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**THE CONTEMPORARY READING OF EDITH
WHARTON: THE INNER CHAMBERS OF THE AGE OF
INNOCENCE**

Esin Kumlu

Danışman

Yrd. Doç. Dr. Yeşim Başarır Ersoy

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Adı ve Soyadı : Esin Kumlu
Anabilim Dalı : Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatı
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ÖZET

Tezli Yüksek Lisans

Edith Wharton'ın Çağdaş Okuması: Masumiyet
Çağı'nın Gizli Odaları

Esin KUMLU

Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi

Sosyal Bilimleri Enstitüsü

Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı

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Her toplum, tarihinde; umursamazlık, abartı, refah ve sınırsız enerjiyi kapsayan bir dönem barındırmaktadır. Böyle bir tarih bölümü de Amerikan toplumunda açıkça Yaldızlanmış Çağ adı altında yer almaktadır. Edith Wharton Masumiyet Çağı adlı eserinde 1870'lerden başlayan ve 1920'li yıllara uzanan bu dönemi tüm çıplaklığıyla yansıtmıştır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, yazıldığı dönemden bu yana yapısal okumaların egemen olduğu metnin, yapı bozucu, yeni tarihselci ve post-yapısalcı okumaların sonucunda tamamen farklı ve bugüne dek keşfedilmemiş anlamlar içerdiğini kanıtlamaktır. Bu çok sesli yeniliği açıklamak amacıyla romanda, metne paralel olarak tarihsel dönem, Amerikan sosyal tarihi ve belirli karakterler üzerinde yoğunlaşmıştır. Sonuç olarak, bugüne dek metin ve yazar ile ilgili varılan sonuçların aksine, Amerika'dan kopuk olduğu ve metninde gerçek Amerika'yı yansıtmaktan uzak olduğu iddia edilen Edith Wharton'ın aslında birçok yazarın aksine, tüm çıplaklığıyla Amerikan gerçeğini yansıttığı gözlemlenmektedir. Bir Birinci Dünya Savaşı sonrası romanı olan, Masumiyet Çağı'nın, bencillikten öteye gidemeyen bir çocukluk parodisi olduğunu iddia eden profesyonel eleştirmenlerin aksine, Amerika'nın kuruluş döneminden bu yana tutunduğu ilkelerin birer birer nasıl yıkıldığını yansıttığı sonucuna varılmıştır. Çalışma sonucunda ortaya çıkan gerçek, fırsatlar ve özgürlükler ülkesi olarak bilinen

Amerika'nın Yıldızlanmış Çağ da yansıttığı görüntünün, yapay gerçeklikler üzerine oturtulmuş, iskambilden ev olduğudur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: 1) Edith Wharton, 2) Masumiyet Çağı 3)New York, 4) Post-Yapısalcılık, 5) Yeni Tarihselcilik, 6) Yapıbozum

ABSTRACT

Masters of Art Degree

**The Contemporary Reading of Edith Wharton: The Inner Chambers of The
Age of Innocence**

Esin KUMLU

Dokuz Eylul University

Institute Of Social Sciences

American Culture and Literature Department

With its limitless prosperity, hyperbole, indifference, and energy, The Gilded Age is one of the few significant periods that highlights the realities of American culture. In addition, Edith Wharton is one of the few novelists, who had the potential to turn the era into flesh and blood. The subject of this study is to indicate the inner chambers of The Age of Innocence(1920), and the secret meaning of the novel. To disclose this multi vocal innovation, parallel to American history, the text is examined from the perspectives of post-structuralism, new-historicism, and deconstruction. In conclusion, the study aims to illustrate how appearances are seldom synonymous with realities. Hence, contrary to structural readings, The Age of Innocence proclaims the reality that The Gilded Age, which is represented in the novel, apparently portrays America, not the glorification of Europe against America, a house of cards, based upon artificial realities

**Key Words: 1 Edith Wharton, 2) The Age of Innocence, 3) New York,
4) Post-Structuralism, 5) New Historicism, 6) Deconstruction**

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ABBREVIATIONS

THE AGE OF INNOCENCE	AI
A BACKWARD GLANCE	BG

INTRODUCTION

Born in 1862, Edith Wharton belonged to an aristocratic family with ancestry stretching back approximately 300 years to colonial times. The Jones family belonged to the American élité, who were the symbol of any luxury that money could procure. However, that kind of luxurious life never attracted Edith. According to her, as she states in The Age of Innocence, she lived in “a kind of hieroglyphic world, where the real thing was never said or done or even thought” (AI 45). In this hieroglyphic world, her predestined role was to learn the properties of rituals, social manners, and codes. In addition, she should have learned the realities that must be concealed by the members of the society. However, instead of concealing the realities in her culture and society, she preferred to display the inner layers of America that focused on the unuttered and the unutterable. Her struggle to highlight the inner chambers of the American culture taught her that one cannot stand away from the intricate web of customs, manners, and culture. As a result, in her works she naturally focuses on the identities, which are bound to the web of culture, customs, and manners.

It was quite difficult for Edith to reflect the realities of her native soil because although her world provided limitless wealth for art, it provided her only a few good examples of male or female writers. Furthermore, the ones who were interested in art, especially fiction, were called Bohemians. The American élité tried to insult the writers such as Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe and Edith Wharton. The problem was not their writing career or choices but their intellectual power seen as a potential danger that would unmask the realities behind their luxurious lives. As it treated the élité, Wharton’s and other writers’ intellectual power somehow turned out to be sinful. Edith might have sensed how dangerous the élité would be. As a result of that, she retold her life story in diaries, letters, in her autobiography and in conversations. As she sensed how her life could be created by the New York Clan and by the professional critics, she wrote A Backward Glance (1934).

A Backward Glance starts with Edith's childhood days when her favorite play was making up stories. She was pretending to read aloud the books she could not read. She spent most of her time in her father's library with the books, which were her best friends. The books were the gift of life that shared the loneliness she deeply felt. Although her two brothers spent most of their time with their mother, Edith spent much of her time alone. The loneliness she felt as a child and lack of mother love later appeared in her novels as characters and identities which are devoid of mother love. That kind of loneliness and emptiness always followed Edith like a shadow. In the books characters were the only friends Edith could have. However, her interest in art was not welcomed by her mother, she brought dozens of expensive toys to stop her powerful inclination to reading and writing. In the end, her mother's attempts failed. However, Lucretia's attempts to control her daughter's intellectual capacity, her insistence on raising up Edith as a society matron would be the biggest enemies of Edith. For instance, when she was fifteen, she wrote a novella called *Fast and Loose* (1889). The heroine Georgies Rivers has to choose either money or love. At the end, her material choice makes her unhappy and she realizes she has already missed the flower of life like Newland Archer. At the very beginning of her writing career, Edith tried to reflect her mother's and her society's' problematic life that rejected the spiritual in favor of the material wealth.

Edith's growing taste for writing alarmed her mother and she immediately planned a conventional panorama for her daughter. She must get married, have children and learn the codes, roles, and manners of her class. The plan was going to set Edith apart from creative work and her literary talent was going to be stifled by the conventional female role. Lucretia's plan was successful at the beginning. She chose a wealthy Bostonian young man, Teddy Wharton. Edith and Teddy married in 1885. Teddy's material wealth provided a luxurious life to Edith. The couple traveled around the world, stayed in famous hotels. However, not long after her marriage, Edith began to display signs of depression. Her illness was not related to physical but psychological facts. Her marriage deteriorated her health and her mother's attempts to create a daughter who was kept in a cage failed. She kept on writing despite the fact that her marriage was a disaster, that she witnessed how a mother deliberately

could try to make life worse for her child and that she was called Bohemian by the élité. Despite every calamity in her life, she did not stop writing.

Education was a burden for Edith. She was expected to remain at home and pretend to be happy. Her love, her taste for writing and her interest in art kept her alive. Even the famous cure of her era, “the rest cure” by Dr. Mitchell could not stop Edith. She was prescribed “intellectual inactivity” not only by doctors but also by the society but Edith rejected to stay inactive. The intellectual passivity forced by the society could not prevent Edith from writing. She created many texts including decoration, fiction and war stories. Her interest in interior decoration was the secret key to Edith’s spiritual need to give shape to her life. She also decorated her own house in Massachusetts; the Mount, for interior decoration gave her a sense of isolation and order:

The colorful symmetry allows for no unexpected mingling of servants and masters, no preparation of guests into private quarters, no romantic hermitages in the gardens but rather a kind of social interaction that is carefully planned, controlled, deliberate” (Fryer, 1986; 73).

At the Mount, Edith planned to purify her soul from the American élité and New York. She welcomed intellectuals such as historians, painters, writers, poets and lawyers. While she was living at the Mount, she woke up before her guests and husband. While she felt the warm and bright morning sun, she began to write. There was not any noise, she could shut her eyes to the restrictions of her class and gender, and she sat alone and wrote. Morning was the source of her power. At last she managed to build a private sphere where she could freely write. However, she must have needed more freedom as she decided to leave not only her husband but also her native soil. She moved to France. In Europe, she found the freedom she had long been searching for. She not only wrote several novels but also continued to write during the First World War. She organized several rescue committees and her relief efforts were awarded by several nations. Certainly, the war had changed her dramatically like every individual in Europe. After the war she focused more on individual psychology and how our identities are bound to culture. One of the best examples of that work is her post-war novel The Age of Innocence.

The Age of Innocence has always been interpreted as a typical text of Edith Wharton. The text has few chances to purify itself from the shadow of its creator. Thus, the judgementality and prejudice against the text has always existed. That kind of approach has prevented a close reading of the text. Many critics and readers have remained silent and not tried to understand the inner chambers of the text. As a result, the superficial and prejudiced readings of the text have prevented the discovery of the secret code of the text. The problematic existence of the text can even be seen when the 1920 Pulitzer Prizes are examined. In 1920, The Columbia University awarded the Pulitzer Prize for literature to Sinclair Lewis for his novel Main Street. However all of a sudden the board of trustees overturned the jury's decision and gave the prize to The Age of Innocence. She was the first woman and the third person who got the prize. The Age of Innocence was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for it reflected the highest Standard of American manners and American man. It should be mentioned that there was a clear paradox between the actual content of the text and the Trustees reading of the text. The Trustees must have missed Wharton's satire and irony. From the novel, they got the impression of a man who chooses familial duty to his wife, instead of choosing a foreign creature personified in Ellen Olenska. It is asserted that, the problematic existence of the text dates back to its Pulitzer winning days. The Age of Innocence was read by a group of wealthy, élité businessman. As a result of their reading, they forced the Committee to give the prize to Wharton. The businessman must have associated themselves with the young, wealthy lawyer Newland Archer, who gives up his desires for Ellen and decides to remain loyal to his life. As a matter of fact, he pretends to be loyal to his wife just for the sake of his reputation. He denies his desire for Ellen and prefers to preserve his social status quo. The committee members read the novel as a typical love story and they were honored by Archer's attitude who denies his desires in order to protect his family. Archer must have a lot in common with the businessman in the committee so much that the members thought that the highest Standard of American manners and manhood were represented by Newland Archer. The Trustees thought that Wharton's message was morally uplifting as it called for the preservation of family and family reputation. However, the text does not call for a message like that. Instead it gives thoroughly a different message. In the novel, Wharton compares and contrasts May

Welland with Ellen Olenska. May represents the material standards while Ellen represents the spiritual values. In addition, not only the female but also the male characters are bound to obey customs and culture. Hence, the text is not a love story or the comparison of Europe with America as most critics have always thought, but the comparison of true American virtues with the synthetic, un-American values.

In the text Edith Wharton focuses on the American culture and the individual identities which try to free themselves from the suffocating environment of the American East. Choosing New York as a setting, Wharton judges to what extent the Newland America achieve to be an innocent “city upon a hill”. Her allusion to New England through New York, offers a small microcosm that represents the very roots of American culture. The security of that small microcosm is destroyed by the arrival of Ellen Olenska who dresses and lives as she pleases. Her house is not like any house Newland has seen. Her mystery and difference are the elements that make her dangerous. The most significant point is given through the eyes of Newland; the roots of American culture question its identity. As opposed to the synthetic American East, the natural America, which is the American West, is devoid of judgementality, ignorance, and inequality, and is depicted in the image of Ellen’s house. Her sitting room was full of Italian-looking pictures, Greek bronzes, the smell of Turkish coffee, ambergris and dried roses. Her house is the signifier of the harmony that American nation stood upon at the very beginning of its establishment.

In addition to these, another element that was ignored by the Trustees, portrays the concept of the American Dream in the text. Ellen, though interpreted as a European by the New Yorkers, is the American who decides to go back to her native soil because she believes that limitless opportunity and freedom will welcome her. Ellen decides to live in America to assert her intellectual and economic independence to her husband. She hopes to find a distinct social place in the new land. For Ellen, America is the only land that can promote limitless energy. However, her experience in her native soil disappoints her. The hypocrisy of New York in all areas of life disappoints her. Thus, the American dream turns out to be a nightmare at the end. However, the hypocritical and dull life only captivates the

ones, who are close to change and improvement. On the other hand, Ellen at the end of the novel maintains an economically and intellectually independent life. She lives in an apartment in Paris where she can be out of reach. At the same moment, Newland is looking at her balcony. The ending is not a traditional pessimistic Wharton ending but an open ending that is expected to be filled in by the reader. The ending is quite ironic in the sense that, the true American virtues such as individualism, self-reliance, and optimism (Ellen) clashes with the artificial values such as hypocrisy and materialism (Archer) meets in Europe. It is Europe, where the American dream has its origins. Humanity had always dreamed of a nation in which they could live far from restrictions. Thus, the ending gives the message that, individuals as Newland miss the flower of life due to the artificial world they create, whereas individuals like Ellen live happily anywhere in the world. It can be asserted that, the ending offers readers various choices. However, the precise reality is that the true-American, Ellen, proves how her optimism, adaptability new circumstances, self-reliance, and individualism can help her to start a new life anywhere in this world. As the only “American” in the hypocritical New York, she spreads the core values of American culture, individualism, self-reliance, and optimism, to the rest of the world.

Like Ellen, Edith Wharton spreaded and still spreads the core ideas such as optimism, individualism, self-reliance that humanity is based upon. Her language is based on difference, her intellectual power is beyond words, her prolific interest in architecture and her wartime activities clearly separates her from her contemporaries. She writes:

I have often thought that a woman's nature is like a great house full of rooms: there is the hall, through which one receive formal visits: the sitting room, where the members of the family come and go as they list; but beyond that, far beyond, are other rooms, the handles of whose doors perhaps are never turned; no one knows the way to them, no one knows whither they lead; and in the innermost room, the holy of holies, the soul sits alone and waits for a step that never comes (BG 14)

Edith Wharton's interest in architecture gives her the power to define women's nature like a house, which has inner layers. Strangers who are strange to

her heart and nature are greeted with formality and the closer ones are greeted with the inner layers of the true-self. However, Wharton declares the difficulty of reaching the true-self of a woman. That kind of difficulty has always existed for the Wharton readers and critics. Like her true self, her text The Age of Innocence has attempted to open the doors of Wharton's secret room in which the treasures of her texts and true self are hidden. Wharton's works and her life repeatedly focus on the idea that the outer layers, the literary reading based on judgementality, are always open for the strangers who are interested in what is written. On the other hand, the innermost chambers of Wharton's texts are open to the one who does not trust on the seen and the written. Naturally, that kind of reading can only be achieved through an eye that searches for objectivity and conscience free of judgementality. The need of such an eye has been extremely felt by Wharton because throughout her life she was accused of being aloof from America. As a result, her texts have always been regarded as the glorification of Europe. As a minor Henry James, she has always been compared with James and other writers. To many, she is the American writer of Europe. However, her achievements, her artistic creativity and her relief efforts as an American intellectual, have always destroyed the fake portrait of her life created by the professional critics. The best example of this is her text The Age of Innocence. In her text, Wharton answers all the questions about the 19th and early 20th century America. Her close observation of her native soil, her objective eye that has the potential to reflect the loopholes in her culture separates Wharton from her contemporaries.

In the Age of Innocence Wharton focuses on the Gilded Age that is a highly energetic period in the American culture and literary history. Intellectuals such as Mark Twain and Theorstein Weblen frequently reflected the era in their texts. Edith Wharton was one of the prominent literary figures of the era like the above mentioned intellectuals. As a matter of fact, she was one of the most prominent figures of the period. While the male writers turn their faces to the limitless wealth, and individual liberty, which is doomed to destruction as a result of (technology), and (hyperbole), Wharton turns her face to the outcomes of such limitless energy in her native soil. She focuses on the paradoxes and dilemmas of the period. She

displays how the Gilded Age turns out to be a period of syntactic liberty in America that derives its origins from the Puritan past.

In the first part of this work, I will analyze the social identity of Edith Wharton, her life, and her writing career from a variety of perspectives. Then I will focus on her identity as a literary figure and give her portrayal as a writer by the critics. In order to understand the influence of critics upon Wharton, I will examine her autobiography A Backward Glance. In the final part of this section, I will give the picture of Wharton in detail during the First World War and her contributions to humanity, peace, and individual liberty.

In the second part of this study, I will examine The Age of Innocence as a text and Edith Wharton as a writer from a new-historical perspective.

In the third part of the study, I will make a post-structural reading of the text that will focus on the metaphorical disguises veiling the characters, namely, Ellen Olenska, Newland Archer, May Welland, Ned Winsett, Medora Manson, Mr. Riviére, and finally the city of New York. The main subject of this part is the Washington mask, the subverted identity of Ellen. In the last part of the section, I will look more deeply into the text by the aid of post-structural, new historical and deconstructive reading.

In part four, I will focus on the beginning and ending of the novel and Wharton's ultimate message to the reader.

Although her text has been regarded as a return to childhood days and the portrait of the lawyer Newland Archer, The Age of Innocence is a masterpiece because not only it highlights the American reading of the era but also it shows the defects of the liberty-oriented American panorama that separates her book from other works.

PART ONE

CRYSTALLIZATION OF IDENTITY

1.1. No Gifts from Chance

As Sherley Benstock assumes in her book No Gifts from Chance, Edith Wharton throughout her life, misled the ones who thought that she would be a society matron. Her life is a life bracketed by wars, she was a determined character honored by the French Legion of Honor, and she had an artistic creativity awarded by the Pulitzer Prize and a philosophy that stood for hope. Taken strength from Mathew Arnold's poem: 'Resignation', Edith fashioned her life to her own desires, not to the ones expected from "others." Her extraordinary life roars the message that awaiting no gifts from chance has conquered fate.

Imagine for a moment, a young woman born to wealth and privilege in the leisured society of nineteenth-century Old New York. Fitted into brocade and velvet, her red-gold hair caught in a ringlet of curls, she is expected to become a society matron. However, another calling-born of her love for words and a gift for story telling- intervenes against these well-laid plans. (Benstock, 1994; vii)

Not only in her youth but also throughout her life Edith misled the ones who thought that she would remain as a society matron who would follow the predestined traditions of her clan. However, her creativity, her taste for the unknown destroyed the plans prepared for her. Instead, she preferred to open the doors of imagination and knowledge to her heart.

Edith Newbold Jones was born on January 24 1862. She was born to wealth and privilege in a leisured society. She was member of an aristocratic New York family, who belonged to the American élité. Her father George Jones, owner of a town house was one of the most prominent figures in New York. Edith spent much of her time with her father, who had a library including tents of books, which nourished Edith's literary taste. She loved reading his books and taking up long

walks with him. As her autobiography A Backward Glance and her biographies are examined, it becomes clear that she remembered her father as an affectionate man who was probably the only member of the family who could understand her. Unfortunately, her father died when she was nineteen and she deeply felt his loss.

When it comes to Edith's mother, the picture completely changes. Lucretia Jones was a completely different being when one compares her with Edith. She was the typical model of the era, indolent, capricious, illogical, pessimistic, and mired in gossip, fashion, and luxury. She followed strictly the customs of her class. As a result, shopping was the only activity she took part. In addition, there was not a biographical data about Lucretia's feelings about her third pregnancy that is the birth of Edith or her feelings about her daughter. Therefore, Lucretia has remained a mystery for Wharton biographers and readers. However, Edith's feelings for her mother were not unclear. She never remembered her as a "real mother." Lucretia was just like a picture on the wall who told her what to do all the time. She was never "beside" Edith but always "against" her. Not only her mother but

...the social restrictions of Old New York also created a repressive environment for Wharton in her youth. Her world was made up of strict social codes and proper behavior that could be abandoned at risk of being 'cut' and ostracized. (Dyman, 1996; 12)

The relationship between Edith and Lucretia was always a complex one. Edith saw her as a hindrance to her life, writing, and choices. The paradox started even from her childhood days. Like many 19th century girls, she never attended school, unlike her brothers. Unfortunately, there were sharp distinctions between Edith and her brothers. Lucretia supported her two sons' all the time, encouraged them to study abroad. Unlike her brothers, her father's library was the only source of Edith's unalienable hunger for intelligence, and New York was the first city where she derived her intellectual capacity. However, it was not easy for her to get the full flavour of that capacity. Though Lucretia supported her son's education, when it came to Edith, she was alarmed at her daughter's passion for reading. She simply ignored Edith's interests and never wanted her to write and read. It was not a surprise as Lucretia's world produced few male or female writers. As an extension

of that, writing was sinful especially if you were a woman. Thus, Lucretia tried to take Edith into the inner layers of custom, social codes and a society spending its time gossiping in the ballrooms:

Entering the ballroom...as a seventeen-year-old debutante, she has already lived a third of her life in Europe, written a novel and several stories, and published (under her pastor's name) a translation of a German poem, receiving for it an honorarium of \$ 50, her first literary earnings. Before the assembled guests, representatives of a society that was hers by birth and where she was expected to take her rightful place, she stood paralyzed with fear. (Benstock, 1994; vii)

Hence, from the very beginning, Edith was a quite different person and neither Lucretia's buying of expensive toys or her attempts to suppress her intellectual capacity prevented Edith from reading and writing. Without a doubt according to Lucretia, Edith's role was to learn the intricate pattern of social life, manners, and mores as the member of the "clan" that would be the greatest enemies of her life. Unlike Lucretia, marriage, having children, accepting the social responsibilities were never part of her dreams, and living in this atmosphere was like living in a room filled with gas. She writes in her autobiography: "When I was young it used to seem to me the group in which I grew up was like an empty vessel into which no new wine would ever again be poured" (BG 5). Living in this stifling environment, spending childhood in the lack of mother love, Edith grew more and more sensitive. She shares her loneliness with creativity for during her childhood, and making up stories was her most enjoyable game. This can be either the result of her extraordinary gifts for literature or a kind of escape from the brutalities of her life by creating different lives and performing them through her mind like Theodore Dreiser's Sister Carrie (1927) who prefers acting to close her eyes to her own miseries.

Only for one time in her life, Edith preferred to open her eyes when Lucretia changed her attitude towards her daughter. With the appearance of Teddy Wharton, a young man from Boston, Edith's life would never be the same again. Marriage suited Lucretia's needs and Edith decided to marry Teddy Wharton. However, the question is whether Edith decided to marry Teddy, the man she loved or fell in love

with the rise of Lucretia's love for her. The second one is the real answer. During Teddy and Edith's affair Lucretia changed drastically. She grew warmer and became an affectionate mother with whom Edith came across for the first time in her life. Although Edith deeply sensed the real reasons of that sudden change she preferred not to see the black side. Her hunger for mother love would be the greatest sorrow of Edith's entire life.

Most of the Wharton readers overlooked the dramatic effects of Lucretia on Edith. Edith's marriage is an excellent model for how Lucretia doomed her daughter's life into destruction all the time. Lucretia supported Teddy as she would gain not only a son, who would help any time she needed, but also a status that drives off Edith from intellectual life as a wife.

Lucretia organized every little detail about the wedding and the wedding card utterly told the entire truth. On the wedding card, Edith's "name" was not written. Lucretia, who organized each detail, might have missed it! She did not intend to write her daughter's name on the card. Edith's wedding card would just like be her marriage; Edith would always remain as a ghost who never wanted to be part of that vacant union. This marriage would never be a real one. According to her, "The real marriage of true minds is for any two people to possess a sense of humor or irony pitched in exactly the same key, so that their joint glances at any subject cross like interarching searchlights" (BG, 173)

Teddy never had witty and intelligence as Edith. Throughout their marriage, Edith preferred traveling to forget the greatest costume of her life that was 'a married woman'. However, she knew that she immediately had to create her own formula; as Henry Adams writes every individual has to invent "...a formula of his own for his universe, as the standard formulas failed" (Adams, 1918; 472). Edith without a doubt created her own formula for her universe that was a life dominated with originality, an objective vision of the eye, and a language that had the potential to turn even the dullest character into flesh and blood. The essence of this formula was writing. She became much healthier each day in relation to her unpreventable literary success.

The more successful she became, the more Teddy deteriorated. Teddy turned to other women while Edith preferred writing. Eventually they divorced in 1919. The marriage was also the end of an unnatural union and during that period, she blamed her mother, who never shared her experiences with her. She also blamed her mother on the question of her paternity. Edith was born into a family rife with secrets, it was rumored that Edith was the daughter of her brother's tutor or she was the daughter of a Scottish Lord. Edith must have believed these rumors as she searched for her brother's tutor but found out that he had died long before. On the other hand, Wharton's father, was pretending not to notice his wife's infidelity, in order to prevent a kind of scandal that no wealth or reputation would survive. Edith was so hurt that when Lucretia died in Paris 1902, she did not even attend her funeral.

Edith's life was extraordinary both unlike the women of her era and an ordinary one encapsulating paradoxes, duplicities, and sorrows. Nevertheless, despite everything, she derived optimism from Herbert Spencer, strength from Mathew Arnold's poem "Resignation", passion from Morton Fullerton, her secret lover, skepticism from her native soil and a childlike heart, empathy, objectivity, affection and self-reliance from nature.

1.2. JUXTAPOSING THE FAMOUS AND THE NOTORIOUS

1.2.1. "Professional" Critics and Edith

Critics have always played a crucial life in Edith's life as they have the power to keep her alive. Edith has always been at the crux of hot debates. She is either the famous, brilliant 19th and 20th century American intellectual or the notorious "...narrow, dated, bleak and minor Henry James" (Tuttleton, Lauer & Murray, 1993; ix). Thus, it is not difficult to surmise that debates on her will either be black or white but never grey.

As a writer, as a woman, and as a subject of biographies, realities about Edith have always been shadowy. While scholars continued to believe her passionless life, she astonished them, as she did most of the time, when her letters appeared. The passion between Edith and Morton Fullerton astonished the scholars who always believed that her friend Walter Berry, related to Edith on Lucretia's side of the family, was the key of the secret relation. However, Fullerton, a journalist who was slightly younger than her, was at the center of passion. It has been thought that Edith loved Berry and expected to marry him but this was not the case. Just like Edith, Bernard Berenson, Wharton's lifelong friend, stood aside from groups and not appreciated by the society due to his difference in style and mind.

Edith also misled the critics and scholars when she made a successful forward glance. She always had a talent to sense what would probably happen in life. Thus, she decided to prepare her autobiographical documents for her biographers. She might have alarmed at the thought of biographies that would turn into something different from the real one. She wrote, "...but one sees nowadays so many post-mortems attempted by biographers, that I thought I would rather tell my uneventful story myself" (Lewis, 1975; preface). Instead of waiting gifts from chance, she wrote her autobiography: A Backward Glance. According to Edith, the gist of her life can only be found in her autobiography.

She was quite right to fear from the biographies that would create a different life from hers. A biographer "must appraise the life of another by becoming that other person; and he must be scrupulously careful that in the process the other is not refashioned in his image" (Edel, 1973; 11). Edith's predictions about her future biographies came true. After her death she first became the subject of Percy Lubbock's book: The Portrait of Edith Wharton (1947). Lubbock's portrait of Edith was something dull, cold and distant that declared her a minor Henry James, and the book served the next generation an Edith quite opposite of her natural-self. As a biography, Lubbock's book seemed to be complete, as Virginia Woolf (1928) states "biography is considered complete if it merely accounts for six or seven selves, whereas a person will have as many thousand" (p. 153). As a result most of her early

biographies ignored her achievements. Thus it can be said that Wharton's early biographers simply preferred to ignore The House of Mirth (1962) "the most rapid sale of any book ever published by Scribner" (Lewis, 1975; 152), and The Age of Innocence that won the Pulitzer price when they supported Edith's sharp eye failing. In addition, she accepted an honoree degree from Yale University, the first Doctorate of Letter offered to a woman, and she honored the French Legion of Honor and Edith stood as the only American in Europe who reflected the realities of war through her writing. These achievements were all ignored and she always met with considerable criticism.

When the claims about Wharton are examined, it obviously reveals different portraits of Edith at the center of hot debates. She was accused of plagiarism, and writing only about the "rich". Wharton was obviously uneasy about the situation she said:

But of late a far more serious charge has been brought against me. It is that I only write about the rich!... Supposing I did write only about the rich-What then? If I did, the chances would be that it was because they happened to be the material most 'to my hand' (Wegener, 1996; 161-162)

Despite wide range of criticisms about Wharton, the criticisms remained shallow. They never include visible proofs such as quotations from her books, debates about her literary style or inadequacy of her language. Instead, most of the critics preferred not to postulate ideas, which would be related to her art. The sharpest tactic chosen by the critics was, comparing Wharton to the other writers of the era and always to the other's advantage. For instance, Frederick Wegener believes that "Mrs. Woolf is a brilliant experimentalist, while Mrs. Wharton is now content to practice the craft of fiction without attempting to enlarge its technical scope..."(Goodman, 1996; 116). In addition to that, Phelps states in her review of The Age of Innocence "As Mrs. Wharton Sees us": "Here is Mrs. Wharton resembles Joseph Conrad and Henry James, for the love scenes in this book are fully worthy of those two men of genius" (Phelps, 1920; 1,11). Thus, the critics mainly put Edith at the center of comparisons but the problematical side was neither her prose nor the quality of her writing were examined. As a result, the question bears to mind that in what cases Wharton

resembles James or modernists of the era such as Woolf and Conrad, the answer cannot be found. Phelps asks in her review:

And is not Guy de Maupassant out of place in the early seventies? I suppose Mrs. Wharton knows her Maupassant thoroughly; but unless I am quite at fault, it was not in the early seventies, but in the eighties, that his tales began to appear. (Phelps, 1920; 1, 11)

She was pointing out, The Age of Innocence and the protagonist Newland Archer, asking how can the protagonist of the text read Maupassant if the novel takes place in the seventies? Phelps perilously misleads The Age of Innocence that has a triple action including three different times: 1870s (the beginning of the novel), 1890s, (the end of the novel) and 1919 the period when Edith was writing the novel.

In addition, at the center of comparisons Edith was either the copy of Henry James or the extension of the modernists of the era. At this point one can not ignore Gore Vidal's comment on Edith. In 1978, Gore Vidal said that, "Henry James and Edith Wharton are the two great American masters of the novel." (Tuttleton, Lauer & Murray, 192; xxi). According to him, "Edith Wharton has been denied her rightful place in American letters because of her sex, class, and residence abroad" (Tuttleton, Lauer & Murray, 1992; ix). One of the sharpest eyes of America, the historian Vidal for the first time pointed out Wharton's denied place in American letters as a result of her sex and class. The word 'denied' gains significance when hundreds of women writers, poets and playwrights come into mind, whose literary achievements were suppressed or tried to be covered by the male literary world in America, especially in the 19th century. Obviously, the critics failed to read Edith solely as a writer. Instead, they preferred to take into account her gender, opportunities to travel all around the world and her close relationships with Europe that most of the authors did not have during her era. As a result, most of the critics could not reach the key self of Wharton that is the inner chamber of Wharton's life, her feelings both as a writer and as a woman. Ignoring her true self, they lost their chance to reach the Key self of Edith; actually, it cannot be wrong to call it natural, because while denying her true self, they lost their chance to reach it. Virginia Woolf comments about it: "What we call the 'true self' maybe a compact of all these selves, "commanded and locked up by the Captain self, the Key self, which amalgamates and controls them all" (Woolf,

1928; 153). Woolf was right in order to find the locked, key Self of Wharton the reader should better do a backward glance.

1.2.2. A Backward Glance

On one side were comparisons and ignored achievements and on the other side was the struggle as a woman writer in America. Her life was not easy like most of the female intellectuals in America. Though she spent most of her life abroad, she was always in touch with her country and read what was said of her books. While most of the Wharton scholars searched for different sources of information to understand Edith, she had already shared this information with the reader.

Written in 1937, A Backward Glance whispers Edith's life-long feelings. The autobiography clearly answers two questions: What were Edith's thoughts about the critics, how did they affect her writing, and what was her answer as a labeled minor Henry James? Edith's ideas about the critics and their effects on her writing are always a central concern for the Wharton scholars. The examination of A Backward Glance calls for the idea that Edith never stood against the criticisms about her. She always remained silent like the silence before the storm. She must have had a word for them. Eventually, the completion of her life, her autobiography became her implicit messenger. She declared what she had been thinking about the professional critics:

I have no quarrel with the Professional critics, who have often praised me beyond my merits; but the man who has to review fifty books a week, often on a great variety of subjects, can hardly deal as satisfactorily with any one of them as the friend talking over a book with a friend, and I have always found this comment the most helpful (BG 122)

Her power of the language is the greatest possible answer. Emphasizing the word "Professional," she raises the question to what extent a critic can be a professional. Is it the one who does a structural reading or the one who deals with the text objectively? According to Wharton the answer is apparently the latter one. She trusted her friends, who were mainly from the literary world, who interpreted her texts objectively, unlike the critics who interpreted her texts sided. Hence her texts

were not the subject of reviews but her identity. That kind of readings irritated her but never affected her writing. Her writing did not depend on “the other” but herself. She comments on the issue:

Every short story, I now saw, like every other work of art, contains within itself the germ of its own particular form and dimensions, and above is the artist’s only rule. In an instant I was free forever from the bogey of the omniscient reviewer, and though I was always interested in that was said of my books, and sometimes (though rarely) helped by the comments of the professional critics, never did they influence me against my judgment, or deflect me by a hair’s-breadth from what I knew to be “the real right” way (BG 114)

For Wharton, the real right way was escaping from the standards offered by the professional critics that astonished her greatly. She mentions her ideas in her autobiography:

When Mrs. Wharton, the condescending critic wrote, “has learned the rudiments of her art, she will know that a short story should always begin with dialogue.” “Always?” I rubbed my eyes. Here was a professional critic who seemed to think that works of art should be produced by the rule of thumb, that there could be a fixed formula for the design of every short story ever written or to be written! (BG 114)

The structural reading of her texts turned them jewels born to be sealed thus, true-union between the text and the reader, which is the union of the text and the reader to rediscover the inner complexities of the text itself, would never occur. Therefore, the text would close itself and the reader would never reach the inner layers of it.

The situation is not different when it comes to the question of Henry James. Edith was predestined to be a labeled minor Henry James by the professional critics. Naturally, her texts were read under the shadow of James but she has just one sentence for that dilemma: “At any rate I always try to keep my own work out of his way” (BG 181). She might have sensed that her intimate friend James and her texts would be the victims of the literary world. She did not highlight the differences between her style and his; as a matter of fact she did not need it. As a writer, she did not feel herself obligatory to explain something. If there are clear evidences in a

situation, one does not have to think about it. Instead of jailed in comparisons, she shared her ideas about the other side of the mirror that reflected James not as a literary figure but as an ordinary individual with his own struggles and defects. Hence, she interpreted James from a different perspective which was not done before. She states in A Backward Glance, where she creates an isolated chapter for him:

Henry James was essentially a novelist of manners, and the manner he was qualified by nature and situation to observe were those of the little vanishing group of people among whom he had grown up, or their more picturesque prototypes in older societies. For better or worse he had to seek that food where he could find it, for it was the only food his imagination could fully assimilate. He was acutely conscious of this limitation, and often bewailed to me his total inability to use the “material”, financial and industrial, of modern American life (BG 176)

The strong figure of literature with his determined, realistic standing of words, James was at the crux of an unsaid schema. Wharton’s allusion to the professional critics was the reading of Wharton as a bleak James and glorifying him in order to grab, simplify her style that prevented them from capturing the unsaid and the untouched. According to Wharton,

Like many men of genius he had a singular inability for dealing with the most ordinary daily incidents, such as giving an order to a servant, deciding what to wear, taking a railway ticket, or getting from one place to another; and I have often smiled to think how far nearer the truth than he could possibly have known was the author of that cataclysmic sketch in the famous “If-series” series: “If Henry James had written Bradshaw.” (BG 187)

The critics were also implicitly criticized by Edith through her portrayal of James. James as the diamond ring that whispered fidelity, friendship and invaluable rich comradeship, Edith objectively reflected his inabilities. Unlike the critics who were blind to objectivity, when it came to dealing with subjects naturally, she objectively reviewed his latest novels. To Edith; “His latest novels, for all their profound moral beauty, seemed to me more and more lacking in atmosphere, more and more severed from that thick nourishing human air in which we all live and move” (BG 190). She

was searching for harmony in James's works, pointing out the critics who were afraid of dealing with subjects objectively.

In A Backward Glance James has been given an isolated chapter that encapsulates inabilities, misunderstandings and a rich mental union that both literary figures shared. However, beyond these, there is the determination that rejects the definite understanding of each mind and heart. According to Wharton welter will remain and should remain.

1.3. The American Girl at the Front

As a literary figure Edith has always been examined through different perspectives but the core of the claims mainly encompasses the idea that, "The great praise for her social satire was now translated into condemnation that she was old-fashioned, trapped in a lost era, out of touch with America, and too bitter to deal objectively with the postwar world" (Tuttleton, Lauer & Murray 1992; xvi). The last claim implicitly raises the question of Edith's isolated world that prevented her understanding the effects of war which came from her dull and cold personality in extreme bitterness. However, Edith was the most prominent figure in the First World War. She was not only the voice of the war through her writing but also the brave, individualist, self-reliant American Girl at the front, who contributed to hope, education, freedom and security for harmony.

Imagine a life bracketed by wars (The American Civil War, The First World War) and punctuated by The Second World War. Edith was the daughter of the Civil War America and the victim of the First World War. Throughout her life, she was tinged with the brutalities of the war. After the Civil War, so as to escape the economic depression in America, she had to leave her native soil and went to Europe with her family. On the other side, during the First World War, her literary career interrupted. The war had tremendous effects on her, but beside these, 1914 was the year of internal excitements for Edith. She got divorced from her husband as a result ended the spiritual pain lasted after 28 years, she was recently abandoned by her

secret lover Morton Fullerton and the War made her helpless. Certainly, this was the portrait offered by the critics most of whom believed Edith's sharp sense of literary taste would not prevail any longer. Edith was not only in the middle of the war but also in the middle of critics. This time she was accused of being a war propagandist just because she was trying to share her ideas about the war that destroyed the concept of peace, happiness and a secure future in her mind. Interestingly, at that time, intellectuals such as Mary Roberts, Gertrude Stein and many others were writing about war. However, none of them was attacked by the critics but Edith. The question is what was so bothersome about war when it came to Edith Wharton? As a matter of fact the answer was quite clear: Edith peered skeptically into the realities of her country. As an objective eye, she was uneasy about the neutrality of American Public, who continued their social lives as if the war had never happened. As she felt the brutalities of war, she expected her country to feel it as well and she declared her thoughts without fear. Declaring her a war propagandist (that was used as a negative connotation by the critics) America ignored the achievements of Edith Wharton who was the only source of objectivity and reality served to the American Public through her writing. Alan Price mentions about that:

In a 1987 survey of war articles contributed by Scribner's authors to the magazine, James Sait argues: 'Male war correspondents, and male and female writers in Europe and America kept within decorous bounds in response to editorial policy and in response to their American readers' inability to grasp the horror of a war that, until 1917, did not touch them personally. Only the work of Mrs. Wharton shows signs of being radically altered because of her first-hand experience of the War and, as we have seen, it evoked strong emotions in its readers (Price, 1996; 46)

Edith was the only mind that highlighted the inner layers of the war to American people, who were thousands of miles away from the war not only geographically but also mentally. Through her magazine articles for Scribner's about life in Wartime Europe, she stood out as the greatest symbol of humanity and Americanism throughout the war.

As an intellectual, she did not watch the catastrophe of the war but put her heart and soul to alter something in the lives of the victims. The war for sure resulted

in creating hundreds of victims. However, Edith's relief efforts became a model for the humanity. Though she did not want to believe the existence of war, she first adopted herself to the situation and began to work as an individual. Naturally, the war left behind hundreds of women who were thrown out of their jobs and left employed women without any means of support. She first organized a sewing room that soon gained the reputation of producing fine lingerie as well as different products that would help the clothing of soldiers such as producing socks and gloves. In the interim, while writing Fighting France (1915) and The Book of Homeless (1916) she established American Hostels for refugees, a charity that provided education, employment, housing and food. Astonished by her achievements, determination of success, and hope for a better future, The Belgian government asked Edith if she could care for a group of orphaned children from Flanders. Without thinking, she said yes and after a short time, the Children of Flanders Rescue Committee was caring for hundreds of children.

Throughout the war Edith did not intend to support individuals through financial aid. Instead, she wanted the children and other victims to continue their lives as self-reliant individuals. Because, after the war she knew that the victims would turn their daily routines, need jobs to live on, and only education would help them in their future life's. Edith decided to set up classes such as carpentry and race-making. She also arranged concerts to aid out-of-work musicians. In addition, she was the supervisor of various refugee and relief organizations.

The war destroyed thousands of lives. It broke up families, left people unemployed, damaged thousands of lives. Edith Wharton on the other side of the war lost many of her friends, a happy and safe future she expected like many individuals. However with her optimism, determination and hard work, she turned disadvantages to advantages for thousands of people. Like a shining diamond, she was the American girl at the front who stood for happiness, self-reliance, and hope.

PART TWO
CONTEMPORARY READING OF THE AGE OF INNOCENCE

2.1. The Age of Innocence and Confinement

Pulitzer Prize winning novel, The Age of Innocence is a social satire that chooses New York as a setting. With its familiar love story and classical portrayal of family relations, it is awarded the Pulitzer Prize as a result of its glorification of American virtues. However, one should ask the question that to what extent the age is “The Age of Innocence” and what will happen if the text is deconstructed?

The novel starts at a New York opera; the reader meets the young lawyer Newland Archer, his fiancé May Welland and Countess Olenska, who is May’s cousin. Countess has just returned from Europe due to her problems with her husband, the Polish Count. Now, she is in her native soil with the scandalous rumors that she had divorced from her husband and run off with his secretary. Despite the rumors, Newland Archer falls in love with the Countess, but the spirit of freedom that he derives from Ellen cannot prevent him from getting trapped in society, because for Newland the only possible salvation is to marry May. The wedding however does not solve the paradoxes but intensifies them. The dullness of his marriage and Ellen on the other side begins to deteriorate him. In spite of his marriage he keeps seeing Ellen. However, Ellen rejects to continue her life as a mistress. She is ready to resist any kind of oppression from society but when she learns that May is pregnant, she returns to Europe without giving any explanation and leave this hypocritical life behind her. At the end of the novel, Wharton takes reader to 26 years later; May has already died, and their children Dallas and Mary have a good life. On the other hand, Archer is in Europe looking at Ellen’s balcony in Paris, has already missed the flower of life as depicted by Wharton at the end of the novel.

This is the simple plot of the text suffocated by detailed descriptions of furnished rooms and fashionable houses, monotony of trivial routine, and a series of characters. However, what can be hidden beyond these details and simplicity? Can these suffocating details reveal a code behind them? Is the text so familiar and so typical that it is regarded as a novel, which represents the Genteel Tradition? In order to decipher the text what should be done.

First, the reader should ask the question what are the inner chambers of The Age of Innocence. Hence, the reader should concentrate on the text so intensively to get the answer. That kind of close and objective reading are going to free the text from limitations, it is going to reveal how the text undoes itself and it is deconstructionist reading. Nevertheless, it should be underlined that:

Deconstruction is not synonymous with ‘destruction’. It is in fact much closer to the original meaning of the word ‘analysis’, which means ‘to undo’...The deconstruction of a text does not proceed by random doubt or arbitrary subversion, but by the careful teasing out warring forces of signification within the text (Johnson, 1980; 5)

Deconstruction is a new reading strategy that lays emphasis on the maxim of undecidability of language that stands for a text, which has many meanings. Therefore, it highlights that there is no definitive interpretation for a text. This innovative strategy first emerged in 1966 when Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), read his paper “Structure, Sign, Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” at a John Hopkins University Symposium. According to Derrida, texts are dynamic, like language itself, thus, one can never declare one interpretation to be right and another one wrong. The energy of deconstruction, celebrates the joy of discovering different interpretations each time a text is read. Therefore, deconstruction champions the creative character of the reader. As Madan Sarup has noted,

Deconstruction disarticulates traditional conceptions of the author and the work and undermines conventional notions of reading and history. Instead of mimetic, expressive, and didactic theories of ‘literature’ it offers textuality (écriture). It kills the author, turns history and tradition into intertextuality and celebrates the reader. (Sarup, 1993; 53)

That kind of creative power signals the use of post-structuralism synonymously with deconstruction. In the words of Madan Sarup:

One of the main features of post-structuralist theory is the deconstruction of the self. In place of a unified and stable being or consciousness we get a multifaceted and disintegrating plays of selves. The reader, like the text, is unstable. With deconstruction the categories 'criticism', 'philosophy' and 'literature' Collapse, borders overrun. The work, now called 'text', explodes beyond stable meaning and truth towards the radical and ceaseless play of infinite meanings. (Sarup, 1993; 53)

It is clear that, the character of deconstruction is strictly bounded with post-structuralism and new-historicism. Without the light of skepticism, which is the core value of all these reading strategies The Age of Innocence apparently takes place in the 1870s, reflects the unproblematic, wealthy and energetic era, yet is this the reality? Alternatively, is this the glossy allusion? According to Singley, "Wharton was searching when she wrote The Age of Innocence for an order irrevocably lost by World War I. It was natural that she turned to the security of her childhood at such a time..." (Singley, 1995; 166). Is this a kind of security that she turns on her face? or an insecurity that tells us how her text reveals a historically implicit model of truth. Hence placing the text in its historical context, new historicism will highlight the question: How does this work reveal a historically implicit model of truth? In order to answer the question, the reader should focus on her shaky language, as each word may contain puns and allusions, each word may reflect a different meaning, which is underlining the unknown and the unsaid or refracting the known that is craving the known and can be reached only through a post-structuralist question: What is the code of the text?

Deconstructive, new-historical and post-structural reading of the text is based on the concept that each model restricts and limits individuals, and eliminates the one that does not suit it. Three approaches of readings are intermingled here in the sense that all are natural results of one another: deconstructive reading is the extension of post-modernism and post-structuralism is deriving its origins from postmodernism, and new-historicism takes its roots from post-structuralism. According to all

approaches, each text includes silences and blanks that are expected to be filled in by the reader, as the reader is the central figure of the explanation of the text.

Three different concepts of reading: deconstructive, new-historical, and post-structural readings raise three questions. What are the inner and revealed chambers of The Age of Innocence? How does the text reveal an implicit model of historical truth? , What is the code, the inner meaning, of the text?

2.2. Reading in the Light of New Historicism

The term new historicism originated from Stephen Greenblatt's book Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare (1980). The book is also regarded as the beginning of New Historicism, and the American critic has been the guiding force in the New Historical perspective. New Historicism mainly focuses on the idea that to understand a text one should focus on the culture and society that has produced it. When *The Age of Innocence* is put into its historical context, it reveals the historical truth that is the reality that what really happens in the text has never been objectively or purely seen.

Accepting the view that there is nothing outside of the text, new historicism is founded upon post-structuralist thinking. Accordingly, The Age of Innocence is not separated from the surrounding context. Hence, excluding critical interpretations of the text will help the reader to decipher the silences created by the author. As a result, the reader is going to find out the implicit and the unsaid, moreover the reader can also find out the ideas even the text itself may not intend to say. In order to achieve this, The Age of Innocence must be put in its historical context, giving equal emphasis on literary and non-literary materials that call for the end of the text-centered approach to literature. Thus, it is significant what other texts, both literary and non-literary says.

When the Age of Innocence is put in its historical context, the sharpest dilemma is the incorrect readings of the text. Firstly, up to day, various studies have

been done about the text, but most of the studies have preferred structural reading of the text that underlines what is written is the main thing that the reader should trust. Secondly, The Age of Innocence has been mostly read through the feminist lenses that limits the text. Thirdly, the text has always regarded as an act of self-confrontation. As Lino Mainiero comments on the issue, "The Age of Innocence is Wharton's retrospective self-confrontation with the world of her childhood"(Mainiero, 1982; 372). In addition to Mainiero R.W.B Lewis states, "...Edith Wharton was performing, as it were, a retrospective act of self-confrontation" (Lewis, 1975; 431). It has been believed that Edith Wharton "...goes back-back to the old world, and far enough into it to make the action of her story openly historic; she goes as far back as the early seventies..." (Times Literary supplement, 1920; 775)

At the center of structural reading the text has been read only through feminist perspectives as if it did not say much more, so the reader has turned into the previous interpretations of the text viewing it as a return to childhood days of Wharton and assumed "1870s" as the date the novel seems to take place. However the greatest clue is hidden in the text itself. As Phelps marks, Newland Archer is reading Maupassant in the novel roughly in the 1870s and she emphasizes that Maupassant's tales began to appear in the 1880s. Thus, according to Phelps, Wharton did a great fault because of her ignorance. However, the structuralist readers like Phelps simply could not see the clue that the text either may be timeless or may refer to different periods, because an author who devoted her life to literature could not have missed this mistake.

Written in 1919, The Age of Innocence is a kind of ingathering. Wharton intermingles three periods in her life. At first, the novel opens in 1870s and then at the end the novel goes to 26 years later (to the end of the 1890s), and finally the text goes to the date 1919 when the text was actually written. It is clear that, the historical context of the text is not the 1870s but the period between the 1870s and 1919. Reading the text outside the limits of this context is similar to the situation R.W.B Lewis states in his book The American Adam.

...In a section called “ Instability of the Administration in the United States,” that “ no one cares for what occurred before his time.....In America, society seems to live from hand to mouth, like an army in the field. Nevertheless, the art of administration is undoubtedly a science, and no sciences can be improved if the discoveries and observations of successive generations are not connected together in order in which they occur. (Lewis, 1955; 17)

Like the American history, the novel can only be improved if the timeline is connected together. If the period between the 1870s and 1919 is closely examined, the concept of “binary oppositions” is the key term that clearly defines the epoch. During the selected era, America was a land of cherished illusions and allusions that both included brilliance, wealth and sorrow. The starting point for the gloomy dilemma is The American Civil War. After the Civil War, America became the most heavily industrialized nation in the world with its railroads and steam power. America is naturally transformed from a rural republic to an urban state. The machines replaced hand labor as a result of the new technology. At that time America attracted immigrants who hoped to have a place in the American Dream. It can be asserted that, progressivism gave the land its exceptional difference beginning from 1870 up until 1919. During the era, everything was connected with the reform movement. Cities sponsored with the construction of canals to increase their commercial rich and profit. In short, the nation blossomed by urban growth with the appearance of canals, railroads, and the automobile.

The technology that dominated the nation rose in the curiosity of the Americans. They desired to travel abroad, which was possible with the transatlantic ships, wished to experience everything that called for vitality. This insatiable energy and restless curiosity shaped the epoch. Even the prominent president of the era, Theodore Roosevelt, was associated with the word “energy”. Born into a wealthy New York family, he signified both wealth and energy of the American in all areas of life. The reorganization of the South, the progressive youth, and the age of automobile and yachting, the foundation of Modern Language Association of America, John Hopkins University, great World Fairs, expositions such as The Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia in 1876, The world’s Colombian Exposition of

1904, life filled with architecture, sculpture, books and literature were all the signifiers of energy. Hence, the extraordinary energy, restlessness, and curiosity were the keywords of the progressive era.

The progress in all areas of American life is successfully portrayed in The Age of Innocence. The Genteel Tradition that dominated high culture from 1865 to 1915 is reflected through a life-style demanded that, being part of a wealthy family, wearing expensive clothes, and creating a life that included every luxury that money can buy. In the novel, wealthy New York families continue their lives without hesitation. Throughout the novel, there is no sign of financial problems. The houses are decorated with expensive ornaments, and in this fantastic atmosphere the role of women is to play the rules of the social game: spending their lives doing shopping, gossiping and mingling in submissiveness. During the 19th century, “They prescribed for women four virtues: beauty, purity (meaning sexual purity), domesticity, and submissiveness.” (Foner, 1990; 190) as represented in the novel. On the other hand, men were active not only in economic life but also in social life. They spent their life’s traveling for their careers, deciding and organizing the life of women. In the text, Lawrence Lefferts is the specialist of “form”, Sillerton Jackson is the authority on “family” and Henry Vander Luyden is the last word on “social authority”. Apparently, the life of women are shaped by the authority of man. Men are “the last word” in the social world. The conventions that moulded the life of women are covered with the most luxurious life-styles that one can imagine. The great balls, fashion shows, expensive cars, and gigantic houses represented the era between the 1870s and 1919. In the novel at first sight, happiness is combined with energy, freedom to buy, taste, and absence of daily problems and poverty. With its simple love story, The Age of Innocence may not offer an innovative idea for the era. However, from a different perspective and with a detailed look at different texts, the appearance may change.

The structural reading of the novel imprisons the text in a historical context that includes only the social situation and the known. What if the text also embalms the unknown and the unsaid? When the text is examined through New-Historicism,

the period between the 1870s and 1919 seem to be problematic. Progress, energy and perfection are juxtaposed with spiritual decay, general skepticism and the fear of any social pattern different from their own. When secondary sources are examined to understand the novel, *The Genteel Tradition* stands at the center of the era:

Standards of etiquette have been defined in all societies, but seldom have the formalities of manners and morals been so sharply emphasized as in the post-Civil War United States. Amidst the brawling financial barbecue of the Genteel Tradition, with its superficial polish, its negative morality, and its pitifully inadequate attempt to impart a veneer of good breeding in a world of gross material vulgarity. Originating largely to repel the social climbers, the Genteel Tradition soon became part of the texture of society at large, coloring the art, literature, architecture, dress, and every day manners of an entire period.(Edwards and Horton, 1974; 191)

It becomes clear in the critical sources that the era reveals several kinds of contradictions as opposed to the perfect order and wealth in all areas of social and political life, familiar to most readers. America, the land of perfection and opportunity, encapsulated and covered the unpleasant aspects of life and created binary oppositions. As Lewis Perry states; “Mid-nineteenth-century American Culture was a *mélange* of optimism and anxiety. For the individual with intellectual gifts, the era of reorganization resounded with feelings of emancipation” (Perry, 1984; 207). Perry’s binary opposition “optimism vs. anxiety” was acceptable not only in intellectual life but also in social life. One of the core values of American culture juxtaposed with anxiety and skepticism, which is the portrait of America as a land of liberty. Alexis de Tocqueville, the French writer and political theorist, as one of the skeptics, pointed out the seeming equality in America after he visited the country. Especially in his work “*Democracy in America*”, he underlines how the land of liberty can turn into a land of confinement. Another intellectual was the English novelist Charles Dickens who visited America in the 19th century. His disappointment is described with the following words:

One skeptic was English novelist Charles Dickens, who first visited United States in 1841–1842. ‘This is not the Republic I came to see,’ he wrote in a letter. ‘ This is not the Republic of my imagination...The more I think of it’s youth and strength, the poorer and more trifling in a thousand respects, it appears in my eyes. In everything of which it has made a boast-excepting its

education of the people, and its care for poor children- it sinks immeasurably below the level I had placed it upon. (Cincotta, 1994; 149)

The historical context of The Age of Innocence is a diagram of sharp contrasts. Until the First World War America was not only the symbol of human freedom but also the symbol of a slave –holding society that denied the right of human freedom. For instance, Jim Crow Laws were the greatest paradox of the country. On one side, it is a nation attracting millions of immigrants due to the liberty and humanity it called for, on the other side the laws that forbade black access to social life and their right to vote. Though later the black granted their freedom, they never granted equality. In contrast to the unproblematic, wealthy portrayal of America, like the black population industrial workers were combating with low wages, long hours, and hazardous working conditions. When it came to women, the picture deteriorates more. Though they were working equally, they received lower wages than men that stood for the syntactic equality of the United States. The syntactic equality was intensified by capitalism that fostered huge contradictions of wealth and power, poverty and insecurity. The material dominated economics and judiciary that displayed the stick who tried to rebel against the system. While hundreds were living in villas, millions were living in poor conditions. The country was both the land of prosperity and depression.

2.2.1. Edith and the Other

The historical context of the Age of Innocence is bracketed by contradictions. When Edith is placed into this context, two questions must be asked: as a woman what was her place in the context? How does her text differ from the other?

As a woman and as a literary figure she faced almost the same oppressions as many of the women of her era. Though women considered being successful, most of their achievements were ignored as they were considered as a threat to male writers. The basic hindrance to women's liberation was the quotas in education. Elaine Showalter mentions about this in Women's Liberation and Literature:

...in the United States, although Oberlin College first graduated of woman in 1814, Princeton University and Yale College barred women until 1969, and quotas in the medical, law, and graduate schools, still deny women equal admission to Professional training...Today women demand the right to study the same subjects in the same schools as man, and in addition, they demand that feminine experience become part of the academic curriculum.
(Showalter, 1971; 1)

As a result of the quotas mentioned by Showalter in education and barriers put in front of women's works were between 1870 and 1919 remained limited. Their Works neither had a little chance to affect society nor to create heroes that would be role-models for the public. In relation to these, women writers were prevented from being heroes like their characters in their works. They were entrapped as violent cats in an artificial cage that tried to be forced to live as losers, mothers, sisters and servants, for the place of women thought to be home. An educated woman, such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman helps us to understand the physical and psychological forces that caused spiritual losses in her life. One of the most prominent figures of the era, Gilman got bored of her life as a trapped cat 'at home'. As a result of her physical problems, such as; headaches, stamina, and insomnia, prominent doctors of the era, offered his 'Rest Cure' that was specially designed for women. Gilman shares her feelings about the Rest Cure with the reader in her autobiography in The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Live as domestic a life as possible. Have your child with you all the time...Lie down an hour after each meal. Have but two hours' intellectual life a day. And never touch pen, brush or pencil as long as you live. I went home, fallowed those directions rigidly for months, and came perilously near to losing my mind. The mental agony grew so unbearable that I would sit blankly moving my head from side to side-to get out from under the pain. Not physical pain, not the least 'headache' even, just mental torment, and so heavy in its nightmare gloom that it seemed real enough to Dodge.(Gilman, 1975; 96)

As mentioned by her, the problem is not physical but psychological. The forces that trapped women at home resulted in psychological detoriation. Like Charlotte, Edith also combated with headaches, insomnia and fatigue because as educated women they were aware of the realities. They were not blind, and they did not close their

eyes to the world. They deeply felt the social boundaries drawn for women indicated by the key words “home”, “children”, “domesticity and submissiveness”. The male world simply tried to cut out the organ they had (the rebellious intellectual mind) unlike other women. Edith once wrote to Sara Norton, her life-long friend who was an independent mind like Edith, about this organ

Don't I know that feeling you describe, when one longs to go to the hospital & have something cut out, & come out a minus an organ, but alive & active & like other people instead of dragging on with this bloodless existence! Only I fear you & I will never find surgeon who will do us that service. (Lewis and Lewis, 1998; 55)

Intellectual women of Edith's day felt the effects of that organ that was the sign of intellectual capacity and the depth in their eyes that made them different from others. They were not “the other” (the women at home, the submissive, the isolated) but ‘themselves’ who stood against limitations and boundaries drawn for women. In short they did not want to be the member of the painted bird club. Though Edith seemed to share the same destiny with other intellectuals, Katherine Joslin writes:

It is in her late thirties, an age when most traditional stories about women have ended, that Edith Wharton's story begins to take shape. Hers is not the story of romantic love, blissful marriage, and plentiful children; rather hers is the story of literary work, social insight and prolific writing. (Joslin, 1991; 14)

Edith was the member of the intellectual group that called for liberation for women, but before that, she was the literary figure who could easily be separated from her contemporaries. Unlike the writers of her era, she never stopped writing. She traveled, got interested in decoration, was eager to search new things, read works of various writers, divorced from her husband, worked at the center of the First World War, changed something in the lives of individuals and the last but not least, she kept on writing.

Though feminist debates were hot in her day, she was not interested in them. She spent her time traveling to expand her horizon. Her great knowledge of foreign lands, world history and art strictly made her different from the other writers of her

era. Though intellectuals such as Gilman's and Kate Chopin's achievements were ignored while they were alive, Edith's were too powerful to be ignored. Hence, how Edith's text differed from others is a critical question to be answered. When her text and her identity as a writer put together in a historical context, the loopholes in "Happy American Life" come into question. Various kinds of social differentiation, unnatural fondness for titles and luxury, tendency of American identity with limitless wealth and opportunity were the symptoms of rising materialism and declining spiritualism. Mark Twain, Henry James, Edith Wharton and William Dean Howells analyzed the impacts of rising materialism and wealth upon America. It must be pointed out that Wharton is the only woman among the stated male writers. The era was the era of slums vs. palaces and ballrooms vs. ghettos. In addition to these writers, Walt Whitman in Democratic Vistas (1871) pointed out the growing materialism in the land of spirit. Like many of the intellectuals decided to seek opportunities in Europe, Henry James's protagonist in The American (1876) decides to seek spiritual power in Europe. Like many of the intellectuals decided to seek opportunities in Europe. Self-educated individuals diminished and American thought became more and more Europeanized each day. The social Darwinism intensified the crises and the egalitarian agricultural nation turned into a callous nation. Mark Twain called the era "The Gilded Age" that was gilded with luxury, poverty, material rise, and the spiritual decline while Wharton called it "The Age of Innocence" that encourages reader to ask the question: To what extent the age was The Age of Innocence. Frederick Townsend's book The Passing of the Idle Rich and Torstein Veblen's book The Theory of the Leisure Class (1899) depict a society invented nothing but hyperbole, which stands for an exaggeration of consumption, fashion, and leisure, in all areas of life. In addition, Edith was writing in the era of hyperbole and writers such as Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, and Frank Norris who already had their supporters and had already been at the center of the literary world unlike her.

The naturalists depicted individual life as a bird in cage; naturally individuals were not stronger than nature so they did not have the power to change the world. The pessimism of naturalism was the result of increased class division, increased

crime, slums, problems of child labor and broken homes. The Enlightenment idea of faith in democratic system no longer existed in America. Men became the victim of sweatshops, starvation, unfair wages, and irresponsible price fixing. The rich controlled everything, even the government itself, while the common man was the victim of the period. As a result, man lost his ability to hope and to believe in progress. Shattering of optimism is depicted in Theodore Dreiser's novel Sister Carrie (1987) Carrie leaves her home and takes the train to Chicago. The seductiveness of the city dazzled her eyes. In order to survive, she goes after material rise and seeks self-interest in her relationships. At the end, she is rich but she will never be satisfied with her life. She does not have the power to change her fate, nature controls it. The power of nature is also depicted in Stephen Crane's and John Steinbeck's novels. The situation depicted in naturalist novels became worse with the spiritual waste of the First World War. General spirit of isolationism, skepticism and intolerance hardened the living conditions. Thus, the conformist and materialist America gained momentum.

Among the naturalists of the era, Edith's novel is not the signifier of shattered hopes. While most of the writers depicted characters doomed to destruction, The Age of Innocence opens the door of optimism, individualism and idealism to the reader. When her text and its author are put into their historical contexts, the depiction of two Americas appears: The individualist and the idealist on one side, and the conformist and the materialist on the other. However, how does the novel reveal an implicit model of truth? The question can only be answered by another question: What is the code, the inner meaning, of the text?

PART THREE
POST-STRUCTURAL READING OF THE AGE OF INNOCENCE:
WHARTON'S METAPHORICAL MASKS

3.1. The Constitution of the Secret

The Age of Innocence derives its plain and precise origins from structural readings. Deriving its origins from linguistics, structuralism supports the idea that readers can reach reliable conclusions about language and the world. Thus, most of the Wharton readers trust the neutral tone and style of the text, which is what is written in the text. As a result, most of them believe that, language is an orderly system that never turns out to be a chaotic one. Due to structural readings, in addition to the readers, The Age of Innocence even misled the Colombian Board of Trustees who awarded the text the Pulitzer Prize as it uplifted American values. However, is this, the real code, the inner meaning, of the text? The only way to understand is applying post-structuralism, the core of new-historicism and deconstruction, because,

Post-structuralism derives ultimately from philosophy. Philosophy is a discipline which has always tended to emphasize the difficulty of achieving secure knowledge about things...Post-structuralism inherits this habit of skepticism, and intensifies it. It regards any confidence in the scientific method as naive, and even derives a certain masochistic intellectual pleasure from knowing for certain that we can't know anything for certain, fully conscious of the irony and paradox which doing this entails. (Barry, 2002; 63)

With its emphasis on linguistic skepticism, post-structuralism is a reading strategy that stands for euphoria, deconstruction, and the reader who frees himself/herself from the limitations of models. Post-structuralism emerged in France in the late 1960s and associated with Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, who are the forerunners of this strategy. Not only Barthes and Derrida but also other post-structuralists favor the notion that a text cannot be restrained by the writer. The work of art is viewed as a text composed both by the author and the reader. Therefore, Post-structuralism champions endless free play of meanings and the attitude to reject

all forms of textual authority. Naturally, linguistic anxiety is a key note of post-structuralism.

The essay “The Death of the Author” (1968) by Roland Barthes is the declaration of the death of the author that is the birth of the reader, at the same time it is the declaration of post-structuralism. The death of the author encourages the idea that a text can be produced by the reader. As the language is no longer a stable, or a closed system, the readers’ task is to decipher the text and find out the code of the text. However readers’ task is not so easy, as the ghostly presence of each word should be carefully examined in order to overcome the language based on liquids that is the duality of the language. Post-structuralism calls for an endless free play of meaning, which enables the reader to find the shadow of each word. As a result, the post-structural perspective will reveal the idea that Wharton dresses her characters with a metaphorical mask to hide their real selves that remain an unknown land to most of the readers. Wharton uses the metaphor to indicate something different from their real meanings. That kind of mask also hides the subversion of the identity of each character and their enigmas. As Luce Irigaray states in Sexes and Genealogies:

...Every text is esoteric, not because it hides a secret but because it constitutes the secret, that which has yet to be revealed is never exhaustively reliable...Who are you? is probably the most relevant question to ask of a text, as long as one isn’t requesting a kind of identity card or an autobiographical anecdote.(Witzig, 1999; 49)

She is quite right in the sense that who you are, is the most significant question that most of the post-structuralist Wharton readers should ask. Up to day, Wharton readers have ignored such an esoteric question. Actually, ignoring the question leads them to read the text only through feminist and structural lenses. That kind of reading declares The Age of Innocence not more than a family and a love story. However, if the question is asked to intensify the crisis, which is ignoring the structural reading and calling for a post-structural reading, the question postulates another question that is “What is the code, the inner meaning of the text?” that enables entrance into the novel. The first key of the inner meaning is the new-historical perspective that is putting the text and the author in the historical context but the inner meaning of the

text can only be understood by making both a new-historical reading and a post-structural.

3.1.1 New York

New York is one of the most prominent characters in The Age of Innocence. With its gloomy tone, brown-stone streets and shadowy atmosphere New York is not only the setting that encapsulates characters in the text but also an individual character that shapes the life's of the characters. The depiction of New York is so powerful that it encourages reader to find out what is hidden under the mask of New York: a city of vitality or the roots of America.

In The Age of Innocence, New York is depicted as a powerful character. Its power is severely felt by the characters because it's the center of vitality in the nation. In the novel, the city is associated with strength, an individual identity and intolerance. New York is the voice of the society. Before a character tries to decide on something New York has already made the decision for him or her. Strict social codes, strong emphasis on morality and intolerance make New York the representative of New England that carries the very roots of Puritanism. One of the greatest masks created by Wharton is the mask of New York to hide the concept of Puritanism in the text.

New York is in the New England region in America. New England has always carried the mission of being a true role model for the rest of the world. It is more religious, thickly settled and more independent than other regions in the States. As a center of vitality, New England, especially New York is the capital of communications industry, business and finance. New York derives its power from New England with its universities, education facilities and the exceptional literary world. The great publishing area of the nation is New York and therefore the core of ideas. Most of the national magazines have their principal offices in New York; the city is also the center of the nation's theater and arts. Its famous library resources, art museums, prestigious colleges and private schools shape the American intellectual

life and the dynamism of the city, which is the key symbol of the American East. As Peter Clathorpe and William Fulton states, “New York has the longest and proudest tradition of regional planning and has sought to renew its regional identity and regional vision in every new generation” (Clathorpe and Fulton, 2001; 172). In addition to that, during the 19th and 20th century “New York was the tarantula at the center of the manufacturing and financial web that was American capitalism...” (Rae, 2003; 66)

Wharton’s novels provide readers with the chance to see their own spectacles in the mirror of the text, to become conscious of other spectacles (or ways of seeing and living), and finally-through imaginative effort-to learn to shift flexibly and varied ways of being’ (Wheeler, 1997; 36)

The fruit of the imaginative- effort that the text provides is the concept of Puritanism in the text. Wharton candidly hides Puritanism with the New York mask. When the reader does a structural reading, she finds New York that is the symbol of New England, but when the text is read from a post-structural perspective, the core ideas and the inner meaning of the text declares the Genteel Tradition and its Puritan origins. In order to understand Puritanism one must go back to 18th century developments that involve the creed of it. When the creed of Puritanism is examined it can be assumed that from a social perspective the individual had always been lonely. Everyman had to work out his own salvation:

The Puritanism appears, from the social and economic point of view, to have been a philosophy of social stratification, placing the command in the hands of the properly qualified and demanding implicit obedience from the uneducated...It was autocratic, hierarchical, and authoritarian (Miller and Johnson, 1963; 19)

According to Puritanism men were predestined to heaven or hell thus denies the natural goodness of men, and the idea of toleration. That kind of patriarchal and aristocratic society based the Puritan social thinking. In relation to that kind of thinking, “what the Puritan does insist on is that the natural man, if let to himself, will not read the lessons of nature and reason correctly” (Miller and Johnson, 1963; 52). While some souls were predestined to heaven, others were sentenced to damnation, emphasizing the helplessness of men. Puritan theology called for a

process of renunciation: the renunciation of liberty. As Warren Susman states, “Puritanism has been hailed as the creed of a highlighted self-restraint and control over appetites and emotions...Subordinating individual will to social welfare” (Susman, 1984; 41).

The reflection of Puritanism can also be found in the Genteel Tradition of the 19th century and early 20th century. The creed of Genteel Tradition is found in Puritanism and “Puritanism continued hold in a new America made for a pale and ineffectual genteel tradition” (Susman, 1984; 45). As represented in The Age of Innocence, Puritanism, under the mask of Genteel Tradition, New York and New England, stresses achievement of wealth thus calling for the rise of materialism. Like the Puritans, the New Yorkers in the text underline intolerance, frustration of individual liberty and freedom of self-expression. They are all hostile to nature, self-expression and beauty. Law is not segregated by law but by customs created by the society, thus denying freedom of equality and justice. The monotony in all areas of life is regarded as an order for the New Yorkers in the text. As Jane Jacobs states,

If the sameness of use is shown candidly for what it is- sameness-it looks monotonous. Superficially, this monotony might be thought of as a sort of order, however dull. But esthetically, it unfortunately also carries with it a deep disorder: the disorder of conveying no direction. (Jacobs, 1992; 223)

According to Jacobs, this monotony is a kind of chaos. That kind of chaos causes individuals to run “like senseless river that did not know how to stop” (AI 215). The monotony, unimaginativeness and inactivity interlocks the characters to the early settlers of New England who wrote in order to guide in daily living, to educate and to edify, rather than artistic creativity. Spiller comments on the issue ,

They left us no novels, no drama, and very little that can be classified as best-letters, not because they were aesthetically blind but because they were sure that there were better uses for their talents. Most of their work was designed to convey religious truth or to give sound instruction on immediate practical issues, political, social, or economic, because they were confident that such work was essential for the building of a vigorous and virtuous state. (Spiller, 1946; 54)

However, that confidence for a perfect society to be built on precise truths failed to achieve its goals. Depicted in The Age of Innocence, the limitations of creativity because of strict social codes; resulted in artlessness of America.

The artlessness of America in the novel derives its origins from Puritanism that limits equality and freedom of expression. Perry Miller supports this idea indicating that in the Puritan concept,

The officers were above the common man, as the quarter-deck is above the fore-castle. There was no idea of equality of all men. There was no questioning that men who would not serve the purposes of society should be whipped into line (Miller, 1981; 43)

They maintained here precisely what they had maintained in England, and if they exiled, fined, jailed, whipped, or hanged those who disagreed with them in New England...(Miller, 1981; 145)

They were expected to keep their opinions to themselves; if they discussed them in public or attempted to act such, they were exiled or they were hung on Boston Common. The limitations on freedom of thought and equality resulted in a culture barren of art. Especially art was something dangerous for Puritans as most of them believed that art may cause the worship of false idols. Thus, the artists always had to cope with social and financial limitations and quotas. The situation was not different in the 19th and early 20th century America. Artists had to take other jobs in order to survive. The cultural stability and spiritual stagnation forced many intellectuals and artists to turn their face to Europe for art. An American painter of the era, F. Hopkins Smith interprets Italy, particularly Venice through the eyes of a painter:

It was a joy to live in Venice ‘ in this selfish, materialistic, money-getting age, where a song is more prized than a soldo; where the poorest pauper laughingly shares his scanty crust; where to be kind to a child is a habit, to be neglectful of old age a shame; a city the relics of whose pasta are the lessons of our future; whose every canvas, stone, and bronze bear witness to a grandeur, luxury, and taste that took a thousand years of energy to perfect, and will take a thousand years of neglect to destroy...to know her thoroughly is to know all the beauty and romance of five centuries (Hopkins, 1896; 5)

The artlessness of America is also criticized by Nathaniel Hawthorne in his preface to the Marble Faun (1860). It is stated that America only consisted prosperity but no spiritual origins like art.

The artlessness of America is candidly portrayed by Wharton in The Age of Innocence. In order to reflect the artistic and cultural stagnation, in the text at short intervals she uses phrases such as “usual” (AI 7) “always” (AI 8) “expected” (AI 27), “apparently” (AI 38), generally(AI 38), “invariably happened in the same way” (AI 6). The monotony and artlessness, resulting from uniformity in all areas of social life is also indicated by the concepts of immortality and blindness in the text. In the novel, all the characters that are the symbol of style, wealth, power, privileged, are portrayed as immortals. The concept of immortality has its roots from stability and intolerance to “change”. The immortal characters declare the denial of vitality, restless energy and development of New York and the American East. In the text, Mrs. Beaufort (specialist of form) growing younger and blonder and more beautiful each year. Mrs. Van der Luyden (the final word on social authority) is depicted by Wharton as a living death who shows no visual sign of vitality.

Her fair hair, which had faded without turning grey...She always, indeed struck Newland Archer as having been rather gruesomely preserved in the airless atmosphere of a perfectly irreproachable existence, as bodies caught in glaciers kept for years a rosy life-in-death” (AI 34)

May Welland is also an immortal as Wharton believes, for she says, “there was something superhuman about her” (AI 96). She is not a human but a being. In addition to May, the butler of Van der Luyden is also an immortal who had been summoned from his final sleep. Archer feels as if real people were living in another world, and real things happening to them. The wealthy society matrons are not real for Archer; they are also dead in the sense that there is no sign of movement for them. They do not laugh, feel pain, cry or show any sign of life. In addition to that as depicted by Wharton, even the eyes of New Yorkers are transparent. The depiction of the characters gives the idea that they do not belong to this world and “Seats were already prepared for them in another world” (AI 114). As depicted by Wharton, they are immortals who do not belong to this world but another one.

The concept of immortality is supported with the metaphor of blindness. In The Age of Innocence, blindness is the most obvious characteristic of the New Yorkers. Especially May Welland is associated with blindness. The metaphorical blindness of May Welland is the lack of vision and denial of seeing the difference that is the thoughts that do not suit the established rules. It is a kind of bandage that prevents women characters from self-realization. It is that terrifying outcome, product, of the social system Newland Archer belonged to. Wharton asks, “What if, when he had bidden May Welland to open hers, they could only look out blankly at blankness?” (AI 53) The helplessness of May is the prototype of “the circle of ladies who were the product of the system” (AI 6). They are like robots denying the power of vision thus accepting looking out “blankly at blankness”. The blankness is the dull, sterile New York setting and the incapability of producing individual thinking that is accepting thoughts of others.

The concept of blindness and immortality identified with the genteel community who are alien to creativity and art. In the novel, Wharton’s two characters Ned Winsett and Mr. Rivi re are the greatest examples of the artlessness of America. Though most of the critics have preferred to focus on Newland Archer, New Yorkers and May Welland, the dominant forces in the text Ned Winsett and Mr. Rivi re are still waiting to be explored. They are deliberately drawn backward by Wharton. A skeptical post-structuralist reader should focus on the shadow of Ned and Mr. Rivi re. Their seemingly unimportant role in the text may reveal the untold and the most significant.

Ned Winsett is the friend of Newland Archer. He is a journalist and his wife is an invalid. The question is whether the word invalid refers to a lack of social gifts or of physical movement. Ned is not a journalist by choice; he is a pure man of letters, unfortunately born in a world like New York that has no need of letters or arts. He published the essays he feels deeply to express but his attempts fail because his texts do not cover the needs of the capitalistic market. He takes a sub-editorial job in a woman’s magazine dominated by fashion, love-stories and daily advertisements of wealth. He is not satisfied with his career. He wants to produce the kind of art he

desires but there are no opportunities for that. However, Ned is one of the few characters who realizes the monotony and sterility of New York and the American East. He comments on the artless New Yorkers and tells Archer,

...But you are in a pitiful little minority: you've got no centre, no competition, no audience. You are like the pictures on the walls of a deserted house: "The Portrait of a Gentleman." You'll never amount to anything, any of you, till you roll up your sleeves and get rid down into muck. That, or emigrate...God! If I could emigrate...(AI 80)

Ned's sentences are significant in both ways: first of all he represents the Genteel; like the pictures on the wall of a deserted house signifying their dull life devoid of any social value. Secondly, he emphasizes the word "emigrate" to show the artless and immobile America as a whole. He uses the word "emigrate" that is the desire of leaving America as a whole, which resists change and creativity. Winsett, who makes long walks with Archer, is the only friend of him who really understands his nature. He objectively interprets Archer's and his own life pointing out the fact that Archer needs new ideas, action, and freedom of thought. He says,

The fact is, life isn't much a fit for either of us,' Winsett had once said. 'I'm down and out; nothing to be done about it. I've got only one ware to produce, and there's no market for it here, and won't be in my time. But you're free and you're well-off. Why don't you get into touch? There's only one way to do it: to go into politics. (AI 80)

Ned highlights the fact that Archer as a well-educated member of the society should take an action in politics and create solutions for his country. However, like most of the genteel people he is not brave enough to do that.

Like the friend of Newland, Ned Winsett, Mr. Rivière is the shadow of the artlessness of American culture. Mr. Rivière is the secretary of Ellen Olenska's husband in Europe. During his visit in Europe, Archer meets him. They become friends and Archer learns that Mr. Rivière wants his share in the American Dream, for he believes that, the vast literary opportunities in the States will foster his literary

success. While Rivière talking about his dreams and America, as the land, which will never make his dreams come true,

Archer looked at him with startled eyes. New York, for a young man who had frequented the Goncourts and Flaubert, and who thought the life of ideas the only one worth living! He continued to stare at M. Rivière perplexedly, wondering how to tell him that his very superiorities and advantages would be the surest hindrance to success (AI 127) in America.

Archer's critical response to the situation is quite significant. According to him, Rivière's literary power, and his artistic creativity will promote nothing in America. As a man, who devotes his life to ideas and creativity, Rivière will have no chance to survive in America, as it only gives importance to materialism and ignores literature for "literature is inconceivable in New York, and unsettling to think of" (AI 66). In addition, the writers are called "Bohemians" and writing is regarded as something unnecessary. Art and artist are unknown in this hieroglyphic world. Even the blindest and the idlest rich, Beaufort, is aware of the artlessness in America. He asks, "Painters? Are there painters in New York...? New York is dying of dullness" (AI 68). It can be assumed that, Wharton juxtaposes the idle and ignorant rich with Rivière to whom the air of ideas, freedom of expression is the only air worth breathing. Pointing out the vital role of creativity and freedom of thought in life he tells to Archer: "The air of ideas is the only air worth breathing. And so I have never regretted giving up either diplomacy or journalism- two different forms of the same self-abdication."(AI 127). Even he is part of the ignorant rich; Archer could understand Rivière and observe how the city deteriorates:

...the New York of literary clubs and exotic restaurants, though a first shake made it seem more of a kaleidoscope, turned out; in the end, to be a smaller box, with a more monotonous pattern, than the assembled atoms of Fifth Avenue.(AI 81)

New York, a huge, limitless city of opportunities, can easily turn out to be a small box. Archer's minimalization of New York as a great city of the era indicates the appearance vs. reality. New York, the representative of the American East, has always been negatively portrayed by Wharton. The city never displays any signs of

development or vitality unlike its appearance at first sight. As Wharton Marks in A Backward Glance

At first I had felt this indifference acutely; but now I longer cared, for my recognition as a writer had transformed my life. I had made my own friends, and my books were beginning to serve as an introduction to my fellow-writers. But it was amusing to think that, whereas in London even my modest achievements would have opened many doors, in my native New York they were felt only as a drawback and an embarrassment. The literary life of New York had changed very little since my youth. (BG 144)

As Edith Wharton implies; the concept of New York as a center of vitality, energy and hope fails to accomplish the needs of the intellectuals. The case is not different in The Age of Innocence: Mr. Rivi re and Ned Winsett, whose ideas encapsulate intense expressiveness and an insatiable taste for letters, have to face sharp limitations on art. At the end, not surprisingly, their literary ambitions fail. Subsequently, New York is given in a cultural, artistic stagnation. Wharton portrays this urban uniformity through Ned Winsett and Mr. Rivi re in the text. In addition to them, from an intertextual perspective, A Backward Glance is the voice of the deadly uniformity in New York, very much like the characters in the text.

Written in 1939, A Backward Glance is the mirror of Wharton’s feelings about life. The depiction of New York in her mind is parallel to the one in The Age of Innocence. The depiction of her city in her autobiography is like a Brown Stone impossible to give shape. New York signifies the difficulty to change the limitations and rigidity of it.

The difficulty of living in a city barren of art is the common problems of Ned, Mr. Rivi re and little Edith. She says that it is quite difficult for her “...to grow up in an atmosphere where the arts are simply non-existent” (BG 121), and she asks

...in the monotonous streets, without architecture, without great churches or palaces, or any visible memorials of an historic past, what could New York offer to a child whose eyes had been filled with shapes of immortal beauty and immemorial significance? (BG 54)

Certainly Edith's interpretations of her childhood life are her ideas through the eyes of an adult. When she remembers old New York, "The old fifth avenue with its line of low brown-stone houses, of a desperate uniformity of style" (BG 2), she molds her childhood memories with her ideas as an adult. The portrayal of America and her city is far from giving hope like Ned and Rivière: "My little-girl life, safe, guarded, monotonous, was cradled in the only world about which, according to Goethe, it is impossible to write poetry" (BG 7). The impossibility of art and creativity is also the problem of Ellen Olenska in the text. Even the blindest of the blind, May Welland, is aware of the situation. She says to Archer, "I think she's been used to lots of things we haven't got; wonderful music, and Picture shows..." (AI 77).

In the text, the dominance of artless New York develops a complex psychology for the individuals. It does not provide anything to the characters such as freedom, hope, art, development and optimism since "Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when they are created by everybody" (Jacobs, 1992; 238). However, New York is "such a labyrinth" (AI 49) that captivates any kind of liberty leaving and leaves no exit to the characters. As a result, the city brings alienation to the characters.

Deriving its origins from New England and Puritanism, New York has always been regarded as a city of angels waiting to lay out all kinds of opportunities for everyone. However, the city of angels turns out to be a house of cards, which is quite easy to pull down. With its golden mask, it candidly hides its original identity resting on a Puritan background. Like Puritans, New York is personified as "...a nourishing mother and an undefiled virgin (a mixed metaphor that adds pungency to the later concept of the rape of the land-providing material plenty, perennial good health, and moral purity against a backdrop of edenic lushness)" (Bercovitch, 1975; 137).

3.1.2. The Land of Hope: The American West under the Washington Mask

The Age of Innocence has always been regarded as the story of the Genteel Tradition and the story of the American East. New York and New England have

always been at the center of debates and Newland Archer at the center of American virtues for he denied his desires towards Ellen and returned to his loyal, innocent wife, May Welland. However the post-structuralist reading with its deconstructive capacity enables the most accurate reading of the text. The result of such a close reading puts the American West at the center of the novel and leads the reader to a critical question: Can Ellen Olenska; a woman of European according to the Easterners, can be a Western hero, the pure American?

The most common reading of the text is ignoring the counter questions and focusing on what is actually written in the text. The most common result of that kind of ignorance is avoiding the shadow of each word. Wharton's tactique has perilously deceived the readers. She candidly hides 'the most significant, the unsaid, and the unseen among her stifling, suffocating, descriptive writing. Among this suffocating crowd, the reader gets lost and tries to cling to each fact that Wharton presents them. As a result, the reader's celebration of each fake discovery, offered by Wharton, removes the reader from the hidden more and more from that is the West under the mask of Washington, which is the hidden setting of the novel.

Most of the critics have overlooked the trick of Wharton. She raises the question of the American West with this passage:

She had grown tired of what people called "society"; New York was kind, it was almost oppressively hospitable; she should never forget the way in which it had welcomed her back; but after the first flush of novelty she had found herself, as she phrased it, too 'different' to care for the things it cared about- and so she had decided to try Washington, where one was supposed to meet more varieties of people and opinion. (AI 151)

Against the American East, Ellen decides to try Washington. The tone of the paragraph starts with pessimistically but ends optimistically, expressing the American West. Washington is not only the call for harmony but also the freedom of thought, power of politics, and idea of individualism as the center of American politics. At this point, the question is how Wharton cleverly turns the flow of the text to Washington. The weapon of Wharton is Medora Manson, the aunt of Ellen, who

is born to be sealed by Wharton. Dozens of essays, articles, and reviews have simply ignored or overlooked the power of Medora Manson. She is quite significant not only to understand the idea of the American West but also Ellen Olenska, the secret hero of The Age of Innocence. Medora Manson is the romantic aunt of Ellen who raises her after she loses her parents. Medora is a pure Westerner who lives according to her desires unlike the Eastern characters in the text. When Ellen is a child, she takes her to Europe; they visit European cities and travel all around the world. Medora is a role-model for Ellen who is in search of the spiritual world while strictly rejecting the material one. In The Age of Innocence, Medora is the “poor Medora” for the Easterners, like their “poor Ellen”. As stated in the novel, Medora is poor in the sense that she was repeatedly widowed, was always coming home to settle down (each time in a less expensive house), and bringing with her a new husband or an adopted child. However, after a few months she invariably separated from her husband or quarreled with her ward, and having got rid of her house at loss, set out again on her wanderings.

As stated by Wharton, Medora is a double-edged character from the perspective of the Easterners. She is growing poorer each day, has to face divorce and does not plan her future. From a different perspective, in the New York Clan she is the only member of the family who devotes her life to “individual liberty”. She is free to divorce, to marry, to travel wherever she wants. In addition, she sacrifices the material world for the spiritual. She is free to wander around. She is poor for the Easterners for she is growing poorer and poorer after each marriage, but denial of the material world is securing her freedom as a woman and as an individual. With strong emphasis on individualism and liberty of conscience, Medora Manson represents the Western mind of the text. She strictly rejects uniformity and conformity. She says to Archer: “To me the only death is monotony. I always say to Ellen: Beware of monotony; it’s the mother of all the sins” (AI 132). She is pointing out the mother of all the sins, monotony, which exists in New York. The stability in the American East forces her to turn her face to the American West. Her energy, vitality, optimism, and her belief in freedom clearly separates her, from the members of the New York Clan.

Her choice Washington, the center of politics, ideas, production and creativity, is the mask put on the American West, the mother of vitality and restless energy.

The identity under the Washington mask is the American West. Wharton intentionally escapes from binary opposition and avoids the binary opposition of East and West. Instead, she offers two different facades of America, East and West. Throughout the novel the author remains silent, never attempts to ask for choices, never displays binary oppositions, and never asks the reader to take side with either. Instead, she forces the reader to understand the complex psychology of the oppositions and leaves him/her alone with his choices. She neither tries to offer solutions to the reader nor tries to solve the dilemmas in the text. What she simply does is to display two sides of the coin. The reader either prefers the strong, determined, self-reliant individual or a captivated life designated by others. The overlooked side of the coin is the American West. When the frontier is put into historical context, it reveals the code of the text. The free, liberated American West has great differences compared to the Puritan East. As represented both in the novel and in the history, the Puritan codes of society fails in the face of the American West. American frontier is located on the western boundary of the colonial settlements, and basically more democratic and free-spirited in nature than the East because of the lack of social and political institutions. In addition, West defines the true American Values. The sharpest difference between East and West is the geography. The land is more spacious in the West, more gigantic in proportions with high mountains and deep canyons. The extremes always characterize the West. When west is examined geographically, Wharton's emphasis on the differences between the two becomes clear. Wharton's choice of New York and Washington as different settings of the novel, is a clear attempt to clarify the sharp differences between the American East and West through so called geographical elements. She does this in order to reflect the very nature of East and West. Unlike the Appalachian mountains of the East, the western mountain system- the Cordillera is not continuous as the Appalachians and separated by trenches and basins. Like the strict social codes, stability of the Eastern mountain system fails in the face of discontinuous, energetic western mountain system that varies greatly from place to place. In addition, the humid Pacific coast

describes the climate of Washington. With its mild weather, it is the signifier of tolerance and flexibility of the American West unlike the harsh weather of New York, the signifier of conformity preventing the free flow of mind.

Opposed to the American East, the American west is a new world for Americans: When they came to West they did not know the land but they were optimistic, and had hope for a better life. In order to reach their dreams they had to be practical, and nature was the only power that could give strength to them. Only the lucky would survive in the West. Thus, the material wealth would not help any individual. Each person had to combat with difficulties individually. Each individual had to create his or her own pragmatic solutions. The Westerners derived their pragmatism and practicality from the restlessness and transience of the Western soil. The unexhausted, cheap, vast and unlimited lands promoted incessant activity for the individuals. The West was another name for opportunity: Natural resources were open to every individual unchecked by the restraints of a social order, because the non-sectorial, tolerant, democratic West promoted equality in the society. The West fostered by the ideals of equality and glorification of the common man, it was less conservative, more tolerant, democratic and less provincial. As a result of the vitality and liberty, West created the “man of action” unlike the “man of culture” in the East. In the American West, unlike the American East, the frontier is the distinguishing feature of the American life. The Easterners found themselves in European costumes, thought, industry and tools. Naturally they become the extension of the European life and mind in America. However, Western American life was a movement away from the influence of European life. It was the growth of Americanization that called for a classless society, equality, adaptability to new circumstances and a new product that is American. As a result of the sharp differences, the East and the West began to depart from each other. The strong environment of the West and its primitive economic, social and political conditions clashed with the complexity of city life. While the Westerner focuses on the achievement of the common good, the Easterner focuses on selfishness that sacrifices the common good for the individual, parallel to American history.

The American West is the spirit under Washington and Medora. The West is the symbol of democracy and hope in the novel that is the distinguishing feature of American life and the American character. In the text, as in the American history, the outcome is not the old Europe but a self-reliant, self-made individual, the Westerner that is Ellen Olenska.

3.1.3.1 The Foreign Creature

The Age of Innocence has always been regarded as the story of the New Yorker, Newland Archer, and his oscillation between marriage that is the social will and Ellen, that is the individual will and passion. Ellen Olenska on the other hand, the foreign figure of the novel, has always remained a minor character who is shadowy and mysterious for the critics. Like Edith, she has always been associated with Europe and her aloofness from the American roots labels her “foreign”. However, the foreigner Ellen Olenska can help us to understand the roots of the American character in the text.

Critics mostly “...criticize her of not reflecting what America was thinking about everything in those critical days. Many emphasized that; most of the readers are surprised and chilled by her” (Watson,1921;170–172). Frederick Watson’s allusion to The Age of Innocence as a post-World War I novel written in 1919, is related to America’s twentieth-century need for texts that told about “war”. From his allusion, it can be deduced that like most of the “professional critics” he read The Age of Innocence as a text of wealth, leisure and the caprices of the New Yorkers. Like many, Watson failed to see the war between the individual and the society in the text. Implicitly, Edith Wharton reflects the metaphoric war in America which could not be understood by the “professional critics”. Vernon L. Parrington criticizes Edith in the Pacific Review. He believes that:

She has done notable things, but she has paid a great price in aloofness from her own America. There is more hope for our literature in the honest crudities of the younger naturalists, than in her classic irony; they at least are trying to understand America as it is. (Parrington, 1921; 57–160)

Indicated by Parrington, Edith fails to understand and interpret America. She is accused of being a foreigner as a result of her aloofness from her own America. However, close reading of Ellen Olenska indicates that, from the eyes of Edith with her precise, objective knowledge of her own America, Ellen is the only natural, pure American in the text.

Ellen is the dark heroine, the “European” of The Age of Innocence. She is the “foreigner” from the perspective of structuralist readings. Structuralism lays emphasis on language as a stable system, naturally it strictly rejects the ambiguity of language and mainly focuses on binary oppositions. It is clear that structuralism favors binary oppositions as post-structuralists do. However, structuralists ignore the ambiguity of binary oppositions: “America vs. Europe,” “Ellen vs. America,” and “Women vs. Men.” Therefore, the text can never go beyond the feminist lens and Edith Wharton’s, as the writer of the text, celebrations of glorified Europe against America. The problematic side of structural reading is that, it abandons psychological, sociological, and historical explanations of the novel. In addition, its emphasis on the concreteness of language and its attempt to build models simply make The Age of Innocence a novel of nostalgia that glorifies Europe and male authority. From this picture, it is quite natural to declare Ellen Olenska “the foreigner.” When one reads the novel from a structuralist perspective, the reader trusts what is written in the text and ignores puns and allusions. That kind of attitude rejects skepticism, irony, and paradox coded in the text. As Charles Bressler has noted,

In addition to emphasizing the system of literature and not individual texts, structuralism claims it demystifies literature. By explaining literature as a system of signs encased in a cultural frame that allows that system to operate, say the structuralists, a literary work can no longer be considered a mystical or magical relationship between the author and the reader, the place where author and reader share emotions, ideas, and truth. (Bressler, 2007; 110)

The structuralist reading of Ellen results in the concept of foreignness in her roots. Katherine Mansfield in her review “Family Portraits” in *Athenaeum* mentions that

However, the real problem, which the family has to face, is that Ellen Olenska has become that most mysterious creature- a European. She is dangerous, fascinating, and foreign; Europe clings to her like a troubling perfume; her very fan beats “Venice! Venice!” every diamond is a drop of Paris. Dare they accept her? The question is answered by a dignified compromise, and Ellen’s farewell dinner-party before she leaves for Paris is as distinguished as she or the family could wish (Mansfield, 1920; 810–119)

Mansfield declares Ellen as an alien, who scares everyone in life. As she is a mysterious-European creature, not only the critics in real life but also the New Yorkers in the text label Ellen “foreign.” Certainly, the label of foreignness is the greatest trick of Wharton to the reader. She clearly alludes to the 19th and 20th century America; their strong emphasis on uniformity and conformity that brought fear of foreigners that is interpreted as xenophobia in the novel. Edwards and Horton say:

Our present-day isolationists usually justify their position by quoting George Washington’s advice against entangling alliances, but in reality, their attitude indicates a carry-over of the suspicious provincialism of the Genteel Tradition far more than it does the convictions of our first President. Like our great-grandparents, they carry within themselves a fear of any social patterns different from our own and, like those worthies, can find no more effective means of damning a thing than by labeling it’ foreign.” (Edwards and Horton, 1974; 196)

The case is not different for Ellen Olenska; she is labeled as a foreigner but especially as European. New Yorkers damn anything or anyone a thing by labeling it foreign. Apparently, the case of Ellen Olenska represents the general atmosphere of America in the 19th and 20th century. During these periods, America that clings to uniformity and conformity rejected anything that had the potential to destroy the security of the American life.

...The conditions of modern American life in America, so far from being productive of great arguments, seem almost purposefully contrived to eliminate them... modern America has chosen a dead level of prosperity and security it reduced the whole life to a small house with modern plumbing and heating, a garage, motor, a telephone, and a lawn undivided from one’s neighbor’s (Wegener, 1996; 154)

The artificial security of America encapsulates the concept of foreignness. For instance,

The Knights of Labor, founded in 1869, and the International Workingmen's Association, which established a branch in New York in 1868, grew out of socialist ideas imported from Europe and, though mild enough, were immediately regarded with fearful suspicion as dangerous foreign creations (Edwards and Horton, 1974; 205)

It can be asserted that, Wharton opens the debate of foreignness caused by blindness, thus identifying one of the loopholes in American culture through Ellen Olenska: the foreign element.

Ellen Olenska has always been interpreted as "...an ideal victim" (Singley, 1995; 167), because she comes to America, becomes unhappy and in the end New Yorkers "...send Ellen Olenska back to Europe..." (Singley, 1995; 166). However, she is neither a victim nor an individual sent back to Europe by the society. Instead, she is a western hero, with her difference, strength, and determination. Her difference, vitality and devotion to independence and freedom are hidden in the sentences of Mr. Rivière, who helps her to escape from her husband. Mr. Rivière begins to see things differently after he has listened to Countess Olenska and Archer wants to know what sort of change it is. The charm of Ellen is explained by his discovery and he tells to Archer: "Tenez—the discovery, I suppose, of what I'd never thought of before: that's she's an American. And that if you're an American of her kind—of your kind..."(AI 160). Rivière, one of the most significant characters in The Age of Innocence declares Ellen's Americanness. It must be highlighted that, Ellen is the only character in the novel that is associated with America and Americanness. The reason of this association lies under the fact that, she is the only woman associated with liberty except Medora Manson. Rivière's discovery is declaring all blind New Yorkers un-American. It must be pointed out that, Rivière explains Archer the American character of Ellen. The dialogue between Archer and Rivière reveals the fact of Ellen's American Character and Archer's as an Easterner, un-American character. Archer never understands Ellen's return to America. He believes that her leaving a wealthy, colorful life and a rich husband who is a count is

a great mistake. According to him, divorce will leave Ellen penniless and away from such a luxurious life. To him, material loss is the most tragic event in life. Like New Yorkers; his denial of the spiritual is the outcome of materialism encouraged by the capitalistic viewpoint of the American East. However, Mr. Rivière reminds the importance of the “spiritual” to Archer who believes it is not wise to leave a Count and live as a poor lady instead of a wealthy one, ‘You see, Monsieur, it’s worth everything, isn’t it, to keep one’s intellectual liberty, not to enslave one’s power’s of appreciation, one’s critical independence?’(AI 126). Rivière tries to remind the most significant fact in life: the freedom of mind. Without hesitation Ellen denies the material. It is the sacrifice of the material to regain the spiritual, her independence and the intellectual liberty which are as vital as water in life. Unlike the other characters in the text, Ellen is the only individual (except Medora) who believes in individual capacity to create a world that signifies freedom. Taken strength from Ellen , Archer decides to search for a world lacks categories. He tells to Ellen,

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. (AI 183)

Ellen replies:

Oh, my dear-- where is that country? Have you ever been there? She asked; and as he remained sullenly dumb, she went on: ‘I know so many who’ve tried to find it; and believe me; they all got out mistake at wayside stations... (AI 183).

Ellen’s powerful insight and rebellious mind, open the blind eyes of Archer and encourages him to search for a world of freedom unlike America and New York. However, as a Westerner, Ellen emphasizes the impossibility of such a world. To Ellen, this world will never be available for Archer; he just wants to have it but does not fight for it. She implicitly gives the message that the only community who tried to establish such a world was the Puritans. Wharton’s destruction of the “city upon a hill” through Ellen’s words is quite powerful. Like Puritans, the eastern Newland in the 19th and early 20th century fails to establish a world of perfection. Like the Puritans, he just searches for it but never tries to build up the liberty in all areas of

life. However, Ellen points out the spiritual elements that are absent in the American East.

In The Age of Innocence Ellen is the symbol of objectivity, natural fondness for liberty, optimism and the intellectual capacity. According to Wharton, “Her tone was so natural, almost indifferent...” (AI 181). Her tone is natural as the western soil, and indifferent to the limitations of the eastern soil. She represents the frank, self-made woman of the west. Her depiction is the portrayal of her Americanness as opposed to the un-American New York, the American East. As Howard Mufford Jones states, “There were those who would read New York City out of the nation on the ground that it did not really represent America” (Jones, 1971; 51). Jones continues that, “The clubman, the stage-door Johnny, the tenderfoot, the effeminate clergyman, the long-haired poet (or musician, actor, painter, or dancer), the artistic poseur, the absent-minded professor-these were Eastern products, undemocratic and essentially un-American” (Jones, 1971; 55).

In the text parallel to the un-American genteel era, “pretend” is the key word. The un-American New Yorkers pretend to be the members of a perfect society, the innocent individuals who simply ignore any unpleasant situation, hypocrisy, and selfishness. Ellen asks to Archer, “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!” (AI 50). It is clear that, New York fails to establish “a city upon a hill”, which will be the model of a perfect society. Instead, New York seems to establish an extension of a fake society and calls for fakeness. Ellen declares the unnecessary of such fakeness: she says: “It seems stupid to have discovered America only to make it into a copy of another country”(AI 151). Her objective eye displays the loopholes in the American East where it is impossible to be by oneself but possible to be surrounded by European standards. She says:

One can't be alone for a minute in that great seminary of a house, with all the doors wide open, and always a servant bringing tea, or a log for the fire, or the newspaper! Is there nowhere in an American house where one may be by oneself? You're so shy, and yet you're so public. I always feel as if I were in the convent again- -or on the stage, before a dreadfully polite audience that never applauds (AI 85)

The phrase “convent again” indicates Ellen’s departure from the convent Europe. Her portrayal of convent as a jail is a metaphor of confinement. It is the confinement in the American East where she comes to seek liberty that lacks in Europe. She is a Countess; she has the power that can open all the doors in life but she leaves them behind and searches for freedom. Generally in the novel, the New Yorkers call Ellen, Countess Olenska. In the mind of the New Yorkers, she is distant, snob, and cool. However she misleads the New York society. First of all, throughout the novel she is the only individual who does a favor. She astonishes Ned Winsett with her attitude and he talks to Archer:

The fact is she’s a neighbor of mine--queer quarter for such a beauty to settle in-- and she’s been awfully kind to my little boy, who fell down her area chasing is kitten, and gave himself a nasty cut. She rushed in bareheaded; carrying in her arms, with his knee all beautifully bandaged, and was so sympathetic and beautiful that my wife was too dazzled to ask her name (AI 78)

Winsett continues, “ I wonder, Winsett broke off, ‘how a Countess happens to live in our slum?’” (AI 79)

As a western mind, she is against formalism; for her it is not important to live among the ordinary folk or in a slum. For Ellen, the only thing worth living is liberty. She does not live in her European castle as a countess but she can live as Ellen, the individual character who has freedom of choice in life. Secondly; throughout the novel she is the only character who displays signs of flesh and blood humanism. She is the only mortal in the novel unlike the immortals in New York “The red cheeks had paled; she was thin, worn, a little older-looking than her age...”(AI 39). It is only Ellen who physically changes; her physical change is the signifier of movement, vitality and humanity in her. In addition, she is the only character who cries. Wharton writes: “...she let the tears on her lids overflow and run slowly downward.”(AI 153). Ellen’s tears are the signs of emotions. Unlike the immortal humans in New York, she displays physical signs of feelings. Her power as a mortal also affects Archer. “Suddenly he felt something stiff and cold on his lashes, and perceived that he had been crying, and that the wind had frozen his tears” (AI 184). However, the wind and

nature, prevents the flow of his tears. Here, the wind is the symbol of harsh nature of New York, which and it freezes his tears. As “The New York of Newland Archer’s day was a small and slippery pyramid...” (AI 32). The apex of the social pyramid consists of the wealthy like Archer’s family. Thus, the hierarchical pyramid does not give way to his tears. As a result, He does not have the capacity to become a mortal, a human being due to his unnatural, un-American origins. Through tears, the difference between Ellen and Archer is not only portrayed by the symbolized tears but their lives. Two quotations from different pages in *The Age of Innocence* starting with “I’m” show the sharp distinction. The first quotation belongs to Ellen and the second one to Archer.

“But I’m improvident: I live in the moment when I’m happy.” (AI 152)

“I’m the man who married one woman because another one told him to.” (AI 152)

The optimistic tone of Ellen’s sentence calls for relaxation, sweetness of life and the moment of happiness which are the sources of her hope. On the other hand, the pessimistic tone of Archer gives an idea about his personality. He lives according to others. He does not have the chance to control his life. He is the captivated one, while Ellen is the American eagle fighting for freedom.

The western hero Ellen Olenska, the roots of America, symbol of power, optimism, and adaptability to new circumstances, vitality, energy and freedom of conscience are depicted as an antithesis to the immortal, blind, static American East. Edmund Wilson remarked in the “New Republic” that her residence abroad had made Wharton’s novels “a little thin” and that her America was “shadowy” and “synthetic” because she “had lived so long abroad.” (Tuttleton, Lauer & Murray, 1992; xviii). However her America is not shadowy, not synthetic because though she had lived so long to abroad she knew her country more than any intellectual of her era. She traveled Europe, lived in Paris for a long time where she had the chance to observe and analyze her country from a distant perspective. She was never out of touch with her country; she saw the loopholes in her native soil more than the ones who spent their whole life’s in America.

The reason Mrs. Wharton succeeded where so many others have failed is that in addition to her gifts as an artist she had a firm grasp of what ‘society’, in the smaller sense of the word, was actually made up of...She knew when money can open doors and when it couldn’t...She realized that the social game was without rules, and this realization made her one of the few novelists before Proust who could describe it with any profundity. (Auchincloss, 1965; 52–53)

It will not be misleading to say that,, the greatest power a woman can have in life is the intellectual capacity that can see beyond the horizon.

3. 1. 3. 2. Ellen Olenska and Intertextuality

Frederick Jackson Turner’s speech “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893) is pointing out the significance of the American West in shaping the American character. Throughout the American history, the West has been the subject of many texts such as Walter Prescott Webb’s The Great Frontier (1952), Seymour Martin Lipset: Continental Divide: The Values and Institutions of the United States and Canada (1990), Frederick Marck: Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History (1963) and Richard Slotkin: Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the frontier in Twentieth- Century America (1992). The American West has become part of the context of the American history. However Ellen Olenska, the westerner of The Age of Innocence, has never been part of the context of the American West. From the perspective of intertextuality, she is interlocked with the western heroes from different texts. Ellen reveals the fact that American West is the identity of Ellen.

The western heroes in the novels have always differed from the eastern ones. They do not face the complexity of city life, ideas of materialism or capitalism, but they face complex natural problems that money cannot solve. The natural problems of the western characters are harsh conditions that force the survival of the fittest. However, unlike the eastern concept of the survival of the wealthiest, the western concept enables only the survival of the individual, who can easily adapt to new circumstances and fit in. In addition to these, the Eastern texts focus on Americans

doomed to destruction. Especially naturalistic characters, such as in Stephen Crane's or Theodore Dreiser's texts, do not have the power to shape their own lives but nature controls them. On the other hand, the Western heroes have the capacity to shape their lives as in Jack London's, Edith Wharton's, Willa Cather's, Owen Wister's novels and David Belasco's plays. The common point of these texts is that, they all assert the distinguishing feature of American life, which is the pure America, the American West.

One of the best texts that display the American West is Jack London's novel, The Call of the Wild(1903). The protagonist of Jack London's novel The Call of the Wild is a big, strong dog called Buck. He is a huge animal with human-like tendencies. He is kidnapped and sold by a man who needs money for gambling. During these hard days, Buck dreams an ancient world in which men and dogs fight side by side to survive. Buck's emphasis on solidarity is one of the key elements of the West. One should need to have the individual power and the power of others to survive in the West. Thus, individualism based on selfishness in the Eastern mind is transformed into the sacrifice of individual will for the common good in the Western mind. In addition, Buck's ability to listen to his instincts makes him powerful and he trusts his senses. The quality of being humane is another concept of the West: He mainly feels powerful in California but when he has to live in Klondike after he is kidnapped, he feels the hierarchy of the East. However he survives because he can adapt himself to new circumstances. Like Buck, Ellen adapts herself to different conditions while she lives in Europe, but finds elements in European life that make her happy. Later she returns to America, tries to spend her days improvidently to ignore the cruel realities of city life, and goes to Washington to feel the taste of freedom, and at the very end she returns to Europe and tries to adapt herself to new conditions. While trying to search for happiness in life, Ellen trusts her senses: She feels that her life in America will not bring happiness to her. The eyes were upon her improvident identity; there were gossips about her and Newland Archer, who implicitly offers her to continue her life as a mistress. Thus, it is not difficult for Ellen to sense that misfortune in her life. Immediately, she decides to go back to

Europe, which is the most pragmatic solution, where she will be out of reach to the entire family.

Her senses and pragmatism combines Ellen with Buck and certainly her gentility binds her with Owen Wister's cowboy, Virginian. For the first time the readers come across with a cowboy who is a gentle and a kind person. The protagonist of the novel is the cowboy, man of justice, a humorous Westerner as a man of kindness. For the first time, the western readers witness the portrayal of a gentle cowboy. The narrator of the novel, an Easterner visiting the West for the first time, feels himself a foreigner like Archer feels himself at Ellen's home in New York that is a mysterious, foreign and exotic place implying the metaphorical west. Like Newland, the eastern narrator, enchanted by the beauty, simplicity and the order of the Western soil. The hard daily life of the West and the environment is beyond magic. In addition, Virginian, like Ellen at the center of the text, is a kind westerner who searches for justice. This time, the villain is Trampas, who tries to make the Virginian look bad. Like the New Yorkers who try to slander Ellen. However, both fail at the end of the novels. The gentility of the exotic Westerners in both books dazzles the eyes of the Easterners with their emphasis on justice, as an element of democracy.

The democratic West brings freedom and equality to the members of the Eastern soil. Each individual has the chance to taste the sweetness of achievement. The equality and success is the code of the American West. This chance, offered by the Western soil, is also depicted in Willa Cather's O Pioneers! (1913). The protagonist of the text is the older sister of the family Alexandra Bergson. At the beginning of the novel pessimism is the dominant sentiment. The father of the family is dying and leaving his farm to his sons. However, Alexandra is much stronger than the other characters in the novel. During drought and depression, her determination gives strength to the reader. While most of the families sell their farms and move away, Alexandra preserves her faith in the Western soil and always remains optimistic. At the end, the novel moves to 16 years into the future and Alexandra is the owner of the most prosperous lands in the West. Like Alexandra, Ellen's capacity

for happiness and success is the roots of the American West. Despite negative predictions about the conditions of west, Alexandra as a self-reliant individual becomes the symbol of hope like Ellen. In spite of the cruelty of New York, Ellen manages to create an illusion for herself. She does not depend on the rules of the society but herself. Individualism, self-reliance, and optimism are the key elements that bind Ellen to Alexandra.

Ellen Olenska does not only resemble the optimism of the West but also the teacher of universal values like David Belasco's character in The Girl of the Golden West (1911) which is one of the best texts that portrays the western life. The Girl is the owner of the polka saloon that is both used as a bar and a school. Girl gives lessons to the miners since many of them are uneducated. Girl, the symbol of mother-earth and the generous West, prepares the miners for life and she shares not only her knowledge but also her experiences in life. Girl is the role model for the miners. When she learns that her lover is a thief, instead of judging him, she tries to understand why he has become a thief as a result of misfortunes. She changes his life by tolerance that is the key word of the West. As a land, the West welcomed prisoners and uneducated foreigners. It opened its immense, free lands to everybody. It is understood that, the tolerance of the western soil and the Girl is the natural result of empathy.

Closely related to the ability to read other people's emotions is empathy--the arousal of an emotion in an observer that is a vicarious response to the other person's situation...Empathy depends not only on one's ability to identify someone else's emotions but also on one's capacity to put oneself in the other person's place and to experience an appropriate emotional response. Just as sensitivity to non-verbal cues increases with age, so does empathy. Empathy guarantees successful social relationships in all stages of life (Morris, 1996; 442)

Empathy binds Ellen to the Girl. In The Age of Innocence Ellen is the only character who has the potential to understand the feelings of others. She respects others' feelings; she puts herself in others' shoes. As a result, she has successful social relationships in all stages of life. However, the New Yorkers in the text cannot understand and respect different ideas. Only Ellen accomplishes to preserve her liberty against the limitations of the American East.

As a woman, Ellen proves what feminine power can make a stand. Her determination, self-reliance, optimism, individualism, and emphasis on economic freedom sharply separate her from the blind, ignorant, abysmal pure male figures and submissive, unproductive female figures of the text. Encapsulating the core values of the American culture, the Western hero Ellen proves what feminine power can accomplish in New York. In addition, for the critics who think, “Like her idol and master, Henry James, Wharton is forever comparing America with Europe, to the latter’s advantage” (Perry, 1920; 196) Ellen is the purest answer.

3.2. Wharton’s Colorful Wardrobe: Edith Wharton’s Characters and the Subversion of Identity

While writing The Age of Innocence Edith Wharton had already witnessed an huge amount of change in her country. Horrified by the destruction of war, Edith metaphorically tries to jig her country for the ones who think that in The Age of Innocence “Edith Wharton was performing, as it were, a retrospective act of self-confrontation” (Lewis, 1975; 431). Many cannot understand the underlying forces in the text. As a matter of fact, The Age of Innocence is a personal recollection of the changes and stabilities in Edith’s native soil and her character is strictly bounded to the sociology of America, not only to her family.

Edith’s colorful wardrobe, the sociology of America, is composed of characters who call for the subversion of their identities. Each character is displayed by opposite signs that deceive the reader. The appearance may be a pure; a symbol of an innocent young lady but the reality can be a dark and abysmal purity. Thus, the identity of the characters is subverted. In A Backward Glance Edith Wharton states that her characters always appear with their names and ‘...these names are hardly ever what I call “real names” (BG 201) she says. She underlies the fact that the names of her characters are not the ordinary names given to individuals in daily lives. Instead, they represent a standard, the inner complexities of their identities. Wharton says, “I often wonder how the novelist whose people arrive without names manages

to establish relations with them” (BG 202). Hence the names of Edith’s characters are quite significant to understand the relations between their appearances and their inextricable identities. Naturally, characters names need to be examined carefully. The first object of that kind of detailed examination is the couple Newland Archer-May Welland.

3.2.1 Newland Archer

Newland Archer is the young lawyer who is torn between the undemocratic, un-American values of New York and democratic free-spirited Ellen. This split reveals itself in his name. His surname “Newland” is evidently an allusion to the New World, America: the New World with its vitality and hope taking its roots from Europe. Torn between the tolerant characteristic of his nation and the intolerant nation created by the genteel tradition, he tries to find a way to himself. The newness of the American soil, especially New York, clashes with the stability of the land that is the social codes of the American East. On the other hand the name “Archer” reminds the reader of the great twin archers in mythology. Archer is the one who tries to preserve the world that his ancestors tried to escape. On the other hand, his brother represents the freedom of idea and it clashes with the rigidity of the land, the “new”. His name and surname linguistically sounds determined and powerful, but as a man of law, how he defends the innocent, while he cannot even survive himself in the artificial legal system of New York. The artificial quality in law is the rule that simply denies the individual right to divorce. The improvement of marital law in America relied heavily on Sir William Blackstone’s articulation of English common law Commentaries on the Laws of England. He states that “Our law considers marriage in no other light than as a civil contract” (Blackstone, 1851; 355). Like the Mayflower Compact, marriage is based on a contract and the members have the right to annul it, if it violates their rights. Similarly, Archer wants to annul his marriage. However, basically New York does not give permission to divorce. Thus, through Newland Archer, the reader questions the lack of natural law in America. The laws are only one side of the coin. Through Newland, the reader also questions whether the surname “New Land” can bring spiritual wealth on earth. From his eyes the

reader can understand that “frankness and innocence were only an artificial product...Archer’s New York tolerated hypocrisy in private relations; but in business matters it exacted a limpid and impeccable honesty.” (AI 30–163). The reason of this is that, the society does not have the power to ignore the hypocritical attempts in business as they do in private relations.

At the center of the combination of innocence and ignorance, May Welland appears. She immediately raises the suspicion that America; the innocent, the perfect nation may be a Well land (land of goodness), may be a land of cherished illusions. The name May postulates the idea of probability. She may be innocent, may be real or fake. Archer’s future wife and Ellen’s cousin May is not an independent American woman. She is an uninteresting, unimaginative young woman, whom society adores,

...generous, faithful, unwearied; but so lacking in imagination, so incapable of growth, that the world of her youth had fallen into pieces and rebuilt itself without her ever being conscious of the change. This hard bright blindness had kept her immediate horizon apparently unaltered (AI 220)

The bright blindness that comes from the common ignorance of the society results in unawareness: “Perhaps the faculty of unawareness was what gave her eyes their transparency and her face the look of representing a type rather than a person...” (AI 119). When Archer realizes that May’s innocence is a false purity, he has already missed the flower of life. Step by step, he realizes that it is not traveling, nor reading that interests her but only shopping. The peace and stability he adores begins to turn into a chaos for Archer. May, his innocent fiancée becomes the snob wife of Archer who calls Mr. Rivière the man of literature “The little Frenchman? Wasn’t he dreadfully common?” (AI 127). According to May, being common is equal to poverty, taste for letters, and intellectual vision. She simply denies the concept of “common man” in her native soil. The finally yet importantly, May is the inverted sign of the May Flower Compact. As a colonial New Yorker, Wharton writes in her autobiography:

Milder manners, a greater love of ease, and a franker interest in money-making and good food, certainly distinguished the colonial New Yorkers from the conscience-searching children of the ‘Mayflower’” (ABG 10)

May Flower ship, full of hope, democracy, and tolerance, leaves its place to May, the blind, snob, un-American woman. May’s offspring at the end of the novel is her daughter Mary. Her name is the call of the abysmal purity she has. Mary also symbolizes, to combine successfully with something else that is grammatically married well with something. In the text, as her mother May, Mary marries well with the society, which builds not “a city upon a hill” but a house of cards.

3.2.2. Ellen Olenska

Ellen Olenska, the powerful American of the text, derives her surname from the nature of her soil. She represents the Hellenistic beauty. Like the mythological figure Helen, she is the symbol of beauty. Unlike May Welland and Newland Archer, she does not have the word “land” in her name or surname, so she lacks rigidity, rootedness, and strict codes of morality. The pronunciation of her name gives the speaker comfort, peace and tranquility. The pronunciation of her surname puts emphasis on the “s” sound. Her surname reminds a snake who has the potential to use its body freely, which has briskness and bites. Like snake, Ellen is the controller of her own body, and briskness gives her the power of adaptability to new circumstances, and like snakebite, she poisons Archer with her improvidence and disregard to social rules and democratic vision. Her name Ellen, the signifier of the beauty of America, and her European surname Olenska are the union of Americanism with its European origins and new ideas.

In the text, Ellen is not the only character who includes the “s” sound. The aesthetic power and intellectual briskness are found in different characters. Ned Winsett, the symbol of good talk and intellectual capacity, has the “s” sound. In addition to him, Dallas, the eldest child of Archer, includes that kind of power. Like Ellen, he is interested in design and architecture. He is like Ellen who lives according to his desires. His engagement with Fanny Beaufort is the greatest example for that. Fanny is the daughter of Julius Beaufort, who is shunned by the society due to his

bankruptcy. However, either the notorious past of Fanny's father nor gossips about her family prevents Dallas from loving her. Dallas prefers Fanny as she is "different". The last but not least, Medora Manson has the "s" sound. Medora is like Pandora's Box. She can do anything at any given time. She is full of surprises and the "s" sound in her surname is the signifier of her snake-like brilliance and power.

Edith Wharton has a colorful wardrobe full of different types of characters. All derive their origins from their names and Wharton's subversions of the identities are many to. Each of Wharton's character is like a cryptex, which can only be deciphered by the right code that is finding out the subverted identity of each character: The Appearance vs. Reality.

PART FOUR
BEGINING AND ENDING: THE SPECTATOR & THE PERFORMER

4.1. The Flower of Life

The novel begins with the music from the Academy in New York. Wharton calls the New Yorkers in the academy ironically “an exceptionally brilliant audience” (AI 3). She presents her characters to the reader and generally, her language is intricate and suffocating parallel to the suffocating environment of New York. On the other side, the ending of the novel takes the reader twenty-six years later. May has died of infectious pneumonia. Her daughter Mary, like her mother once did, announces her engagement to the dullest wealthiest man of New York. Dallas, May’s son, travels and smells the flower of life more differently than Mary. At the same time, Ellen is living in Paris; she never returns to her husband and depends on herself, and Newland Archer is spending his life thinking Ellen’s life decorated with art and individual liberty.

The beginning of the text displays Newland Archer as a spectator at the opera. Actually, the scene symbolizes his whole life spent as a spectator. He never achieves to become a performer. He always watches his life as it goes by and controlled by others. In addition, he never has the chance of performing the life he wants. The final scene of The Age of Innocence says farewell to the reader while displaying Archer looking at Ellen’s balcony in Europe. Again, he is the spectator and Ellen is the performer. Dallas leaves his father under Ellen’s balcony and moves upstairs to reach Ellen. He wants his father to come with him, but again Archer gets frightened and remains as a spectator. Though most of the critics find the ending of the text as the traditional pessimistic ending of Wharton, the ending is an open ending. We do not know whether Archer meets Ellen again or whether they continue their affair. However, the final chapter includes Wharton’s optimism. The narrator of the text, talks about the reform movements in the world. It is clear that, the narrator is optimistic about the future. The beginning and the ending of the Age of Innocence wants readers to ask themselves whether they want to be spectators in life or

performers. She portrays Archer to display reader what will become of them if they remain passive in life. On the other side, she portrays Ellen as an active individual in life. Wharton does not ask reader's choice but her powerful insight and literary talent simply tells the answer.

The question is implicitly answered by Wharton. The Age of Innocence is awarded the Pulitzer Price because the committee was composed of rich businessman like Archer. They applauded the text as Archer denies his desires and returns to his wife. His loyalty to his wife and his power to protect his family captured the committee. Thus, Newland Archer's sacrifice enchanted the businessman. However, the text simply tells the opposite. Archer does not deny his desires but Ellen leaves him for she learns that May is pregnant (though May is not sure while declaring it). Archer keeps saying Ellen that he loves her but Ellen realizes that he continues his affair with May. It is understood that, Ellen is the one who draws the borders of Archer's life. She returns to Europe where she can be far away from the hypocrisy of Archer and New York. Most of the reviews about the text emphasize the fact that Ellen is sent back to Europe by the society, and the victory of May causes Ellen to be depicted as a loser. In fact, the case is quite different. Ellen does not leave America due to May's pregnancy but she simply gets tired of Archer's hypocrisy. She faces the reality that Archer keeps having love affair with May. Ellen understands that he is not different: hypocrisy, blindness and enslavement sticks to his mind and heart. As a result, she leaves everything behind her and prefers to live in Europe where no one can reach her. It should be pointed out that at the end of the novel Wharton brings together Ellen and Dallas both of whom are the symbol of freedom and artistic creativity. The meeting of Dallas and Ellen signifies individualism, intellectual capacity and frankness. Both characters live according to their desires and both are performers in life. On the other side, Archer continues his life thinking about how he destroyed his life. His role in life is to ignore his unhappy marriage and his weaknesses.

It is clear that the Committees reading of the text highlighted the fact that America in 1921 still could not free itself from cultural ignorance- the ignorance that veils the reality.

CONCLUSION

In this work, I want to show how appearances are seldom synonymous with realities. I choose Edith Wharton, because of her prolific writing, her use of language and her insights that strictly separate her from her contemporaries. I choose *The Age of Innocence* because of the novel's secret layers of meaning, waiting to be explored by the reader. Apparently, up today, the text is condemned by structural, and feminist perspectives and the comparisons between America and Europe always results in the latter's advantage. In reality, the text is the reflector of the wholesome atmosphere of American life since its foundation.

19th and early 20th centuries witnessed the Industrial Revolution, wealth, power, money and social mobility. These are the key words of American social life during that period. In many literary texts, comfort, energy and limitless wealth are the key elements that represent the era. Because of these typical elements, Wharton's text at first sight has always been understood as the photograph of the hyperbole in the nation, which shows the lifestyles of the Genteel Tradition. According to the critics and readers, the text simply signifies Wharton's childhood days that focuses on the New York élité and their capricious life's. In addition, as a post-World War I novel, the text was harshly criticized by many American critics because it was far from reflecting the agonies of the war and preferred to focus on the 1870's. According to the critics, readers were expecting to see the ideas of the American Public about the war. To them, Wharton's attitude was just like the capricious genteel members because she closed her eyes to the realities of the world and the realities of her native soil. Thus, the readers did not expect to read a document about the Genteel Tradition. The main reasons of this can be found in the timing of the text. Firstly, the text opens in the 1870's and ends approximately in 1920's. It is clear that the period was a period of wealth, and comfort in all areas of life. On the contrary, Americans expected Wharton to write a text about the brutalities of war and tried to find out what American society thought about war during that period. Most of the critics declared that, the American public did not need a document on the Genteel Tradition. Many thought that the text was the result of selfishness, because in these

critical days Wharton went back to her childhood days just to give her text a historical taste. According to many readers, the text could never go beyond her childhood days. In addition to that, she was not successful at portraying American culture as she spent most of her life abroad that prevented her from understanding the realities of her native soil. Her only success was the characterization of Ellen Olenska, the European foreigner of the text. It is clear that the general attitude towards *The Age of Innocence* was quite negative. Apparently, the novel did not address to the needs of the American people or American literary world, and obviously, Edith Wharton was not the true voice to satisfy these needs. However, when the text is interpreted from a different perspective, the period between the 1870's and 1920's turn out to be something different. The text, which has always been read as a childhood parody, gives different messages, which do not focus on the comparison between Europe and America, the wealth of the Genteel Tradition and Edith Wharton's childhood days. Naturally, the superficial reading of the text gives the general atmosphere of the New York life in the Gilded Age and the prosperous life of the rich. Actually, the text implicitly calls for the realities of American life. One should ask, how Wharton can successfully hide these realities. The realities are hidden in her supreme use of language, a sentence enclaves different meanings thus, a close reading must be done in order to understand the unuttered.

Naturally, superficial readings have prevented the discovery of the hidden meanings. The most obvious result of such superficial reading is misinterpreting the time of the text. *The Age of Innocence* does not reflect the wealthy life of the Genteel in New York but it highlights the 19th and early 20th century America that has experienced many ups and downs. Industrial Revolution, technology, progress, and modernization have created number of social, economic, and historical crises. Between these periods, the industrial and economic mobility in America marked by rapid immigration, urbanization, and mechanization that encouraged people to move to cities. Because of that, New York became a popular setting of the novels. The aim of Wharton to choose New York as a setting, is to take the reader to the inner chambers of the capitalistic mechanical worldview that America adopted in 19th and early 20th centuries. Due to these drastic changes, a social hierarchy and social

classes appeared, which encouraged social competition. Social segregation and unfairness became the key words of the era. During the Gilded Age, the Genteel clearly separated themselves from other social classes. Their money, wealth, and power, not only in economic life but also in social life, kept them away from other social groups. The American panorama during that period displays the dullness of the American values such as money, power, and capitalism, which were once upon a time, resembled freedom, independence, and intellectual power and had the potential to create “the city upon a hill”. “New York,” as portrayed by Wharton, is far from “the city upon a hill.” Actually, it is just like a house of cards easy to destroy because of its weak construction. America in the text is no longer a rural nation based primarily on agriculture and America is no longer the land that dedicated its future to the Protestant Work Ethic. American nation is an urban society whose primary concern is leisure as the most significant element in life. The Age of Innocence portrays American People doomed to destruction because “The American Dream” no longer offers a natural equality of all men but equality gained through materialistic success and wealth. Being respectable in society meant having the financial power that exploits the country and the labor of men. This reveals the reality that, America was no longer, “God’s commonwealth as the Puritan imagined or a public wherein ordinary man could rise...as Paine and Jefferson supposed” (Darrel, 1963; 19). America becomes the land of businesspersons and social hierarchy that can be felt in all areas of social and political life. Thus, it can be claimed that, the doctrines of equality, optimism, and freedom become a romantic fantasy. In the text, the wealthy Genteel and the dominant elite devoted themselves to leisure, money, and show-off. They live in big houses; wear expensive jewels, and clothes. On the other hand, the common has to live with slums, get unfair wages, rank low in social hierarchy, and suffer poverty. Moreover, the wealthy Genteel have already established their own standards that strictly deny other social classes.

Obviously, wealth comes up as an important social value in the novel. Parallel to American history, the characters are obsessed with keeping up their appearance for they are part of the upper class. Their only concern is to make show-off. The opera episode in the beginning of the novel is an excellent example for that.

In the text, it is common among the upper class to attend the opera. However, the point is they do not really like it. Their real intention is to see others, to be seen by others, to observe others and be observed by others, to judge others and be judged by others. Grammatically, the active and passive voice in the previous sentence signifies the vicious cycle hidden in American culture. As they are metaphorically stable because of their so-called virtues, which were once equality, freedom, and liberty for all men. It is clear that, they are at the opera not for art's sake but just for show-off.

The artlessness of American culture is open to debate by Wharton, which dominates the general atmosphere of the American life. The only thing the élité are interested in is clothes, because clothes are essential to clearly define the social status of each individual. In New York, which is the symbol of the American East, one's outfit is the easiest way to judge his/her social position. Outfit, is a means of power, which gives the message that, expensive clothes are the representative and the clue of ones standards and they are the symbol of good reputation and the guarantee of being respected. *The Age of Innocence* displays the realities of American Culture that has upheld wealth, show-off, social hierarchy, and segregation in contrast to freedom and equality. America is no longer the land of dreams and opportunity but the land that only welcomes "the fittest" who is the "richest." The dramatic contrast between the American virtues and the un-American values is the primary concern of Wharton. Although she was accused of being detached from the realities of her native soil, she misleads the critics. Her identification of the loopholes in American culture simply separates her from the other intellectuals of the era. Instead of closing her eyes to the realities of her Culture, she tries to interpret them from a third gaze. She is neither the member of the élité club nor the member of the blind club, which closed their eyes to the brutalities of the capitalistic hierarchy in America. She is not Edith Newbold Jones who is not capable of interpreting the realities of her culture; she is not the ex-wife of Teddy Wharton; she is not the minor bleak Henry James; she is not the foreign creature, like Ellen Olenska, but particularly Edith who devotes her life, language, literary career, and artistic power to underline the hidden facts, realities and defects of the modern existence. Without first names, without second names, without Henry James before or after her name, without the genteel etiquette

put on her, she is the writer of the novels that calls for the urgency of turning on to true American virtues.

The un-American values represented by her, are depicted in The Age of Innocence. The characters signify the declining American virtues and the rise of materialism calling for the necessity of being fit and wealthy. Thus, the text is not the panorama of the upper-class New York members or the childhood days of Edith Wharton but the panorama of the symptoms that signify the very decline of the “city upon a hill” as a house of cards.

Despite her efforts to portray the real face of America, Edith Wharton has always been accused of being out of touch with America, comparing America, and Europe all the time. Apparently, The Age of Innocence has always been interpreted through the story of Newland Archer and the feminist perspective because of the submissiveness of Ellen Olenska as a woman. According to the critics, as a post world war novel, it fails to reflect the realities of war and what American people had been thinking in that critical atmosphere.

In reality, The Age of Innocence is the story of America and American virtues. When it put into its historical context, the text reveals an implicit model of truth that is the failure of the American energy in all areas of life, including technology, politics, and art in addition to the face of cultural stagnation. The key metaphor of the era in the text is the masking costume of innocence that is ignorance, which disguises hypocrisy and unfaithfulness in America. That kind of innocence is the call of the war between individual and society. With its limitations and boundaries, the society is the greatest enemy of individual liberty that America, was initially founded upon. The critics who want to know the impacts of European war upon America face the American war of individual vs. society they have tried to ignore.

The war between the individual and the society is deciphered by the post-structural reading of the text. Wharton puts metaphorical masks on her characters to

subvert their identities. New York mask is the New England; the very root of The Puritan society: it projects how Americans have tried to preserve the limitations they once tried to escape. The Puritan strictness is represented by Ellen, the modern Hester Prynne of Wharton, marked by rumors of adultery and treachery to her native soil. While the society is represented by the American East, the members of the Genteel Tradition, whom

Except in the area of business...invented nothing at all- not a book, not a philosophy, not a religion, not a scientific discovery, not a single new mode of art or culture, but only an occasional machine like the reaper and harvester (Jones, 1971; 137)

The individual is represented by Ellen Olenska, with her emphasis on equality, difference, intellectual power, individualism, and optimism that reveals the code of the text America. Wharton compares two Americas, the American East with its Puritan origins and the free American West.

Wharton's deconstruction of America enables the reader to reread America and focus on even the smallest detail offered by the text. Finally, the details give the code of the text: America is a land of diversity that includes both enslavement and liberty. As reflected by the characters, it has never become a land of purity, innocence, or equality. Instead, it is a mixture of purity and artificiality: Newland Archer, May Welland, and New Yorkers are the artificial products of the system. Each represents a type rather than a character. Newland, the man of law, denies the natural rights of man and the social contract, thus denies the spirit of freedom. As opposed to the Columbian Board of Trustees, the novel cannot be considered to reflect the American virtues through Newland who seems to remain loyal to his wife just to prevent rumors about his family. Contrary to most of the reviews, he is not the one who gives up Ellen, but Ellen is the one who gives up Archer because of his weaknesses. Like the New Land America, Newland Archer cannot find himself a place in a free world; he oscillates between freedom of choice and the European (Puritan) elements in his character. Like Archer, May displays the submissiveness of the individual in a vicious circle. She denies her freedom and chooses to stay with Archer who never loves her. Wharton shows that individuals often struggle with the

un-American culture not with their own choices since they never have the chance to choose. Each choice is the result of falsity and each falsity is the result of an illusion.

On the contrary, unlike Archer and May, Ellen does not sacrifice herself, her body, her intellectual freedom for the others.

In conclusion, the text has answered three critical questions waiting to be explored by the reader. First, the reader should ask the question about who or what the text represents. It should be highlighted that, The Age of Innocence is not a text that is entirely about the luxurious life of the Genteel in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The text mainly focuses on the American virtues and how these virtues are changed by the un-American values. Choosing New York as a setting, Wharton frequently refers to New England where the American civilization is rooted. New York not only signifies the Puritan past of America but also the core values of American culture that derive its origins from the settlers, who came America to build "A City upon a Hill." Core values such as optimism, freedom of conscience and happiness, individualism and self-reliance fail in the face of capitalism, rising materialism, social hierarchy and inequality. The idea of common man no longer exists as it has already been altered by the survival of the richest that is the survival of the fittest. Climbing the social ladder is the only aim of the individuals, and while you are climbing the ladder, you are free to do whatever you want to do. The act of climbing may include the immorality, injustice, and act of degrading others, judging individuals according to their financial position, segregation, defining the lower classes as the common man that means ordinary, inferior or loser. The Age of Innocence is not a childhood parody of Wharton. Most of the critics believed that turning back to the 1870s meant Wharton's efforts to turn back to the security she found in her childhood days. However, the reader asks the question that how the text reveals an implicit model of truth. The answer lies in the problematic childhood days waiting to be explored. First of all, the Gilded Age in American history has always been interpreted as the age of energy and wealth. At first sight, the age gives the impression that American culture was in a golden age in which money, success, and social mobility strictly bounded together. However, when the age is closely read, the truth is revealed by the Wharton reader. In reality, the age is what Mark Twain called

a kind of gilded age. The age is as a rotten Christmas tree, decorated with golden ornaments such as power, energy, and social stability. When the ornaments are unstitched, the rotten tree can be seen. The age is not an age of innocence but the age of refinement. The characters cannot depend on the ideas of individualism, self-reliance or optimism and America no longer offers the American values as a land of opportunity. America represents a standard that glorifies un-American values in order to climb the social ladder. The only way to be successful is to play according to the rules of the social game. For instance, characters such as Ned Winsett and Mr. Riviére cannot find a place in America as artists. Art is simply ignored by New Yorkers and they call artists bohemians. Even Newland Archer, who is part of the social game, is deeply convinced that intellectuals such as Mr. Riviére who devotes his life to creativity cannot find a place in America. Like the male characters, Medora Manson tries to redeem her soul from the vicious cycle; she declares her freedom as a woman by denying the material in order to save the spiritual. However, she is “Poor Medora” to New Yorkers for she is penniless due to her insistence on freedom. Like Medora, Ellen calls for freedom who denies her luxurious life as a Countess and turns back on America hoping for finding the core values, the American virtues that her native soil is based upon. Unfortunately, she faces the reality that her native soil cannot preserve the ideals. Hence turning back to the Gilded Age does not mean turning back to the security Wharton longs for; instead, she highlights the reality that 19th and early 20th centuries signal the dangers of creating such a synthetic America that rejects the true American culture. In order to reach the American virtues, Wharton refers to Ellen who leaves the American East, which is the extension of European hyperbole, and goes to Washington. It should be underlined that Medora Manson who signifies the roots of Ellen also lives in Washington to leave the un-American lifestyle in the east.

Wharton puts the Washington mask on the American west that is truly American. West is, unlike the East that is based on the values with which the first settlers tried to define themselves. Referring to the American West and Washington as the center of politics, Wharton focuses on the sharp differences between the American East and the West. Unlike the belief of most of the critics, Wharton does

not compare America and Europe to the latter's advantage, but she compares the original America with the synthetic America. Contrary to the critics, her America is not synthetic; she just displays the synthetic one in her novel. Thus, the code of the text has already been answered. The code is not New York, not the comparison between Europe and America, not the Genteel Tradition, but America as a whole. The text focuses on the integral atmosphere of America.

Wharton's portrayal of America, her determination to display the loopholes in her culture shows how close she is to her native soil. She is much closer than the intellectuals who spent a lifetime in America. In addition, The Age of Innocence is the lighthouse that helps the reader to understand the genteel era and how significant it is for the American culture. From a critical perspective, the text questions the core values of American culture and probes on the questions such as "Where is the New Land?" "What is American?" and "Who is the pure American?" The answer is the optimistic and self-reliant individual who is the signifier of the "New Land" America, which encompasses the experience of the new and represents purity and liberty of soul.

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