

T.C.  
BEYKENT UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

**AN EMERSONIAN READING OF HENRY  
JAMES'S *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY* AND  
EDITH WHARTON'S *THE AGE OF  
INNOCENCE*  
(M.A.THESIS)**

**Presented by: SEVİNÇ ELAMAN**

İSTANBUL, 2007

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İSTANBUL, 2007

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**AN EMERSONIAN READING OF HENRY JAMES'S *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*  
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**Tezi/Projeyi Hazırlayan: Sevinç Elaman**

**ÖZET**

Bu yüksek lisans tezinin amacı, toplum ve birey arasındaki çatışma ve bu çatışma sonucu elde edilen bireysel özgürlük temalarını incelemektir. Ralph Waldo Emerson'ın "Self-Reliance" adlı denemesindeki temaların ışığında, Henry James'in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1908) adlı romanındaki Isabel Archer ve Edith Wharton'ın *The Age of Innocence* (1920) adlı romanındaki Newland Archer karakterleri analiz edilecektir. Bireyler ve toplumsal normlar/kurallar arasındaki çatışma; bu çatışmaların, bireyin kendini keşfetme ve anlaması sonucunda elde ettiği deneyim ve süreci nasıl etkilediği ve geliştirdiği, bu tezin ana temasını oluşturmaktadır. Edith Wharton'ın *The Age of Innocence* adlı eserinde yansıttığı toplumsal hiciv ve eleştiri de ayrıca ele alınacaktır.

Tezdeki ilk bölümde, bireysel tatminlik ve kişisel özgürlüğün Emerson'ın "Self-Reliance" adlı eserinde nasıl tanımlandığını ve Henry James'in *The Portrait of a Lady* adlı romanındaki Isabel Archer ile Edith Wharton'ın *The Age of Innocence* adlı romanındaki Newland Archer'ın 'Emersonian öz'leri ele alınmaktadır. Daha sonraki bölüm, Isabel'in kişisel özgürlüğünü elde etme sürecinde- hem kendi benliğinde hem diğer karakterler ile- yaşadığı çatışmalar ve nihayetinde kazandığı bilinçlenme ve kişisel tatminliği yansıtmaktadır. Son bölümde, toplumun beklentileri ve kendi istekleri arasında kaldığı ikilem ele alınarak, Newland karakteri analiz edilecektir. Isabel gibi, Newland nihayet kendi benliğini keşfetmiş ve anlamıştır ki, gerçek bireysel tatminlik kişinin önce kim olduğunu kabullenmesi ve hayattaki beklentilerini görebilmesi ile başlar. Yapılan hataları kabullenebilmek ve sonuçlarına katlanabilme erdemini gösterebilmek ise bu süreçte atılacak ilk adımdır.

Kurallar ile çevrili toplumun bir parçası olan birey, hem bu sosyal döngünün bir parçası olmak, hem de bireysel özgürlüğünü yaşamak ihtiyacı hisseder. Bu tez, kısaca, bu kişisel ve

toplumsal çatışma sonucunda elde edilebilecek bireysel özgürlüğün bir süreç olduğunu, bu süreç sonunda alınan kararlar esnasında, iyi ya da kötü, bireyin, Emerson'ın dediği gibi, daima kendine güvenmesi gerektiğini vurgulamaktadır.

**AN EMERSONIAN READING OF HENRY JAMES'S *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*  
AND EDITH WHARTON'S *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE***

**Presented by: Sevinç Elaman**

**Abstract**

This thesis is dealing with the conflict between social and individual fulfilment. Using Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* and Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* through literary writings, specifically from the perspective of Emerson's "Self-Reliance", the focus will be on James's Isabel and Wharton's Newland Archer's search for personal freedom. In this respect, this study is an attempt to explore the conflicts between individuals and the norms/codes of society; and how these conflicts inform and transform the experience and possibility of personal freedom attained in self-awareness. I will also discuss social satire and criticism in relation to self-freedom stressed by Edith Wharton in her novel. The first chapter of this thesis deals with how individual fulfilment is described in Emerson's essay, "Self-Reliance". Isabel and Newland's Emersonian selves will also be emphasized in this chapter. The next chapter attempts to examine Isabel's self-consciousness as she gradually attains her self-liberty through her final renunciation; and the last chapter aims to explore the dilemma of Newland Archer who yields to convention and sacrifices his personal freedom. Like Isabel, however, he comes to his self-discovery realizing that, in order to achieve his self-freedom, he has to acknowledge who he really is and what he really expects from life. Having the decency to admit one's failure and be able to face with its consequences is the first initial step for one to take in this process.

One always is in need to be a part of society as well as to fulfil one's individual expectation. This thesis will argue that self-freedom is a learning process leading to some decisions, revealing its consequences, better or worse, and making some decisions from those learnings



for further improvements in all parts of life. The important point, however, in this process, as Emerson underpins in his Self-Reliance, is to “trust thyself”.

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

*Oath – Yemin Metni*

*Jury Page – Jüri Sayfası*

*Abstract (Turkish) – Türkçe Özet*

*Abstract (English) – İngilizce Özet*

**INTRODUCTION** **2**

### **CHAPTER I:**

**1. THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY** **28**

**1.1. 1.1. Isabel Archer’s Emersonian Idealism: Freedom attained in self-awareness**

“I make my own circumstances” (Emerson)

**CHAPTER II** **62**

**2. THE AGE OF INNOCENCE**

**2.1. Newland’s Conflict and His Self-Awareness: “Let a Man Then Know His Worth” (Emerson)**

**CONCLUSION** **84**

**WORKS CITED** **95**

## INTRODUCTION

The conflict between social and individual fulfillment is a universal theme questioning the meaning of individualism. This debate between social and individual fulfillment concerns one of those eternal issues, which will never be settled by any form of argument. David-Hillel Ruben has maintained: "...individualism has never been stated with enough clarity and precision to permit its proper evaluation"(39). Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* and Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* are sharply ironic portrayals of individual entrapment within social expectations. In confronting the conflicting situation of individual and society, Henry James and Edith Wharton question the following questions in these two novels: Can and should any society determine the right course of action for an individual? To what extent is it right to sacrifice one's individual fulfillment for the sake of social security? Is duty to one's community more important than duty to oneself? Can and should one remain a self-reliant individual while simultaneously being a contributing member of society? To what extent can an individual achieve self-freedom within the frames of a society with its strict rules imposed upon the individual? What responsibility does the individual have to the community? How are we to lead our lives? Answers for these questions can be evaluated from various points of view with various interpretations. This thesis looks at such questions through an analysis of Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* (1920) and James's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1908) through the perspective of Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Self Reliance".

This thesis intends to show that Henry James' Isabel Archer is an Emersonian self in *The Portrait of a Lady* and Edith Wharton's Newland Archer become an Emersonian self in *The Age of Innocence*. My own understanding of this process is based on Ralph Waldo Emerson who explores the importance of self-reliance as a key to one's fulfillment in his essay "Self-Reliance". In referring to individual entrapment within the frame of society and his/her

release from this captivity, Emerson takes our attention to “The Transcendentalist”, and says that “you think me the child of my circumstances: I make my circumstance”. Isabel Archer and Newland Archer permanently replaced the roles of those individuals facing with their ambivalence in search of their self-freedom and making their ‘own circumstances’ at the end. This is the identity that Ralph Waldo Emerson defines in his “Self-Reliance”.

Looking at the concept of individualism in *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Age of Innocence* in relation with the Emerson’s “Self-Reliance”, this study is an attempt to explore why the concept of self-reliance takes the form of a quest for self-fulfillment through Isabel and Newland in these two novels. James and Wharton make it clear that the initial and foremost step is the awareness of society’s confinement and the choice that one will make accordingly. Emerson’s emphasis on ‘inner self’ and his insistence on the integrity of self-reliance appealed to Henry James and Edith Wharton who worked in the vein of social realism, presenting a blending of social satire and criticism, depicting the dilemmas of the individuals between what they desire to do and what society expects them to do. James’s Isabel Archer and Wharton’s Newland Archer find themselves in the cage of society, but their responses to their entrapment, while they differ in content, are alike in form as each makes their own decisions, free from any social fear or pressure, at the end of the novels.

Brooks Atkinson, in her Introduction to *The Complete Essays and Other Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, states that Emerson's literary and philosophical importance in the American literature has always been associated with his influence in especially in “the emergence of a characteristically American conception of individual consciousness and actions”. In his *The Portrait of a Lady*, Henry James incorporates Emersonian themes, through his portrayal of the American female character, Isabel Archer and the difficulties she encounters in Europe. It is appropriate to say that James had acquired what Matthiessen calls “the Emersonian nicety of

taste” (85). James read and was influenced by Emerson’s works. Yet, as Harold Bloom argues, all this does not suffice to consider James as an Emersonian American writer. One may maintain at the most that James inserted not the complete ideas from “Self-Reliance”, but some of Emerson’s transcendent idealism from this essay into his *The Portrait of a Lady*. Again, it is a well-known fact that, as Shari Benstock states in her *No Gifts From Chance: A Biography of Edith Wharton*, that Edith Wharton was also influenced by Emerson in her writings. The father of her tutor, Emelyn Washburn, introduced Wharton to Emerson who emerged during significant moments in her life. In addition to this information, there has been a continuous debate about whether or not Wharton was so much influenced by Henry James that she was always under the shadow of her ‘master’. While there is no certain answer to this question, it is most obvious that she wrote her *The Age of Innocence* as if “as if a dialogue were going on”(Strout 53). Based on this comment, then it is possible to consider Newland Archer’s motivation to make his own decision at the end of the novel as an Emersonian self-reliance as well.

One may argue that James’s Isabel and Wharton’s Newland are not Emersonian individuals as they both choose a miserable life for themselves. However, this is only the small piece of the ice-berg seen on the surface of the water. Isabel and Newland Archer are two complex characters who are not easy to be defined by a certain characteristic formula in literature. Although they may seem as two weak characters yielding to their destinies, there is more than that for them. *The Portrait of a Lady*, says Strout, contains so much ‘mystery’ between the lines that one needs to read again and again in order to grasp the unclear motivation behind Isabel’s return to Rome. What makes this novel so great is that that ordinary point of view must be avoided in order to grasp the whole picture of the message in the novel (315). Even after the end of the novel, the mystery of Isabel’s fate remains. Again, Edith Wharton, in a 1934 essay, wrote that “for full recognition...” one has to wait “...till the surface of life is

once more discovered to be of interest only in proportion to its inner significance" (Powers 9). In *The Economist*, it is stated that *The Age of Innocence* is a novel filled with irony about the portrayal of the changing scene of Old New York Society. To view Wharton's fictions as 'straight-laced', states *The Economist*, "is to miss the elephant in the room. Codes and signs abound, each pointing to what is bubbling below the surface in a society that defined itself by what it excluded" (January 27<sup>th</sup> 2007). Wharton's life, the Gilded Age of the novel, and the characters in *The Age of Innocence*, all contribute to the irony of the novel's title.

For this debate, the strongest argument comes from Harold Bloom who suggests that both Isabel and Newland are representations of Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Self-Reliance" (35). Emersonian idealistic and transcendent philosophy of life is represented by Isabel's independence and her immense confidence in herself. Newland is, for Bloom, more like a representation of Emersonian philosophy that "truth is above other emotions". For Newland, Ellen's illusion is the only truth he has created himself and he does not want to unite with Ellen in order not to lose his only access -his 'truth'- to his self. As Emerson puts it, "truth is handsomer than the affection of love" and Ellen's illusion in his mind is the symbol of his true self. In this sense, like Isabel, Newland makes his own choice, choosing his "truth" and achieves his self-awareness at the end of the novel.

Again, Robert B. Pippin, in his *Henry James and Modern Moral Life*, defines Isabel with such an emphasis on her "radical background rather than conventional America background; self-reliant, self-taught, brave..." (49). Newland Archer, Allen writes "...becomes conscious of his entrapment finally" (115). Despite the different ways of telling between the story of Isabel Archer and of Newland Archer, the similarity of their surnames is not misleading for their stories do overlap. There is a certain conflict between their individual desires and social demands and both characters' endings are unexpected as well as meaningful. More

importantly, the two Archers are linked by their coming to understand their self-reliant individuals in acknowledging the fact that individual freedom means to do what one feels is right to do and it demands one to take full responsibility for it. More importantly, individual fulfilment requires, in Emerson's word, to "trust thyself". This is the moral theme underpinned by James and Wharton in these books as their joint interest.

To highlight the motifs of Emersonian themes in *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Age of Innocence*, a brief discussion on Ralph Waldo Emerson and an analysis on his "Self-Reliance" will be presented. Strout indicates that "Emerson in many respects is American literature...The lengthened shadow of our American literature is Emerson's" (97). Strout continues to say that even critics who differ over their evaluation of Emerson's point of view and his influence agree in identifying him as "an example of the hero-poet who is an imperialist of the inner lives of other people, speaking for 'the imperial self' that denies the relevance of associated life and history" (72). Regarding this 'imperial self', Emerson's "Self-Reliance" shed more light on understanding the motivation of Isabel and Newland leading them towards their self-awareness. From this point of view, it is pertinent to suggest that self-awareness is the key to self-freedom:

The genesis and maturation of a planet, its poise and orbit, the bended tree recovering itself from the strong wind, the vital resources of every animal and vegetable, are demonstrations of the self-sufficing and therefore self-relying soul" (159).

Influenced by Emerson, Henry James and Edith Wharton are considered as the ideal American types representing the free spirit of America not only through their characters in their works but also throughout their own lives. Henry James, says Harold Bloom, "allowed himself to be both condescending and evasive towards...American predecessor..." (9).

Similarly, Edith Wharton had also been influenced by Emerson's ideas whilst writing her works. Among other American writers, she always "applauded...Emerson" (Bloom 11).

Emerson, in his "Self-Reliance", invites us to believe in our own thoughts; to believe that what is spoken in our "private heart" is true. For Emerson, "that is genius." He describes his vision of the individual who is dependent on himself and listening to his own heart and disregarding the thoughts of others. Emerson emphasizes that man's only true support is himself. He tells us, "Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of [our] own mind"; and he adds that the only forgiveness necessary is: "Absolve you to yourself" (151). Emerson's doctrine of self-trust refers to intellectual and spiritual isolation, in which "you shall not discern the footprints of any other; you shall not see the face of man; you shall not hear any name" (153). The rule, "What I must do is all that concerns me, not what people think," serves for "the whole distinction between greatness and meanness" (153). In response to a concern that these personal impulses in practicing our self-reliance may be motivated by negative feelings and dismantle the commonwealth of others, Emerson replies:

"They do not seem to me to be such; but if I am the Devil's child, I will live then from the Devil." No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature. Good and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my constitution; the only wrong what is against it. A man is to carry himself in the presence of all opposition as if everything were titular and ephemeral but he. ( *The Complete Essays, 155*)

On the other hand, says Cahir, Emerson also underlines the importance of society in order to achieve personal fulfillment. This Emersonian theme is a reference more to Wharton since she also comes to appreciate the old values of her old New York society. Emerson, says Cahir, was occupied with issues relating to the interplay of society and individual, dealing with self-



reliance versus a duty to social participation. She concedes that the importance of society in fulfilling the desire to achieve self-freedom should not be ignored. In other words, while we must have independence and solitude, we must also have society. "A man must be clothed with society, or shall feel a certain bareness and poverty" (10); yet it is "the necessity of isolation which genius feels" (6). Moreover, in reality, not many people choose to step away from the frame of society because, as Emerson admits, "for nonconformity the world whips you with its displeasure".

In *The Age of Innocence*, Wharton emphasizes the importance of society as a "world whips you [Newland] with its displeasure". However, she also emphasizes that through this displeasure one can realize one's individuality. In other words, for Wharton, both society and individual complement each other. She points out the need for one to feel a part of society while one also needs to practice her/his own individuality. In this sense, Newland Archer is a clear reflection of Wharton's philosophy. By the time she wrote *The Age of Innocence* (1920), Wharton had come to regret the lost world of her youth. The following citation from her *A Backward Glance* (1934) is in support of this theory:

When I was young it used to seem to me that the group in which I grew up was like an empty vessel into which no new wine would ever again be poured. Now I see that one of its uses lay in preserving a few drops of an old vintage too rare to be savoured by a youthful palate; and I should like to atone for my unappreciativeness by trying to receive that faint fragrance. (235)

Thus, individual freedom, asserts Cahir, should not be understood as someone who "puts off all foreign support and stands alone"; as long as one acts with her/his own free will, one should have the freedom of being a part of community as well. Thus, Emersonian self-

freedom does not only refer to individual independence free of society but it is centered in the contradictory states of the need for solitude and the need for society.

Wharton's perception of the self-freedom continues to reanimate itself in the saying that "We can discover our selves only if we realize "...our continuing need to re-conceive ourselves" and personal freedom is a "...natural outcome of this awareness" (Powers 9). Similarly, for Elizabeth Power, self-freedom is achieved through self-awareness. In considering the modern notions of individuality, Power refers to Augustine's narrative of 'spiritual blindness followed by illumination that became foundational for nonreligious self-presentation'. This is a very common issue dealt in various works with "superior point of view of a narrator looking back on a life of errancy that will lead to a transformative experience, which will in turn produce self-understanding" (23). *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Age of Innocence*, drawing on Augustine's insights, transformed the individual's reliance on fate or society into self-reliance and "staged the hero's growth through a series of life-transforming experiences". Thus in the enlightened narrations of James and Wharton, both Isabel and Newland review the past in order to take lessons from the events that, in Power's words, "have led to the present moment of wisdom". Power continues her argument for the gradual process of self-awareness leading to the experience of individualism as follows:

We look upon our pasts as, say, a series of missteps that are constantly being corrected. In this, it is a case of "discovering" the self - a formulation that, in much attenuated form, can be heard among young people: who am I? what am I here for? To post-modern critics, such concerns suggest that life has a "plot," as in a well-crafted novel, but of course what they are really pointing out is that such issues have no

meaning in the absence of a transcendent grounding...[this is] an awareness of individuality that thereafter went underground for centuries (19).

When James and Wharton are studied side by side, it is clear to see that they share this mutual way of interpreting self and community conflict. James and Wharton's characters, Isabel and Newland, although actively functioning within society, achieve wisdom and their self-awareness. The characters understand that their need to solitude, privacy, and self-reliance occurs in their equally deep need to be understood, to understand another, and to be integrated into the society they live. However, the integration never comes about. Isabel's constant arguments with her cousin, Ralph who tries to understand her; her alienation in her marriage to Osmond are some examples for this theory. Again, Wharton's Newland is entrapped between his urge for his self-reliance and integration into his society. This is what Emerson defines individualism which "...is centered in the contradictory states of the need for solitude and the need for society, for self-reliance and for solidarity" (9). Carin observes James's Isabel and Wharton's Newland such characters who "...are idealists isolated by society's actualities ... often end their searches in defeat, not rebirth. If their characters learn any lesson, it is that spiritual isolation is a condition of human existence and that social compliance, at times, can be our greatest moral obligation" (15). Emerson says "Nothing can bring you peace but yourself". This is the very reason of why Isabel and Newland choose what they do at the end; for their inner peace.

For a better understanding of Isabel and Newland's Emersonian selves, a close examination will be presented for Emerson's influence on Henry James and Edith Wharton. According to Harold Bloom, there is an irony in Henry James's position among other novelists since he gave up on his nation and chose to be a British citizen. In other words, he refused to be "a

citizen in Emerson's America". However, Bloom asserts, this did not stop James reflecting his American nationalistic views in his works. Henry James understood very well that:

An American writer can be Emersonian or anti-Emersonian, but even a negative stance towards Emerson always leads back again to his formulation of the post-Christian American religion of "Self-Reliance" (235).

It is interesting to note that, Bloom suggests, among those writers who are 'overt Emersonian' or anti-Emersonian, the most 'haunted writers' are those who 'evade Emerson' as they 'never leave his dialectical ambiance'. Henry James is one of them. (2) For Henry James, Emerson was like a family tradition. Considered as the American prophet of Power, Fate, Illusion and Wealth, Emerson was very influential on the senior Henry James who is remembered for his famous 'outburst' against Emerson as a sign of his admiration as well: "O you man without a handle!" Like Emerson's restless mind, every member of the James family had the same never-resting mind. Bloom underlies the strong intimacy that junior Henry James felt for Emerson since James "needed a provincial Emerson...as he needed a New England that never was: simple, gentle, and isolated, even a little childlike"(3). What James judges Emerson's 'great distinction' and 'special sign' is that Emerson "had a more vivid conception of the moral life than any one else" (Bloom, 6). The special sign of Emerson's influence in 'Jamesian' works is this very distinction for James's fiction which "represents a vivid conception of the moral life" (Bloom 9).

Another special sign of distinction James found in Emerson is 'that ripe unconsciousness of evil'. Although this is, for Bloom, a complete misreading about Emerson, still, says Bloom, James was aware of Emerson's strongest virtue: "But no one has had so steady and constant,

and above all so natural, a vision of what we require and what we are capable of in the way of aspiration and independence.” No one, except Henry James. And James reflects his strong relation with Emerson through the quest of Isabel Archer who has no ‘vision of evil’ as “Emersonian vision of aspiration and independence’ requires. After twenty years of exile, James returned to America in 1904 on a visit. He went back to Concord and reflected his feelings in *The American Scene*, which is a sincere and effective study revealing James’ relation to Emerson, as follows;

I open Emerson for the same benefit...the sense of moving in large intellectual space...the rarity of Emerson’s genius, which has made him so, for the attentive peoples, the first and the one really rare, American spirit in letters...If one had reached a “time of life” one had thereby at least heard him lecture; and not a russet leaf fell for me, while I was there, but fell with an Emersonian drop. (139)

In 1898, prior to its publication, Wharton considered changing the title of her first collection of short stories, *The Greater Inclination, to Mortals Mixed of Middle Clay*, the first line of Emerson’s poem "Guy" (3). Wharton’s appreciation of Emerson’s ideas prevails itself in the way she describes her feelings for Morton Fullerton with whom she falls in love at first sight. In 1908, in a letter to Fullerton, she referred to a Sophoclean line from Emerson’s essay "Character" to describe the love that Fullerton inspired in her: "The moment my eyes fell on him I was content". In 1910, realizing that their love affair is coming to an end, Wharton wrote a poem referring to a night spent with Fullerton in Charing Cross Hotel near Waterloo Station. The poem, "...surprisingly candid and certainly poignant, is written in a Whitmanesque style, but it is called "Terminus", the title of an Emerson poem. Similar to

Ellen and Newland's affair in *The Age of Innocence*, Wharton ends her poem referring to the end of her own affair with a dramatic air:

"So must we forth into the darkness..." (Benstock 335).

Another influence of Emerson on Wharton is that she used the last line of his "Give All To Love," for the title of her *The Gods Arrive* (1932), a novel which explores the relationship of a writer's work to his life. In Emerson's poem, the speaker describes his beloved as "a self of purer clay" and Emerson concludes his poem as follows:

Heartily know,

When the half-gods go,

The gods arrive. (*Complete Writings*, II, 861)

In April 1937, four months ago before she died, Emerson once again inspired Edith Wharton. She wrote to her friend, the Italian Renaissance art historian Bernard Berenson, asking him "to remember that, whether as to people or to places & occasions, I've always known the gods the moment I met them." R. W. B. And Nancy Lewis read these lines as "re-evoking the passage from Emerson she had first drawn upon . . . to tell Morton Fullerton of the nature of her love for him" (Wharton, *Letters* 512).

James's Isabel and Wharton's Newland are representations of Emersonian selves. While it is suggested that Henry James is indebted to Emerson for his sense of 'aspiration and independence', *The Portrait of a Lady* is hardly accepted as an Emersonian novel. Nonetheless, maintains Harold Bloom, Isabel Archer is Emerson's daughter because to her Emersonian self, by returning to her unhappy marriage, she does what she feels is right to do, because she believes, "what matters is the integrity of her will" (12).

From this perspective, Newland's conflict between being a respectable member of society or leaving everything precious to him and going after the woman he loves becomes a manifestation of what Emerson's says in his "Self-Reliance": "Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events". This is the point from which Newland's awareness begins. He decides not to unite with Ellen, on his own free will. This decision makes him a self-reliant character, because Newland realizes who he really is: "an old-fashioned" in the twentieth century" (*Innocence* 362). This is about the universal theme entails individual's choice between convention and the inner-self; the conflict between oppression and freedom as well as between spirituality and communal society. He accepts what he lived for, and agreed to 'honour his past'. Like Isabel Archer, Newland believes in the importance of the "integrity of his will" and makes his choice accordingly. Now he "...has the "comforting feeling of the place where he belongs" (Benstock 316).

Howe asserts, like James, Wharton also attempts "to give imaginative embodiment to the human will seeking to resist defeat or move beyond it" (117). In other words, similar to Isabel, Newland is in a constant attempt to go beyond 'convention' throughout the novel. However, Howe continues, as Wolff emphasises this point, Archer remains as a responsible husband who chooses to stay with his wife, May due to his "deep-rooted conviction" that "his own moral duty must ultimately be defined by family obligations" (127). Considering that Wolff's suggestion is true, than Newland's last decision of leaving without seeing Ellen echoes with Isabel's respect for her marriage. However, says Strout, "Wharton does not put her hero on a high plane of moral judgement. Instead, she presents him in the more mundane context of his half-hearted rebelliousness and detached accommodation to his society" (411).

One noticeable difference between the renunciation of Newland and Isabel is, then, Isabel's ending is more tragic trying to locate her situation with her own moral consciousness. From this view, Wharton's Ellen Olenska is another version of Isabel in terms of possessing a moral consciousness for she accepts the 'code of decency' observed in society rather than trying to manipulate Newland to be with her. Newland Archer "makes his peace with this decision of hers in his final refusal to see her in Paris, when no obligations on either side would have prevented it. There is no moral force by then to his renunciation. It is a matter of realism, of recognition that too much has flowed under the bridge for him to resume a relationship that had never been consummated" (Strout 411).

Mindful of Isabel and Newland's last renunciations at the end of the novels, then, it is fair to say that James's Isabel and Wharton's Newland act upon their convictions and they base their determinations on whatever truths they hear in their private hearts. They do not run away from society, they move in and exploit their own worlds within the society. Recognizing that they are not bound by their fate or divine truth, "these self-reliant characters pursue their private truths in a manner that indifferently sweeps aside any rights or needs of others when those others' interests are in, conflict with their own" (Carin 19). From Emerson's point of view, both Archers are in such situation as follows:

The sinew and heart of man seem to be drawn out, and we become timorous, desponding whimpers. We are afraid of truth, afraid of fortune, afraid of death, and afraid of each other...we see that most natures are insolvent, cannot satisfy their own wants...our arts, our occupations, our marriages, our religion we have not chosen, but society has chosen for us. We are parlor soldiers. We shun the rugged battle of fate, where strength is born" (162).



James and Wharton on this forever dilemma of individual and society provide a related way of understanding the pressure of, particularly, American society. Regarding Emerson's "Self-Reliance", it is safe to suggest that their fundamental argument implies an acceptance of individual fallibility. This is the motivation led James's Isabel and Wharton's Newland to make their renunciation at the end of each novels. As Emerson says that "I make my own circumstances", both Isabel and Newland finally see their fallibility and accept that their decisions in their marriages cost their happiness. This is the source where they obtain their courage to suffer the consequences of their own actions and eventually achieve their self-integrity.

This comparison also refers to the "divided selves and social fragmentation" Robert Shulmen deals with in his *Social Criticism & Nineteenth-Century American Fiction*. In other words, their selves were fragmented in a fragmented society and finally fulfil the satisfaction of self-awareness. By fragmented society, Shulman means 'the impact of society' on the consciousness of those "who inevitably absorb and resist the prevailing power relations, values, and practices" (Shulman, 9). The relation between Shulmen's concept of 'divided self' and James-Wharton's dealing with 'self-creation' overlaps in the sense that James's Isabel and Wharton's Newland are two figures representing these 'divided selves' in a conventional society. These 'divided selves' are, in McPherson's words, "possessive individuals" seeking their freedom in a 'possessive market society' (Shulmen, 7).

In order to understand the background on *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Age of Innocence*, it is best to understand the strong friendship between Henry James and Edith Wharton and the effect of this friendship on the characters in these two novels. During their association and even today in literary world, it has been a common criticism that there were obvious

similarities between Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* and Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*. It has been even claimed that Wharton merely imitated James's style in her work. For the purpose of clarifying such criticisms, a detailed justification for analysing the friendship of these writers is required. Beyond the striking similarities in each novel lies a "story of a fruitful, fascinating relationship between two principally expatriate American writers that spanned the first fifteen years of the twentieth century" (Powers 1). James's and Wharton's friendship is worth more than a mere attention, for it is their blossoming friendship that inspired Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* as a sequence of James' *The Portrait of a Lady*. Especially after his 1895 failure in the theatre along with his last twenty years of his life, James had felt his 'loneliness of existence' more clearly than ever and therefore he needed a real, more intimate associations during that time. Eventually his visits to the United States between 1904-1905 and 1910-1911 reinforced his sense of loneliness and alienation in his native land, which urged his need to hold onto his adopted England. During this period, he began to seek close association with attractive, bright and interesting men. However, none of these friendships provided the quality of a sustained intimate friendship James needed (Powers 12).

Wharton was a friend James was seeking for. As Lyall H. Powers indicates in his *Henry James and Edith Wharton: Letters: 1900-1915*, the importance of this friendship for James with Wharton was that it "offered him a combination of ingredients that he had long needed and had never quite found before" (12). For Wharton, their friendship was a result of "[...] common sense of fun that first brought about our understanding. The real marriage of true minds is for any two people to possess a sense of humour or irony pitched in exactly the same key... Henry James was perhaps the most intimate friend I ever had [...]" (173).

In relation to *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Age of Innocence*, James and Wharton also inspired each other in creating their characters; James's Isabel and Wharton's Ellen. Wharton was, for James, the representation of two important women he loved: his beloved cousin Minny Temple and Constance Fenimore Woolson, American expatriate writer. Of the women James knew in the last part of the nineteenth century, these two women had special places in James's life: The interesting connection between these two women and James's friendship with Wharton is that, Minni Temple was, for James, blessed with "moral spontaneity" and Clover with "intellectual grace". These features refer to James's Isabel and Wharton's Ellen. Isabel, by James himself, in his preface to the novel, was defined as the representation of "intellectual grace" while Wharton, in his "A Backward Glance", referred her Ellen Olenska as a woman with "moral spontaneity".

Wharton's friendship was important to James because, in Power's words, "she [Edith] was the 'combination of the intellectual grace of Clover Hooper' and 'of the moral spontaneity of Minny Temple'". Power continues to say that, James depicted so vividly the "virtuous attachment" of Isabel Archer with Wharton. Bell also asserts a connection between Wharton and James's Isabel Archer on the ground that Wharton possesses the "qualities of James's American heroines" and suggests that "there are Jamesian aspects to *The Age of Innocence*." (Strout, 64). It is also surprising to see that there is a strong commonality between Isabel and Wharton in the sense that these two women are starving for intellectual mental nourishment. They both educated themselves through the library of their fathers and have an immense taste for the world literature. In her *Life and I*, Wharton says, she had two lives; "the one of physical exercise & healthy natural "fun", & the other, parallel with it, but known to none but to myself – a life of dreams & visions, set to the rhythm of the poets..."(12) Similarly Isabel too had a passion for reading and her "reputation of reading a great deal hung about her like the cloudy envelope of a goddess in an epic"(Bell 40).

Again Cahill points out that Wharton, in her official autobiography, “A Backward Glance” (1943) returns to her childhood as “the lonely little girl that I was” and underlies her silence on “her mother’s rejection of her youngest child and only daughter.” In this sense, considering the influence of Wharton as a heroine on the creation of James’s Isabel, Wharton’s cold relationship with her mother explains why Henry James is silent on the subject of Isabel’s mother who is already dead right from the beginning of the novel. This is another sign pointing to the mutual effect of James and Wharton on the characters in their novels.

The strong influence between *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Age of Innocence* is also pointed out by Cynthia Wolff in her *A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton* (1977). Wolff explores this ‘antiphonal’ relationship between Newland Archer and Isabel Archer and concedes that “the link of Wharton’s Newland Archer to James’s Isabel Archer is underlined by Wharton’s having one of Newland’s friend’s remarks that he looks like a painting, “The portrait of a gentleman” (64). This friend is Ned Winsett whose remark becomes the voice of those people who believe that portrait of a gentleman is “in a pitiful little minority” who “has got no centre, no competition, no audience: You’re like the pictures on the walls of a deserted house...You never amount to anything ...till you roll up your sleeves and get right down into the muck”(Innocence 124).

In his *Portrait of Edith Wharton*, Percy Lubbock suggests that Henry James saw Wharton as ‘a novel of his own, “no doubt in his earlier manner.” (Strout, 406). Lubbock continues to say that he was the “master of her art” and the “master of her ceremonies” as tours in her car. Wharton was, for Lubbock, “a dazzling intruder” on Henry James’s sole dedication to his art. The ending of Lubbock’s work brings a vision of Wharton and James together disappear on top of a hill. This image, Cushing Strout points out, means to say the development of

Wharton's literary talent led her to be 'more Jamesian as if she were now a "creation of his latest manner."' (406) In Strouts definition, being "engulfed in the legend of the master" was not to Wharton's advantage: "She was dubbed a James manqué, her work characterized as "James and water" (Power, 5). Wharton was aware of these criticisms and she believed that, she "had never before been discouraged by criticism...but the continued cry that I am echo of Mr. James (whose books of the past ten years I can't read, much as I delight in the man)...makes me feel rather hopeless" (R.W.B and Nancy Lewis. The Letters of EW. 91)

Recent admirers of Wharton were in a constant attempt to disassociate Wharton from James as she herself tried to do in his latest novels. Bell quotes from *A Backward Glance*, indicating that, for Wharton, James's later works were lacking in "that thick nourishing human air in which we all move," including "the irregular and irrelevant movements of life"(63). Strout, however, takes our attention to the cover of Bell's book where James's "sharp black and white" picture is at the left whereas Wharton is in purple at the right. And this is, Strout interprets, "as if she were forever in his [James's] shadows" (63).

The most important aspect of James and Wharton's friendship is that both writers are considered as the writers of America's "free spirit". Henry James, says Harold Bloom, is hailed as 'the major American writer' or 'the most accomplished novelist' in the English language. He is considered as a very influential writer 'whose spirit lingers' in many other writers. Henry James, Bloom continuous to say, is "what Emerson prophesied as the Central Man who would come and change all things forever, in a celebration of the American Newness" (1). According to Nina Baym, the editor of *The Norton Anthology American Literature* (5<sup>th</sup> ed. Vol. 2), Wharton, along with Henry James "is considered a major ... depicter of life among Americans of the leisure class at home and abroad" (672).

Cynthia Wolff puts an end to this discussion in her *A Feast Of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton* to emphasize that it is not proper to present Wharton as ‘merely a clever disciple of James’ but appoints her ‘as a major writer on her own terms’ (Strout, 406). Although feminist critics have agreed with Wolff in rejecting “the influence from the master [James]” to Wharton, it has been widely accepted that the deep influence of James on Wharton is unquestionable. Robert Martin maintains in his “Henry James Review” that “There has been a long resistance to an examination of the literary relation between Henry James and Edith Wharton.” He further states that feminists evaded, for a long time, offering the possibility of a one way influence “...from the master [Henry James]...to the weak Wharton.” (Vol. 21, Number 1). Millicent Bell contributes to this critical assumption of “Wharton as a faithful follower of the Master prevented study of the actual degree and nature of the artistic relationship”(216). Bell reflects Wharton’s desire as to “...emulate yields to an irritated sense of the need to assert her distinctiveness”(217). In his book, *Making American Tradition*, Cushion Straout emphasizes the strong friendship between James and Wharton “who for about a dozen years...until his [James’s] death...was his close friend and frequent travelling companion” (63).

Both *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Age of Innocence* present the New York society as a manifestation of the rigid conventions and as a satire of the corrupt and privileged class. For Emerson, society is “...everywhere [and] is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members”(Emerson, Self-Reliance). This is the self-deluded, hypocritical society, which is, in Karl Marx’s words, divided “into antagonistic classes based on a relation to the means of production”; the society that kills individualism; a society which, as Ezra Pound puts it, entails a “blotched civilization”. In light of this statement, it is pertinent to say that society is a veil that obliterates people’s inabilities to fulfil what they really desire. Having attained in

their self-awareness eventually, both Archers are displayed as the portrayal of individuality and seeking to find their true-selves in the entrapment imposed by society. In these works, both Wharton and James deal with the issue of “the ability to live with one’s mistakes and to refuse the easy solutions” (Bamberg 122).

According to W.C. Brownell, *The Portrait of a Lady* “...is the most important work Mr. James has thus far written, and ... worthy of study”. Brownell summarizes the book as “the dissection of an interesting character [Isabel Archer] by a clever and scrupulous character [Osmond]” (661). Of the novels James had written, Wharton “admired ... *The Portrait of a Lady* in particular ... [and] recognized the signal respect he enjoyed as master of his craft...” (Powers 5). She had even taken a role in the creation of the essay William Morton Fullerton devoted to praise the edition of James’s revisions of his *The Portrait of a Lady*. Finally, in her *A Backward Glance*, Wharton indicates her praise for James’s masterpiece: “Exquisite as the early novels are – and in point of perfection probably none can touch “*The Portrait of a Lady*...” (174).

Henry James’s *The Portrait of a Lady* is considered as a reflection of his own values and experiences he had been through in his life. Various critics hailed the book as James’s most successful and important novel as a masterpiece. Although there has been many criticisms for *The Portrait of a Lady*, questioning its success, most critics agree on the point that, Isabel Archer is considered as one of the most memorable female characters in American Literature representing the Emersonian self-reliance. “Of all the early novel” says Richard Poirier, “*The Portrait of a Lady*” offers the fullest expression, both in the relationships among its characters and in the features of its style and composition...the relationship between judgment and pleasure, between knowledge and entertainment, between the limitations or fixities which

awareness imposes upon our experience of the world and the freedom of response and aspirations which innocence allows” (15).

At the time the book was published, it was a great success in the literary world. Since then, debates over the success of the book had been frequent. Some critics believed that James depicts the characterization of Isabel so real and vividly for he got his inspiration from his own life. They claimed that there had been remarkable similarities between the characters James created in his book and his family members or friends in his life and it was the main cause for the book’s immense effect. Robert B. Bamberg points out the parallelism between James’ works and his life by stating, “... biographical critics have been inferring how James’s artistic creation of characters reflects the whole of his personality and experience, both conscious and unconscious”(637). It has been assumed that Isabel, for example, resembles to James’s cousin, Minnie Temple, who dies at the age of twenty-four because of tuberculosis while Osmond has got many similarities with James’s American friend, Francis Boot who lived with his daughter in Florence as well. He goes further by saying that Isabel and Osmond are the reflections of James’s two different sides just like the “...two sides of the same coin, two studies in egotism – and a kind of egotism which belonged to their author.” (639) For F.W. Dupee, had James married his cousin, Minnie, he would have been a husband exactly like Osmond who “James fearfully fancied”(98) (Dupee, Henry James). Carl Van Doren in *The American Novel* (1921), states that, although Isabel Archer belongs in “the charming line of those American girls whom James subtly traces through their European adventures”, she is considered more important than Henry’s other heroines. “She is...incidentally American... moving across a scene already lighted by his [James] imagination...”. According to Doren, James saw in Isabel ‘the type of youth advancing’ leading toward knowledge of life;



thou of youth at first shy and slight in its innocence but flowering under the sun of experience to the fullest hues and dimensions of a complexity which might under different circumstances have lain dormant; of youth growing irresistibly to meet the destiny which growth compels... (315).

Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* is considered as a satire of 1870s New York society with its arbitrary and sometimes ridiculous rules. Wharton presents New York society composed of closely tied families who maintain the manners and codes of behaviours transferred from one generation to another; documenting the 'moral bankruptcy' of wealthy New York residents during the Gilded Age; a term taken from the title of an 1873 novel by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner, denotes a period "noted for political corruption, financial speculation, and the opulent lives of wealthy industrialists and financiers" (Webster's New World College Dictionary, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.)

By the time Wharton wrote this novel, she had survived an unhappy marriage for 25 years, ignoring her husband's affairs and his improper business connections. She had moved to Paris after her divorce, believing that Paris is a more convenient and 'congenial place' for divorcees. In her novel, the setting is the New York City in the 1870s; a society of innocence. It worries about social codes such as "... wedding details, rituals, women's positions ..." (Benstock 365).

Wharton's ironic satire and criticism of the New York culture reveals Emerson's opinions of such a society and the way individuals are perceived and evaluated by this New York society. For Wharton, society was arbitrary, instable, and incoherent but she also admits that people

must also depend on each other for essential human functioning. This is the theme she underlines in *The Age of Innocence*; “the escape that proves to be no escape”, and this theme of loss still resonates today. Like James, Wharton raises the dilemma of an individual imprisoned by society.

With its inconsistent double-standards, society would claim its norms and codes aloud while pardoning the inconveniency of those who are in control. Auchincloss continued: “She [Wharton] realized that the social game was without rules, and this realization made her one of the few novelists before Proust who could describe it [society] with any profundity” (151). Wharton’s way of representing the entrapment of individuals within the control of society led Alfred Kazin to note in 1941: “It is easy to say now that Edith Wharton’s great subject should have been the biography of her own class, for her education and training had given her alone in her literary generation the best to access it” (Lewis 145).

The most shared view on the obvious relationship between *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Age of Innocence* is that Wharton’s novel provides the answers left out in James’s novel. Both novels are centred on a single protagonist’s point of view; both writers tend to deal with “individual freedom” and “self-awareness” through the complex situations and choices of their characters by reflecting the satiric social details and the obligations the individuals face in a world of conventions. Both Archers are unable to follow their natural impulses due to the constrictions of society. Freedom is the crucial theme for both characters. As James points out in his introduction, he felt that his book possessed the unity of what “groups together”, yet, he continues, “the rest may be taken up or not, later.” Again, in his article “Complementary Novels of Manners by James, Wharton, Howells and Cahon,” Strout argues that it is possible to pair these writer’s novels “as if a dialogue were going on”(53).

In this mutual dialogue, Strout matches James's *The Portrait of a Lady* along with Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*. For Strout as it is understandably and widely accepted in literary world, these two novels are "read in many respects like a sequel"(53). James, in his preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, mentions his fear about "the weakness of the whole story" which is, for him "too exclusively psychological" and he would be criticized that he does not let the reader see Isabel "to the end of her situation." Such observations, says Strout, opened Wharton new opportunities to exercise her talent "to take up the rest by putting the psychological in a social context, telling the male side of the story more fully, and seeing the heroine and the hero through the end of their situation." (64). For Strout, this is a privilege of Wharton's book over James's. These are, Strout adds, the "virtues...of *The Age of Innocence*...complements *The Portrait of a Lady*" (406). In other words, Wharton tries to complete what James left in his novel. Wharton allows us to get the whole picture of her protagonist's end in this romance whereas James leaves the end of his heroine to the reader's imagination. Wharton, for Strout, then does what James says he did not do in his novel.

Isabel and Newland are fascinating to compare because they "remain the major representations of American individualism" (Bloom 9). As Strout puts it, "It is a tribute to the vicarious imagination that a man [Henry James] created the female [Isabel] Archer and a woman [Edith Wharton] created the male [Newland] Archer...What their creators have in common, however, is experience of deliberate privation, which enabled them to appreciate renunciation ..." (414). Isabel has advantage over Newland in the sense that she achieves her "significant advance in consciousness" by far earlier age than Newland. Isabel may seem 'advanced in worldly sophistication' but one wonders, if her emphasis on her own identity, and her insistence on accepting 'the contract with life' is not achieved at the cost of others. On the other hand, Newland is richer in consciousness since he knows he has chosen his

conventional life not only because it is where he feels comfortable but also not to cause unhappiness to others. Yet, the final decisions they make have a common purpose: individual fulfilment. In attributing to Emerson's philosophy of "Self-Reliance" within the context of the conflict between individual and society, both Isabel and Newland are torn between convention and defiance while they seek fulfilment in their selves. They take Emerson's doctrine of self-trust literally and at face value and admit who they are; Isabel goes back to her unhappy marriage while she has the chance not to. Newland chooses to keep Ellen as a memory in his mind although there is no social obstacle in their way to be together at the end of the novel. This is because he realizes that it is not society that kept them separate but his own weakness. Therefore, he admits who he really is, his failure.

In light of these statements, in the first chapter, Isabel's Emersonian idealism will be presented through her conflict between her self and her need for social integration. This chapter aims to analyze that this conflict finally leads Isabel to 'make her own circumstances' with full knowledge as a sign of her individual fulfilment. Likewise, Newland's inner conflict between his responsibilities and his personal passion will be observed in the third chapter. This chapter intends to show that Newland, as Emerson encourages, follows his own 'truth' within his heart and makes his own decision free of any pressure at the end of the novel. The idea in this chapter is to emphasize that what is important is to understand who you are and choose how to act accordingly. The conclusion will re-state the idea that, both Isabel and Newland have come to the realization that freedom and maturity are sometimes best defined as the acceptance of one's destiny in order to achieve self-integrity.

## CHAPTER I: *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*

### *1.1. Isabel Archer's Emersonian Idealism: Freedom attained in self-awareness*

*Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles.*

*Emerson (Self-Reliance)*

Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady* serves a succinct example of Emersonian self through the characterisation of Isabel Archer. James represents Emersonian philosophy of idealism with a reference to the destructive effect of Europe on his American characters. There is a clear contrast between the 'old-world, corrupt Europe and innocent America'. His American characters find themselves deceived and victimized by 'the immoral European environments'. Yet, they keep their Emersonian ideology of individualism. The aim of this chapter is to present Isabel's dilemma between her personal freedom and her need to be a part of society and how this conflict finally leads Isabel to her Emersonian self.

At the beginning of *The Portrait of a Lady*, Isabel seems an idealist who seeks knowledge and wants to experience life. She wants to be free. She is determined to see the world as a "place of brightness, of free expansion, of irresistible action" (*Portrait* 139). She is always "planning out her development, desiring her perfection, observing her progress" (*Portrait* 144). Her 'idea of happiness' is the momentum that drives her in her life. "Do you know where you're drifting? Henrietta pursued, holding out her bonnet delicately. "No I haven't the least idea, and I find it very pleasant not to know. A swift carriage, of a dark night, rattling with four horses over roads that one can't see – that's my idea of happiness" says Isabel.

Isabel's wish is "to leave the past behind her and, as she said to herself, to begin afresh" (*Portrait* 408). She is considered a typical American with her enthusiasm to discover new things and experience life. This is not a mere outcome of the social circumstances of her life. This is due to her natural impulse and intuition as Emerson encourages individual to do so because Isabel "carried within herself a great fund of life; and her deepest enjoyment was to feel the continuity between the movements of her own soul and the agitations of the world" (*Portrait* 41-2).

Isabel Archer is an Emersonian self, more a representative of a 'transcendentalist enthusiasm' for the more possibilities to express her freedom with almost no social circumstances: her parents are dead, her two sisters are married, and had three trips across the Atlantic. James introduces Isabel with an emphasis on her radical background such as being a self-taught, self-reliant, brave girl who wants to explore the world and "likes to do everything for herself and has no belief in any one's power to help her" (*Portrait* 25). It is never very clear what Isabel expects of life. Her philosophy of life makes her personality ambiguous to other people around her. Even she herself is confused:

Who was she, what was she that she should hold herself superior? What view of life, what design upon fate, what conception of happiness, had she that pretended to be larger than these large, these fabulous occasions?... The isolation and loneliness of pride had for her mind the horror of a desert place.  
(*Portrait* 164)

Bloom argues that Isabel's too much confidence in herself is her fallacy and this fails her to see her limitation as her ignorance. Relying on her beauty, intelligence and even her

knowledge she has learned from her father's books, Isabel, in Harold Bloom's words, "is like a child who has never been denied whatever toy or sweet she desired" (*Portrait* 29). She assumes that her world is limitless for she is at the beginning of the road. She was lucky as "she had the best of everything, and in a world in which the circumstances of so many people made them unenviable it was an advantage never to have known anything particularly unpleasant ... the unpleasant had been even too absent from her [Isabel] knowledge, for she had gathered from her acquaintance with literature that it was often a source of interest and even of instruction" (*Portrait* 39). With these instructions she has seen, she feeds a narcissist confidence in herself since "she had known she had too many ideas..." (*Portrait* 359). Her desire to perfect her self to the extreme is clear with the following lines:

Her [Isabel's] thought were a tangle of vague outlines which had never been corrected by the judgment of people speaking with authority...She had a theory that it was only under this provision that life was worth living; that one should be one of the best, should be conscious of a fine organization, should move in the realm of light, natural wisdom, of happy impulse, of inspiration gracefully chronic...One should try to be one's own best friend...The girl had a certain nobleness of imagination which rendered her a good many services and played her a great many tricks... (*Portrait* 104).

However, considering Isabel's time period in which girls exist within the rigid parameters of their social conventions, it is obvious that James created such a likeable character that we, as readers, might not notice at the beginning of the book Isabel is a "brash, know—it-all, somehow self-important...pronouncing on this or that with great confidence and authority" (Bloom 50). She had a reputation of 'reading a great deal', which was like a 'cloudy

envelope' covering her. This is the way James introduces Isabel who seems "so admirable to modern readers", yet, her not being sure what exactly she wants from life "will lead her straight to her doom" (Bloom 50). Rohrer agrees with Bloom on the point that Isabel believes in "a certain sort of transparency in her dealings, as if whatever she turns the light of her intellect upon will be purely revealed to her" (15). She is quite sure that in this light, "she [Isabel] would be what she appeared, and she would appear what she was" (*Portrait* 5). She does not want to "touch the cup of experience," the "poisoned drink ... she simply wants to see life for herself (*Portrait* 5).

Isabel's first Emersonian self appears when she resists as society expects her to marry a decent and rich man with a social status. This shows her idealistic Emersonian philosophy because Isabel "had an immense desire to appear to resist...The world, in truth, had never seemed so large; it seemed to open out, all round her" (365). Rorty suggests that Isabel "comes to resist what she construes as a common, materialistic world, and, more specifically, to contest the traditional standards of everyday life" (35). As opposed to others who want her to marry a rich man, she marries Osmond, a man with no entity, no money and no social status. Almost everyone around Isabel opposes this marriage, including her aunt, Mrs. Touchett. She ignores the warning of others for she does not see any possibility that she could have mistaken. She thinks "she had not been mistaken about the beauty of his [Osmond's] mind; she knew that organ perfectly now" (*Portrait* 359). Isabel resists those who try to impose their own expectations on her in order to change her personality. Isabel does not surrender. Instead, she posits herself as a "distinctive subject whose own opinions, statements, and system of ideas define her as a person" (Matthiessen 231). This is a clear indication for Isabel's determination in formulating her own idealistic self by opposing the others. As Matthiessen concedes, resisting common social practices "can and does take place, actively or



passively, through single people...privately and publicly. It can take the form of refusal as much as intervention; it can be in the service of conservation as much as of disruption” (5).

For some, Isabel may perhaps be considered too Emersonian due to her too much belief in herself. On arriving in Europe, Isabel Archer is naïve yet confident young American girl. “It is her inherent qualities, dreams and desires that create the foundation on which her demise is built” (Strout 119). It is through her self-assured eyes that she idealizes and romanticizes the new, European world around her. Isabel views her new environment so romantically that she is unprepared for “its harsh realities” that come from making mistakes. Isabel doesn’t believe that she can make mistakes. She is arrogantly and naively confident in all that she does (Strout 119).

Her growth, though, alarms her friends and relations who “want to see her safely married” (*Portrait* 37). However, she was different. She “liked to be thought clever...had a great desire for knowledge; she had an immense curiosity about life and was constantly staring and wondering” (*Portrait* 41). Of her sisters, Lilian and Edith, Isabel is regarded as the intellectual one. Lilian’s husband, Edmund, for example, disapproves Isabel for she is ‘too original’ like “written in a foreign tongue. I can’t make her out”. When Lilian tells him that Isabel will go to Europe “to develop”, Edmund exclaims, “O Jupiter! I hope she isn’t going to develop any more!” (*Portrait* 38). And her friend, Henrietta Stackpole says, “She is not the bright American girl she was. She is taking different views and turning away from her old ideals”.

Millicent Bell argues that Isabel’s desire to learn is not an outcome of a religious or moral interest, but of an intellectual or aesthetic interest. This is the reason that Ralph accuses Isabel of not being ready to experience life truly and fully, but simply wants to “see...not to feel.”

Although Isabel says that seeing and feeling is not different from each other, Ralph is right in observing Isabel's contradict in herself. This is Isabel's first flaw leading her towards her unhappiness. When Isabel refuses to marry Lord Warburton, she explains that marrying him would mean to escape "the usual chances and dangers...what most people know and suffer" (*Portrait* 187). She believes she would not suffer easily, and says "It's not absolutely necessary to suffer; we are not made for that" and she continuous to say that she has come to England "to be as happy as possible" (*Portrait* 65).

What is most important to Isabel is her great views about "independence". The importance of this issue is first raised by the telegram the Touchetts, Isabel's aunt and her husband, receive. Mrs. Touchett describes Isabel as "quite independent", a comment that signals the question of what being independent means: "In a moral or financial sense? ...that they [Isabel and her sisters] wish to be under no obligations? Or does it simply mean that they are fond of their own way?" (*Portrait* 39). This ideal presents the conflict in the meaning of being 'independent' which is unclear not only for Isabel but also for the others in the novel as well. Not knowing what she exactly expects from life, "the consequences of Isabel's aspirations for a "free exploration of life" will be her stepping freely into the gilded cage of Gilbert Osmond's villa and life. It is the paradox or problem at the heart of the moral issues of independence and dependence, or freedom and convention, on which so much in the novel hangs" (*Pippin* 130-32).

Within this paradox, Isabel is always subject to other's expectations around her. Power states "humans... are caught in contingencies of all sorts... We juggle in ourselves a host of contradictory tendencies" (225). In other words, for individuals to enter the order of discourse, one must fulfil certain requirements. In this respect, Isabel, as a young girl who

seeks for her freedom, does not fit into the ideal 'portrait of a lady' posed by society. Even her cousin, Ralph watches her growth and is not happy with the changes he observes: "The keen, free girl had become quite another person; what he saw was the fine lady who was supposed to represent something" (*Portrait* 223). These complaints indicate that her fall into darker knowledge is regrettable. However, James's sense of her is different. "Experience and suffering do not ennoble her but increase her understanding. They make her a competent interpreter of a world of tangled desires, of illusions and disillusionments whose complexity she can finally assess even to her own cost" (Zwerdling 150).

For all her limitation in her ignorance and her blind sense of confidence in herself, Isabel's passion to make the most of her life, and not really knowing what she expects from life, is what Richard Rorty describes as the conflict leading to 'self-creation'. Isabel is simply trying to describe herself, "to avoid being objectified by being described by someone else". In *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity*, Richard Rorty calls this conflict leading to her 'self-creation' as "the private pursuit of autonomy, split off from the public realm and ideas of human solidarity". In other words, we do not have to isolate ourselves from the demands of public in order to achieve our personal fulfillment. This is an echo of Cahir's philosophy indicating that "A man must be clothed with society". Rorty sets out to show that we should simply "treat the demands of self-creation and of human solidarity as equally valid, yet forever incommensurable" (7).

In relation to Rorty's 'self-creation', the first sign of Isabel's dilemma between her independence and social security appears when she refuses the proposal of the American millionaire, Caspar Goodwood. She neither says a definite 'no', nor a clear 'yes' to his proposal.

Caspar went on: “If I should cease to think of you at all for a prescribed time, I should find I could keep it up indefinitely...”.

She [Isabel] promptly came round: “Think of me or not, as you find most possible; only leave me alone.”

“Until when?”

“Well, for a year or two” (*Portrait* 138).

From this dialogue between Isabel and Caspar, one feels that while Isabel seeks her independence, something in her character also seems to desire for stability, safety and order. She does not want to reject Caspar for good since she is scared of losing her chance for a settled life. On the other hand, she knows that this will be a typical marriage, assuming the traditional roles of wife and husband. When she rejects Caspar Goodwood upon his arrival in Europe, Isabel declares: “I like my liberty too much. If there’s one thing in the world I ‘m fond of it’s my personal independence”. Caspar, the free American man protests, “Who would wish less to curtail your liberty than I? What can give me greater pleasure than to see you perfectly independent – doing whatever you like? It’s to make you independent, that I want to marry you” (*Portrait* 228). Isabel calls his statement as “beautiful sophism” since she perceives what Caspar means indeed – he will marry her and free her of material concerns -. The implication that money is freedom has a social truth. Goodwood is right in saying that a single woman like Isabel is not actually ‘independent’ but “hampered at every step” (*Portrait* 228). Marriage to someone with money would give her the social role ‘without which herself cannot compose itself’ (Bell 772). For Prior, Isabel refuses to be with Caspar because marrying him will impede her independence (95). Caspar is the representation of the male-dominated society, believing that he is the key for Isabel’s desire to be independent. He says

to Isabel that “an unmarried woman - a girl of your age – is not independent. There are all sorts of things she cannot do’ ” (*Portrait* 16). This is why Isabel cannot be clear in her answer to Caspar’s proposal. What if she fails in searching her freedom? What if she finds herself in a situation she has never thought of? Within the oppression of such thoughts, Isabel’s elusive attitude for Caspar is a clear manifestation of her inner conflict between her self-reliance and her desire for security. Caspar had thought she simply wanted to see the world a bit and offered to help her to do so. Yet Isabel says he could only help her by putting the sea between them. When Caspar protests saying “One would think that you were going to commit some atrocity”, Isabel replies: “Perhaps I am. I wish to be free even to do that if the fancy takes me “ (*Portrait* 229-230). Tony Tanner contends that Isabel manifests her Emersonian self in her refusal when Caspar proposes her. As Tanner puts it, Caspar Goodwood suggest to Isabel “oppression, coercion and constraint on the psychological level” (35).

She also refuses to marry Lord Warburton, who with his “complex social relations and obligations suggest immobilization on the social level” (109). The reason for Isabel to reject Lord Warburton is that what he offers her does not fit in her understanding of freedom. In other words, she knows that if she marries Lord Warburton, she will have a ready-made role of Mrs. Warburton who is expected to behave in a certain way with certain social rules. The difficulties and social obligations are the very sources from where she gains strength for her quest to seek for her freedom. Patricia Rohrer states that, through the story of Isabel Archer, “the tension between freedom and necessity is vividly played out in the lives of women”. However, in search of her own freedom and individuality, she finds herself right in the middle of conventions. She rejects all her suitors for she is in search of her freedom ‘to experience the world’. Therefore, she chooses to define her own self rather than being defined by others.

Ralph's role is very important in exploring the Isabel's conflict which will eventually take the form of self-reliance. He is the first name appears in interpreting Isabel differently with double dose of expectations. On the one hand, it seems he appreciates her. He becomes the voice of Henry James, believing that she is "...a fine free nature"; on the other hand, he is not sure "what was she going to do with herself?" Ralph reminds himself that doing is "irregular, for with most women one had no occasion to ask it. Most women did with themselves nothing at all; they waited, in attitudes more or less gracefully passive, for a man to come that way and furnish them with a new destiny" (*Portrait* 87). Neither Ralph nor Isabel knows what new plot has been written for her. However, economic sense of 'independent' is obvious throughout the text. Ralph decides to see that Isabel has money so that she will be "able to express this fondness fro her own way because she is well off" (Bell 773). Ralph explores his feelings about the 'economic sense of independent' by saying that "I call people rich when they're able to meet the requirements of their imagination" (*Portrait* 261). Thus, Ralph asks his father who is in deathbed to leave half of his inheritance.

This inheritance shifts the light on Isabel's conflict between her freedom or being a part of society. The main reason for Ralph to see Isabel economically free is that, through this way, Isabel will not have to sacrifice her freedom for a conventional marriage and instead, she will seek to find her own potential. Money may not be an abstract to shape the future of one who has it but Ralph is able to think of what money will prevent Isabel from doing. "If she has an easy income she'll never have to marry for a support. That's what I want cannily to prevent. She wishes to be free, and your bequest [Ralph's father - Mr. Touchett-] will make her free" (*Portrait* 261). Ralph, in his illness, cannot "throw himself into life' as he informs Isabel who, in contrast, desires to experience life. Therefore, Ralph's faith in Isabel turns into such a heavy burden in the form of 70,000 pounds for Isabel. Isabel, however, is filled with a certain

amount of fear because “A large fortune means freedom, and I’m afraid of that. It’s such a fine thing, and one should make such a good use of it...I’m not sure it’s not a greater happiness to be powerless” (*Portrait* 320). This inner thought is a clear evidence underlines Isabel’s dilemma about what she really wants; to be free or to be a part of convention.

Although Ralph’s description of his cousin earlier in the book is very flattering, for Isabel, ironically, he is wrong in his judgment of her. His regarding Isabel in his eyes that are perhaps too bright is probably the most effective cause for the disappointment of Isabel’s portrait as an epitome of free-self. Ralph provides Isabel with his words:

‘You’ve answered my question’ he said at last. ‘You’ve told me what I wanted.

I’m greatly obliged to you.

It seems to me I’ve told you very little.

You’ve told me the great thing: that the world interests you and that you want to throw yourself into it.

Her silvery eyes shone a moment in the dusk. I’ve never said that.

I think you meant it. Don’t repudiate it. It’s so fine!

I don’t know what you’re trying to fasten upon me, for I’m not in the least an adventurous spirit.’ (*Portrait* 265).

As time passes, Isabel’s imagination of freedom recovers, and she pictures her future “by the light of her hopes, her fears, her fancies, her ambitions, her predilections...She lost herself in a maze of visions; the fine things to be done by a rich, independent, generous girl who took a large human view of occasions and obligations were sublime in the mass” (*Portrait* 321). The money, contends Millicent Bell, “increases her sense of a great of potential from some still

unchosen action, but one which escapes the plot of female hood” (773). That is to say, through the money Isabel inherits, she can have the chance to exercise her freedom, not feeling under obligation to marry a rich man to survive. Isabel illustrates this idea as she “made up her mind that to be rich was a virtue because it was to be able to do and to do could only be sweet. It was a graceful contrary of the stupid side of weakness – especially the feminine variety” (*Portrait* 301).

Yet, Isabel’s vagueness, her reluctance to ‘objectify her feelings by action’, also alludes to her struggle to be clear in her feelings. The declarations she makes on behalf of her ‘freedom’ convey this idea better. Ralph reveals her ‘anti-deterministic’ personality: “I don’t believe you allow things to be settled for you”. She replies, “Oh, yes; if they’re settled as I like them” (*Portrait* 22-23). This suggests, again, that Isabel thinks, she knows what she wants. She was “always planning her own development” (Bell 775). But, there is no certain sign of these plans. When she rejects Lord Warburton, she thinks, “What view of life, what design upon fate, what conception of happiness, had she that pretended to be larger than these large, these fabulous occasions? If she wouldn’t do such a thing as that then she must do great things, she must do something greater” (*Portrait* 156). Getting impatient to see how Isabel will justify her declining of those proposals through her future decisions, Ralph keeps observing Isabel with improving attention. He becomes more satisfied and content in his decision to help Isabel financially because her rejecting those proposals, for Ralph, is clear symptoms of Isabel’s desire to control her destiny in full.

Ralph’s faith in Isabel is finally consumed completely when Isabel decides to get married to Gilbert Osmond. The two cousins who shared their lives so intimately since their first meeting



loose their connection after this marriage. Here Ralph describes the portrait of Isabel correctly:

‘I had treated myself to a charming vision of your future...I had amused myself with planning out a high destiny for you. There was to be nothing of this sort in it. You were not to come down so easily or so soon...It hurts me,’ said Ralph audaciously, ‘hurts me as if I had fallen myself!’ (*Portrait* 265).

In her perpetual quest in finding her self within the captivity of her marriage, reader’s appreciation and admiration of Isabel is replaced with the feeling of pity now. Scudder concedes that, Isabel’s marriage is “a noble pity takes the place of frank admiration” (666). However, he says, it is difficult for the reader to keep this admiration for Isabel. Osmond “had told her he loved conventional, but there was a sense in which this seemed a noble declaration. In that sense, that of the love of harmony and order and decency and of all the stately offices of life, she went with him freely...”(*Portrait* 359). With this marriage, she simply disappoints everyone around her. “The irony of Isabel’s fate hinged on her thinking herself unconventional and generous in making a marriage that actually caused her to be” as Ralph states, “ground in the very mill of the conventional” by a Europeanized dilettante with fraudulent pretensions to unworldliness”( Strout 65). “After a little, she began to see...” and this leads her to search a way to fulfil her desire of being free.

In her conflict between her freedom and marriage, one wonders, then, why Isabel chooses to marry Osmond whose ideal was “...a conception of high prosperity and propriety, of the aristocratic life...” (*Portrait* 361). He treats everyone around himself as an object, as one of his possessions in his house. Even his daughter, Pansy, he feels, is merely an object that he

owns as he sends her to the convent to raise her as he wishes. Then, one wonders, why does Isabel fail to see her tragic end in this marriage? William Veeder maintains that the ending of James' novel is difficult for reader whose satisfaction is not fulfilled because "...wish fulfilment proves finally incompatible with fairy tale." Veeder continues his discussion as follows: "If James was writing a story book romance, the rich princess would marry her prince charming and lives happily ever after. Instead Isabel marries disastrously. To understand how such an anti-fairy tale can function...as a wish-fulfilment for Henry James, we must understand why his protagonist chooses a prince un-charming" (742).

It is Isabel's Emersonian view of life that prompts her in her resistance to the "common" opinions of others around her, and leads her to choose to marry Osmond. This is how Isabel's melodramatic journey to her self-reliance starts. So far, our admiration for Isabel's courage is at its peak point. Still, she has the impression of a strong-willed woman, believing in her free will. She defies the society and its rules, does not take any advice from her friends about what she wants to do. She pursues her dreams, of being a confident, independent individual. Yet she fails to see that once she allows herself to be trapped into this marriage, she also loses to accomplish in her free will to act as a free individual as she has always aimed. That is the reason Horace Scudder defines Isabel as an "...individual...in the painting, one may fairly take her as representative of womanly life today. The fine purpose of her freedom, the resolution with which she seeks to be the maker of her destiny..." (65).

Although she fails in her marriage, Isabel's Emersonian self sustains and nourishes her and "helps her develop a strong independent character" (Tanner 195). Isabel marries Osmond because he is the representation of 'self-existence' for Isabel (Bell 772). "Who and what then is Mr. Gilbert Osmond?" asks Caspar. Isabel answers: "...Nobody and nothing but a very

good and very honourable man. He's not in business...He's not rich; he's not known anything in particular." (*Portrait* 279). Osmond says to her "go everywhere, do everything, get everything out of life...be triumphant." He may be a type easily definable as Ralph thinks when he terms him "sterile dilettante" (*Portrait* 71). He is, as Bell observes, 'the 'Byronic hero-villain...bored, indolent, aloof, misanthropic...' (772); or in Veeder's words, he is, "the quintessence of absence, the essential nullity" (365). However, Isabel thinks of him "as the first gentleman in Europe...and that indeed was the reason she had married" (360). When Ralph objects Isabel in marrying Osmond, Isabel retorts "What's the matter with Mr.Osmond's type, if it be one? His being so independent, so individual, is what I most see in him...I am marrying a nonentity...a person who has none of Lord Warburton's great advantages, or position, or reputation, nor brilliant belongings of any sort. It is the total absence of all these things that pleases me" (*Portrait* 34). In this respect, Isabel's marriage to Osmond can also be considered as an outcome of her strict Emersonian self. She echoes the words of Emerson who wrote in his "Self-Reliance":

What I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people think. This rule, equally arduous in actual and in intellectual life, may serve for the whole distinction between greatness and meanness. It is harder because you will always find those who think they know what your duty better than you know it. It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own..."(417).

Another reason prompting Isabel to marry Osmond is the money she inherits. This contributes to her dilemma whether she should marry Osmond or not. Isabel doesn't "know anything about money.". She has nothing but the crumbs of that feast to live on, and she doesn't really know how meager they are"(*Portrait* 18). Adherence to this statement, Isabel, besides the

needs of loving and being loved, also needs someone who knows what to do with her money and can take the burden away from her shoulders. “At bottom her money had been a burden, had been on her mind, which was filled with the desire to transfer the weight of it to some conscience, to some prepared respectable. What would lighten her own conscience more effectually than to make it over to the man with the best taste in the world?” (*Portrait* 358). She even thinks about giving the money to a hospital or a charitable institution to feel much better with her money. There is no delicacy, for Isabel, inheriting seventy thousand pounds. Osmond “would use her fortune in a way that would make her think better of it...” In other words, the delicacy for Isabel is “to marry Gilbert Osmond and bring him such a portion” (*Portrait* 119). Therefore, she prefers to entrust her responsibility of handling her money, in turn her freedom, to Osmond. In short, Osmond will do her doing for her. Consequently, in Millicent Bell’s words, “if he [Osmond] is guilty of regarding her as an object, she is guilty, also, of thinking of him as an instrument” (768).

Veeder offers another perspective for Isabel’s free self. Osmond knows that she is not what she seems to be. That is why, she thinks, Osmond is ashamed of her. “When one had a wife who gave one that sensation there was nothing left but to hate her” (*Portrait* 465). He argues that it is her ‘non-conformist nature’ as a woman that irritates Osmond. Isabel has the urge “to act for which she is hopelessly unprepared. It is no wonder that her first reactions are depression and restlessness and that, startled into premature action, she seems to be “a conventional and traditional” (Baym 631). She “accuses him [Osmond] of nothing... She knew of no wrong he had done; he was not violent, he was not cruel: she simply believed he hated her” (*Portrait* 190). Surprisingly, Isabel still “feels a passionate wish to give him a pleasant surprise...” (*Portrait* 363). This is because not being aware of the manipulation of Madame Merle, she assumes that she decided to marry Osmond on her free will. However,

deep down, she has still doubts about her marriage. When Henrietta asks to Isabel; “What does he do to you?” and Isabel responds: “He does nothing. But he doesn’t like me” (*Portrait* 284). On the one hand, she pretends that Osmond’s despising her has no great importance to her. On the other hand, “She had no opinions-none that she would not have been eager to sacrifice in the satisfaction of feeling herself loved” (*Portrait* 43). This proves Isabel’s conflict, reflecting her ambivalent, indecisive, restless state of her mind. However, it is still through the motivation of Isabel’s confidence in herself that she tries to ignore her conflict within herself.

By marrying a non-entity, Isabel is engaged in the attempt to define herself, but as Millicent Bell puts it “no fixed image emerges from this play of perceptions – though in the end, it may be said, she does for a moment become something else than herself, the generic type she has resisted, the “portrait of a lady” (Bell 752). Four men love her, however she chooses the worst; so she will be punished both by the ‘well-intentioned secret plot’ of Ralph who endows her with money and a villain plot of Merle to manipulate her into this marriage. Isabel has her first big disillusionment, thinking that “her first free action was to put herself into” this small marriage cage with her own free will. The outcome from this statement is, as James stresses throughout the novel, that wishing for independence is just like the other dreams: “when its substance is all romantic...and will meet the same defeat in real life” (Baym 632).

Isabel’s entrapment within her is revealed again at the point of Lord Warburton’s reappearance in her life, for he “comes with a renewed challenge” (Bloom 31). The pressure and expectation again force Isabel to choose between her duty and her inner wish. Lord Warburton’s proposal is, this time, for the hand of Pansy Osmond, although Pansy loves another man, Edward Rosier. Lord Warburton is not meant to pressure Isabel, but with this

marriage, he simply hopes to be 'close to Isabel'. Yet Osmond, greedy for wealth and 'the vast riches of lordship', insists that she should help this marriage happen or else she would be the one who prevented Pansy's future for a better life. Once Madame Merle is involved in this ambiguous game of pressure on Isabel, she finally finds herself in a gap of logic that she cannot fill. She is right in the middle of her dilemma, once again, to do whether her husband or her heart expects her to do. Osmond's sister, Countess Gemini paints Isabel's portrait in this imprisonment:

'My poor Isabel, you're not simple enough.'

'No, I'm not simple enough,' said Isabel... 'What do you wish me to know?...!'

'In your place I should have guessed it ages ago. Have you never really suspected?'

'I've guessed nothing. What should I have suspected? I don't know what you mean'.

That's because you've such a beastly pure mind. I never saw a woman with such a pure mind!' cried the Countess. (*Portrait* 269).

She is in another attempt to define her portrait now. Clearly, simplicity and pureness of mind do not match each other for the Countess. These two qualities may seem similar, yet they are in opposition. This emphasizes Isabel's deep 'contradictory and paradoxical self'. At last, Isabel must face 'the task of rendering her self-portrait'. She challenges Osmond to return to Gardencourt to be with Ralph in his deathbed. Yet, Isabel's portrait is still unfinished. She defies Osmond to see her cousin, but she will not violate 'the sacrament of her marriage' and run away with Caspar.

Being stuck in the darkness of not knowing how to act, she eventually begins to see that the real disagreement of Isabel is not with Osmond, who has "put the lights one by one", but with

her self. “Isabel realizes that she is not what she really is because “she had been hypocritical...she had too many ideas for herself...one could not pluck them up by the roots, though of course one might suppress them, be careful not to utter them”(Portrait 359-363). This awareness in judging herself is probably one of the major effects leading Isabel to her Emersonian self-reliance. In her self-journey, her way of looking at herself and life changes into a more modest and realistic way.

The question is ‘why it took so long for Isabel to see her tragic end?’ Because, Poirier concedes, there is no true version of evil in Emersonian individualism. In this sense, again, Isabel can be considered as an Emersonian consciousness because she was so naïve that she failed to see the true vision of evil as represented by Osmond. As Poirier observes, the most interesting irony of the novel “is the degree to which Osmond is a mock version of the transcendentalist”. This leads us to another suggestion that Isabel “whose mental processes are authentically Emersonian” should see an image of herself in the man she marries” (Poirier 359). Thus, Isabel is an Emersonian consciousness because she was too blind to see the real nature of Osmond until it is too late and this is related to the lack of true vision of evil that James found in Emerson. In this sense, Isabel, then, is the victim of Emersonian aspiration. Bloom defines Isabel as having “her own version of Emerson’s...grand style of aspiration”, that seems to warn Isabel about her ominous future;

Life only avails, not the having lived. Power ceases in the instant of repose; it resides in the moment of transition from a past to a new state, in the shooting of the gulf, in the darting to an aim. (“Self-Reliance”)

Harold Bloom agrees with Priour on the point that, like Emerson, “she [Isabel] supposedly lacks that grand New-Critical... virtue – a Vision of Evil”. Being transcendental, Isabel’s slip is not just a mere consequence of her marriage since her desire for her ‘aspiring self’ remains until the end of the book. For Bloom, inherited systems of morality in the book – Christian or humanistic - are not relevant with Isabel’s Emersonian self. Bloom adds, “Isabel is the heroine of the American, post-Christian version of the protestant will; she is the heiress of all the ages...What matters is the integrity of her will. For her, love entails her conferring of esteem upon others, and accepting back from them only her own authentic self-esteem” (*Portrait* 12). In other words, what is important to her Emersonian self is not what others dictate her to do, but her own self-esteem which “...prevents any kind of shadow from falling upon her ego” (Bloom 14).

Isabel’s first connection with reality occurs when she begins to see the true colour of Osmond. Earlier in the novel, Osmond, for Isabel, was the representation of ‘self-existence.’ However, Isabel finally sees that Osmond is actually a traditional man in every sense. For him, tradition is the best thing in the world. He refers to himself as the “convention itself.”(*Portrait* 265) As a father, he sends his daughter, Pansy to a convent “...to see what you’d [the nurse] make of her...a daughter in whom you will have nothing but contentment” (*Portrait* 199). His impression on Isabel was “...so large, so enlightened, so perfectly” that as an “honest man and a gentleman” Osmond “took himself so seriously; it was something appealing...” (*Portrait* 359). In his conversation with Isabel, Osmond explains his strict traditional values attached to young girls who “...should be kept out of the world” (*Portrait* 243). She could see Osmond “was ineffably ashamed of her. What did he think of her - that she was base, vulgar, and ignoble?”(*Portrait* 362). For Osmond, a woman should “operate in his favour...he had expected his wife to feel with him and for him, to enter into his opinions, his ambitions, his



preferences” (*Portrait* 362). However, Isabel’s Emersonian self reveals itself during her marriage as well. Throughout the novel, she proves in different ways that, she can easily override the conventions if she wants. Although Osmond does not approve Isabel’s visit to see Ralph at a hotel, nor her going to England to see him on his death-bed, she does what she wants to do because she has “a mind of her own”( *Portrait* 362).

When Isabel understands that she is deceived in her marriage to Osmond, Ralph advises her to ignore what others say. When Ralph is dying due to his illness, Isabel feels a deep attachment towards Ralph and she needs to “let her sorrow possess her”, and “to melt together into his [Ralph’s] present pain”. Ralph, even in this situation, tells her; “don’t mind people...I think I’m glad to leave people”. When Isabel asks him “Is it true – is it true? ... that all [love} I have is yours” he turns his head away and then replies, “Ah don’t speak of that – that was not happy” (*Portrait* 575). She draws her strength from her Emersonian self who encourages her not to surrender pain – not even to the painful truth of love, and she responds:

Here on my knees, with you dying in my arms, I’m happier than I’ve been for a long time. And I want you to be happy – not to think of anything sad; only to feel that I’m near you and I love you. Why should there be pain? In such hours as this what have we to do with pain? That’s not the deepest thing; there is something deeper”. (*Portrait* 623).

James says: “Of all liberties, the one she herself found sweetest was the liberty to forget.” (*Portrait* 21) What James means, says Veeder, is that the real threat for us is not external but internal. He continues to say that “We will die even if no one will kill us. Thus for a person obsessed with vulnerability, the only way to deal with the fear of being killed is to kill it. This

means to kill the self... Isabel Archer expresses Henry James's desire to escape from suffering altogether." (743) According to this explanation, Osmond is Isabel's solution to kill her self and "...not to worry-not to strive nor struggle. To resign myself" (*Portrait* 24). In other words, "what Gilbert offers her is what she wants, negation" (Veeder, 743). This is the common approach for the woman situation in woman stories. Baym puts this situation in two words: "rescue story."

An intelligent and attractive young girl, who is independent and wishes to remain so, is rescued from this false conception of an appropriate feminine life, by love and marriage. When she falls in love, the natural impulses denied by her desire for independence assert themselves. She finds independence incompatible with a woman's way of living." (629)

The dialogue in chapter nineteen between Madame Merle and Isabel is essential to understand how Isabel sees 'self' which contradicts with that of Madame Merle.

"Am I what I wear?" asks Isabel: "Am I what I appear to society? Am I to be made society's type or am I my own unique self?"

Madame Merle retorts, as it were, "Are you, my dear child, intending to go forth naked into the world? One's self" Madame Merle says, ' – for other people – is one's expression of one's self; and one's house, one's clothes, the book one reads, the company one keeps – these things are all expressive.' Isabel replies: I think just the other way. I don't know whether I succeed in expressing myself, but I know that nothing else expresses me... Nothing that belongs to me is any

measure of me; everything is on the contrary limit, a barrier, and a perfectly arbitrary one..." (*Portrait* 110).

Isabel's Emersonian self becomes evident in this conversation. She hears the voice of her own self, and rejects everything that goes against this independent self. According to F.O. Matthiessen, Isabel "lives ideally and entertains an imaginary world of her own to project an ideal 'Emersonian American self'" (19). And she does this successfully. The over 'anti-Emersonianism' of Madame Merle's view of the self contrasts with Isabel's self. According to Madame Merle "self is determined by an envelope of circumstances". That is to say, one does not create herself, but she/he is created by society. As Robert Shulman contends, society "penetrates the consciousness of those in subordinate classes, who give them their willing if often uneasy support" (3). However, Isabel believes 'in the integrity of the self'. This discovery will lead her, at the end of the novel, to return to the self 'she has defined by all her previous action and acquisitions" (*Buitenhuis* 111).

Leon Edel emphasizes James's representing of 'self-reliance' through Isabel Archer; "...what would Isabel do with her new-found privileges? Where would she turn? How behave? He was seeking answers to the transcendentalism of Concord: his novel is... American "self reliance" (8). Towards the end, Isabel realizes she cannot ignore the ominous signs ringing her tragic end. Yet, she does not want to choose the easy way and escape. As Scudder stresses, Isabel "seems to be going down as in a diving-bell into the very secrets of her nature"(667) for she sees the deceit and the entrapment; but she also sees that she has made a choice. Her dilemma is still there: She knows that she is not happy with Osmond's portrayal as a man with rigid rules, yet, Isabel feels, "...this was no great insolence on the part of a man so accomplished and a husband originally at least so tender" (*Portrait* 363). "She remembered the first sign"

that Osmond gave about himself. “It had been like the bell that was to ring up the curtain upon the real drama of their life. He had said to her one day that she had too many ideas...before their marriage...she had not noticed it...” This is her failure in noticing that “he had really meant it” (*Portrait* 359). Within this confusion, however, the first major fact Isabel discovers about herself is that; it is no one but herself who allows Osmond to entrap her in “the house of darkness...She seemed shut up with an odour of mould and decay” (*Portrait* 361). As James writes, “She could live it over again, the incredulous terror with which she had taken the measure of her dwelling. Between those four walls she had lived ever since; since they were to surround her for the rest of her life. It was the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation...” (*Portrait* 306). The crucial question here to ask is why, then, does she insist to live in this suffocating house? Ironically, this is because Isabel is under the spell of Osmond’s adherence to tradition and, because she “was brought up on a different system” (*Portrait* 243). In other words, Isabel and Osmond have different ideas, different understandings, and different desires and this attracts Isabel because it appeals both to her desire to be free and her need to be a part of convention which creates a balance between her self and integration. James points out this difference as follows:

Her notion of aristocratic life was simply the union of great knowledge with great liberty...But for Osmond it was altogether a thing of forms, a conscious, calculated attitude. He was fond of the old, the consecrated, the transmitted...He had an immense esteem for tradition.(361)

Within this gloomy picture, no one knows what exactly Isabel will do, including herself. She transforms from a young woman who “want(s) to get a general impression of life...”(*Portrait* 41) to a young woman torn between self and duty. Her complex issue is a tough challenge

for everyone since she does not give a clear-cut answer what she is thinking. In this sense, the whole narration composes itself around the question Goodwood asks: why does she “...think of sinking back into that misery, of going to open your mouth to that poisoned air?” (*Portrait* 489). Out of his vast flash of his mind, he unveils his feelings: “How can you pretend that you are not heart-broken? You don’t know where to turn. Now it is that I want you to think of me...You don’t know where to turn; turn to me!” (*Portrait* 487). Isabel knows that Caspar offers a ‘perpetuated inequality’ because, in William Veeder’s words, “the absence of any truly egalitarian viewpoint characterizes Caspar’s empty rhetoric” (*Portrait* 746). Caspar continuous to say:

Were we born to rot in our misery, were we born to be afraid?  
I never knew you afraid!” Isabel is in an endless torture, stuck  
between oppression and freedom “...as if he [Goodwood] were  
pressing something that hurt her!”

She cannot resist to what has been said to her. His words are going  
deep and burn her soul because he tells the truth. She cannot free  
herself to what she really wants: to escape, away, as far as she can.  
Yet, she knows she cannot. She is simply imprisoned in her own  
world. “The world is very small” she says. (*Portrait* 489)

It is not only her courage to try to experience everything she can in a time period with more,  
compared to our present world, rigid norms and rules, that makes her challenging but also

James has also given some ironic clues about Isabel's last decision earlier in the book. Isabel, James notes, had "a certain nobleness of imagination", yet, Isabel is still very vulnerable to "the danger of keeping up the flag after the place has surrendered: a sort of behaviour so crooked as to be almost a dishonour to the flag." From this perspective, questioning Isabel's return to Rome might seem like dishonouring the flag and expose her "deep-seated fear of passion". In other words, why Isabel goes back to her miserable marriage might seem like reflecting her blind devotion to conventionalities. However, this is not the case. Isabel's "magnanimity, though magnificent, has a dark side. Three good men love Isabel...but she will have none of them, for they all entrench on her 'freedom'. But it finds itself in accepting a miserable marriage as a chosen fate" (Strout 412).

At the end of the novel, Isabel has to make a decision; whether to honour her marriage vows and preserve social propriety or have a freer and probably happier life, possibly with Caspar Goodwood. In the end, she finally realizes that, in Brownell's words, she "... has wrecked her life most miserably" (663). Although her going back to her miserable marriage might be considered as Isabel's inability to act for her personal freedom, this is indeed Isabel's spiritual transition. In his article, "Isabel Archer and the Affronting of Plot" Millicent Bell makes an important comment on Isabel's last renunciation: "The act of choice is more important than the thing chosen" (773). In other words, in a condition free of any constraint, Isabel's choice to go back to her marriage is the outcome of her Emersonian self-awareness. Richard Poirier summarizes best James's relation to Emerson as he states that;

The relationship between James and Emerson is important within the larger fact that both of them subscribe to attitudes which are discernibly American...from their

Emersonian echoes, *The Portrait of a Lady* could have brought the theme of aspiration...”(8).

Considering how unhappy Isabel is in her marriage, then, one may strongly resent and be saddened by Isabel’s return to Osmond. However the ‘great enigma’ remains: While one may understand the spiritual meaning of Isabel’s decision, how can one approve her return to Osmond emotionally? Harold Bloom indicates, “her return violates our sense of fairness and increases our distance from her, despite our intense caring” (10).

William Veeder argues that by ending the novel on the morning as Isabel heads for Rome, rather than the next day when she would have already arrived Rome, and by leaving Isabel ‘suspended between departure and arrival, poised between separation and commitment’, James intends to reflect the conflict and tension that will lead Isabel to her ‘renewed Emersonian self’ (265). The denouement of this complication is that Isabel is neither with Caspar and Henrietta – ‘represent the bondage of advocated adultery’ - nor with Gilbert and Pansy – ‘represent the bondage of conventional domesticity’ – Isabel is alone, lingering somewhere between existence and non-existence; she is ‘neither exposed nor dead’. As Veeder puts it, “her train ride is a timeless suspension” (746). In her railway coach, Isabel experiences the same state of mind on her ride out to England:

To cease utterly, to give it all up and not know anything more – this idea was as sweet as the vision of a cool bath in a marble tank, in a darkened chamber, in a hot land. She had moments, indeed, in her journey from Rome, which were almost as good as being dead. She sat in the corner, so motionless, so passive simply with the sense of being carried, so detached from hope and regret, that if her spirit was haunted with sudden

pictures, it might have been the spirit disembarrassed of the flesh. There was nothing to regret now – that was all over. (*Portrait* 53)

Slovač Zizek makes an important contribution to the understanding of Isabel's Emersonian self-awareness. He argues that Isabel goes back not because of "the moral pressure exerted on her by the notion of what is expected of a woman in her position". This, continuous to say Zizek, "would not be in itself sufficient and strong enough if it were not sustained by another fear and apprehension..."(115). Isabel knows that she was manipulated into this marriage; but it does not change the fact that she made the decision out of her own free act. Isabel "agreed to be his [Osmond's] wife before the world, and this she will be while she has breath in her body. For better or worse. That was to be a lady in her time" (Auchincloss, 726). She is afraid of accepting, "...of demonstrating her private failure to the world". She knows she has to suffer the consequences of the action she has taken herself. "When a woman has made such a mistake, there was only one way to repair it - to accept it...Isabel stays because of her commitment to the bond of her word, and she stays because she is unwilling to abandon what she still sees as a decision made out of her sense of independence" (725-726). Zizek illuminates Isabel's case by defining the concept of sacrificing: "At its most elementary, sacrifice relies on the notion of exchange: I offer to the Other something precious to me in order to get back from the Other something even more vital to me" (115).

For Isabel, this predominance of the exchange is between her happiness and her independence. She has to sacrifice something to suppress the guiltiness imposed on her by the manipulation for this marriage. This is the power of being fully aware of the repressed truth and of facing it which is clearly signalled by Isabel's preference of her inner peace as the true



reason for her return to Osmond. Isabel sacrifices her happiness over her independence, not only as a woman, but also as a human being. Zizak concludes as follows:

Isabel is "the hostage of the word." it is wrong to interpret this act as a sacrifice bearing witness to the proverbial "feminine masochism"... to leave Osmond would simply equal depriving herself of her autonomy. While men sacrifice themselves for a thing (country, freedom, honour), only women are able to sacrifice themselves for nothing. (115)

Finally, Isabel perceives the whole picture of her "horrible life", sees "a lamp in the darkness" and this is what Isabel needs: to see in the darkness (*Portrait* 353). "When she saw this rigid system close about her, that sense of darkness and suffocation...She had resisted; at first very humorously, ironically, tenderly; then as the situation grew more serious, eagerly...She had pleaded the cause of freedom...of other longings..." (*Portrait* 361). Her fault was to fail in seeing the "full moon" in Osmond. One mistake cannot compensate another one. Isabel knew that she desperately needed help in order to overcome her miserable marriage and run away from her husband since before she has "seen only half his nature then, as one saw the disk of the moon when it was partly masked by the shadow of the earth. She saw the full moon now – she saw the whole man" (*Portrait* 357). Once she realizes her biggest failure in life, Isabel's journey to her self-discovery starts. By choosing what to do with her own free will, she becomes aware that she can attain her self-freedom and triumph as an independent woman. "She listened a little...she had not known where to turn; but she knew now. There was a very straight path.": the path that will lead her to her true self. As William Veeder puts it;

The ride back, however, is different. Art assures both that Isabel's train will never arrive and that her acts of commitment to life, love, and relationships – to Pansy, on behalf of marriage – will suffice as a rejection of suicide and a commitment to life. Like Ralph, she can do without people, yet unlike Ralph, she is saved from the death feared by Henry James and us all". (747)

As a believer in self-reliance, Isabel quests her mistake after she realizes. One may ask; does she fail in her quest too as she failed massively in her marriage to Osmond? She had wanted help..." She is alone, and she needs a place where she could feel she belongs to. . Her marriage is like walking "...through the darkness" and she needs a way out; a place where she fulfils her sense of belonging, to attain a conclusion out of her complicated dilemma. Poirier, reading the novel as a Jamesian comedy, gives an informing as well as a convincing answer. For Poirier, Isabel's failure in her marriage is 'a great defeat' according to Emersonian self and this is unacceptable because Americans "always demand victory". He continues as follows:

James had a very tenuous and unorganised sense of the connection between sexual psychology, on the one hand, and, on the other, the desire for freedom and death. He had a very clear and conscious idea, however, about the relationship between freedom and death...What Caspar offers her in the garden is an old call for action in freedom: (725)

In possession of her independence, she walks away from the 'garden' of her dreams and gets lost in London fog: "The world lay all before her – she could do whatever she chose." What is more interesting in Isabel's last act is that there is no promise of happiness through suffering.

This is, for Bloom, “absolutely within the logic of her Emersonian idealism, so much so that the logic takes its vengeance.” One recalls a scene at Gardencourt when Isabel’s aunt says, “You’re too fond of your own ways”: “Yes, I think I’m very fond of them. But I always want to know the things one shouldn’t do.” “So as to do them?” asks her aunt. “So as to choose” said Isabel (*Portrait* 93). The visionary and melodramatic scene between her and Caspar opens up this aspect of the novel vividly implicating Isabel’s true freedom achieved through her self-awareness. Caspar says: “The world’s all before us – and the world is very big, “a truth that Isabel knows better than does her perpetually frustrated suitor:

“The world is very small”, she said ...but it was not what she meant. The world, in truth, had never seemed so large; ...to take the form of a mighty sea, where she floated in fathomless waters. She had wanted help, and here was help... I know not whether she believed everything she he said...she felt herself sink and sink... she [Isabel] had moved through the darkness (for she saw nothing) and reached the door. She had not known where to turn; but she knew now. There was a very straight path” (*Portrait* 489)

This straight path will lead Isabel to her renewed Emersonian awareness. ‘The erotic imagery of this superb encounter’ in Bloom’s words, ‘is oceanic’. This oceanic scene is like a mighty sea, fathomless water in Isabel’s head following ‘a train of images before they sink’. As a reference to ‘Transcendentalism’, Isabel defines her situation as “you think me the child of my circumstances: I make my circumstance”, including “my own misery”.

Emerson in his “Self-Reliance” concedes, “It is only as a man puts off all foreign support and stands alone that I see him to be strong and to prevail” (169). As Isabel embarks on her ‘free exploration’ of life by returning to Rome, Henrietta says she is drifting rather to “some great

mistake' that she is not enough 'in contact with reality' with the 'toiling, striving' world. Ralph tells Isabel that she has too much conscience'. Although all her friends agree on the point that she should not go back to her 'miserable' marriage, Isabel, in Matthiessen's words, "proceeds to do the wrong thing for the right reasons" (595). She has a special pride in marrying Osmond, since she feels that she is not only taking but also giving; she feels, as Gary Kuchar concedes, "too the release of transferring some of the burden of her inheritance to another conscience..." (79). However, Isabel chooses, in Emerson's words, to "put off foreign support" and chooses to "stand alone" and face with her own greatest failure on her own.

But much is involved than that – "James's whole conception of the discipline of suffering" (Kucek 79). Isabel's link with humanity is through her acceptance of suffering. Her reflection that "she should not escape, she should last" becomes "she should never escape, she should last to the end" (Matthiessen 596). Her intensified spiritual transcendence is emphasized through the lines James wrote: "Her spirit rose ... She reflected that things change but little, while people change so much" (*Portrait* 485). Isabel is, after all, "a firm daughter of the Puritans, not in her thought but in her moral integrity" (Kuchar 81). Again, Nina Baym, in her essay "Revision and Thematic Change in *The Portrait of a Lady* states that: "Isabel's awareness replaces her faculty of feeling...; she responds with her mind rather than her emotions"(623).

Isabel's action in the end is parallel with what she always wanted do to: exercise her own free will. In other words, she "asserts her idealism of self not in innocence but in full knowledge of the world." (Bloom, 10). Seen in this light, then Isabel's self-creation becomes a 'form of indifference' to the fact that returning to Rome will cost her life. This is, as Strout interprets,

the freedom, as the condition of self-creation with an Emersonian wish "...in her case...the legacy of a transcendentalist enthusiasm for the possibilities of free expression." (66). This is Isabel Archer's journey to her self-reliance. The melody of her self-reliance is heard, not only at the end of the novel, but beyond it, by Isabel in her miserable marriage with Osmond, who no longer loves her and whom Isabel no longer loves. Yet she will choose to be the compass of this fathomless sea. She has been through

[...] the genesis and maturation of a planet, its poise and orbit, the bended tree recovering itself from the strong wind, the vital resources of every animal and vegetable, are demonstrations of the self-sufficing and therefore self-relying soul".  
(Emerson Self-Reliance 159)

Isabel's defiance the social role as a mere "translation" (*Portrait* 38) of other women and seeking, instead, her freedom always creates disapprovals in her society. However, there is another dilemma for the reader to decide whether Isabel is the victim or not. As regards to the cruel scheme that Madame Merle and Osmond drag Isabel into, the answer is yes, she is the victim of the plot. In addition, considering Ralph Touchett, inducing his father to leave a fortune to Isabel to see what she will do with "a little wind in her sails" is another reflection of the matter suggesting that Isabel is the victim of another outline. However, "the person who really ties the cords of Isabel's fate is Isabel herself" (*Auchincloss* 724). Thus, Isabel's situation is the representation of the constant battle between the true nature of individualism and society.

Yet, James Isabel is still an epitome of Emersonian self, seeking for her freedom. In light of these explanations, it remains not arbitrary to say that Isabel Archer, as exposed to all such

criticisms, is one of the unforgettable heroines in American literature. She is the New World woman trying to find her way in the Old World Society. She represent the free-thinking part of American society. She is “vastly superior to most of us, in fineness of sensibility and aspiration, and yet she is one of us, poor in judgement and unlucky where she had seemed luckiest” (Bloom 11). Inconclusive ending of the book suggests that Isabel’s growing awareness will not stop merely just because the novel ends. She remains as a mobile character, continuous to grow in her self.

## CHAPTER II: *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*

### 1.1. Newland's Conflict and His self-awareness: "Let a Man Then Know His Worth" (Emerson)

*To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men...Speak you latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense...*

*Emerson "Self-Reliance"*

Earlier of *The Age of Innocence*, Newland Archer does not give the impression of a self-reliant character. This is the main difference between Newland and Isabel Archer. While Isabel, right from the beginning of the novel, appears as a strong-willed young woman who is determined to do whatever it takes for her freedom, Newland seems a more of a conventional character. On the surface, Newland and Isabel are not very consistent with each other because Newland's conventional side and his conflict with his self and society are reflected more evident. However, with a thorough analysis, one can easily see the pivotal similarity between these two characters. What combines Newland with Isabel is that he finally achieves his self-awareness through his conflict and does what he really thinks is the right thing to do at the end of the novel. Newland Archer has the potential to follow his inner voice as an Emersonian self requires. However, in his battle between his self and rules, every time he attempts to resist society in order to be with Ellen, he fails to do so. Finally, he comes to terms with his own limitation and achieves his emotional maturity. In light of this, I would like to analyze Newland Archer's dilemma by giving examples from *The Age of Innocence* and then his gradual self-awareness leading to his self-integrity.

In “Self-Reliance”, Emerson says: “Let a man then know his worth, and keep things under his feet.” He points out that a man should know his worth and admit who he is. In the same way, asserts Emerson, “an individual’s apparently decisions show consistency when that person’s life is examined in its entirety and not in haphazard segments... We must “scorn appearances” and do what is right or necessary”. In this sense, it is important to examine Newland’s dilemma between his self and convention in detail in order to understand how society makes one realize one’s individuality and that it has a greater value on our lives within the controlled mechanism of this social structure. The idea to emphasize here is that whether people act according to society or to their own standards, what is important is why you do it rather than what you do; is it due to your own free will or due to the pressure and fear of society? This chapter intends to answer these questions by analyzing Newland’s conflicts between his inner and outer self with examples from *The Age of the Innocence* and his gradual awareness of his self through this entrapment.

In analyzing the conflict of Emersonian individual and society, *The Age of Innocence* deals directly with themes of duty and desire. In her *No Gifts From Chance: A Biography of Edith Wharton* Shari Benstock says that, the novel “...re-creates a world bound by form and convention” (35). In this intensely researched and impressively through biography, Benstock indicates the importance of self-awareness in achieving self-freedom with relation to Newland Archer in *The Age of Innocence*. The main emphasis in this novel is not of how unhappy and pitiful the life of a young man can be if deprived of personal freedom, but rather to show to what extent depriving one of his liberty can be justified within the confinement of society. Wharton depicts inequalities and frustration caused by the demands of society and the desire to be respected as opposed to personal freedom. Dilemma of integrity and personal freedom explored by Wharton in *The Age of Innocence* suggests more than the pitiful entrapment of Newland Archer. The demands and consequences of duty are laid out before Archer clearly



enough, but the question is how he should respond to them. This gets more complicated by the possibilities of ‘social conspiracy’ and individual fulfillment. Archer’s indecisiveness of whether he should have a life with May Welland or a life with Countess Olenska indicate his strict sense of social responsibility. Archer's son, Dallas says to Newland; "she [May] knew we were safe with you, and always would be, because once, when she asked you to, you'd given up the thing you most wanted" (*Innocence* 359). Here, the question is; ‘Must security be purchased with sacrifice?’ Or is it always right and moral to protect others at the expense of one's happiness? Or is Newland only a puppet, incapable of claiming his romantic fulfillment because his community always imposes what he should do upon him? The answers vary. One may appreciate Newland for he, in the end, ‘upholds his obligations, his duty to wife, children, and society’ or pity him for he misses “the flower of life” . Thus, another important question emerges here: Is duty to one's community more important than duty to oneself? *The Age of Innocence* raises fundamental questions as the following; Is Newland manipulated to do what society wants him to do regardless of his desires or happiness? Is he mastered by convention, tradition, and morality? Or is it Archer's naïveté and his romantic imagination that imprison him? Is he a man of ‘affluence’ or a master of his own fate?

Newland Archer struggles between, in Knights’s words, “integrity and individual freedom”, a man who is tormented by attempting to reconcile his own ideals with social norms. The story of Newland’s eventual self-reliance from an infuriatingly indecisive individual imprisoned by conventions towards a powerful individual who is able to see his own inability to act and finally realizing that he is an “old-fashioned” belongs to his ‘close and structured world’ is certainly a story of individual freedom. His fear for social pressure and “what others might think of him” (*Innocence* 140) imprison him within himself.

Newland's conflict within himself can be considered as a way leading him to his self-awareness. Newland sees himself different from the other convention-bound members of the society. Yet, Wharton unfolds his real nature by describing his acceptance of "the German text of French operas sung by Swedish artists...(and)...translated into Italian for the clearer understanding of English-speaking audiences" (*Innocence* 5). Newland reflects his addiction to conventionality even in his appearance for he parts his hair "with two-silver-backed brushes with his monogram in blue" and he has a gardenia in his buttonhole, which is socially an acceptable flower. Early in the novel, he makes critical observations of the New York society and says he believes that new things unwelcome there and applauds "the freedom of women"; but later he chooses his responsibility for society by marrying May instead of his desire for Ellen. In other words, he sacrifices his personal freedom for a safe and socially comfortable life. This shows that he rigidly and hypocritically adhered to the social codes and manners of the same society. Similar to Isabel, he makes claims to his "intellectual and moral superiority" over the other members of society. It is this characteristic that makes Archer a true innocent. In many ways, he pictures himself standing apart "from his milieu, believing that he is somehow a free agent, less susceptible to the claims of the social world" (Lee, 365). Newland finally understands that his life is subject to powers out of his control, but it is too late.

Newland's adherence to convention and his cowardice show itself first when he goes to St. Augustine where May and her family are having their holiday. His purpose is to convince May to marry him as soon as possible. When May asks him "Is it because you're not certain of continuing to care for me?", Newland answers angrily: "...perhaps – I don't know..." (*Innocence* 146). His real motivation to hasten this marriage is indeed his fear of losing his control over his passion for Ellen and disobeys the rules of conventional society. He is scared of losing the so-called 'respectable' identity given to him by New York society. On one hand,

he does not want to lose Ellen, on the other hand, he does not want to be rejected by society. Stuck between his own personal feelings and convention, he chooses to play by the rules of the society which turns out to be his biggest fallacy. In chapter five, Wharton defines his conflict between himself and society as follows:

Untrained human nature was not frank and innocent; it was full of the twists and defenses of an instinctive guile. And he felt himself oppressed by this creation of factitious purity, so cunningly manufactured by a conspiracy of mothers and aunts and grandmothers and long-dead ancestresses, because it was supposed to be what he wanted, what he had a right to, in order that he might exercise his lordly pleasure in smashing it like an image made of snow. (*Innocence* 43)

Again, when society rejects Ellen, this underlines the rigidity and cruelty of the old conventional people against the “new people, whom New York was beginning to dread” (*Innocence*, 8). Ellen asserts that New York’s code of behaviour is a “blind conformity to tradition – somebody else’s tradition”(179). This society does not welcome those who refuse to obey the social codes. In chapter one, for example, when Ellen presents herself to New York society, she creates whisperings about the way she dressed at the opera. Sillerton Jackson embodies the voice of those conventional people, gasping: “I did not think they would have tried it on”, which means, in other words, The Mingotts should not have let Ellen with her inappropriate and revealing dress come and sat next to them. Newland disapproves this ill-reputed woman sitting next to her fiancée “being exposed to the influence of a young woman so careless of the dictates of Taste” (*Innocence*, 12). In this perspective, one may suggest that unless you are loyal to those established social values, then in Ellen’s words, you are “dead and buried” (*Innocence* 15).

Newland's personal freedom is oppressed by his marriage. In this sense, marriage is perhaps among the most evident social codes imposed upon people in order to keep the stability of established system of society. It is considered a way of market raising the rank of individual, a way for people to fit in the conventional circulation of society. In light of this explanation, it is clear to see that Newland chooses to marry May mainly because he does not want to give up on the social etiquette given to him as a respectable member of society. May Welland is a virgin with no past, dresses in white and carries white lilies representing her innocence. Newland, on the other hand, is not embarrassed to hide his sexual experience with a married woman for two years. His role in this marriage is to educate May, the perfect bride of society, in her social relations, and in the art of "attracting masculine homage while playfully discouraging it" (*Innocence* 239). The implication hidden between the lines is that, had Newland had the courage to dig his vanity deeper, he could have realized that marriage with a wife sexually experienced would be more sophisticated and satisfactory. Squeezed by the demands of conventions, Newland feels safe to act according to the codes of society rather than challenge them.

Newland Archer himself serves as an example for an individual who is structured by the discourse of family. Viewing the preserved traditions of New York society with its "inscrutable totem terrors", "sacred taboos" and cruelty for those who do not fit in, Wharton shows us the impact of family in the "1870s...the customs and ceremonies of a vanishing tribe" (Knights 22). *The Age of Innocence* brings the questions of social process and 'the primacy of patriarchal modern family' (Knights 22). As McLennan puts it, "With the advance of society...the superiority of the male sex must have everywhere tended to establish that system" (7). For Newland, the criteria for the right or wrong for his decisions is his family and the novel takes form around it. Marriage, fatherhood, the role of husband, son, and daughter are all positional: He is, for example, a son, brother and husband, caught in the "bridegroom's

convulsive gesture” (*Innocence* 1162). However, he is not able to break free and defy these established roles imposed upon him when he realizes his entrapment. Being imprisoned, finally, by May’s news of expecting a baby, Knights summarizes Newland’s situation as follows:

His [Newland] role is compounded by his casting as the official voice, the spokesman for Firm and Family, who has to represent the word of all the tribal fathers in the containment of the woman who threatens them, until he even hears himself talking of “our ideas” in a voice that sounds like Mr. Letterblair’s (1103)

Another reason for Newland’s dilemma between convention and his personal freedom is also based on his own affair with Mrs. Thorley Rushworth. His mother says of men’s affairs as “such things happened”. It was “foolish of the man” but “always criminal of the woman”. This is a double standard passed down from mothers, aunts and other female relatives. There are “women we love and respect” and so men marry them, and “women we [men] enjoy and pity” with whom they have affairs. This is Newland’s continuing conflict between considering Ellen as a person who should be respected and be free to divorce or as the woman with whom he desires to have an affair. He decides to convince her not to divorce in order to save her from the censure of New York society. Emerson defines this hypocrisy of society as follows:

Society never advances. It recedes as fast on one side as it gains on the other. It undergoes continual changes; it is barbarous, it is civilized, it is Christianized, it is rich, it is scientific... For every thing that is given something is taken” (*Self-Reliance* 166).

Newland's conflict between his social duties and his passion also appears in choosing the colours of flowers for May and Ellen. He sends white lilies to his fiancée and yellow roses for Ellen. This color is "too strong for his insipid fiancée but perfect for the Countess Olenska's free spirit" (Knights 145). Two boxes of flowers, white and yellow, are for two different women: "With one he would live an orthodox life; with the other he would be free. One seems to lack imagination and original thoughts – a person suitably symbolized by bland, white lilies-of-the-valley – while the other represents the passion and imagination of yellow roses" (Knights 145).

Chapter sixteen points out Newland's entrapment by conventions. When Ellen send him a note asking him to visit her the next day, Newland experiences feelings merged with joy and fear. Instead, he goes to St. Augustine to see May and hasten their marriage. This signals his conflict again for deep inside, he desperately wants to see Ellen; however, he is too scared to go against the conventions. Where he stands now, as a conventional man "... was truth, here was reality, here was the life that belonged to him" and as a man who always "fancied himself so scornful of arbitrary restraints, had been afraid to break away from his desk because of what people might think of ..." (Innocence 140). Again, his conversation with May reveals his dilemma. Assuming that May will stare "blankly at blankness" signifies May's inability to make decisions on her own. When Newland voices his desire to travel with May, she expresses her concern about how to tell this to her family who cannot understand doing things "differently". She asks:

- "Why should we change what is already settled?...We can't behave like people in novels, though, can we?"

- "Why not – why not- why not?"

“She knew very well that they couldn’t, but it was troublesome to have produce a reason” (*Innocence* 82).

Newland would like to think he could “...be unconventional, but May more truthfully realizes that both hate resisting social pressure” (Benstock, 295). Again, as Newland explains his ideas about being free, May reflects her conventionality that he is “like people in novels...vulgar...”. The important point to stress here is that May is the reflection of Newland’s conventional side though he wants to think that he could be unconventional. This is exactly the gun of the society uses against its individuals; unquestionable rules that one cannot produce logical -or one would say, convincing enough- reasons to explain why things are the way they are. “Sameness – sameness!” muttered Newland, the word running through his head like a persecuting tune as he saw the familiar tall-hatted figures lounging behind the plate-glass...He knew not only what they were likely to be talking about, but the part each one would take in the discussion..” (*Innocence* 83). Newland is scared of confessing the fact that he is unhappy with what he is now and yet he has not got the courage to yield to his true self.

His conflict between his feelings for Ellen and what society thinks of her leads him to numerous excuses about the Countess’ past, thinking that women in Europe might be drawn into affairs from loneliness. “His [Newland’s] concern for her [Ellen’s] protection outweighs his sense of prudence as an engaged man” (Montgomery 235). In the letter the Count sends to Newland hints that Ellen had a scandal to hide. Newland never questions this statement since his decision is based on his desire to protect her and her “pitiful figure” (*Innocence* 169).

Newland's dinner with Newland's boss, Mr. Letterblair also adds emphasis to the idea that Newland is a conventional man at heart. He is experiencing conflict of feeling about Ellen's decision to divorce and explains to Ellen that the collective interest of society outweighs the needs of the individual. Mr. Letterblair asks him to represent the Mingott family to dissuade Ellen from seeking divorce since New York society believes that the institution of family must be protected. There are three main reasons to prevent this divorce: the Mingott family is against divorce, the Countess does not want the Count's money, and it would be wise to avoid a scandal that could damage the name of the Mingotts. He desires to rebel against convention that divorce will not be wise for Ellen for she is a woman. Newland's conflict between a 'matrimonial snare' and his 'adherence to society's rules' shows itself here again clearly. With calls in his mind to make from "one tribal doorstep to another," Newland perceives himself "shown off like a wild animal cunningly trapped" (*Innocence*, 161). He does not know exactly whether or not he should try to convince Ellen to "go back into that hell" (*Innocence* 160).

When Ellen questions why she should not divorce, Newland explains: "New York society is a very small world compared with the one you've lived in. And it's ruled, in spite of appearances, by a few people with – well, rather old-fashioned ideas..." Archer continued: "Our ideas about marriage and divorce are particularly old-fashioned. Our legislation favors divorce – our social customs don't" (*Innocence* 109). Ellen murmurs saying that this is what her family tells her. She further seeks a more convincing answer asking "But my freedom – is that nothing?" Archer proves his imprisoned soul within the boundaries of society and how ignorant he is about the true meaning of individual freedom: "But aren't you as free as air as it is?...think of the newspapers – their vileness! It's all stupid and narrow and unjust – but one can't make over society...The individual, in such cases, is nearly always sacrificed to what is



supposed to be the collective interest: people cling to any convention that keep the family together – protects the children, if there are any...”(119). In light of this, both Ellen and Newland are individuals being sacrificed to society’s collective interest: its desire to replicate itself by proper marriages between people.

This is the code and manner that Newland applies to Ellen when he advises her not to divorce her husband as it “not approved by our social codes”, he says. Woman is, after all, in the mercy of such social conventions, no matter to what extent she is free of obedience or of practicing her individuality. This society disallows women knowledge outside their narrow existence. It is inconvenient for women to be in the company of other men without their husbands. It is a convention for them to sit in the front to show their valuable possessions such as jewels or expensive clothes. Amongst the incoherent social conditions posed by society, marital beliefs are perhaps at the top of this list. As Wharton explains, New York of Newland Archer’s “day was a small and slippery pyramid, in which as yet, hardly a fissure had been made or a foothold gained.” As Mrs. Archer calls, this pyramid is constituted with “plain people” and “honourable but obscure majority of respectable families who...had been raised above their level by marriage with one of the ruling class...” (46). These lines clearly suggest the sanctity of marriage as a step to reach high-level in society. This is what Ellen was made to do so when she was young; marrying a Polish count, it was suggested, she guaranteed her respectable place in society at the cost of her happiness.

Ellen reveals Newland’s dilemma when she says: “You, you, you!.. Isn’t it you who made me give up divorcing – give it up because you showed me how selfish and wicked it was, how one must sacrifice one’s self to preserve the dignity of marriage...and to spare one’s family the publicity, the scandal?...” (*Innocence* 169). Newland realizes his weakness in this

conventional society and Mrs. Manson Mingott summarizes this situation by saying that; “not one of them wants to be different; they’re scared of it as the small-pox” (153). Ellen is not. Her desire for and capacity to envision the ‘transcendental’, both promotes and destroys her. She wants to live authentically, in accord with the best of Emersonian principles; and her spirited attempts to act ethically in a pretentious dissolute world. One may sympathize with Ellen in her brave "struggle against the disintegrating... traditions of a decadent aristocracy" ( Tuttleton, "Leisure, Wealth and Luxury"347). However, in the eyes of society, she is a woman who does not “care for society [...] no longer in the good graces of her family...”. She made ‘a fatal mistake’ by running away from her husband since, ‘after all a young woman’s place is under her husband’s roof...’ (*Innocence* 262). Edith Wharton here points out just how dangerous such a struggle can be. She is rejected by her own family, and seen as a threat to the moral balance of the society, and finally she becomes “the black sheet that their [society] blameless stock had produced” (*Innocence*, 9). It is only Ellen herself who is courageous to ask, “Does no one want to know the truth here...? The real loneliness is living among all these kind people who only ask one to pretend!” (*Innocence* 75). She then asks; “Why must everyone be exactly alike?” (*Innocence* 169). Newland has never questioned this idea before.

The dilemma of the duty and love Newland is torn between is strongly pointed in chapter eighteen as well. Newland finally confesses his love for Ellen and tells her that they can still be together. Ellen, however, says “I can’t love you unless I give you up” (*Innocence* ). This statement reveals Ellen’s morality meaning that she does not want to hurt May. It is also ironic that May sends telegram to both Ellen and Newland informing them about the family decision to move the wedding after Easter. Newland’s dilemma is stated the strongest in the sense that his argument saying that social, religious, and class standards must be considered

seriously or 'all is chaos' proves itself ironically. Ellen does not try to change Newland's mind about his wedding with May for she learns from him that one cannot win one's freedom by sacrificing the happiness of others. In other words, she reminds Newland "his own selfish interest must be sacrificed for the good of honour, family, and principles" (Bell 49). These were Newland's very thoughts before.

In chapter twenty-one, Newland's confusion about whether he should keep "shining in the brilliant diplomatic society" or follows his feelings for Ellen becomes most evident. It has been a long time that Newland has not seen Ellen. He is a married man now. After the Newport Archery Club's annual tournament, May suddenly suggests that they see the grandmother, Old Mrs. Mingott. Newland then is sent to summon Ellen who is visiting for the day. He finds her at the end of the pier by a seashore and silently watches her. He asks himself: "What am I? A son-in-law-?" He then says to himself: "If she doesn't turn before that sail crosses the Lime Rock light I'll go back" (*Innocence* 217). Yet, Ellen never turns around and Newland walks back up the hill. May's winning at the tournament and her calculated suggestion that they visit Ellen's grandmother are both symbols of how deeply Newland is " [...] entrenched in the leisure-class New York lifestyle. He is restless and the constraints of that life weigh on and him" (Ammon 365). Yet, he is still reluctant to fetch Ellen and this could have been another chance for an intimate meeting that could have changed the direction of his life. In chapter thirty, May asks Newland to close the window otherwise he will "catch [his] death". Newland's answer to himself is the summary of the way he feels: "I am dead – I've been dead for months and months". This is the moment he realizes that he can never have Ellen and he will be May's husband forever. In other words, this shows that his dreams of life with Ellen are only fantasies. He would never give up his social position.

He is the victim of a society who “dreaded scandal more than disease, who placed decency above courage, and who considered that nothing was more ill-bred than ‘scenes’” (179). Newland is “...timid and apologetic: he is no longer upright; he dares not say ‘I think,’ ‘I am,’ [...] He is ashamed before the blade of grass or the blowing rose...” (Carin 157). He easily blames society and the limits ‘set to his time’ for his inability to act to be with Ellen. Newland seems in charge of his world. However, he is one of the most naïve, perhaps the most innocent character in the novel. “He had had high things to contemplate, great things to delight in; and one great man’s friendship to be his strength and pride. He had been, in short, what people were beginning to call “good citizen” (*Innocence* 348). For twenty-six years, he lives in a world where he feels he belongs to. “He had been... a faithful husband” because “... their long years together had shown him that it did not so much matter if marriage was a dull duty, as long as it kept the dignity of a duty... After all, there was good in the old ways” (*Innocence* 350).

“Newland never seems to look ahead” (*Innocence* 222). Wharton creates doubts about his restlessness when Newland describes May as “peace, stability, comradeship and the steadying sense of an inescapable duty” (*Innocence* 223). This is 1870s, and marriage is “a steadying influence in a sea of chaos” (Benstock 359). Newland “...was not sure that he wanted to see the Countess Olenska again; but ever since he had looked at her from the path above the bay he had wanted ... to follow the movements of her imagined figure...” (*Innocence* 224). The idea that Newland ever dreamed of marrying the Countess is described as ghostly memory since “marriage is one long sacrifice” (*Innocence* 225).

After he met Ellen, he begins to believe “in the absolute reality of the transcendental realm, in beauty...authenticity... He longs for a republic of kindred souls; but he is also astutely pragmatic and recognizes the real and present condition of actuality and materiality”.

Tuttleton claims that Newland Archer’s “careless, dilettantish rendition of Emerson’s doctrine, which is arguably a trivializing and a debasing of Emerson’s ideals, is the stuff of sweet and frivolous daydreams, nothing more”. (351). Yet, he holds those ideals out to Ellen as a ‘touchstone’ for her own behavior; and by watching her, he becomes torn between two worlds -- the ideal and the real. Tuttleton continues to say that Edith Wharton saw in ‘Emerson’s tempting doctrine the vast and dangerous disparity’ represented through Newland’s conflict ‘between the unattainable ideal and the imperative real’ (351).

Newland wants to conform and not conform, to be simultaneously self-reliant and socially integrated. His thinking is, steeped in contradiction... feels bifurcated, and in this dichotomic split, he longs to be a natural and free inhabitant of both realms. To do so, he believes he must be amphibious, a creature essentially different from what he actually is” (Carin 42).

It is important to analyze the role of Ellen in Newland’s life since it is through Ellen that Newland becomes aware of his own self. She is the only reality he has in his own mind, the reality he has created himself, the symbol of his self-freedom. Even married, he is haunted by Ellen. He follows her to Boston since “The longing was with him day and night, an incessant, indefinable craving, like the whim of a sick man for food or drink once tested and long since forgotten” (Innocence 224). For Newland, Ellen Olenska represents, in Benstock’s words, “a dream of the unconventional, more passionate life” (359). This is mostly due to her free spirit

as an individual who is condemned for insisting on her liberty. Ellen begins novel as a naïve woman, thinking that New York would welcome a woman who runs away from her marriage. She finally realizes that beneath the surface are cruelty, judgement, and hypocrisy. Living in Europe for years and not knowing the rules of the game, she "...stretches the tolerance of the New Yorkers, eventually forcing her exit" (Benstock 315). According to Benstock, Ellen, of all the characters, is perhaps the least naïve, for she has "...done something so much more unconventional" (*Innocence* 233). She is a woman with self-freedom, in Benstock's words, "the natural woman" (322) against to the type of social milieu who is dictated what to do by convention. However, referring to Emerson's "Self-Reliance", this is also a sign of Ellen's individuality: "Speak what you think now in hard words...though it contradict every thing...Ah, so you shall be sure to be misunderstood...Plato was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood" (Emerson 152).

In his mind, Newland creates a romantic dream of what he wants to say to Ellen in chapter twenty-nine. "If you're not blind, then, you must see this can't last ... our being together and not being together..." (*Innocence* 291). In considering their options, Newland suggests that she should be his mistress and run away with him. Ellen's clear-sighted prediction of what an affair with a conventional engaged man like Newland Archer would mean and her respect for the stability of his life with May Welland indicate that she is more realistic than Newland. Ellen is like an old version of Isabel Archer, became more realistic with sorrow and disappointments in her life, yet still not given up on her generosity of spirit. When Newland tells Ellen that he wants to get away from categories like "mistress" and "wife" in order to be "simply two human beings who love each other", Ellen remarks that she has known many who have tried to find that country and "believe me, they all got out by mistake at wayside stations: at places like Boulogne, or Pisa, or Monte Carlo – and it wasn't at all different from the old world they'd

left, but only rather smaller and dingier and more promiscuous.” Her mistaken marriage not only made her so unhappy but also kept her eyes open “so that they’re never again in the blessed darkness” (*Innocence* 265). Seeing no way to have the woman he loves, Newland is caught in a web of paradox, not knowing what he should do. Deep inside, he knows that both Ellen and himself are products of the culture and code in which they live.

As Strout puts it, Ellen “might have urged him [Newland] to have on their own behalf” (115); but she votes for decency. She leaves after May tells her that she is pregnant; the reason that triggers Ellen to leave, knowing that happiness too has a price provided that it is “... bought by disloyalty and cruelty and indifference” (*Innocence* 20). This shows that the difference between Ellen and Newland is that Ellen has lived in a more open society and she realizes sooner than Newland that personal freedom and desire must be sacrificed for the social code enforces such rules for the good of society. She also realizes that, in Benstock’s words, they cannot exist outside the roles they “have been groomed to play by society” (360). For Ellen, Newland’s words kindle the struggle between conformity and nonconformity and between society and self-freedom that Ellen learned well by experiencing the real world called ‘miserable little country’ where she “...opened her eyes...fastens...eyelids open, so that they’re never again in the blessed darkness” (*Innocence* 293). No matter how much they love each other, they should maintain social integrity. Their love must be pure, or else innocent people will be hurt. Ellen leaves Newland alone with his sorrows and “pleasures of living with his conventional wife” and returns to Europe (407-8). Thus, although Ellen acts decently and refuses to continue her affair with Newland, she knows she has to pay a price for her attempt to break the rules of society before.

On the other hand, Newland sees their world free from social constraints in the Emersonian self of the spirit. A world exchange as a sweet wonderland where people escape from the real world in order to be “simply two human beings who love each other, who are the whole of life to each other...” (*Innocence* 293).

Newland’s self-awareness begins when he realizes that, in Katherina Joslin words, he is “too devitalised by his environment to follow his inner wishes” (95). His wisdom is in realizing that we just have to understand and accept who and what we are and what we live for. Newland, ‘while filled with dreamy notions’ through Ellen’s love, realizes the difference between ‘a kind of sanctuary’ he had built up within himself filled up with ‘his secret thoughts and longings’ and ‘his actual life’ in which he moved with a growing sense of unreality and insufficiency, blundering against familiar prejudices and traditional point of views...” (*Innocence* 265). “Each person needs a healthy vacillation between ...society and ...solitude” says Linda Costanzo Cahir. Newland becomes aware of the fact that the movement between them is not easy. It requires an act of self-awareness, understanding not only the essence of community, commonwealth of the others, but, more so, of one's self and one's world.

He realizes that he felt secure with May Welland who was defined as ‘pure, innocent because’, “...she had nothing to conceal, assured because she knew of nothing to be on her guard against; and with no better preparation than this, she was to be plunged overnight into what people evasively called ‘the facts of life’” (*Innocence* 145). She would lack “the experience, the versatility, the freedom of judgment, which she had been carefully trained not to possess”. Ironically, for Newland, these virtues were also important for a “passionate and tender comradeship” in his marriage. Throughout her marriage to Newland, May pretends not



to know Newland's passion for Ellen. May has been taught to remain innocent and be dedicated to her husband. She was a perfect product of the social code. "Her incapacity to recognize change made her children conceal their views from her as Archer concealed his. There had been, from the first, a joint pretence of sameness, a kind of innocent family hypocrisy" (*Innocent* 351). Newland never realizes this until the end; even after her death he believed that she was ignorant of real life from beginning to end. Newland finally becomes aware of his own ignorance and that "...everyone outflanked him, especially the women in his life who have used his innocence well" (Benstock 315). This is an important contribution to Newland's self-awareness.

Newland's self-awareness proves itself when he retreats from seeing Ellen in the last chapter. He simply elevates this natural barrier of desire up to a moral illicit. Regardless of the society's expectations, there occurs another and much stronger barrier before Newland's hope of meeting Ellen: awareness of May's awareness about his secret love. In short, her predicament is a natural outcome of his respect for May's repressed truth. Zizek concedes that, "This is a defence against the painful turmoil of excessive *jouissance*" of the love Newland has for Ellen (15). In other words, the defence against desire comes out of another desire which is to suppress his guiltiness and having inner peace instead. With this awareness in mind, Newland knows that the amount of his love for Ellen, sooner or later, will change; his connection, his passion, his closeness to her; his eternal passionate attachment for Ellen will no longer be as pure and innocent as it has been so far.

He finally realizes that individual fulfilment is free of any kind of pressure leading to self-awareness. Zizek concludes this motivation as "the imaginary concern for the balance of pleasures, the real of drive". In other words, the *jouissance* is "the satisfaction brought about

by the very act of renunciation, of maintaining the distance towards the beloved object” (Knights 21). This paradoxical *jouissance* characterizes the movement of drive as that which finds satisfaction in circulating around the object and repeatedly missing it” (15). Consequently, the satisfaction of Newland’s self-awareness entails his inner peace; the sacrificing of his love in exchange of his self-freedom.

The last chapter raises another important point that Newland becomes aware of; time’s instability and how everything is subject to changes. Attentive to all the prohibitions that “bent and bound”, Newland feels he does not belong to this new generation. As Monika M. Ebery states in her *The Politics of Maternity in Summer*, Newland “has the comforting feeling of the place where he belongs. He is a relic in the twentieth century, where increased personal freedom is changing life forever...” (135). His son, Dallas is free to have a life he desires; a life Newland would like to have for his own but failed to do so due to his responsibilities. Dallas is the youth Emerson addresses in his “Self-Reliance”:

Do not think the youth has no force because he cannot speak to you and me. Hark! In the next room his voice is sufficiently clear and emphatic. It seems he knows how to speak to his contemporaries. Bashful or bold then, he will know how to make us seniors very unnecessary. (147)

In light of this view, Dallas becomes the voice of the new generation and criticizes Newland for having a life without passion, living in a “deaf and dumb asylum” for so many years. Wharton describes this generation in her *A Backward Glance* as follows: “The present generation hears close underfoot the growling of the volcano on which ours danced so long” (46). Newland realizes that he is finally free of any constraints or obligations posed by society

upon him and he knows that he is free to be with Ellen, his true love at last; yet he decides not to. Newland is no longer scared of being an outcast in society. There is no other obstacle to stop him from what he desires to do for the world has changed.

Archer eventually understands that, at the end of the novel, he has not only given up Ellen, but also in a type of "innocent family hypocrisy," (*Innocence* 276), he has never even spoken of her. Through the years he has devoted himself to the world of his family, "...to parenting, to work in the civic arena, and to the preservation of his home" (Kessler 36). Indeed, after May's death, Archer himself becomes an "... emblem of motherhood, combining affectionate single-parenting and a public career of benevolent reform with a civilizing role reminiscent of the eternal "feminine" (Kessler 37).

Kessler states that the final scene in which Archer's leave-taking is vivid as he sits alone on a bench, five floors below Ellen's home. His eyes are frozen at the window, half open, in the hope that Ellen will appear. The sun flashes its strong gleam, shining so strongly; bringing the beauty of Ellen and the priceless moments they shared together back to him. Finally, he says to his son that he is not coming with him because he is "old-fashioned". Under the painful turmoil of his passionate love for Ellen, Newland's admonition that prevents him from meeting Ellen, after all those longing years, leads us again to the same conclusion; repressed truth about admitting who we are. Finally Newland realizes what Ellen told him years ago: "you've never been beyond" social constraints, "ever" (*Innocence* 294).

Judging Newland from Emerson's "Self-Reliance", he has attained his individual fulfillment. He accepted "...the place the divine providence has found" for him, "the society of your

contemporaries” and accepted “in the highest mind the same transcendent destiny” (Self-Reliance 146). Now the situation is free for Newland to be with Ellen but he has to fight with his own self to decide. Throughout the novel, society seems to be the reason for Newland and Ellen not to be together. But in the end, Newland realizes that it is his own inability to make decisions on his own. Although there are disparate views on Newland’s last renunciation, the common consensus supports Emerson’s theory that, it is better to live ‘truly and obscurely than to have one’s goodness extolled in public’. It makes no difference to him whether his actions are praised or ignored. The important thing is to act independently: “What I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people think”. The lessons Newland Archer learns by the end of the novel is that self-freedom does not mean that one should always think about only for personal happiness. If it is necessary, one should also be ready to give up personal happiness for the good of others, to nurture familial bonds, to value the family above the pleasures of the world, and, at all costs, to do what it seems right to do within that particular time and acknowledge the consequences of one’s decision. Ellen and Newland choose to honour the stability of a social code instead of their love for each other. In Brooke Allen’s words, Archer’s tragedy lies in his choice, but the fact still remains, says Allen; this is his own choice (5). At the end, he chooses, as Emerson puts it in his “Self-Reliance”, to “act singly, and what you have already done singly will justify you now...in the midst of the crowd keeps [...] the independence of solitude” (150-153). He chooses to be what he really is, a man living by principles, as a clearly victorious character. His last renunciation, free of any impediment posed by society, proves that he becomes an Emersonian self.

## CONCLUSION

In comparing James's portrait of Isabel in *The Portrait of a Lady* to Wharton's portrait of Newland in *The Age of Innocence*, the similarities are discernable. James portrays her "as an autonomous agent who is ... responsible for her own behaviour, and who refuses to be swallowed by circumstance". In depicting her thoughts, ideas of independence, idealism and transcendence, James presents Isabel as an Emersonian subject who attempts to improve and perfect herself and who refuses to be a "mere sheep in the flock" (Portrait 215). Wharton's Newland may not be presented as a clear Emersonian individual earlier in the book. However, Wharton situates him in a social context which seems more conventional and stricter than Isabel's society. Wharton's purpose is to show how an individual stuck between such a rigid society and his desire reacts to outside forces. She shows such characters as weak, helpless and desperate. Yet, Wharton maintains the hope for those individuals to achieve their self-reliance through the process of this conflict they experience. In other words, Newland, like Isabel, becomes conscious of his own self, and makes his own decision free of any social pressure at the end. This is the reason that makes Newland an Emersonian character at the end. Therefore, both James's *The Portrait of a Lady* and Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* are connected as similar representations of self-reliance.

Although James wrote his masterpiece, *The Portrait of a Lady* in 1908 and Wharton wrote her *The Age of Innocence* in 1920, the influence and power of these novels are attributed to their showing of the timeless conflicts between convention and inner-self; oppression and freedom; spirituality and communal society. Social roles of women, marriage-hindering woman's independence as an entrapment for them, widespread sense of individual alienation are other common themes these two novels deal with. Both James and Wharton probe the world of the

'diseased', a sickness that divide Isabel and Newland and "relate them to basic conflicts within the America of the Gilded Age" (Shulman 5). Isabel and Newland's alienation among other people reveal the "persistence of those divisive pressures"; Shulman explored those pressures through his concept of "divided selves" in a possessive society determined to keep its power over individuals and keep the status-quo as the way it is. The main connection between Newland and Isabel is that they both make their own decision, sacrifice their personal happiness for the sake of their personal fulfillments.

In *The Portrait of a Lady*, Henry James presents the Emersonian individual who seeks growth and independence. As F.O. Matthiessen notes that, " if Isabel's portrait as a whole implies anything, it is the American anxiety to build the topology of the ideal, the complex self-identity whose limits are undefined, as well as the mysticism and spirituality of such identity" (13). Isabel is "not fixed, but ... a good deal mystified" (Portrait 235). She says, "Nothing can be a measure to express me", which shows how much the nature of her self, her independence, infinite freedom is important to her. Again, when she says "I try to judge for myself; to judge wrong, I think, is more honourable than not to judge at all. I don't want to be a mere sheep in the flock; I wish to choose my fate" (Portrait 120). This statement is a clear manifestation of Emerson's Self-Reliance.

One may suggest that Isabel's last decision is due to her commitment to social propriety as she is not that strong enough to assume her non-conformist identity and unable to prove her individuality. However, as Harold Bloom suggests in his *Henry James's The Portrait of a Lady*, Isabel, through her last action, achieves her spiritual 'transcendence'. This leads to, according to Emerson's "Self-Reliance", true individualism. Again, Carl Van Doren states that, "the conclusion, on various grounds, does not satisfy, but it consistently enough rounds

out Isabel's chronicle....the spirit of the fresh young girl, gradually transfers the action to her consciousness and...her realization of her fate. In something of this delaying fashion life dawns upon its victims" (*The American Novel* (1921). Thus, it is safe to say that Isabel goes back to Rome not because she chooses to honour her marriage but because this time it is her free decision free off any kind of manipulation or the control of others; in order to 'proclaim her self-reliance, indeed to establish a continuity in her self-identity" (Bloom 10).

Henry James, in his 1908 preface, says Isabel is "affronting her destiny." (89) According to Bell, this statement has got much deeper meaning than what it seems. Many critics agree on the same point that such ending is "ill-formulated expression of the feeling that the creation lacks the final..." (Schudder, 666). However, says James, he did not simply mean that Isabel "confronted her destiny; but she, in a hostile way "... defied it, slapped it in the face." (Bell Preface, 1908). What Matthiessen suggests for Isabel's decision to go back to Rome summarizes the main idea in the novel. For him, James knew how Isabel was romantic and how she was wrong in believing that 'the world lay before her – she could do whatever she chose'. However, says Matthiessen, James also knew that, "The American life of his [James's] day, in its reckless plunge to outer expansiveness and inner defeat, had taught him that as his leading spiritual theme" (597). In other words, James, through Isabel Archer, gave the 'freshest' expressions of self-reliance. She finally perceives that no matter how miserable or unhappy she might have been, she knows that, in order to find the right path, "one must accept the consequences of one's acts"(Matthiessen 597).

*The Age of Innocence* deals with issues that resonate beyond its historical time. The conflict Newland Archer goes through speaks well to readers who can easily find something similar with their own lives. Through the "thwarted" love story between Newland and Ellen, Wharton

imply explores the universal conflict between passion and responsibility, freedom and tradition. Wharton also addresses to the difficult sacrifices required in the process of achieving self-actualization and self-maturity. In other words, she emphasizes that sometimes it is the right thing for people to hide their true feelings deep inside, like Newland did, for the protection of their self-integrity and private life from the pressures of society and to continue to be a part of the mainstream. As Elizabeth Ammons puts it, Newland Archer understand that “...becoming one’s best self means coming to terms both with one’s own limitations and with those of the culture in which one’s self was formed, and then possibly sacrificing to these recognitions one’s greatest dreams” (115).

Wharton's choice of Newland as her main character is very effective in order for male readers to empathize with Newland Archer who is trapped by convention and narrow-mindedness. In this way, Wharton encourages them to consider their social roles as well as their personal attitudes, specifically against women, and their feelings in dealing with their dilemmas. According to Auchincloss, Wharton’s Newland is realistic since Wharton “had a firm grasp of what ‘society’, was consisted of. Newland, in contrast with Isabel, is aware that “in reality they all lived in a kind of hieroglyphic world, where the real thing was never said or done or even thought, but only represented by a set of arbitrary signs”, a system of shared assumptions. (Strout 409). This is the society where May’s innocence was “only an artificial product... factitious purity, so cunningly manufactured by a conspiracy of mothers and aunts and grandmothers and long-dead ancestresses, because it was supposed to be what he wanted, what he had a right to, in order that he might exercise his lordly pleasure in smashing it like an image made of snow” (43). Therefore, if James’s Isabel has a reputation as an intellectual young lady which is “like the cloudy envelope of a goddess in an epic”, May’s status as the innocent woman ready to sacrifice everything for her husband is an outcome of a familiar



product of social codes. In the end, Newland Archer shares similar destiny with Isabel Archer when, in Strout's words, he makes "his own milder act of renunciation" (410). This is, Strout points out, the end of Newland and Ellen's situation, "as James deliberately did not do with Isabel and Caspar Goodwood" (410).

In examining individuality and society conundrum, Wharton shares Emerson's doctrine. Emersonian "Self-Reliance" carries us to a world where the outcome of self-reliance might be tragic and although he may want "to be one with us...his unmitigated self-reliance will plunge him into... the deepest loneliness that man can know" (Kazin 44). According to this doctrine, sometimes, self-reliance might require to resign one's self to the limits and boundaries of life, "...to the understanding that the implacable fate of all beginnings, no matter how propitious, is that they must have endings..." (Ammons 25). This is Wharton's consciousness which is reflected on her novel and this is evident through Newland's 'thwarted love'. Late in life, Newland goes to Paris to see Ellen, stands outside her building, but he does not go inside to see her after all those years spent separate. In "The Economist", January 27<sup>th</sup> 2007, this situation is associated with Wharton's 'long, intimate, though ambiguous, relationship with Walter Berry' and stating that "Wharton divorced in 1913, but, like Newland Archer, she had already missed "flower of life" (77). Brooke in her article "The Accomplishment of Edith Wharton", says there is a good reason why Wharton demonstrates the subject of 'missing the flower of life' as the theme of her youth. The rigidly 'stratified society of old New York...its complicated social code provided a series of rules which were both flexible and...arbitrary" (Allen 5). For Wharton, says Allen, to conceive American society and its code was like a 'small and rather absurd corner of a large and interesting world" (5). From this perspective, in referring to Newland as the reflection of Wharton's philosophy, it is safe to say that the tragedy does not lie in the fact that Newland gives up his love of his life, but, in the

worthlessness and the futility of what he chooses instead. This is, for Allen, ‘an enveloping nullity that is personal as well as social’ (5). However, what is important to consider here, says Allen, is the fact that it is Newland himself who “creates his own tragedy” which makes him a free individual at last.

All these reasons, however, take us to the same conclusion: like Isabel Archer, Newland Archer fails to have his individual fulfilment earlier in the novel. His last renunciation, however, leaving without seeing Ellen, is a true sign of his first step towards his self-awareness. He finally realizes that whether it is right or wrong, he has made his choice many years ago and knows that he gave up on his love for the sake of his marriage, for his social reputation. “There was nothing now to keep her and Archer apart...During that time he had been living with his youthful memory of her’ (*Innocence* 360-2). However, Newland finally realizes his subsequent inability to declare his love for Ellen not because he could not but because he did not. This is too much for him to confront and deal with and that is the sole reason that he chooses consciously to leave “...slowly and walked back alone to his hotel” (*Innocence* 364). This time, he makes his decision free of any ‘repressive and mediocre society whose denizens sacrificed their young to the same ossified standards that had blighted their own lives” (Allen 33). He feels himself like “...a relic in a small dim chapel” (*Innocence* 362). “More than half a lifetime divided them, and he had spent the long interval among people he did not know, in a society he but faintly he guessed at, in conditions he would never wholly understand” (*Innocence* 365). In this sense, Newland’s final renunciation, compared to Isabel, is more acceptable. He knows what a heavy emotional price he has paid for his timidity in pursuit of his love for Ellen and he knows he has gained real benefits from his adherence to conventional life. He has no fear of losing his family, no fear of degrading his reputation, or no fear of social offence. He chooses to leave since he realizes that this is a new society that he does not belong to. This is a perfect indication of the fact that he attains his

self-awareness which comes out of his sense of self integrity. Cushing Strout gives an interesting commentary on both Newland and Isabel's final decisions:

On closer inspection, James's more tragic conclusion invites our reading it as an ironic commentary on Isabel's romantic predisposition, the motives of her original "fall" recurring in her later renunciation. James relies on the classical idea of a tragic flaw in depicting both the fallen action and her moral response to it. In this respect she is consistent with her past as her male counterpart is with his history in *The Age of Innocence*. The continuities are symmetrical (411).

The reasons for the directions Isabel and Newland choose to go may vary. However, as Pamela Knight puts it, it is evident that both attained their individual fulfilment through their own individual decisions at the end of the novel. As Emerson puts it "To believe that what is true in your private heart is true for all men – that is genius" (Self-Reliance). Both Isabel and Newland have come to feel that self-awareness is admitting who you are, what you live for and taking full responsibility for the consequences of one's deeds. Isabel finally realizes that, in Nina Baym's words, "the independent life is attained only in awareness" (634) and her awareness is that whether it is right or wrong, whether she does it for herself or for society, she makes her own individual decision and goes back to her marriage. The obligations of marriage, Isabel believes, are "quite independent of the quality of enjoyment extracted from it" (*Portrait* 239). Her renunciation at the end entails a suffering, however unpleasant, and "is the awesome measure of Isabel's moral grandeur" (Strout 413).

This self-freedom is what Henry James and Edith Wharton describe in *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Age of Innocence*. In the first half of this twentieth-century discourse on solitude and

society, James and Wharton emerged with a mutual response to the issue of individual and society. While James acknowledges that we are free to choose how we wish to conduct our lives, independent or according to the rules of society, no matter what we choose, “we can not escape our essential condition of alienation” (Carin 11). Thus, James’s Isabel realizes that there is no way to escape from her alienation, no matter where she goes. She simply chooses to confront her self by herself, alone, in her decision to go back to her miserable marriage since, in Herman Melville’s words, every one, “by virtue of being human, is an ... isolated living on a separate continent of his own” (Carin 15). Writing her *The Age of Innocence* twelve years later, Edith Wharton reached this same conclusion. Wharton shared James’s understanding that although we function within a social structure, we are inherently solitary beings, being in a constant battle to practice our individuality within the controlled mechanism of this social structure.

With the story of a young American woman, Isabel Archer, asserting her independence in *The Portrait of a Lady*, and with Newland Archer’s tragic story in *The Age of Innocence* emphasizing that life never fulfils all our hopes, James and Wharton concede that “we find happiness not in idealized illusions of what might be, but in living – with as much integrity as possible – our own imperfect and circumscribed lives” (Ammon 155). From this perspective, it is safe to say that, our individual needs are very important to us; however, safety and security are also two necessary components of life. This safety can be acquired through order. Yet, order and regulations restrict the freedom of the individual. Within this very thin line of the conflict between individual and society, the ever-present question still remains: how can we achieve the desirable quality of self-reliance if we, as individuals, must contribute to the order of society? There is no doubt that individual and society are dependent on each other. Simply put, one cannot exist without the other. Of course every individual has many and different needs but the point to consider here is that not all of these needs can be achieved

because, otherwise, society as a whole may cease to exist. Then the most reasonable answer to this conflict is that there must be mutual concessions between individual and society. In order to transcend a better existence and enjoy individuality, one must be able to assess the advantageous and disadvantageous of both options, and act accordingly.

From this perspective, both James's *The Portrait of a Lady* and Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* prevail the Emersonian idealistic and transcendent philosophy of life. James's Isabel and Wharton's Newland are regarded as vivid portraits of the struggle between individual and community. Both novels explore the freedom of choosing one's self or the conventions. Newland Archer is a powerful redolent of these ideas as he finally realizes that relying on the public ideas and having lived his life by the expectations of society wasted his life. However, he also realizes that such complete independence is also doomed to fail for he is a man who would choose to promote his ties to his family and his social reputation. Similarly, Isabel Archer's need for consistency also leads her to her tragic end. My understanding is that, Emerson simply encourages people to have the freedom to think for ourselves and find the truth within our hearts, whether for better or worse. In light of this, what makes Isabel and Newland free individuals is that they shape their own endings with their own free wills. They find themselves in a battle between their own self-reliance and the demands of society. However, they both manage to see their own fallacies and finally choose to do what they feel is right to do. As Cushing Strout asserts, this is the Emersonian voice in James's Isabel Archer and Wharton's Newland Archer.

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## ÖZGEÇMİŞ

01 Ocak 1979 tarihi, İzmir ili Karşıyaka ilçesi doğumluyum. İlk, orta okulu aynı ilçede, liseyi Konak ilçesinde tamamladıktan sonra, Beykent Üniversitesi, Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümüne kaydoldum. Bu bölümden 2002 yılında mezun olduktan sonra, 2004 yılında, Beykent Üniversitesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümünde yüksek lisans eğitimine başladım. 2002 yılından beri Beykent Üniversitesi Yabancı Diller Bölümünde öğretim görevlisi olarak çalışmaktayım.

**Aday:**.....