

Venice, Orientalism, and *The Wings of the Dove*

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In her 1983 essay, "Henry James, Orientalist," Adele R. Tintner notes that the American expatriate writer Henry James has a long history of incorporating "Eastern" details into his tales and novels. Tintner first identifies this trait as emanating from his interest in earlier British writers—the Romantic poets, the Pre-Raphaelites—and French writers such as Flaubert, Daudet, Gautier, and Sand who traveled to the Orient and wrote about their experiences there (121–2). She also identifies James's fascination with *The Arabian Nights* as well as Orientalist artwork of artists such as Gérôme, Decamps, and Delacroix (122) and then goes on to demonstrate where and how those motifs appear in James's works. Tintner's Orientalists are the arbiters of the nineteenth-century taste for an exotic, fanciful, and imaginative Orientalism, which constructs a world view that exhibits the Other to the American and European public.

These representations of the Orient are fodder for scholars of a more self-reflective Orientalism that Edward Said defines. As Said has amply explained in his seminal work, *Orientalism* (1978), there are many definitions for this term; we may divide these definitions into at least two broad categories: unreconstructed or old-fashioned Orientalism, which identifies references to images and

tropes from the Middle East and the Far East; and poststructuralist Orientalism, which understands Orientalism as a discourse that identifies the relationship between representation and domination, between Otherness and empire. Though Tintner's own analysis falls into the former category, what she identifies enables us to situate James within an orientalist discourse that interrogates representation, Otherness, and power.

Painstakingly thorough though she is, Tintner does not mention a major James novel which utilizes Orientalist motifs and also performs Orientalism in its depiction of the treachery surrounding its main characters: *The Wings of the Dove* (1902). By visualizing Venice as an extension of the Orient in the novel, James furthers this Orientalizing representation in order to complicate and sharpen the relationship between the two female protagonists—middle-class, impecunious, and scheming British Kate Croy and the slowly dying American heiress and “dove”¹ of the narrative, Milly Theale, and their circle.

That Venice has long been the locus of writerly desire has been chronicled not only in the literary works themselves but also in scholarship. Tony Tanner, in his *Venice Desired*, charts Venice's representation in works by Byron, Ruskin, James, von Hofmannsthal, Proust, and Pound, and exuberantly exclaims his admiration:

[A]s spectacle—the beautiful city *par excellence*, the city of art, the city *as* art—and as spectacular example, as the greatest and richest and most splendid republic in the history of the world, now declined and fallen, Venice became an important, I would say central, site (a topos, a topic) for the

European imagination. And more than any other city it is inextricably associated with desire. Desire of Venice, desire for Venice, desire in Venice—this is a crucial force and feature in European literature. (4)

Tanner goes on to note how Venice has always enjoyed a reputation as an exotic locale. He reminds us that Sir John Mandeville's *Travels* (1356–7) likens Venice to Cathay; that Sir Roger Ascham was first to identify Venice as “*the* place of love, lechery, sensuality, prostitution, *as well as* a place of wise rulers and just laws”; that this is a city with “labyrinthine little streets and canals and endless bridges ... [w]atery, dark, silent; a place of sensuality and secrecy; masks and masquerading; duplicity and desire”; and that this is where two Shakespearean plays with protagonists who are profoundly Other (Shylock, Othello) as well as Gothic romances (*The Mysteries of Udolpho*) are set. He then impresses us with the fact that “Venice is not really ever written from the inside, but variously appropriated from without” (5), which echoes the relationship between the East and the West in that it is the Occident that silences and speaks for the Orient.

Tanner's comprehensive tome presents a nostalgic and romanticized Venice, a Venice we know without ever visiting it. David Nally, in his essay “Incorrigible Venice and the War Against Cliché,” warns us that as Régis Debray argues in *Against Venice* (1999), Venice “appears alarmingly easy to present and re-present ... in tired, facile codes” (295). He posits—as I do—that though scholars such as Tanner point to “the extraordinary tenacity of a European imagination as it fixed itself upon Venice” (296), they

fail to address the importance of Venice's crucial links to the Orient as well as how "Venice is represented in tones, styles, and tropes that recapitulate the homology and practice of Orientalism" (297). This means that Orientalism in Venice is not simply a matter of artefacts that are from or suggest the East (and given Venice's long relationship with the Orient, those artefacts are myriad), but that the way in which it functions in the popular imagination parallels the functions of Orientalism. Because the Otherness in this space, therefore, allows for machinations and intrigue where normal judgments are easily suspended, Venice then represents a form of inversion.

Henry James understood not only the rich literary legacy of Venice that Tanner delineates and also recognized the city's value as a stand-in for the East. In a notebook entry from November 1894, James scribbles the following locations as possible settings for his new novel, *The Wings of the Dove*. He writes: "I seem to see Nice or Mentone—or Cairo—or Corfu—designated as the scene of the action" (Edel 107). This sequence of seemingly random geographical names reveals that in this year that opened with the death of his close friend Constance Fenimore Woolson, James's mind is still on her: *Mentone, Cairo, and Corfu* (1896) is the name of Woolson's posthumously published travel book and it was she, not he, who had visited the East. In *The Private Lives of Henry James*, Lyndall Gordon chronicles how James's cousin, Minnie Temple, and his friend Woolson influenced his writing. When describing Woolson's apartment in Venice—the apartment James visits after Woolson's death by defenestration—Gordon carefully includes Oriental artefacts. She writes:

[Woolson] kept her unframed photographs and small pictures in the drawers of a Japanese cabinet of black lacquer. On every available surface were the spoils of her travels, including a piece of alabaster which she had picked up in the Temple of the Sphinx and an Arabian tile with a shameless label: "stolen in April 1890 by C. F. Woolson, from the wall of the Mandarah (or reception room) of the ruined Palace of the Sheik el Moofti, at Cairo, Egypt. Date between A.D. 1200 and A.D. 1300"; ... coffee cups of glass with solid silver holders, given to her by the Khedive Twefik of Egypt; and not least, a scarab pin from Egypt with ancient telepathic powers—or so she fancied. (261–2)

The Orient is encapsulated in this sitting room in Venice (and in many more of the sitting rooms of James's acquaintances, no doubt). If James had indeed followed Woolson's lead and located the action in Cairo, for instance, it would have been his first and only "Oriental" tale.

However, as Tintner reminds us, James "resisted devoting either an entire novel or tale to the pull of the East, chiefly because he had never been there" (122). One wonders why James never ventured to the East but in any case, in *The Wings of the Dove*, Venice, a familiar and favorite city of his, is a convenient substitute for points further east: for James, it is the westernmost point of the East and the easternmost point of the West, one of the nexus points for commerce and culture to flow to and from either side.

The film adaptation of this novel makes explicit Venice's identity as an Oriental space. As director Iain Softley notes, "Venice at

the turn of the century was on the extreme of European culture[.] ... It was multi-ethnic with a lot of Arab, African and gypsy influence, which Mussolini later tried to erase. There would have been Casbah-style markets. And there are the labyrinths of the canal system ..." (Tibbetts 315); given its history of shifting identities both as a city state and as part of empires both east and west, what Tanner refers to as the desire of/for/in Venice (4) is indeed what links the city to Orientalism, the celebration of exoticism, and the often illegible Other. Therefore it comes as no surprise that Softley's film highlights the Orientalism that is more subtle in the novel by deftly incorporating it both as decoration and as discourse.

On one hand, the film speaks to the former category of Orientalism as decoration in that it highlights, magnifies, and extends the fixation on the Orient in this narrative through costumes, decorative arts, representations of sexuality, geographical locations, as well as physical tableaux. The Orientalism of the film comes to the fore as a result of setting it in the 1910s instead of right at the turn of the century: the women are draped in uncorseted kimono-like robes in silky materials and move through interiors decorated with eastern accents both in London and in Venice. And as John C. Tibbitts remarks, "By drawing upon the paintings of Venetian artist Ettore Tito for inspiration, cinematographer [Eduard] Serra creates a sumptuously luxurious glow suffused with more than a whiff of the East" (315).

On the other hand, because the film hints at Britain's complicity in global commerce and the corruption it engenders in a sequence we do not see in the novel, the film gestures toward an

Orientalism that must be considered in a larger context. For instance, early in the film, Kate Croy, the British female protagonist, visits a Limehouse opium den to deliver something to her disreputable father, from whom she is estranged. The door to the den is opened by an inscrutable Oriental figure and after Kate leaves, the camera pans through the smokey interior to reveal Kate's father, Lionel Croy, supine and stoned.

This decision to define Lionel Croy's disgrace solves the narrative problem that is Kate's father, though it decreases the ambiguity, the not knowing, that the novel relishes in withholding from the reader the specifics of Lionel Croy's fall. That Softley and screenwriter Hossein Amini chose to ascribe a fall into yellowness as the reason for disgrace and the event that necessitates Kate to seek her fortune by encouraging her lover, journalist Merton Densher, to woo an ailing American heiress, Milly Theale, demonstrates their cleverness² because they synchronize our expectations of what Orientalist representation is with the content and imagery of the film.

Unlike the Limehouse opium den, which represents an undesirable outpost of the Orient, Venice in the film is a more vibrant and consciously Oriental landscape, not only because of the multiculturalism Softley mentions above but also because of the literary representations of the city as decadent and dangerous. No wonder then, that we see the chaos of the carnivalesque as well as the quiet repose of images where Milly Theale, played by a slightly too healthy-looking Allison Elliott, again dressed in flowing shapeless robes, appears as an odalisque in the Venice section of the film.

The film also underscores another "danger" the novel does not

make particularly clear: the homoerotic attraction between Kate Croy and Milly Theale. Nally disagrees with Said's determined disregard for connecting homosexuality to travel and Orientalism and advocates "a gendered and sexualized erotics of place, which ... entwines the mythology of Venice and the history and practice of Orientalism" (297) which he uses to discuss Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (1911) and Ian McEwan's *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981). This palimpsest of desire Nally describes applies to this film adaptation as well: assisted by Kate's cross-dressing and the love triangle of Kate, Milly, and Merton Densher flattening out into a mirroring of the women with Densher in the middle, the film seems to say that this manifestation of desire is only possible because they are in Venice and not London.

The Orientalist representations and Orientalism in praxis in the novel are more measured and subtle in depicting Kate as Other and Milly as an innocent shining white fairy princess and a Christian martyr who is surrounded by excess and treasure but beset by money-grubbing, unreliable pagans. As he describes Kate and Milly in London, James starts with the conventional fair lady/dark lady dichotomy popular writers such as Sir Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper employ in their novels. However, he develops it to suggest that an Orientalized Kate is Other because of her outward appearance and her family situation in contrast with Milly Theale, whose looks and fortune afford her a natural social position unaccessible to Kate. The cumulative descriptions of things Oriental in the first London section of the novel signify how the British empire is closely linked with the material culture of the Orient and hints at the encroaching powers that are working

to enmesh Milly. Therefore, when the action moves to Venice, a shift occurs: Milly's whiteness, which had prevented her from acceding to Otherness, is precisely what makes her Other and the colonization of her body becomes the controlling motif of the narrative.

From the beginning, James characterizes Kate as dark. In the beginning of the novel, he writes:

She readjusted the poise of her black closely-feathered hat; retouched, beneath it, the thick fall of her dusky hair; kept her eyes aslant no less on her beautiful averted than on her beautiful presented oval. She was dressed altogether in black, which gave an even tone, by contrast, to her clear face and made her hair more harmoniously dark. Outside, on the balcony, her eyes showed as blue; within, at the mirror, they showed almost as black. She was handsome, but the degree of it was not sustained by items and aids; a circumstance moreover playing its part at almost any time in the impression she produced. (22)

The dark hair and dark clothes are not a surprise, though her eyes which are blue in the sunlight outdoors and almost black indoors are. They hint at a doubleness in Kate that suggests that it is interiors like her father's lodgings in Chirk Street that darken her and make her abject.

Indeed, it is Kate's family that marks her as Other in socio-economic terms: hers is the world of her deceased mother, who insisted on economies because she wanted to save an estate that turned

out to yield very little (34); the disgraced father from whom she is estranged and who is upset that Kate should share her small legacy with her widowed elder sister instead of him (33); her sister, the bedraggled and perpetually tired widow with children, Mrs. Condrip, who with her sisters-in-law, pressure Kate to take advantage of Aunt Maud Lowder's largess so that they too may benefit by her munificence (44). Beset by the squalid concerns of equally squalid family members, her lack of money and fall from respectability because of her father's unmentionable (and unmentioned) transgression push Kate toward the margins of society.

Because Maud Lowder hopes to marry off Kate to an impoverished aristocrat, Lord Mark, and settle money on her, it is hard for Kate to call her body her own. In an attempt to control her own future, she resists Lord Mark and continues to meet with Densher, despite Maud Lowder's disapproval; but she also understands that without her aunt's money, she is unable to marry Densher because his "want of means—of means sufficient for any one but himself—was really the great ugliness ... [as well as] his private inability to believe he should ever be rich (54).

If Kate's poverty keeps her marginal and at the beck and call of her aunt, who as "Britannia of the Market Place" (37) represents the British establishment, Milly Theale's fortune and social ties place her squarely in the center. Bereft of family (but with an abundance of money), Milly arrives in London, meets Maud Lowder through her traveling companion Susan Stringham, and through Maud Lowder is befriended by Kate who in turn reintroduces her to Densher, whom she had met in her native New York City. Needless to say, she also charms Lord Mark.

James description of Milly is in contrast with how he describes Kate:

[T]he slim, constantly pale, delicately haggard, anomalously, agreeably angular young person, of not more than two-and-twenty summers, in spite of her marks, whose hair was somehow exceptionally red even for the real thing, which it innocently confessed to being, and whose clothes were remarkably black even for robes of mourning, which was the meaning they expressed. (76-7)

Though she is attired in black, as Kate is in the quotation above, Milly with her pale skin and red hair is in counterpoint to the handsome Kate. Milly's companion, Susan Stringham, a local color writer from Burlington, Vermont sees in Milly "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 possibilities" (77). Instead of characterizing her as an American version of Britannia of the Market Place, Susan Stringham imagines Milly as a fragile and delicate fairy princess frequently and on one occasion, herself as her fairy godmother (97). Kate also appears in Susan Stringham's tableau of Milly as a "wandering princess": Kate, is "the worthiest maiden, the chosen daughter of the burgesses" who waits upon the princess at the city gate" (111).

To accentuate Milly's whiteness and her privileged state, James surrounds her even while she is in England with people and things that are tinged with the Orient. In addition to the dark Kate, Aunt

Maud, who Susie Stringham remembers as “florid, alien, exotic” (96) when they were schoolgirls together, is alternately a raven haired, pagan, exotic lion within her cage (37) and an eagle with gilded beak and claws who swoops down and fixed upon Kate (60), much like the roc does in the adventures of Sinbad. When Lord Mark serves iced coffee on the lawn of his home, Milly is reminded of official receptions at the court of a native ruler of India and fancies some of the entourage to be native princes. And when Maud Lowder invites Milly to stay at Lancaster Gate with her and Kate, Milly’s mind wanders:

Milly ... was, while [Maud Lowder] talked, really conscious of the enveloping flap of a protective mantle, a shelter with the weight of an Eastern carpet. An Eastern carpet, for wishing-purposes of one’s own was a thing to be on rather than under; still, however, if the girl should fail of breath it wouldn’t be, she could feel, by Mrs. Lowder’s fault. (134–5)

The idea of this Eastern magic carpet is part of Milly’s daydream of visiting a court in India. The carpet is not simply an artefact of British imperialism but here an instrument for wish fulfillment. The irony of course is that since the carpet is a mantle—reminiscent of childhood playacting games in which any patterned piece of cloth became a royal mantle—and not something she is able to sit upon so that she may soar to any destination she desires. This mantle is a heavy burden and if she is under the carpet, she is liable to be trodden on by others.

This image of Milly covered by an Oriental carpet coupled

with that of Milly as a “Christian maiden, in the arena, mildly, caressingly, martyred ... [by] the nosing and fumbling not of lions and tigers but of domestic animals let loose as for the joke” (209) foreshadows Milly’s fate in Venice where the violence she experiences is not so much a sudden attack but a slow suffocation and suffering. Whereas in London, the Orientalism that surrounds Milly depends on British imperialism and its signification of avarice, excess, or in Kate’s case, marginalization through personal appearance and lack of privilege, Venice’s Orientalism hinges on the representation and contestation of Milly’s body.

Venice’s positioning as an extension of the Orient in James’s mind brings to the last third of the novel not only the historical and cultural imagery and connotations Tanner and others enumerate, but also those that place the Orient as a location, which, as Said states, helps define the West “as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience” (2). Here an inversion occurs: in Venice, all the suppressed desires of the protagonists percolate to the surface of their consciousnesses and spill out onto the pages of the narrative. This specificity is echoed in Kate’s words to Densher: “If you want things named, you must name them” (308). Kate encourages Densher to articulate his understanding of what she wants: he asks for confirmation from her when he utters, “Since she’s to die I’m to marry her? ... So that when her death has taken place I shall in the natural course have money?” and receives it when she not only parrots his queries but adds, “We shall in the natural course be free” (308). This of course is Kate’s desire for money, which is made all the more acute after Milly enters her life.

In Venice, Densher's sexual desire for Kate surfaces, and he realizes that he has been following her instructions without getting anything in return. This prompts him to ask her to come to his rooms; when she seems reluctant, he presses her by saying, "If you decline to understand me I wholly decline to understand you. I'll do nothing" (311). His bargaining works: Kate acquiesces. And Lord Mark's thwarted desire—monetary and sexual—for two moneyed women (Kate, through the promise of the Lowder wealth if she were to marry Lord Mark, and Milly, who has her own money) propels him to revenge and an act of treachery that reveals Kate and Densher's secret and triggers Milly's decline and death.

Milly's desire surfacing is the most heartbreaking since her desire is simply to live. Diagnosed with an unspecified illness by an eminent physician, Sir Luke Strett, Milly is dying. Her illness, which seems to be in check in London, ravages her body in Venice and as the narrative progresses, she disappears from view because she is not well enough to appear in public. Even Susan Stringham's fanciful imaginings of Milly as princess take a darker and more sinister turn once they leave London for their new Venetian home, the Palazzo Leporelli which is "[h]ung about with pictures and relics, the rich Venetian past, the ineffaceable character" and in which "Milly moved slowly to and fro as the priestess of the worship" (260). It is also evident in another princess-and-hand-maiden image James presents to us:

[W]e 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, across the black water streaked with evening gleams, fitful questions and answers. The upright lady, with thick dark braids down her back, drawing over the grass a more embroidered train, makes the whole circuit, and makes it again, and the broken talk, brief and sparingly allusive, seems more to cover than to free their sense. (262)

The pale princess, Milly, is decked out not unlike the Palazzo Leporelli, and is transformed into a figure decorated with rich accoutrements that recall the Orient. Hers is not necessarily a happy existence: weighted down (not unlike the Eastern carpet mantle), she must sit still as the braided lady of the court, Kate, circles around her and speaks deceptively.

Though up until this point, it is Kate who is Orientalized—dark, mysterious, and full of nefarious plans—it is Milly Theale, who is the object of not only an Orientalist gaze but also subject to the Otherness that signifies a subjugation by colonizing forces. Milly is described as rich and strange (77), she is passive and inhabits a world that is not willing to understand her in terms other than economic ones, and she is inscrutable and feminine. And like the Orient, her history is also imagined in the most convenient ways by the other characters. Her identity continues to shift depending upon who is doing the imagining: not only is she a dove to Kate, a princess to Susan Stringham, and attendant fairy to

Maud Lowder (134), but on the way to Venice Susan Stringham compares her to Catherine the Great (260) and later to a figure in a living version of a Veronese painting (301), and to Merton Densher, she is more than a princess, an angel, and a star because she is “the little American girl who had been kind to him in New York” (279). Given her imminent death, Milly’s renting the Palazzo Leporelli instead of staying at a hotel may be wishful thinking but certainly it reflects her desire for a more permanent and stable residence. However, even this palace serves as a backdrop for another imagined Orientalized Milly: that of a ruler marking her ascension to the throne of her own empire.

Though it is in Venice that Milly exercises the most autonomy and power—she chooses where to live, who to see, and how to act without much surveillance by Mrs. Lowder and with much indulgence by Mrs. Stringham—ironically, we hear less and less of her voice as her sojourn in Venice wears on. Because she is unwell, she is not able to leave the Palazzo and when Densher tries to make a joke about this, “he had winced for himself as soon as he made his mistake” (318). Milly catches on and despite her knowing that Densher thinks of her as an invalid, she continues to plead her case to him after Densher tells her “I’ll believe whatever you tell me”:

“Well then, I’m splendid.”

“Oh I don’t need you to tell me that.”

“I mean I’m capable of life.”

“I’ve never doubted it.”

“I mean,” she went on, “That I want so to live—!”

“Well?” he asked while she paused with the intensity of it.

“Well, that I know I *can*.... If I want to live. I *can*,” Milly repeated. (318)

For Milly, being an invalid is *invalid*: she wants to believe that her life can be full and long. Densher’s blithe tone is reassuring but it disguises his mixed allegiance to Milly. In an inversion zone like Venice, though desires can be articulated, they do not necessarily come true: both Densher’s articulation of the plan for him to marry Milly for her money so that he and Kate would benefit from Milly’s death, as well as Milly’s fervent desire to live, fail.

Milly’s whiteness that in London was an asset is here in the inverted world of Venice a liability. In “Reproducing Whiteness: *The Wings of the Dove*,” Patricia McKee discusses Milly’s whiteness as a voided identity that makes her blank and allows her to mimic Kate (39). In addition, this same whiteness and blankness, also transforms her into a *tabula rasa* for male colonizers to fight over and inscribe. Like Venice, Milly “is not really ever written from the inside but variously appropriated from without” (Tanner 5). This is why the desires of Kate, mediated by Densher, and Lord Mark encircle and enmesh Milly. Kate, having left Venice ahead of time with her aunt, leaves the dirty work to Densher who, after several weeks of visiting with Milly, suddenly finds himself shut out of her presence. In the Piazza San Marco, when he comes face to face with Lord Mark at Florian’s, Densher understands that it is Lord Mark’s visit that precipitated his rejection by Milly. Densher “had been looking at a man who had done what he had come for,

and for whom, as done, it temporarily sufficed" (328). Lord Mark's news to Milly is that all this while, Densher and Kate have been secretly engaged and that Densher's wooing of Milly is a sham.

Lord Mark is motivated by revenge and spite, since he has already been rejected by Milly and wishes to destroy Densher's chances with her so that he himself may be back in the running. Clearly Lord Mark does not care what effect his disclosure will have on Milly; by diminishing her will to live, he also forfeits his chance to woo her. Densher, because we can see his point of view, is more careful with Milly's feelings; but still, though the messenger may have been brutal, it is Densher's deception that has wounded Milly. It is as if she is under that Eastern carpet and these men walk all over her. Milly, as Susan Stringham later tells Densher, "has turned her face to the wall" (333). Physically, she resists this colonization by withdrawing into her palace and then into herself. Mentally, she refutes machinations and greed by taking the high road at the cost of her life and by choosing to whom she will leave her money.

Furthermore, as the novel progresses, we see the overlapping of how Venice and Milly mean. They are both rich, Orientalized objects of desire and colonization but are also in decline, and in Milly's case, dying. By the end of the novel, Venice and Milly are one and the same to Kate and Densher. In one of their conversations in the aftermath of Milly's death, in response to Kate's explanation of why Lord Mark is staying at her aunt's home, Lancaster Gate, Densher exclaims, "You stayed for thinking of—Venice?" (388). Densher clearly cannot utter Milly's name and so we see

that then the desire of/for/in Venice overlaps and is complicated by the desire of/for/to Milly which is fraught with disappointment, betrayal, and silences.

Milly herself disappears from the text even as Kate and Densher discuss her. They Orientalize Milly in that they speak for her—the Orient is not allowed to speak for itself—and use her to talk about themselves. Her letter to Merton Densher which arrives posthumously in London could have made up for her enforced silences toward the end of the novel but she does not get the last word, though she tries hard to do so. Kate incinerates the letter before either of them reads it and Densher chooses not to rescue it from the fire. What is curious about this episode is that they talk about the outside of the letter—the envelope, the handwriting—but do not dare to speculate extensively what the contents of the letter other than her bequest to Densher might be. This is not to say that they do not imagine what it says but instead of coming face to face with it, they choose the former course of action and silence Milly.

What James's text reveals is that Milly, variously imagined as Oriental within an already Orientalized city Venice, as Other because she is no longer able to speak for herself or have a viable history that matters, and as a rich yet mysterious source of capital that may be exploited, embodies the anxieties of the other characters and forces them to reassess their desires. As Said reminds us, Orientalism has less to do with the Orient than it has to do with the world we live in (12).

If James was leery of writing about places he had not visited or cultures he did not know much about, then his decision of making

Venice the scene of intrigue and having Milly stand in for the Orient—and the Orient is always feminized and represented as female—has a consistent logic of its own. Why does he choose to have an American heiress take its place? I think there are at least two reasons for this. The first has to do with James's participation in trying to articulate the process of defining national identity. Deploying Orientalism to talk about non-Asian problems perhaps is how James avoids talking about the East; but nonetheless the presence of the United States in the Pacific and the British in India and other colonies made considerations of the Orient and the Other inevitable. While his American compatriots were looking south and west (to Cuba and the Caribbean as well as Hawaii and the Philippines) at the turn into the twentieth century, James's American heiresses were looking east: as in real life, the shoring up the depleted coffers of British and European aristocracy through marriage to rich Americans was not an unusual occurrence. James sees this relationship as being fraught with tension: the American Girl Abroad was supposed to define American spirit and individualism but instead she is the one who is exploited by the Old World. In his transatlantic milieu, appropriating the discourses of Orientalism would then assist him in his fictional explorations of the condition of American women in Europe.

Another answer may be that American girls are truly Other for James since he spends most of his writing career explicating them and still they continue to fascinate him. And at this late stage in his writing career, his exercises in representing American womanhood—the trajectory of Daisy Miller, Isabel Archer, and Milly Theale comes to mind—allow him to remember and resurrect

women who were important to him: in this case, his cousin Minny Temple and his friend Constance Fenimore Woolson. One the companion of his youth, the other, his confidante in his middle years, together they inform the novel and in Milly Theale, they live again. In considering the difficulties of their lives, James finds ways to express their discontent and joy and in doing so, gives them, as Psalm 55 intones, the wings of doves so they may fly away and be at rest.

Notes

Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Henry James, Joseph Conrad, Ford Madox Ford International Conference (University of Kent, 1999) and to the Department of English, University of Denver (2001).

1. The title of this novel is from Psalm 55, verse 6: "And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest" (King James Version).

2. I use the word "clever" in an unflattering Jamesian sense. The film, which has been the biggest box office hit of all the James film adaptations with a domestic ticket revenue of 13.7 million dollars (Bousquet 234), has had a mixed reception by literary scholars, mostly because of the liberties the film takes with the novel. However, Ruth Bernard Yeazell's "Sex, Lies, and Motion Pictures" discusses the strengths of this film by arguing that it "is both a powerful film and a visual tribute to the late James that finds its own language for some of the deepest tensions in the novel ... boldly calling attention to its power to make visible what Jamesian narrative characteristically leaves unarticulated" (87-8).

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