

**WORDS AS PREDATORS  
IN HENRY JAMES'S  
THE WINGS OF THE DOVE**

**By**

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**A thesis  
submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of**

**MASTER OF ARTS**

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**Words as Predators in Henry James's**

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**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University**

**of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree**

**of**

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## Abstract

The frequent predatory images in The Wings of the Dove are created by the characters in order to reconcile the conflict they experience between their strong desires for personal gain and their equally strong desires to see themselves in a favourable light. In portraying themselves as victims of other characters' predation, the characters conveniently overlook the rapacious nature of their own behaviour, while at the same time experiencing a sense of control over the characters around them by capturing them with verbal images. The roles of prey and predator within the novel are thus not fixed; they fluctuate according to the motivations of the characters who produce the images, and are paradoxically overturned by the predatory power these characters gain in the very act of defining themselves as prey.

The ability of words to capture and to create a sense of control makes them a powerful commodity in the novel, and yet their power frequently eludes the characters as they attempt to grasp it. Words to a certain extent parallel money, and the characters' comprehension and utilisation of the power of words to limit or to expand meaning is affected by the limitations, or lack thereof, of their own wealth. Words, however, are shown to have a power more far-reaching and potentially sinister than that of money, for their implications are ontological; in representing a person, they serve as a replacement for the person, and so figuratively annihilate them.

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## Introduction

*“There were always people to snatch at you, and it would never occur to them that they were eating you up. They did that without tasting.”*

Henry James, The Wings of the Dove (39)

In The Wings of the Dove, Henry James creates a world characterised by predation. Images of animals preying upon each other permeate the novel, so that the English society which James depicts becomes what John Goode, in “The Pervasive Mystery of Style,” terms a “social jungle” (252). It is my intention in this thesis to examine closely the nature of this social jungle, and to uncover some of the many layers of implication within it. In the first chapter, I look at the predatory nature of the relations between characters, and at the predatory imagery used to depict these relationships. Examining the viewpoints from which these images are presented, I show that the roles of prey and predator within the novel are subject to these defining viewpoints, and thus constantly in flux.

In the second chapter, I suggest that the very act of defining their situations as predatory can provide characters with a sense of power. I look at Kate’s depiction of her Aunt Maud as lioness and herself as kid, showing how she lessens the semblance of danger for herself by her use of words. Comparing the scene with Densher’s depiction of Maud as lioness and himself as lion tamer—an analogy which fails to give him the sense

of power achieved by Kate—I explore the conditions under which words may or may not provide their users with a sense of power.

In Chapter 3, starting with an exploration of the scene in which Susan Stringham portrays herself as being ready to pounce on Milly simply for knowledge, I put forward the idea that words themselves, by their confining nature, are often shown to be predators within the novel, and that they may have significant power to harm when the defined characters are made aware of the labels which they have been given. I investigate the concept of words as predators, looking specifically at how various characters use predatory words, and at the effect these words have on the characters being defined.

While the concept of words as predators is one which has not previously been explored, many of the issues which arise from it have been explored by the critics under different frames of reference. Peggy McCormack, for instance, in her study of the motif of money in Henry James, discusses the idea of fixing a value on characters—a concept which I also explore, although I use the idea of fixation as capturing in terms of predation. Similarly my concept of predatory words is part of the broader concept of representation, which Julie Rivkin explores. With regard to words, several critics have mentioned the concept of reductive terminology, in particular with regard to labels which various characters use to define Milly. Thus while no critic has dealt specifically with the concept of words as predators, some of the ideas to which my topic gives rise have been explored in different ways, and mine is yet another way of exploring them.

## Chapter 1

### Predator or prey? Predatory language and the conflict of desires

The predatory motif of The Wings of the Dove has been noted by several critics. Susan L. Mizruchi, in her book The Power of Historical Knowledge, draws our attention to “the parallel between ‘Lionel’ Croy and ‘the lioness,’ Aunt Maud—a pair of predatory beasts contesting for possession of Kate” (221). Quentin Anderson, in The American Henry James, points out that “The world of Kate’s and Densher’s London is vulpine, feral. Its prime verb is ‘to have’” (246). Even a cursory reading of the novel (as far as such a thing is possible) clearly reveals to us a world abounding in predatory imagery: Kate is “a trembling kid . . . to be introduced into the cage of the lioness” (37), Aunt Maud has “gilded claws” (60), and Milly sees Kate as “a creature who paced like a panther” (171).

In the London society which James depicts, relationships between characters consist of seizing opportunities for exploitation and personal profit, as Lord Mark makes clear when he explains to Milly Theale that: “Nobody here, you know, does anything for nothing” (106). John Goode encapsulates the rapacious nature of this society in his assertion that “James creates a moral world in which the most lucid values are treachery and exploitation” (“The Pervasive Mystery of Style,” 249). The workings of these various relationships reveal to us that the very structure of the London society which James creates is based on predatory values, to the extent that such predation occurs even within

the family unit, in which, as Sallie Sears points out in The Negative Imagination, it appears most unnatural:

So the theme of manipulation, of tampering, of regarding a fellow human being not as a person but as an object for use is present from the beginning of the novel, more horrifying perhaps because of its context within the family setting, where the distortion and reversal of roles are so severe, the primary responsibility of who nurtures whom so askew, that the situation takes on almost cannibalistic overtones: a family party feeding off the younger daughter. (66)

Kate is preyed upon by both her father and her sister, who plan to sacrifice her freedom by giving her into Maud's possession, in order that they may receive some of Maud's money. In fact, their predation is so grasping that Lionel and Marian do not even work together; rather they vie with each other to receive the most from Kate. When Kate tells her father "I give up a hundred to Marian," Lionel's response is to sigh "'Oh you weak thing!' . . . as from the depths of enlightened experience" (27). Clearly, Marian and Lionel view Kate and each other as their potential prey rather than as fellow human beings.

While money is a powerful motivating factor for predators within the novel, the theme of money extends further than the level of the literal; it becomes a type of predatory symbol in itself, representing the way in which this social predation works. The utilisation of money as a metaphor in James's fiction is explored by Peggy McCormack in The Rule of Money; she describes the intricate interweaving of literal and metaphorical money, pointing out that "While metaphors far outnumber literal discussions about dollars

and cents, both are so pervasive in James's writing that this economic language acquires a privileged status among his linguistic codes" (1). It is significant that although Maud's motivation in her predation upon Kate is not money, but rather acquisition of social status—Kate being, as Onno Oerlemans points out, "a means for Maud to extend her connections into the aristocracy" ("Literary Value and The Wings of the Dove," 192)—Maud's desires are, however, clearly depicted in monetary terms:

Kate's presence—unluckily for you—is everything I could possibly wish. Kate's presence is, in short, as fine as you know, and I've been keeping it for the comfort of my declining years. I've watched it long; I've been saving it up and letting it, as you say of investments, appreciate; and you may judge whether, now it has begun to pay so, I'm likely to consent to treat for it with any but a high bidder. I can do the best with her, and I've my idea of the best. (65)

The extensive money imagery here reveals that despite the fact that money is not Maud's goal, she does, like Lionel and Marian, see her relationship with Kate in terms of value for herself; as Peggy McCormack suggests, in James's fiction "Society immediately sets prices upon characters' merchandizable assets such as physical attractiveness, mental acuity, culture, title, or money itself" (2). It is clear that the concept of investment is an integral part of the way in which this social predation works, for Maud would no more think of Kate in terms of Kate's wishes and desires than she would think of her money in those terms. To Maud, Kate is not a person but a "presence"—something to be marked for auction, saved up and invested, and then given to the highest bidder.

Indeed, in these terms, Kate becomes a type of currency which, if properly invested, will ensure Maud the end she desires. Marian and Lionel want money, while Maud desires social status, but in each case, Kate is the investment these characters make; Marian and Lionel invest her by giving her to Maud, while Maud invests her by trying to give her to Lord Mark. Maud's final statement—"I can do the best with her, and I've my idea of the best"—is extremely revealing; the preposition "with" emphasises how very impersonal her view of Kate is, for she is not concerned with doing the best for Kate, but with her. Indeed, the significance of this choice of preposition is emphasised by the fact that it follows soon after the scene when Kate's equally predatory father distinguishes between the two prepositions: "I'm not talking only of what you might, with the right feeling, do for me, but of what you might, with the right feeling, do with me" (29). Maud thus translates Kate's "presence" into a form of currency to be traded. Indeed, the very fact that it is Maud's own "idea of the best" epitomises the complete lack of choice she allows to Kate. Like Marian and Lionel, she sees Kate purely in terms of how she may exploit her.

The most blatantly predatory behaviour in the novel is of course that of Densher and Kate toward Milly, as it is the only plan that actually involves benefiting from someone's death. After much subtle implication, this plan is finally made evident in a conversation between Densher and Kate:

"Since she's to die I'm to marry her?"

. . . "To marry her."

"So that when her death has taken place I shall in the natural course have money?"

“You’ll in the natural course have money.” (308)

Their relationship to Milly, like the relationships of Marian, Lionel and Maud to Kate, is characterised by the concept of investment. They plan to invest Milly by giving her to Densher in marriage, so that they will eventually profit from her money.

The novel’s frequent linkage of money with predation suggests another image: in a sense, money actually represents the life force of these characters, for it is what drives them in their dealings with one another. We may even say that The Wings of the Dove represents a complex elaboration on the metaphor of bleeding someone dry, to the extent that the characters’ money can be seen metaphorically as their blood. Money is essentially what enables these characters to live, if we take the word “live” in the broader sense in which James so frequently uses it. Indeed, the ambiguity and implications he creates with regard to what it means to live are an integral part of the novel. Kate’s initial conversation with her father demonstrates that to survive in this social jungle is a far more complex matter than it would be in a literal jungle, where survival would simply mean maintaining one’s physical life:

“. . . Of course I’ve not the least idea how you get on.”

“I don’t get on,” Mr. Croy almost gaily replied.

. . . . “Oh I beg your pardon. You flourish.”

“Do you throw it up at me again,” he pleasantly put to her, “that I’ve not made away with myself?” (26)

Although the word “live” is not actually used here, the concept of living, and its various shades of meaning, is clearly present in the turns of phrase used by Kate and her father. To “get on” can mean either to prosper or simply to fare, and thus Kate’s comment and

her father's reply play with the dual implications of living as mere survival or fulfilment—particularly fulfilment in terms of the financial success which the concept of “getting on” so often implies. The word “flourish” adds to the richness of ambiguity, for it also may refer to thriving financially as well as personally, and is actually repeated later in the scene in direct connection to the word “live”—Kate declares to her father: “You live. You flourish. You bloom” (28). Such double meanings are especially significant in the light of the fact that, for both Kate and Densher, lack of money—or “getting on” financially—prevents them from “getting on” in the sense of being personally fulfilled, for it stands in the way of their getting married, so there is a legitimate sense in which money is their life-blood. Indeed, for Milly, such an analogy is even more evidently appropriate, for the acquisition of her money actually necessitates her death—there is therefore a more literal sense to her being bled dry.

The basic framework of predatory relationships is developed in the extensive usage of predatory imagery that pervades the novel. At the very beginning of the novel, the language used to describe Kate's meeting with her father creates a strong atmosphere of predation. As Kate waits for her father, we discover that “she had braced herself; and for what had she come but the worst.” This impression that Kate is ready to be attacked is heightened by the language used to describe Lionel Croy. We are told that “[h]e had ceased to be amusing—he was really too inhuman” (23), a statement which, as well as having the figurative meaning that he has no natural feelings of compassion, also, if taken literally, starts to suggest to us an image of his perhaps being more like an animal. This literal image is encouraged and developed by the verbs used to describe his movement; for instance, we are told that he “hovered” (25)—a word suggesting a bird suspended in

flight, and which has significantly dual implications. On the one hand it may represent the concept of brooding—the protective behaviour of a parent towards a child which we might expect Lionel, as Kate’s father, to display; on the other hand, however, it is suggestive of a bird, and more specifically used of a bird that is waiting to devour its prey—an image which seems more appropriate to Lionel’s intentions. Similarly, his bodily response to Kate’s verbal reminder that she is “ready” is described with words that could indicate predation “Standing before her with his hands behind him and his legs a little apart, he swayed slightly to and fro, inclined toward her as if rising on his toes” (25). His swaying and inclining toward her suggest an image of his physically cornering her, and the rhythm of his motion implies that it is entirely instinctive, like that of an animal. In particular, the image of swaying and rising brings to mind a snake, while the very reminder of Kate’s being “ready” recalls the idea of her bracing herself for attack, and works with the imagery of Lionel to produce a highly sinister image of predation.

This animal-like predatory imagery is complicated, however, by another, seemingly contradictory, depiction of Lionel, occurring in the same scene, which indicates a significant paradox in this social predation. Apparently, Lionel is also “the man in the world least connected with anything unpleasant.” The description of him continues thus:

He was so particularly the English gentleman and the fortunate settled normal person. Seen at a foreign table d’hôte he suggested but one thing: “In what perfection England produces them!” He had kind safe eyes, and a voice which, for all its clean fulness, told the quiet tale of its having never had once to raise itself. (24)

A voice which has “never had once to raise itself” is a far cry from the roar of the lion which Lionel’s name brings to mind. His predation, although so evidently animal-like in some respects, clearly also has aspects that are quite alien to the animal kingdom: it is instead the “civilised” type of predation of humans—and a specific race of humans: Lionel is “the English gentleman.” The seeming contradiction between this and the animal-like image of his hovering and swaying begins to make sense, however, when we consider that this view is what Kate imagines is seen “at a foreign table d’hôte,” whereas the other is what is seen by Kate, who is an Englishwoman herself. These differences of perception thus portrayed can be understood in one of two ways. We may say that Kate, being English, is more able to understand the underlying predatory nature of her own kind than are those of other countries, who would see only the external signs of British respectability, and that we are thus to trust her depiction of her father over theirs. If Lionel is indeed a predator, then his appearance as “the English gentleman” can then be seen as a disguise, making him a different type of predator: a confidence trickster, or—to use a more predatory image—a wolf in sheep’s clothing. Alternatively, we may say that the question of whether or not a character may be defined as a predator is a subjective one, being dependent on how this character is perceived by other characters rather than on any innate predatory qualities he or she possesses. In short, in this case, either Kate’s perception is the more accurate one, or both perceptions are equally valid.

James provides no easy answer to this question; in fact, throughout the novel, he creates much ambiguity with regard to how, and indeed whether, predators and prey may be identified. The scene in which the narrator describes the talk between Densher and Maud epitomises such confusion:

Aunt Maud clearly conveyed it, though he couldn't later on have said how. "You don't really matter, I believe, so much as you think, and I'm not going to make you a martyr by banishing you. . . . I can bite your head off any day, any day I really open my mouth; and I'm dealing with you now, see—and successfully judge—without opening it. . . ." (66)

Here is a very definite predatory image of Aunt Maud. Although the concept of biting off someone's head is a cliché, the mention of her opening her mouth creates a visual image which draws our attention to the literal implications of the metaphor. The predatory image is, however, completely undermined at the beginning of the paragraph which follows it: "He afterwards felt that if she hadn't absolutely phrased all this it was because she so soon made him out as going with her far enough." We thus realise that we were being misled; despite the use of quotation marks which would seem to indicate this to be a verbatim report of Maud's speech, we discover that in fact this is merely Densher's interpretation of Maud's communication—an instance of what Arlene Young terms "hypothetical discourse" in her article "Hypothetical Discourse as Ficelle in The Golden Bowl," defining her term as "dialogues or monologues which are presented as quoted speech on the page, though not in fact (or fiction) ever verbalized" (382). This image of Maud as predator is therefore not to be relied upon as an objective representation, for it tells us less about her predation than about Densher's feeling preyed upon. Furthermore, with Densher's credibility thus brought into question, we are more aware of the subjectivity of his, and indeed potentially any character's, representations of self and others, and the consequent difficulties in distinguishing predator from prey. Charles R.

Anderson draws attention to this subjectivity in Person, Place and Thing in Henry James' Novels, addressing the scene where Kate sees herself as a kid and Maud as a lioness:

The image first introduced is a dual one: Kate in her upper chamber at Lancaster Gate, thinking of Aunt Maud in her "counting-house" on the ground floor, has likened herself to "a trembling kid" about to be introduced into "the cage of the lioness." But there is nothing here or elsewhere to suggest that anyone shares the niece's notion, only temporary even with her, that she is to be a sacrificial animal. (200)

When looking at the predatory images in terms of the characters who are defining, rather than the characters being defined, it becomes clear that this social predation involves complexities not present in animal predation, where the roles of predator and prey are clearly defined. The objectivity of roles in the animal kingdom cannot exist in the subjective world of human social predation. The scene where Maud is likened to both a vulture and an eagle emphasises this, as it involves a number of ambiguities with regard to predator and prey:

"... She fixed upon me herself, settled on me with her wonderful gilded claws."

"You speak," Densher observed, "as if she were a vulture."

"Call it an eagle—with a gilded beak as well, and with wings for great flights. . . ." (60)

These two images of Maud, although both predatory, create very different implications. An eagle, unlike a vulture, brings to mind an image of power and splendour—an image which is enhanced by the word "gilded," repeated twice by Kate—and the reference to

“wings for great flights.” Furthermore, although an eagle may sometimes act as a scavenger, eagles are more typically understood to kill live prey, while a vulture waits for its prey to die. It would seem that in thus correcting Densher, Kate is indicating that an eagle is a more fitting image of Maud than a vulture. We may say that Kate, as Maud’s niece, would be more likely to have an accurate view of Maud, and indeed her choice of image certainly seems to make sense when considered in the light of the external respectability of her predation. Just as Lionel is “so particularly the English gentleman,” Maud could easily be described as “so particularly the English lady.” However, a close look at Kate’s language reveals that she does not actually say that Maud is not a vulture—she merely tells him to “call it an eagle,” thus suggesting that the difference lies more in the name than the behaviour of the birds. The additional implication is therefore created that Aunt Maud could be either—she is an eagle for Kate and a vulture for Densher.

If we explore these conflicting predatory images of Aunt Maud in terms of what they tell us about those defining her, we discover that these images are indeed very apt. It is significant that Kate, who is the prey in question here, sees Aunt Maud as an eagle rather than a vulture because, as prey, she is very much alive. She has no intentions of literally or figuratively dying in the near future: “Personally, no, she wasn’t chalk-marked for auction. She hadn’t given up yet, and the broken sentence, if she was the last word, would end with a sort of meaning” (22). The prey of a vulture, however, being dead, obviously has no way of escaping, and it is thus significant that Densher, unlike Kate, sees no way of escape for himself. He feels defeated in the face of Maud, coming to the conclusion that “Decidedly there was something he hadn’t enough of” (63). While the prey of a vulture has no way of escaping, the prey of an eagle, however, can use all its

skill to attempt to escape, and if successful, prey in turn on animals beneath itself in the food chain, which of course is exactly what Kate does.

I would contend that the different images that Kate and Densher have of Aunt Maud reflect not only their views of themselves as prey, but also their own way of predation. Kate lives very much in the present; she sees Milly, her “prey,” as alive. She tells Densher “I want to make things pleasant for her,” (214) and talks of “the beauty of what I see” (202). Densher, on the other hand, sees Milly and their predation on her merely in terms of her impending death: “Since she’s to die I’m to marry her?” (308)

From this we see that the predatory imagery in the novel has a more complex function than is immediately evident. While on the surface it creates an atmosphere of predation and seems also to create a paradigm by which we can define which characters are predators and which prey, a closer look reveals that such definitions are not as clear-cut as they seem. Adrian Poole states that “[t]here are no real or permanent differences between worker and worked or predator and prey, because everyone is both” (Henry James, 120), and I would further suggest that this is largely because such distinctions are dependent upon the subjective viewpoint of the definer. The identities of prey and predator are partially created by the words of characters who consider themselves to be victims, and so the roles are constantly changing.

That it is the prey, rather than the predators, who do the defining in the cases we have examined thus far is indicative of a significant feature of this predatory society. The English characters, although recognising the predatory nature of their society, and the predators around them, never seem to see themselves as predators. On the contrary, much emphasis is placed on the predators’ apparent good intentions toward their prey. It is

important to note that in speaking of Maud as an eagle, fixing upon her with “her wonderful gilded claws,” Kate is referring not to Maud’s plans to thwart her relationship with Densher, but to Maud’s provision for her when “troubles were at the worst” (60). Similarly, Kate, while clearly seeing her aunt’s and father’s relationship to her as predatory, never sees her own relationship to Milly in such terms—rather, as far as she is concerned, she and Densher are actually doing Milly a favour: “We’re doing our best for her. We’re making her want to live” (305). As Dorothea Krook comments in The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James, “What is so difficult and puzzling (and profoundly deceptive) is that the exploitation is perfectly compatible, it seems, with the most genuine devotion to Milly herself” (204-5).

The notion of having such good intentions towards one’s prey is of course completely alien to the animal kingdom, but it is a fundamental part of the “civilised” English society James depicts. For these characters, survival is psychological as well as physical, and it is therefore necessary for them to see themselves, and be seen by others, as good people, whose behaviour adheres to society’s definition of honour. The concept of honour is a recurring theme in the novel, frequently portrayed in direct relation to predation. Significantly, it is a concept which finds its meaning in the perception of others—honour exists insofar as it is bestowed upon something by others. The following description of Maud’s seeming good intentions for her prey draws attention to the relation between honour and predation within the novel:

It was clear, on the other hand, that Mrs. Lowder was keeping her wealth as for purposes, imaginations, ambitions, that would figure as large, as honourably unselfish, on the day they should take effect. She would

impose her will, but her will would be only that a person or two shouldn't lose a benefit by not submitting if they could be made to submit. (125)

Here Maud's predation and her honourable unselfishness are placed in a paradoxical and somewhat tongue-in-cheek juxtaposition. The phrases "she would impose her will" and "if they could be made to submit" completely undermine the apparent honourable unselfishness of Maud, and show quite clearly that she still exerts power over her prey and thus restricts their freedom. Her honourable unselfishness is in fact also further undermined in a more subtle way; the word "figure" is extremely suggestive here; to figure as honourably unselfish is not at all the same thing as to be honourably unselfish. Its most obvious meaning in this context would be "to appear," which indicates, appropriately, that the honourable unselfishness of Maud's "purposes, imaginations, ambitions" exists more in appearance than in reality—a notion which is emphasised by the fact that the concept of honour itself finds its definition in how one's behaviour is esteemed by others. The somewhat paradoxical implication is that the goodness of Maud's motives can actually be defined by the way her behaviour appears to others. Thus, by turning on its head the fundamental notion of motivation as something inwardly directed, James illustrates the paradoxes inherent in his characters' seeming good intentions.

In playing thus with the ideas of appearance and motivation, James conveys through his very ambiguity the elusiveness of roles in this social jungle. If we consider the other possible shades of meaning in the word "figure," the significance of this ambiguity becomes still more apparent. Figuring can refer to numbers, and also to language, as in a "figure of speech"—meanings which both carry strong connotations

with regard to Maud. The mathematical meaning suggests that Maud's intentions would eventually work out to be honourably unselfish, implying that such unselfishness is not inherent in Maud's nature, but is something that can be simulated in several stages. Together with the telling phrase "on the day they should take effect," and the mention of "benefit," this indicates that the concept of investment is at work again here, especially when we consider that a figure can also refer to a value or price; indeed, in the light of this, the word "large" now may be seen to mean something more literal than the generosity of spirit to which it appears to refer. It is somewhat ironic that although the passage is ostensibly about Maud's material wealth, it actually deals with a very different type of value; the value is attached to Maud's ambitions—or to their appearance, if the passage allows us to distinguish between the two—and is measured not in monetary units but in such qualities as unselfishness. Thus James subtly conveys the paradoxical concept that Maud's honourable intentions are in themselves part of the investment she reaps in her predation.

The implications of the other meaning of "figure" are vast. The concept of the figure of speech draws our attention to the possible metaphorical meanings in this passage, inviting us to see the language as figurative, and thus to acknowledge the ambiguities of the passage as an inherent part of its meaning. Furthermore, it draws attention to the gap between the figure and that which it is intended to represent; despite the fact, for instance, that the novel's language speaks of lions and kids and eagles, there are of course no such literal animals in the novel, but instead human characters who use such predatory imagery for their own benefit. Thus we are reminded of the subjectivity of Maud's words, and indeed of the words of every character in the novel, with regard to

self-representation; we may see that we are dealing with figures of speech which characters use to manipulate their reality to show themselves in a favourable light.

In the light of the implications which we may infer from the passage's subtle ambiguities, I would contend that there is a sense in which the good intentions of the characters in their predation are simulated by themselves for their own benefit. With regard to these good intentions, Frederick C. Crews, in The Tragedy of Manners: Moral Drama in the Later Novels of Henry James, states that "In purifying the motives of his characters James has reached a stage at which personal enmity is not only unnecessary to evil-doing, it is regarded as an element of moral redundancy" (59). I would disagree, however, that the question of personal enmity is morally redundant. On the contrary, James portrays the paradoxical concept that personal good will towards one's intended prey is somehow more menacing than enmity. Densher, indeed, finds himself pondering how much easier it would be if Maud didn't "like" him:

. . . it was her good nature, not her asperity, that he feared. Asperity might have made him angry—in which there was always a comfort; good nature, in his conditions, had a tendency to make him ashamed—which Aunt Maud indeed, wonderfully, liking him for himself, quite struck him as having guessed. (203)

The idea suggested here is that good-natured predation exerts more control over its prey than ill-natured predation, for it renders the prey powerless to respond with anger, but rather invokes a response of shame. This apparently good-natured predation thus affects not only the material well-being of its prey but also the psychological well-being, for in creating polar opposite worlds of prey and predator, the prey need their predators to be the

villains, so to speak, of their imagined world, so that they may be the heroes. If a predator displays good nature, such opposites are overturned; one cannot be directly opposed to a good-natured person without inevitably proving oneself to be ill-natured. The prey, like the predators, need to think well of themselves, and it is this very need upon which the benevolence of the predators preys; one cannot think well of oneself while responding in an ill-natured way toward apparent good nature.

Therefore, a large part of the power of the predation lies in the very benevolence of the predators, for it feeds upon the need of the characters to be “honourable” in the eyes of society. These characters are afflicted with a conflict of desires: on the one hand it is important for them to see themselves, and be seen by society, as civilised and respectable; on the other hand they have strong personal desires, the satisfaction of which threatens to compromise their honour. Their depiction and execution of predation is thus ironically influenced by a social code which is at odds with the very concept of predation, causing these characters to be in constant conflict with themselves. These characters therefore display a highly ambivalent attitude towards the predation in which they find themselves involved.

It is into this contradictory predatory world that the American characters, Milly Theale and Susan Stringham, uninfluenced by this social code, make their entrance. These characters noticeably live by quite a different set of values from those of the British characters, a difference which may be seen in examining the predatory imagery surrounding them. It is significant that neither Milly nor Susan wants for money, nor do they attach personal value to social status; they do, however, have their own personal desires, and predatory language is used to describe their efforts to attain them. These

predatory images differ significantly from those of the English characters, however, in that Milly and Susan use predatory language to describe themselves as predators rather than prey. Apparently they find no conflict between seeing themselves as predators and maintaining a good opinion of themselves, and, interestingly, “honour” is not a concept spoken of by either Milly or Susan.

Susan Stringham, Milly’s friend and confidante, is portrayed in a predatory role as she travels through Switzerland with Milly. The first suggestions of her predation are subtle—“[Mrs Stringham] wore her ‘handsome’ felt hat, so Tyrolese, yet somehow, though feathered from the eagle’s wing, so truly domestic, with the same straightness and security” (78)—but the distinct echoes of not only Maud as eagle but also Lionel’s safe, domestic predation, make the predatory implications unmistakable. It is interesting to note that while Maud is represented as an eagle, complete with gilded beak, Susan is represented merely by feathers from the eagle’s wing, an indication perhaps of her inferior status to Maud, which is much emphasised as Milly and Susan prepare to travel to London: “Maud Manningham had made, she believed, a great marriage, while she herself [Susan] had made a small” (95). More than this, however, it brings to mind the title image of Milly; the wings of an eagle are in direct juxtaposition to, as well as being a parallel to, the wings of a dove. Wings imply flight, but are also suggestive of a mother bird taking care of her young, an image which fits both Milly and Susan: Susan takes Milly “under her wing”, so to speak, and Milly later provides financial support for Kate and Densher. The difference between an eagle and a dove, however, as predator and prey, is only too evident, and the paradox of a predator taking its prey under its wing is therefore another evidence of the paradox of good-natured predation.

Most significantly, however, this predatory image of Susan differs from the predatory suggestions of Maud as eagle in the fact that while Maud's feathers exist only in Kate's imagination, Susan's are not only quite literal, but evidently chosen by her as an accessory, thus suggesting that her role as predator is not, like Maud's, a passive one, but one which she herself actively creates. Whether or not Susan is aware of the predatory implications of her choice of hat is unclear; however, the more evident predatory depiction of her which soon follows it clearly indicates her role is self-defined:

Thus it was that on this wondrous day by the Brünig the spell of watching her had grown more than ever irresistible; a proof of what—or of a part of what—Mrs. Stringham had, with all the rest, been reduced to. She had almost the sense of tracking her young friend as if at a given moment to pounce. She knew she shouldn't pounce, she hadn't come out to pounce; yet she felt her attention secretive, all the same, and her observation scientific. She struck herself as hovering like a spy, applying tests, laying traps, concealing signs. (83)

The language here is clearly that of predation: tracking, hovering and pouncing are verbs that could be used of a predator, and it is evident that the character who views Susan in this light is Susan herself. Indeed, her self-consciousness in this role is emphasised by reminders so frequent that they become obtrusive: "She almost had the sense," "She knew," "she felt her attention," "She struck herself." Unlike the British characters, she appears to connect no sense of social shame to the concept of identifying with a predator; rather she is motivated by conflicting feelings of curiosity and desire not to harm Milly. We are told earlier that Susan "was positively afraid of what she might do to her" (80).

She knows she really “shouldn’t pounce,” but finds her curiosity gets the better of her “all the same,” and uses the analogy of a spy to justify her curiosity as “scientific”. One reason, perhaps, she can so easily use such an analogy is that her reasons for becoming a predator are far more abstract than those of the British characters, and therefore appear less threatening. The object of her predation is not Milly’s money, but knowledge of Milly, and therefore does not have the appearance of greed that material desires might have. Thus Susan’s self-defined role as predator does not present to her the moral dilemma which Kate and Densher would face were they to define themselves thus.

A further reason for Susan’s easy self-definition is that she is able to justify her predation by linking it to concerns about Milly’s safety. Indeed, her own motivations become irrelevant to her, for in her mind she figuratively actually stops being herself:

The difficulty, however, by good fortune, cleared away as soon as she had further recognised, as she was speedily able to do, that she Susan Shepherd—the name with which Milly for the most part amused herself—was not anybody else. She had renounced that character; she had now no life to lead; and she honestly believed that she was thus supremely equipped for leading Milly’s own. (81)

However, the language here is rich with ambiguities which, as in the earlier description of Maud’s “honourably unselfish” motives, suggest paradoxes inherent within the apparent self-sacrifice which it appears to describe. The word “character” is indeed somewhat like the word “figure—one of its implications is that of representation; it can be a symbol, and as such implies a difference between itself and that which it signifies. It suggests that Susan not only is acting out a part in a play in her decision to lead Milly’s own life, but

that she was so doing even before she met Milly, since such a decision involves her renouncing the character of being “anybody else.” Any real identity of Susan is therefore obscured, which undermines any notion of her selflessness—Susan is not, it appears, denying herself, but merely choosing a different character to play. Furthermore, if she is, in her own mind, leading Milly’s life rather than her own, her very concern with regard to the effects of her predation on Milly becomes a strange type of self-protection, for in a sense, she is Milly. Susan is thus able to manipulate language to justify her predation.

So justifiable is this concept of predation to Susan’s mind that she uses such predatory verbs to describe not only her own behaviour but also that of Milly, whom she evidently considers far superior to herself. After forming in her mind the “conceit in which Milly was the wandering princess,” she goes on to describe the behaviour of such princesses:

. . . what could be more in harmony now than to see the princess waited upon at the city gate by the worthiest maiden, the chosen daughter of the burgesses? It was the real again, evidently, the amusement of the meeting for the princess too; princesses living for the most part, in such an appeased way, on the plane of elegant representation. That was why they pounced, at city gates, on deputed flower-strewing damsels; that was why, after effigies, processions and other stately games, frank human company was pleasant to them. (111)

The word “pounced” is a clear echo of Susan’s portrayal of herself tracking Milly; the word therefore stands out in stark contrast to the language of royalty, suggesting that Milly’s search for “frank human company” is a type of predation.

Not only does Susan's language depict Milly as predator, but the language used to portray Milly's own thought patterns suggests that Milly herself also sees her desire for company in predatory terms. We are told that "it had rolled over her that what she wanted of Europe was 'people,' so far as they were to be had" (93). Although this is not directly predatory, the word "had"—appearing as it does in this sense as somewhat crude—suggests a type of grasping for possession. As the paragraph continues, this leads to more directly predatory implications:

. . . the vision of this same equivocal quantity was what . . . was again spoiling for her the pure taste of scenery. She was all for scenery—yes; but she wanted it human and personal and all she could say was that there would be in London—wouldn't there?—more of that kind than anywhere else. . . . they would eat and drink because of what might happen tomorrow; and they would direct their course from that moment with a view to such eating and drinking. (93)

In speaking figuratively of "the pure taste of scenery" and then specifying that the scenery she wants is "human and personal," Milly mixes her images to suggest obliquely that what she wishes to taste is people. The predatory implications are clearly not accidental, for she then uses the biblical reference to eating and drinking—"Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die" (Isaiah 22:13)—to illustrate her plan to find this human scenery. While such an image is just that—an image—we are not allowed to overlook the literal meaning of eating and drinking, for having so made their plan to eat and drink of human scenery, they then go on to eat and drink in actuality: "They ate and drank that night, in truth, as in the spirit of this decision."

Milly's own awareness of the predatory nature of her desires is made evident in the representation of her thoughts when she is dining at Lancaster Gate. Wishing to "get away from" Lord Mark, she reflects: "If she was to keep herself out she could naturally best do so by putting in somebody else. She accordingly put in Kate Croy, being ready to that extent—as she was not at all afraid for her—to sacrifice her if necessary" (107). The choice of the word "sacrifice," with its literal implications of death, clearly reveals that not only does Milly possess the potential for ruthless predatory behaviour, but that it is a potential of which she is well aware. She expresses no sense of shame at such awareness; indeed her motivation is transparently self-centred. Unlike the British characters, she apparently finds no necessity to show her intentions as "honourable."

The significance of this passage as an indication of the difference between Milly and Kate can be seen by comparing it to a passage in which Kate and Densher speak of sacrifice; Kate says:

"I do see my danger of doing something base."

"Then what can be so base as sacrificing me?"

"I shan't sacrifice you. Don't cry out till you're hurt. I shall sacrifice nobody and nothing. . . ." (60)

Unlike Milly, Kate displays a determination not to sacrifice anyone.

This contrast sharply contradicts the way in which the novel is often read, epitomised by Sallie Sears in her comment: "Milly is passive and gentle—a dove; Kate is restless and ruthless—a panther" (73). Indeed the very title of the novel would seem to point to such a reading; being a direct quotation from the Bible, it immediately brings to mind the biblical image of the dove, with all its connotations of the peacemaker bearing

the olive branch, and the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus. The biblical juxtaposition of raven and dove seems to suggest a neat analogy for Kate and Milly, especially in the light of the novel's opening description of Kate having "dusky hair," being "dressed altogether in black," and, perhaps most significantly, wearing a "black, closely-feathered hat" (22). This neat analogy, however, is clearly deceptive; the novel continually undermines such black and white (quite literally in this case) readings—in fact, we see that Milly hopes that Dr Luke Strett "might pronounce her . . . a veritable young lioness." Of course, in saying this, she is merely expressing a desire for strength; she does not have plans to harm anyone. But the word "lioness" does have specific predatory implications, and harks back to the imagery of Aunt Maud. Perhaps what allows Milly such freedom in accepting her desires, is that, like Susan's, they are non-material. Like the desire for knowledge, the desire for human company does not have the appearance of grasping—nor the appearance of what Kate frequently refers to as "vulgarity"—that the desire for money is portrayed as having.

The self-definitions of Susan and Milly as predators are of course just as subjective as the self-definitions of Kate and Densher as prey, although differently motivated. Indeed, the fact that it is Milly who dies, and whose death is taken advantage of, would cast more than a little doubt over her apparent role as predator—although one could equally say that her final act of generosity is a subtle act of predation, for in heaping burning coals on the lovers' heads (to use the biblical image), she succeeds in harming their relationship rather than helping. Of course there is nothing to suggest that this was her intention, but since we are not shown the contents of her thoughts after her discovery of their plot, we cannot dismiss it as a possibility. Besides, as we have seen,

motivation is a slippery concept in the predation of the social jungle which James portrays. These ambiguous American predators therefore further obscure our efforts to understand this social jungle, and so emphasise the impossibility of clearly distinguishing between prey and predator in the novel.

Such confusion is clearly created by the fact that these lionesses, kids and eagles exist merely in words—words which evidently contradict their outward appearances of civilised respectability. Indeed, this essential component itself creates further ambiguity with regard to the image of the jungle, for words do not exist for the animals of a literal jungle; literal animals have no words to define themselves or each other. In the social jungle of The Wings of the Dove, however, James creates, and constantly plays on, an intricate connection between words and predation, and the power of words to affect our understanding of this jungle. Due to the subjectivity of the viewpoints portrayed, and the ambiguity of the words chosen, we find that the predatory roles of the characters are constantly in flux, and that it is therefore impossible to find our way in this jungle.

## Chapter 2

### Survival by definition: The power of words in a predatory society

Having established that the images of predation which pervade The Wings of the Dove are highly subjective and speculative—created by the words of characters with specific ends in mind, and thus in essence figments of the imagination of imaginary characters—it is important to note that these images nevertheless wield considerable power for the characters who create them. Such predatory imagery actually does more for the self-defined prey than simply let them see someone else as the villain and consequently think well of themselves. Paradoxically, the very words used by the prey to define their predators give the prey a kind of power themselves, for in thus defining their own situations the self-defined prey develop some sense of control over them.

The sense of control that words can bring to a predatory situation may be clearly seen in the detached admiration and amusement Kate displays in her depiction of Maud, when she speculates that her aunt “would have been meanwhile a wonderful lioness for a show,” and creates “with free fancy” the somewhat comical image of Maud as “Britannia unmistakable but with a pen on her ear” (37). The benefit for Kate in creating such vivid images of Maud is made evident by the narrator’s brief comment at the end of Kate’s lengthy visualisation: “So at all events in silent sessions and a youthful off-hand way Kate conveniently pictured her.” We see that creating a humorous “off-hand” image of Maud is convenient for Kate—it enables her to reduce the semblance of danger by

capturing the situation, and indeed Maud herself, in words. This becomes yet more manifest as the paragraph nears its conclusion: “Yet what were the dangers, after all, but just the dangers of life and of London? Mrs Lowder was London, was life—the roar of the siege and the thick of the fray” (38). In thus generalising Maud as London itself, and even as “life,” Kate “conveniently” generalises Maud’s potential to harm as “just the dangers of life and of London,” and so neutralises it. Kate’s words, therefore, become weapons in themselves, so that far from being the prey she portrays herself to be, she takes on a type of predatory role herself, while Maud, trapped by Kate’s generalising words, becomes Kate’s prey. Of course, Maud knows nothing of this and so is not personally affected by Kate’s words, but insofar as the predation has a separate existence in the words of the characters’ minds, in Kate’s head Kate clearly has power, ironically even as she portrays herself as prey. Thus her words enable her to survive psychologically any predation upon herself.

Densher, too, uses his image of Maud to attempt to gain some control over the predatory situation through words, but to quite a different effect: “She was in fine quite the largest possible quantity to deal with; and he was in the cage of the lioness without his whip—the whip, in a word, of a supply of proper retorts” (62). While Kate sees herself as a kid, Densher sees himself as a lion tamer—an image with very different implications. While a kid is at the mercy of a lion, a lion tamer not only has control over a lion, but has control which supersedes the predation of the food chain. A lion tamer doesn’t kill for food, but controls the behaviour of the living beast for the purposes of entertainment. Densher’s image of a whip generated by “a supply of proper retorts” clearly indicates his realisation that words are the key to gaining control in the face of predation—indeed, it is

an image he also uses to describe Kate's words to him: "her easy injunction . . . was like the crack of a great whip in the blue air" (61)—but, despite this image, he does not attain the sense of control that Kate, the "kid," achieves in her image of Maud. Ironically, his very recognition that words can have power—even violent power—simply serves to frustrate him, as he considers himself to be "without his whip."

We see throughout this scene that Densher is grasping for words, not merely to use on Aunt Maud, but in order that he may describe the situation to himself and so reduce his sense of its danger. This can be clearly seen in the delight he experiences at the moment when he does, albeit temporarily, find a word to describe his surroundings:

Never, he felt sure, had he seen so many things so unanimously ugly—operatively, ominously so cruel. He was glad to have found this last name for the whole character; "cruel" somehow played into the subject for an article—an article that his impression put straight into his mind. He would write about the heavy horrors that could still flourish, that lifted their undiminished heads, in an age so proud of its short way with false gods; and it would be funny if what he should have got from Mrs. Lowder were to prove after all but a small amount of copy. (63)

In finding the word "cruel," Densher begins to gain a sense of control, and at once starts to see how he can put the whole situation into words by reducing it into "the subject for an article." Like Kate, he begins to use vivid images—"heavy horrors" with "undiminished heads"—to turn a potentially predatory situation into something humorous, and thus to neutralise the predatory power he sees in Maud.

He quickly begins to lose this sense of control, however, as he finds his words failing:

Yet the great thing, really the dark thing, was that, even while he thought of the quick column he might add up, he felt it less easy to laugh at the heavy horrors than to quail before them. He couldn't describe and dismiss them collectively, call them either Mid-Victorian or Early—not being certain they were rangeable under one rubric. (63)

Densher begins to quail, not because the situation has in any way changed, but because he discovers he cannot find words with enough power to reduce the predatory power of the situation: he cannot “describe and dismiss” these “heavy horrors.” This is significant, for it clearly reveals the annihilating power of words; to “describe” is to “dismiss.” Words, if they can be found, are a powerful predatory weapon in the world of psychological predation—they have the capacity to change the attitude of the “prey” from fear to control.

This of course raises the question of why Kate is so much more successful than Densher at finding words which empower her in the face of predation, especially considering that Densher's imagined role as lion tamer would seem to give him greater opportunity for experiencing a sense of control than Kate's as a kid. I would suggest, however, that it is these very roles that influence the feeling of control they do experience. An important aspect of the power of words is their ability to confine, for to reduce or limit a concept is to make it more manageable and therefore less threatening. Thus for the purposes of reducing the semblance of danger in a situation, words that confine by limitation carry considerably more power than words that open up meaning by

implication. I would contend that an essential reason why Densher's definition of himself as a lion tamer fails to provide him with the sense of power which Kate's role affords her is that there is clearly a sense in which the implications of Densher's role are vaster and more complex than Kate's; adopting a role of power demands that he take on responsibility for controlling Maud's behaviour, while Kate, adopting the passive role of prey, is under no such obligation. Ironically then, the limitations of Kate's role serve to empower her, while Densher's role of power serves to entrap him by making demands of him which he cannot fulfil. Ruth Bernard Yeazell's comment on Marcher from The Beast in the Jungle could also apply very aptly to Densher: "But Marcher the tiger-hunter is in reality Marcher the terrified" (Language and Knowledge in the Late Novels of Henry James, 37). Indeed, Densher's imagined role as lion tamer is almost comic in its utter incongruity with reality; Maud's power over him is so incontestable that she does not even feel the need to use "her weapons of defence"—she leaves them "untouched and unmentioned" (63). In his insistence on living out his role as a lion tamer, then, Densher weakens his position, for his role makes demands of him which he clearly cannot achieve in reality.

The evident disparity between Densher the lion tamer and Densher the terrified draws attention to another element at the root of his role's failure to empower him: the very act of carrying out his self-imposed responsibility involves bringing the world of fantasy into the real world, for in order to succeed he would clearly have to become in reality the fictional lion tamer he imagines himself to be, and so control in reality his fictional image of Maud the lioness. Densher thus attempts to live simultaneously in two incompatible worlds, and I would contend that this renders inevitable his inability to

achieve a sense of control with his words. Significantly, when Kate finds convenient words to capture Maud, it is “in silent sessions;” her limited role as kid frees her from the responsibility of controlling Maud in reality. Her images are able to maintain for her a sense of power because she confines them within the realm of her imagination; indeed, while forming these images, she chooses to stay upstairs in Maud’s house, knowing that “to go down, to forsake her refuge, was to meet some of her discoveries halfway, to have to face them or fly before them; whereas they were at such a height only like the rumble of a far-off siege heard in the provisional citadel” (36). Densher’s imagined whip of retorts, however, indicates that he wishes his words to have the same power in both worlds; having recognised the power of words, he does not appear to be aware of any conditioning limitations to this power, for he plans for his words to control Maud not only in the world of his imagination, but also the outside world, where Maud exists quite separately from his image of her. This is where his images become unmanageable, for of course Densher’s imagined world of Maud the lioness and the outside world of the actual unreduced and human Maud are quite incompatible, and thus his words cannot maintain the same power in both.

Survival in this social jungle therefore renders necessary an awareness and internal separation of the dichotomy of worlds into which it is divided. The world of the characters’ imaginations is just as vivid as the physical world in which these characters live, but these worlds are very clearly distinct; the lions which roam in the world of the characters’ imaginations clearly do not exist in reality. It is an awareness of such a distinction which enables Kate to understand that her father is both a predatory animal and “the English gentleman” (24); she sees that roles change according to paradigm shifts

in this jungle, and that therefore her defining words must change accordingly in order to maintain their power.

Paradoxically, then, there is a sense in which Densher's images are more limited than Kate's, as the very reason they place him in incompatible worlds is that he rigidly holds on to them in the face of opposing complexities, while Kate changes hers as the situation demands. Having portrayed Maud as a lioness, Kate then goes on to use a very different image: that of "Britannia of the Market Place" (37), and immediately follows that image with modifications, having begun to understand "the mistake of trusting to easy analogies." Such modifications, though, simply become part of her ever-changing images; her realisation that Maud is "a complex and subtle Britannia" serves to give freer rein to her versatile imagination, whereas Densher's similar realisation—his uncertainty that Maud's "heavy horrors" were "rangeable under one rubric"—hinders the development of his image, for the rigidity of his images prevents him from encompassing such ambiguities within his vision. I would suggest that the fluidity of Kate's images serves to empower her within the social jungle for it indicates an understanding and acceptance of the elusiveness of roles within it. This understanding is exemplified in her response to Densher's declaration that "I think, you know, we've been awfully decent." She shows a clear comprehension of the fluidity of roles by saying "For ourselves, for each other, for people in general, yes. But not for her. For her . . . we've been monstrous" (53). It is significant that while Kate defines herself as a kid in the instant which we examined, she rapidly and easily changes her roles throughout the novel to suit her situation. She finds a "basis" for permitting Densher to call upon her by defining herself as "just the contemporary London female, highly modern, inevitably battered,

honourably free” (50), and she rejoices in her and Densher’s “wearing of the name” of lovers (51).

Most significant, perhaps, is her role as the writer of her own life and that of her family: “the broken sentence, if she was the last word, would end with a sort of meaning” (22). Indeed, although not a writer by trade, her story-telling abilities rival those of Densher and Susan; the language she uses to tell Densher of her life is described as almost having a life of its own; her descriptions are characterised by “free and humorous colour” (56), she is “violent and almost unfeminine” in talking to him, and she uses the “short cut of the fantastic and the happy language of exaggeration” (57). Densher is made aware of the comparative inadequacy of his own stories: “It always struck him she had more life than he to react from, and when she recounted the dark disasters of her own house and glanced at the hard offset of her present exaltation—since as exaltation it was apparently to be considered—he felt his own grey domestic annals made little show” (56). Interestingly, Densher considers the difference to lie in Kate’s life, not the words she uses to depict it; to him, Kate’s words are merely a reaction to this life, rather than a manipulation of it. The emphasis drawn to his acceptance and utilisation of her term “exaltation,” however, stresses the grossness of his underestimation of Kate’s control. It is clearly a term of value, not of fact, and one which we may suppose Densher—from his use of the word “apparently”—not to have considered using himself. Despite his hesitation, though, he adopts this word, and thus its value, into his understanding of Kate’s life, without realising that in so doing he is being manipulated by her. Kate’s life, then, is in a sense created by her own words; as Susan Mizruchi points out: “In

conceiving of her past as a debauched tale that has somehow gone awry, Kate establishes her power to rewrite it" (186-7).

Although each image Kate creates is limited, the images have a fluidity which enables her to maintain a sense of power in a world where roles are in constant flux. Densher, in attempting to hold rigidly to his images, finds himself repeatedly trapped by the changing nature of this social jungle. Rather than travel from world to world, he attempts to merge the two into one. Interestingly, he does what Ruth Bernard Yeazell describes the reader as being in danger of doing: ". . . we postulate a consistent referential universe to which a novel's words finally point. But one thus translates James's late novels at the risk of doing violence to what is most idiosyncratic and exciting in them, of making their peculiarly fluid and unsettling reality something far more stable and conventional" (2).

Densher's inability, or unwillingness, to give his roles the fluidity of Kate's may be clearly seen in his attempted merging of not only the conflicting worlds of the imagined and the actual, but also two other related contrasting worlds: that of the animal kingdom and the human world. His human role as a lion tamer in a predatory society quite squarely places him simultaneously in these conflicting worlds. While we may say that there is a sense in which all the characters are so placed, Densher's situation is different in that he attempts to merge these two worlds into the single world of his imagination. While the other characters are animals in the imagined world of metaphor and humans in the real world, Densher is unwilling to conceive of himself as an animal either in the literal human world or in his imagined animal kingdom, and thus tries to place his human self-image incongruously amongst the animals of his mind. Kate suffers

from no such conflict; while she sees herself as “the contemporary modern female” (50) in the human world of such social conventions as a man paying court to a woman, she just as easily imagines herself as an animal in the jungle she envisages. Her choice of animal interestingly reflects some of her characteristics as a human; goats are traditionally portrayed in contrast to sheep, which represent both innocence and stupidity. Kate knows herself to be intelligent—she says to Densher “we’re hideously intelligent” (60)—and she also has no delusions of being innocent—she “didn’t pretend to be a sheltered flower” (50). Her role as a kid, then, fits in with her human self, but it is nevertheless an animal role and thus places her imagined self in the same world of the other characters as she imagines them. Such an identification then gives her power to create an image which fits in completely with the notion of the food chain which is an intrinsic part of the metaphorical jungle of the novel, and yet also with her understanding of her own nature, and so her sense of helplessness is lessened.

Densher’s role as lion tamer, however, incurs more confusion than control because it creates an uncertain place for him within the animal kingdom which he sees as surrounding him. It is this very ambiguity which robs his words of their power. Although his role has the seeming advantage of placing him outside of and above the animal kingdom, his very choice to define those around him as animals and himself as human means that he alienates himself from a world in which he has no choice but to live and try to survive. Such self-imposed alienation naturally makes survival more difficult, for in separating himself from this imagined animal kingdom, he separates himself from the predatory mind-set he attempts to define, and thus cannot be contained in its discourse. His role requires a different discourse, so to speak, from that of the “animals”

around him, and therefore he finds the words he uses are completely incompatible with the situation he attempts to dismiss. This can be clearly seen as Densher's solitary musings on his status, as he waits for Maud, draw to a close:

But it was above all the solid forms, the wasted finish, the misguided cost, the general attestation of morality and money, a good conscience and a big balance. These things finally represented for him a portentous negation of his own world of thought—of which, for that matter, in presence of them, he became as for the first time hopelessly aware. They revealed it to him by their merciless difference. (63)

A human's power of thought would be of little help to him when being attacked by the "solid form" of a lion, and so Densher can find no words to capture the "solid forms" of Maud's world; he becomes "hopelessly aware" of the "merciless difference" between Maud's world of "things" and his of "thought." The very notion of using an abstract world of "thought" to attempt to define a concrete world of "things" emphasises the impotent vagueness of Densher's words in the face of predation.

Densher's attempt to merge incompatible worlds may be seen as resulting from a fear of facing the harsh realities of living in a social jungle. Paradoxically, however, rather than protect him, the very evasiveness of his self-definition serves to trap him between two conflicting discourses: those of the words he uses to define the predatory world around him—of which he is undeniably a part—and those he uses of himself as a member of a human, civilised world. As a "lion tamer" he is denying the power of the predatory nature of his society—a power which he has himself partially created in the very act of so defining it. Furthermore he is denying the animal aspects of his own

nature—a denial which can be clearly seen in his frequent judgment of Lord Mark as a “beast.” The distinction he sees between his own behaviour and Lord Mark’s is clearly a delusion, as noted by Millicent Bell: “Later, when he discovers that it is Lord Mark’s revelation of his secret engagement to Kate that has caused Milly’s collapse he is wildly indignant, as though to assert that he is not, like Mark, after Milly’s money—though what else has he been after?” (Meaning in Henry James, 297). It is interesting that the two worlds between which Densher appears to hover—the animal and the human—are similar to those pointed to by Bell as being the worlds of Milly and Kate:

Kate is a contrast with Milly because she is conceived not so much as a wicked person who plots to contrive personal gain and deceives her friend as a character who belongs to another plot of her own—that of naturalism. In the latter plot, she is, of course, only what she must be, determined by her circumstances and endowments, her own will itself a “natural” force that makes her not so much a passive victim as a creature who survives as she can. The novel’s two heroines seem to belong to different worlds of cause and effect. (299)

Although Bell does not talk specifically of the animal and human worlds, the concept of naturalistic world to which she claims Kate belongs may be seen as one governed by animal instincts. One could argue that Densher’s relationship with the two women is a parallel to his attempt to live in both worlds, and that his ultimate failure to possess them both reflects the impossibility of simultaneously inhabiting both worlds. The confusion he creates by insisting on maintaining human status in his imagined animal world puts him in a weaker position than Kate, for in not accepting the rules of survival, he cannot

live by them, and the result is that he ends up behaving in conflicting ways. On the one hand he is so scrupulously true to his word that he feels obliged to go to church simply because he did not refute Maud's assumption that he was going to do so; as William W. Stowe points out, Densher "maintains his literal, surface honesty to the end" (Balzac, James, and the Realistic Novel, 163). On the other hand, however, Densher does not stay true to the unspoken but much stronger agreement between himself and Kate. Having agreed to stay with Milly in Venice on the condition that Kate will fulfil his desire for physical intimacy with her (and thus, let us note, becoming a predator not only on Milly, but on Kate too) and furthermore clearly understanding from Kate all the implications of staying with Milly—to carry out the predatory plan of giving Milly opportunity to fall in love with him, marry him, and leave him money, which he and Kate will in due course possess—Densher eventually fails to keep his side of the agreement, refusing to see the plan to its conclusion:

“ . . . Well she stretched out her wings, and it was to that they reached.

They cover us.”

“They cover us,” Densher said.

“That’s what I give you,” Kate gravely wound up. “That’s what I’ve done for you.”

. . . .

“Do I understand then—?”

“That I do consent?” She gravely shook her head. “No—for I see. You’ll marry me without the money; you won’t marry me with it. If I don’t consent you don’t.” (403)

In no longer holding to the agreement that they marry and take the money, Densher displays a very different moral code than Kate, who is always true to her honour; as she points out at the end of the novel, “I did . . . play fair” (395). Densher’s choice would make no sense in the animal kingdom—morally it may seem like the better choice, but in reality he has taken the best of both worlds, while taking no responsibility for his actions in either. He joins the animal world in his predation on Kate, and his animal desire for sexual relations with her, but backs out of the fair exchange he promised her by reverting to a supposedly humanistic code of behaviour, which ironically is, as Millicent Bell points out, “as futile (Milly is dead and cannot appreciate his sacrifice) as it is self-mutilating (Kate will consequently be lost to him)” (305).

Kate’s and Densher’s attempts to define the predation surrounding them, and in so doing to establish a sense of control over it, are set in direct contrast with Milly’s understanding of this same world. Despite the varying levels of success they achieve in reducing the semblance of danger of the predatory world around them, Kate and Densher both share an understanding that it is predatory and that they are being preyed upon. Milly, however, being from a very different world, has no such concept of predation, and consequently no concept of using words as a weapon against it; as Frederick C. Crews points out, the English society in which she finds herself “corresponds to no values with which she is familiar” (69). As we have seen, Milly sees herself as a predator, and appears to connect nothing shameful with it. As far as she is concerned, the people that surround her in London are her prey, and it does not occur to her that she herself might be in danger from the very human scenery she is so eager to taste.

Milly's understanding of predation, however, and herself as predator, is greatly influenced by her financial situation. While Kate has a specific and thus limited amount of money (if she gives a certain amount to her sister, then there is less for her father), Milly's wealth is so vast that any measurement or limitation seems impossible:

She 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 it away in any softened sigh. She couldn't have lost it if she had tried—that was what it was to be really rich. (86)

Without such limitations or measurements, Milly has no concept either of capturing things or of being captured, and so her understanding of predation does not carry with it the consequences of danger that Kate's does. For Milly, then, predation is something very different from Kate's understanding of it; Sallie Sears comments that Kate's dilemmas "would not exist if Kate had a fortune like Milly's" (640). For Milly, to be a lioness would simply mean she would have the power and freedom to live life as she likes. Her desires being all-encompassing—wanting, that is, as much of life as she can get—she has no understanding of the very specific needs that Kate and her relatives have, and the limitations such needs entail. Therefore, as Kate observes, she has no comprehension of the consequences of such needs:

It was not moreover by any means with not having the imagination of expenditure that she appeared to charge her friend, but with not having the imagination of terror, of thrift, the imagination or any degree the habit of a conscious dependence on others. (114)

Thus, for Milly, predation is a far less dangerous occupation than it is for Kate; her lack of comprehension of limitations means that the concept of one person's gain resulting in another's loss is completely unknown to her. As Dorothea Krook points out in The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James, "Milly knows nothing of these material pressures that lie beneath the gracious surface, and therefore knows nothing of their demoralising effects upon the human spirit . . ." (204).

Having no experience of such predation, Milly naturally has no words for it; she has no reason to define the world around her as predatory, and furthermore no understanding of the potential power in the use of such definition. More importantly, however, the very idea—let alone the benefit—of using words for the purpose of limitation is completely alien to someone unaware of the concept of material limitations. For Kate, the concept of reduction by definition comes naturally, for in her world, everything must be limited to a specific value; Aunt Maud's "main office" is to give the Croys "their fixed measure of social greatness" (34), while Lionel Croy takes pleasure that Kate "was in her way a tangible value" (24). Milly, however, has no such experience of being seen as a value; indeed, her companion, Susan, is convinced that Milly "exceeded, escaped measure" (83). The utter foreignness to Milly of the concept of being measured as a value may be clearly seen by comparing the responses of both her and Kate to the idea that Aunt Maud wants to make use of them. Kate shows her response to Maud's predatory scheme in her conversation with her father:

". . . Aunt Maud has made me a proposal. But she has also made me a condition. She wants to keep me."

"And what in the world else could she possibly want?"

“Oh I don’t know—many things. I’m not so precious a capture,” the girl a little dryly explained. “No one has ever wanted to keep me before.” (27)

Kate’s cynicism clearly reveals her familiarity with the concept of being a value; she is merely, in this case, unsure of what her value is. For Milly, however, in her conversation with Lord Mark, this concept comes as a complete surprise:

“ . . . it isn’t as if [Susan] had anything to give.”

“Hasn’t she got you?” Lord Mark asked without excessive delay.

“Me—to give Mrs Lowder?” Milly had clearly not yet seen herself in the light of such an offering. “Oh I’m rather a poor present; and I don’t feel as if, even at that, I had as yet quite been given.” (102)

What is interesting here is that while Kate understands that Aunt Maud not only wants something from her, but also has the power to take it against Kate’s wishes, Milly sees Maud in the passive position of accepting her as a present. Even after Lord Mark suggests to her the idea of her value, it does not occur to her that Maud might be actively seeking to exploit this value; Milly evidently has none of Kate’s awareness of Maud’s power to possess.

Milly’s obliviousness to the entrapping nature of the social jungle surrounding her serves by contrast to emphasise it further. From her perspective—unlike that of Kate, whose familiarity with this world of predation makes it appear a matter of course—each instance in which she encounters such “quantification” becomes a psychological journey of discovery. Lord Mark, who is, in Julie Rivkin’s words, Milly’s “self-appointed social guide” (*False Positions*, 100), exerts a powerful influence on Milly’s growth of understanding of the power of confining words, but Milly’s way of thinking is so

different from that of the society in which she finds herself, that she initially does not believe Lord Mark when he gives her the very warning that she needs. His response to her naïve comment about having not yet been given is: “You’ve been shown, and if our friend has jumped at you it comes to the same thing.” The concept of being “jumped at,” which he repeats several times, is significantly ambiguous. On the one hand it may suggest attempting to reach for something unattainable; on the other hand, however, it may indicate pouncing, with evident predatory implications. In this social jungle his words are more than a little sinister. Milly, however, simply thinks he is joking: “He made his jokes, Lord Mark, without amusement for himself; yet it wasn’t that he was grim” (102).

During the course of their conversation, however, Lord Mark’s effect on Milly becomes evident, as the potential power of his words starts to dawn on her: “It was strange his words should have given her the sense of his knowing, but it was positive that they did so, and to the extent of making her believe them, though still with wonder” (103). She begins to realise that she is in a world which places a value and quantity on everything and everyone: “she was more and more sharply conscious of having—as with the door sharply slammed upon her and the guard’s hand raised in signal to the train—been popped into the compartment in which she was to travel for him” (104). Milly’s response to Lord Mark’s confining words—“a fear passed over her” (104)—draws dramatic attention to the concept that words may have tremendous power.

Having never experienced such valuing and quantifying, Milly finds herself both attracted to and frightened by its power; despite her fear, however, she wants definition. Even before this conversation with Lord Mark, she was hoping that “she might learn from

him why she was so different from the handsome girl.” The powerful effect which the concept of quantifying has upon her is shown clearly in the next chapter:

That sense of quantities, separate or mixed, was really, no doubt, what most prevailed at first for our slightly gasping American pair; it found utterance for them in their frequent remark to each other that they had no one but themselves to thank. It dropped from Milly more than once that if she had ever known it was so easy—! though her exclamation mostly ended without completing her idea. (109)

In not finishing her sentence, Milly emphasises her very ambivalent response to “that sense of quantities.”

The power which Lord Mark, with his reductive words, may exert over Milly, is quite different from the power which Kate experiences in reducing Maud, for while Maud is oblivious and impervious to such reduction of herself, Milly is both aware of, and open to accepting, her definitions. Unlike Maud, she finds herself subject to the power of such words; they are able, by their very nature of confinement, to make her afraid and vulnerable. The concept that confining words may exert power on those they define is the topic of my next chapter.

## Chapter 3

### Predation by definition: Words as predators

We have looked at the potential power in words, and seen that if they are limiting enough to define and reduce a predatory situation, the self-defined prey is able to regain a sense of psychological control. I have shown that Kate succeeds in mentally capturing Maud in words, while Densher's attempts to do the same are unsuccessful, but it is important to note that despite this, neither Kate nor Densher is able to control either the situation or Maud by these words. We have seen, however, that in the conversation between Lord Mark and Milly, the case is somewhat different; Lord Mark's reductive words clearly do exert some control over Milly. I would contend that throughout The Wings of the Dove, James illustrates such external control as a further potential for words, suggesting that they can indeed also control people, when the people so defined know of and are willing to accept the definition. In fact, the predatory imagery that is so prevalent throughout the novel is taken a step further, to suggest that words themselves may be predators.

Returning to Susan's depiction of herself as predator, we may see an essential difference between her predation and the other types of predation I have examined. While the British characters prey on each other for money—or in Maud's case, social prestige—Susan is interested in neither; her predation is far more subtle: "She struck herself as hovering like a spy, applying tests, laying traps, concealing signs. This would last,

however, only till she should fairly know what was the matter . . .” (83). Clearly, the aim of her predation is knowledge of Milly. The phrase “the matter” is a vague one, possibly referring to Milly’s mental state or her illness, but the key point is that Susan wants to turn this vagueness into something definite. We see that throughout the novel she wants a concrete diagnosis of Milly’s mysterious illness, a diagnosis which is significantly denied to the reader.

Through her constant attempts to define Milly, Susan creates for herself a sense of understanding and thus a type of predatory possession of Milly. We are told that Susan “was in the position, as she believed, of knowing much more about Milly Theale than Milly herself knew” (76). The predatory language describing Susan’s desire to define Milly draws attention to the potential harmfulness of such definition. To define something is to reduce it to something knowable and fixed, and thus to develop a sense of possible predatory control over it. Knowing somebody implies a type of possession over them, as Quentin Anderson points out with regard to the world of The Wings of the Dove: “To know people in this world is to have people, for one use or another” (266). Although, as we have seen, this concept of desiring knowledge may appear more abstract and thus less threatening than that of desiring money, it is evident that its predatory implications are just as real.

Indeed, the predatory implications of such knowledge can be taken further if we consider that the concept of knowing a person completely implies that this person is a fixed quantity who can be contained within the confines of our understanding. John Goode says of Susan: “Like Kate, she attempts to possess through knowledge, and possession means defining the human as creatural, created not creative: ‘the charm of the

creature was positively in the creature's greatness'" (256). The concept of knowledge as possession suggests that people who are known are subject to those who know them—they, as "creatural," are simply acted upon, while the definers, as creators, act upon them. Furthermore, complete knowledge of a person leaves no room for that person's individuality or ability to change, for the known person becomes a static part of the knower's mind. There is thus a sense in which such knowledge annihilates a person's life force. Marcia Ian explores this concept in her essay "The Elaboration of Privacy in *The Wings of the Dove*":

For James, permitting the self to be known by another makes selfhood impossible, because, he fears, the self known and identified then becomes continuous with, identical to, and indistinguishable from that other (which is then no longer other). To know is to reduce and limit; to be known is to be annihilated or at least violated and imperiled. (112)

The implications of such predation show it actually to be potentially more dangerous than predation for money, for while taking money is external and material and deprives a person of possession, seizing knowledge of a person is concerned with their very self, annihilating by reduction their individuality. Money in itself is amoral, but such knowledge as Susan attempts to grasp is shown to be deadly in its inevitably reductive aspect.

Such knowledge can only exist within the parameter of language; we see that any knowledge which Susan believes she possesses of Milly consists solely of words; Priscilla L. Walton states in *The Disruption of the Feminine in Henry James* that "[Susan] tries to possess [Milly] through language and believes that Milly's meaning will become clear in

her reading” (126). As a writer of romance stories, she is constantly creating with words, and her decision to become Milly’s companion is simply a matter of changing medium; Milly becomes for Susan the text which she creates. As many critics have pointed out, her depiction of Milly is a romantic one:

. . . she bristled with discriminations; but all categories failed her—they ceased at least to signify—as soon as she found herself in presence of the real thing, the romantic life itself. That was what she saw in Mildred—what positively made her hand a while tremble too much for the pen” (78).

Susan thus uses the concept of Milly as text in order to reduce Milly to the satisfaction of her own romantic ideals. The indication of the predatory nature of such reduction is subtle but unmistakable: the narrator describes in sequence—as if the two activities were quite naturally linked—Susan’s wearing of her predatory hat “feathered from the eagle’s wing,” and her favourable comparison of Milly to the “fictive ‘love-interest’” of the magazines. Indeed she is not the only character to “write” another character; Millicent Bell draws attention to the fact that “[t]he effort to represent each others’ characters in literary terms is universal in the novel” (314).

Evidently, the words Susan uses to describe Milly are more a reflection of Susan’s own romantic interests than of Milly herself, and thus confine Milly to Susan’s limited understanding. We may see that while money attributes value to an object, words attribute a value to a person, and thus abstract a person into something no longer living. Therefore, in the light of the clearly predatory depiction of Susan waiting to “pounce” on Milly for knowledge, it becomes clear that for James, words can take on a predatory nature in themselves; as Janet Gabler-Hover points out in her essay entitled “Truth and

Deception: The Basis for Judgment in The Wings of the Dove”: “In James’s novel, characters prowl and pace through the civilized instrument of words” (181).

In fact, I would further suggest that in the novel words are shown to have a potential predatory power such that they prowl and pace themselves—although James’s imagery has them flying and perching rather than prowling and pacing, suggesting birds rather than lions. As Densher is given the opportunity to travel to America on business, we are told that “The imprisoned thought had, in a word, on the opening of the door, flown straight out into Densher’s face, or perched at least on his shoulder” (67). This image suggests that thoughts, once translated into words, have a powerful life of their own; they are granted the same status as characters in the novel—that of being portrayed as animals. Although the image is not directly predatory, the implications of potential violence are evident. A similar example occurs when Milly asks Susan to be her companion:

Mrs. Stringham’s little life had often been visited by shy conceits—secret dreams that had fluttered their hour between its narrow walls without, for any great part, so much as mustering courage to look out of its rather dim windows. But this imagination—the fancy of a possible link with the remarkable young thing from New York—had mustered courage: had perched, on the instant, at the clearest lookout it could find. . . . (76)

The birdlike verbs used to depict Susan’s thoughts give them, like Densher’s, their own independent life. Like Densher’s thoughts, they are released from inertia by new words—in this case the words with which Milly “dropped into [Susan’s] mind the shy conceit of some assistance, some devotion to render” (76)—and once again this freedom causes

them to perch, a verb which, especially in the light of the predatory imagery pervading the novel, contains subtle suggestions of possible predation. To be “perched” on a “lookout” could imply a bird waiting for the best time to swoop down; indeed, the very act of waiting—which, interestingly, as Kathleen Komar points out in “Language and Character Delineation in The Wings of the Dove,” appears to be Kate’s main function in Book 1—is no small part of the act of predation. Thus James subtly draws our attention to the predatory potential of words by portraying them as flying and perching. Equally, however, being perched on a lookout could have the opposite implication—that of a bird assuming a posture of defence. It is important to note that the bird imagery does not pin down the predatory role of the bird; these birdlike words could be either prey or predators, an ambiguity which emphasises the elusiveness of roles in James’s social jungle, and suggests the subtlety of the role of words within such a world. There is no way of knowing whether a seemingly innocently perched bird might pounce. Indeed, the tamest animals are shown to be killers in the novel; Susan views Milly as being “mildly, caressingly, martyred” by the “nosing and fumbling not of lions and tigers but of domestic animals let loose for the joke” (209). The portrayal of these thoughts as birds, however, clearly puts forward the concept that, whether predators or prey, words themselves are more than inanimate weapons in the novel—they are an active part of the social jungle.

The idea of words as possible predators in the novel is taken to its natural conclusion; James not only shows that words may flutter and perch, but suggests that they also may in fact kill. We can see this most clearly in the scene when Kate and Densher

toy with the idea that Milly's death could be brought about by the realisation that she has been told lies, rather than directly by her illness:

"We've gone too far," she none the less pulled herself together to reply.

"Do you want to kill her?"

He had an hesitation that wasn't all candid. "Kill, you mean, Aunt Maud?"

"You know whom I mean. We've told too many lies." (294)

The conversations which take place among the characters frequently illustrate this concept of the predatory potential of words. At the beginning of the novel, James introduces us to the idea of words as an active part in the social jungle, by portraying Kate as a potential victim of such predation. The scene is that of Kate's visit to her sister, Marian.

"I can't imagine," Marian on this occasion said to her, "how you can think of anything else in the world but the horrid way we're situated."

"And, pray, how do you know," Kate enquired in reply, "anything about my thoughts? . . ." (40)

The conversation is significant in that it highlights the presumptuousness inherent in claiming to know someone. In her implications that Kate's thoughts extend beyond Marian's situation, Marian suggests that she has a knowledge of Kate's thoughts and thus that she has reduced Kate to her own understanding of her. In fact, her implications are more subtle than they appear, for were Kate to deny Marian's assumption, she would entrap herself further; the alternative to Marian's supposed knowledge would entail the limitation of Kate's thoughts purely to Marian's situation, and so eliminate any life of her

own. Kate's reply, however, is just as subtle; not only does it draw attention to Marian's ungrounded presumptuousness, but, in so doing, it actually also side-steps the implications of Marian's trap: by questioning the grounds of Marian's assumptions, Kate neatly evades being caught in the emotional blackmail Marian is evidently using in an attempt to manipulate her. Furthermore, Kate's reply gives specific meaning to the vague implications of Marian's remark; it is significant that Marian does not say outright that she knows what Kate is thinking—indeed her words are vague enough to be interpreted purely as an idle speculation. Thus, in fixing a limited meaning to Marian's words, Kate fights against Marian's words in the same way as she empowers herself against Maud's words, locating herself as prey and Marian as predator in a situation where the roles are in reality not so clear-cut.

Kate's words of self-defence draw our attention to the predatory nature of the words Marian is using, and the potential predatory nature of her own words. As the conversation progresses, the complexities of survival in the social jungle of words become increasingly evident:

“If I name that person I suppose it's because I'm so afraid of him. If you want really to know, he fills me with terror. If you want really to know, in fact, I dislike him as much as I dread him.”

“And yet don't think it dangerous to abuse him to me?”

“Yes,” Mrs. Condrip confessed, “I do think it dangerous; but how can I speak of him otherwise? I dare say, I admit, that I shouldn't speak of him at all. Only I do want you for once, as I said just now, to know.”

“To know what, my dear?”

“That I should regard it,” Marian promptly returned, “as far and away the worst thing that has happened to us yet.”

“Do you mean because he hasn’t money?”

“Yes, for one thing. And because I don’t believe in him.”

Kate was civil but mechanical. “What do you mean by not believing in him?”

“Well, being sure he’ll never get it. And you must have it. You shall have it.”

“To give it to you?”

Marian met her with a readiness that was practically pert. “To have it, first. Not at any rate to go on not having it. Then we should see.”

“We should indeed!” said Kate Croy. (42)

Marian’s intentions are quite evident; she clearly wishes to control Kate’s choice of marriage, and uses words to trap Kate into complying. We may see in Marian’s words an essential difference from Susan’s use of reductive terminology; in using such vague words as “terror” and “dread” Marian does not attempt to reduce Kate or Densher by confining them within a word, but rather to pretend to an undefined knowledge of Densher, so that by her evasion of definition, she may lead Kate to believe in the existence of some awful definition, of which Marian is the sole proprietor. By such an implication of exclusive knowledge, she indeed suggests that she “possesses” Densher in a way that Kate cannot, even while she ostensibly claims that such knowledge makes her a victim: “I’m so afraid of him.” By indicating that her own knowledge is more complete

than Kate's, Marian subtly attempts to make Kate doubt her own judgement and instead submit to Marian's.

Kate, however, does not allow herself to be affected by Marian's insinuations; her own talent for finding entrapping words ensures her an effective method of self defence. She thus easily restricts Marian's insinuations by demanding specification, and, when it is not given, supplying her own confining definitions. At the start, she diffuses Marian's implications of terror by suggesting that daring to abuse Densher thus is incompatible with such terror: "And yet [you] don't think it dangerous to abuse him to me?" As Marian continues to use vague, insinuating tactics, Kate continues to entrap them by asking her to specify what she means: "Do you mean because he hasn't money?" and "What do you mean by not believing in him?" She effectively reduces Marian's ominous "terrors" into simple facts, laying bare Marian's motivations, and thus manages to escape being trapped by her predatory words. The complex power play of such an ostensibly simple conversation draws attention to the subtlety of the social jungle of the novel, and the role of words within it. Kate's position here is clearly a precarious one; she must be alert to every word Marian says in order to deflect it and thus protect herself.

Clearly, in this social jungle, one needs words not only to create a personal sense of safety against the vulture-like money-grabbers, but actively to fight the predatory words these characters use to obtain their desires. Kate's experience and adeptness at such verbal defence prevent her from being trapped, but the similar verbal battle which occurs between Milly and Lord Mark at Lancaster Gate leaves Milly extremely disconcerted. Lord Mark, like Marian with Kate, tries to make Milly doubt her understanding:

He explained, for that matter—or at least he hinted—that there was no such thing to-day in London as saying where any one was. Every one was everywhere—nobody was anywhere. He should be put to it—yes, frankly—to give a name of any sort or kind to their hostess’s “set.” Was it a set at all, or wasn’t it, and were there not really no such things as sets in the place any more? Was there anything but the groping and pawing, that of the vague billows of some great greasy sea in mid-Channel, of masses of bewildered people trying to “get” they didn’t know what or where?

(100)

Like Marian, Lord Mark hints that he possesses a knowledge which cannot be translated for Milly. In fact, he goes further than insinuations; he tells Milly that any such naming would be impossible. Milly, like Kate, tries to diffuse the situation by using reductive words herself, but she is clearly lacking in Kate’s defensive skills. Her inexperience in English society, as well as her great curiosity, renders her attempts ineffective. Although she seems to believe that such vagueness can be reduced to something definite—expressing the belief that Lord Mark’s “incoherence” must be only “temporary” and that some “key” would be able eventually to clarify his meaning to her—unlike Kate with Marian, she has no concept of what this meaning can be, and finds herself overpowered, as well as intrigued, by this sense of the unknown. On the one hand, she tries to diffuse any semblance of danger by mentally reducing Lord Mark himself to a generic “case”: “Perhaps he was one of the cases she had heard of at home—those characteristic cases of people in England who concealed their play of mind so much more than they advertised it.” On the other hand, however, she finds herself, motivated by curiosity, becoming

vulnerable to his claims to knowledge. Thus, while Kate keeps up the unrelenting vigilance necessary for survival amongst the verbal traps of the social jungle, Milly, ignorant of the extent of the dangers, frequently lets down her guard. Indeed, she begins to see him as a potential teacher rather than an enemy: “she could neither escape nor prevail by her strangeness; he would have, for that matter, on such a subject, more to tell her than to learn from her. She might learn from him why she was so different from the handsome girl” (101).

Lord Mark’s use of predatory words, although initially similar to Marian’s, gradually reveals a subtle manipulation more complex than Marian’s attempts: after arousing Milly’s curiosity by speaking with such a knowledgeable air of the impossibility of defining anyone in London, he then goes on quite easily, with no apparent sense of inconsistency, to express his categorisation of Americans, of whom Milly, in his opinion, is a typical example: “She was already, he observed to her, thinking what she should say on her other side—which was what Americans were always doing.” The entrapping nature of such categorising language is made clear by Milly’s feeling that she has “been popped into the compartment in which she was to travel for him.” Milly’s response to Lord Mark’s labelling shows the power of such predatory definition: “It was strange his words should have given her the sense of his knowing, but it was positive that they did so, and to the extent of making her believe them, though still with wonder.” This power is such that, despite the fact that “he had for an instant the effect of making her ask herself if she were after all going to be afraid,” Milly looks to him for guidance, even appearing to see him as a Christ-like figure; he appears to her to say “I’m the way” (105).

Lord Mark's words, then, clearly wield power over Milly, for they evoke in her a response of fear and submission. Seeing no possibility of self defence, she sees herself cornered into either flight or passivity, and, as flight would defeat her object in coming to England, she accepts the latter option: "she seemed to have seen in a quick though tempered glare that there were two courses for her, one to leave London again the first thing in the morning, the other to do nothing at all. Well, she would do nothing at all . . ." (104). Although recognising the reductive quality of his words—"You're blasé, but you're not enlightened. You're familiar with everything, but conscious really of nothing" (106)—Milly still chooses to fit herself within his definition of her: "she was more and more content herself to be easy; she would have been resigned, even had it been brought straighter home to her, to passing for a cheap exotic. Provisionally, at any rate, that protected her wish to keep herself, with Lord Mark, in abeyance" (109). There is a sense, however, in which Milly's conscious decision to submit releases her from the simple role of prey, for paradoxically, in the very act of allowing herself to be preyed upon, she is exercising control. On the one hand, her submission may be seen as a Christian act of renunciation; on the other hand, however, the active role she thus takes in influencing Lord Mark's view of her makes her a type of predator on him.

This desire to keep herself "in abeyance" is a telling factor in Milly's vulnerability to the predatory words defining her, and marks a clear distinction between herself and Kate. While Kate, like Milly, allows herself to become the person others define her to be—"It wouldn't be the first time she had seen herself obliged to accept with smothered irony other people's interpretation of her conduct. She often ended by giving up to them—it seemed really the way to live—the version that met their convenience" (34)—

her “smothered irony” makes evident that she does so with a clear concept of the difference between their “version” of herself, and her own self definition. Not only does she have a definite idea of where she stands—“she knew herself now, the sensitive niece, as having been marked from far back” (36)—but she also has a definite idea of who she is—“Kate knew what to think of her own power thus to carry by storm; she saw herself as handsome, no doubt, but as hard, and felt herself as clever but as cold; and as so much too imperfectly ambitious, furthermore, that it was a pity, for a quiet life, she couldn’t decide to be either finely or stupidly indifferent” (52).

The fact that Kate “knew what to think” indicates that this self-knowledge is externally imposed; it is in fact similar to the type of thinking which Sharon Cameron discusses in Thinking in Henry James: “But in James’s work . . . thinking is often represented as if its inception occurred outside the mind” (124). Cameron’s discussion centres on literal thinking—knowing what to think is of course slightly different, indicating a further externalisation which demonstrates Kate’s complete control in her use of language. Kate’s self-definition is clearly just as external and reductive as any others might impose on her, but the essential difference is that it is chosen by herself, and thus she is able to maintain a sense of control over her self-image. She sees all too clearly that imposing a definition on herself is the only way to remain impervious to the potentially predatory words of those who would define her, a point which Hugh Stevens discusses in Henry James and Sexuality: “Kate expresses with vehemence the fear of being the subject of others’ representations, of ‘being written’ rather than ‘writing herself’” (26). Stevens asserts that Kate’s “ability at self-presentation, and her arts of representation” are her “two chief means in her bid for power” (24). Milly on the other hand, keeping herself “in

abeyance,” has no clear self-definition, nor any sense of the power of such self-presentation; indeed, when shown the Bronzino portrait and asked if she can see the likeness to herself, she simply replies: “I don’t know—one never knows one’s self” (138). Thus, having no words by which to place herself, she is increasingly influenced by the words others use to label her, believing their understanding to be superior to her own, and thus placing herself under their control.

The characters surrounding Milly are all too eager to supply the definitions which she lacks, and thus Milly is frequently prey to such predatory labels. Susan, despite her insistence on Milly’s inability to be defined, paradoxically finds a definition of Milly within this very insistence: “She reduced them, Mrs. Stringham would have said, to a consenting bewilderment; which was precisely, for that good lady, on a last analysis, what was most in harmony with her greatness. She exceeded, escaped measure, was surprising only because they were so far from great” (83). The word “precisely” creates an amusing contradiction here, for it is a defining word in itself, indicating that Susan is using some kind of the “measure” which Milly apparently exceeds. In basing her knowledge of Milly on what she sees as the inadequacy of anyone else’s knowledge, Susan creates further specificity in her definition, by ensuring that her “knowledge” of Milly is exclusive. While the inherent paradox is amusing, the predatory aspect of Susan’s words is not allowed to pass unnoticed, for such a desire for exclusivity harks back to Lionel’s desire for exclusive possession of Kate’s money. Just as Lionel’s predation on Kate for her money is competitive with all others that may lay claim on it, so is Susan’s predation for understanding of Milly, to the extent that Densher’s claim to further exclusivity of

knowledge—his reminder that he knew Milly at a time when Susan was not present—makes Susan “really lose her head” (207).

Susan’s image of Milly as a “princess,” which more blatantly contradicts her perception of Milly as indefinable, makes clearer the predatory nature of her words:

Milly clearly felt these things too, but they affected her companion at moments—that was quite the way Mrs. Stringham would have expressed it—as the princess in a conventional tragedy might have affected the confidant if a personal emotion had ever been permitted to the latter. That a princess could only be a princess was a truth with which, essentially, a confidant, however responsive, had to live. (85)

The reductive quality of such definition is highlighted in the last sentence of the quotation; Milly, as a “princess,” “could only be a princess.” Milly is, for Susan, entrapped in a very limiting role. Indeed, the individuality of her life is denied in Susan’s equation of it with a “conventional tragedy.”

The deceptiveness of Lord Mark’s and Susan’s claims to exemption from the use of limiting definitions reveals that the role of predatory words, like that of the predatory images which the characters employ, is a slippery one. Characters may be using predatory words even while their words vouch for their non-participation in such an act. Indeed, what makes the traps of this social jungle so effective is that the very words which claim to be freeing are often the most entrapping of all. This can be clearly seen in Densher’s idea that his own view of Milly surpasses the labels which the other characters use:

[Densher] continued to see her as he had first seen her—that remained ineffaceably behind. Mrs. Lowder, Susan Shepherd, his own Kate, might, each in proportion, see her as a princess, as an angel, as a star, but for himself, luckily, she hadn't as yet complications to any point of discomfort: the princess, the angel, the star were muffled over, ever so lightly and brightly, with the little American girl who had been kind to him in New York and to whom certainly—though without making too much of it for either of them—he was perfectly willing to be kind in return. (279-80)

Like Susan, Densher attempts to lend exclusivity to his view of Milly, which ironically is a type of predation in itself, for it indicates, as Sharon Cameron points out, that he “wishes sole possession of her” (151). Furthermore, despite the apparent distinction of his own view of Milly, the fact of course remains that it is just as much a reductive label as the other labels. As Priscilla L. Walton states, “He ignores her individuality and . . . perceives her as a ‘type’” (130). Indeed, in calling Milly “little,” Densher is inevitably reducing her, for in actuality she is not “little” at all, as Densher is well aware: “He thought of her for some reason as little, though she was of about Kate’s height, to which, any more than to any other felicity in his mistress, he had never applied the diminutive” (190). In fact, his words become yet more controlling as he makes the subtle change from “the little American girl” to “his little New York friend” (192). The possessive pronoun indicates he considers himself to have some kind of ownership over Milly, belying the apparent innocence of his words.

The potential danger of such labelling can be clearly seen in the incident when Lord Mark tells Milly that she is “the image of the wonderful Bronzino” (135). Her reaction to the picture is described thus:

. . . she found herself, for the first moment, looking at the mysterious portrait through tears. Perhaps it was her tears that made it just then so strange and fair—as wonderful as he had said: the fact of a young woman, all splendidly drawn, down to the hands, and splendidly dressed; a face almost livid in hue, yet handsome in sadness and crowned with a mass of hair, rolled back and high, that must, before fading with time, have had a family resemblance to her own. The lady in question, at all events, 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 recognised her exactly in words that had nothing to do with her. “I shall never be better than this.” (137)

The sentence “And she was dead, dead, dead” is extremely significant; it draws attention to the idea that to reduce someone to an image is to capture them, and by preventing them from living, moving, changing or growing, is to effectively kill them. The image here is a painting, not words, but the concept of reduction by representation is clearly present. The motif of representation in James is discussed at length by Julie Rivkin, who draws attention to the paradox that “the activity of representation itself is a form of labor that depletes value in its very attempt to preserve it” (85). Indeed, Elissa Greenwald points out the ironic fact that in Milly’s quest to experience life in London society, “she finds not

life but art, a series of representations” (“I and the Abyss,” 182). I would contend that the frequent references to visual representation within the novel—the Bronzino, the National Gallery, the “lady-copyists,” Densher’s mother’s career as a copyist, and indeed Kate’s initial view of herself in the mirror—parallel the verbal representation which words create. Indeed, I would go further and suggest that the Bronzino scene plays on the predatory nature of both visual and verbal images, for it is Lord Mark’s words which draw Milly to make the comparison—his very use of the word “image” limits Milly to the confines of the painting. Furthermore, the only way in which Milly can comprehend the picture and see herself in it is to mentally put it into words: “Milly recognised her exactly in words that had nothing to do with her.” Such recognition cannot occur without the defining and crystallising words. Sharon Cameron draws attention to the implications of Milly’s words:

The “this” in “I shall never be better than this” seems as if it would signify either “better than I am now” or “better than this lady in the portrait.” In fact neither is implied. For Milly looks at the portrait and has thoughts not of her present self, and not of the woman as painted, but rather of the representation of the woman epitomized by its lifelessness, of an image of death, which Milly analogizes to her own image and which she sees in the woman’s place. (128)

The image which affects Milly is then not that of the painting, but that which the painting represents—an image of lifelessness which Milly translates into and understands by words.

That Milly is using words to induce recognition, suggests that she, too, is participating in the usage of predatory words, paradoxically attempting to confine herself to her own understanding. We could say that Milly indeed preys on herself, insofar as grasping for knowledge is predatory, for she has a voracious appetite for self-knowledge, as Dorothea Krook comments:

For Milly Theale's passion for knowledge is principally a passion for self-knowledge; and it is for this, more than anything, that she is prepared to suffer pain, confusion and humiliation, and finally total deprivation and loss. That is why (for instance) she participates, in the way we saw, in Kate's analysis of the American mind, entering into Kate's view of herself with an avidity of interest that would be almost masochistic if it were not what it in fact is—the disinterested passion for self-knowledge, characteristic of all the great Jamesian heroes and heroines. (209)

Throughout the novel, Milly invites and welcomes definition, which complicates the roles of prey and predator further. Knowing that Densher defines her as “the American girl,” she becomes “as spontaneous as possible and as American as it might conveniently appeal to Mr. Densher, after his travels, to find her” (179). Similarly, after Kate has defined her as a dove, Milly decides that she “should have to be clear as to how a dove would act” (172). Susan Mizruchi makes a telling comment about Milly's taking on the role of dove: “It is appropriate that Milly's first exercise of her powers as a dove involves her manipulation of a figure who has proved formidable even to Kate” (192), referring of course to Milly's lie to Maud. Paradoxically, Milly takes the traditional image of the innocent dove and, with a self-consciousness which clearly belies any such innocence,

uses it for the purposes of control and manipulation. As Virginia C. Fowler states, “we watch Milly Theale discover the value of self-consciously using these interpretative objectifications (American Girl, princess, dove) to her own advantage” (A Companion to Henry James Studies, 183). There is thus a sense in which Milly’s active choice to take her sense of self from other characters is clearly just as predatory as their definitions.

The relationship between Milly and Sir Luke Strett illustrates another aspect of the complex role of words in the society of the novel, for Sir Luke uses words in a very different way; while other characters use specific words in an entrapping way, he uses words characterised by their ambiguity. Unlike Marian and Lord Mark, who use vagueness to imply a superior knowledge, his vagueness allows Milly the freedom to interpret his words in a variety of ways, and thus very actively prevents her from being trapped. His role in the jungle of predatory words then is somewhat unusual; indeed he is the one character who offers Milly an escape from such confining words. However, in this jungle of fluctuating roles, there is an inherent paradox within his role, created by the fact that as a doctor, he is the one person who can give Milly an official, fixed definition; it is his job to diagnose, and indeed it is to him that Milly, hungry for diagnosis, decides to turn.

It was of course as one of the weak that she had gone to him—but oh with how sneaking a hope that he might pronounce her, as to all indispensables, a veritable young lioness! What indeed she was really confronted with was the consciousness that he hadn’t after all pronounced her anything: she nursed herself into the sense that he had beautifully got out of it. (154)

Milly's clear expectations and apparent willingness to submit to Sir Luke's power throws into confusion any neat roles of predator and prey. On the one hand, her evident disappointment in him indicates that she sees him as misusing his power over her: "This was the damning little fact—if she could talk of damnation: that she could believe herself to have caught him in the act of irrelevantly liking her. She hadn't gone to him to be liked, she had gone to him to be judged; and he was quite a great enough man to be in the habit, as a rule, of observing the difference" (155). On the other hand, however, one can hardly call Milly, with her keen desire to be pronounced a "veritable young lioness," a passive victim in this case. Indeed her indignation at Sir Luke's failure to fulfil her expectations is somewhat ironic, for she is thus judging the man to whose judgment she claims herself willing to submit.

The irony is heightened by the fact that while Sir Luke offers her freedom from predatory words, Milly has her own predatory definition of Sir Luke and his role. As a doctor and a "great man," his role in Milly's view is merely to diagnose, to the exclusion of such natural human feelings as "irrelevantly liking" his patients. Milly's confining definition of Sir Luke contrasts starkly with his diagnosis of her, for his ambiguous language conveys the possibility of liberation from predatory words:

"And, as I've told you before, I'm American. Not that I mean that makes me worse. However, you'll probably know what it makes me."

"Yes"—he even showed amusement for it. "I know perfectly well what it makes you. It makes you, to begin with, a capital case."

She sighed, though gratefully, as if again before the social scene. "Ah there you are!"

“Oh no; there ‘we’ aren’t at all! There I am only—but as much as you like. I’ve no end of American friends; there they are, if you please, and it’s a fact that you couldn’t very well be in a better place than in their company. It puts you with plenty of others—and that isn’t pure solitude.”

(149)

Sir Luke responds to Milly’s desire for definition by appearing to define her, and then exploding the definition by showing that it reveals nothing concrete. His amusement at Milly shows that his definition of her as “a capital case” is more tongue-in-cheek than definitive. Furthermore, it is ambiguous; “capital” has several meanings. Its economic meaning draws attention not only to Milly’s wealth, but also to her own value, as defined by those around her. In terms of Milly’s health, however—the meaning for which she is searching—it has two diametrically opposed meanings; “capital” can refer to capital punishment, or it can mean “excellent,” and so Sir Luke’s “diagnosis” could be interpreted both that Milly is going to die and that she is fine.

Clearly Milly and Sir Luke are talking at cross purposes; their conversation clearly sets in juxtaposition the possibility of words either to entrap or to set free. Milly’s response “Ah there you are” evades the ambiguity of Sir Luke’s words and emphasises her desire for fixation. Although he has said nothing definitive, she responds as though he has. Indeed, the phrase “there you are,” repeated in several forms throughout the novel, is another illustration of the inherent paradoxes in the concept of predatory words; its meaning seems to indicate that the words to which it is referring have the ability to place a person, and yet whenever it is used, any such placement is notably unclear—F. M. Colby, in a contemporary review of The Wings of the Dove, declares that James “has a

way of saying ‘There you are’ . . . at the precise moment at which you know you have utterly lost yourself” (Critical Heritage, 339). Sir Luke’s reply—“oh no; there we aren’t at all”—explicitly explodes this concept, showing Milly that the words he has spoken have no power to pin her down. Her attempts to obtain a specific diagnosis from him are futile:

“Shall I at any rate suffer?”

“Not a bit.”

“And yet then live?”

“My dear young lady,” said her distinguished friend, “isn’t to ‘live’ exactly what I’m trying to persuade you to take the trouble to do?” (151)

The word “live,” as Sir Luke uses it, is as ambiguous as the word “capital.” It can refer to either quantity or quality; if someone is to “live,” it can mean they are not going to die, or alternatively that they are to enjoy quality of life, perhaps because they have not much time left. Sir Luke thus refuses to let his words limit Milly by defining her life in terms of her inevitable death by drawing equal attention to her capacity for life.

It is important to note that while Sir Luke’s words provide a striking contrast to the powerful predatory words so common in the speech of the other characters, they still exert a different power of their own, and have a marked effect on Milly’s thinking. This effect becomes evident in Milly’s subsequent reflections in Regent’s Park, as she begins to recognise and embrace the possible freedom these words may bring:

She had gone out with these last words so in her ears that when once she was well away—back this time in the great square alone—it was as if some instant application of them had opened out there before her. It was

positively, that effect, an excitement that carried her on; she went forward into space under the sense of an impulse received—an impulse simple and direct, easy above all to act upon. She was borne up for the hour, and now she knew why she had wanted to come by herself. No one in the world could have sufficiently entered into her state; no tie would have been close enough to enable a companion to walk beside her without some disparity. She literally felt, in this first flush, that her only company must be the human race at large, present all round her, but inspiringly impersonal, and that her only field must be, then and there, the grey immensity of London. Grey immensity had somehow become her element; grey immensity was what her distinguished friend had, for the moment, furnished her world with and what the question of “living,” as he put it to her, living by option, by volition, inevitably took on its immediate face. (151-2)

Sir Luke’s words have clearly given Milly a sense of her own individuality; she becomes aware of the concept that she cannot be contained within someone else’s knowledge: “[n]o one in the world could have sufficiently entered into her state.” The phrase “grey immensity,” repeated three times, emphasises Milly’s new awareness of a possible freedom from predatory definition; the word “grey” implies that there is no simple division of black and white, while the word “immensity” creates an impression of limitlessness.

However, the phrase “for the moment” draws attention to the constant fight between predatory words and freedom within the novel. Milly’s acceptance of her freedom has little chance of surviving the jungle of predatory words she will inevitably

reencounter on her return to Lancaster Gate. Indeed, her desire to be defined is reawakened by Kate's ready provision of such definition, following Milly's question as to why Kate advises her "to drop us while you can" (170):

"Because you're a dove." With which she felt herself ever so delicately, so considerately, embraced; not with familiarity or as a liberty taken, but almost ceremonially and in the manner of an accolade; partly as if, though a dove who could perch on a finger, one were also a princess with whom forms were to be observed. It even came to her, through the touch of her companion's lips, that this form, this cool pressure, fairly sealed the sense of what Kate had just said. It was moreover, for the girl, like an inspiration: she found herself accepting as the right one, while she caught her breath with relief, the name so given her. She met it on the instant as she would have met revealed truth; it lighted up the strange dusk in which she lately had walked. That was what was the matter with her. She was a dove. (171)

The words used to describe Kate's kiss are significant in their connotations: "cool," "sealed" and "pressure" are not words of affection—they would more appropriately refer to the concept of stamping something and thus fixing it, and indeed hark back very specifically to the description of Densher's personality awaiting the fixing pressure of the final stamp. This is not a kiss of warmth, but a kiss of definition, fixing Milly's value. The imagery of stamping thus refers not only to Kate's kiss, but also to her words; it draws attention to the crystallising effect of labelling Milly as a dove.

One cannot, however, define Milly as the victim and Kate the villain in this scene, for Milly clearly wants the definition. Kate has done what Sir Luke refused to do—she has diagnosed her. In describing the definition as “what was the matter with her,” Milly makes it evident that she sees this definition as a type of medical diagnosis. Indeed, the reference to “inspiration,” indicating that she sees this definition as life-giving, suggests that Milly views this as a spiritual diagnosis too; the fact that it is followed by her catching her breath emphasises the literal meaning of inspiration, as if Kate has, as it were, breathed life into her. Kate is thus for Milly the doctor and judge that Sir Luke failed to be, and Milly accepts her words as definitive.

The deadly nature of such predatory words, however, may be seen in the effects of Lord Mark’s, informing Milly of the truth about Kate’s and Densher’s relationship. Milly has thrived on the ambiguity of her friendship with Densher; while she cannot say he loves her, she has been able to allow for the possibility of such love developing. Therefore, Lord Mark’s unequivocal definition of Kate’s and Densher’s engagement destroys any room for this possibility. Milly’s death may indeed be understood to result from the effect of Lord Mark’s words on her spirit, for these words cause the termination of hope which may be inferred from her turning of her head to the wall. Interestingly, while Densher calls Lord Mark “beastly” for his disclosure, the malevolency of his motives is quite immaterial to Milly, and indeed to the novel. It is the words themselves which affect Milly; Lord Mark is merely a messenger whose motivations bear no relevance to this effect.

The fact that Lord Mark’s words are truthful, exposing the deception of Kate’s and Densher’s predatory plan, draws further confusion around the roles of prey and

predator, for we see that the very unmasking of predation may be predatory in itself—no sooner does one escape one type of predation than one falls prey to another. The traps of this social jungle are indeed endless, and constantly shifting. Even Kate, with her verbal prowess, is ironically eventually trapped by the results of her own predatory plan, as she realises “We shall never be again as we were!” (403). This statement is in fact more than a commentary on the status of her relationship with Densher; it is a negation of the novel’s frequent refrain of “there we are,” and thus indicates an eventual realisation that any such secure placement is impossible in the shifting traps of this predatory jungle.

## Conclusion

The predatory motif of The Wings of the Dove contains complexities which, by their very deceptiveness, may indeed be called predatory themselves. While the animal imagery appears to create roles for the characters, and thus a context for our understanding of them, the contradictions contained in the images soon render such understanding an illusion. Clearly there are no fixed roles in this metaphorical jungle; the roles of prey and predator exist purely in the subjective words of biased characters, and thus fluctuate according to the motives and imaginations of these characters. Therefore, the concept of prey and predator in the novel depends less on the actions of the characters than on the language they use.

The fact that these roles owe their very existence to words draws attention to the major role of language in this social jungle. Not only does language define and redefine the roles of prey and predator, it enables the characters to experience a sense of power by reducing the situations with convenient definitions, and even to exert power over other characters by inciting them to believe and live up to such labels. In fact, one could argue that language is the most powerful component in the predatory jungle of the novel, for there is a sense in which every character is subject to its power—if the characters do not master language, then it will master them, as is illustrated in the contrasting scenes in which Kate and Densher attempt to reduce Maud with words; while Kate easily uses words to her advantage, Densher finds himself overwhelmed by them. Thus it follows

that words are the true predators in the novel, for they are the source of the fleeting predatory power which the characters may possess. Of course it is a power which needs to be harnessed, and thus works with or against the characters.

The characters' subjection to the power of words is perhaps most evident in the subtle role shifts between Milly and her definers. Milly's demand for such definition, and appropriation of it for her own satisfaction, shows how easily the power of words may be seized by the prey to enable them to overturn the predatory roles. And Milly's own death, resulting arguably from the words of Lord Mark, emphasises once more the transitory nature of this possession of power, as of course does the ultimate power she wields in the words of her will. The elusive nature of this power of words is further shown in the very different usages to which it may be put; Sir Luke's ambiguous words possess power just as much as Kate's limiting words—indeed the juxtaposition of these two very different types of power creates contradictions which emphasise further the formidability of language; words are undoubtedly an untameable power in the novel.

Indeed, the predatory power which words may possess in this social jungle means that the novel is not merely a jungle of traps for the characters but also for the reader, for our comprehension is manipulated by ever-changing definitions. My thesis deals solely with the characters, but the topic could be taken further to examine the sense in which we, as readers, are prey to the words of the narrative—words which deny us an objective view of the situation and thus exert control over our responses. We may see that our understanding of the novel is partially controlled by what the characters say about each other, but the extent to which we take the characters' words to be definitive must depend on the credibility the narrative voice allows us to lend to the characters. There is in fact

the subtle but undeniable presence of a narrator in the novel, whose role is explored in Brenda Austin-Smith's study, "The Man Without Characteristics." The subtlety of this narrator's influence may be seen in the fact that many critics take the character's views of each other to be apt definitions. Quentin Anderson begins his chapter on The Wings of the Dove by stating: "James's readers have often described the little American girl of The Wings of the Dove as in some way carrying out the suggestion of the title and descending on London as a visible image of the Holy Spirit" (233). Indeed, it is true that many critics unquestioningly take Kate's label for Milly to represent Milly's role within the novel, perhaps seeing its place in the title as lending it authenticity; what is even more interesting, however, is that Anderson, while drawing our attention to this, does not indicate any awareness that he himself has just as easily adopted Densher's label for Milly, referring to her quite naturally as "the little American girl."

Even when critics dispute the labels given, it is interesting that they often unquestioningly take them to be James' own. Brian Lee, in his book The Novels of Henry James, attributes the idealism which James's characters possess to James himself, and is thus quite harsh in his judgment of him: "There is, I want to say, in James's presentation of Milly Theale an idealism that is finally naïve and unjustifiable. James envisages her as a princess, 'the heir of all the ages'" (98). That it is Susan, not James, who envisages Milly thus does not seem to occur to Lee, or if it does, he does not appear to differentiate between Susan's and James' views. The fact is, that any "true" depiction of Milly from James as omniscient author simply is not available to us; as Millicent Bell points out in Meaning in Henry James, "the use of the restricted point of view . . . confines us to the

subjectivity of a single observer who can never know everything, and who must be acknowledged to have no final vision” (14).

That critics have taken the words of fictional characters to represent accurate definitions of other fictional characters, and furthermore seen these definitions as those of James himself, says a great deal about the subtlety with which these characters are portrayed by the words of the narrative voice—words that have at least the potential of being as predatory as the characters’ own. The characters themselves do not communicate with a reader—they exist in their own reality where of course no reader exists. The narrator, however, makes known his acknowledgement of the presence of a reader, and furthermore communicates, be it ever so subtly, with this reader; he draws our attention to the fact that he is a character outside the story who is representing to us the characters within it. A detailed and interesting study could therefore be made of the narrator’s exploitation of predatory words, and the extent and duration of his success at harnessing the power of language.

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