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# What Does Jamesian Style Want?

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A remarkably intelligent woman of little means is in love with a talented man of equally few prospects. . . . They meet a dying, very young American heiress. . . .

—Robert Pippin, *Henry James and Modern Moral Life* (1)

Of James's final novels, *The Wings of the Dove* seems the least morally ambiguous. It is the text that (to use the terms memorably proposed by James's secretary Theodora Bosanquet) most luridly juxtaposes the "children of light" with the "creatures of prey" (Pippin 17). In *The Ambassadors*, the revelation of Chad Newsome's caddishness doesn't preclude the idea that his dalliance with Mme de Vionnet was undertaken in good faith. Indeed, in that novel's permissive atmosphere, Chad's readiness to embark on erotic adventure makes him exemplary of the text's mandate to "live all you can" (215). In *The Golden Bowl*, Charlotte and Amerigo's decision to marry a father-daughter duo so as to financially enhance their own sexual liaison is at least matched in ethical dubiousness by the self-absorption of that father and daughter. By the text's excruciating finale, with Maggie dispatching a wailing Charlotte to the wasteland of American City, more than one reader has found the roles of villain and victim definitively switched. But it's hard to make such excuses for Kate Croy and Merton Densher. Kate's sister is greasy, her boyfriend penniless, and her father exquisitely seedy, but none of this mitigates the callousness of her scheme to manipulate her dying friend into believing herself loved and so giving away her fortune.

It is to *The Wings of the Dove*'s severity of moral outline that Alan Hollinghurst most obviously alludes when he has one of his high-living characters in *The Line of Beauty* ask, "What would Henry James have made of us, I wonder?"—to be answered by the novel's protagonist Nick Guest, "He'd have been very kind to us, he'd have said how wonderful we were and how beautiful we were, he'd have given us incredibly subtle things to say, and we wouldn't have realized until just before

the end that he'd seen right through us" (140). The remark is perfectly keyed to the chiaroscuro of *Wings*, which juxtaposes the much-remarked "beauty" of Kate's plan with the ugliness of its motivation. If *The Line of Beauty*, though, ranks with the most interesting recent James criticism, this is partly because its criticism occurs in narrative: we are invited by the fact of this utterance's fictive environment to ask questions about its validity, and perhaps particularly about its form. Nick's reading of James's work as invested in a moralized teleology is apparent. Less so—but as characteristically Jamesian—is the way Nick claims residence in a character population defined not by sharp ethical distinctions but by a shared condition: the susceptibility to being "seen right through" is, he insists, universally distributed, and thus the morality tale he sketches seems haunted by a vision of a collectivity where moral distinctions are strangely irrelevant. *The Line of Beauty* ends as firmly in the melodramatic mode as James himself could wish, with Nick cast among the victimized children of light—homophobic ejected from the Tory household where he had ambiguously sheltered, convinced of his HIV-positive status (although, like Milly Theale before him, with no firm diagnosis of his condition), and, in a scene that cites Milly's walk through Regent's Park, savoring how his mortality and utter aloneness give point to the beauty of the world.<sup>1</sup> Given the sharpness of the moral distinctions structuring his plot, why does Nick insist on speaking of himself as just another member of a community defined by a common trait?

I think his words should alert us to an alternative ethical economy operative in James's late work—an economy that does not render irrelevant the Manichaeism so palpable to Bosanquet but that operates alongside it and in crucial respects upstages it. To perceive this ethical economy will require us to step to the side of James's plots, as it were, and look at his style. It's my suggestion here not only that this is what James's texts—with their tireless feats of stylistic invention—are themselves always prompting us to do but also that what is distinctive about Jamesian ethics can only be perceived through attention to his style. In its emphasis on style, this short piece represents a partial response to the analysis of Robert Pippin's *Henry James and Modern Moral Life*. Pippin reads James's work as asking what might constitute morality in a world that has lost the institutional and ideological structures that facilitate ethical decision making. As my epigraph suggests, Pippin reads James primarily as a teller of exemplary stories: if he opens his book by translating the text of *The Wings of the Dove* into a parable (a poor couple meets a young dying heiress), this is because the ethical valence of the novel has, for Pippin, everything to do with what actually happens to its characters. In the case of *The Wings of the Dove*, this approach leads to the conclusion that Kate and Densher's plan fails to take Milly into account as an ethical agent ("Whatever the purposes that include Milly must actually include Milly" [Pippin 179])—a judgment that seems to me as undeniable as it is incomplete. Faced with the brutal clarity of Pippin's plot synopsis, one wants to respond, "Well, if you put it *that* way. . . ." But of course James never does put it that way, and in what follows I'll argue that that difference—the difference of Jamesian style—harbors a radically collectivist ethical imagination only tangentially related to the differentiating moralism of his plots. Pippin opens and closes his study with analyses of *The Wings of the Dove*, and it is my sense that he does so precisely because of the moral clarity offered by the plot of that book. I focus here on the same text and for the same reason

but with a different goal in mind: it is the very moral obviousness of *Wings's* plot that challenges us to read it otherwise than for its plot of moral distinction.<sup>2</sup>

Alongside the plot of moral difference is a deeply Jamesian interest in what I want to call performative universalism. I'll focus first on the second half of the term: the universalism that interests me is clearest in the style of the novel, and that style in turn is perhaps most evident in the texture of the Jamesian line. Here, chosen almost at random from *The Wings of the Dove*, are some of the sentences Nick Guest probably has in mind:

“Oh she's grand,” the young man allowed; “she's on the scale altogether of the car of the Juggernaut.” (113)

“We agreed just now that you're beautiful. You strike me, you know, as—in your own way—much more firm on your feet than I.” (63)

“Well, he likes to please,” the girl explained—“personally. I've seen it make him wonderful.” (100)

“She understands,” Milly said; “she's better than any of you. She's beautiful.” (160)

“I had much rather see you myself—since you're, in your way, my dear young man, delightful—and arrange with you, count with you, as I easily, as I perfectly should.” (109)

He made his jokes, Lord Mark, without amusement for himself; yet it wasn't that he was grim. “To be seen, you must recognize, *is*, for you, to be jumped at. . . . Look round the table, and you'll make out, I think, that you're being, from top to bottom, jumped at.” (153)

He but “looks in,” poor beautiful dazzling, damning apparition that he was to have been. (43)

Lining up these passages highlights certain obvious features (less generously, mannerisms) of James's late style: the use of appositives and inversions, the almost Germanic deferral of grammatical closure. But it also reveals the striking verbal similarities that hold across the whole cast of Jamesian characters: in the passages above, Densher speaks to Kate about Aunt Maud; Kate speaks to Lionel Croy about himself and then to Densher about Lionel; Milly speaks to Lord Mark about Susan Stringham; Aunt Maud speaks to Densher about himself; and Lord Mark speaks to Milly about herself. The speakers, addressees, and subjects are distributed over the entire social landscape of the book. But these quite different characters address each other in almost indistinguishable patterns, and they laud one another with adjectives that seem interchangeable (“grand,” “beautiful,” “wonderful,” “delightful,” etc.).

This uniformity will hardly be news to any reader of late James, but it has largely escaped critical commentary. I think this is so because that stylistic uniformity requires

us to think about James's interest in collective forms of being, while our dominant critical paradigms have seen James primarily as a writer of individuals. I'm thinking particularly here of Peter Brooks's justly influential characterization of James as a chronicler of the "melodrama of consciousness" (see 153ff). Both parts of Brooks's term tend to obscure the collectivism of James's stylistic imagination: read as a melodramatist, James appears as a painter of stark characterological oppositions; read as a novelist of consciousness, James appears concerned to trace incommensurate perspectives. Both James's moralism and his perspectivalism, in other words, imply a poetics of division and differentiation. The Jamesian doctrine of "establishing one's successive centres" of consciousness—committed as it is to subtle accounts of individual temperament and thought process—seems perfectly suited to this project (AN 296). But as the above examples make clear, the style of James's writing actually interrupts the operation of this paramount Jamesian formal principle, inundating the drama of moral and perspectival difference in a bath of stylistic indistinction.

We might thus venture that one thing Jamesian style wants is to replace the differentiating energies of the drama of consciousness with an equally compelling vision of collectivity and universalism.<sup>3</sup> While this vision of collectivity proceeds from a certain stylistic sharing among characters, it also blurs the boundary between *author* and character in late James. My final example above bears a striking resemblance to those that come before, but it is taken from the section of *The Wings of the Dove's* preface in which James regrets that Lionel Croy makes such a brief appearance in the novel. The sentence evinces one of the fundamental markers of Jamesian style, the self-interruption with phrases of apposition, specification, or qualification ("poor beautiful dazzling, damning apparition that he was to have been"). Intricate as these effects of complication and syncopation can become in James, they frequently proceed from the homeliest of narrative interjections. Often it is only the choice of where to place speech-tags that creates the Jamesian note. "Well, he likes to please . . . personally"—what Kate "actually" says about her father in the example above—is ordinary enough; it is the eccentric placement of the also-ordinary tag "the girl explained" that gives the sentence its Jamesian point and suggests a wealth of meanings in that final adverb. But far from leading us to conclude that James's characters are banal speakers lent subtlety and originality by the way they are "set" in his narration, the sentences above prompt something like the opposite conclusion: even the stupidest characters (i.e., Lord Mark) know what a relatively straightforward utterance ("Look round the table and I think you'll make out you're being jumped at from top to bottom") gains in ambiguity through rearrangement of its particles. Every Jamesian character seems to sense how idioms ("from top to bottom," "jumped at") are poeticized—ironized, given resonance, made strange—by being subjected to predication, hesitation, or inversion of sequence. It is as if these characters were conscious of a shared duty to hold up the general tone.

I am suggesting that one effect of this uniformity of style is to intimate a shared purposiveness on the part of these characters. The stylistic consistency of James's fiction lends them a sense of affective and intentional surplus—as if, whatever role they occupy in the story (villain, ingénue, *ficelle*), Jamesian characters are always haunted by an extra-diegetic consciousness of themselves as engaged in precisely those roles and thus in a larger fictional project. I have called this distinctive ontology of James-

ian characters “performative,” and I employ the word not primarily to describe an ironized distance from a role or social identity (though this is one potential, recently much discussed, feature of performance) but to convey my sense that a secondary purposiveness akin to that of a good actor haunts the specific narrative projects and fates of each character in late James. In an effective theatrical production, we may notice not only that Malvolio is foolish and pompous but also that the actor playing Malvolio radiates intelligence in conveying that foolishness and a sense of humor in conveying that pomposity. This actorly purposiveness—this ability to communicate to the beholder a consciousness that has no narrative function and may even be directly opposed to diegetic meaning—is a central feature of the phenomenology of theater (it is in fact what we may call this *suspension* of the suspension of disbelief that is definitive of theatrical experience as such: without it we would only be pained or exasperated at Malvolio’s gullibility). The actor’s style addresses us *alongside or to the side of the plot* in performance, and it is this suggestion of supplemental awareness that is one powerful effect of James’s late style. Equally important—and equally characteristic of successful performance—is the fact that this purposiveness is distributed universally along with the style that conveys it, crossing even the most bitter or moralized characterological divides. My use of “performative” is thus also intended to convey the collaborative and unifying energies that Jamesian style infuses into the divisive structures of Jamesian plotting.

Even the most abject, marginal, and despicable characters are enfolded in this performative universalism. Take Lionel Croy, who for some powerfully unspecified reason serves as *Wings’s* polestar of depravity.<sup>4</sup> James’s prefatory remarks about him, from which I’ve already quoted, continue in this way:

He but “looks in,” poor beautiful dazzling, damning apparition that he was to have been; he sees his place so taken, his company so little missed, that, cocking again that fine form of hat which has yielded him for so long his one effective cover, he turns away with a whistle of indifference that nobly misrepresents the deepest disappointment of his life. One’s poor word of honour has *had* to pass muster for the show. Everyone, in short, was to have enjoyed so much better a chance that, like stars of the theatre condescending to oblige, they have had to take small parts, to content themselves with minor identities, in order to come on at all. (43)

Both of the features of performative universalism I’ve discussed above (its connection to a sense of surplus intention and its collective nature) are in evidence here. First, James attributes to Lionel Croy a supplementary consciousness, an awareness not only of his position in Kate’s life but of his place in the architecture of *The Wings of the Dove* itself. (And just as Malvolio’s idiocy optimally comes accompanied with a sense of actorly intelligence, the awareness James imputes to Lionel Croy lends him an affective dimension wholly tangential to his “real” diegetic situation: in the opening chapters of the novel, Croy is of course not casually shown the door—“so little missed”—but entreated by Kate to *stay*). Second, in taking on this secondary awareness, Croy morphs from being utterly distinctive in the text’s character system to being utterly typical. If the novel’s plot encourages us to see Lionel Croy as the

single cause of Kate's misery and the source of her ambition, in the passage above James dissolves this singularity by casting Lionel as, precisely, just another member of the cast, and a representative one at that: note how quickly the passage moves from Croy's particularity to a discussion of "everyone" in the novel, and how Lionel's role as a cast member is the hinge on which the move to generality turns.<sup>5</sup>

Equally interesting is the way this extra-diegetic consciousness not only unifies the characters but also intimates an alternative realm where, as Sly and the Family Stone would have it, everybody is a star. If in the novel as it exists there are bit parts and major players, James here conveys a sense of the contingency of that apportioning of narrative importance. The theatrical metaphor becomes a means to register a democratizing pressure—to hold open, if only imaginarily, the possibility of a radically flattened distribution of narrative sympathy and attention.<sup>6</sup> James invokes this leveling aspect of theatricality in the preface to *The Tragic Muse*, where he writes that "No character in a play . . . has . . . a *usurping* consciousness; the consciousness of others is exhibited exactly in the same way as that of the 'hero'; the prodigious consciousness of Hamlet . . . the moral presence the most asserted, in the whole range of fiction, only takes its turn with that of the other agents of the story, no matter how occasional these may be" (AN 90). While these prefatory remarks are, strictly speaking, external to the novels themselves, the stylistic extravagance of Jamesian characters insinuates an effect of performative universality into the heart of the fiction itself. Especially in the late fiction, it is the uniformity of the verbal style (we could, again invoking the theatrical metaphor, call it James's "company style") that conveys this sense of a corporate and uniform consciousness in which all the characters somehow participate. James's style prompts us to imagine the novel on the model of a collective production, referring us fantasmatically to a scene of necessarily cooperative enactment as the ground of the text's "performance."<sup>7</sup>

This performative leveling has a special significance for *The Wings of the Dove*, which, as we have seen, is the James novel most insistent on creating moralized distinctions between characters at the level of the narrated action. I have been arguing that in their commitment to a shared style the characters radiate a sense of collective purpose even from their sharply differentiated situations in the plot. I want further to specify this claim by examining what is perhaps the central example of the novel's utopian universalism, its titular image. Uniquely among James's late fictions, the title of *The Wings of the Dove* is proposed by a character in the story. While the idea of embassy hovers in the conceptual background of *The Ambassadors* and *The Golden Bowl's* title refers to an actual object in the story, only in *The Wings of the Dove* is the text's governing metaphor supplied by a character within it: Kate nominates the dove as a figure for Milly near the end of the first volume (236). The dove is thus a product of one character's linguistic inventiveness, an element of personal style. Once introduced, however, the figure rapidly circulates among the characters and throughout the text, taking on shades of meaning as it does so: Milly, for example, immediately seizes on the image, pondering "straightway the measure of the success she could have as a dove" (237); and before long Densher too is thinking under the figure's auspices, so that when he rents new rooms in Venice he wonders to himself if any suspicion of his motive in doing so has "brushed [Kate] with its wings" (365). Even the clamoring of pigeons in Saint Mark's undergoes a figurative transubstantiation to become for Kate and Densher "the flutter of the doves" (373).

Surveying these proliferating meanings, we may be tempted to label the image of the dove the definitive sign of psychic distinction, an object lesson in perspective's ability to transform any object. But more important than any of these particular differences may be the very fact of the figure's circulatory success. Read with this emphasis, the dove becomes an emblem not of a melodramatic perspectivalism but of stylistic infectiousness—as if the provenance and destination of the metaphor were less important than the felt need on the part of the characters to spread it around. As we have seen, the first thing the image does is jump the novel's moralized character-gulf: originated by Kate, the term immediately enters and begins to fascinate the consciousness of Milly. It then widens its indexical reach to enfold someone originally unconnected with it, as Milly hears Mrs. Lowder's questions to her as having a "tone of the fondest indulgence—almost, really, that of dove cooing to dove" (236). Later Densher adopts the metaphor precisely to note its ramifying power, reflecting that Milly's "wings" have "lately taken an inordinate reach, and weren't Kate and Mrs Lowder, weren't Susan Shepherd and he, wasn't *he* in particular, nestling under them to a great increase of immediate ease?" (389). And by the novel's end, Kate and Densher agree that Milly's "wings" have reached out to "cover" them both (508).

This closing figure of the protective, all-encompassing wings can of course be interpreted as a mystification of the plot's economic engine: Milly's wings on this reading would simply be her money, and Kate's wonder at their span simply her delight at Milly's bequest and the imminent success of her plan. But in its mobility, the image resists the reduction of this equation. Or, to put this somewhat differently, the restlessness of the imagery of the dove can be understood as James's attempt to hold in view the utopian promise—we might call it the promise of the redistribution of stylistic wealth—lodged in the mystification. The largesse with which Milly allows her fantastic riches to circulate is less the "truth" of the text than a sign of the prodigality of style in the Jamesian universe. Rather than a symbol of moral Manicheism or perspectival difference, the dove is emblematic of the text's own refusal of the economy of stylistic scarcity, its attempt to imagine a community united by a language whose very sameness is an emblem of radical egalitarianism.<sup>8</sup> In its refusal to observe the limits of any particular consciousness, the dove becomes an emblem of what I have termed the text's performative universalism, or of what Stanley Cavell, in his recent *Cities of Words*, offers as one definition of art: a "site of the transmutation of public and private into and out of each other" (41).

James puts just such a vision of transmutation tantalizingly in play in the novel's final Venetian soirée, when Milly's dove-like mildness strikes Densher as a kind of tide-pool that sustains the novel's characters with equal and sublime indifference: "He moved about in it and it made no splash; he floated, he noiselessly swam in it, and they were all together, for that matter, like fishes in a crystal pool. . . . She hadn't yet had occasion—circulating with a clearness intensified—to strike him as so happily pervasive" (386). As a character in the plot, Milly is of course committed to her personal lot, her desire for Densher and her anguish over her looming death. But as an emblem of style—as the dove the text won't let us forget she also is—Milly must be seen as committed to the making-pervasive of the riches concentrated on her person. And in this redistributive project, she should be understood as, strangely but palpably, a collaborator even with her chief antagonist. Much like the starring actresses in

“some dim scene in a Maeterlinck play” (339) to which James compares them, Kate and Milly radiate a sense of co-operating on some other plane that while not-quite-narratable nonetheless happily pervades this unhappy novel. This other scene may never rise to the level of narrated action, but it makes itself felt in the texture of the characters’ language and in their emotional stance toward one another. Some such fantasmatic scene of collaboration, for example, seems necessary to explain James’s insistence on what would otherwise appear only a refinement of Kate’s depravity: her repeated insistence that she likes and respects Milly, indeed is a good friend to her and in some sense a supporter of her interests.<sup>9</sup> If we want to rescue this claim from the charge of the most banal cynicism, we should see this avowal as a local, imperfectly instantiated manifestation of a deeper collective project.

Of course, if the transmission of Milly’s money is a sign of a collaborative attempt at redistributive justice, this noble impulse does not play out at all smoothly in the book’s narrated action. While the novel’s style bespeaks an already achieved communalism, at the level of the story the novel’s redistributive impulse gets entangled in deception, disappointment, and death. It is as if James wants to insist that difference ultimately vanquishes the stylistic universalism so palpable in the text. Indeed, the very word “difference” recurs insistently in the novel’s final book as if semantically to underline the point.<sup>10</sup> This brings me up against what I will have no doubt seemed perversely to have avoided so far—namely, the intransigence of the novel’s plot: if the story actually narrated in *The Wings of the Dove* is less central to the ethical imagination of the novel than we might expect, it is not quite as marginal as I have found it necessary to imply in my attempt here to hold style in view. But the meaning of that plot is significantly altered once we set it in relation to style understood with its proper degree of importance—once we concede that, in its insistent presence, style actually becomes a kind of secondary protagonist in the novel. If we understand *The Wings of the Dove* to be narrating not only the fate of a victimized heiress but also the destiny of a stylistic project, the novel’s plot becomes legible as the story of style’s ultimate social ineffectuality, its inability to render palpable on the plane of the real its democratizing imagination. “They could think whatever they liked about whatever they would—in other words, they could say it,” James writes early on about Kate and Densher’s situation (97), and his words might refer not only to all the prodigally stylish speakers who populate his fiction but to the prodigality of Jamesian style and, beyond that, the aesthetic itself: all of them combine a fantasmatic richness with a poignant powerlessness to see their projects materialize on the field of the social.<sup>11</sup> Cavell suggests that in offering us a vision of “our unattained but attainable commonwealth,” aesthetic artifacts are a means for a society to perceive “its further, or future, version existing within its present” (69). In positing an intoxicating image of communitarian possibility and then making us feel the pathos of that possibility’s remoteness, *The Wings of the Dove* is at once a repository for the imagination of collectivity and a ruthless analysis of how damaged we remain by our separateness. The insistent carrier of a utopian promise, Jamesian style wants its vision of collectivity, and it wants to insist on that collectivity’s status as still only visionary.

## NOTES

Thanks to Heather Love and Joe Rezek for their comments on a draft of this piece.

<sup>1</sup>For more extensive analyses of Hollinghurst's engagement with James's work, see Flannery and Rivkin.

<sup>2</sup>Pippin's is a rich and complex argument, and the following pages are offered less in disagreement with his findings than out of the sense that an interest in style could add a dimension to precisely the ethical questions he compellingly illuminates in James's work. My thinking about style's ethical force has been influenced especially by Bersani and Dutoit, D. A. Miller, and Ohi. It is not a coincidence that all of these are writers centrally concerned with issues of queerness and its relation to aesthetic form. Whether or not these writers are overtly interested in ethical questions, they might all be fairly described as exploring what Warner, in the provocative subtitle to *The Trouble With Normal*, terms "the ethics of queer life": these ethics would combine a commitment to sexual variety and a defense of the spaces, institutions, and historical moments in which such variety flourishes, an awareness of the ways aesthetic forms record or attempt fantasmatically to repair the damages of heteronormativity, and perhaps most saliently an interpretive agnosticism when faced with questions of sexual and identitarian "truth." In invoking these critics here I am attempting to draw attention to, and question, a faultline in recent James criticism according to which an interest in the "queer" James has seemed tangential to an interest in the "ethical" James. If the work of these writers reveals the falsity of any such distinction, it also illuminates that the difficulty in perceiving the ethical valence of queer work is tied to the frequent failure (as in Pippin and in the recent work of J. Hillis Miller) to understand the work of style as ethical in nature.

<sup>3</sup>Cameron's is the most sustained examination of Jamesian consciousness as an exteriorized, publicly shared quantity. But in Cameron's analysis this deprivatized Jamesian consciousness becomes a vector of coercion, a means by which one character imposes thoughts on another. I want to suggest that the sociability of Jamesian consciousness has other, less cruel imaginative possibilities.

<sup>4</sup>But see Sedgwick's decisively convincing argument that the very namelessness that attaches to his crimes indexes male homosexuality. As we'll see, James's invocation of a theatrical metaphor in describing Croy's character ontology has the effect of relocating him from the margins of the text to its symbolic center. One result of the performative universalism of *Wings* is thus the deterritorialization of the queerness narratively secreted in Croy's person.

<sup>5</sup>In exceeding the normal ontological contours of fictional characterization, Lionel Croy is representative not only of *Wings*'s characters but of character more generally as discussed in the prefaces: thus Christopher Newman is not only a gullible American in Paris but the featured performer on "a high and lighted stage" (AN 23); the characters of *The Portrait of a Lady* importune James "like the group of attendants and entertainers who come down by train when people in the country give a party: they represented the contract for carrying the party on" (AN 53); and Christina Light, not content with being consigned after *Roderick Hudson* to "the pasteboard tomb, the doll's box, to which we usually relegate the spent puppet," demands that James "clothe[] her chilled and patient nakedness" with her own eponymous novel, *The Princess Casamassima* (AN 74, 73). In these examples (all of them, not coincidentally, referring us to a fantasmatic theater), James's characters seem instinct not only with their particular "biographical" co-ordinates but with a shared awareness of their position in the larger fictive enterprise.

<sup>6</sup>My thinking here is indebted to Woloch, who elaborates a theory of the way characters in realist texts jockey for limited narrative attention in a unified character-system. I am arguing that one distinctive result of Jamesian style is that an awareness of the potentially egalitarian shape of the character-system not only governs the narrative structure of the text but also conditions the consciousness and verbal habits of the characters themselves.

<sup>7</sup>James's *The Awkward Age*, not coincidentally his most consistently play-like novel, is the book where this interest in collective forms of life reaches its clearest narrative thematization. For an analysis of the interlocking thematic and formal aspects of that novel's collectivism, see my "Horrible Impossible."

<sup>8</sup>In refusing a purely demystificatory a stance toward Jamesian style, I am taking my cue from O'Hara's suggestive analysis of the (at least) three meanings of class in James as socioeconomic position, group identity, and style. For O'Hara, James's work analyzes as well as rehearses the mystifying sublimation of the first two terms into the latter.

<sup>9</sup>This insistence on Kate and Milly's friendship was the most dramatic alteration James made to the plot from his initial notebook record of the novel's germ. The notebooks insist with underlined emphasis that the two central women of his story "*must not love each other*" (NB 172). But it is precisely the mutual love of Kate and Milly that becomes perhaps the central fascination of the novel.

<sup>10</sup>"Nothing was stranger than such a difference in their view of it" (WD 455). "It made him also think, but with a difference" (456); "he was conscious enough, in preparing again to seek her out, of a difference on that score" (474); "But she differed with you?" "She differed with me. And when Kate differs with you—!" (479); "The difference was thus that the dusk of afternoon—dusk thick from an early hour—had gathered" (481); "they asserted their differences without tact and without taste" (482); "Yet all the while too the tension had its charm—such being the interest of a creature who could bring one

back to her by such different roads. It was her talent for life again; which found in her a difference for the differing time" (501).

<sup>11</sup>For a far-ranging analysis of the ways literature thinks its own "situation of restricted agency" in modernity, see Ngai (2). Ngai builds on an Adornian understanding of the aesthetic's critical capacity to make the more particular claim that negative affects are powerfully diagnostic of situations of obstructed political will. Her chapter on envy (126–73), which focuses on the way antagonism between women may be a way "to critically negotiate rather than simply disavow or repudiate" the desire for female collectivity (163), is particularly suggestive for *The Wings of the Dove*, where the female envy motivating the plot seems at once indistinguishable from erotic fixation and an incipient form of alliance.

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