In Henry James's *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), money reaping is always entangled with the interpersonal relations such as marital alliances, familial bonds, friendships, and liaisons between lovers. The bargains in these interpersonal relations, in this thesis, will be read as acts of gift giving and the performers of the acts as gift givers and gift receivers. The characters in the London society, with their efforts to develop interpersonal relations, are gift givers who offer nonmaterial gifts to exchange for money. In this milieu, the rich American heiress, Milly Theale, naturally becomes an easy target for the money reapers in London. Milly, as one of the gift receivers, accepts the self-image provided by the Londoners and connives at their money reaping in return. With the bequest to the couple scheming against her, Milly finally offers a material countergift the money reapers aim to obtain from her.

In the flow of money among the characters, the gift givers and the gift receivers play with the paradoxical nature of the gift. On the one hand, the gift is acknowledged as a gratuitous offer aiming to consolidate the giver’s relationship with the receiver. On the other hand, the gift will be returned in either material or symbolic forms. As Marcel Mauss specifies in *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Society* (1925), it is obligatory for the gift receiver to offer a countergift to the gift giver. Gift giving, in this sense, initiates an economic circulation, namely, an

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1 References to this work will hereafter appear in the shortened title, *The Gift*, in the thesis.

2 Mauss’s idea about the obligation of gift returning will be discussed in detail in the following chapters of the thesis, especially in Chapter Two.
exchange of gifts. Such is the case of the money reapers in *The Wings of the Dove*. Being aware that their seemingly gratuitous offers will not be given without return, the pursuers of money become gift givers who plan to acquire money by building interpersonal relations.

To maintain the seeming purity of the gift, the characters in *The Wings of the Dove* further employ strategies to conceal the incompatible truths about gift giving. The strategies of concealment, as well as the gift givers’ limitations brought by the temporal structure of the gift exchange, will be the focus of the thesis. After discussing the characters’ strategies employed in the gift exchange, the thesis will move to the ultimate problem of the gift exchange. That is, the interpersonal relations have become a medium of the characters’ pecuniary pursuit, but the monetary calculations hidden behind the exchange also threaten to undermine the genuineness of these relations. The gains and losses of the young couple (Kate and Merton) and of the American heiress (Milly), in the end, will be determined by the different ways they reconcile the conflict between money reaping and the interpersonal relations.

I. Money and the Interpersonal Relations among Kate, Merton, and Milly

For the reader of *The Wings of the Dove*, what attracts their first attention is often the depiction of the conflict between money and the interpersonal relations.

Among such readers, Charles Roberts Anderson in *Person, Place, and Thing in Henry*
James’s Novels refers to “the power of love in mortal conflict with the power of money” (174) as one of the themes of The Wings of the Dove. In the novel, the central conflict lies in the relationship among Merton Densher and the two heroines, Kate Croy and Milly Theale. Suffering from her family’s decline in both finance and reputation, Kate is urged to accept the marriage to Lord Mark arranged by her aunt. While resolving to save the future of her family, Kate insists to find her own financial support to marry Merton, a journalist with “means sufficient for any one but himself” (Wings 44; bk. 2). In a drastic need of money, Kate sends Merton to please and even marry Milly, an American heiress fatally ill, in the hope that Merton may receive Milly’s bequest and thus have sufficient money to marry her.

Like Kate, Milly is confronted with the conflict between money and interpersonal relations, only her trouble being that her fortune blocks the way of her pursuit of love and life. In the Preface to The Wings of the Dove, James describes Milly as

a young person conscious of a great capacity of life, but early stricken and doomed, condemned to die under a short respite, while also enamoured of the world; aware moreover of the condemnation and passionately desiring to ‘put in’ before extinction as many of the finer vibrations as possible, and so achieve, however briefly and brokenly, the sense of having lived. (xxxii)

Haunted by the approaching death, Milly in the trip to Europe seeks for an opportunity to enrich her life experience. She strives to be accepted by the society and especially by Merton, whom she once met in her homeland and “liked [. . .] as much as ever” (Wings 213) when she reencounters him in London. Unfortunately, her
affections for Merton are manipulated in Kate’s plan of money reaping. Since Milly’s
elder confidante, Susan Shepherd, and Kate’s aunt, Maud Manningham, maintain
secrecy about Kate’s relationship with Merton, Milly unwittingly believes that Merton
is now in love with her until she finally learns the truth and dies.

Milly’s death is supposed to be to Kate’s liking, for Milly still bequeaths Merton
after learning the couple’s real intentions. The bequest, however, brings no pleasure to
Kate and Merton but forces them to deal with another conflict between money reaping
and interpersonal relations. After Milly’s death, Merton’s guilt makes him reluctant to
receive her money and accordingly undermine the earlier intimacy between Kate and
him. In the end, the couple recognizes that in the process of money reaping, their
relationship can no longer be genuine.

With regard to the interactions among Kate, Merton, and Milly, some critics
offer a reading that polarizes the two heroines—taking Milly as a victim whose
fortune is coveted by Kate and other Londoners. Stephen Koch, for example, refers to
Milly’s bequest despite other characters’ fraud as an act of self-sacrifice leading to the
moral transformations of both herself and the money reapers. Expressing no
abhorrence of her friends’ betrayal, Milly leaves her money to the voracious
victimizers. According to Koch, Milly’s death also symbolizes her transcendence into
the impersonal. It is because her bequest redeems the victimizers by showing the
limitation of their quest for money, which contributes to the final realization of Kate
and Merton, especially the latter. Hence, Milly is said to play an “ethereal role” (Koch
95) in the “personal drama of consciousness of Kate and Merton” (100). Milly, in this
regard, is extolled as a figure of innocence, self-sacrifice, and sacredness.
Compared with Milly’s virtue as Koch suggests, Kate’s interest in money seems to make her just an opposite to the other heroine. In *Meaning in Henry James*, Millicent Bell argues that Kate inherits the materialistic worldview from her elders and that her relationship with Milly shows a “contention between the pragmatic calculus [. . .] and the idea of ‘sacrifice’” (299). In this perspective, Kate’s money reaping is done at the cost of Milly’s life and happiness. Here the opposition between Kate and Milly also demonstrates what Peter Brooks calls a Jamesian “melodramatic antithesis” comprised of “the polarities of innocence and deception, good and evil, life and sudden death” (Introduction xi).4

However, the polarized readings on the two heroines are less plausible when challenged by the interpretations focusing on Milly’s conspiracy behind her silence. In *Henry James: an American as Modernist*, Stuart Hutchinson contends that the characters in *The Wings of the Dove* “fail to find a transcendent or impersonal cause for being or doing anything” (94) and Milly is no exception. It is because Milly constrained by death can merely have a cursory look at the world, which assures her of no chance to grow in her vision (97-98). Moreover, Milly is accused of participating in Kate’s and the Londoners’ money reaping by accepting the docile image Kate uses to represent her. As Hutchinson says: “[She] tacitly acquiesces to Kate’s patronizing her as a ‘dove,’ because she gains in this identity an exclusive

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4 There are other critics who attempt to explain the encounter between the two heroines (or between Milly and the Londoners) as reflecting the opposite worldviews Kate and Milly represent respectively. Daniel Mark Fogel, for example, enumerates various “oppositions: America and Europe, wealth and poverty, mortal affliction and brutal vitality, ideas and goods, renunciation and possession, openness and concealment, transcendental desire and actual limitation, innocence and initiation, the requirements of the heart and social requirements, spiritual and carnal love” (55). Such a reading of the oppositions in the novel, however, is challenged by the critical arguments that Milly conspires with or even plots against the Londoners’ money reaping. Those critics against Milly’s innocence will be introduced later in this chapter.
Similar to Hutchinson, Douglas Paschall refers to the characters in the novel as actors of “complicit manoeuvres” (13). By “complicity,” Paschall means “a whole range of accommodations, acquiescences, and compromises,” and “manoeuvre principally denotes military tactics or actions, hence any planned, especially cunningly planned, action by means of which to gain advantage over another party” (15). For Paschall, Kate and the Londoners do scheme against Milly, but the scheme is in fact a conspiracy in which the victim herself participates. It is because Milly with her silence and docility in fact connives at the money reapers’ actions. Her illness and her bequest to Merton, without any detail and explanation provided in the text, are further manipulated “as a weapon of considerable power in gaining, and pressing, her own advantage” (Paschall 15), which can be discerned from the memory she leaves to Merton after death.

Paschall’s study as well as Hutchinson’s therefore shows that the traditional readings on the polarity between Milly and Kate can be problematic. Obviously, Milly’s intentions behind her actions are obscure, and this obscurity allows equivocal interpretations of her bequest to Merton, which can be a part of her conspiracy rather than an act of sacrifice.

In view of the deficiency of the polarized readings on Kate and Milly, this thesis

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5 On Kate’s patronization of Milly, Brenda Austin-Smith explicates that “Kate uses the figure—‘because you’re a dove’—not to elevate Milly but almost to patronize her, to suggest that there are things she wouldn’t, or couldn’t know about the world” (197). Kate’s words seem to reduce Milly metaphorically, but the metaphor in effect lends force to Milly by offering an ideal image to which she can tailor herself. That is, the image of the dove allows Milly “to play the role of American innocent, rather than simply being the innocent” (Brooks, Notes 522). The second chapter of the thesis will explore in detail how Milly appropriates the metaphor as part of her self-formation among the Londoners.
Huang 7

attempts to read them in terms of their respective struggles for life. Instead of dividing
the characters into two categories in moral conflict with each other, the thesis will
begin by showing Kate’s plan of money reaping as that prompted by her family’s lack
of money. With the investigation into the role of money in the London society, it can
be seen that the possibility for Kate and her family to gain control over their future
lies in money reaping. Similarly, Milly caters to the Londoners’ love of money so that
she can fight against death by acquiring a position in their community. Both Kate and
Milly, to solve their personal crises, seek to respond properly to the milieu where they
are cast.

From this perspective, it can be further seen that both of the heroines participate
in an exchange in which each of them gives what she possesses and takes what she
desires from the other. Suiting Milly’s fancy of romance, Kate offers Merton’s love in
exchange for the share of Milly’s fortune. And Milly with her money also repays for
Merton’s love. In the process of give-and-take, both Kate and Milly have gains and
losses, and what they offer and lose will be the main concerns of the thesis.

II. The Londoners’ Quest for Money and the Marital Exchange

Centering on the exchange between Kate and Milly, The Wings of the Dove
presents a society where money dominates each individual’s actions and interactions
with other people. Before Kate conceives of her plan of money reaping, it can be seen
that her father and her sister are ready to benefit from her marriage. Another character,
Lord Mark, is also acquainted with Maud Manningham for the profit he can make
from the friendship. And he becomes a suitor of Milly as soon as he finds greater
potential in her fortune. Each individual in the community, with his/her own plan of money reaping, plays a part in Kate’s exchange with Milly. The exchange between the two heroines, in this regard, should be discussed in terms of the collective money reaping of all of the Londoners in the novel.

What motivates the collective pursuit of money can be traced to the possibilities enabled and prohibited by money. The rich, such as Milly and Maud, not only afford luxuries but also enjoy their social power granted by their pecuniary abundance. The power of fortune is reflected in Maud’s appellation of “Britannia of the Market Place” (*Wings* 22; bk. 1) and in Milly’s being praised as a “success” (*Wings* 112; bk. 4) once she enters the London society. With money, one is enabled to “see everything [. . .]—everything [one] dream[s] of” (*Wings* 112; bk. 4). As Daniel Mark Fogel points out, “[f]ortune [. . .] is the key very near to life itself, to freedom” (56). Accordingly, one who lacks money, such as Kate and her family, is not only deprived of social power but is forced to submit the control over his or her own future to the rich and powerful like Maud.

As revealed in the cases above, money has become a means of displaying one’s social power and determining one’s position among the social strata. John Carlos Rowe indicates that in the novel “[m]oney takes the place of traditions or the accumulated heritages and values of families and positions as the central organizing principle for social relations” (145). In *The Rule of Money*, Peggy McCormack also maintains that “gender in James’s fiction is less of a determinant than is wealth upon a character’s outcome” (6). Indeed, what James depicts in *The Wings of the Dove* is a world predominated and discriminated by money.
As a result, in the society “[n]obody [...] does anything for nothing” (Wings 114; bk. 4), and it is only natural that the characters think of money even when they develop interpersonal relations with others. The marital alliance Kate’s elders plan to make with Lord Mark, and the possible marriage between Merton and Milly are such examples of the money reaping in the interpersonal relations. The exchange seems to work in a simple logic that one is able to share the spouse’s wealth and bring the benefit gathered from the marriage to his/her original family. Both Kate’s marriage with Lord Mark and Merton’s marriage with Milly are manipulated to exchange for money and fame. In The Image of Money, Jan W. Dietrichson thus recognizes exchanges in marriage as constituting a “marriage market,” a place “marked by ‘the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another’” (107).

Regarding the exchange in the marriage market, critics often pay more attention to the market than to marriage. Comparing the characters with fortune to “buyers” and those deprived of capital to “seller[s]” in marriage, McCormack argues that “the concept of marriage market obscures the distinction between public and private realms by obtruding the commercial into the domestic” (6). The marital exchanges in the novel, in her view, are an epitome of the transaction in the market. Like McCormack, Bell sees the text as “the reflex of a commercial society in the recesses of private life” (292). For Bell, the exchanges in marriage demonstrate that “market value” is applied to judging “those parts of a person, those aspects of behavior, once thought to have incalculable value” (292).

Both McCormack and Bell tend to read the characters’ marital exchanges as duplicating or representing the mode of exchange in the market, but they do not
clarify how money reaping in public is transformed into that in private relations, that is, how the transaction in the market is converted to the exchange in the interpersonal relations among the characters. Whereas the exchange in marriage does resemble the interflow between goods and money, the marital exchange is distinguished by the interpersonal relations through which it is carried out. The money reapers may take their appearances as possessions that can be priced and sold, but it is through marriage that they are able to exchange their property with others’. The marital exchange, in this sense, should not be reduced to a resemblance of the commodity exchange just because both are involved with money.

Moving the focus from market to marriage, the thesis attempts to explore the distinctive mode of exchange in *The Wings of the Dove*. The main argument of the thesis is that the characters’ give-and-take of money, rather than trading goods of fixed price, is achieved through the development or usage of interpersonal relations among the in-laws, the family members, the friends, and the lovers. With a close examination of the interpersonal relations involved with money, it will be seen that the mode of exchange in the fiction, rather than being explicit, public, and transparent, is an implicit and complicit one among the participants in the exchange.

### III. Critical Approaches to the Gift

To examine the distinctive mode of exchange in *The Wings of the Dove*, this thesis will appeal to the theories of the gift, which demonstrate an intricate relation among the gift giver, the gift, and the gift receiver. The French anthropologist Marcel Mauss observes that in some tribal communities all materials flow in the form of a
gift. The gift giver, with the objects offered as gifts to the head of other social groups, gains reputation for the community. And the receiver of the gift is obligated to return a gift in later occasions of gift giving. By gift giving, gift receiving, and gift returning, peace is thus maintained among the social groups.

In Mauss’s study, it can be seen that the social and the economic aspects of the gift is different from those of the commodity. Sociologically, the gift consolidates the relationship between its giver and receiver and is a medium through which interpersonal bonds are created between the two parties. According to Jacques T. Godbout and Alain Caillé, this interpersonal bond reveals the gift’s “bonding value,” for the thing given bears the “capacity to express, to facilitate, to foster social ties” (173-174) between the gift giver and the gift receiver. Regarding the economy of the gift, the French philosopher Georges Bataille asserts that the gift giver’s rivalry to offer more objects than those received earlier reveals the “general economy” (Accursed Share 19) of the gift, for the givers make resolutions to lose, not to gain, when they offer and even destroy their possessions as gifts. In the moment when it is being offered, the gift is an “unproductive expenditure” (“Notion” 118), a “pure and simple loss” (Accursed Share 31) without any profit in return. In this perspective, gift economy challenges the meaning of economy in the capitalist market, which, inheriting the rationality stressed in classical economy, refers to financial management, thrift, and accumulation (Accursed Share 175-177).

The social and the economic aspects of the gift, however, betray the paradox that gift giving initiates an exchange. As can be perceived from Mauss’s book on the gift, the giving, receiving, and returning of the gift are obligatory for the giver and the
receiver. But the obligation to return not only generates a compulsory reciprocity but also renders gift giving an economic circulation. That is, the gift can be given as the beginning of an exchange, rather than being offered out of generosity and altruism.

Pertaining to the paradox of the gift, the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has demonstrated how the gift moves in an economic circulation. Challenging the dichotomy between the economic and the noneconomic, Bourdieu discerns an economic structure from the practice of gift giving. He explains how gift giving works to present a “misrecognition” (Logic 117), a disinterested scenario in which the giver and the receiver, consciously or not, deploy strategies to conceal the objective truth of exchange. In The Logic of Practice, Bourdieu seeks to articulate the underlying structure with the idea of capital, explaining that besides the material interflow between the giver and the receiver, the gratitude and reputation thus generated are also “symbolic capital” (112) which can later be converted to material one. Taking the symbolic accumulations in gift giving as a sort of capital, Bourdieu’s study sheds light on the way interpersonal relations and material interflows work in the gift exchange.6

With the theories of the gift, especially those of Mauss and of Bourdieu, the thesis will read the characters in The Wings of the Dove as givers and receivers in the gift exchange. As revealed in the novel, the gift exchange is seen in the entanglement between the characters’ interpersonal relations and their interests in money reaping, including the plan of Kate’s elders on her marriage, Kate’s scheme against Milly, as

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6 Bourdieu’s explanation of the symbolic capital is nonetheless criticized by Alan Smart as exposing “a danger of collapse into economic reductionism” (389) and as showing too much overlap in his classification of different sorts of capital. However, the thesis adopts Bourdieu’s views of economic circulation in the gift exchange to show how the characters in The Wings of the Dove manipulate the gift exchange as a way to reap money. Bourdieu’s ideas of the symbolic capital will be revisited in Chapter Two of the thesis.
well as Milly’s docility and bequest in the end of the novel. In Chapter Two of the thesis, these exchanges will be taken as a collective practice among all the characters instead of separate and disconnected activities. From the collective pursuit of money generates a system of exchange. When the exchange between Kate and Milly is located in this system of exchange, which is a broader context of social mobility, it can be discerned that the exchange is a duplication of Maud’s plan on Kate’s marriage, and that each heroine is an individual who struggles against the “process of inclusion through exclusion” (Hadley 134) in the system of exchange.

Chapter Three will analyze the paradoxical nature of the gift, which threatens to blur the distinction between the gifts of the characters and the commodities transacted in the market. The gift givers in the novel, confronted with the paradox of the gift, require skills of gift-wrapping to disguise the exchange as a gratuitous offer. In this chapter, the strategies of the gift givers in the fiction, especially those of Kate, will be discussed in detail.

In Chapter Four, the main concern will be the work of time in the gift exchange. Between gift giving and gift returning, there always lies a lapse of time. The period of time, having its dual effects on the gift giver and the gift receiver, requires them to appeal to different strategies to deal with the uncertainty brought by the lapse of time. This chapter will argue that during the time, Kate and Merton fail to overcome their impatience of waiting, while Milly, with her arrangement of the tempo of gift returning, determines Kate’s ultimate losses and gains in the gift exchange.