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## The “Time-Values” of *The Wings of the Dove*

By Benjamin Mercer

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Merton Densher’s pocket watch only merits a few mentions throughout the course of *The Wings of the Dove*, but Henry James nonetheless establishes that for Densher the device is not so much accessory as appendage. Early on in the book, as Densher thinks ahead to his first interview with Maud Lowder—who roundly disapproves of him as a prospective husband for her niece Kate Croy—he revolves over precisely how he wants to dazzle the imperious woman:

He wouldn’t grovel perhaps—he wasn’t quite ready for that; but he would be patient, ridiculous, reasonable, unreasonable, and above all deeply diplomatic. He would be clever with all his cleverness—which he now shook hard, as he sometimes shook his poor dear shabby old watch, to start it up again. (83–84)

Here, he handles an element of his personality, “his cleverness,” just as he would an object he carries on his person. The contrivance has in its advanced age acquired a measure of trustworthiness as a possession, even as it has demanded the physical co-operation of its owner: ensuring that the apparatus is even remotely accurate requires him to give it a periodic shake. He must keep time for the watch just as much as the watch keeps time for him. A couple hundred pages later, Kate rather coldly likens the American heiress Milly Theale—who has developed or is at least in grave danger of developing an unspecified terminal malady—to Densher’s quietly expiring watch:

Yes, she’s so wonderful. She won’t show for that, any more than your watch, when it’s about to stop for want of being wound up, gives you convenient notice or shows as different from usual. She won’t die, she won’t live, by inches. She won’t smell, as it were, of drugs. She won’t taste, as it were, of medicine. No one will know. (284–85)

Kate reiterates the faultiness of Densher’s watch, casting it as entirely discreet in its malfunctioning.

And yet apparently the watch continues to do its job. It enters the picture as, among other things, an emblem of Densher’s relative poverty, so when he checks the time again in Book Eighth the reader can only assume the Fleet Street journalist hasn’t sprung for a new machine. Gazing out over the Grand Canal, pausing while on “a walk replete with impressions to which he responded with force,” Densher reflects on the “special smothered soreness” (370, 373) of his pent-up desire for Kate. A glance at his timepiece is what finally snaps him out of this trance: “By the time he looked at his watch he had been for a quarter of an hour at this post of observation and reflexion” (374). His musings are not apart from time but basically *of* it—he’s able to mark how long he’s stood stock-still at this particular “post,” so it must be assumed that he had eyed his watch before these moments of “observation and reflexion” as well. In other words, the “quarter of an hour” estimate suggests Densher’s line of thought can only have been bracketed on both ends by consultations of the clock. Later, during some precious private moments with Kate in the “great social saloon” of the Piazza San Marco, she “asked him the hour”: “‘Oh only twelve-ten’—he had looked at his watch. ‘We’ve taken but thirteen minutes; we’ve time yet’” (382). Tellingly, it is Kate who relies on Densher for “the hour”—even as she knows full well his device’s tendency to lapse without warning—not once calling into question his reading and in fact using it to determine that at once they “must go toward” the party from which they’ve detached. Since the chapter ends with the secretly affianced couple “suggest[ing] nothing worse . . . than a pair of the children of a supercivilised age making the best of an awkwardness” (391), and thus eliciting no particular suspicion from the Venice companions they’ve now rejoined, Densher’s watch, here under constant and close inspection from three minutes before noon, must not be too terribly off. Presumably, then, he’s been quite diligent all book long about rattling it “to start it up again.”

Writing in 1903, a year after the publication of *The Wings of the Dove*, Georg Simmel noted “the universal diffusion of pocket watches” (412) as a defining feature of the big-city life of the period. For Simmel, the watch made portable the “stable and impersonal time schedule” (413) that was increasingly integral to social and economic relations in the urban sphere. A citizen of bustling London who works nocturnally, “pass[ing] the best hours of each night at the office of his newspaper” (WD 63), Densher has to an appreciable extent internalized his own brand of “impersonal,” external time. He appears to think and act according to it, and in a way he has even come to embody it, as demonstrated by the scattered descriptions of his high-maintenance timepiece—a much more telling presence in the book than, say, Lambert Strether’s in *The Ambassadors* (in that later novel’s opening chapter, the man checks his watch reflexively before finally “look[ing] at the hour without seeing it” [66]). And Densher’s in-tuneness with time becomes a matter more pressing than merely one of his self-definition as a modern metropolitan. Densher—whose “want of means . . . was really the great ugliness” and who remains unable “to believe he should ever be rich” (74)—nonetheless emerges as a value (a word James himself very frequently uses) in the novel’s two most prominent schemes, conceived by Kate and by Maud and Susan Stringham, his presence effectively becoming a means of “buying” time. Throughout *The Wings of the Dove*, James marks time quite closely, aligning

Densher in particular with and showing him as having privileged access to a form of countable, almost palpable time and eventually positioning him at the center of a sort of time economy that only winds up corrupting the very thing it's meant to circulate.

Time has not generally been a major concern in the voluminous secondary literature on James's fiction, though some of the criticism that touches directly on the topic casts the author as more interested in a private time out of sync with public time than in the ways those two types of time interrelate. Deidre Lynch has observed, broadly, that as a psychological novelist James, "[s]crupulous about the representation of consciousness, . . . is determined to do justice to . . . subjective time's wild variances from clock time" (341). Such a "subjective time," at odds with the uniform intervals ever more important to the functioning of early-twentieth-century public life, can be seen in James's 1908 story "The Jolly Corner." In that narrative, the protagonist, Spencer Brydon, stalking his now-unoccupied childhood home in the small hours in pursuit of a spectral other self, "looked again at his watch, saw what had become of his time-values (he had taken hours for minutes—not, as in other tense situations, minutes for hours) and the strange air of the streets was but the weak, the sullen flush of a dawn in which everything was still locked up" (515). "Hours for minutes," "minutes for hours"—the interchange of units that are not outwardly seen to be interchangeable—is the kind of chiasmic construction that Sharon Cameron sees as so important to James's depiction of thinking, with its signal acrobatics of manipulation, the linguistic reversal emphasizing precisely the kind of time that the watch fails to keep. The final chapter of *The Wings of the Dove* features a similar description of a subjective sense of time passing, although, tellingly, the words "minutes" and "hours" are absent from it. Densher is said to have "felt the lapse of the weeks, before the day of Kate's mounting of his stair, almost swingingly rapid. They contained for him the contradiction that, whereas periods of waiting are supposed in general to keep the time slow, it was the wait, actually, that made the pace trouble him. The secret of that anomaly, to be plain, was that he was aware of how, while the days melted, something rare went with them" (532).<sup>1</sup> Nicola Bradbury notes in passing that when Densher finds himself turned away from seeing Milly in Venice, "[t]hree weeks pass by full of such empty forms: they are noted in one page. But when Densher is turned away from the palazzo, time, as well as setting, atmosphere, character itself, changes. Densher's three minutes on the steps are measured exactly" (*Later* 114). Indeed, there is a good deal more "measuring exactly" in the book as a whole than has generally been acknowledged, with the process of counting out the time going well beyond Densher's mental calculation of intervals from glances at his pocket watch.

*The Wings of the Dove* is, broadly speaking, a book of appointments—most often ones that wind up being interrupted or postponed—in which each character feels, in one way or another, the pressure of time. The very opening words of the book, "She waited, Kate Croy, for her father to come in" (31), in which the full subject gets deferred until after a verb descriptive of agonized stasis, establish that delay takes thematic precedence. Throughout the plot that does eventually unfold Kate and Densher must temporize, stealing moments here and there for their clandestine conferences. Meanwhile, Milly, as well as everyone who surrounds her, is keenly aware of her finitude. Time is of particular essence for the heiress, who expresses her desire to live to the fullest while she can but also appears to grow increasingly absent from the measurable present of the novel. The narrator often marks time in reference both

to her schedule and her impressions—there is, for instance, the “ten mere minutes” (194) of her first meeting with the eminent London doctor Sir Luke Strett, and one “strange sense” of hers is said to last “as usual . . . but fifty seconds” (213), as if, oddly, that were the set duration of any such feeling—but the palazzo she rents in Venice represents a prescribed retreat from the apparently noxious current of life in London. Strother B. Purdy observes that, there, Milly ensconces herself in the local splendors of the past:

The palace in which Milly lives is a combination of the Gothic with Venetian and Sansovino’s imaginations; the *canali* are those of Guardi and Canaletto; the weather that of Tiepolo. This is nothing so magical as turning under a bridge and meeting a gondola filled with eighteenth-century revelers, but it is not the less time-warping for that. (88)<sup>2</sup>

Purdy writes that James “does not show his characters merging with the past here, or some ‘spirit’ of the past impinging upon them; rather the past is *accessible*,” but even amid this milieu Densher is the one most readily accessible by the outside-world present, specifically his newspaper, with its up-to-the-minute imperatives. Though he eventually sees it as an option to ignore such a summons, he’s nonetheless conscious that “[h]is manager might wire that he was wanted” (WD 428). It is, then, the embattled Densher—whom Leo Bersani sees as “the central dramatic character of *The Wings of the Dove*, not merely because Milly tends to be rather a pale figure, but because it is the state of Densher’s soul . . . around which the moral action of the novel is built” (137)—who is most consistently situated *in* time.

The narrator’s recording of time, which takes place regularly throughout the novel, has special resonance in the scenes in which the action, fully or partially, appears to be routed through the consciousness of Densher, as one of what James, exploring the internal mechanics of his own method in his 1909 preface, calls his “registers or ‘reflectors’” (WD 24) working “in arranged alternation” (25). In many of these moments, it becomes unclear who, exactly, is measuring Densher’s cognition, the inveterate clock-watcher himself or the narrator closely reporting his thoughts—or possibly both. Near the end of the first meeting he has alone with Milly, at the urging of Kate, Densher and Milly agree to go out for a drive; she tells her servant, “In ten minutes” (310), before leaving the room to dress for the occasion, leaving Densher behind to await her return. “[H]e stood there alone. Alone he remained for three minutes more—remained with several very living little matters to think about,” “little matters” that might well have a life—and thus a lifetime, a duration—outside of his mind (311). Densher continues “ingeniously discriminating,” betraying his reluctance about becoming a participant in the plan that Kate has begun devising: “[i]f he might have turned tail, vulgarly speaking, five minutes before, he couldn’t turn tail now; he must simply wait there with his consciousness charged to the brim” (311–12). Unexpectedly, Kate herself arrives on the scene to visit her friend Milly, speaks briefly with Densher, then leaves; “Milly, three minutes after Kate had gone, returned in her array” (316). The phrase “for the minute,” along with several close variants, occurs repeatedly during Densher’s later Venice conference with Susan Stringham, at which she asks him to deny to Milly the fact of his engagement to Kate, which Lord Mark has vengefully disclosed to the girl. These words mark the progression of the conver-

sation in time, while also imparting a rough span to Densher's impressions—often impressions of what must be impressing Susan: “Mrs Stringham said nothing, was as mute in fact, for the minute, as if she had ‘had’ him” (447); “[h]is visitor, for the minute, while their eyes met, might have been watching him hold it down” (448); “[m]ore and more, for the last five minutes, had he known she had brought something with her, and never in respect to anything had he had such a wish to postpone” (449). The minute-counting continues as the colloquy-at-dusk winds down: “Her companion, after a stiff minute—sensibly long for each—fell away from her again, and then added to it another minute, which he spent once more looking out with his hands in his pockets” (457). It cannot be assumed that Densher—by all appearances a charming and sociable (if a little too passive) young man—checks his own watch constantly throughout such scenes, but whether the narrator is keeping track for him or whether Densher's internal time-sense has become finely tuned enough for him to reckon on his own how long things are running remains unclear.

What can be determined is that Densher and the narrator (occupying a notoriously hard-to-pin-down position, shifting among James's various “reflectors”) share an interest in noting little individual spaces of time, specifying relatively precise amounts of seconds and minutes and hours in order to maintain a grasp on the ticking-away present.<sup>3</sup> While they do not account for the timed quality of these observations and impressions—other than very generally as another “inevitable limitation of embodied life” (115), in the words of Merle Williams—many phenomenological critics of James's fiction have explicitly ascribed a chronological dimension to such individual perceptive acts. Paul Armstrong cites James's mid-career essay “The Art of Fiction,” as well as such iconic inhabitants of his house of fiction as Isabel Archer, Lambert Strether, and young Maisie, to establish that in the various elaborate “acts of knowing” (40) staged by the author the knowers use their perceptions of a given scene to project their thoughts toward revelations and possibilities that ultimately transcend the confines of it.<sup>4</sup> In James, then, the fundamental unit of mental process has what amounts to a built-in temporal orientation: “The impression,” Armstrong writes, “is teleological and futural,” a form of projection, anticipation, and even prediction. In his own investigations into the phenomenon of the Jamesian impression, John Carlos Rowe more broadly finds, via Kant, that it contains an interpretive component that derives much of its solidity of meaning from time itself. Rowe writes that “[t]he interpretation is a relational act that is at once spatial (as in the arrangement of shapes in a painting) and temporal (as in the associative or causal models of simple temporality)” (*Theoretical* 206). Essentially, then, time and space alone are the irreducible “pure objects” (207) that wind up informing the impression.

While Armstrong and Rowe establish that there is no impression in James without an alignment in or through time, it is James's own older brother—who “along with his friend and colleague Charles Sanders Peirce . . . has come to be regarded as a founder of an American phenomenology” (Armstrong 3–4) and thus had his own enduring philosophical interests along these cognitive lines—who offers perhaps the most productive lens through which to view the specific circulation of temporal increments throughout *The Wings of the Dove*. This almost compulsive subdivision of time into discrete blocks recalls the (albeit much smaller) decimal figures William James cites in the “Perception of Time” chapter of his 1890 text *The Principles of Psychology*, on the way to concluding that “we are constantly conscious of a certain

duration—the specious present—varying in length from a few seconds to probably not more than a minute, and that this duration . . . is the original intuition of time” (603). The “specious present,” a term James borrows from E. R. Clay, constitutes the perception “of our immediate experience” (573):

the practically cognized present is no knife-edge, but a saddle-back, with a certain breadth of its own on which we sit perched, and from which we look in two directions into time. The unit of composition of our perception of time is a *duration*, with a bow and a stern, as it were—a rearward- and a forward-looking end. It is only as parts of this *duration-block* that the relation of succession of one end to the other is perceived. (574)

The “specious present” is for all practical purposes measurable as well as a measure in itself—as “the original intuition of time” it becomes, then, a constituent element of the more expansive form of duration that Henri Bergson characterized in 1903: “a multiplicity of moments bound to each other by a unity which goes through them like a thread” (50). It is also a “perch,” a sort of point of rest, a vantage that is essentially unique to the individual.

Susan Griffin cites *The Principles of Psychology* as perhaps more important than any other of William’s works to Henry’s fictional practice, not as a “direct influence” but for providing a framework through which to understand the latter’s “characters’ perceptions” (8). In *The Wings of the Dove* Henry doesn’t strive for scientific precision, of course, allowing for a much wider range of measurements than William could have in his treatise, but nonetheless Merton Densher might be productively seen as a natural inhabitant of this “specious present”—a marker of durations, like the mechanism of the watch that he carries around, at once fundamentally unreliable and reliable enough, constantly orienting himself in immediate time rather than acting on his own to alter the ultimate course of events. As Kate does when she requests the hour, and as Milly does when she asks him “Isn’t it rather empty for you?” (425) among the pastness of her Venice, those around Densher seem to recognize his relation, unique in the social compass of the novel, to the flux of the present. Established, and apparently recognized by others, as a sort of figure of duration—the name Densher, often taken to signify his “murky and self-deceiving consciousness” (Wood 25), sounds curiously similar to the word, scrambled and compressed—he becomes enmeshed, both knowingly and unknowingly, in multiple attempts to slow down the clock, as it were.

These attempts eventually come to entangle every character in the novel, but they both revolve around Densher, chiefly because Milly has fallen in love with him. He does not love her—at least while the schemes are still in motion—and so his participation depends on deception. What transpires is a muddled moral drama where people show little compunction about using each other—and even spin manipulation as ultimately salutary for the manipulated. It is clear, though, that the characters’ actions are consistently cast as attempts to extend time. After Densher’s first meeting with Maud Lowder—the anticipation of which occasions that first mention of his pocket watch—Kate argues that the importance of pleasing her aunt is simply “that we shall have gained time” (100), just as she later sells her plot to briefly bring together Densher and Milly to him as essentially a way of securing extra time, “[t]ime for something in particular that I understand you regard as possible. Time too that, I

further understand, is time for you as well” (408). Densher hesitantly gives his time to this cause. Meanwhile, Susan and Maud also resolve, based on the advice of Sir Luke, that Milly must join ties with Densher, the two older women bent on keeping her illness at bay or at least brightening her remaining days by bringing her romantic happiness, but, in so doing, rather callously disregarding Kate. Susan thinks that “Kate wasn’t in danger, Kate wasn’t pathetic; Kate Croy, whatever happened, would take care of Kate Croy” (330). And as Densher spends more time at Milly’s side in Venice, he does for a while seem to extend the “mere makeshift duration” (343) that she sees as Susan’s exclusive concern. Densher, for his own part, is not unaware that he has become bound up with Milly’s fortunes: “He was mixed up in her fate, or her fate, if that should be better, was mixed up in *him*, so that a single false motion might either way snap the coil” (428).<sup>5</sup> These plots’ clockwork growing ever more tenuous, the time-related benefits of Densher’s presence at this juncture are nonetheless said to extend to others within Milly’s orbit. Densher hears from Susan his significance to Sir Luke: “He went with you to galleries and churches; you saved his time for him, showed him the choicest things” (447). It is a figure now on the periphery of these events, though—Lord Mark—who finally touches off their disruption. His revelation to Milly finally precipitates her demise, causing her to withdraw from Densher’s company and turn “her face to the wall” (440).

The basic economy of time represented by these overlapping intrigues—both of which are conceived by people other than Merton Densher to employ Merton Densher—is perhaps the most unstable one of all in a work that has inspired a number of productive readings along exchange-value lines. Julie Rivkin zeroes in on the circulation of copies and originals, mapping out the novel as a competition “between . . . two representational economies” (98). Mounting a less thorough market-based reading, William Stowe writes that *The Wings of the Dove*

is about a new world, a new market, a new system of exchange in which money has become the universal signifier, and other traditional tokens of signification—words, figures, works of art, religious symbols and practices, conventions of courtesy, “standards of decency”—have been set adrift, their meanings no longer set and clearly motivated but shifting and arbitrary, up for grabs, for sale to the highest bidder. (198)

Not dissimilarly, Millicent Bell sees a “calculus of gain” (292) as governing practically every relation in the book. James, she writes,

recognizes that it is not sufficiently descriptive of modern man to say that he is subject to a market economy and constantly engaged in a contest for economic advantage. The competitive establishment of market value extends to those parts of a person, those aspects of behavior, once thought to have *incalculable* value.

Bell’s portrayal of a voracious turn-of-the-century market eager to co-opt “parts of people” and “aspects of behavior” heretofore untouched by commerce is particularly useful in understanding the ascendance, and subsequent breakdown, of Densher’s perceived value as a conduit of time, a representative of the “specious present.” James

depicts a society all too eager to tamper with any and all of its known quantities, regardless of their provenance, rather heedless of the considerable consequences.

Densher obtains his first meeting with Kate upon his return from Venice, before Milly’s death but during her precipitous decline, by arriving early for tea at Lancaster Gate, punctually a little unpunctual:

Mrs Lowder’s reply to Densher’s note had been to appoint the tea-hour, five o’clock on Sunday, for his seeing them. Kate had thereafter wired him, without a signature, “Come on Sunday *before* tea—about a quarter of an hour, which will help us”; and he had arrived therefore scrupulously at twenty minutes to five. (473)

It is another meeting that hangs over the conversation: Densher’s parting one with Milly, about which he’s reluctant to provide details. Sheila Teahan writes that not just this encounter but all of “Densher’s last scenes with Kate revolve around the impossibility of articulating the contents of his final interview with Milly, itself elided in the narrative” (207). And that other meeting is said to have lasted the exact amount of time apportioned for that of Kate and Densher:

She believed, I suppose, that I *might* deny; and what, to my own mind, was before me in going to her was the certainty that she’d put me to my test. She wanted from my own lips—so I saw it—the truth. But I was with her for twenty minutes, and she never asked me for it. (481)

When Kate tries to press him further on what occurred in that not inconsiderable period of time, Densher only curtly says, “I didn’t time it to a second. I paid her the visit—just like another” (482). Kate and Densher finally break conference and proceed to Maud’s tea table, when Kate sees that their own twenty minutes is up: “Kate moved from her place then, looking at the clock, which marked five” (484). Densher’s involvement in the dual plots has not only ultimately shifted his allegiances from Kate to the memory of Milly, but it has apparently altered his relation to time, the twenty minutes of the past meeting fully overshadowing the twenty minutes of the one presently transpiring. After his return to London, Densher, in his retrospective daze, no longer “times,” but himself becomes subject to “timing.” Milly’s Christmas Eve letter first arrives as a sort of eerie emanation, with Densher, only after hours of deliberation, concluding that “[t]his thing had been timed” (524), although the issuance still appears out of time amid the novel’s gathering flurry of instantaneous communication by wire. The missive goes on to haunt Densher as an absence—“[t]he part of it missed for ever was the turn she would have given her act” (532)—after Kate flings it, unopened, into the fire. In these final scenes it is as if present time has been thickly overlaid by the time of a haunted past.

The famous last line of the novel, “We shall never be again as we were!” (539), that Kate declares on her way out the door after Densher makes his final ultimatum (“You’ll marry me without the money; you won’t marry me with it” [538]) and after the nature of his love for Milly comes to light, serves as a confirmation that the economy of time, in its attempt to circulate something inherently unstable, has ruptured, with these words stranding Densher in particular at an impasse. Nicola Bradbury parses

the verbs at play in Kate's crowning statement. For Bradbury, "fixity of time and place" in the novel's "eternal present" has once and for all given way "to the ellipsis of future ('we shall . . . be') and past ('as we were') which articulates through the tenses of the verb the recognition also voiced in the negative ('never') of a felt absence: the absence of Milly, and of the possibilities of life she represents" ("Nothing" 83). William Stowe, himself citing Bradbury, sees the statement more generally as "predicting an indeterminate future . . . and skipping the present altogether, as an infinitesimal abyss between two times" (198). Densher, who remains behind as Kate "turned to the door" (539), is the one left to fall into this particular "abyss," having ceased to be able to keep time as he used to. So *The Wings of the Dove* shows that the attempted exchange of "time-values" (to use James's own "Jolly Corner" term)—a sort of provisional economy of "buying" and "saving" time—can only wind up bankrupting everyone's relations to the present, corrupting the presences such an exchange has been set up to extend. If Kate's statement, as Bradbury contends, pointedly elides the present, then the novel concludes with a recognition not only that time has run out for Densher and Kate but that Densher's personal clock has sputtered to a complete stop, that he has finally been unseated from the position of that "saddle-back." For him, the fugitive present that he's always taken the measure of has ultimately become too riven by abysses—too treacherously specious—to inhabit.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Chatman notes that such relatively open-ended "nouns of time measurement" as are used here—"weeks," "periods," and "days"—frequently serve as subjects in a late James style predicated on "intangibility" (46).

<sup>2</sup>More philosophically inclined readings of *The Wings of the Dove* often see Milly not merely as fading out from the contemporaneity of the action but also as gradually taking up residence in the thoughts of others as that very retreat occurs. Rowe draws a comparison between Milly's eventual fate and James's own notoriously elusive narratorial strategies, observing that "[l]ike the Jamesian novelist, she becomes increasingly vague and disembodied until she is finally present only through the interpretative consciousness of others" (*Henry Adams* 191). More specifically, Rowe writes that it is a "consciousness of time and death" (190) that she brings forth. Williams, meanwhile, sees Milly as touching off a "malady of the human psyche" within her social circle, a practically pandemic "infection of consciousness" (113, 114) that becomes an inevitability once she sees both Kate and Densher at the National Gallery and opts to delude herself (i.e., adopt Sartrean "bad faith") with regard to the true allegiances of the journalist.

<sup>3</sup>In this respect, perhaps the character who most resembles the Jamesian novelist is not Milly, whom Rowe in *Henry Adams and Henry James* likens to the figure of her creator, but rather Densher. Heavily invested in keeping time, Densher (along with the narrator, who has special access to his thoughts and impressions) is not only himself a sort of mere mechanical instrument but also a man attuned to the particular, and often unpredictable, cadence of the events in his vicinity. Naturally, this calls to mind the passage in James's defense of realism, "The Art of Fiction," in which he observes that "[c]atching the very note and trick, the strange irregular rhythm of life, that is the attempt whose strenuous force keeps Fiction upon her feet" (*EL* 58). In the 1884 essay (which James would revisit four years later), the author sees the ideal writer as adopting a sort of adaptive and retroactive metronomic function with respect to the noise of reality, clocking what amounts to an arrhythmic rhythm.

<sup>4</sup>Armstrong cites, as one general example, how the protagonists of *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Ambassadors* "are ahead of themselves when their early impressions of Europe promise an enthralling enlargement of experience" (40).

<sup>5</sup>It should be noted that Densher thinks of Milly's life and death here in language that brings to mind Kate's earlier association of Milly and Densher's watch—the "motion" and "coil" evoke first and foremost the threat of a violent snapping, but the words also call to mind the movement Densher must make to wind his device. The language of fates inextricably "mixed up" with each other suggests gears whose movements have reciprocal effects—yet another coded reference to what goes on behind the face of a timer of any sort.

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