

Six Songs and an Epilogue

from *The Wings of the Dove*

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Texts for *Six Songs and an Epilogue from The Wings of the Dove*

He heard her out in stillness, watching her face, but not moving. Then he only said:

1. Hung about with pictures and relics, the rich Venetian past, the ineffaceable character, was here the presence revered and served: which brings us back to our truth of a moment ago--the fact that, more than ever, this October morning, awkward novice though she might be, Milly moved slowly to and fro as the priestess of the worship. Certainly it came from the sweet taste of solitude, caught again and cherished for the hour; always a need of her nature when things spoke to her with penetration. It was mostly in stillness that they spoke to her best; amid voices she lost the sense. Voices had surrounded her for weeks, and she had tried to listen, had cultivated them and had answered back; these had been weeks in which there were other things they might well prevent her from hearing.

2. She made now, alone, the full circuit of the place, noble and peaceful while the summer sea, stirring here and there a curtain or an outer blind, breathed into its veiled places. She had a vision of clinging to it. . . She was in it, as in the arc of her deluge, and filled with such a tenderness for it that why shouldn't this, in common mercy, be warrant enough? She would never, never leave it--she would engage to that; would ask nothing more than to sit tight in it and float on and on.

3. [They were at the window.] The casements between the arches were open, the ledge of the balcony broad, the sweep of the canal, so overhung, admirable, and the flutter toward them of the loose white curtain an invitation to she scarce could have said what. But there was no mystery, after a moment; she had never felt so invited to anything as to make that, and that only, just where she was, her adventure. . . .

They were at the window, pausing, lingering, with the fine old faded palaces opposite and the slow Adriatic tide beneath; but after a minute, and before she answered, she had closed her eyes to what she saw and, unresistingly, dropped her face into her arms, which rested on the coping. She had fallen to her knees on the cushion of the window-place, and she leaned there, in a long silence, with her forehead down. She knew that her silence was itself too straight an answer, but it was beyond her now to say that she saw her way.

4. She found herself, from the first moment, looking at the mysterious portrait through tears. Perhaps it was her tears that made it just then so strange and fair. . . . The lady in question, at all events, with . . . her eyes of other days, her full lips, her long neck, her recorded jewels, her brocaded and wasted reds, was a great personage, but unaccompanied by a joy. And she was dead, dead, dead.

5. It was a Venice all of evil that had broken out for them alike, so that they were in it together in their anxiety a Venice of cold, lashing rain from a low black sky, of wicked wind raging through narrow passes, of general arrest and interruption, with the people engaged in all the water-life huddled, stranded and wageless, bored and cynical, under archways and bridges.

6. [Her] turn had possibilities that somehow, by wondering about them, his imagination had extraordinarily filled out and refined. It had made of them a revelation the loss of which was like the sight of a priceless pearl cast before his eyes--his pledge given not to save it--into the fathomless sea, or rather . . . it was like the sacrifice of something sentient and throbbing, something that, for the spiritual ear, might have been audible as a faint, far wail. This was the sound that he cherished, when alone, in the stillness of his rooms. He sought and guarded the stillness, that it might prevail there.

7. (Epilogue.) *But she turned to the door, and her headshake was now the end. "We shall never be again as we were."*

Program Note

The song cycle as a genre makes something novelistic by adding music to a series of semi-independent poems. I have sometimes wondered what it would be like to do the reverse: to start with an actual novel and break it down into a small series of semi-independent fragments. Henry James seemed like an ideal choice for the purpose because his novels have so many passages that can stand almost alone as if they were prose poems. *The Wings of the Dove* in particular seemed rich with these. It is perhaps James's most sensuous text and the sensuality, even eroticism, of much of its prose has the paradoxical effect of heightening its introspective power.

The cycle is based on six passages, which with small exceptions are extracted verbatim and without internal ellipses. The texts are generally sung without repetition of words or phrases; the voice treats them as narrative. This rule, however, is proved by its proverbial exception: songs two and five feature condensed repetitions of their entire texts, acts of re-narration that open the question of what drives narration as such. The question is compounded by the piano, which frames the text with cyclical, lyric forms, the familiar shapes of traditional song, to which the voice, which never repeats itself musically, poses an alternative understanding.

James's novel concerns an especially dark romantic triangle. In love with the impecunious Kate Croy, Merton Densher woos a dying heiress, Milly Theale, in hopes of becoming her heir. He does, but at the cost of both the money and his mistress, neither of which his conscience will let him keep. The first three songs evoke Milly's experience of Venice, where she has gone in vain to recover her health; the fourth is a flashback to the moment that Milly, looking at a Venetian portrait, realizes that she is doomed; the next two take up Densher's discovery of the enormity of his actions; and the last sets the famous close of the novel, Kate's exit and parting words.

Although the songs interpret the moods and meaning of the novel, they are also independent of it. They treat the extracts as a free sequence of evocative moments: an open invitation to imagine a narrative pattern of one's own, a possible story of which the extracts and music together form the expression. The cycle explores what it feels like to do that, and to do it because a great deal depends on the story to be told and the means of telling it.

Six Songs and an Epilogue from The Wings of the Dove was composed for baritone Michael Halliwell from October 2006 through March 2007 (as five songs; the sixth, number four in the sequence, was composed in May 2008.) Duration: about twenty minutes.

1. "Hung about with pictures . . ."

Quasi-rubato: enunciate naturally through the cycle (except as noted)

♩ = 80

Voice

(Spoken:) He heard her
out in stillness, watching
her face but not moving.
(Pause.) Then he only

said:

Hung a - bout with pic - tures and re - lics, — the

Piano

(silently)

ff

p

Ad. (catch harmonic)

*

Ad.

5

rich Ve-ne-tian past,

the in - ef - face — a - ble cha - rac - ter — was here the pre - sence re -

5

*

9

rit.

a tempo

vered and served: —

which brings us back to our truth of a mo - ment a - go, the

9

12

rit.

fact that, more than e - ver, this Oc - to - ber morn - ing,

a tempo

15

awk - ward no - vice though she might be, Mil - ly moved slow - ly to and fro

pp *p*

18

as the priest - ess of the wor - ship. Cer - tain - ly it came

mp *p* *mf*

8va *quasi 3/4* *Ped.*

22

from the sweet taste of sol - i - tude, caught a - gain

mp *p* *mp*

26

resume 4/4

p *espress.*

29

and cher - ished for the hour;

pp

8va - - -

4 (Spoken:)
Always a need when things
of her nature spoke to her

33

with — pe - ne - tra - tion. — It was

mp *p* *pp* *p* 8va

37

most-ly in still - ness — that they spoke — to her best, —

1.h. *ff* *p*

Ped. * Ped. *

41

a - mid voi - - -

cresc. poco a poco

45

ces she lost the

f *p*

3 3

49

sense. Voi - ces had sur - round - ed her for

pp

3 3

8va -1

53

weeks, and she had tried to lis - ten,

p

quasi 3/4

Red. *

56

had cul - ti - va - ted them and had ans - wered back; ____

56

resume 4/4

8^{va}

resume 4/4

8^{va}

59

these ____ had been weeks ____ in which there were o -

59

59

rit.

a tempo

62

- ther things ____ they might well pre - vent her from hear -

62

pp

62

pp

65

65

ing.

ppp

8va

The musical score consists of three measures. Measure 65 features a vocal line with a dotted quarter note and an eighth rest, and a piano accompaniment with a dotted quarter note and an eighth rest. Measure 66 features a vocal line with a dotted quarter note and an eighth rest, and a piano accompaniment with a dotted quarter note and an eighth rest. Measure 67 features a vocal line with a dotted quarter note and an eighth rest, and a piano accompaniment with a dotted quarter note and an eighth rest. The piano accompaniment in measure 67 is marked *ppp* and includes an 8va marking.

2. "She made now, alone . . ."

68 $\text{♩} = 72$

She made now, a - lone, the full cir - cuit of the place,

p *pp* *p*

8va *8va*

Red. ** Red.* ***

72

no - ble and peace - ful while the sum - mer sea,

mp *p* *espress.*

3 *3* *3*

75

stir - ring here and there a cur - tain or an ou - ter blind, breathed in - to its

mp *mf*

3 *3* *3*

92

95

95

mer-cy, be war-rant e-nough?

95

f *ff*

98

She would ne - ver,

mf *ff mp*

101

ne-ver leave it; she would en - gage to that, would ask no - thing more

p

104

than to sit tight in it and float on and on.

rit. *a tempo* *subito p*

She made a -

lone the full cir - cuit of the place, _____ the

sum - mer sea. _____

Why _____ in

116

com-mon mer-cy — should this not — be e - nough? —

116

3

3

120

— She would ne - ver, ne - ver leave — it; —

120

3

3

3

3

p

pp

123 *poco riten.*

would ask no - thing more. —

123

3

p

3. "They were at the window . . ."

126 ♩ = 80

They were at the win - dow. _____ The

p *pp* *p* *mp*

8va - -'

129

case - ments _____ be - tween the ar - ches _____ were o - pen, _____ the

mf

132

ledge _____ of the bal - co - ny broad, _____ the sweep _____ of the ca -

mp

135

nal, _____ so o-ver-hung, ad - mi-ra-ble, and the flut-ter _____

138

_____ toward them of the loose white cur-tain _____ an in-vi-ta-tion to she _____

141

scarce _____ could have said what. But there was no mys-te-ry af-ter a mo-ment; _____

144

she had ne-ver felt so in - vi-ted to a - ny - thing as to make that,

147

— and that on - ly, just where she was, her ad - ven - ture. —

149

They were at — the win - dow, paus - ing, tin - ger - ing,

151

with the fine old fad - ed pa - la - ces op - po - site and the slow

151

p

153

A - dri - a - tic tide be -

153

p

155

neath; but af - ter a mi - nute, and be -

155

p

164

sist-ing-ly, _____ dropped _____ her face in-to her

164

p *mp*

167

arms, _____ which rest-ed _____ on the cop-ing. _____

167

f *fff* *mf* *fff*

8va- *8va-*

15ma- *15ma-*

senza Ped.

171

_____ She had fal-len _____ to her

171

mp *p*

174

174

knees _____ on the cush - ion _____ of the win - dow place, _____

174

177

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4323

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4332

4335

4338

4341

4344

4347</

183

si - lence _____ was it - self too straight an ans - wer, _____

186

but it was be - yond her now, _____ be - yond _____ her

189

now _____ to say that she saw her

rit.

192 *poco*

 a

poco

4. "She Found Herself . . ."

195 ♩ = 88

195 She found her - self,

pp

Red. *

199 from the first mo - ment, look - ing at the mys - ter - i - ous

199

202 por - trait through tears. Per - haps it was her tears

202

206

that made it just then so strange and fair.

pp

Leg.

Leg.

209

The la - dy in ques - tion, at all e -

pp

8

Leg.

212

vents, with her eyes of o - ther days

3

3

8va

216

her full lips, her long neck, her re-cord - ed jewels, —

p *cresc.*

*

220

her bro - cad - ed and wast - ed

f *subito p*

Red. *

223

reds, was a great per-so - nage, but

f *subito p*

Red. *

226

un - a - com-pan - ied by a joy.

229

And she was dead,

pp

Led.

233

dead dead, dead,

237

attaca:

dead, dead.

237

*

attaca:

5. "It was a Venice all of evil . . ."

242 ♩ = 144

242

fff con forza *f* *ff*

8^{va} - Ped.

247

It was a Ve - nice

fz *fz*

* Ped.

251

all of e - - - vil that had

fz *fz* *fz*

* Ped.

Detailed description: This is a page of a musical score, page 28, for a piece titled "5. 'It was a Venice all of evil . . .'". The tempo is marked as ♩ = 144. The score is in bass clef and consists of three systems. The first system starts at measure 242 and includes piano, vocal, and a lower piano part. The piano part features a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a sustained bass line in the left hand, with dynamic markings *fff con forza*, *f*, and *ff*. The vocal part has a melodic line with a fermata. The lower piano part has a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a sustained bass line in the left hand, with a dynamic marking of *fz*. The second system starts at measure 247 and includes piano, vocal, and a lower piano part. The piano part features a melodic line with a fermata and a dynamic marking of *fz*. The vocal part has a melodic line with a fermata. The lower piano part has a melodic line with a fermata and a dynamic marking of *fz*. The third system starts at measure 251 and includes piano, vocal, and a lower piano part. The piano part features a melodic line with a fermata and a dynamic marking of *fz*. The vocal part has a melodic line with a fermata. The lower piano part has a melodic line with a fermata and a dynamic marking of *fz*. The lyrics are "It was a Venice all of evil . . .".

255

bro - ken out _____ for them a - like, _____

255 *con forza* *fz* *fz*

ped.

259

so that they were in it to - ge - ther _____ in their an - xi - e -

259 *subito p* (Do not release pedal) *f* *ff*

molto rit.

263

ty, _____ in _____ their an - xi - e - ty, _____

263 *a tempo* *ff* *f* *fz*

a tempo *ped.*

267

a Ve - nice of cold lash - ing rain

267

ffz fz fz fz fz fz

Red.

271

from a low black sky,

271

fz fz fz fz fz

Red.

8va

Red.

275

of wick - ed wind rag

275

sffz sffz ff

Red.

279

279

fz fz fz fz

8va *Ped.*

283

283

fz

8va *Ped.*

287

through nar - row pas - ses, of gen - eral ar -

287

p *fz*

(Do not release pedal)

291 *rit.*

♩ = 96

rest and in-ter - rup-tion,

quasi 3/4

mp

♩ = 132 Mm. 296-99
singsong--allow
wrong accents

296

with the peo - ple en-gaged - in — all the wa - ter life, the wa - ter

resume 4/4

mf *p*

8va — —

301

accel.

life, life, life, life — with the peo - ple

f

3

305 $\text{♩} = 144$

hud-dled, strand - ed and wage -

305

ff

Ped. *

309

- less, - bored - and

309

Ped. *

313

cy - - ni - cal - un - der arch - ways

313

rit. pp

p

8va

Ped. (Do not release pedal)

319

and bridg - es. It was a

p *mp*

8^{va} * Red.

324

Ve - nice all of e - vil that had bro - ken out for

mf *subito p*

Red. *

328

them. A Ve - nice of cold

mf *subito p*

Red. * Red. * Red. *

332

lash - ing rain, _____ of wick-ed wind _____

332

mf

mp

8va

rit.

336

— rag - ing with the peo-ple strand - ed, wage - less,

336

mf

mp

8va

rit.

340

cyn-i-cal, _____ un-der arch - ways _____ and brid - ges. _____ A

340

p

pp

8va

rit.

344 $\text{♩} = 120$ *poco riten.*

Ve - nice, hud-dled, strand-ed, wage - less,

344

tr

And.

349 *rit.*

cyn - i - cal un der arch - ways _____ and brid - ges. _____

349

6. "Her turn had possibilities . . ."

353 ♩ = 80

Her turn had pos-si-bi-li-ties _____ that some-how, _____ by won -

p

Red. *

357

- der-ing a-bout them, _____ his i - ma-gi-na - tion _____ had ex -

8va

Red. *

360

traor - di - nar - i - ly filled out _____ and re - fined. It had made of them a

Red. *

363

re-ve-la - tion the loss of which was like the sight of a price - less

Ped.

366

pearl cast be - fore his eyes, his plesdge gi - ven not to save it,

cresc. poco a poco

369

in - to the fa - thom - less sea, or ra - ther

f *subito p*

373

it was like, it was like the

373

mf

Ped. *

376

sa - cri - fice of some - thing sen - ti - ent and

376

f *mf* *mp*

8va

379

throb - bing, some - thing

379

p

383

that for the spir - i - tu - al ear might have been

Ped. *

386

au - di - ble as a

espress.

senza Ped.

8va

391

faint, far wail

(8va)

pp

Ped. *

395

(8va) 15ma

395

396

397

398

p

399

.This was the sound that he cher-ished,

399

400

401

mp

402

when a-lone in the still-ness of his rooms.

402

403

404

405

p

406

He sought and guard - ed the

Ped. *

409

still - ness, that it might pre-

pp *

Ped. *

413

Epilogue

♩ = 52

vail there. (Spoken:) He heard her out in stillness, watching her face but not moving.

mp *

pp *

senza Ped.

420



But — she turned — to the door, —

420

423



— and her head - shake — was now the end.

423

426



"We shall ne-ver be a-gain — as we were." —

426