

Michael Anesko*, Philip Horne**, Tamara Follini***

Millicent Bell: A Memorial Hour

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/LC.2017.022>

At the recent Henry James International Conference, held at Brandeis University 9–11 June 2016 (the theme of which was “Commemoration”), participants were invited to attend a memorial hour for Professor Millicent Bell, who passed away in December 2015 at the age of 95. These three tributes were composed for that occasion.

Remarks by Michael Anesko

None of us, I’m sure, would want an obituary compiled from the pages of the *MLA Bibliography*, but in Milly’s case, those pages are quite instructive. There are 68 entries recorded there listing her as principal author; her first publication dates from 1951 (an article not on James or Edith Wharton, but rather on Melville). Other early pieces reveal her

* Professor of English and American Studies at the Pennsylvania State University. He is the author of five books, the most recent of which, *Generous Mistakes: Incidents of Error in Henry James*, will be published in March by Oxford University Press. He is also a General Editor of the *Cambridge Edition of the Complete Fiction of Henry James* and *The Complete Letters of Henry James* (University of Nebraska Press). E-mail: mwa2@psu.edu.

** Professor of English at University College London. He is the author of *Henry James and Revision: The New York Edition* (Oxford University Press, 1990); and editor of *Henry James: A Life in Letters*, Dickens’s *Oliver Twist*; and James’s *The Tragic Muse* and *The Portrait of a Lady* (all Penguin), as well as of James’s *Autobiographies* (Library of America, 2016). He was also co-editor of *Thorold Dickinson: A World of Film* (Manchester University Press, 2008). He is the founding General Editor of *The Cambridge Edition of the Complete Fiction of Henry James*. E-mail: f.horne@ucl.ac.uk.

*** Fellow, Senior Lecturer and Director of Studies in English at Clare College, Cambridge. Her research interests are centred in modern narrative, life-writing, relations between literature and visual culture, and particularly the work of Henry James, on whom she has published extensively. She has served as President of the Henry James Society and is one of the four General Editors for *The Cambridge Edition of the Complete Fiction of Henry James*. E-mail: tf211@cam.ac.uk.

growing interest in Hawthorne; but then James and Wharton come into the picture, and they never really leave. Her first book, *Hawthorne's View of the Artist*, came out in 1962; and was followed by *Edith Wharton and Henry James: The Story of their Friendship* (1965); her massive biography of John P. Marquand (1979); and lastly the volume that most of us especially revere, *Meaning in Henry James* (1991). Along the way she also edited several collections of critical essays (on Wharton and Hawthorne) and numerous reprints of James's fiction.

But Milly was far more than her books and other publications, as these few occasional tributes hope to show. Besides myself, Philip Horne and Tamara Follini will give their remarks; and then we shall open the floor to any of you who would like to share your memories of the cherished friend and colleague we have lost.

* * *

It would be tempting to say that I first saw Milly, sitting on the edge of a precipice somewhere high in the Swiss Alps—and that wouldn't be much of a "stretcher" (as Huck Finn would say). For I did first meet her in Switzerland, almost 25 years ago, even though the occasion had somewhat less glamour than those we associate with *The Wings of the Dove*. Still, to have that initiation in Europe was decidedly Jamesian—and the happiest of coincidences. Both of us had been invited to address a gathering of the Swiss Association for American Studies, so it was in Bern that we first shook hands and took each other in. Even though we had lived on opposite sides of the Charles River for many years—she was comfortably ensconced at Boston University (where she had taught for 30 years) and I was then still at Harvard—this little Swiss sojourn was our first opportunity to become formally acquainted.

Of course I already knew Milly—indirectly, at least, through her abundant scholarship—but to stand face to face with the author of all that impressive work could only have been bracing: such a learned and catholic intellect; such a sensitive eye and ear for Jamesian nuance; in such an itty-bitty person! But behind of all that was what even then I knew—that Millicent Bell was a survivor, a bruised veteran of a long and bitter behind-the-scenes struggle for access to Henry James's manuscripts and letters, someone whom Leon Edel had berated and tried to censor when she sought to publish her richly detailed study of James and Edith Wharton back in mid-sixties. "There is no more validity in such a book than in 'HJ and Elizabeth Robins,'" Edel scoffed—"HJ and Mrs. Humphrey [sic] Ward,' 'HJ and Fanny Kemble.'"¹ Having spent many years working *freely* with the James Papers at Harvard, I could appreciate all the more what it would have meant *not* to have had such freedom; and yet Milly had persevered, had published despite Edel's stubborn interference—and even was willing to throw down the gauntlet herself. As she unhesitatingly said, "That [Leon] Edel really felt that he had 'property rights' in the knowledge available to students of the letters has always seemed too shocking an idea for me to take seriously."² A line like that makes me think of what Huck Finn would have said about her (as he did about Mary Jane Phelps):

¹ L. Edel to R. Garnett [editor at Rupert Hart-Davis in London], 1 Feb. 1965 (Edel Papers, Box 4, folder 41; McGill Univ. Library).

² M. Bell to E. Seaver [editor at George Braziller], 9 Feb. 1965 (photocopy in Edel Papers, Box 13, folder 9; McGill Univ. Library).

“You may say what you want to, but in my opinion she had more sand in her than any girl I ever see; in my opinion she was just full of sand.”

As it turns out, Millicent Bell loved sand—and the swell of the surf rolling up on the beach. One of the next times I saw her was at her family’s summer retreat in Falmouth, down on Cape Cod, which she generously had invited me to come south and visit. She was not at all like a retiring Miss Birdseye, swaddled up in shawls and blankets on the verandah at Marmion, but instead still a vigorous swimmer, eager to get her septuagenarian limbs in the water. Later that day, after we all had been brushed and bronzed by the sun, Milly proudly showed me some of the family photo albums, with pictures of her as a young woman swimming and sunbathing on Brighton Beach in Brooklyn—just blocks from where she grew up. With her in some of those photographs was broad-shouldered Gene Bell (nearly twice her size!)—the man she married when they were both sophomores in college (and she just having barely reached the legal age of consent). “He sat in back of me in a philosophy class,” she later recalled. “We didn’t speak to each other immediately, but after a while we got to know each other. We were very shy.”³

Shyness is not one of the qualities I associate with Milly—but that’s because I came to know her only much later, after a long and varied career that led her eventually to the not quite idyllic groves of academe, where she had to overcome so many of the obstacles that women of her (and even later) generations were faced with: inescapable patriarchal condescension (so audible in Edel’s dismissive remarks about “that Bell woman”) and even forced removal from the classroom, when she chose to bear children (which she did, twice). After such knowledge, what forgiveness? And yet after it all, Millicent Bell was still the most charitable of scholars, always willing to share her knowledge, her expertise, her insights—even her hunches—with others who came to her with questions or for help.

At any rate, no one would have accused her of shyness when she labeled Leon Edel’s ponderous five-volume biography of James a “failure”—though admitting that it was “best, probably, where its aims [were] most conventional.”⁴ All too often, she claimed, the repetitive structure of the work—a premeditated series of “climaxes and revelations”—seemed “forced and somewhat vulgar,” a biography more attuned toward the Book-of-the-Month Club than to the fidelity of its subject’s life experience.⁵ Edel’s James, according to Milly, was an accretion of biographical incidents (many of them trivial)—not a man of genius or intellect who was engaged with the social, the political, and philosophical ideas of his time. The biographer’s reiterated speculations about James’s inner life, reductively advanced through a smattering of Freudian principles, were applied, with a vengeance, to his novels and tales, draining those same works “of their variety of theme” and the “fertility of imagination” that produced them in the first place.⁶

For me, however, the most compelling implication of Millicent’s sustained critique came in the final paragraph of her review essay. There she was obliged to comment on the distorting influence that the snail’s pace of Edel’s work (which had proceeded over two full decades) had had on so many others. “A whole generation of James readers have had no other guide to exact knowledge of the man behind the long shelf of books than Edel’s

³ Qtd. in B. Marquard, obituary of Millicent Bell, *Boston Globe*, 10 Sept. 2015.

⁴ M. Bell, “Henry James: The Man Who Lived,” *Massachusetts Review* 14 (1973), p. 391.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 392.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 395.

volumes as they slowly have come forth, and his use of his materials has gone by with little serious challenge. The effect of this has been undesirable on two counts,” she went on.

If Henry James criticism [...] deserves the charge of having concentrated on the inner aesthetics of the fiction and ignored its rooting in the author’s experience and observations it may be because James biography has been, for the most part, a closed research area. For Mr. Edel, himself, this situation has meant an excess of freedom to shape and interpret, to indulge speculation without curb or self-criticism. The active attention of other scholars able to refer to his sources with equal authority or publish alternative or contrary readings of James’s life might have made a difference. Despite the large achievement of Edel’s biography, it cannot be called definitive, and such readings will in time be made.⁷

Well, Milly, it’s been a long time coming—but that day, certainly, has arrived.

Despite what these (admittedly selective) quotations might lead you to suspect, Millicent’s critical assessment of Leon Edel’s work really was meticulously generous and even-handed. She extended a different kind of generosity to me on several other memorable occasions. Certainly the first was an evening when she and Gene invited me to have dinner with them at their home in Boston. It was a winter evening, as I recall, a dark night unrelieved by moonlight; and since I was not much familiar with house numbers in the Back Bay, I approached several different imposing residences in search of the designated address. Flanking the portals of all of these looming structures were panels of doorbells, vertical rows of buttons and nameplates, acknowledging the common fate of most of these grand old mansions, which had been subdivided into multiple apartments; but none of them was #305 Commonwealth Avenue. When, at last, I found my true destination, how startled I was to see but a single buzzer next to the doorframe: was it possible that anyone could live, exclusively, in such a massive pile of a house? When the imposing entrance door swung open, I felt as if I were stepping into *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, only this time two blocks removed from the water-side of Beacon Street. How could such a house *not* seem like a hold-over from the nineteenth century, when all of its neighbors had been carved up by the irresistible forces of a frenzied real estate market? So much of the house, too, had remained untouched: somber woodwork and paneling, a little thick with Victorian gloom. But there was unconventional Milly, who had outfitted the dining room with Saarinen tulip chairs and a melamine pedestal table—all dazzlingly white. The *tableau* couldn’t help seeming a little incongruous to me: this was Star Trek meets Silas Lapham. Who could forget *that*?

The last time I saw Millicent Bell was again at her home on Commonwealth Avenue. It was the summer of 2010 (by which time Gene Bell had passed away). I had come back to Cambridge for a research stint that summer and had contacted Milly to let her know my whereabouts and to express the hope that we might get together. The day that I had planned to make a visit to the Boston Public Library, Milly graciously suggested that I come over afterwards to have luncheon with her; and so we sat in those same tulip chairs, chatting across that same melamine table, feasting on broiled scallops that my hostess proudly brought out from the kitchen. The Fourth of July was fast approaching and Milly then asked me if I would join her on that holiday night to watch the fireworks from one of her upper rear windows, which had a spectacular vantage of the esplanade and the river. So, for what

⁷ Ibidem, p. 414.

I didn't know would be the last time, I made my way again to #305 Commonwealth Avenue and climbed the stairs all the way up four flights to a room that had to have been a servant's quarters when the house was first built. With her usual grace, Milly had laid out a tray of delectable cheese and fruit and crackers—and of course we shared a bottle of wine. It was a very sultry night and the air in that cramped upper room was close, but when I threw up the sash, strains of the Boston Pops concert on the esplanade came in on the breeze. And then the darkened sky came alive with dazzling starbursts of color and light, synchronized with the music from the band shell.

By then Milly had become a little more like Miss Birdseye, perhaps—not in any way akin to the satiric caricature that James gives us in the early chapters of *The Bostonians*, but rather more like the venerable and kindly matriarch whose sad decline we witness in the latter portion of the novel, where she becomes “the incarnation of well-earned rest.” In her final hours, Miss Birdseye is surrounded by those who have cared most about her (Olive Chancellor, Verena Tarrant, and, yes, even Basil Ransom), and she seems intent upon self-reflection in their presence. “It has been a lovely time,” she says, “I have done so much—so many things.” “I guess I wouldn't talk much,” Dr. Prance interrupts; “we know how much you have done. Don't you suppose every one knows *your* life?” “It isn't much,” she humbly responds, “only I tried to take hold. When I look back from here, from where we've sat, I can measure the progress.”

Through her gracious life and penetrating critical insight, Millicent Bell *has* taken hold among those who care about Henry James; and we can all measure the strides of progress that she—and her work—have made possible. Thank you, Millicent Bell.

Remarks by Philip Horne

I can no longer remember quite when I first met Millicent. I had already reviewed *Meaning in Henry James*, in an appreciative way, which she graciously appreciated; and it's even possible we met as far back as 1993 at the Sesquicentennial in New York. At any rate, she had always seemed to me an admirable critic of James, with a range of specialisms extending back to Hawthorne, and Shakespeare, and forward to Wharton and Marquand—but covering a much wider waterfront than that—not only of literature, but of other arts also, in particular I think painting... and of things beyond the arts.

She was a surprising presence in many ways—often rather girlishly dressed, with large glasses and a very prominent smile, she had a charming, open manner. Not really a *grande dame* in outward appearance, she was one in every way that mattered—a warm and generous, extremely considerate hostess, with a great sense of fun and sympathy. Though Millicent looked frail, and small, she was in fact astoundingly wiry and energetic—and I remember one of the last times I saw her we walked from her house to the Boston Museum of Fine Art, of which she was a devoted member—and though I can't say I had trouble keeping up, I was glad of my long legs as she marched. She wore with tremendous lightness her lifelong preoccupation with writing—and indeed, though she never showed me any of them, she seemed to be writing poems and stories as well as criticism, scholarly and journalistic.

Her prose style is splendidly eloquent, sensitive, thoughtful, fired by ideas and impulses, elegant and precise, full of infectious delight at getting to grips with great literature. She was a very *Jamesian* Jamesian—funny, clever, both patient and impatient, ready to see the best but at the last ready to be amusingly exasperated by the obstructions of life. She was a great lover of poetry also—and thus made an eager listener (and somehow there aren't many) to my discoveries of James's allusions to the poets. A Francophile with an *appartement* in Paris and a place in the French countryside—and savoring the memory of a delicious year in Sicily with the family early in their marriage—Millicent packed so many tastes and connections and identities into her small frame that one was being perpetually—and splendidly—surprised.

In her reach back into the first half of the century, she could appear to have a greater stretch of years to her credit than James's Juliana Bordereau in *The Aspern Papers*, who only goes back about sixty years or so by my calculations. Whereas Millicent had, in my mind at least, started out as a cub reporter in the 1930s, the heyday of wisecracking Hollywood newspaper comedies—as if she were at the shoulder of Barbara Stanwyck, Katharine Hepburn or Rosalind Russell. In fact the titles of the papers she worked on shimmered with vibrant local colour—the *Savannah Evening Press*, the *Toledo Blade*, the *Philadelphia Record*.



Boston, Back Bay. From Keiko Beppu's private collection

And the stories she and Gene told of their first meeting at NYU in the middle of the Depression offered a sweet sophomore romance, which seemed to me, brought up on 1930s Hollywood, very touching. Her marriage with Gene was a wonderful, loving partnership—they were both brilliant people, but they'd as it were domesticated their brilliance and got into the habit of it, without becoming blasé, so never insisted on it or showed it off. Gene was a great man, a very eminent scientist, at MIT, and at the Marine Biology institute at Woods Hole, very close to their place at the Cape—and another link was discovered when

it turned out that there he had become friends with another marine biologist, Sir Hans Kornberg, who as it happened had been master of my Cambridge college. We had dinner with the Kornbergs there, in mufti, as it were, without robes and regalia—in the wonderful hospitable forum that was Millicent and Gene’s summer home—not too grand, but very spacious and comfortable, airy and sunny. When there they used to swim great distances every day together—while we feeble youngsters sat on the shore, or perhaps paddled, and watched in amazement. That kept them fresh and fit. I remember Michael coming down there as well, on one sunny occasion.

Part of the glory of being from foreign parts is that you can come and *stay* with people—and see more of them, in several senses, than those you see every week because you live in the same place. Gene and Millicent were marvelous hosts—their nest was empty by the time I knew them—it was indeed a very ample nest—and were in a way my sponsors, among others, when I was working at the Houghton or the Massachusetts Historical Society. Millicent was the perfect audience when I returned at the end of a day—making me feel my discoveries, such as they were, really amounted to something. Sometimes I was alone – but sometimes *en famille*, and Millicent and Gene were always very welcoming to my wife Judith and daughter Olivia (then small), making us all feel like honorary members of the family. I remember being with them one New Year, and Olivia seeing her first real snow—walking down Commonwealth Avenue with her tongue out to catch the flakes. She also loved spinning in the bloblike 1970s plastic armchair which Millicent and Gene gave as I recall a room-sized area to itself in their vast ground floor. They were proud guardians and preservers of their extraordinary, enormous house—in which they loved to entertain. Though she bravely carried on when Gene died, things were not the same for Millicent thereafter: as she wrote, “I am suffering the greatest loss conceivable. My beloved husband died suddenly of a heart attack and it is difficult to find reality in anything.”

I don’t know when it struck Millicent, as I’m sure it did—but I myself was late in realizing that there was probably a particular reason why I asked her to edit *The Wings of the Dove* for Penguin Classics—that she was in herself uniquely qualified, being a Milly with a thumping bank account (on account of Gene’s discoveries and the biotech companies he founded)—indeed, she was also an angel. It’s a magnificently sympathetic edition—and it was a privilege to work with her on that—as it was on her contribution to the special issue of the *Cambridge Quarterly* on “Modern James” that Tamara and I co-edited. It’s one of my deepest regrets that the volume she undertook with such enthusiasm (as well as some misgivings) for the Cambridge *Complete Fiction of Henry James* never came to fruition.

Well before I met her, I had seen in the archives a rather shocking letter from Leon Edel to Paul R. Reynolds, who handled the James estate in the 1960s, saying that he has heard of the impending publication of “a book called *Henry James and Edith Wharton* by a woman named Millicent Bell”—and that it should be stopped.⁸ It was touch and go whether Millicent’s first book would be published—it was, happily, and she went on to higher and higher things. But the whirligig of time brought in its opportunities—and I happened to be staying with Millicent when news came in of the *death* of Leon Edel. The phone rang, and it was the *Times* of London wanting an obituary. I can’t quite reconstruct the sequence

⁸ Quoted by P. A. Walker, “Leon Edel and the ‘Policing’ of the Henry James Letters”, *The Henry James Review* 21.3 (Fall 2000), p. 282.

of events—there was a moment when it could have been awkward—but the outcome was a happy one—for us—in that Millicent wrote her obituary for the *Times* and I wrote one for the *Guardian*. It felt like a collaboration.

When Millicent died I have to confess that I was astonished to learn how old she was—95!—having assumed she was not much beyond her mid-80s... She was actually older than my own mother, who had died at 88—but her youthfulness and adventurousness of spirit was indomitable, in my recollection. Her spans are unparalleled—80 years after enrolling in NYU as a prodigy of 15, she was still a passionate student of literature. It was an epic, a heroic life.

But it was also a very warm and human one, in which talk about literature and talk about everything else flowed into each other. My abiding memory of Millicent will be of our long talks in the narrow kitchen at the back of the great house—originally the province of the servants, no doubt, but it had been a favorite area, informal, hospitable, collaborative, for Millicent and Gene. One particular talk went on, and on, as the afternoon light faded into evening: the tone—this was after Gene’s death—grew more serious and meditative as we tried, in Millicent’s phrase, to “find reality” in things, and as the light in the room darkened and the shadows deepened. Neither of us wanted to light a lamp or flick a switch; and that seems the best way to leave this warm, affectionate memory, as a quietly fading scene of friendship and communion.

Remarks by Tamara Follini

How might Henry James have described Millicent Bell if he had encountered her? For those of us in the James community who had the privilege of knowing Millicent, either personally or as a gifted teacher and critic, the question arises naturally when we recall her vibrant presence and prose, the impression she made as an extraordinary “character” who evaded easy definition or the confines of “type,” including those associated with conventional notions of age. Although we had met previously, my true friendship with Millicent began in the spring of 2007, when she was eighty-seven years old, and yet, astonishingly, conveyed a contagious vivacity, a warmth of intellectual excitement and social engagement, of someone whose years were half that sum. I had invited Millicent to speak on a panel that I was hosting, as President of the Henry James Society, at that year’s ALA conference in Boston. Afterwards, our papers delivered, a group of Jamesians, as all good Jamesians are wont to do, repaired to the nearest cafe, an occasion about which Millicent sent me the following account. Extolling what she called the “extraordinary brightness and richness” of that gathering, she went on:

I remember how we all sat on in that hotel bar and talked and talked, and totally forgot the paltry ALA reception which was going on—for what could have been better than to stay where we were, holding hands, one might say, across the distances that separate one from another person, certainly from persons one supposedly hardly “knows.” Yes, verily, an “act of life.”

I count myself lucky indeed that our talk continued, despite geographical distances or circumstantial impediments, as we proceeded to share a friendship and deeper working relation, a consequence in part of Millicent's contribution to a special James number of the *Cambridge Quarterly* that I edited with Philip Horne, and through serving as Millicent's General Editor for the volume, *"Daisy Miller" and Other Tales*, that she had undertaken for our Cambridge Edition. Rereading our correspondence that whizzed back and forth between Boston and London during this period, I was moved again by several qualities in Millicent's temperament that made the relation of friendship an especially capacious receptacle. Her excitements about matters great and small in the world surrounding her often released bursts of vivid prose in which passages of evocative description concluded with the flick of a comment, an observation, that carried a mild overtone of aphoristic truth. Having conveyed, in one such missive, her almost breathless anticipation of the imminent blossoming of the magnolia trees on her street and in particular one outside her window that she was watching closely, a communication a week later brought this Thoreauvian utterance:

My magnolia has just climaxed its splendid efflorescent display. It is one of the row of such trees along our Commonwealth Avenue, shamelessly exhibiting itself extravagantly at this moment as though nothing else but flowers is worth thinking about at this time.



Millicent Bell and Keiko Beppu. From Keiko Beppu's private collection

Millicent's letters were also marked by a warm solicitousness, unbounded by any decorous stiffness, and infused with feeling thoughtfulness. My apology for a delayed response, oc-

casioned by a minor accident, to one of her messages, generated an immediate expression of imaginative sympathy and concern, while yet, in the next paragraph, she made light of a catastrophe of her own. Once again, she summed this up with an observation that transformed personal vexation into a matter for philosophic pronouncement and which, in this instance, was conveyed in a tone of stoical exuberance (the paradox is intended). Winter storms had caused the roof of her grand, beautiful home to collapse, flooding a top floor work room, where, Millicent explained:

I had a collection of books and research materials (some on HJ, actually) as well as boxes of writing starts and projects to be continued that I had the delusion of bringing to completion “one day”—but perhaps it is well to be disabused of such expectations—consumed by an act of Nature!

It is that exclamation mark that defines what was for me an essential quality of Millicent’s intellect—her predilection for looking reality squarely in the face but doing so with a zealotness born of a completely unsentimental, passionate curiosity. That relish, her ardor of engagement with life’s conditions, was at no time more marked, in my personal experience, than when I had the good fortune to stay at Millicent’s home during one of my Boston trips. I shall always remember the impression she made as, waiting on the step outside, having just arrived from London, she opened her door to me: a slight figure clad in a short dress that displayed, incongruously but delightfully, strong legs culminating in bright colored running shoes, her hair in disarray, her eyes vibrant with anticipation. My stay was short, but it was made into a luxurious space of many hours as Millicent insisted upon filling every available moment with talk: talk in which her openness and flexibility of mind were matched by strong opinions and decisive common sense, and in which, with her delight in the stories of people’s lives, she fired off endless questions about my personal history while offering sundry glimpses of her own, in loops and swings of reminiscence that returned always to the immediacy of the present and current literary enthusiasms and undertakings.

When it came to embarking on her volume for our new James Edition, Millicent was by a good distance the first editor out of the blocks, perhaps because, again in her clear-sighted way, she was all too aware that another kind of “act of Nature” might consume her own self in the near future. Early in this adventure—for an adventure it certainly was, working with Millicent—she sent this reflection of a prior involvement in an editorial role:

I have experienced something of what a challenge such undertakings are, and yet found, to my surprise, how compelled and fascinated I have been doing what some might think dull, the notes as well as the more glamorous part, the essay of Introduction [...] I loved making something more clear and found new points to discover in the text I thought I knew. It is the way I feel about translating poetry [...] one gets into the work in question in the most intimate, moving way in one’s vigilant effort to turn an obscurity into something meaningful. The comparison is not exact; I don’t want to translate James. But in some passing reference easily bounced over, I often was thrilled to find a suggestion of his complex poetry of meaning—and I enjoy having to think hard about his every word.

Millicent described herself, in another communication, as a “compulsive fact-checker,” a highly appropriate phrase, I was to find, as I assisted her pursuit of matters of editorial

choice: how carefully, for example, she weighed the different possibilities for copy-texts, running down clues of textual history, worrying conundrums; how passionately concerned and exacting she was about issues regarding variants, insistent on both the common reader's ease and the scholar's requirements; and how challenging to any fuzziness or uncertainty on the part of the "Generals"—as she amusingly referred to me and my fellow General Editors, Adrian, Philip and Michael.

Sadly, although Millicent confirmed that she had finished her volume's annotation and was at work on its introduction, this material never reached me, nor were we able to retrieve it after her death. This is an unfortunate loss, and I would have especially liked to know what "complex poetry of meaning" she might have discovered in these early works, especially "Daisy Miller," about which, she had confided, she had been nursing fresh ideas. The direction these ideas may have taken, however, might be implied in earlier editorial work she completed and in an article that derived from this: I refer to the essay she supplied for our special James number of the *Cambridge Quarterly*, "'Type' in *The Wings of the Dove* and the Invention of Kate Croy," and her admirable Penguin Edition of that novel from which this article had evolved, a volume that, as the editor of *The Wings of the Dove* for the Cambridge Edition, I am immensely indebted to. In the introduction to her edition, Millicent's admirable qualities of mind and temperament converge to make her an expert guide to the novel's complex human dramas, and are fused with a deep knowledge of the history of narrative representative rendered with her natural eloquence. In prose that is always elegant but never showy, precise in its discriminations but never pedantic, and resolutely free of abstraction, she leads a reader through a discussion of James's understanding of nineteenth-century narrative traditions of "type" while defining one of his prime interests in this work as the exploration of alternative definitions of character that he observed to be emerging in the modern age. For Millicent, it was Kate Croy who most exemplified this nascent figure, the power of whose portrait, Millicent also proposes, in a lightning, suggestive aside, may have derived from James's speculation of what it would be like to be in love with such a woman—a conjecture that goes some way toward accounting for the allure of that character. These are ideas that she returned to and expanded upon in her later article; about her titular heroine, she speculated:

Perhaps Kate's indifference to absolutes or any idea of truth that is not dependent on occasion and conditions and results may be that ancient radical skepticism that denies knowable distinction between what is and what is felt or perceived. Densher spoils it all, Kate would say, by his atavistic insistence on a truth to which even Milly herself becomes indifferent.

The attribution of a version of radical skepticism to Kate Croy continues a theme that Millicent had pursued several years earlier in her book on Shakespeare. Her contemplation of this attitude of mind in *The Wings of the Dove* here issues in an assessment of the novel's ending that is unmarked by sentimental or moralistic or idealist tones, and is conducted with a discerning, calm objectivity (similar to the author's own) that is yet feelingly sympathetic to the complex motivations and mostly frustrated desires that shape the compromises of individual lives. These are qualities, in her writing on James, that Millicent bequeaths to us and which we can all be deeply grateful for.

I began by wondering how Henry James might have described “Millibel”—the name by which she was identified in her email address and which was associated for me, whenever it appeared on my screen, with her small, almost birdlike, but energetic physicality and her quick curiosity, always about to take flight. Certainly, she, too, was a new sort of figure, wholly modern for her time, with the qualities of lucidity, spontaneity and skepticism found in the James characters that she most admired, and undoubtedly, superbly, never a “type,” but a “character” of the most unique kind.