Chapter Two

Exchangers and the System of Gift Exchange

Every one who had anything to give—it was true they were the fewest—made the sharpest possible bargain for it, got at least its value in return. The strangest thing furthermore was that this might be in cases a happy understanding. The worker in one connexion was the worked in another; it was as broad as it was long—with the wheels of the system, as might be seen, wonderfully oiled. (Wings 127-128; bk. 4)

In The Wings of the Dove, what James attempts to present is a society in which the activities of giving and taking are constantly practiced among the Londoners in the novel. As can be seen in the opening passage of this chapter, the Londoners make offers with sharp calculations, and in so doing they gain profits in return. In the light of this principle of give-and-take, it can be perceived that each character in the social circle initiates his/her own exchange with other people, fitting themselves either into the position of the “worker” or into that of the “worked” (Wings 128; bk. 4). The individual exchanges, when being put together, further constitute a system of mutual exploitation, “a community of ‘usage’” (179) as Kenneth Graham indicates in Henry James: The Drama of Fulfillment.

Regarding the activities of give-and-take, it should be noted that they are carried out through layers of interpersonal relations built upon the giver’s offer precedent to the profit he/she receives. That is, everyone in the system who attempts to make profit has to work upon “tiers and tiers of others” (Wings 200; bk. 5) in order to take what
he/she desires from the receiver. Moreover, it is the worship of money that dominates the London society and motivates each individual to benefit from the interpersonal relations. To examine the relation between the pecuniary quest and interpersonal relations, the give-and-take in *The Wings of the Dove* will be taken as occurring in a system of exchange among the characters. With the aid of Mauss’s and Bourdieu’s theories of the gift, it can be clarified how money can be acquired by building interpersonal relations such as marital alliances. This mode of exchange is so effective that it draws both Kate and the outsiders such as Milly Theale, who is traditionally recognized as a victim of the Londoners’ exploitation, to join the system of gift exchange by acting either as the gift giver or as the gift receiver.

I. Gift Giving/Exchange: Social Relations and Economic Circulation

The issue of the gift has been widely discussed since the publication of Marcel Mauss’s *The Gift* in 1925. In his study, Mauss revisits earlier anthropological researches on the customs and rituals of the tribal societies such as the Maori and the tribal communities in the islands of Melanesia and Papua New Guinea. From the societies Mauss observes a “system of total prestations” in which all of the clan, through the intermediacy of its chiefs, makes contracts involving all its members and everything it possesses (Mauss 3-4, emphasis mine). That is, each individual of the community is included in the system of exchange and has to keep the private property in circulation. According to Mauss, the meaning of the gift surpasses the general notion of an object freely given from the giver to the recipient. The range of the gift is extended to social services or hospitality presented as a means of communication among individuals, families, clans or groups.

---

1 The anthropological studies from which Mauss develops his theory of the gift range from those of Bronislaw Malinowski to the materials adopted from various ethnographic records (Mauss 17).

2 Ian Cunnison, the translator of the English version of Mauss’s *The Gift*, explicates that the French word *prestation* refers to “any thing or series of things given freely or obligatorily as a gift or in exchange; and includes services, entertainment, etc., as well as material things” (Mauss xi). On the meaning of *total prestations*, Mauss indicates that the system is constituted “in the sense that the whole clan, through the intermediacy of its chiefs, makes contracts involving all its members and everything it possesses” (Mauss 3-4, emphasis mine). That is, each individual of the community is included in the system of exchange and has to keep the private property in circulation. According to Mauss, the meaning of the gift surpasses the general notion of an object freely given from the giver to the recipient. The range of the gift is extended to social services or hospitality presented as a means of communication among individuals, families, clans or groups.
members of the society are involved with certain ceremonies of “constant give-and-take” (Mauss 33). Among these ceremonies, the potlatch is practiced in the Indian tribes of American Northwest. On certain occasions such as marriages or cult festivities, the potlatch—a public feast in which the host distributes gifts including game, crops, and blankets to the guests—is held among various groups, clans and tribes. The feast holder, by offering presents of great value and quantity, is reputed as generous and thus earns an equivalent rank, prestige, and even leadership among the groups (Mauss 4, 31-33).

As a way to earn social prestige, gift giving can sometimes trigger competition and rivalry among the hosts of the potlatch. To outdo the former gift giver, the new host often strives to display the ability to give by offering gifts of greater value or quantity than those of the earlier gifts. Sometimes the new gift giver even appeals to “a solemn destruction of riches” such as killing slaves, burning the village, or throwing valuable copper bars into the sea (Bataille, *Accursed Share* 68) to defeat the former gift giver and reach an upper position in the society.

As Mauss points out, the acts of gift giving are motivated by the obligations to give, to receive, and to repay (Mauss 37-41). Mauss observes that each individual in the group is obliged to dissipate or squander valuable gifts. And gift receivers such as the guests in the potlatch also have the obligation to accept the gift unless they intend to insult the giver. The guest’s refusal of a gift will be considered as “fear of having to repay,” which threatens to “lose the weight” of one’s name by admitting defeat (Mauss 39). Besides receiving the gift, the gift receiver is further obliged to make a worthy compensation when it is the receiver’s turn to be the host of gift giving. Mauss
discerns that “[f]ace is lost for ever if it [the countergift] is not made or if equivalent
value is not destroyed” (Mauss 41). Gift giving, by obligating the receiver to return, is
“nothing other than gift-exchange” (Mauss 33). That is, gift giving such as that in the
potlatch is not a unilateral offer from the gift giver but an exchange of gifts and
countergifts between the giver and the receiver.

In the light of Mauss’s study, it is clear that gift giving, by which one’s social
position can be acquired, can also begin an economic circulation among the members
of the society. The three obligations are a part of the social structure followed by the
individuals, but the obligations also create a reciprocal relation between the gift giver
and the gift receiver. The exchange of the gift, which is inseparable from the social
relations among the exchangers, provides an approach to the money reaping through
interpersonal relations in The Wings of the Dove.

II. Gift Exchange in Kate’s Marriage

In the opening dialogue between Kate Croy and her father, Lionel Croy, the first
exchange in The Wings of the Dove has been put into action. Kate’s wealthy Aunt
Maud “has made a proposal” (Wings 9; bk. 1) to keep her at the mansion of Lancaster
Gate. Staying with Maud, Kate is promised to “get a great deal” (Wings 11; bk. 1) of
material and social resources for Maud will “do’ [. . .] handsomely” (Wings 9; bk.1)
for her. But actually Maud’s generosity is provided with “a condition” (Wings 9; bk.
1); that is, it is a “treaty” (Wings 11; bk. 1) whose validity is contingent on Kate’s
radical disconnection from her disgraceful father. So Kate must “break off all
relations” with Lionel (Wings 9; bk. 1), sacrificing her familial ties in exchange for the
potential wealth Maud will possibly bring her.

Being perplexed with Maud’s conditional offer, Kate is nonetheless deprived of the right to determine her own role in the treaty. Both her father and her sister, Marian, know that Kate’s relation with Maud stands for a chance to “[m]arry properly” (Wings 13; bk. 1), which means that Kate will marry a man of wealth or rank so as to bring money and fame to the Croy family. Lionel, for example, demands that Kate should stay with Maud for a rich marriage. Entrusting Kate to Maud, Lionel claims that “I place the case for you wholly in your aunt’s hands. I take her view with my eyes shut; I accept in all confidence any man she selects. If he’s good enough for her—elephantine snob as she is—he’s good enough for me” (Wings 13-14; bk. 1).

Marian, like her father, believes in Maud and asks for Kate’s acceptance of “Aunt Maud’s man, [. . .] Aunt Maud’s money” and above all, “doing what she wants” (Wings 29; bk. 1). Kate, urged by her father and her sister, is not allowed to make any other choice than adopting Maud’s suggestion to stay at Lancaster Gate.

Lionel’s consent to transmit his custody of Kate, however, is a feigning expedient that helps benefit himself from Kate’s marriage. Although he yields to Maud’s request by declining Kate’s wish to return home, he is not concerned about Kate’s future but his own profit from the prospect of Kate’s marriage. The reason why he agrees on Maud’s taking over Kate is that Lionel himself is short of material and social resources to make rich acquaintances for Kate. To Lionel, Maud functions as a “spoon” whose use is not to be given up if “one’s reduced to living on broth” (Wings 10; bk. 1). That is, he has to rely on Maud as the intermediate of matchmaking if the only possibility of an improvement of his present condition of finance and prestige
lies in Kate’s marriage. After Kate marries a rich husband chosen by Maud, Lionel will “resume relations” (*Wings* 13; bk. 1) with Kate and shares the benefit granted by her marriage.

Lionel’s manipulation of Kate’s marriage and relationship with Maud implies an exchange in which Kate is given like a gift and received by her blood relatives and her family in law. On the exchange of women in marriage, Claude Lévi-Strauss elaborates Mauss’s study on the potlatch and deems that “the marriage itself is an inherent part of the prestations [the potlatch] which accompany it” (*Elementary* 63). Among the gifts exchanged in the aboriginal communities, women are the “most precious category of goods” (*Elementary* 61) to be given by men as givers. Women being married are not only a gift given to another family but also a medium through which the two families redistribute their possessions. The kinship families of the wife and the husband in Polynesia, for example, offer betrothal gifts and countergifts including a feast and objects such as a basket or food (*Elementary* 64). Women in marriage, as a gift exchanged by men, are “recognized as belonging to the sex by which the biological continuity of the group passes” (Hénaff 49). According to Lévi-Strauss, the marital exchange together with other social institutions such as the incest taboo function to reinforce the structure of kinship and superiority of patriarchal authority (*Elementary* 61).³

³ An imbalanced power relation can be seen in the exchange of women. Lévi-Strauss implies that heterosexual marriages in the patriarchal society demonstrate a gift exchange in which women assume the position of an object exchanged between two male-dominated families. Subjugating women as gifts to be given, men as the subjects of exchange are able to secure the paternal power. Different from Lévi–Strauss’s structuralist understanding of the marital exchange as that of the gift, Luce Irigaray asserts a feminist view which refers to women’s position in marriage as that of a “commodity” (174). That men are in charge of the transaction of women as commodities not only reflects a capitalist form of exchange but shows the way “hom(m)osexuality” is maintained (Irigaray 175). In such a system of exchange, female body is embedded with use value, exchange value, and exchanged usage (Irigaray...
Kate, to be given to the husband appointed by her elders, is such a gift through which the giver obtains the countergift returned by the husband. Bourdieu indicates that marriage involves “very complex negotiations that lead to the marriage agreement” (*Logic* 116) for the two families are “great negotiators [. . .] who can get the most out of this situation (*Words* 70). It is out of such calculations that Maud strives to take precedence over Kate’s marriage. To monopolize the countergift from Kate’s husband, Maud severs Kate from Lionel, who as Kate’s father is both the lineal relative and the gift giver. Once Kate is ceded from Lionel, Maud can take the position of the giver in Kate’s marriage. Since Kate’s husband as the gift receiver is obliged to return a countergift, Maud, as the giver of the gift, will receive the husband’s financial and social resources in return.

The man Kate is to marry, as the expected receiver of the gift, should be able to provide a countergift desirable for Maud. The ideal husband for Kate, as far as Maud is concerned, is Lord Mark (*Wings* 31; bk. 1). Although his noble pedigree leaves him nothing more than a title, he is “grand enough, with a duke in his family” (*Wings* 260; bk. 6). To Maud, Lord Mark’s “ducal value” (*Wings* 259; bk. 6) does not lie in the substantial power from the amount of his material property but the “social values” (*Wings* 259; bk. 6) which can be derived from Mark’s rank of nobility. Maud’s potential profit from Lord Mark’s aristocratic name, as Bourdieu points out, is a sort of “symbolic capital” (*Logic* 112) offered and accumulated in the exchange such as

184-185). Since my focus here is the implicit manipulations of the giver and the receiver in the marriage, I take Lévi–Strauss’s observation of gift exchange to explain the interaction between Kate’s relatives and her husband. But Irigaray’s viewpoint on women’s value as a commodity is also related to my argument of the blurred boundary between gift and commodity, which will be discussed in Chapter Three of the thesis. For more discussions on women’s role in the marital exchange, please refer to Rubin, Cixous, and Butler.
gift giving. That is, besides material capital, the gift receiver’s “counter-services” can be “provided in the typically symbolic form of gratitude, homage, respect, obligations or moral debts” (*Logic* 123). The gift giver, on receiving the symbolic countergift, augments his/her “credit of renown” or “credit worthiness” (*Logic* 120). The symbolic capital, as Bourdieu points out, is “valid even in the market” (*Logic* 119). It is because the symbolic capital enables one to “conclude a deal [. . .] either by mobilizing a number of guarantors, or, even better, by virtue of the credit and the capital of trust that stems from a reputation for honor as well as wealth” (*Logic* 119). The symbolic and the material capital, in this sense, are not mutually excluded but interconvertible.

The marital exchange, according to Bourdieu, implies such a “system of [social] strategies oriented towards the maximizing of material and symbolic profit” (*Logic* 16). This explains why Maud can augment her symbolic capital through her affinity with Mark in spite of his inability to afford any material resources as a countergift. If Kate marries Lord Mark, Maud as the gift giver will benefit from the extension of her social power, which in turn will lead to an increase of the material capital in the end. Through the marital exchange, both Kate and Maud will be endowed with forces in the social circle among the upper class, which means that they will have a chance to be acquainted with wealthy people and further intensify their pecuniary power. Maud, in this way, can secure “the comfort of my declining years” (*Wings* 58; bk. 2).

The economic profit provokes the competition between the elders, but it is Maud’s powerfulness in the social circle that enables her to take Lionel’s place as the gift giver in Kate’s marriage. Her powerfulness, in the eyes of Kate, is revealed in Maud’s being a woman of “strong will and a high hand” (*Wings* 21; bk. 1). Snobbish
as she is, Maud shows her “militant and diplomatic” (*Wings* 23; bk. 1) attitude in making acquaintances with others. Kate, “introduced into the cage of the lioness,” cannot but make “a general surrender of everything […] to Aunt Maud’s looming ‘personality’” (*Wings* 21; bk. 1).

What grants Maud’s precedence over the social circle around her is apparently her wealth. Although both Maud’s speech and her acts are invisible in Book First and Book Second of *The Wings of the Dove*, her material abundance speaks for her even in the occasions from which she is absent. “The tall rich heavy house at Lancaster Gate” (*Wings* 18; bk. 1), for example, contrasts with Lionel’s shabby lodgings in Chirk Street, which Kate describes as a “vulgar little street” (*Wings* 1; bk. 1).⁴ Maud’s material luxury is so powerful that other characters in *The Wings of the Dove* can only admire it with awe. Kate, for example, lingers around “the small silk-covered sofa” (*Wings* 21; bk. 1) in Maud’s house. Merton, on his first visit to Lancaster Gate, is also stunned by the mansion which “look[s] rich” (*Wings* 55; bk. 2) and “the message of her massive florid furniture, the immense expression of her signs and symbols” (*Wings* 54; bk. 2). Maud’s power, beyond any verbal description, is incarnated by “the language of the house” (*Wings* 55; bk. 2).

Maud’s authority granted by her fortune, far from being an exceptional case, reflects “the deplorably superficial morality of the age” (*Wings* 12; bk. 1) that wealth can be a signifier of one’s social power. The “language of material objects,” as Michiel Heyns indicates, not only conveys the “formal relations” but the “social

---

⁴ Chirk Street is nonetheless a fictional one fabricated by James. Relevant to the point is Chris Brown’s remark that “Chirk Street existed neither in James’s day nor in any other, […] ‘Chirk’ seems chosen mainly for its cacophony, appropriate to the tawdriness of the boarding house where Croy resides” (215).
relations” (134-135), or, more specifically, the hierarchy among the characters distinguished by one’s material consumption regardless of virtuous and ethical values.⁵ For example, while Maud can be “unscrupulous and immoral” (Wings 22; bk. 1), her social position is still secured by her fortune and her symbolic capital enlarged through Kate’s marriage. Lionel, on the contrary, is an impotent father responsible for the Croys’ “failure of fortune and of honour” (Wings 1; bk. 1). His scandalous past, which remains unnameable throughout the novel, leads to the whole family’s loss of prestige. Burdened with the ill fame, the Croys are deprived of social and economic potentiality, and further marginalized among the social strata constructed by the disparity between the rich and the poor.

Besides Lionel, Lord Mark and Merton are also unable to fight against Maud, for the former is a nominal aristocrat and Merton is afflicted with his “want of means” (Wings 44; bk. 2). In contrast to the male characters, Maud “was London, was life” (Wings 23; bk. 1). Apparently, what Maud represents is a different evaluation of the “material, [. . .] morality and money” (Wings 56; bk. 2), which dominates the London

⁵ Concerning the social hierarchy determined by one’s ability to consume material objects, the American economist Thorstein Veblen terms this phenomenon in the late nineteenth century “conspicuous consumption” (68) and refers to the consumers of luxury goods as belonging to a “leisure class” (22)—the class newly formed under the influence of capitalism. As Veblen makes clear in The Theory of the Leisure Class, people of this class are those whose ability to purchase high-grade commodities marks their social power. He explains, “Unproductive consumption of goods is honourable, primarily as a mark of prowess and a perquisite of human dignity; secondarily it becomes substantially honourable in itself, especially the consumption of the more desirable things” (69) such as food, wine, clothing, and accessories. This analysis may explain why in The Wings of the Dove the furniture in Lancaster Gate is able to express Maud’s social influence. Moreover, Veblen states that the leisure class is distinguished from the working class by their exemption from labor (35-43), which corresponds to the fact that the characters in The Wings of the Dove dedicate themselves to working upon interpersonal relations, instead of doing sordid jobs, to acquire fortune. The distinctive sort of “labor” in The Wings of the Dove is also noted by the critic John Vernon; he indicates that the “fortune hunters” in James’s novel are indeed laborers for money, but more specifically speaking, they are “ladies or gentlemen of leisure class” whose work “doesn’t soil their fingers” (173-174). Being supplementary to the theories of the gift, Veblen’s and Vernon’s studies on the leisure class’s labor and consumption help clarify the formation of the mode of exchange among the characters in the novel.
society depicted in *The Wings of the Dove*. With her fortune, Maud thus surpasses other Londoners in her social power, which is reflected in her manipulation of Kate’s marriage.

The altering hierarchy determined by money explains why money reaping through interpersonal relations is commonly granted as an effective way to make profit. This mode of exchange is clearly seen in Maud’s manipulation of Kate’s marriage, and it will be recurrent in the exchange to be introduced in the following section.

### III. Kate’s Duplicated Exchange with Milly

Kate, to be taken as a gift exchanged for wealth, is powerless to resist Maud’s proposal to keep her and the ensuing manipulation of her marriage. For one thing, she is burdened with the Croys’ deficiency of social and financial competence. As “a penniless girl” (*Wings* 3; bk. 1) in the society where wealth signifies one’s social power, Kate is unable to reverse the decline of her family and the loss of their “precious name” (*Wings* 3; bk. 1). The scarcity of material and social capability, moreover, deprives Kate of her autonomy on the engagement to Merton, who is “also destitute and impossible” (*Wings* 16; bk. 1) to marry Kate. Caught in the dilemma, Kate yields to the elders’ plan on her marriage.

Kate’s decision to stay with Maud, despite that it seems compelled by the elders, partially results from her fascination with the material amplitude provided by Maud’s fortune. From the life in Lancaster Gate, Kate learns

[. . .] how material things spoke to her. She saw, and she blushed to see,
that if in contrast with some of its old aspects life now affected her as a
dress successfully ‘done up’, this was exactly by reasons of the trimmings
and lace, was a matter of ribbons and silk and velvet. She had the dire
accessibility to pleasure from such sources. She liked the charming
quarters her aunt had assigned her—liked them literally more than she had
in all her other days liked anything [. . .]. (Wings 20; bk. 1)
Kate’s acknowledgement of the charm of the material confirms the power of wealth
discussed earlier in this chapter. Maud’s “provisioned citadel” (Wings 22; bk. 1) not
only keeps Kate in sensuous pleasure but also displays the power of “things” (Wings
56; bk. 2) that Maud can afford with her fortune. In this light, Kate’s staying at
Lancaster Gate can be regarded as a decision made out of her inability to resist the
material abundance of Maud.

Since Kate has surrendered to the material provided by the power of fortune, it
is only natural that she plans to make profits when she sees a prospect in Milly.
Seeing Milly is “an angel with a thumping back-account” (Wings 253; bk. 6), Kate
also discovers that Milly is stricken by “some physical break-down” (Wings 252; bk.
6). What is more, Kate notices that Milly shows particular fondness for Merton
(Wings 228; bk. 6). Bringing these discoveries together, Kate plans to conduct an
exchange with Milly by using Merton—sending him to “make up to” Milly (Wings
256; bk. 6). If Merton successfully marries Milly, he may have the chance to receive
her fortune as a bequest. In so doing, Kate will have sufficient money to fight against
the elders’ intervention in her marriage.

Kate’s plan, in its usage of marriage as a medium of exchange, apparently
duplicates Maud’s strategies to benefit from marital exchange. Both of the exchanges are effectuated by manipulating the relation between the gift giver and the gift receiver. In Maud’s exchange with Lord Mark, Kate is a gift through which Maud as the giver will be able to share Mark’s title as a countergift. Adapting Maud’s exchange for her own plan, Kate becomes a gift giver offering Merton’s love to Milly: the gift receiver expected to repay after death. Precisely because Kate does not take without giving, she considers that her plan is an exchange rather than an exploitation of Milly.

The transformation of Kate’s position from an object to a subject of exchange, however, cannot be probed with the structuralist perspective of the marital exchange as applied to Maud’s and Lionel’s manipulations of Kate’s marriage. It is because in Lévi-Strauss’s study, the daughter’s role in the marriage is reduced to that of an object transferred to the husband, which can hardly explain Kate’s initiation of another exchange with Milly to resist the elders’ control.6 Different from Lévi-Strauss’s idea that the social structure has unilateral influence on individual practices, Bourdieu’s theory demonstrates an interactive relation between the “objective structures” and “the mental structures” of an individual (Words 14). As Bourdieu indicates, individual actions are generated by his/her “habitus,” which is systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles.

---

6 On the weakness of Lévi-Strauss’s analysis of the gift exchange in marriage, Bourdieu indicates that “[. . .] everyone used to talk of ‘rules’, ‘model’ or ‘structure’, somewhat indiscriminately, and putting themselves objectivist position, that of God the Father watching the social actors acting like puppets controlled by the strings of structure” (Words 9). According to Bourdieu, the structuralist study on the matrimonial exchange is confined to “the rules of kinship” (Words 9) drawn from the aboriginal practices of gift giving. But in the case of Kate’s ability to shift her role from a gift to a gift giver, it can be perceived that the principles fail to explain individual practices which go beyond the structure.
which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (*Logic* 53, emphasis mine)

With the description above, habitus can be perceived from two angles. First, an individual’s habitus is his/her “mental habit” (Swartz 101), which as “the product of the incorporation of social structures” (Bourdieu, *Words* 14) is cultivated through the exterior rules and institutions such as law, education, and class divisions. Second, habitus is a set of “internalized and converted” dispositions which “generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions” (Bourdieu, *Distinction* 170). Therefore, habitus not only illustrates an internalization of the general values and practices in the society but also externalizes itself as the principle by which individual actions and judgments are made (Swartz 103).

In other words, although habitus acts to reinforce the social structure outside an individual, it is still supple and “transposable” rather than being a finished and unchangeable product molded by the social structure. One’s mental structure does integrate the social rules, while the habitus is also that by which he/she produces individual practices which consolidate the social structure in return. Thus, an individual may not be able to subvert or abandon the social structure, yet he/she is still a “strategic improviser” (Swartz 100) whose actions can vary in response to the present situation.

Kate’s exchange with Milly, in this sense, manifests the interplay between the individual habitus and the exterior norms to which she adheres. On the one hand, her
plan of gift giving, as a duplication of Maud’s scheme of her own marriage, shows that she internalizes both the mode of exchange and the common worship of money among the Londoners. This explains why she thinks that money reaping through developing marital alliances is workable and acceptable.

On the other hand, her exchange with Milly also exhibits her own strategy against the elders’ authority. Concerning the ultimate goal of her plan, Kate declares that she conducts the exchange to “square” Maud and make her agree with Kate’s marriage with Merton (Wings 53; bk. 2). In other words, Kate challenges the preceding exchange with its duplication, attempting to resist the former exchange of gift with the same mode of exchange. Her duplication-as-resistance suggests that Kate has the chance to assume an active role by adjusting her actions to the present situation she encounters.

IV. Milly’s Position among the Londoners

Since the Londoners’ exchanges center on the benefit from gift giving, Milly with her pecuniary profusion is inevitably brought into the system of exchange when she encounters the Londoners. The first position Milly is placed is that of the receiver of Kate’s offer. Kate notices that Milly’s wealth, like Maud’s, “was a great power” (Wings 373; bk. 8) in the materialistic society. Such a power of differentiation can be illustrated by the pearls Milly wears. As a “royal ornament,” the pearls are “a symbol of differences” which signifies “what Merton Densher would never be able to give her [Kate]” (Wings 374; bk. 8). Thus, Kate chooses Milly as the gift receiver who by accepting Merton’s love will offer her money in return. Kate’s implementation of the
exchange, paradoxically, should be kept from Milly so that Merton’s affections can be
taken as genuine.

The attraction of Milly’s fortune is also explicit in her confidante Susan
Shepherd’s attempt to use her to mend the friendship with Maud. Susan and Maud
used to be schoolmates in girlhood, but they have long been isolated by the
discrepancy between their respective marriages. It is because Maud has “a great
marriage,” while Susan’s is “small” (Wings 99; bk. 3). Marriage, as revealed in
Lionel’s and Maud’s efforts to marry Kate to Lord Mark, serves as a medium through
which the relatives of both the husband and the wife share their possessions. Likewise,
Susan’s and Maud’s social positions are discriminated by their respective marriages.
As a result, their friendship is replaced with “distance, difference, fewer community,
and impossible reunion” (Wings 99; bk. 3).

Introducing Milly to the Londoners, Susan launches an “experiment” (Wings 99;
bk. 3) to improve her relationship with Maud. Knowing that Maud is snobbish in
making acquaintances, Susan takes Milly as a “trophy” (Wings 99; bk. 3) to “give Mrs
Lowder” (Wings 110; bk. 4). Milly with her fortune is thus presented as a gift by
which Susan acquires a “new sense of success,” “whipping her wand [. . .] like a fairy
god-mother” (Wings 103; bk. 4). Susan’s success, as Doran Larson suggests, is
because her “having Milly to give partially balances accounts between Susan and
Maud” (83). Introducing Milly to Maud, Susan caters to the latter’s material pursuit
and thus successfully regains her attention, which can be attested by Susan’s exciting
discovery that “Mrs Lowder’s [Maud’s] life bristled for her with elements that she
was really having to look at for the first time” (Wings 121; bk. 4).
The amity between Susan and Maud is apparently built upon the latter’s interest in Susan’s gift, and Milly is somehow aware of the Londoners’ intention to reach for her money. Early in her first encounter with Lord Mark, Milly is informed of the Londoners’ tendencies to make use of their interpersonal relations. According to Mark, Milly is “being shown” to Maud, which means that she is “to be jumped at” (Wings 110; bk. 4). Since Milly is such a “success” (Wings 112, 114; bk. 4), Maud will never miss the chance to benefit from the acquaintance with her. Although Milly is mystified by Mark’s description of his compatriot, she learns later from Kate that the Londoners are accustomed to working upon each other, and that the Londoners “appeared all [. . .] to think tremendously of money” (Wings 140; bk. 4).

Noticing the Londoners’ enthusiasm for money, Milly nevertheless embraces her new friends for she relies on their help with her crises in confrontation with her wealth and the approaching death. As revealed in the novel, Milly is entrapped by her own wealth, which provides no satisfaction but a burden for her. According to Susan’s observation,7 Milly’s property is so much that “[s]he couldn’t dress it away, nor walk it away, nor read it away, nor think it away; she could neither smile it away in any dreamy absence nor blow softened sigh” (Wings 87; bk. 3). Milly’s wealth does provide her with almost all worldly pleasures desirable for the Londoners, but what the fortune fails to bring is the “power to resist the bliss of what I have” (Wings 94; bk.

---

7 Critics such as F. R. Leavis and Stephen Koch have acknowledged Milly’s absence or her position as an emptied center throughout the novel. That is, her thoughts and personalities are often indirectly represented by other characters’ perspective of her. Thus our observation of Milly’s plight, since Milly herself rarely shows any sign or thought over it, must somehow depend on other characters’ observation, especially Susan’s, on the sideline. For more discussions on Milly’s absence, see Koch 97-98, Austin-Smith 189, Bell 312.
3). Because her wealth can never be exhausted in any possible way, it turns out to be an inexorcisable nightmare that haunts Milly. Besides the trouble with her fortune, Milly is menaced by impending death. Although her lethal illness is never specified in detail, Milly’s concern about the limitation of lifetime is made clear by her doubts if she can retain “everything I have [. . .] for long” (*Wings* 93; bk. 3). Confined by her wealth and illness, Milly seeks for lively experiences with the Londoners.

Meanwhile, Milly realizes that it is difficult for her to “‘get into society’” (*Wings* 106; bk. 4) of the Londoners, for she as an American newcomer is threatened to be labeled as “an outsider” (*Wings* 200; bk. 5) to them. However, much of the difficulty in Milly’s joining the Londoners comes from within rather than from without. For example, she imagines what she will be represented by the Londoners: a “mere little American, a cheap exotic” who is “easy” to be seen through (*Wings* 118; bk. 4). Milly’s imagined state of her being despised by the Londoners further amounts to fears when she is led to a Bronzino portrait in Lord Mark’s country house in Matcham. Milly observes that the lady in the painting

> with her slightly Michael-angelesque squareness, her eyes of other days, her full lips, her long neck, her recorded jewels, her brocaded and wasted reds, was a very great personage—only unaccompanied by a joy. And she was dead, dead, dead. Milly recognized her exactly in words that had nothing to do with her. ‘I shall never be better than this.’ (*Wings* 157; bk. 5, emphasis mine)

---

8 Milly’s illness, never directly articulated in the novel, not only leads to the mystification of her self-image but also contributes to the characterization of her as a dehumanized and objectified figure among other active exchangers in *The Wings of the Dove.*
Apparently, the woman in the portrait serves as an artistic double visualizing Milly’s personal crises including physical illness and social helplessness. Like Milly, the “pale sister” (Wings 158; bk. 5) in the picture wears jewels, the symbol of material affluence. But she also resembles Milly in her lack of joy and vitality, which can be illustrated by Milly’s description of the woman’s being “dead, dead, dead” (Wings 157; bk. 5). To Milly, the threat of death is posed physically and symbolically. Certainly, Milly is dismayed at the fact that her life is limited by her fatal illness, but her ultimate fears lie in the failure to be accepted by the Londoners. It is because she begins the journey to England in anticipation of a vitalized experience, which may be the only possible way for her to ease the confinement of wealth and death. Thus, if Milly fails to attain a place among the Londoners, she will meet her symbolic death caused by the lack of identity.

To expel the fears articulated by her artistic double in the Bronzino portrait, Milly edges her way through the social “labyrinth” (Wings 133; bk. 4) and constructs her selfhood through the image of “a dove” (Wings 202; bk. 5). From Kate’s representation of her avian docility, Milly is endowed with an ideal which “lighted up the strange dusk she lately had walked. That was what was the matter with her. She was a dove” (Wings 202; bk. 5). Apparently, the dove is an image of totality with which she identifies herself and in so doing dismisses her earlier anxiety and helplessness in front of the portrait. Acquiring the new identity, she begins to fathom what would be “the most dovelike” (Wings 202; bk. 5). To Milly, being a dove means that she must abandon her autonomy in the interaction with the Londoners. Drifting along the “current determined [. . .] by others,” Milly is not to resist once Kate
“open[s] the flood-gate” (Wings 195-196; bk. 5).

Milly’s docility, however, is not a forced surrender but a studied imitation to her advantage. Inasmuch as she has been recognized as a dove, Milly assumes the look of obedience to “keep herself [. . .] in abeyance” (Wings 119; bk. 4). And in front of Kate and Merton, Milly begins to act “as spontaneous as possible” (Wings 211; bk. 5) as an innocent American girl. The trope of the dove further shows “a metonymical effect” besides its signifying function as a metaphor (Buelens 413), for its contingent power renders the conversation between Milly and Maud “that of dove cooing to dove” (Wings 202; bk. 5). By fitting herself into the image imposed on her, Milly gradually finds her own position in the community and constructs her selfhood.

Furthermore, Milly’s passivity can be her “complicity” or “willing cooperation” (Paschall 16) with the potential exploitations of the Londoners. Since Milly looks naïve and gullible, the Londoners are made believe that she can be exploited unresistingly. In other words, her compliance equals her acceptance of others’ manipulation of her by conniving at the Londoners’ quest for money. In so doing, she seems to be ready to offer her property as a countergift to those who desire it and thus joins the system of exchange among the Londoners. Milly’s acquiescence in the Londoners’ money reaping also leads her to enter Kate’s exchange despite her ignorance of Kate’s plan.

Therefore, the exchange between Kate and Milly can be taken as that between the two heroines with their respective struggles to find a place in the system of exchange in the London society. Kate’s initiation of the exchange with Milly is a duplication of the marital exchange of her elders. By sending Merton to please Milly,
Kate expects to obtain Milly’s money as the countergift which helps remove the hindrance to Kate’s marriage with Merton. In this way, Kate will be able to marry her lover without sacrificing the social power granted by money. Similarly, Milly fits herself into the role of gift receiver because she seeks to enter the Londoners’ society even though it is her money that attracts them. The exchange between Kate and Milly, like the marital exchange planned by Maud, is thus a part of the system of exchange which incorporates every individual striving to enter the community. In the system, both Kate and Milly assume double positions—“the worker” and “the worked” (*Wings* 128; bk. 4), being exploited but seeking to resist the exploitation by manipulating their positions of gift giver and gift receiver in the exchange.