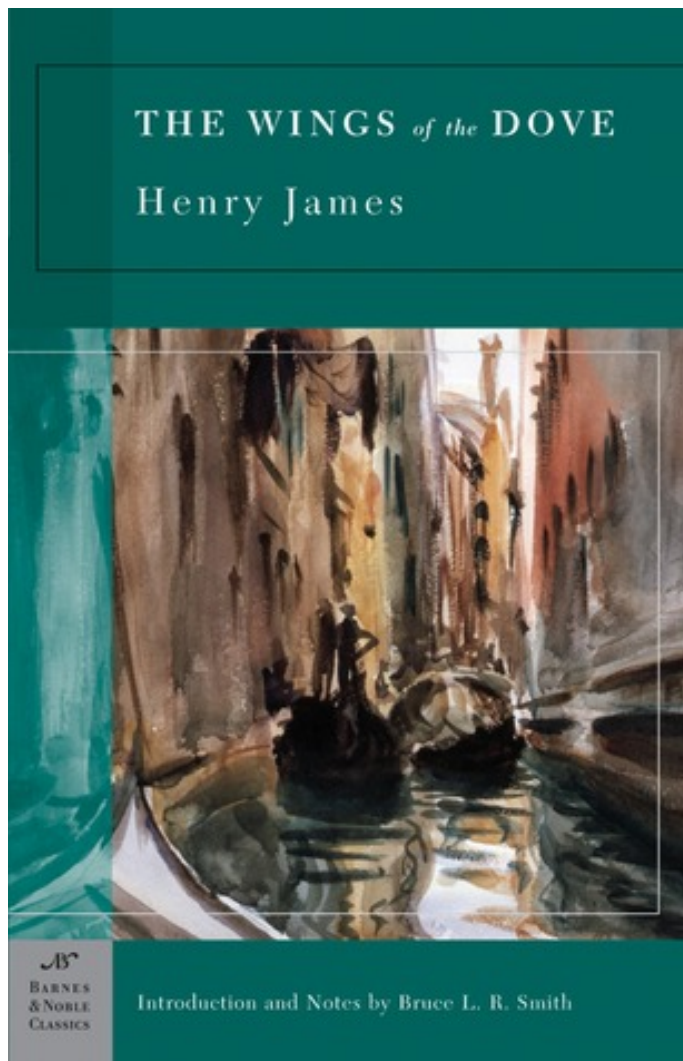

Henry James

The Wings of the Dove



Title: The Wings of the Dove

Author: Henry James

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Description

One of three masterpieces from **Henry James's** final, "major" phase, *The Wings of the Dove* dramatizes the conflict between nineteenth-century values and twentieth-century passions. Born to wealth and privilege, Kate Croy's mother threw it all away to marry a penniless opium addict. After her mother's death, Kate is offered an opportunity to return to the opulent lifestyle her mother gave up—on one condition. Kate must renounce the man she loves: the witty, good-looking, but poor, Merton Densher. Reluctantly agreeing, Kate finds herself becoming friends with "the world's richest orphan," Millie Theale. When Kate learns that Millie is dying, she devises a plan of dizzying possibility for herself and Merton that should solve all their problems, but instead leads them down a path strewn with tragic, unexpected consequences.

First published in 1902, this rich and intriguing novel has lost none of its fascination and relevance a century later.

Insightful reviews

carl theaker:

HJ must have been paid by the comma as there are often 8 or so in a sentence. This is a story of nuance, 50 or so pages dedicated to dissecting a thought, or question of who knows who, or what a simple gesture means at a party. Took some getting used to the style, but believe it or not the last 100 pages were a good read.

Maybe since it was written in 1902, Henry James, and has the classic stamp, I didn't expect, and then I was impressed, at the conniving plans of the women.

(See my Ambassadors review for the James cumulative effect)

Callie: I consider myself of slightly above average intelligence when it comes to readin' and writin' but I couldn't comprehend about 75% of the sentences in this book. I probably could have if I'd forced myself to slow down and reread, but I don't like doing that. I just plowed ahead and luckily I can still get the gist of what James is saying. If you want my opinion you could cut that 75% and improve this novel greatly. Every fourth sentence is all he needed in the first place. Well, we can't all be Hemingway, although I must say I'll take the staccato flat three word sentence fragments every time over Jamesian obfuscation.. That being said, the plot and its unfolding was brilliant. Good thing I didn't know beforehand what happens or I wouldn't have stuck with it, but because I didn't he kept me wondering and surprised throughout. (Now stop here if you haven't read this novel because I'm about to ruin it for you. I will discuss how it unfolds and you don't want to know this stuff if you are planning on ever reading the book.) The other thing about HJ is that he is a sly sonuva because he gets you to really like Kate and Densher at the outset of the novel, and you're rooting for them, but they turn out to be liars. Densher's not so bad, but Kate is a shady lady. She is always one or two steps ahead of

Densher, too. These people are very good at NOT saying things and very delicately talking around and around things so as not to ever implicate themselves. Just hinting all the time. They are none too ethical. HJ clearly did not have a very sanguine view of human nature. I think this is the third novel I've read by him and his characters all always turn out to be dirtbags, for lack of a better word. In this case, Densher bothered me least because he at least had the good sense to feel bad about what he was doing. I wonder what James wanted me to think of Milly? I didn't particularly love her much either, even though she was the only one who wasn't trying to play an angle. I couldn't abandon my early warmth toward Kate and Densher, even though they just got progressively more deceptive and disappointing as the novel continued. I never wanted Densher to fall for Milly. This would be a fun book for a reading group because people might have different allegiances and you could get into a debate about that. In fact, this book is packed with stuff that would be fun to discuss.

I wish I could give it more stars because I realize modern library picked it as one of the 100 greatest books of the twentieth century and I realize that he's quite brilliant in how he pulls it off, but I am compelled to rate it based on how much I ENJOYED it and because he's not big on clarity well that really put a damper on it for me.

Yulia: Well, I finished it and I didn't even skim one passage, though there were countless sentences that, no matter how many times I read them at whatever angle and no matter how sincere my desire to understand, had absolutely no meaning to them whatsoever. Often this was caused not by subtlety or for suspense, but but because of simple misuse of pronouns. (Who's thinking this of whom? Ah, never mind. I must have an inferior intellect to care for such details.)

Others are merely clotted arteries of metalanguage, suggesting, it was as though, somehow, upon reflection, one could surmise the undeniable but fleeting truth of what she had guessed and know it was how she had been meant to understand it all along.

Other passages, however lofty their intention, remind you that James is writing of an experience he himself has never had but has only considered from every possible theoretical guise. So as not to spoil anything, I won't mention what it is (and who in this book ever mentions anything directly, except at parties where anyone can overhear?), but suffice it to say, much of his ability to keep so much on a pedestal results from his having lived so pinched a life.

The rest of the novel is characterized by constant evasion, unceasing fogs, and unverifiable rumors. If this were a Harlan Coben novel, it would be titled *Don't Tell Her*. This is most aggravating in Milly's visit to the great doctor, where nothing as tawdry as a medical exam takes place, or in book 8 chapter 1 where Aunt Maud and Susan Stringham discuss Susan's own meeting with the great doctor, with discretion best suited for those in a witness protection program.

And may I ask, if James is such a master at characterization, why must he clobber the reader by introducing characters as representing something larger than themselves (Merton as the embodiment of intellect, Kate of life, and Susan of culture) and then fail to support such claims with the characters' own decisions and behaviors? In fact, how can the greatest literary critics

not be bothered by how every James character speaks with the same voice and possesses the same ever-comprehending and analytical mind that considers all nuances of each sentence in mere seconds (over the course of several pages) before coming up with precisely the right thing to say?

Yet, despite the repeated reminders of what is so exceptional about the lead characters, why can I not understand why Merton is so alluring to Kate and Milly or why Kate if she is so beautiful and brilliant, is courted by only two men in London? What did Isabel Archer (of *Portrait of a Lady*) have that Kate lacked? It's one thing if it were made a point that others were interested but were kept away by Aunt Maud, who had decided for Kate that she should only consider Lord Mark. But even if this is the case, Kate has the freedom to roam about the city and meet whomever she likes (as she did Merton), so the Rapunzel theory doesn't quite fit.

I just don't know what to make of this book. It frustrated me so intensely and its supposedly brilliant ending was so out of character--for Merton because he'd do anything for Isabel, for Isabel because she was never the jealous type--yet the shocking last line was also so ploddingly built up to for hundreds of pages that it was hardly a dramatic slap, that all I can feel right now is that the movie was much more satisfying and fixed many of the problems in the book. There, I said it.

P.S. I do respect James for having admitted disappointment in this book and thinking it didn't live up to what he had wanted it to be in terms of characterization and plot, so some credit must be given to him for that.

I wrote to a friend, "I don't think I'll ever be one of those James fans who think his writing genius and are blind to his impossible evasions and taking ten pages to convey what can be expressed in one, but I do find myself now able to get through the dull passages so I can appreciate the moments when things click together. And there is a mental challenge (worthy or not) in figuring out what the heck he's trying to say. So I enjoy putting up with him--for now. That said, I do need frequent breaks from him and alternate a chapter of his with several from a book with sparse and clean writing. Reading him is akin to going antiquing: you can find very valuable pieces among lots of junk hidden beneath decades of dust. And I may want to bring a piece home, but I'm not inspired to cramp my home with these purchases or stop dusting so as to romanticize my apartment. How's that for praise?"

Rachel: i've got a specific thing for Henry James. whilst I learn *The Golden Bowl* in grad tuition and enjoyed it, my professor proposal i used to be crazy. i assume many scholars locate him dense and confusing. yet i admire his style. i like the careful, layered characterizations, the particular descriptions, and how James' novels circulate more often than not from inner dialogue. His artistry is in telling the tale in the course of the realization of the characters. I easily love it!p.s. i locate it humorous {and revealing} that his novels translated to the motion picture display are R rated. Or very sensual. Gotta love the undercurrent of Victorian sensuality--in the books the untold is the told.

Beth: there's a worthy tale hidden someplace during this novel, however it is obscured by means of the words. and i am not only touching on James's convoluted sentence structure, even supposing that definitely is denser and extra opaque than in his prior works. much more daunting is his obdurate refusal to relate something except what a given personality is pondering and perceiving; and because the entire characters are busy deceiving themselves and one another, the language in their recommendations and speech is rarely clear.

Delaney: Why used to be he thought of an excellent stylist? His past due type is just horrible. i lately learn experience and Sensibility, the reproduction of which had reviews within the again via nice authors. the 1st remark is through Henry James written in 1905, while he could were in his "great" overdue style. the fashion of his remark is as infuriating as that during his final 3 "masterpieces." If the cause of constructing this kind used to be to painting the nuances of his characters' consciousness, then why may he use it to touch upon one other author's work?! i feel it much more likely that he felt better in confounding the reader and that students have praised this accomplishment for a comparably elitist reason. try out Edith Wharton in its place who wrote approximately comparable subject matters through the related period of time yet who advised an excellent tale with attractive prose, that is what sturdy literature may still be.

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