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ELLEN OLENSKA'S SILENT BANISHMENT FROM OLD NEW YORK IN EDITH WHARTON'S *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*

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Abstract

In her Pulitzer-winning novel, *The Age of Innocence* (1920/1999), the American novelist Edith Wharton portrays how societal norms and codes rule the lives of individuals in Old New York, creating boundaries and forcing them to act within them. In this social environment, the novel's protagonist, the dilettante bachelor Newland Archer, is presented as an intelligent yet conventional young man engaged to beautiful May Welland, a member of elite society. When Ellen Olenska, a former member of their circle, returns to New York after separating from her foreign husband, her family rallies around her to safeguard her reputation from the rumors circulating behind her back. However, her unorthodox, foreign lifestyle, as well as her alleged romantic entanglement with Archer, further jeopardize her newly gained place in society. In the end, when Ellen Olenska clearly recognizes the conventional taboos that make it impossible for her to lead a life of fulfillment in New York society, she chooses to leave Archer and New York for good to free herself from the oppressive upper-class social surroundings. The aim of this paper is to investigate the reasons why Ellen Olenska is treated as an outcast and is silently cast away from Old New York society. By doing so, this study concludes that her banishment/exile from patriarchal society serves as the only way for true liberation indicating the future of American women at the turn of the 20th century.

Keywords: *The Age of Innocence, Old New York, Code of Silence, Social Outcasts, Ellen Olenska.*

EDITH WHARTON'IN *MASUMİYET ÇAĞI* BAŞLIKLI ESERİNDE ELLEN OLENSKA'NIN ESKİ NEW YORK'TAN SESSİZ SÜRGÜNÜ

Öz

Amerikalı romancı Edith Wharton, Pulitzer ödüllü *Masumiyet Çağı* (1920/1999) başlıklı eserinde toplumsal norm ve kuralların sınırlar çizip eski New York'taki bireyleri bu sınırlar içinde yaşamaya zorlayarak yaşamlarını nasıl yönettiğini anlatır. Bu toplumsal ortamda, romanın sanat meraklısı bekâr kahramanı Newland Archer, seçkin bir topluluğun üyesi olan güzel May Welland ile nişanlı, zeki ancak geleneksel bir genç adam olarak sunulur. Aynı çevrenin eski bir üyesi olan Ellen Olenska yabancı kocasından ayrılıp New York'a döndüğünde, ailesi Ellen'ın itibarını arkasında dönen dedikodulardan korumak için ona destek olur. Ancak alışılmadık, yabancı yaşam tarzı ve Archer ile sözde romantik ilişkisi, toplumdaki yeni kazandığı yeri daha da tehlikeye atar. Ellen Olenska en sonunda New York toplumunda tatmin edici bir yaşam sürmesini imkânsız kılan geleneksel tabuların açıkça farkına vardığında, baskıcı üst sınıfın sosyal çevresinden kendisini kurtarmak için hem Archer'ı hem de New York'u tamamen terk etmeyi seçer. Bu makalenin amacı, Ellen Olenska'nın neden dışlanmış bir birey muamelesi gördüğünü ve Eski New York toplumundan neden sessizce sürüldüğünü araştırmaktır. Bu doğrultuda bu çalışma, Ellen için tek gerçek kurtuluş yolunun ataerkil toplumdan uzaklaştırılması/kendi kendini sürgün etmesi olduğu sonucuna varmaktadır; bu da Amerikan kadınının 20. yüzyılın başındaki geleceğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Masumiyet Çağı, Eski New York, Sessizlik Kuralı, Sosyal Dışlanmışlar, Ellen Olenska.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, authors in exile have served as a voice for large groups of people while being exiled from their homeland. One type of exile that authors have always faced is the need to depart so as to fulfill their sense of individual destiny and vision. In that sense, some of them can be classified as expatriates since their exile or emigration was self-chosen despite the pressures that made it necessary. The American novelist Edith Wharton (1862-1937) is one example of such a writer who settled permanently in France in 1914 and afterwards visited the United States for a very brief stay of twelve days. In her own autobiography, *A Backward Glance*, she admits that "the truth is that he [Henry James] belonged irrevocably to the old America out of which I also came, and of which – almost – it might paradoxically be said that to follow up its last traces one had to come to Europe" (1934/2008: 91). Having spent some part of her childhood in Paris and Rome, Wharton might have felt more at home in Paris where she gained a more objective insight into the differences between European and American customs. In her Pulitzer-winning novel, *The Age of Innocence* (1920), she quietly and nostalgically recounts the long-gone world of her upbringing from across the seas, recording the aristocratic Old New York society with accuracy and calmness. The twin themes of self-exile and social ostracism are easily identified in this novel, in which the beautiful, newly separated Ellen Olenska, after finding herself in a love triangle with her cousin May and May's fiancé Newland Archer, is compelled to move to Paris.

Wharton, an astute observer of her day, retains a realist perspective in her portrayal of themes such as the oppressiveness of upper-class codes and mores, the repression of women in a patriarchal culture, and of the hostility and rivalry between women. According to Hermione Lee, Ellen's banishment from New York society reflects the gloomy fate of women in Wharton's work: "it is the women in Wharton who have to suffer betrayal and social punishment" (2008: 186). Elizabeth Ammons, likewise, reads the novel as the victory of the "angel/ innocent" over the "dark/experienced lady" creating a series of binaries between "new" and "old" female stereotypes (1980: 13). However, Ellen's banishment from New York "can also be said to be defying society's rules, for in returning to Europe—that is, in refusing to play Old New York's game—she shows that she can rise above the game" as Carol Singley puts it (2003: 504). In this vein, Sevinc Elaman-Garner recently analyses "the ways in which the text delivers—through its dialogic narrative—a fragmented, ambiguous and contradictory depiction of New Womanhood" and thus, associates Ellen with the "independent New Woman who challenges social conventions" (2016). This study aims to investigate the reasons why Ellen Olenska is treated as an outcast, which results in her silent banishment from Old New York society. One can conclude that her decision to leave Archer and New York can also be interpreted as an act of liberation from the strict social norms and codes of patriarchy and thus, makes the novel a tale of independence and self-fulfillment rather than failure.

2. THE SOCIAL TERRAIN OF OLD NEW YORK

The title of her novel, *The Age of Innocence,* refers to the New York of the 1870s in the girlhood of Edith Wharton and gives the book the flavor of a historical novel. By setting her novel in a recognizable social environment, she highlights the impact of traditions and mores on the lives of her fictional characters, especially on the unorthodox, exotic Ellen Olenska. In order to understand the reasons why Ellen Olenska is treated as an outcast and is silently driven away from this Old New York society, one should understand the social terrain that shapes the lives of these individuals. In this society, social rank is an integral part of their existence and destiny; thus, social details matter a lot. We recall how Mrs. Archer remarks, in one particular scene, how: "…the roman punch made all the difference; not in itself but by its manifold implications" (1920/1999: 206). The phrase "manifold implications" not only embraces all the traditions so significant to the upper echelons of Old New York society but also underscores who the Archers are and where they stand in that social ranking. Through the terminology of "inscrutable totem terrors" (1920/1999: 4), "sacred taboos of the prehistoric ritual," (1920/1999: 113), and savage practices, the novel's protagonist and dilettante bachelor Newland Archer relates the 1870s customs and ceremonies of the old New York society, thereby characterizing this social group as a little tribe or clan. His traditional way of looking at life is often too dull for the reader, so the intelligent narrator of the novel "never hesitates to peer over his shoulder and point out all kinds of interesting things on the New York scene that we would otherwise miss" (Auchincloss, 1961: 31). The novel also provides plenty of experts who are confidently equipped with opera glasses and innuendo, axioms, long memories, and forests of family trees, to illuminate the reader about social placing in Old New York.

As the sophisticated voice of the narrator reveals, New York society in *The Age of Innocence* is old-fashioned, provincial, and self-satisfied. During their travel abroad, for instance, Archer's mother and sister never become acquainted with foreigners. Similarly, when a French intellectual inquiries about the possibility of a job in New York, for his fiancé May, even the idea of hiring a French tutor is simply unimaginable: "A job in New York?" May exclaims, "What sort of job? People don't have French tutors" (1920/1999: 128). In Wharton's Old New York, people are defined by where they live, when they go out, and whom they see; thus, everyone knows everyone else's family since, as Granny Mingott observes (1920/1999:19), they have been intermarrying for centuries. The use of family names as given names, (Archer, van der Luyden, Sillerton), indicates their closed and complex web of kinship. Thus, it is that the traditional-minded Newland Archer knows from the beginning that he never really has a chance with May's beautiful, Europeanized, disenchanted cousin, Ellen Olenska. That is his pathos. He is engaged to beautiful May Welland who is as traditional as himself, and he will marry May Welland and spend a lifetime with May Welland. Both Newland Archer and Ellen Olenska realize this fact and accept it without questioning or resistance. Accordingly, as Ellen reminds Archer, there can be no new entity: "there is no US in that sense!" (1920/1999: 109), except in a disembodied, romantic union, possible only if they never meet. Otherwise, Archer will always be "the husband of Ellen Olenska's cousin" and she "the cousin of Newland Archer's wife" involved in shabby liaisons (1920/1999: 109).

A Code of Silence, as a means of social control, prevails in Old New York society. In Wharton's fiction, any situation that flouts the rules of high society or threatens its existence simultaneously invites us to read the gestures of the characters and to read between the lines. Newland Archer comments clearly on this hypocrisy: "In reality, they all lived in a kind of hieroglyphic world, where the real thing was never said or done or even thought, but only represented by a set of arbitrary signs" (1920/1999: 29). Accordingly, *The Age of Innocence* contains a glossary of old New York terms, as language plays a highly significant role in defining people's spheres. For example, recurrent terms such as "nice," (1920/1999: 28) and "not the thing," (1920/1999: 3) help the reader to understand how New York society feels about their social codes and values and interpret the implications. For instance, when the novel opens, the old New York families seem secure but are already under threat, as the code of niceness has been violated many times by Ellen Olenska who recently returned to America after separating from her philandering husband, a Polish Count. Yet, "The Mingotts had not proclaimed their disapproval aloud: their sense of solidarity was too strong" as a part of "Old New York's capacity for silent communication" as Clare Virginia Eby puts it (1992: 94). The code operating behind *nice* can be described as compliance with social codes defining one's place and limitations as a woman, one's duties as wives and mothers: principally, this involved assisting husbands or fathers in maintaining social status in the Gilded Age of 1870s New York.

While relating the silent norms and codes of New York society, Archer also expresses his own silent patriarchal disconcertment about her fiancé May's association with Ellen Olenska and how her reputation might be influenced by her unorthodox and foreign ways. In an early scene, Ellen is described as "revealing, as she leaned forward, a little more shoulder and bosom than New York was accustomed to seeing, at least in ladies who had reasons for wishing to pass unnoticed" (1920/1999: 10). For Archer, her "pale and serious face" is a reflection of "her unhappy situation; but the way her dress (which had no tucker) sloped away from her thin shoulders shocked and troubled him" (1920/1999: 10). In this scene at the opera, all other men like Archer observe women as if they were on display in the theatre boxes. Acting like social code and fashion experts, the men of society discuss the appearance and clothes of the women and judge whether their looks are appropriate for public display or not. The mere existence of men such as Lawrence Leffers, serves to monitor and protect manners and customs, ensuring strict adherence to the society's rules: "Mr. Sillerton Jackson had returned the opera-glass to Lawrence Lefferts. The whole of the club turned instinctively, waiting to hear what the old man had to say; for old Mr. Jackson was as great an authority on 'family' as Lawrence Lefferts was on 'form'" (1920/1999: 7). Countess Ellen Olenska, a lady of dubious past, not to mention her unusual and even inappropriate clothing, does not go unnoticed by the men in this society. Accordingly, as the narrator relates, "For a moment he [Mr. Sillerton] silently scrutinized the attentive group out of his filmy blue eyes overhung by old veined lids; then he gave his mustache a thoughtful twist, and said simply: 'I didn't think the Mingotts would have tried it on'" (1920/1999: 8). One can conclude that Ellen Olenska's sudden appearance on this particular occasion is not welcomed as she is not a member of their clan anymore but an outsider who has recently separated from her foreign husband, Count Olenski.

Edith Wharton's protagonists' choice of dress, shoes, and accessories is vividly indicative of their owners' social status. In her work, *Dressed in Fiction* Clair Hughes states that "Traditionally, aspects of dress have been used to portray aspects of personality, particularly when a character first enters the story" (2005: 7). Thus, Old New York society keeps speaking about Ellen's sudden appearance and unconventional dress for days following the opera. For example, Archer's sister, Janey, remembers exactly her outfit at the Opera although she is not present at the event herself: "At the Opera I know she had on dark blue velvet, perfectly plain and flat – like a night-gown" (1920/1999: 25). Mrs. Archer does not let her continue her allusion to the nightgown, yet she supports the idea of corruption and impropriety herself as clear in these words: "We must always bear in mind what an eccentric bring-up Medora Manson gave her. What can you expect of a girl who was allowed to wear black satin at her coming-out ball?" (1920/1999: 26). As an orphan, Ellen Olenska is educated under the direction of her aunt Medora Manson with "many peculiarities" who was "a wanderer" like her parents (1920/1999: 38). Ellen grew up in a European environment that tolerated her "gaudy" clothes while "her high color and high spirits" allured most relatives (1920/1999: 38). Another example of her unconventional clothing appears in the scene in which Archer visits her home in a Bohemian section of town to discuss her wish to divorce:

> "It was usual for ladies who received in the evenings to wear what were called "simple dinner dresses": a close-fitting armor of whale-boned silk, slightly open in the neck, with lace ruffles filling in the crack, and tight sleeves with a flounce uncovering just enough wrist to show an Etruscan gold bracelet or a velvet band. But Madame Olenska, heedless of tradition, was attired in a long robe of red velvet bordered about the chin and down the front with glossy black fur." (1920/1999: 68)

As Newland Archer reflects, even though her outfit follows one of the latest trends in Paris, it looks "perverse and provocative" (1920/1999: 69), in other words, improper and sensuous according to the customs of American society. Thus, one can easily argue that she is doomed from the start due to the nature of her unconventional upbringing and lack of parental guidance.

3. THE NATURE OF ELLEN'S PECULIAR, UNCONVENTIONAL UPBRINGING

In this traditional society, the destinies of individuals are molded by strict social codes and norms, as exemplified in the union of May Welland and Newland Archer; Ellen Olenska's crime, as a runaway wife, is to be ignorant of these boundaries and limitations. For instance, she fails to realize the importance of Opera for them as an opportunity for women to display themselves as eligible products on the marriage market. Having been away from New York society for a while, she also seems to have adopted a different culture and thus, stays foreign to her family and relatives, in other words, her own tribe. For instance, after Archer and May's visit to Mrs. Mingott as a newly engaged couple, Archer relates what Mrs. Welland is silently thinking about Ellen's appearance with Julius Beaufort just before they leave: "It's a mistake for Ellen to be seen, the very day after her arrival, parading up Fifth Avenue at the crowded hour with Julius Beaufort—" (1920/1999: 21). As a recently-separated woman, Ellen's entanglement with Julius Beaufort seems to be improper for the social conventions and mores of Old New York. Upon Ellen's invitation to visit her some time, Archer inwardly criticizes her tellingly: "…she ought to know that a man who's just engaged doesn't spend his time calling on married women. But I daresay in the set she's lived in they do—they never do anything else" (1920/1999: 21). While the differences between the social conduct of Europe and America are highlighted once more, Ellen is presented as a foreigner and a misfit who cannot integrate into the New York clan.

Ellen crosses certain cultural boundaries with her unorthodox lifestyle, her lack of concern for social rules and etiquette, and an advanced and informed taste unlike anything her female cousins have ever experienced. Representing the old-fashioned New York society, Mrs. Archer clearly expresses her resentment and disapproval for Ellen and her foreign way of living: "Countess Olenska is a New Yorker, and should have respected the feelings of New York" (1920/1999: 57). Being no longer a New Yorker, however, Ellen feels little kinship with anyone and feels overwhelmed with the hypocrisy of people who insist on avoiding truth if it involves any hint of unpleasantness. During a conversation with Archer, Ellen openly expresses her disappointment with New York society: "Oh, I know—I know! But on condition that they don't hear anything unpleasant. Aunt Welland put it in

those very words when I tried. . .. Does no one want to know the truth here, Mr. Archer? The real loneliness is living among all these kind people who only ask one to pretend!" (1920/1999: 50) As is clear from these words, not being able to fit into the clan, she already feels lonely and even ostracized among New York society. Later in another scene, when she shares her wish "to become just like everybody else here" (1920/1999: 69) by casting off her old life, Archer tells her the impossibility of being a part of this old-fashioned society: "You'll never be like everybody else" (1920/1999: 69).

Ellen Olenska displays intellectually developed taste and owns what looks like a small library which marks her out as unladylike according to the conventions and mores of New York. As Archer observes, "the books [are] scattered about her drawing-room (a part of the house in which books were usually supposed to be "out of place"), though chiefly works of fiction" (1920/1999: 66). The ironic tone of the narrator cannot go unnoticed when Archer considers himself "distinctly the superior of these chosen specimens of old New York gentility" believing that "he had probably read more, thought more, and even seen a good deal more of the world, than any other man of the number" (1920/1999: 6). Yet, he finds Ellen's interest in arts, literature, and music unusual and Bohemian, befitting the nature of her unconventional upbringing and foreign lifestyle. Although Archer is also proud of his knowledge of Italian art, he perceives the pictures in her room intriguing "for they were like nothing that he was accustomed to look at (and therefore able to see) when he travelled in Italy" (1920/1999: 45). Ellen's literary command and experience, on the other hand, indicate that her personality and also the kind of education she received is different from the other female characters in the novel as clear in the following lines:

> "She was a fearless and familiar little thing, who asked disconcerting questions, made precocious comments, and possessed outlandish arts, such as dancing a Spanish shawl dance and singing Neapolitan love-songs to a guitar. Under the direction of her aunt (whose real name was Mrs. Thorley Chivers, but who, having received a Papal title, had resumed her first husband's patronymic, and called herself the Marchioness Manson, because in Italy she could turn it into Manzoni) the little girl received an expensive but incoherent education, which included "drawing from the model," a thing never dreamed of before, and playing the piano in quintets with professional musicians." (1920/1999: 38-39)

Old New York would describe her upbringing as "expensive but incoherent" and pitied her for being "in such hands" (1920/1999: 39). Katherine Joslin also points out that Ellen's "education, experience, and training" have all combined to create a totally different woman than American culture "usually produces" (1991: 94). In the portrayal of Ellen Olenska, Wharton registers the legacy of the intellectual, artistic woman with a European background.

Ignoring the differences between the social conduct of Europe and America, Ellen follows the customs and practices of Paris such as the Sunday evenings during which she holds musical evenings to the amusement of New York society. However, voicing the strict conventions of Old New York society, Mrs. Archer protests the nature of Sunday evenings: "Good music? All I know is, there was a woman who got up on a table and sang the things they sing at the places you go to in Paris. There was smoking and champagne" (1920/1999: 56). Mrs. Archer clearly explains later that "Ellen's ideas are not at all like ours[theirs]" since "she is completely Europeanised" (1920/1999: 92). Ellen's foreign accent as well as her English interlaced with French grammar also contribute to her display of "Frenchness" (1920/1999: 90). Here one cannot help being reminded of *French Ways and Their Meaning* in which Wharton criticizes the negative effects of Puritanism emphasizing the inequality between American men and women: "The long hypocrisy which Puritan England handed on to America concerning the danger of frank and free social relations between men and women has done more than anything else to retard real civilization in America" (1919: 112-113).

At this point, it should be noted that critics, such as Cynthia Griffin Wolff (1977), Pamela Knights (1995), and Sarah Kozloff (2001), have meticulously demonstrated that one of Edith Wharton's most essential themes is the difference between America and Europe and that she relates this difference with May and Ellen throughout *The Age of Innocence*. To illustrate, May can be seen as a representation of "innocence, America, Eden/ heaven,

youth, and purity" while Ellen reflects "experience, Europe, exile, age, and sexuality" as Kozloff puts it in her article "Complicity in *The Age of Innocence*" (2001: 272). In order to demonstrate the limitations of Old New York society, Wharton also connects May with "frigidity, constraint, hypocrisy, and society" and Ellen is linked with "passion, freedom, honesty, and art" (Kozloff, 2001: 272). The opposing qualities of Ellen and May seem to reinforce in Gilbert and Gubar's terminology (1984: 79) the patriarchal representations of "angelic" and "monstrous" female identities. Considering the binary differences between them, it is also possible to identify them as "mirror images" (Muda, 2011: 153). In this sense, with her big blue eyes and blond hair, May represents the typical angel in the house, who acts exactly like an upper-middle-class wife should behave:

> "The Newland Archers, since they had set up their household, had received a good deal of company in an informal way. Archer was fond of having three or four friends to dine, and May welcomed them with the beaming readiness of which her mother had set her the example in conjugal affairs. Her husband questioned whether, if left to herself, she would ever have asked anyone to the house; but he had long given up trying to disengage her real self from the shape into which tradition and training had moulded her. It was expected that well-off young couples in New York should do a good deal of informal entertaining, and a Welland married to an Archer was doubly pledged to the tradition." (1920/1999: 206)

Following her mother's footsteps, May completes flawlessly all the chores allotted to her, and can thus be seen as the embodiment of the social code of Old New York. As an upper-middle-class American woman, she accepts her role as a wife and later a mother following the four ideals of true womanhood as identified by Barbara Welter in her article "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860": piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity (1966: 151-174). Accordingly, like a dutiful wife, she keeps silent even if she suspects her husband's infidelity. Neither can she blame her husband for not loving and respecting her nor she can openly accuse him of having an affair with Ellen. In an earlier scene, aware of May's intellectual shortcomings, Newland Archer contemplates the future: "with a shiver of foreboding he saw his marriage becoming what most of the other marriages about him were: a dull association of material and social interests held together by ignorance on the one side and hypocrisy on the other" (1920/1999: 29).

As opposed to the suffocating nature of his union with May, Ellen Olenska seems to offer him a world of freedom, intellectual stimulation, and artistic creativity. Accordingly, Archer cannot help comparing Ellen's colorful, exotic drawing-room to whatever might be expected in a household managed by May: "…so different from any he had ever breathed that self-consciousness vanished in the sense of adventure" (1920/1999: 45). Upon contemplation of "the purple satin and yellow tuftings of the Welland drawing-room, to its sham Buhl tables and gilt vitrines full of modern Saxe," he doubts she would want her own domicile to appear any different (1920/1999: 46). It is crystal clear that May would continue the conventions and mores of her own as well as his family. Thus, the interior decoration in their future home will be traditional and conservative compared to Ellen Olenska's charmingly arranged drawing-room with unconventional paintings and exotic flowers. Archer expresses his observation on the interior decoration of her drawing-room in these words: "What he saw, meanwhile, with the help of the lamp, was the faded shadowy charm of a room unlike any room he had known" (1920/1999: 45). Thus, Newland Archer finds himself gradually drawn to Ellen's Europeanized cultural and intellectual sophistication.

In Old New York society, it is preferable for a wife to remain with her husband, regardless of his failure or dishonor, or how monstrously he treats her. As women exist only in relation to men, it is natural for May to hold tight to her marriage even if it requires lying to Ellen about her pregnancy (Knights, 1995: 33). However, Ellen chooses to liberate herself from a poisonous marriage by telling the unpleasant truth about her abusive partner. In this sense, she is presented as the rebellious wife who is trying to get a divorce: the unfortunate victim of an unfaithful husband. In other words, by refusing to follow the code of ignorance and silence when her husband cheats on her, refusing to be an obedient angel in the house in the manner of her cousins, Ellen determines her own fate and strives first in New York and then in Paris, to lead an independent, single woman's life. Her childless union with Count Olenski also indicates her preference for an intellectual, free existence rather than a life of

domesticity and motherhood. However, Old New York society cannot understand and approve of such women, especially when they live apart from their husbands. On the other hand, by sticking to the code of ignorance and silence, May Welland allows her husband, Archer, to assume the role of the typical patriarch. Until her deathbed confession at the end of the novel, she pretends to be unaware of her husband's passion for Ellen, indicating the hypocrisy of the so-called innocence in the Gilded Age.

4. THE SCANDALOUS RUMORS THAT CIRCULATE AROUND ELLEN OLENSKA

Social outcasts typically violate abstract boundaries and limitations, and usually sexual conventions. As Claire Preston also points out, "Male misbehavior… is either charming or mildly exasperating to his family, or resolutely ignored, as if it did not exist" (2000: 76). For instance, the Old New York society treats Newland Archer's relationship with Mrs. Lefferts Rushworth (the widow) and rumors of an affair with Countess Olenska via the code of silence. These strategies indicate not only the hypocritical but also the patriarchal beliefs of Old New York society. Lawrence Lefferts seems to be the epitome of hypocrisy, having many relationships while espousing Christian qualities and snubbing Ellen for running away from her husband. On the other hand, his wife follows the social custom of feigned ignorance in such circumstances; "…even in the most conspicuous moments of his frequent love-affairs with other men's wives, she went about in smiling unconsciousness, saying that 'Lawrence was so frightfully strict'" (1920/1999: 29). Similarly, Julius Beaufort seems able to maintain his flamboyant mistress, Miss Fanny Ring, while remaining apparently safe from tribal censure. As Archer concludes one night, observing Beaufort's carriage leaving for "…a mysterious and probably unmentionable destination… it was not an Opera night, and no one was giving a party…Beaufort's outing was undoubtedly of a clandestine nature" (1920/1999: 64-65). One concludes that a double standard governs the sexual mores of Old New York: one rule for males, another for females, even though the people of this society see themselves as the perfect example of propriety and decorum.

A woman's transgression, however, is like a mortal sin that can never be washed away and even an unfounded rumor of misconduct can ruin not only her reputation but the entire family's name. When Ellen Olenska first appears at the opera in Old New York society, Archer hears the rumors about her elopement: "she bolted with [her husband's] secretary" (1920/1999: 11). Later Mr. Jackson informs Archer more about the nature of her relationship with the same man: "Well, he was still helping her a year later, then; for somebody met 'em living at Lausanne together" (1920/1999: 27), Archer decries the hypocrisy which "would bury alive a woman of her age if her husband prefers to live with harlots" (1920/1999: 27). He declares the necessity of freedom for women in the same scene, yet he later begins to understand how women of his society are brought up deprived of this freedom in New York. He realizes that his fiancé, May, is the perfect product of this society, as "she was making the answers that instinct and tradition taught her to make", echoing what is said to her (1920/1999: 53). However, later when he is asked to discourage Ellen from divorcing her husband on the grounds that the Count may bring up some unfounded yet scandalous accusations to ruin her, Archer merely mimics "the Pharisaic voice of a society wholly absorbed in barricading itself against the unpleasant" (1920/1999: 63). In this sense, Archer seems to reflect the hypocrisy of the society when he advises Ellen not to divorce despite his feelings for her.

In Old New York, the concept of divorce often horrifies the established upper class as much for its offense against taste as for its violation of moral standards. According to Stevan E. Hobfoll, most divorced women feel that their friends and family members seem to be uncomfortable in dealing with their new marital status as single women (1986: 126) and the marital disruption can be a major source of considerable stress for her social surroundings (1986: 118). In line with this information, when Ellen Olenska wishes to sue her husband for divorce, as Archer reflects, "the idea of divorce was almost as distasteful to him as to his mother" (1920/1999: 60). She desires to gain her personal freedom more than anything and cannot help bursting out with frustration: "But my freedom—is that nothing" (1920/1999: 72). However, it is not understandable for a woman to gain personal freedom in a society in which one can expect the wives to be ornamental and submissive to their husbands. Accordingly, Ellen remains silent as she also recognizes the ancient taboos of New York society in which the collective interest of society outweighs the needs of the individual. Her silence, on the other hand, causes Archer to believe that there might be some truth in the Count's accusations, which is one of the ironic moments in the novel. While Archer feels unsettling about the issue of whether she has had an illicit love affair with her husband's secretary or not, he is the one who offers Ellen a life of adultery and an illicit love affair.

As for the violation of moral standards, Archer feels disgusted by the male hypocrisy of Old New York, particularly formed in the illicit affairs of Larry Lefferts and Beaufort, but he is no exception in this patriarchal world. When he confesses his love to Ellen in his wife's carriage, Ellen increases the tension between them by asking directly: "Is it your idea, then, that I should live with you as your mistress—since I can't be your wife?" (1920/1999: 183). She does not hesitate to voice the ugly truth about their situation as she unflinchingly brings up the sheer hypocrisy of New York (Eby, 1992: 97). Although startled by her directness, Archer continues to tell his desire to lead a life together: "I want—I want somehow to get away with you into a world where words like that—categories like that—won't exist. Where we shall be simply two human beings who love each other, who are the whole of life to each other; and nothing else on earth will matter" (1920/1999: 183). However, despite her love for him, she is aware of his shortcomings as a product of his society, just like all the women in New York including her cousin May. Thus, Ellen ironically questions the possibility of such a life: "where is that country? Have you ever been there?" (1920/1999: 183) indicating the differences between their perceptions. This question clearly demonstrates that she rejects getting involved in an extramarital affair with Archer or becoming another "Mrs. Lefferts Rushworth (the lovely widow)," his former mistress (1920/1999: 31). Although his passion for Ellen is obvious, he cannot challenge societal codes and norms and give up his position as of May's husband. At the very end of the novel, by declining to visit the love of his life, Archer fails to take up the threads of an old romance.

Wharton underscores the hypocrisy of Old New York by displaying how its members adhere to arbitrary codes to preserve the social order and easily shun those who do not comply with it. For instance, Old New York society declines the invitation to her welcome party on the grounds that she has transgressed the social codes and mores by running away from her husband and bringing back the unpleasant rumors of an elopement. Although the Mingotts and Wellands feel compelled to step in to save her reputation at the beginning of the novel, they turn their back to her when she decides to get a divorce. In this vein, women can be easily *cast out* by the old upper class as they are always considered to be guiltier than the men for equivalent crimes. As the narrator informs us, "When 'such things happened,' it was undoubtedly foolish of the man, but somehow always criminal of the woman. . ." (1920/1999: 62). As Claire Preston also observes, "Wharton's sexual transgressors belong to a culture which acknowledges theoretically the possibility of an unhappy marriage, but does not, in the case of women, admit of escape" (2000: 76). Newland Archer argues against this custom when he says: "[Ellen] had the bad luck to make a wretched marriage; but I don't see that that's a reason for hiding her head as if she were the culprit . . . [she] has had an unhappy life: that doesn't make her an outcast" (1920/1999: 26). Although Newland Archer dares to say this to a social arbiter like Sillerton Jackson, no Whartonian man can maintain this viewpoint in the face of tribal opposition. The emphasis on marriage and family in traditional societies seems to impose a separated/ divorced woman the role of a deviant, a recipient of disapproval and a social outcast.

Wharton's fiction presents the tragic unpredictability and instability of life by reflecting on how societal conventions confine individuals and create boundaries for their lives. Trapped by her social environment and the rumors that circulate around her, Ellen Olenska cannot escape from being expelled from her own society. Along with her foreign upbringing and lifestyle, Ellen Olenska is treated as an outcast for three main reasons: her broken marriage, her alleged elopement with her husband's secretary, and her rumored liaison with Newland Archer. As seen early in the novel all of Mrs. Manson Mingott's family declines the invitation to meet Olenska because of her alleged but unverified impropriety. Thus, she is socially stranded even from the very beginning in a way foreshowing her final banishment from New York society. The social taboo against dining with a transgressor can only be broken by divine intercession, so "it requires the intervention of the imperial, deific van der Luydens to compel her cousins to break bread with her, an intervention ceremonially solicited and given" (Preston, 2000: 77). In this sense, being at the top of society, Mr. and Mrs. Henry van der Luyden act like the "mouthpieces of some remote ancestral authority" (1920/1999: 35) determining what is appropriate/proper to voice and what is not. On the other hand, Newland Archer who spends a great deal of time inside his own head seems to be Wharton's specimen rather than her spokesman.

At the beginning of the novel, society collectively elects to snub dinner invitations that involve Ellen Olenska, while at the end, it silently stages one final gathering - May's dinner party - to expel Ellen permanently. Although Newland Archer sees the real motives behind this dinner, he cannot act against Old New York society, which has

now "rallied about his wife on the tacit assumption that nobody knew anything, or had ever imagined anything" (1920/1999: 212). Newland's alleged involvement with Ellen Olenska endangers both the dynastic union of the Archers and the Mingotts/Wellands and the familial unit indicated by May's pregnancy. Thus, they would rather Ellen go back to her husband, Count Olenski, like a stereotypical upper-class woman, would do to avoid any scandal or unpleasantness. However, being an independent and free-willed woman, Ellen prefers to return to the streets of Paris, where Archer wanders twenty-six years later thinking about what kind of amazing life Ellen had: "He thought of the theatres she must have been to, the pictures she must have looked at, the sober and splendid old houses she must have frequented, the people she must have talked with, the incessant stir of ideas, curiosities, images and associations thrown out by an intensely social race in a setting of immemorial manners" (1920/1999: 227). Compared to her liberated, unorthodox life in Paris, Archer feels "shy, old-fashioned and inadequate" (1920/1999: 224) more than ever in conformity with the silent codes and mores of Old New York.

5. CONCLUSION

While an outcast is typically characterized as someone who is rejected or cast out, whether from home or society, or who is in some other manner excluded, looked down on, or ignored, an outcast may also symbolize someone who does not fit in with the norms and codes of a certain culture (Forgas, et al. 2005: 2). Women as social outcasts are a common issue in Wharton's literature, revealing patriarchal society's pressure on American women who lack viable alternatives and choices for a life of happiness and self-fulfillment. In a patriarchal society, a woman's reputation is of the utmost importance and she is expected to behave in certain ways. When/if she deviates from societal norms, she can easily become subject to slander and may face social ostracism resulting in her banishment from society for good. The mob mentality of joining together to defeat the so-called threat to the community's way of life forms the social mechanism of ostracism (Girard, 1986: 39). Mattie Silver in *Ethan Frome* (1911), left abandoned as much by the death of her parents as by the ill-will of her relatives, is one of Wharton's tragic females as she is already a social outcast before the story even begins. Likewise, Charity Royall in *Summer* (1917) has little hope for an independent living outside marriage. Hampered by the lawless nature of her origins and the narrowness of her options, she is ultimately trapped into a desperate marital arrangement bordering on incest. One also cannot help being reminded of Wharton's ill-fated Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth* (1905), who is driven in precisely this manner from high society to the working class, where she eventually perishes.

When the rise of literary realism brought a new emphasis on the representations of social relationships, Edith Wharton did not hesitate to reflect what upper-class New York society was actually made up of in *fin de siècle* America. In this world, the forces of convention and tribal traditions exert a powerful influence on individuals, particularly on women. In a letter to William Roscoe Thayer, Wharton protests against the suggestion that she has "stripped" New York Society; it remains, in her view, "…still amply clad, and the little corner of its garment that I lifted was meant to show only that little atrophied organ" (1905/2005: 262). She only wants to show that high New York society is arbitrary, capricious, and inconsistent. Accordingly, in *The Age of Innocence*, Ellen Olenska invites the brutality, judgment, and hypocrisy of New York society when she exceeds certain cultural and social boundaries, precipitating her exclusion therefrom**.** In this sense, it would be "extremely hard to read *The Age of Innocence* as a novel with a happy ending," as "there is no escape, in place or time, for the person (especially the woman) who has been stigmatized" (Lee, 2008: 580). However, considering her nature and the conventions of her society, leading an unconventional and indulgent life in New York would have been very difficult. In this vein, one can conclude that her banishment from Old New York society has enabled her to lead a life of independence and freedom in Paris where she could liberate herself from the strict codes and norms of an old-fashioned society.

As the end of the novel reveals, Ellen has been living alone in the middle of aesthetic pleasures and cultural wealth of Paris for years just like she once told her grandmother Catherine Mingott: "if I return to Europe I must live by myself" (1920/1999: 205). It is clear that she chooses the Parisian life rather than returning to her husband, Count Olenski, or having an extramarital affair with Newland Archer. While Archer is in Paris with his son Dallas twenty years later, he imagines the glamorous square near one of the avenues that Ellen lives: "by some queer process of association, that golden light became for him the pervading illumination in which she lived" (1920/1999: 227). Thus, one can interpret the ending of the novel not as a failure, but as the climax to a

story of determination to achieve liberation from a failing poisonous marriage, from an impossible, illegitimate love affair, and above all from the rules of an oppressive society. Written after World War I, Wharton's novel *The Age of Innocence* seems to reflect an uneasy combination of perspectives: a glancing back to Old New York society, and a gazing forward to the future of women in America.

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