

# Kate and Milly's Manners in Henry James's *The Wings of the Dove*

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## Abstract

This article discusses women's manners as seen in Henry James's *The Wings of the Dove*. *The Wings of the Dove* is one of James's work which becomes substantial and important novels on the international theme in the early of twentieth century. The women who will be observed are Kate Croy and Milly Theale as the representative of the nineteenth century women. The purpose of this discussion is to know Kate's and Milly's manners toward their lover, Merton Densher, because of the background which molded them. To come to this purpose it will be examined the factor that form their manners that is the influence of their family circle or social condition around them. It can also be traced back from historical point of view that though most American people originally came from Europe; they developed a new set of social value after settling in America, as described in Henry James's Novel *The wings of the Dove*.

**Key words:** *women, manner, historical point of view*

## Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas tentang manner para wanita yang ada dalam Novel Henry James yang berjudul *The Wings of the Dove*. *The Wings of the Dove* merupakan salah satu karya Henry James yang bertema internasional yaitu tentang wanita di awal abad 19. Tujuan dari pembahasan ini adalah untuk mengetahui manner Kate Croy dan Milly Theale terhadap Merton Densher, yang disebabkan oleh adanya pengaruh faktor latar belakang keluarga maupun keadaan sosial masyarakat disekitar mereka yang menjadi faktor utama dalam membentuk pribadi mereka. Jika di lihat dari sisi histori; sebagian besar orang Amerika adalah pendatang dari Eropa yang kemudian mengembangkan nilai-nilai sosial yang baru, seperti yang dideskripsikan dalam novel Henry James *The Wings of the Dove*.

**Kata Kunci:** *wanita, manner, sudut pandang sejarah*

## A. Introduction

American is different from British; though they are people of the same origin. Americans are immigrants from various countries; consequently they brought manners of their own. Most of them were immigrants from Europe particularly Great Britain; France; Germany and the Netherland. In *Forging The American Character*; Hall stated that "American begins in Europe. The American today is the descendant of immigrant; most of

whom embarked upon their pioneering venture from Great Britain and the continent of Europe.<sup>1</sup>. Consequently; American social manners is the result of intergration of several cultures of immigrants. On the contrary the British social manners is pure since they were not immigrants but native to the area.

In Victorian era; women's characters were affected by puritan ideas which still maintain the conventional values; in order to be considered as a respectable women; they were demanded to have "*stricter marality; a good conduct and decent language.*"<sup>2</sup> The pride of women make their actions had to be in accordance with their society. For them; to be in harmony with their society is more important than to do things which is uncommon.

Since innovations of the nineteenth century had a significant impact on the women's life . They began to think of using their spare time to work outside their home."*New occupations opened up to women; especially in offices and departement stores; while the number of teaching positions in the public schools increased.*"<sup>3</sup> There was lesser restriction from society for women to do various tasks. They kept on steadily; not half-hearted when they have set their intention on something and they would continue doing it though there were many obstacles they had to face. There were also individualistic; believes that everybody has the same chance to be successful; such as getting a job or even choosing a future husband<sup>4</sup>. Though the women had the rights to choose their own husband, but there is still their parents interference. They intended to look for a man for their daughters. The men who became their chosen gentlemen must have a lot of money and a good position in society.

Kate Croy is a beautiful; charming; young English girl and a daughter of an improverished English social adventure. After her mother's death and her father's bankrupcy; she decides to stay with her rich and domineering aunt Mrs. Maud Lowder in Lancaster Gate where the rich and aristocrats live. Living in Lancaster Gate also means that Kate has to adapt herself to the society and new values that she has never known before. Conventional rules; good manners and materialistic pride are the values of

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<sup>1</sup> Hall, James, W.,ed.,1985 Forging The American Character, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winstons,Inc.

<sup>2</sup> G. Trevelyan, English Social History: A Survey of Six Centuries, Chaucer to Queen Victoria, Edition illustrated, Publisher Read Books, 2011

<sup>3</sup> Frazier, R Thomas, *The Private Side of American History: Readings in Everyday Life: Since 1865*, Published September 28th 1999 by Ingram

<sup>4</sup> Spring, Joel, 1985, American Education: An Introduction to Social and Political Aspects, New York: Longman Inc.

lancaster gate's society; and whether she likes it or not; she must adapt herself to that situation.

Mrs. Lowder is willing to take care of her beautiful niece in her house only as a potential asset for the family and society. Powers affirmed that “ *Kate has been indoctrinated from an early age by her father to consider herself as marketable item; he has impressed on her conscience the idea that her duty is cash in on herself at Lancaster Gate for the general benefit of her family*”<sup>5</sup>. It is a burden for Kate to carry out such a duty; that is she is expected to please her family in term of material things. Consequently she can not be herself; for example when Kate wants to get married with Merton Densher a poor journalist, her aunt did not allow her because Densher is penniless man. She thinks that Kate should marry a man of her choice and that being a wife of a rich man as what she said “ *I can do the best for her and I've my idea the best*” (TWD, P.65)

Though Kate's life is not really independent, her life is full of love and affection that are expressed by her father and aunt who really care for her. It makes her feel stronger and secure but at the same time she has a heavy responsible that is she must think of her family's reputation. She considers that loyalty to her family is more important than her private life. For this reason, she has no courage to do anything which is contradictory to her family's desire.

Kate's attitude is also influenced by her educational background that she gets a private education at home from her aunt Maud. Beside reading and writing, another important subject which taught by her aunt is about the society's value. She is lead towards an understanding of Lancaster Gate's values that emphasizes more on materialism and conventional rules. In materialism it is applied that “ *that everyone was everywhere-nobody was anywhere*”(TWD, p.100) which means that no one can get into Lancaster Gate's society if they do not have money, and on conventional rules, for examples ; a marriage should be based on fortune and parental arrangement, another everyone in the society is even demanded to have modesty of language and conduct and stricter morality.

As a result Kate's knowledge of the society's values is limited only to the knowledge of Lancaster Gate's values. Kate has a narrow insight, nevertheless she can

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<sup>5</sup> Powers, Lyall H., 1970, Henry James: An Introduction and Interpretation, New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, Inc.

accept it deeply because of her brilliance, as Densher admires: “*all women but you are stupid. How can I look another?*” ( TWD p.220)

On the contrary, Milly’s circle is very limited and uneducated and her life is equipped with the wealth. She has no family who takes care of and protects her so she feels hungry for love and affection and it makes her feel weak and insecure and this condition makes her vulnerable to woman exploiters, as Powers stated “ *The combination of features, especially her genial gentleness, her extremes of wealth, and her lack of her family makes particularly vulnerable prey to the predators with whom she comes into contact in Europe.*”

Living without family or anyone else causes her lonely and she bestirs to face her life by herself. In other words Milly has never been associated with people so she lacks of such knowledge about people’s characters then consequently she also lacks of experience in facing people.

Her loneliness urges her to go outside the house to look for companions. By travelling abroad to Switzerland, England and other countries she hopes that she will gain many new acquaintances in the new places she visits. Since she is not trained to know people’s characters, in associating with new companions she always has a positive view about everything and considers people’s thought and people’s deed as good. It is described when Milly is in London which has its center in Lancaster Gate, she is invited and introduced to Mrs. Lowder’s friends. Everythings about them is full of luxury such as their sophisticated costumes, their voices that sound like an old fashioned instrument.

Milly has never associated with people from such society as Lancaster Gate’s so she is not acquainted with that situation. Her lack of such experience makes her look awkward when she is in Lancaster gate’s dinner party. It is also supported by her condition of not being aducated as expressed “ *had now in fact to recognize that an education in the occult had begun for her the day she left New York with Mildred*” (TWD,P.76)

Milly is not knowledgeable to understand the fixed society values as Kate experienced. Milly “*has no nature sense of social values, doesn’t in the least understand (the) differences or knows who or what’s what*” (TWD, P.219) so she has no insights. The consequence of her never associating and her lack of education causes her circle to be very limited and it moldes her to be an innocent.

## B. Discussion

Since Kate and Milly come from a different family and educational background, they have developed a different way of thinking. Their mental treatment toward her lover, Merton Densher, is also affected by this condition.

Kate is in love with Merton Densher, a poor London journalist and their relationship is very harmonious. She has a beautiful appearance, (like any other English girl) “*had a special strong beauty which particularly show in the evening dress*”( TWD, p.98). This makes Densher keep on loving her. Kate herself loves Densher because of his charm, his brilliance and his rich insight. She thinks that “*he had rendered her in special the sovereign service of making that element real*” (TWD, p.47). though her aunt Maud disagree with her love affair and refuses Densher as Kate’s suitor, Kate still maintains her relationship with Densher. Kate is not afraid if her aunt knows about and breaks up her relation with Densher, as Kate says “*I am not afraid of the inquisition. If she asks if there is anything definite between us I know perfectly what I shall say*”(TWD, p.74).

Though Kate has got a luxurious life of Lancaster gate, she still thinks so much about her fortune and it is as an effect of her aunt Maud’s indoctrination of materialism. This attitude is a contradictory to her love for Densher since she knows that certainly she would decide marrying Densher, she becomes poor and dishonourable. As a person who always value things in the term of money, she has no desire to be like Miss Miriam Condrip, her sister who becomes poor because she marries a poor man.

It is a dilemma for Kate that is on one she does not want to give Densher up and on the other side she wants to be rich and honourable. In order to be rich Kate exploits her lover Densher, as her chief instrument to get Milly’s million as Kate stated “*I used, for the purpose, what I have. You are what I have of the most precious, and you are therefore what I used most*”(TWD, p124).

Milly’s relationship with Densher is considered as a profitable chance by Kate, but aunt Maud lower thinks of this relationship as a good chance for her to end Kate’s relationship with Densher and urges Kate to have a better relationship with the rich. Kate who perceives Milly’s decaying health finds an opportunity to get Milly’s fortune through Densher. She concocts her plan of asking Densher to pretend loving and then marrying Milly. Her hope is that after Milly’s death, a poor Densher will inherit Milly’s money and Kate herself will marry that rich widower and enjoy the fortune. To realize her plan, at the

beginning Kate cheats Densher, she does not tell about the scheme clearly, but only asks him to please and console Milly by the reason that his attention can make Milly happy and it postpones her death. *“For all that, if she’s stricken, she must see swept away. I shouldn’t care for her if she hadn’t so much” Kate very simply said*” (TWD, p.214).

Knowing that real scheme, Densher is faced with a choice between making Milly happy by pretending to love her which means ‘life’ for her and another being honest to Milly which means ‘death’ for her. For the sake of his love to Kate, finally Densher agrees to Kate’s plan is expressed *“I’ll tell any lie you want, any idea your idea requires.”* (TWD, p.294)

Kate takes Densher lightly as a man who can be hoped to fulfill the the financial standard of Lancaster Gate, as a proof she gives a suggestion to Densher, the man she loves and should respect to rip off Milly’s wealth in order be richer, Kate’s suitor and then member of Lancaster gate’s society.

As matter of fact Kate will have much money as well as a good position if she grants Aunt Maud’s request that is to marry a man of her aunt’s choice, Lord Mark an English Nobleman. Her Aunt Maud promises Kate that she is going to give her wealth, but only the condition that she marries Lord Mark and breaks her affair with Densher. Kate si not interested in her aunt’s offer because she does have no feeling to Lord Mark and the most important reason is that she can not escape from her aunt’s pressure if she marries Lord Mark. Kate is execeptionally and completely under the pressure of her family as well as her informal education on materialism. She thinks of money as power, a great power which influence her attitude towards her lover. This distinguishes Kate of Milly.

Basically Milly’s characteristic which can be observed clearly is her innocence like any other of James’s American girls. Dorothea Krook in her article *Milly’s Densher’s Ordeal of Consciouness found in a book The Wings of the Dove-Henry James* edited by Crowley and Hooks says that *“ what we perceive at once and with the least difficult is that it is her American innocent which the place lays Milly open to the rapacity and ruthlessness”* ( p.538)

Milly’s mind is only occupied by her taught of Densher. Loves makes her happy and feel alive. She is willing to sacrifice everything she possesses for the sake of love, including her fortune. A good position, title and money are nothing if they are compared to her love for Densher. As decribed *“The romance for her, yet once more, would be a sit there for ever, through all her time, as in a fortress; and the idea became an image of never going down,*

*of remaining aloft in the divine dustless air, where she would hear but the plash ( splash ) of the water against stone* “(TWD. P. 266) Her love towards Densher is so strong that when Lord Mark, a man with high position- proposes her to be his wife she rejects him. She does not realize that Lord Mark’s proposal actually to bargain his title for her fortune that is to get Milly’s money and replace it with his title. Unfortunately, Milly does not accept Lord Mark’s proposal because everything about him boring.

Milly is so inexperienced to analyze Densher’s character. Generally a rich woman would observe the man who likes or loves her in other words she has to know whether her lover really loves her. She does not realize that actually Densher is only interested chiefly in her wealth. She is convinced that Densher’s love and kindness to her is true, as said *“That’s what will be charming for me and what I’m sure he really wants of me”* (TWD.p.242)

Milly always respects Densher and the most important thing is that she still loves him no matter what he does and she does not care whatever people think about him although she knows well that Densher is a man who has nothing *“has no private means, and no respect of any, has no income, and no ability”* (TWD.p.124), Milly still considers him as an exceptional man. Milly is a good lover and she shows it when she gives attention towards the man she loves by asking him about his job, *“she added with a change: And now your book.”*(TWD.p.320-321). She does not have a knowledge in writing and understand what journalism is, but she keeps on trying to know Densher’s job. It shows that Milly is curious to know anything that related to her lover, wants him to share his experience with her.

Because of her true love Milly will not cause her lover a lot of trouble. Milly is too confident about herself and thinks that the problem she faces- her illness- is solvable. For that reason she does not want anybody to know that she is ill. She never asks anyone, even her lover to help her when she is in difficulties. In order to make her lover happy, she assures him that she is perfectly healthy.

Milly never thinks that she will be betrayed by her dearest friend, Kate.

She may also know from the beginning that Kate and Densher are real lovers, but she makes her selfdeceptive theory that Densher is not loved by Kate so that Milly herself can love Densher. The climax of the ordeal of her consciousness comes when *“she turns her face to the wall”* (TWD.p.332) knowing that Kate and Densher have been engaged all

the while. Her ordeal is not caused only by the betrayal of her friends; she knows that her illusion of love is mercilessly destroyed by severe reality. But she gets over her suffering, and when she dies she presents Densher with her money for the sake of her true love for him. Milly's generous and beautiful act brings tragedy over Kate. Though Kate is the anti-heroine and the rival of Milly, her eminence as a character is very clear. She occupies a predominant place in her relationship both with Milly and Densher. Milly is deeply impressed by her great beauty and her eminence, and seeks for her friendship. Densher is her passionate lover, and admires her "talent for life". Densher cannot but obey Kate's order to be Milly's lover for the moment. She is very confident of the success of their "game" to get dying Milly's fortune through Densher to secure their future. Kate succeeds in so far as Milly leaves Densher her money. But after Milly's death, Kate's relationship with Densher changes. Densher is in love with dead Milly and needs no one else. Kate's talent for life is defeated by Milly's passionate desire "to live" through the fulfillment of love. Once Kate realizes her own defeat, she retreats from Densher's presence. Kate's fall from eminence to defeat, and her keen recognition of it are fairly called tragical. The *Wings of the Dove* is a tragedy composed of Milly desire "to live", the ordeal of her consciousness in face of severe reality, and her sad triumph after death over Kate's eminence and her talent for life.

Based on above, it can be known that a family circle background is a factor that can affect one's manners as seen in *The wings of the Dove*. It is described that the female main character, Kate and Milly has an experience and knowledge they received is obtained from the experience they have which is influenced by their each family circle. Unlike innocent Milly, Kate is more experienced in associating with people.

From *The wings of the Dove*, it is described that a family circle and social background can influence Kate and Milly's manners, especially their manners toward their lover, Merton Densher. They have a different manners. Kate's mind is more dominated by fortune, she wants to be rich and honourable in her life, on the other hand Milly dedicates more her life to 'love that she never has before', that is love above money. At last, both Kate and Milly lose their lover. If Kate becomes a victim of her corrupted view, Milly becomes a victim of that love itself because of her innocent.

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