349). He uses Kate to act for him, to reproduce life, as his mother uses famous art from which she copies.

The narrator, wary of Densher's character at the beginning of the novel, gets caught up in his romantic character, and becomes, like Densher, obsessed with Milly's memory. The letter that Kate has burned without reading becomes, in the narrator's romantic rhetoric, Densher's "maimed child". He will never know what had been in Milly's letter, and this

absence of knowledge becomes a "priceless pearl" lost to him forever. The "wail" becomes "the sound he cherished when alone in the stillness of his rooms. He sought and guarded the stillness, so that it might prevail there till the inevitable sounds of life, once more, comparatively coarse and harsh, should smother and deaden it . . . " (NY XX, 396).

As Austin-Smith points out, the narrator contributes to Mrs. Lowder's plan to control Kate's future by substituting Milly for Kate as Densher's love (109). Although warned by Kate of her aunt's power to control others, Densher believes, upon their initial meeting, that he has charmed her. After Milly's death, he believes she has befriended him. She easily persuades Densher that he has fallen in love with the dying Milly, and Densher accepts her fiction as his own. Mrs. Lowder "thus presented him to himself, as it were, in the guise in which she had now adopted him, and it was the element of truth in the character that he found himself, for his own part, adopting" (NY XX, 336). She is able to read Densher, and opens a "new chapter" for him where he is "blighted and ravaged, as frustrate and already bereft" (NY XX, 336). As Rivkin argues, Aunt Maud now accepts Densher as the grieving lover of Milly, and not the lover of Kate (116). He begins to surrender to Maud's design as he allows her to persuade him he is in love with the sacred memory of Milly. He begins to deny Kate, to feel uncomfortable in her presence because she knows the truth about him. He is content to remain a romantic hero in the eyes of Mrs. Lowder. He can talk about Milly now, and feels "free" with Aunt Maud, as he is not called upon to act, but only to think about what has happened. He imagines, like Mrs. Stringham, "commendable fictions" to explain his actions, or non-actions, on behalf of Milly. Like Milly, Densher accepts as his own other people's impressions of who he is. After he seduces Kate, and falls in love with Milly's memory, Densher will see Kate being "different": ". . . he wondered if he were as different for her as she herself had immediately appeared . . . Beautiful still, but different:" (NY XX, 313). Her "difference", earlier what he admired most in Kate, now becomes something unpleasant for him. As Emily Schiller rightly observes, Densher does not want a flesh and blood girl (210). He falls in love with Milly's

memory, in which he has wrapped her in the beauty and dignity of a saint. In Kate, in her flawed humanity, he sees his guilt. Because of his efforts to see himself and be seen in the right light, Densher becomes, for the reader, both a "reflector" and an unreliable narrator (Llewellyn Smith, 208).

The narrator's focus on Densher occurs, suggests Austin-Smith, as the narrator seems more closely allied to Densher's point of view than to the view of any of the other characters in the novel (102). However, warns Austin-Smith, this is not proof that Densher possesses a more accurate interpretation of any of the characters, or any of the things they do (102). Instead, the narrator's early criticism of Densher's qualities has been replaced by an acceptance of these very qualities because Densher fulfills the narrator's romantic notions of who Milly's prince might be (Austin-Smith, 102).

The narrator, in his presentation of Mrs. Stringham, seems at first to mock, and later to share, her romantic ideals. She writes romances for the "best magazines", the narrator informs us in an ironic fashion, suggesting that Mrs. Stringham, a romantic, is not a reliable source to read Milly (Austin-Smith, 86). The narrator records Milly's impression of how Mrs. Lowder feels towards Susie: "Susan Shepherd emerging so uninvited from an irrelevant past--*ought* by all the proprieties simply to have bored Aunt Maud . . . " (NY XIX, 181; italics mine). However, this "impression" of Mrs. Stringham as boring is in all probability the narrator's. The narrator relates to the reader how Mrs. Stringham *would have expressed* her thoughts about Milly: "Mrs. Stringham was a woman of the world, but Milly Theale was a princess" (NY XIX, 120). After she meets Milly "all categories failed her [Susie]--they ceased at least to signify--as soon as she found herself in presence of the the real thing, the romantic life itself. That was what she saw in Mildred . . . ." (NY XIX, 107). Susie wants no knowledge. She does not want to know from what illness Milly suffers, nor does she want to consider any other plan for her princess. She believes that "love" will cure Milly, and she has "only one dream now", that of finding Milly her palace and her prince (NY XX, 118). Susie misreads Milly, believing that Milly is "starved for

culture": "Culture was what she herself represented for her . . . " (NY XIX, 109). It is most appropriate that, in *Wings*, the romantic and sentimental Mrs. Stringham, who reads romantic literary works, views Milly's situation in a similar vein: "This was poetry--it was also history . . . to a finer tune even than than Maeterlinck and Pater . . . (NY XIX, 111). It is through Susie's romantic vision that we hear about Milly. She judges and pronounces Milly as positively good, naming her as princess (NY XIX, 255). Mrs. Stringham, to quote Freedman, is "a representative of the gentry elite who nourished aestheticism in fin de siecle America, and traces the arrival of that elite in the drawing rooms of late Victorian and early Edwardian England" (207).

It is most important to note that the reader never has any direct knowledge of the relationship between Kate and her aunt. We are never privy to their conversations, but only to the narrator's impression of their relationship. The narrator gives the reader his impression of how Kate views her aunt: "It was in fact, *we have hinted*, as a besieger that *our young lady*, in the provisioned citadel, had for the present most to think of her, and what made her formidable in this character was that she was unscrupulous and immoral" (NY XIX, 31; italics mine). This impression of Aunt Maud influences the reader's opinion of her. Mrs. Lowder seems to be no more "immoral" than any of the other characters. In fact, the few sentences she does speak seem to mark Aunt Maud for what she is, and she does not pretend to be other. We know that she "lies well", is "always magnificent", "might be crying if [she] were n't writing letters", and knows "no impossibles", her position fixed in using Kate as a social commodity (NY XX, 116, 113, 108, 110).

Just how credible the narrator is becomes crucial to the reader's view of Kate. The narrator of *Wings* is very persuasive as he tries to convince us that Kate's "effect" on him will be the same for the reader.

Kate's "effect" on the narrator, one that produces sympathy and understanding at the beginning of the novel, becomes lost in the "effect" of the romantic Milly. The narrator uses Kate to construct his own romantic story, that of Kate as a "duplicitous" character who

deceives Milly, and becomes her evil counterpart. Though the narrator plays a part, throughout the novel, in constructing thoughts and feelings of the characters, his own narration is vulnerable, and the reader must recognize the narrator's limitations of omniscience (Austin-Smith, 118). As Austin-Smith notes, "one of the questions in *Wings* becomes that of the use to which such narrative material as Milly Theale, Merton Densher and Kate Croy herself can be put without . . . turning others into mere things in the construction of one's own story" (129).

CHAPTER 3: Kate and "Literary Value"

It is "*the pressure that fixes the value . . .*"

The Wings of the Dove , NY XIX, 49.

F. R. Leavis (1952) argues that "Kate Croy continues to engage more of our sympathy than suits the author's purpose" (227). Yet James stresses Kate's value to the novel in its preface when he writes that she will be his "reflector", and he will use her "for all she is *worth*" (AN, 301; italics mine). Much recent criticism of Kate (Mitchell, 1987, Oerlemans, 1991, Llewellyn Smith, 1994, Rivkin, 1996) refuses to label her simply as good or evil, but as a "value" to the novel, in the role of the artist. Just what Kate's value is to the novel, and how James uses her to create a value for the reader, is the focus of this chapter.

James states, in his preface to *The Aspern Papers*, that his "values are positively all blanks", and it is the reader who creates his own "more or less fantastic figures" (AN, 177). In light of this view, Barbara Herrnstein Smith's criticism on the nature of "value" seems a fitting one for *Wings*. She argues that literary value is:

> what may be spoken of as the "properties" of a work--its "structure", "features", "qualities", and of course its "meanings"--[that] are not fixed, given, or inherent in the work "itself", but are at every point the variable products of particular SUBJECTS' interactions with it. (48)

Value, argues Smith, is equivalent to meaning, and is therefore multiple, diverse, and contingent, and is created by the subjects', or in this case, the readers' interactions with the work.

In his criticism of *The Ambassadors*, Collin Meissner argues that James creates, and then exposes the artifice of any singular concept of value (Meissner, 43). This argument also holds true for *Wings*, where one's value is contingent on the desire of others, as the

narrator notes: "It is nothing new indeed that generous young persons often admire most what nature hasn't given them . . . " (NY XIX, 50). Milly, although her vast wealth is of value to others, searches for what she believes will be of value to her, some knowledge or experience that will give her life "meaning". She believes Kate, with her life experiences, can help her to achieve this desire. Densher desires to be seen as a gentleman of impeccable behaviour. He values appearances, and worries about the impression he will make on others. Lord Mark desires money, and hopes to attain his wealth through Kate, and later from Milly. His value is created by Mrs. Lowder's desire for social status: "One knew people in general by something they had to show . . . His [Lord Mark's] value was his future" (NY XIX, 178). Kate values Densher because he "represented what her life had never given her . . . all the high dim things she lumped together as of the mind. It was on the side of the mind that Densher was rich for her, and mysterious, and strong . . . " (NY XIX, 50-1). Densher's value is created because Milly desires him. For Kate's family, her value is her "position", that of favourite niece to wealthy Aunt Maud. Her family's only advantage is through Kate herself, a circumstance that she well recognizes: "My position's a value, a great value, for them both [Lionel Croy and Marian Condrip]. Its 'the' value—the only one they have" (NY XIX,71). Kate's value, for Densher, is in her "differences": "It was her talent for life again; which found in her a difference for the differing time. She did n't give their tradition up; she but made of it something new" (NY XX, 394).

James creates Kate's value, in part, by introducing characters who, in *Wings*, are unable to balance their romantic notions with the realities of life. James's concepts of "realism" and "romance" are clearly stated in the preface to *The American*. Realism, he argues, "represents to my perception the things we cannot possibly *not* know, sooner or later, in one way or another" (AN, 31). Kate represents the practical spirit of the modern age, suggests Bell ("Dream", 101). Kate's reality is her father: "Oh, papa, it's long since I've ceased to see you otherwise than as you really are" (NY XIX, 9). As realist, she sees Aunt Maud's "fond fiction" of a marriage to Lord Mark as romantic nonsense:

> What was expected of her by others--and by so many of them--could, all the same, on occasion, present itself as beyond a joke: and this was just now the aspect it particulary wore. She was not only to quarrel with Merton Densher for the pleasure of her five spectators . . . she was to set forth in pursuit of Lord Mark on some preposterous theory of the premium attached to success. Mrs. Lowder's hand had hung out the premium, and it figured at the end of the course as a bell that would ring, break out into public clamour, as soon as touched. (NY XIX, 43- 4)

Kate sees her family history as a "broken sentence", and herself as "the last word" of that sentence who will attempt to "end it with a sort of meaning" (NY XIX, 6). It is she who reads Milly as desiring "life". Densher's reading of Kate as "a whole library of the unknown, the uncut" suggests her uniqueness in her determination to escape the constructs society has chosen for her (NY XX, 62).

Lord Mark functions in a fixed role, as does Mrs. Lowder, and their civilized behaviour at Lancaster Gate never varies: "It was one of his merits . . . that both his native and his acquired notion of behaviour rested on the general assumption that nothing--nothing to make a deadly difference for him--ever *could* happen" (NY XX, 159). Indeed, even the dying Milly cannot evoke any sympathy from him, as he cannot understand, or face "the offensive real" (NY XX, 158).

The romantic, James continues, "stands, on the other hand, for all the things that, with all the facilities in the world, all the wealth and all the courage and all the wit and all the adventure, we never *can* directly know" (AN, 31-2). Mrs. Stringham represents the romantic notion of life, choosing "the light in which Milly was to be read", as that of princess (NY XIX, 116). Susie's fiction of Milly as princess is not a viable one, as Milly recognizes, for she "could see Susie, in the event of her death, in no character at all" (NY XX, 134). Milly, also a romantic, reads Kate as "the London girl; conceived from the tales of travellers and the anecdotes of New York, from old porings over Punch and a liberal

acquaintance with the fiction of the day", and as the "handsome girl" with "all the marks of the product of a packed society who should be at the same time the heroine of a strong story" (NY XIX,171, 172). Searching for "the right way to live", Milly, as she watches the lady-copyists in the National Gallery, recognizes that

> what held her was the mere refuge, that something within her was after all too weak for the Turners and Titians. They joined hands about her in a circle too vast, though a circle that a year before she would only have desired to trace. They were truly for the larger, not for the smaller life . . . (NY XIX, 288)

She may not be strong enough for the harsh realities of life. Rowe notes that Milly's Tauchnitz volume, uncut and unread, signifies Milly's avoidance of any reading of a world that will only remind her of the tragedy of her life (141). Romance frees the artist from reality, evident as Mrs. Stringham, the idealist, loses control of Milly, and disappears from the narrative and from the text. Milly adopts the role of princess, and escapes from reality to her palace in Venice. She then begins to see her value only in death:

> It throbbed within her as she knelt there that she had none [no value] at all; though, holding herself, not yet speaking, she tried, even in the act, to recover what might be possible of it. With that there came to her a light: wouldn't her value, for the man who should marry her, be precisely in the ravage of her disease? *She* mightn't last, but her money would. (NY XX, 149)

Densher's romantic impulse lies in the fantasy that he will be able to convince Mrs. Lowder to "like" him for Kate.

Kate's desire, in part, is to turn her family's "senselessness" into something of value. However, as Rivkin argues, Kate will have to work through others--her father, Densher, and her Aunt Maude, to restore any meaning to her family's name (92). Kate is fully aware of the sheer contingency of things, and of their limiting quality (Mitchell, 204). Kate's

strength is her intelligence and imagination. She aims "both to use the system as much as she is able, and to preserve a sense of the value and unity of her own being" (Oerlemans, 187). Oerlemans captures her value when he argues that "Kate sees what the entire novel demonstrates--that value is created . . . only in the active process of creating meaning, of furthering connections that range beyond the self, and are meant to reflect its own worth" (193). Kate comes to see that Milly could provide the money that she and Densher need to marry; but only through Densher can Kate put this plan into action and do something for Milly, and only through Kate does Milly gain access to Densher (Rivkin, 106). Kate's great skill is her ability to put herself into a position of representing an object of desire for all of the characters, and that value multiplies as she becomes the object that the other characters demand (Oerlemans, 192). Kate's full value, because of the economic contingencies of Lancaster Gate society, is never realized although she tries, throughout the novel, to free herself from them.

We see, argues Llewellyn Smith, in the larger picture, that Kate is good "because she embodies the talent and the striving of the artist, but also because she creates in Milly something that isn't just a collection of bits that don't add up" (224). Kate is, as Llewellyn Smith observes, "what she must be, determined by her circumstances and her endowments" (200).

James stresses the value of exposing these "circumstances" in his own fictions because, as Bell notes, he had been fascinated by the naturalist idea that circumstances made character (*Meaning*, 36). In a letter to W. D. Howells, James writes: "We are each the product of circumstances and there are tall stone walls which fatally divide us" (*Selected Letters*, 69). James, critical of the author or historian who makes moral judgements without knowledge of past events or circumstances, remarks, in an 1867 review of a series of articles by British historian James Anthony Froude:

> It is almost impossible to pronounce an individual whom we know only by written testimony positively good or bad without bodily

> detaching him from his entourage in a way that is fatal to the truth of history . . . We are compelled to look at them in connection with their antecedents, their ancestors, their contemporaries, their *circumstances*. To judge them morally we are obliged to push our enquiry through a concatenation of causes and effects in which, from their delicate nature, enquiry very soon becomes impracticable, and thus we are reduced to talking sentiment.
>
> (*Literary Reviews*, 273; italics mine)

As Sheldon Novick points out, James believes many popular writers of the period, including Froude, committed the sin of spreading "a haze of correct sentiment over their subject, obscuring its details and difficulties. Sentiment was the enemy of historic truth" (156). James, in his criticism of Froude, warns against the historian who brings his own moral values into his work, as this leads to personal intrusions upon the narrative (Jolly, 28). It seems ironic that Kate is reading a "history book" when she hears, from Marian, that "Papa has done something wicked", and never learns just what evil he has committed (NY XIX, 66-7).

It is for this reason that James values a narrative technique that refuses to moralize on the characters' actions. As Fowler notes, the later fiction of Henry James "makes moral judgments less comforting because it obliges us to know and understand the pressures acting on all of the characters" (183-84). James's narrator of *Wings* shows a certain hesitancy, at the beginning of the novel, in his evaluation of Densher's character: "He [Densher] suggested above all, however, that wondrous state of youth in which the elements, the metals more or less precious, are so in fusion and fermentation that the question of the final stamp, the pressure that fixes the value, must wait for comparative coolness" (NY XIX, 49). The narrator cannot yet fix Densher's value for us because Densher has not proven himself under pressure. Paul Armstrong, in his phenomenological reading of James, argues that for James "the morality and truth of a novel depend at bottom

on how the artist knows the world . . . morality and truth in general can claim no other foundation than lived experience" (5). Robin Hoople, in his work on *The Turn of the Screw*, observes that what James shows his reader "is not the simple morality tale of sin and retribution, not merely the seductive odors of the flowers of evil, but the labyrinth of human motive and human consciousness, the intense impressions of a mind under great stress and the imperfect system of the mind on coping with the contending states of reality that seem to be available for selection in a cosmos that does not determine right and wrong according to absolute standards" (61). Although Hoople is arguing against the labeling of the governess, by critics and readers, as the "perpetrator of evil", the same argument must be made for Kate. Fowler rightly notes that "it is entirely within the individual consciousness (and conscience) that the moral implications of the late fiction are to be found" (181). The text, by allowing a full disclosure of Kate's circumstances, creates its value in that it makes no moral judgements on Kate. This "open" text allows the reader to draw his or her own conclusions.

James values the art of fiction because, as he writes in his famous criticism of the same title, "the only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life" (*Selected Literary*, 50). Fiction, for him, is a living thing, a "germ" that would "grow" into a story or novel as a "consistent and self-sufficient organism" (AN xvi). In the Preface to *Wings*, he emphatically states

> that the poet essentially can't be concerned with the act of dying. Let him deal with the sickest of the sick, it is still by the act of living that they appeal to him, and appeal the more as the conditions plot against them and prescribe the battle. (AN, 290)

For James, "life" is "someone's apprehension of the experience of it" (*Selected Works*, Intro. AN, xv). Experience "is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue" (*Selected Works*,

401). Experience is, James continues, "the power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life in general so completely that you are well on your way to knowing any particular corner of it . . . " (*Selected Works*, 402). Experience, James believed, brings an ability to see what a situation calls for, and an ability to respond (Meissner, 55). James gives Kate these life experiences, using her as his symbol for "life". Densher recognizes Kate's ability to engage in life: "The parts, as he now saw, under her [Kate's] hand, did fall more or less together, and it was not even as if she had spent the interval in twisting and fitting them" (NY XX, 16). The conscious choice to reject the necessity to live all one can, observes Rowe, is one of the few "evils" in James's fiction (140).

Kate is, argues Llewellyn Smith, a simple character of whom James makes complex use (200). James establishes Kate's value by refusing to "fix" Kate in any one interpretation, thus allowing her to remain open to all possibilities in life. As Aunt Maud, who controls everyone in the novel, so rightly informs Mrs. Stringham: "I don't handle Kate" (NY XX, 114). Neither can the reader. As events occur and situations arise, Kate is able to create a new meaning and value for herself and those around her. Kate's initial plan is to convince her aunt that it is Densher whom she wants. When she sees the improbability of this situation, because of Densher's lack of money, she brings Milly into her story. Kate's only constant, throughout the novel, is her determination to free herself from her social constraints. She does not turn her face to the wall. Williams, in referring to the work of Simone de Beauvoir, argues

> that the individual need not remain trapped within the situation of the moment. The fact that man is a conscious creature provides the groundwork for his transcendence; he is able either to conquer immediate obstacles or to project his efforts into an open future. Even the acceptance of failure can represent an assertion of freedom, for the person recognizes the alternatives of taking a previously

> untried approach to the intractable problem, or of choosing entirely new objectives. At the same time, de Beauvoir stresses the dangers faced by anyone who allows his freedom merely to congeal into a solid fixity of purpose, because he has become obsessed with a particular end. (96)

Kate assesses her situation, but refuses to become trapped in it, and throughout the novel constantly searches for, and tries to create new approaches which she believes will enhance her life and the lives of those around her. To write Kate off as simply evil, is to ignore two fundamental aspects of her function in *Wings:* what she does for Milly and what she does for the novel's sense of "life" (Llewellyn Smith, 200).

James values a certain creative insight to life, writing that, for him, vision would do . . . "half the work" of carrying him through life, and the moment one ceased "to live in large measure by one's eyes (with the imagination of course all the while waiting on this) one would have taken the longest step towards not living at all" (*Autobiography*, 443). James uses Kate as his perceiving character, giving her, as Bell states, acute powers of observation and understanding (*Meaning*, 14). Kate is

> formed at once for being and seeing. You always saw, in this case something else than what you were, and you got in consequence none of the peace of your condition. However, as she never really let Marian see what she was, Marian might well not have been aware that she herself saw. (NY XIX, 33-4)

Williams interprets Kate's ability for both "being and seeing" as Kate's belief that she can enrich her personal capabilities while investigating the world within which she moves (92). Kate's plan will provide, she believes, a magnificent opportunity that seems to require no sacrifices and all will gain from it. Or, as Rivkin argues, it offers "a guaranteed return to all parties in the transaction, it is the model of a restricted economy" (107). Williams suggests that

> Kate needs an open field in which to operate, and an opportunity for endorsing her valuation of herself through the free exercise of her talent and initiative. From this point of view, it is important to consider whether the social forms presented in the novel can, in fact, accommodate and stimulate the ambitious young woman's striving for advancement. (92).

Kate sees the reality hidden behind the "appearances" of life; how lack of wealth can destroy a family; that Milly wants Densher; and that Densher has fallen in love with Milly's memory. Kate's "difference", her value, is that she is one "who at least knows what [she] lose[s]", yet is prepared to try for it all (NY XX, 60). Don't spoil the "beauty of what I see", pleads Kate to Densher (NY XX, 30). Densher never quite understands Kate's intuitive reading of Milly's desires: "The great thing, Kate then resumed, is that she's [Milly's] satisfied. Which . . . is what I've worked for'" (NY XX, 332). Kate explains to Densher that their plan has not failed because Milly has fulfilled her desire "'. . . of having *been* loved, she [Kate]went on. That is. Of having . . . realised her passion. She wanted nothing more. She has had *all* she wanted'" (NY XX, 332). Densher believes Kate's only interest in Milly is her money, (and perhaps he convinces the reader of this as well) and he never understands that she truly loves Milly as a good friend and hopes to give her a chance at love. Densher sees the inheritance as an obstacle in the way of their marriage, but Kate, with her insight, reads Milly's gesture as an act of love. She tells Densher: "'She [Milly] died for you then that you might understand her'" (NY XX, 403). Throughout the novel, Densher sees himself as "fixed" in his circumstances: "His full parenthesis was closed, and he was once more but a sentence, of a sort, in the general text that . . . showed as a great grey page of print . . ." (NY XX, 11). Kate, on the other hand, envisions her life explicitly as the continuation of the family plot, and does not wish to "close" it. Kate, as artist, tries to create a fiction that will satisfy all who use her.

Wings is a book about how one turns the act of reading into a value, and, for the

purpose of this criticism, how we read Kate as she tries to restore meaning and value to her life, how she reads her world. In the preface to *Wings*, James argues that an "attentive reader" will gain a greater value from the work, with its "secrets and compartments with possible treacheries and traps; it might have a great deal to give, but would probably ask for equal services in return . . ." (AN, 289):

> Attention of perusal, I thus confess by the way, is what I at every point, as well as here, absolutely invoke and take for granted; a truth I avail myself of this occasion to note once for all--in the interest of that variety of ideal reigning, I gather, in the connexion. The enjoyment of a work of art . . . is greatest . . . when we feel that the surface of the work, like the thick ice of the skater's pond, bear without cracking the strongest pressure we throw on it. (AN, 304-05)

The reader, in the act of reading and interpreting Kate's actions, becomes a participant in the novel. Mrs. Stringham, the literary artist in *Wings*, would like "to put Kate Croy in a book and see *what* she could do with her " (NY XX, 46; italics mine). The reader, unlike Mrs. Stringham, must value Kate not for "what" she does, but "how" she uses her life experiences to create meaning and value. Felman, discussing *The Turn of the Screw*, argues for the reader to pay close attention to the "how" of the story, how the meaning of the story takes shape and takes effect (165). Booth similarly argues that *Wings* requires a "critical re-reading" that probes for deeper meanings, combining the "what" of the story, and an understanding of structure, the "how", that will lead to a "heightened admiration" of a work (105). In his discussion of *The Ambassadors*, Meissner argues this point as well:

> James's attention to *how* his characters understand as much as *what* they understand adds another dimension to his texts in that the reading subject is invariably drawn into the text and led to examine along with the perceiving character the whole process of understanding. While the character projects hypotheses in an attempt to grasp the

> whole of reality, the reader is carried along and invariably led to participate through either questioning the character's hypotheses or by projecting his or her own. (47)

"Understanding" becomes an event, argues Meissner, in which one comes to understand not so much the text or person or thing before us, but how we stand in relation to it and to our immediate historical situation (43). In understanding her position in Lancaster Gate society, Kate is able to imagine and create possibilities for herself and others that the reader will accept or refute, but never completely resolve.

In his preface to *The Golden Bowl*, James elaborates on his theory of textual revision, and its value. Revision, for James, "is to see, or to look over, again--which means in the case of a written thing neither more nor less than to re-read it" (AN, 338). Revision becomes not an act of re-writing, but of "seeing it again" (AN, 339). It is in this act of "revision" that the reader remains open to all the possibilities of the text (Meissner, 44). In trying to better understand a text, or a character in that text, the reader always projects or extends meaning, allowing him to revise earlier expectations (Meissner, 44). In *Wings*, it is Kate who is able to "re-read" her situation: "The world was different--whether for worse or for better--from her rudimentary readings, and it gave her the feeling of a wasted past. If she had only known sooner she might have arranged herself more to meet it" (NY XIX, 28). Kate's experience brings an ability to see what is called for, and to respond (Meissner, 55). After her mother's death, Kate, at Lancaster Gate contemplating her future, has made several discoveries about herself. She understands how Aunt Maud's wealth appeals to her: "She saw as she had never seen before how material things spoke to her" (NY XIX, 28). Kate also understands that she is a "possession" in Mrs. Lowder's plans: "She knew herself now the sensitive niece, as having been marked from far back" (NY XIX, 29). Early in the novel Kate tries to free herself, in her offer to her father, from becoming her aunt's "commodity". She tells Densher: "It wasn't courage--it was the opposite. I did it to save myself--to escape" (NY XIX, 69). Aware also of her father's

"curse" as a threat to her own being, Kate is still able to go beyond her tragic history, understanding that to "live" requires taking some risks. In "giving" Densher to Milly, she is willing to take those risks, as she tells him: "'I don't like it, but I'm a person, thank goodness, who can do what I don't like'" (NY XX, 226). She has the intelligence and the imagination to experience life while recognizing it can never be fully understood, mirrored in how she sees her father: "If I haven't understood you by this time I never shall, and it doesn't matter. It has seemed to me you may be lived with but not that you may be understood" (NY XIX, 12). Mitchell suggests that one must recognize, in Kate's embrace of discordancy, a model of reading:

> By avoiding easy equations and sustaining Milly through an accommodating vision, she [Kate] teaches us how to approach a novel riddled with contrary possibilities. To choose between incompatibles is finally to settle for a vision that is sadly reduced, and just as Kate resists love without money, we should resist seeing her as either culpable or determined. (209-10)

The reader must not fix Kate in any single reading.

A 1902 review of *Wings* in the *London Daily Chronicle* argues that "the reader who comes victoriously to the end of this extraordinary book may plume himself on something more than an uncommon feat of application. He has some title to be considered joint author" (*Contemporary Reviews*, 361). James attempts, Oerlemans observes, to locate value in the secrets of the narrative, rather than in any easily understood plot (183). These secrets create, for the reader, a desire for meaning that the narrative can never provide (Oerlemans, 183). Booth similarly suggests that nothing is fixed in the novel because there are no fixed truths in an uncertain world, and therefore are no single certain readings (102). Ruth Yeazell notes that "critics have a dangerous tendency unconsciously to fill in such gaps in our knowledge, and then to talk *not* about James's novel, but about their own, less disturbing fictions" (138 n. 7). The reader can never really know, but must piece together "all evacuated centres of meaning" (Brooks, 173). Kate is the only one in the novel, argues

Oerlemans, who is never deluded, for whom secrets are never a surprise, as she is "in" on most of them, creating or learning of them as they are created by others (191). In trying to unlock the secrets of the novel, to understand the text, the reader, like Kate, tries to create meaning and value.

Wolfgang Iser, in his phenomenological approach to the reading process, observes that

> it is only through inevitable omissions that a story gains its dynamism. Thus whenever the flow is interrupted and we are led off in unexpected directions, the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections--for filling in the gaps left by the text itself. . . . For this reason, one text is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential, for each individual reader will fill in the gaps in his own way . . . (1222-223)

James's intention, Bell believes, was to leave these "provocatory" gaps with the reader to compel him to create something out of what remains ("Narrative", 89).

The fact that different readers can be affected differently by a particular text, agues Iser, is evidence of the degree to which literary texts transform reading into a creative process (1222). Just as the characters struggle to read each other, observes Llewellyn Smith, the act of reading the novel is a struggle as well (179). Many readers are affected differently by Densher's actions, and this affects how we interpret Kate's value. Ward (1961) sees Densher motivated by love, and loyal to Kate (137). Densher's "involvement" in Kate's plan is through weakness of will, claims Ward, but he never discusses Densher's horrific use of Kate; the coercion of her to his rooms in Venice. Others, such as Bersani (1976), see Densher's actions as a betrayal as he shifts his allegiance from Kate to Milly (*Future*, 144). Many read Densher's last meeting with Milly as a redemptive experience, as does Densher's narrator: "The essence was that something had happened to him too beautiful and too sacred to describe. He had been, to his recovered sense, forgiven, dedicated, blessed;

but this he could n't coherently express" (NY XX, 343). Bersani observes that "Densher's flabby reasoning allows him to move from one spiritual allegiance to another without ever disturbing the perfect stillness of his being" (*Future*, 142). Everyone "lets him off" (NY XX, 304). Densher believes, as do many readers, that Milly has turned her face to the wall when she learns, from Lord Mark, of Kate and Densher's engagement. He tells Kate: "'It was his [Lord Mark's] visit that she could n't stand--it was what then took place that simply killed her'" (NY XX, 320). This may be true, but it seems more likely that Milly gives up before she ever has her visit from Mark. Milly tells Densher she would like to come to his rooms for tea. However his rooms are full of Kate's presence and he does not want Milly there. In his efforts to deny her this wish, he breaks Milly's injunction against speaking of her illness: "'Will it be safe for you to break into your custom of not leaving the house?'" (NY XX, 245). Quickly seeing his mistake, Densher invites her to visit, but it is too late. Milly says she will not come: "'No--never now. It's over'" (NY XX, 247). This seems the moment that Milly yields, as Marcia Ian suggests, completely to the way others see her, and begins to "turn her face to the wall." (133). Densher attempts to delude himself into believing that because he has never acted directly for Kate, he is not implicated in any way. It is all Kate's doing. Densher's abhorent behaviour is not just in coercing Kate to his rooms, but in recognizing her talent for life, using it, and then blaming her for his predicament:

> how he had admired and envied what he called to himself
> her pure talent for life, as distinguished from his own, a
> poor weak thing of the occasion, amateurishly patched up;
> only it irritated him the more that this was exactly what was
> now, ever so characteristically, standing out in her. It was
> thanks to her pure talent for life, verily, that he was just
> where he was and that he was above all just *how* he was.
> (NY XX, 176)

As Schiller suggests, Densher is far too busy testing and judging Kate to examine his own soul (209). Densher fails to heed Kate's reading of Aunt Maud's fiction that ends with the destruction of their relationship. He allows Mrs. Lowder to write him into her story as the romantic prince who has lost his love.

In James's aesthetic world, Rowe observes, to transcend language is to end only in silence, the absolute void of meaning and the loss of value (135). Near the end of the novel, Densher's language becomes a series of "Oh's", absent of any meaning, much like Lord Mark's earlier in the novel (NY XX,359-60, 57). Densher's loyalty to Milly's memory, suggests Schiller, assures him a "fixed" identity as regenerate (211).

As Llewelyn Smith correctly notes, many readers will understand Kate according to the novel they wish to read (188). However, Kate's value is compromised when many choose to read Milly in the role of saintly heroine. This reading may be due in part to the vast amount written on James's relationship with his cousin Minny Temple, after whom he patterned the character of Milly Theale. A quote from a 1993 lecture given by R. W. B. Lewis seems a relevant example. It reads:

> Henry James spoke of no other woman in quite that intimately admiring and appreciative way. He was nearly in love with her as his nature permitted. To William from England, he wrote that if he had not actually been in love with her, he enjoyed 'pleasing her almost as much as if I had been.' In his later years, he was, certainly, in love with her memory: exactly as, in his novel *The Wings of the Dove*, Merton Densher is at the end in love with the memory of the dead Milly Theale. (10)

James, in his reminiscences about Minny Temple, writes that "the image of this . . . appeared so of the essence of tragedy that I was in the far-off aftertime to seek to lay the ghost by wrapping it . . . in the beauty and dignity of art" (*Autobiography*, 544). In *Wings* it is Densher who will sanctify Milly forever in his consciousness. As Schiller cautions, almost everyone, critics as well as the other characters in the novel, feels compelled to "read

Milly as the innocent heroine, full of the selfless love of a pure heart" (200). Perhaps the reader understands her this way also, diminishing the very human failings that allow her to use Kate to fulfill her own desires.

As Schiller argues, the London society in *Wings* does give Milly identities that serve their purpose, but these identities serve Milly as well (205), for she is, unlike Kate, "a figure to be waited for, named and fitted" (NY XIX, 212). Warned by Kate and Lord Mark of the dangers lurking in the elegance of Lancaster Gate society, Milly chooses to remain:

> there were two courses for her, one to leave London again the first thing in the morning, the other to do nothing at all. Well, she would do nothing at all; she was already doing it; more than that, she had already done it, and her chance was gone. She gave herself up—she had the strangest sense, on the spot, of so deciding . . . (NY XIX 158)

She chooses to be, in their accidental meeting at the National Gallery, the "American girl" for Densher, the princess, in her Venetian palace, for Mrs. Stringham, and adopts the role of "dove" that Kate puts forth. Milly "found herself accepting as the right one . . . the name so given her. She met it on the instant as she would have met revealed truth; . . . *that* was what was the matter with her. She was a dove" . . . It gave her [Milly] straightway the measure of the success she could have as a dove . . . She should have to be clear as to how a dove *would* act" (NY XIX, 283, 284). In her confrontation with the Bronzino portrait, she defines herself as she realizes her own death. As Williams points out, Milly steps into the pose of the woman in the Bronzino portrait entirely on her own. She personally chooses this role, and is not forced into it by social pressures (117). She becomes the princess of Mrs Stringham's romantic fiction, and dies at the end of the novel, in Venice. Her actions prepare her for death, not life:

> she found herself, for the first moment, looking at the mysterious portrait through tears. Perhaps it was her tears that made it just then so

> strange and fair . . . the face of a young woman all splendidly drawn . . . that must, before fading with time, have had a family resemblance to her own. . . . And she was dead, dead, dead. Milly recognized her exactly in words that had nothing to do with her. 'I shall never be better than this.' (NY XIX, 220-21)

It would be wrong to read Milly as a helpless victim. As Schiller rightly argues, that is how the other characters in the novel come to see her, and how they see themselves when placed in relation to her (208). Schiller continues:

> James chooses, instead, to let the characters create their own moral system, with Milly, as "innocence", at the head, and in so doing lets the reader see how inconsistent, self-deceiving, and self-serving such a move can be. . . one must be careful not to attribute what the other characters see in her to Milly herself. If she is a princess, and later Christ, it is they, with their love and guilt, who make her so. (209)

Interestingly, as Alfred Habegger points out, Minnie Temple was "unconventional to the point of indecorousness" and "not universally admired and loved" (129, 133). She did act on James's imagination and after her death she becomes the prototype of his independent heroines (Habegger, 149). (This description of Ms. Temple suggests more the character of Kate, rather than Milly Theale).

Wings questions the nature of "truth". Janet Gabler-Hover argues that Kate's withholding of her feelings for Densher, and Milly's pretense of life in the face of impending death are the novel's great lies (169-70). Kate's family name, the one she is trying to restore, carries the root of belief (Croy = croire, the French verb "to believe"), suggesting that the issue of credibility, and its value, is central to the novel's purpose. Yet, as Yeazell observes, full truth in James's novels is never spoken (86). Just how credible Kate is, how we interpret or value her actions, becomes the novel's "truth" for us. As Mitchell acutely observes, Kate expresses the novel's central vision: that "lies and truths

share more than we assume, that suspended judgements sustain, not deny, and that deception can alter experience for the better" (207-08). Kate does not tell her aunt that she and Densher are engaged, but has she lied? Densher believes he has been above reproach in his relationship with Milly because he has not actually spoken of his feelings for Kate, but has he been truthful? Both Kate and Milly keep silent about their feelings for Densher. The "truth" in *Wings*, argues Mitchell, is in part a process of "mutual deceit" (209). Milly never asks Densher if Lord Mark's news of his engagement to Kate is true because she does not want "full knowledge". Mrs. Stringham will say that a lie is the "truth", believing, in her love for Milly, that the lie will save her princess. She tells Densher: "'What I believe will inevitably depend more or less on your action. . . .'"I promise to believe you down to the ground if, to save her life, you consent to a denial'" (NY XX, 292).

Milly's story is, suggests Bell, about story-telling, about making up a story to deceive:

> But it subjects this process to the test embodied in Kate's pragmatic calculus . . . which is to ask how much more valid is a story that is "true" than a story which persuades us of its truth—or is there no real difference between the two? Does the wrongness only begin when the lie is exposed? (*Meaning*, 320)

Lord Mark's "truth" of Kate and Densher's engagement is hurtful to Milly. Kate cannot believe that Densher would not "lie" to save Milly: "'Would n't it have been possible then to deny the truth of the information? I mean of Lord Mark's.'" Densher replies: "To tell her he lied?'" Kate: "To tell her he's mistaken.'" (NY XX, 322). Densher cannot understand that deception, in this instance, might benefit Milly. He remains fixed in his belief to tell the "truth" at any cost. He warns Kate that if he had lied to Milly about his engagement, he would have stuck to that lie and broken off the engagement. Kate replies: "'Oh you'd have broken with me to make your denial a truth? You'd have 'chucked' me . . . to save your conscience?'" (NY XX, 326). So fixed in his desire to be "right", Densher will turn a lie into the truth. When Mrs. Lowder suggests he might be attending church on Christmas

Eve, he agrees that it was his plan, although he had no such intentions. Recognizing that he has "lied", he must turn it into a "truth":

> To what church was he going, to what church, in such a state of his nerves, could he go? . . . And yet the desire queerly stirred in him not to have wasted his word. . . . The Oratory in short, to make him right, would do. (NY XX, 361-62)

Densher will not lie to save Milly, unlike Mrs. Stringham and Kate, who, out of love, will sacrifice the truth. Kate's story for Milly, although based in part on deceit, is created out of love and compassion, as well as for personal gain. She tells Densher:

> She [Milly] never wanted the truth . . . She wanted *you* . . . She would have taken from you what you could give her and been glad of it, even if she had known it false. You might have lied to her from pity, and she have seen you and felt you lie, and yet--since it was all for tenderness--she would have thanked you and blessed you and clung to you but the more. For that was your strength, my dear man--that she loves you with passion. (NY XX, 327)

William James's definition of "truth" as "'what it is better for us to believe,' rather than as 'the accurate representation of reality'" seems an apt one here (W. James, qtd. in Hoople, p. 243). A perfect example occurs in Book Fourth. Milly discusses her visit to Kate's sister with Mrs. Stringham: "If she [Kate] did care [for Densher] Mrs. Condrip would have told me'" . . . 'But did you ask her?' questions Mrs. Stringham. "Milly, however, easily explained that she would n't have asked her for the world" (NY XIX, 203). Milly reads her situation and opts for "avoidances" (NY XX, 81). She tells Densher: "'. . . there are things I don't want to know'" (NY XX, 103). She never questions why Densher chooses to visit her after her absence from Mrs. Lowder's dinner party, nor does she ask Densher what his relationship with Kate entails, nor will she discuss the fact of her illness. Without true knowledge Milly is able to create her own romantic story that includes

Densher. The "truth" in *Wings* becomes that which will meet each character's needs, and those of the reader as well.

Kate refuses to be fixed in the cultural stereotypes of Lancaster Gate, and this desire for freedom endangers her value as well as her credibility. In a 1993 lecture on the women of James's novels, Bell argues that although the female need to fulfill male expectations may cause a woman to fashion herself into the perscribed masculine view of womanhood, it is also true that a need for some "free self-engendering" may inspire a woman to resist these cultural stereotypes ("Women", 1). Bell also notes that James's view of women expressed his perception that they, and men as well, are likely to be trapped by the dictated roles of the social scheme ("Women", 2). James's favourite scheme, Bell continues, was that of women who found the conventional plot of finding the right man and ending at the altar inadequate and who strove to be more free to realize themselves ("Women", 2). In her essay on economic language in James, McCormack similarly argues that James's later fiction produces men as well as women who resist social forces, but

> If females frequently appear to be better readers of semiotic texts, their greater adeptness may derive from their being forced to recognize their inevitable positions as commodities. But the shock of this recognition blights many women's ability to deconstruct the fixed meaning their lives represent in marriage market systems. (555)

In *Wings*, it is the high spirited Kate Croy who tries for the unconventional plot. She does want to marry and live happily ever after, but she will not be coerced into marrying someone she does not love. She sees, in the Miss Condrips, who "lived in a deeper hole than Marian, and . . . spent their day in prowling", the "bareness" of life for women who did not marry (NY XIX, 43). Nor will she marry only for money. Kate clearly argues this point with Marian: "If it's so easy for us to marry men who want us to scatter gold, I wonder we any of us do anything else. I don't see so many of them about, nor what interest I might ever have for them" (NY XIX, 40). Kate will try for a self that is not

socially defined. She tries to create a plan that will enable her to restore some value to her family name, help Milly to find her prince, and marry Densher. Others, however, will interpret her signs differently, and she is unable to keep everyone happy. Her design is too ambitious, and she loses Densher in her attempt. As Schiller observes, Kate's attempt at representing the feminine ideal, the self-sacrificing heroine of Victorian sentimental literature, is "trampled and pushed aside by the materialistic modernism of James's British society" (200). Her desire to remain loyal to her family is defeated by the unsentimental realism and sheer greed of others (Schiller, 200).

A very credible narrator, discussed in Chapter Two, influences the way we read and value Kate. But, as James warns, the reader must be wary of the story teller who relates only his "impressions" and only his values of the characters and their actions. Kate's story, first presented with such interest and sympathy, is later sacrificed as the narrator becomes caught in the romantic story of Milly, the "New York legend of affecting, of romantic isolation" (NY XIX, 106). This narrative strategy, the narrator's sacrifice of Kate's story, inspires our imagination, and allows us to create our own story about Kate.

The reader, like the characters in *Wings*, never has "full knowledge". James's theory of knowing, as Armstrong suggests, is a way of looking at the world, and the human relationships in that world (5). Knowledge, Armstrong continues, is a mystery, and absolute knowledge a myth (165). Trying to attain "full knowledge" stifles the imagination, as Milly discovers in her relationship with Lord Mark. Lord Mark, aptly named by Marcia Ian as "the nefarious emissary of actuality" is James's example (119). He tells Milly: "'Things that I don't [know]—with all the pains I take and the way I've run about the world to leave nothing unlearned'" (NY XIX, 162)? For all his efforts, however, he becomes "familiar with everything, but conscious, really of nothing" (NY XIX, 162).

James writes, in the preface to *Wings:*

> Heaven forbid, we say to ourselves during almost the whole Venetian climax, heaven forbid we should "know" anything more of our ravaged

> sister than what Densher darkly pieces together, or than what Kate Croy pays, heroically, it must be owned, at the hour of her visit alone to Densher's lodging, for her superior handling and her dire profanation of. (AN, 301)

The improbability of attaining "full knowledge" for any of the characters, or the reader, becomes a "truth" in Book Tenth, during this conversation between Kate and Densher :

> 'She [Milly] would still have received you?'
>
> 'She would still have received me.'
>
> 'Oh, well, said Kate, 'if you *know* –!'
>
> 'Of course I *know*. I *know* moreover, as well, from Mrs. Stringham,'
>
> 'And what does Mrs. Stringham *know*?'
>
> 'Everything."
>
> She looked at him longer. 'Everything?'
>
> 'Everything.'
>
> 'Because you've told her?'
>
> 'Because she has seen for herself. I've told her nothing.' (NY XX, 330)

Both Milly and Densher try to "know" Kate, to try to discover what makes her different from them, and to possess this difference. Of course, it is impossible to ever have full knowledge. As Lord Mark explains to Milly: "'So you're wrong, you see, as to our knowing all about each other. There are cases where we break down. I at any rate give her up--up, that is, to you. You must do her for me--tell me, I mean, when you know more'" (NY XIX, 165). We must create our own "truths" about Kate, Milly, and Densher, and, as with them, these "truths" will fill our needs.

In his discussion of the reading value of James's work, Meissner suggests that one thing that happens at the end of almost all of James's major novels is that the characters are no longer containable within any plot or story (58). Meissner uses the final words from *The Ambassadors* ("'Then there we are!'") to argue his point, but the final line from *Wings* ("'We shall never be again as we were!'") is also relevent. It is James's injunction,

Meissner suggests, to carry the dialogue out into the world at large:

> for as the reader puts down the book and adjusts his or her enhanced gaze upon the world it is almost as though James reaches out and draws back a curtain to reveal a world that has been sufficiently altered as a result of the reading experience. For James, art could be no less. (Meissner, 58)

James is a figure who demands, states Agnew, to be taken on his own terms, rather than on those of the culture from which he held himself apart (68). James uses Kate to express these very same demands. Kate's value is that she will not fit into the role expected of her by her culture. James allows Kate to take narrative risks, refusing a narrative that must be contained, that will be vulgar, that will "tell". This narrative strategy allows the reader to use his imagination, to form his own impressions as to what may or may not have occurred in the novel. When asked what his moral purpose was in ending stories with everything up in the air, James replies: "'Ah, is not that the trick that life plays? Life itself leaves you with a question--it asks you questions'" (Edel, 242). The two unread letters, Milly's bequest being the first, and the second being the one from New York, as Bell understands them

> are actual rejections of text, duplications by the character of the author's insistence upon leaving out. Literally unopened, they are symbolic representations of closure achieved by the *elimination* of something expected. The ending of *The Wings of the Dove* closes upon its reformulated resolution. The inexorable rule of consequence, which Kate, resisting her fate as a naturalist heroine--resisting her plot--has tried to escape, finally seals a destiny expressed by her admission that she and her lover will never be as they were. ("Narrative", 94)

The "open" ending in *Wings* reafirms James's belief that lived experience is never complete.

CONCLUSION:

> *. . . a human, a personal "adventure" is no . . . positive and absolute and inelastic thing, but just a matter of relation and appreciation . . . a matter of interpretation and of the particular conditions.*
>
> Henry James, *The Art of the Novel*, 286.

For James, insists Springer, it is art that is often an "initiating cause of social and moral issues", while at the same time bringing pleasure to an audience (4). James sets himself to defy the virulence of the "consumer culture", desiring to make a work of art so durable that it can be "used again" (Poole, 21). In *Wings*, James "uses" Kate to expose the commodity market of Lancaster Gate. She sells her attributes, she is "durable goods", and she has lost Densher. Her last words "'We shall never be again as we were!'" echo an irretrievable loss (NY XX, 405). Her position seems unchanged from the start of the novel. She is back with her family, now in Chelsea, caring for a father who is "endless". She has tried to free herself from the status of "commodity" by trying for it all, and she has lost. But she has experienced life, and the reader feels that Kate will be able to write a new fiction for herself.

There is no question that Kate is complicit in the design to "use" Milly, but no more so than the other characters in the novel. She does become preoccupied with the power of wealth in the beauty of what she sees, the beauty of Milly's money (NY XX, 30). But she truly loves Milly, and, seems the only character who understands Milly's desire for love. Kate keeps her part of the contract, while Densher does not, leaving a dying Milly in Venice and returning to London. He explains his leaving as "'it was what suited [Milly]'" but, as Mrs. Lowder notes, Kate would have stayed to the end (NY XX, 149). And she does, as James gives her the last words of the novel.

As James admits in the preface, "one's plan, alas, is one thing and one's result another "

. . . (AN, 296). Kate's intent was one thing, but the results were catastrophic. She never intends to hurt Milly, or to do something immoral, as she plots to escape from the commodity status in which she is trapped. She believes that her plan will enable everyone to get everything they desire. Kate and Densher will have Aunt Maud's blessing, and her money, Kate's greedy family will have Kate as their source of income, and Milly will have the love she desires with Densher.

James is most critical of a society that places wealth above all else, and uses Kate to show her world as a false one, one from which she is trying to escape. Kate is shaped by her experiences, but refuses to to be trapped in her history. As Llewellyn Smith suggests, the reader is encouraged to see Kate in terms of aesthetic value (201). The Lancaster Gate society see her as the consummate performer. Milly understands her as the heroine of a strong story. Densher sees her as a painting of "high colour and a great style; at all of which he gazed a minute as at a picture by a master" (NY XIX, 74). And indeed Kate is a work of art created by the Master himself, James. Although forced to comply with other's views of her, Kate never loses sight of who she is and what she wants. As a commodity for all to use, she makes the reader aware of the social and moral issues of the times. She also makes the reader aware of the fact that she is full of human weaknesses as well as strengths, and that she must not be judged in the light only of those weaknesses.

Critics maintain that at the novel's conclusion Kate loses everything. F.W. Dupee, in his Afterword to *Wings*, suggests that Kate's superior character is destroyed at the end of the novel (509). Vernon argues that what Kate will become is another Lionel Croy. The "face Kate sees in the mirror is of course her father's; and the novel is the story of how she becomes a Croy" (Vernon, 193). Bell suggests that Kate will become another Mrs. Lowder as she shares her aunt's market-place mentality. There is textual evidence, however, for the claim that Kate's loyalties have not changed. As Mitchell observes, Milly's generosity need not detract from Kate's compassion, the proof being in her return to her family (208). As Mrs. Lowder tells Densher: "She went yesterday morning--and not

with my approval, I don't mind telling you . . . My own idea, I'm bound to say, was that with *such* events she need have, in her situation, next to nothing to do'" (NY XX, 359). The novel's main concern is, as Williams suggests, the individual's confrontation with the world in which s/he moves (91). Conclusions are uncertain in this story of complex relationships. Nothing in the novel is absolute. For these reasons, there can be no single reading of the novel as "truth".

At the novel's end, Kate is still acting for Densher. In giving Kate the letter containing Milly's legacy, Densher hopes she will return it, refusing its bequest. He believes, suggests Rivkin, that this act of refusal will separate his and Kate's relationship from any connection with Milly, and might lessen the guilt he feels (119). Kate's breaking of the seal of the letter suggests the impossibility of separating the terms that bind him to Milly (Rivkin, 119). As Rivkin argues, both Kate and Densher are committed to their relationship, but see their means to that end in exactly opposed actions (119). For Kate, the legacy makes the marriage to Densher possible. For Densher, it stands for the complete opposite. Densher still relies on Kate to act on his behalf: "'I do nothing formal'" he tells her, about the legacy (NY XX, 400). He could well have sent the letter back unopened, but forces Kate to make the decision about the inheritence for him. Kate understands that memory can never be destroyed. She cannot marry him because he is in love with Milly's memory. For Densher, Kate becomes an absence: "for Kate's presence affected him suddenly as having swooned or trembled away. . . . She was as absent to his sensibility as she had constantly been, since her departure, absent, as an echo or a reference, from the palace . . . " (NY XX, 282).

However we choose to "read" Kate Croy, whether we believe she had Milly's interests as well as her own in mind, we must all agree with F. Prevost Battersby, as he writes, in a 1902 review of *Wings*, that Kate is

> a book in herself, a book which Mr. James has almost written once or twice before. But he has never painted her with such a richness, with such an audacity, and one may almost, despite

> one's disappointment, add with such a subtlety as in this story. And it is by no mere description that we are captivated, by no trick of the novelist. She is built up for us as a figure is built from the clay, with all her fineness, her ingenuity, her responsiveness, her passion taking shape under her eyes. Only the hand of a master could so have made her, and if we are left with unsatisfied understandings we are left with an abiding sense of her personality, which will prove a permanent addition to our memories of women. (*Literary Reviews*, 370)

The true critical act should be, argues Hoople, an attempt simply to interest the reader in an approach to a work of art, not to prove an hypothesis beyond a doubt or to solve the text in some definitive way (249). We, like the critics and the other characters in *Wings*, try to "use" Kate to give us some final definite meaning of the work. We see, however, that criticism of Kate simply as evil will not do. This paper attempts to "see" Kate as a commodity in the novel, trapped by the circumstance of her history, but trying to free herself. Her value to the novel is that she remains open to the vast range of possibilities life has to offer. To remain fixed in relation to one's circumstances is to lose one's value. It is not James's novel that changes, only our interpretation of it. James's value, as McCormack assures us, is that "his work's complexity will continue to outdistance all our efforts to elucidate it" (101).

James, in the Preface to *The Princess Casamassima*, stresses the value of "life" and "imagination" in the creation of art:

> the value I wished most to render and the effect I wished most to produce were precisely those of our not knowing, of society's not knowing, but only guessing and suspecting and trying to ignore what "goes on" irreconcileably, subversively, beneath the vast smug surface . . . that if you haven't, for fiction, the root of the matter in

> you, haven't the sense of life and the penetrating imagination, you are a fool in the very presence of the revealed and assured; but that if you are so armed you are not really helpless, not without your resource, even before mysteries abysmal. (AN,77-8)

No matter how we choose to read Kate Croy, we must all agree that James has given her this magnificent sense of life.

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