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## **The Wings of the Dove : Tracing the Phantom of the Palace**

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### Abstract

Focusing on the name of Milly Theale's Venetian Palace—Le porelli—the article traces the presence of Mozart's Don Giovanni in *The Wings of the Dove*, and in other works by Henry James, from *Watch and Ward* and *The American* to "The Aspern Papers" and "The Third Person." The Don Giovanni motif is connected to James's representation of rococo Venice, Casanova, Palazzo Barbaro and its paintings, and to his relationship with Constance Fenimore Woolson and Constance Fletcher.

## *The Wings of the Dove:* Tracing the Phantom of the Palace

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Ford Madox Hueffer-Ford, having read *The Wings of the Dove*, found that he had more questions than answers and wrote directly to the Master for enlightenment. This is what Henry James answered on September 9, 1902:

Nothing . . . is ever more interesting to me than the consideration, with those who care and see, or want to, of these bottomless questions of How and Why and Whence and What—in connection with the mystery of one's craft. But they take one far, and, after all, it is the doing it that best meets and answers them. (*HJL* 4: 239)

The "doing" of a reader, as well as the doing of the author, is endlessly entangled in such questions. The more so with the Jamesian text whose implied reader is emphatically fashioned as a scrutinizer and often a bamboozled one. Still, critical practice never gives up hope to find a (possibly meaningful) contact with the text, to catch the author by the tail, to find and pursue traces in it and outside of it.

Tracing Henry James is a hard task indeed. It implies the application of that Jamesian recommendation, the "attention of perusal," and suggests investigation as a tool for an emotional and intellectual pursuit whose goal cannot be stability of any meaning: we are not out to find the murderer but, rather, strive to give form to a desire—that of narrowing the distance between the Author, the works, and us (Greenblatt 417).

This may be an illusion; still, I will try to evoke the ghostly presence of James by calling on a phantom, the phantom of Milly's Venetian palace. My investigation starts from a detail, a name, and, like all investigations, follows traces that together might suggest a narrative, focusing on *The Wings of the Dove*, Venice, and our Author himself.

When *The Wings of the Dove* was published, James gave a copy of it to Sir George Trevelyan, who took it along on his honeymoon to Venice. The honeymoon-

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