

801915

索取号: 1106.4/7.555

密级: 公开

南京师范大学

硕士学位论文



伊迪丝·华顿的《纯真年代》 中的女性意识

作者: 张建红

院系: 外国语学院

指导教师: 姚君伟 教授

学科专业: 英语语言文学

学位论文独创性声明

本人郑重声明：

- 1、坚持以“求实、创新”的科学精神从事研究工作。
- 2、本论文是我个人在导师指导下进行的研究工作和取得的研究成果。
- 3、本论文中除引文外，所有实验、数据和有关材料均是真实的。
- 4、本论文中除引文和致谢的内容外，不包含其他人或其它机构已经发表或撰写过的研究成果。
- 5、其他同志对本研究所做的贡献均已在论文中作了声明并表示了谢意。

作者签名：张建业

日期：2005. 5. 10

学位论文使用授权声明

本人完全了解南京师范大学有关保留、使用学位论文的规定，学校有权保留学位论文并向国家主管部门或其指定机构送交论文的电子版和纸质版；有权将学位论文用于非赢利目的的少量复制并允许论文进入学校图书馆被查阅；有权将学位论文的内容编入有关数据库进行检索；有权将学位论文的标题和摘要汇编出版。保密的学位论文在解密后适用本规定。

作者签名：张建业

日期：2005. 5. 10

Acknowledgement

As for the completion of this dissertation, I first would like to express my sincere and hearty gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Yao Junwei, who has given me enlightening guidance and constant instruction in my study of American literature and culture in the past three years.

I feel a special obligation not only to his careful and tireless supervision but also his valuable suggestions and warm encouragement. Without his supervision, this thesis could not have taken on the present shape.

Profound thanks and sincere appreciation are also extended to Professor Cheng Aimin, Professor Chen Xin, Professor Fu Jun, Professor Gu Jiazuo, Professor Huang Hebin, Professor Zhang Jie, and to all other professors who have given me advice and support during my study as a MA student, from whose courses and lectures I have learned a lot.

Finally, I would like to thank my beloved parents and my husband, Mr. Jiang Hongda, for their constant support and endless love.

摘 要

伊迪丝·华顿（Edith Wharton, 1862-1937）是美国著名的女作家。在漫长的写作生涯中，华顿留下了许多的作品，包括 19 部中长篇小说和 11 本短篇小说集。《欢乐之家》、《风土人情》和《纯真年代》被认为是她的三部长篇代表作。华顿的大部分小说都是以她所熟悉的 19 世纪末 20 世纪初的“老纽约”上流社会为背景，并对其社会传统、习俗，道德和价值观作了细致入微的描绘。作为美国普利策奖的获奖小说，出版于 1920 年的《纯真年代》代表了华顿小说创作的高峰，并获得评论界的高度评价和持续关注。在小说中，华顿从独特的女性视角出发，描述了一个新鲜的，完全不同的“老纽约”社会。本文在对文本进行详细的分析和解读的基础上，阐释小说中女性意识的存在。同时，本文还结合作家本人的生活和创作经历来进一步说明：女性意识不仅体现在小说中，而且还贯穿于华顿的生活和写作生涯中。所谓女性意识，就是指女性对自身作为人，尤其是女人的价值的体验和醒悟。对于男权社会，其表现为拒绝接受男性社会对女性的传统定义，以及对男性权力的质疑和颠覆；同时，又表现为关注女性生存状况，审视女性心理情感和表达女性生命体验。本文是从三个方面来说明这个问题的：老纽约社会中男性权威的解构；小说中新女性形象的塑造；以及华顿个人生活和写作生涯中所体现出的女性意识。

关键词： 伊迪丝·华顿； 《纯真年代》； 女性意识； 解构； 新女性

Abstract

As the first female recipient of the Pulitzer Prize in American literature, Edith Wharton (1862-1937) is acclaimed as one of the United States' finest novelists and short story writers. Most of her works are set in the old New York, where Wharton herself was born and brought up, and expose the cruel excesses of aristocratic society at the end of the 19th century. *The Age of Innocence*, published in 1920, wins for Wharton the Pulitzer Prize. In the novel, Wharton has portrayed a fresh and unique old New York from the perspective of a female. And Wharton's delicately psychological description makes the seemingly ordinary love story more revealing and thoughtful. This thesis attempts to make an exploration into the feminine consciousness in *The Age of Innocence* through a detailed thematic analysis. Being a representative of male of his generation, Newland Archer's emotional debility, vocational indecision and continuous evasion of responsibilities betoken the deconstruction of male superiority. This also renders female's desire to be equal and independent possible. Meanwhile, a group of New Women emerge, who appear to be more active, energetic and full of vitality. They are struggling to cast off the restrictions imposed on them by the male-dominated society. These new women's pursuit of independence and freedom clearly shows the existence of feminine consciousness in the novel. Among them, Ellen Olenka is thought to be the typical figure. She is depicted as the opposite side of May Welland, who is a nice girl and ideal wife in the eyes of the old New York people. Actually, May is merely a product

of the social system, and she possesses no freedom of judgment and no individual viewpoint. Furthermore, the thesis seeks to demonstrate Wharton's feminine consciousness through the examples cited from her biography and life experience. Her writing career is virtually a female writer's arduous and painful experience of getting out of the conventional limits, seizing self-identity and creating a room of her own.

Key words: *The Age of Innocence*; Edith Wharton; feminine consciousness; deconstruction; New Woman

前 言

伊迪丝·华顿 (Edith Wharton, 1862-1937) 生于 1862 年的美国纽约, 是纽约名门望族琼斯家的女儿。她是家中的第三个孩子, 也是唯一的女孩, 两个哥哥分别年长她十二岁与十六岁, 这样的岁数差异使得伊迪丝像一个独生女一样寂寞地成长, 家庭对于她来说并非一个温暖的所在, 幼年的孤独感陪伴了她终身, 并且在她的作品中得到了深深的体现。华顿从 1880 年开始创作, 1899 年第一部短篇小说集《高尚的嗜好》(*The Greater Inclination*) 问世, 并获得了意外的成功。1905 年, 她的《欢乐之家》(*The House of Mirth*) 获得了广泛的关注与高度的评价, 为她赢得了很高的声誉。1920 年, 她又以《纯真年代》(*The Age of Innocence*) 一书获得了普利策奖, 并成为美国文学史上第一位获此殊荣的女作家, 从此, 华顿达到了创作的巅峰。在长达五十多年的创作生涯中, 华顿一共写了十九部中长篇小说, 出版过十一本短篇小说集, 还有大量的非小说作品, 留下了包括小说、诗歌、自传、文学批评、游记、室内装饰等在内的四十余部作品。

自她的第一部畅销小说《欢乐之家》的出版起, 伊迪丝·华顿的作品就引起了评论界不断的关注。1937 年华顿去世后, 爱德蒙·威尔逊 (Edmund Wilson) 发表了《为伊迪丝·华顿说句公道话》(*Justice to Edith Wharton*)。1954 年布莱克·纳维斯 (Blake Nevius) 的《伊迪丝·华顿小说研究》(*Edith Wharton: A Study of Her Fiction*) 是关于华顿研究的第一部完整作品。进入 20 世纪 70 年代后, 美国评论界开始把研究重点集中在研究华顿作为女性的个人经验与她的作品的关系上。1975 年著名文学家兼评论家刘易斯 (R. W. B. Lewis) 出版了《伊迪丝·华顿传记》(*Edith Wharton: A Biography*), 此传记被认为是迄今为止研究华顿的最权威的著作。此后第三年, 著名女性主义研究专家圣西亚·格林芬·沃尔夫 (Cynthia Griffin Wolff) 出版了《词的盛宴: 伊迪丝·华顿的胜利》(*A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton*)。直到现在, 评论界对华顿的关注仍在继续, 而且, 评论家不断运用新的文学理论来分析华顿的作品, 并且对她的一些曾经被忽略的作品也进行了分析。

华顿的三部长篇代表作《欢乐之家》、《风土人情》(*The Custom of the Country*, 1913)、《纯真年代》均以“老纽约” (Old New York), 即 19 世纪末 20 世纪初的纽约上流社会, 作为故事的主要背景, 描述了其内部复杂而微妙的关系, 揭示其鲜为人知的一面, 同时也流露出作家对自幼生活过的“老纽约”社会所怀有的一种爱恨交加的复杂情感——那是她度过童年

与青春的地方，她在那儿长大成人，进入社交界。对于伊迪丝·华顿来说，“老纽约”社会不仅是她本人生长的环境，更是她一生无法摆脱、充满复杂情感的寄托所在。本文所评述的《纯真年代》也是以 19 世纪 70 年代末 80 年代初的纽约上流社会为背景，但是华顿从独特的女性视角出发向读者展示了一个不同的“老纽约”。该小说讲述了发生在纽兰·阿切尔（Newland Archer），梅·韦兰（May Welland）和埃伦·奥兰斯卡（Ellen Olenska）三人之间的爱情纠葛。纽兰与美丽纯真的梅的婚事可称得上是金玉良缘，可是，当焕发着自由精神、刚从欧洲回来的埃伦出现在老纽约时，纽兰被深深吸引了。然而，面对强大的社会传统压力，他们的爱情注定逃脱不了悲剧的结局。全书分为上下两卷，上卷 18 个章节，写了纽兰与梅结婚前的事情，包括纽兰与埃伦重逢、相爱，挣扎的经过。下卷 16 个章节，主要叙述了纽兰与梅的婚后生活。

本文在对小说进行详细的文本分析和解读的基础上，阐释《纯真年代》中女性意识的存在。同时，结合作家本人的生活和写作经历来进一步说明：女性意识的存在不仅体现在这部小说中，而且贯穿于华顿的生活和写作生涯。所谓女性意识，就是指女性对自身作为人，尤其是女人的价值的体验醒悟；它既是一种性别意识又带有社会属性，并且是与男权传统相对立意识；表现为女性挣脱男性社会对女性的精神压迫的努力，和女性摆脱附庸地位并成为具有独立人格的要求。在小说中，华顿从女性视角出发，关注女性生存状况，审视女性心理情感，表达女性生命体验；同时对于男权世界，又表现为拒绝接受男性社会对女性的传统定义以及对男性权力的质疑和颠覆。正如伊莱恩·肖沃尔特（Elaine Showalter）在《她们自己的文学》中所论述的，她把女性文学传统的形成定义为三个阶段：第一阶段为 Feminine Phase，从 1840 年到 1880 年的四十年间，这一时期的女作家完全接受了以男性为中心的传统概念，写作过程中以社会传统标准要求自已，因此在这一阶段出现了女性作家发表作品时也采用男性的笔名的情况。第二阶段为 Feminist Phase，从 1880 年到 1920 年，这一时期的女作家已不甘心忍受性别上所受的文化歧视，希望能通过创作表达自己的心声，进而打破社会传统强加给女性的种种束缚。第三阶段为 Female Phase，从 1920 年算起。这一阶段的女作家侧重描写女性在现代社会中的各种感受和遭遇，发展了从女性独有的经历和体验中引出的文学艺术；其中有代表性的是“一间自己的房间”成为当时最受女性作家欢迎的意象。《纯真年代》发表于 1920 年，正处于伊莱恩所定义的女性文学传统的第二和第三阶段之间。因此，也具备了这两阶段的特性。在小说中，华顿通过描写女性在社会中的感受和遭遇表达自己试图冲破社会传统强加给女性的束缚的心声。女性的这种打破传统限制，摆脱男权价值观念的束缚，争取精神上和人格上的独立平等正是女性意识的外化表现。

本文是从三个方面来阐释这个问题的：老纽约社会中男性权威的解构；小说中新女性形象的塑造；以及华顿个人生活和写作生涯中所表现出的女性意识。

作为纽约社会男性的典型人物，纽兰的言行和心理能够很好地说明和反映男性权威的丧失这一现实。在老纽约社会中，男性的权力和优越地位实际上是来自于女性的被动和劣势地位。就像弗吉尼亚·伍尔夫在《一间自己的房间》(A Room of One's Own)里所阐释的：千百年来，女性一直就被男性当作观照的“魔镜”；这面赏心悦目的魔镜，能够将镜中男性的影像加倍放大。在“魔镜”产生的幻觉之中，男人们精神振作，充满信心。在小说中，梅和埃伦同样被纽兰当作了“魔镜”，从中他可以欣赏到完美无瑕的自己；梅的天真无知和埃伦的孤立无助可以使纽兰尽情地展示作为男性的权力和并满足其男性的虚荣心理。他欣赏梅的美丽和天真，并自认为是梅的“占有者”和“灵魂监护人”，而不是地位相等的丈夫。梅的美丽和天真是完全符合纽约社会对女性的要求，能成为“纽约一位最美丽、最受欢迎的年轻妻子的丈夫是令人高兴的”。因此，和梅结婚能够极大地满足纽兰的男性虚荣心，“梅满足了他期待的一切”。而对于埃伦，纽兰更多的是站在保护者的立场上。埃伦“可耻的”过去，不幸的婚姻以及由此而产生的流言蜚语极大地激起了纽兰的侠义精神和保护欲望的。他心中充满了同情，埃伦“像一个无人保护的弱者站在他面前，等待着他不惜一切代价去拯救，以免她在对抗命运的疯狂冒险中受到进一步的伤害”¹。但是，“女人一旦讲真话，镜中的影像便会萎缩；男性在生活中的位置也随之动摇；移开影像，许多人只怕活不成，就像禁绝了瘾君子的可卡因”。²同样，对于纽兰来说，事实并非他所想象的那样。天真无知的梅早就感觉到了纽兰和埃伦的恋情，并巧妙地控制了她和纽兰的婚姻，使得他最终放弃埃伦；而且，埃伦也不是他所认为的那样柔弱无助，相反，是她使纽兰重新认识社会，开导他并让他认清那些“看得太久因而不能认清的事物”，甚至还反转了他原先的价值观。她的自信，她的不顾习俗，她的处变不惊，她的追寻自由，都让纽兰感到惊讶和自叹弗如。另外，纽兰的行为也表明了他所代表的年轻一辈男性的弱点——平庸，无为：他们家境富足，事业上没有抱负；虽然人人都认为自己应该有个职业，但赤裸裸地挣钱依然被看作有伤体面；他们没有一个有望在职业上有所成就，而且谁也没有这种迫切的欲望，在他们身上，一种新型的敷衍塞责的习气已经相当明显地蔓延起来，并且逐渐陷入了他们长辈们那种平庸安逸的生活常规。这些，都摧毁并解构了男性的权威和优越感。同时，也使女性的冲破传统束缚，争取独立平等的愿望成为可能。

¹ 引自伊迪丝·华顿的《纯真年代》，赵兴国译，译林出版社，2002年1月。（另：前言中其他小说中的引用均出自此书）

² 引自弗吉尼亚·吴尔夫的《一间自己的房间》，贾辉丰译，人民文学出版社，2003年4月，第30页

另一方面，华顿从女性视角出发，在小说中关注了女性的情感、心理和生存状况。美丽纯真的梅在传统人们的眼中是个好女孩，好妻子。但事实上，她只是生活传统下的产物。她从不表达自己内心的真实想法，没有自己的思想，也缺乏独立判断的能力。美丽无暇的外表下只是苍白，肤浅的内心。她注定只能成为男权社会华丽的装饰和男人的附属品。与之相反的是，埃伦被刻画成小说中新女性的代表人物：她充满自信，具有主动的自我意识；她不顾习俗，勇于创造自己的时尚而不是盲目遵从传统和潮流；面对男性，她不甘处于卑微和顺从的地位；对于不幸的婚姻，她敢于抗争，具有叛逆精神；她聪明睿智，对人生和艺术都有着自己独立的思想见解；她追求人格和思想上的自主，并不把婚姻看作是女性幸福的归属。另外，华顿塑造了其他几位新女性形象。她们和埃伦一样，反对传统习俗、追求独立人格、向往自由生活、具有叛逆精神。她们坚信自己有着和男性一样的智力和理性，相信女性接受教育的必要性和可能性，并不间断地追求人格和思想上的独立。如喜欢音乐，“每个星期天晚上都搞点活动”的斯特拉瑟斯太太，有着“偏执行为”并轻视传统规矩的梅多拉·曼森，和“喜欢一切新奇的东西”和敢做任何男人敢做之事的曼森·明戈特太太。虽然她们不是小说中的主要人物，作者所费笔墨也不多，她们的偏执行为也为那些正统人士所轻视，但是她们却为这部小说以及沉闷的纽约社会带来了新鲜和活力。她们在言行举止方面的与众不同以及她们对艺术的热爱和对生活的独到见解充分体现了她们挑战男性占主导地位的社会和传统的愿望，以及她们追求自我和独立，实现自我价值的意识。

文学作品是社会生活与时代背景的一面镜子。文学作品中的人物、事件、矛盾以及相关的社会价值观念，都是与当时的社会甚至作家自身的经历息息相关，这部作品也不例外。在《纯真年代》中对于埃伦的描述，在很大程度上可以看作是作者华顿个人的真实写照。和埃伦一样，华顿的爱情之路也十分坎坷，年轻时的她并没有逃脱“老纽约”社会为每一位女性拟定的命运道路。因为是女性，她从未受过正规教育，她的母亲和家族也反对她在文学上的追求，并试图用婚姻的束缚来阻断她的文学写作尝试。1885年她和一个比她大十三岁的门当户对的爱德华·华顿结了婚。但是两人的共同之处很少，这段没有爱情的婚姻给华顿的一生造成了不可弥补的阴影。1913年，不顾家人的反对，华顿坚决地离婚了，尽管这在当时的上流社会是不能容忍的丑闻。出于对当时男权社会和传统的深深不满，华顿同埃伦一样，远走欧洲，希望在那古老的艺术氛围中求得解脱，并通过创作抒发对故土的失落感和作为女性对男权社会的不满。在欧洲自由的经历培养了华顿活跃的思维和敏锐的洞察力，以及最重要的，她拥有了自己的思想。她的与众不同打破了“老纽约”上流社会固有的死气沉沉，她用自己的行为对那些束缚女性自由的条条框框表示蔑视。正像华顿在自传《回顾》(A Backward

Glance, 1934) 中所描述的, 为了能够在—个男性主宰的社会中自由选择角色和生活方式, 她进行了长久的抗争与努力, 并在付出了巨大的努力和代价后才最终得以成功。在华顿的生活和写作生涯中, 她从未停止过对男性主导的社会传统的抗争, 她一直都在追寻自己创作的梦想, 追寻作为女性和女性作家的自我意识和自我价值。

华顿的对男权社会传统的抗争, 对于与男性平等的受教育权利和创作的权利的争取, 并为自己在美国文学史上赢得—席之地, 这些都是女性意识在她个人生活和创作中的充分体现。同时, 她所获得的奖励和荣誉也为其他的女性创作打开了一片新的天地。但是, 尽管华顿的生活和作品中充满了女性意识, 她对老纽约社会的态度和对于当时女性主义的看法还是摇摆不定甚至有些矛盾的。—方面, 她批判束缚女性自由的旧风俗, 但她又对完全开放的新思潮持怀疑态度。就像她对那个曾经养育过她也束缚过她的老纽约的态度—样, 她的感情是复杂的, 既有亲切的眷恋, 又有清醒的针砭, 就像小说中最后一幕中纽兰·阿切尔所感叹的, “毕竟, 旧的生活方式有其好的一面, 而新秩序也有好的一面”。

Introduction

Edith Wharton was born on January 24, 1862, into a socially prominent New York family. Her parents belonged to the aristocratic family that had dominated New York from the Dutch and English colonial era until 1870. Edith never attended school, and was privately educated by governesses and tutors at home for the only one career: marriage. As a female member in Victorian New York society, her role was to learn the intricate pattern of social manners, mores and rituals and that would pave the way for a nice marriage and an eligible wife. At an early age, she displayed a marked interest in writing and literature, but it was discouraged by her family, who believed that writing was unsuitable for a young girl like Edith Wharton. Nevertheless, Edith finished her first novella at the age of fourteen and published a collection of verse two years later. As a prolific writer, Edith Wharton wrote more than forty books during her long writing years, including fourteen novels, thirteen novellas, eleven short story collections and nine nonfiction books, etc. Among them, *The House of Mirth* (1905), *Ethan Frome* (1911), *The Custom of the Country* (1913) and *The Age of Innocence* (1920) have been regarded as her masterpieces. All these have contributed to her reputation as an important writer in American literature. In 1921, Wharton received the Pulitzer Prize, as the first female recipient of American literature, for her novel *The Age of Innocence*. She was granted an honorary Doctorate of Letters from Yale University in 1923, for being considered elevating “the level of American literature”. Professor William Lyon Phelps announced in the Granting Ceremony---“American novelist of international fame...she [Edith Wharton] holds a universally recognized place in the front rank of the world’s living novelists.... We are proud...to enroll her name among the daughters of Yale”.³

Born in an upper-class family in New York, Edith Wharton has experienced and suffered intensely from the constraints and limitations brought by the cultural and

³ From *A Forward Glance: New Essays on Edith Wharton*, ed. Clare Colquitt and Susan Goodman, University of Delaware Press, 1999, pp.13-14.

moral doctrines of the old New York society, upon personal freedom especially upon women's freedom. According to the conventions of her day, a young girl should be handed by her father to a suitable husband, who would continue to offer her masculine wisdom and security. Edith Wharton, however, never did fit the traditionally constructed pattern of female success and happiness. Her talents in literary writing led to her broken engagement to Harry Stevens. It was reported by the Newport Daily News that Harry had dropped her because "Miss Jones is an ambitious authoress, and it is said that, in the eyes of Mr. Stevens, ambition is a grievous fault".⁴ In 1885, Edith married Teddy Wharton, a man who was eight years senior to her and proved not to be her match. Although her marriage was rather unhappy and Wharton suffered a series of nervous breakdowns from it, Wharton put up with this situation for a long time because she had been reared in a society that did not tolerate divorce. She, however, finally managed to break away from it in 1913 and took up her permanent residence in Paris, where she found a purposeful life in her writing. Due to these, Edith Wharton was in many ways considered as a rebel, even an outcast.

Best known as a novelist of manners, most of Edith's fictions expose the cruel excesses and moral decay of aristocratic society in the United States between the end of 19th century and the beginning of 20th century. The upper class of old New York society into which Edith Wharton was born provides her with an abundance of material for her writing. Just as Louis Auchincloss has believed that "what was to have a much greater influence on Edith Jones as a writer, and to supply her with the subject material for her most important work was her own clear, direct, comprehensive little girl's vision of the New York Society lives."(1961: 7) Dissatisfied with social life and disillusioned with marriage, Edith also illuminates the repressiveness of American upper class and the conflict between the inner self and social convention in most of her works. She also shows her concern for the status of women and endorses female's struggle to forge their identities outside accepted social boundaries. Elizabeth Ammons has commented that Edith Wharton's

⁴ See Elaine Showalter, *Modern American Women Writers*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991, p.539.

fiction “is both a record of one brilliant and intellectually independent woman’s thinking about women and a map of feminism’s ferment and failure in America in the decades surrounding the Great War”.⁵

In *The Age of Innocence*, Edith gives us a portrait of “1870s New York from both the outside in and the outside out”.⁶ She has used the mechanics, the mores and manners she has learned as a woman, to create an acute and freshly observed work of fiction. The late-nineteenth-century New York is an inflexible and traditional one: there are rules, never codified but never broken; change occurs slowly in this society, and it requires time and generations. The plot of this novel is a triangle love story about three characters: Newland Archer, May Welland and Ellen Olenska. Newland is a young lawyer, who is engaged to marry pretty, innocent May Welland. Shortly before their engagement is announced, May’s cousin Ellen Olenska, a woman unbound by convention and surrounded by scandal, enters into their life. She was born in New York but left there years ago and married a wealthy Polish count. Because of her husband’s notorious unfaithfulness, Ellen left him and returned to her familiar old New York for support and comfort. When Ellen pleads for a divorce, the whole family, which is afraid of scandal, asks for Newland to persuade Ellen from her decision. Gradually, Newland falls in love with Ellen and is attracted by her self-confidence, her sophistication, her unaffectedness, and her freedom of thoughts. Under the influence of Ellen, Newland begins to realize the limitation of his own life and the pettiness of old New York society. He vacillates between the traditionally unalterable life of propriety to which he belongs and the other world with moral freedom and personal fulfillment which he imagines he could enjoy with Ellen. Unable to break away from the old New York society and its mores, Newland chooses to marry May, but he still intensely loves Ellen. After marriage, he grows weary of the monotony and dullness of their marital life and attempts to elope with Ellen to Europe. Meanwhile, May and the whole family frustrate them continually. Eventually, May gives a large dinner in honor of Ellen, which is meant to end Ellen’s

⁵ See *Short Story Criticism*, Vol. 6, Gale Research, 1990, p. 413.

⁶ See Introduction by Wendy Wasserstein, pp.vi, in *The Age of Innocence*, Bantam Books, 1996

“affair” with Newland and expel her from New York. And May’s advance announcement of her pregnancy has smashed Newland’s plan and trapped him in the marriage and society forever. Twenty years later, Newland is widowed with grown children. His son Dallas Archer has an artistic career as an architect rather than becoming a conventional lawyer like her father. He knows that Ellen lives in Paris and has never married, and insists that Newland accompany him to Europe. The novel ends with a scene in which Newland Archer would rather choose to sit on a Paris bench alone when given the chance of being reunited with Ellen. He says she is more real to him in his memory.

From the very beginning, the novel has aroused incessant interests among critics. Among them, the most notable ones have focused on “the frustration and futility of Newland Archer’s empty life caused by the weight of social inhibitions”.⁷ Some criticisms have investigated the unwritten laws, the prevalence of silence and the “hieroglyphic world” of old New York represented in the novel, “where the real thing was never said or done or even thought, but only represented by a set of arbitrary signs”. (*Age*, 40)⁸ Others raise issues of “Puritanism and morality” (Killoran, 2001: 94): they suggest that a buried life like Newland can well contain a Puritanical element. They agree that the Puritanical aspect of the tradition of New York emerges strongly in *The Age of Innocence*. In general, we are easy to find that their attentions are put mainly on the male protagonist, the old New York society, the relationship between the male protagonist and the mores and conventions of old New York society. Few critics have cared about the female protagonists of the novel, and their social status, their psychology, their pursuit of self-identity. If we examine the novel in detail from the perspective of a female, then we’ll have a completely different world before us. Based on the feminine consciousness, this thesis attempts to analyze the novel through a detailed textual study and through a combination of Wharton’s life and writing experience. It comes to the conclusion that there is the existence of feminine consciousness in the novel.

⁷ From Helen Killoran, *The Critical Reception of Edith Wharton*, Camden House, 2001, p.94.

⁸ Parenthetical reference to *The Age of Innocence* in the thesis will be preceded by *Age*.

Elaine Showalter has defined the evolution of women writers as three stages: *Feminine*, *Feminist*, and *Female*. She identifies the first Feminine phase as the period from the appearance of the male pseudonym in the 1840s to the death of George Eliot in 1880; the Feminist phase as 1880 to 1920, or the winning of the vote; and the Female phase as 1920 to the present, but entering a new stage of self-awareness about 1960. She thinks that the three stages are no rigid categories distinctly separable in time, and they are overlapping at the same time. And she continues to argue that for the generation of the Feminine phase, the will to write as a vocation in direct conflict with their status as women is the appearance of the male pseudonym, which signals the loss of innocence and the historical shift. (Showalter, 1977: 13-19) With the death of George Eliot and the appearance of a new generation of writers, the woman's novels move into a Feminist phase, which is "a confrontation with male society that elevated Victorian sexual stereotypes into a cult". (Showalter, 1977: 29) The feminist novelists challenge "many of the restrictions on women's self-expression, denounced the gospel of self-sacrifice, attacked patriarchal religion, and constructed a theoretical model of female oppression". (Showalter, 1977: 29) Thus, they make their fiction the vehicle for a dramatization of wronged womanhood, and demands "changes in the social and political systems that would grant women male privileges and require chastity and fidelity from men". (Showalter, 1977: 29) And the literature of the last phase moves beyond feminism to a phase of courageous self-exploration: in the rejection of male society and masculine culture, literature becomes a refuge for feminist writers from "the harsh realities and vicious practices of the male world". (Showalter, 1977: 33)

The Age of Innocence is published in 1920, at the turning point of the Feminine phase and Female phase. Therefore, the novel has the characteristics of the two phases: challenging male society and social limits on women's self-expression, and at the same time, asking for freedom and rights equal to those men enjoy. Through attacking male-centered cultures, challenging old New York's conventions and asking for personal and mental autonomy, Edith Wharton has conveyed her notion of feminine consciousness in the novel.

Feminine consciousness can be defined as a kind of female experience and awakening to her self-identity and self-value, either socially or sexually. The struggle for the equal rights, the striving for the independence and autonomy is the externalization of feminine consciousness. It is also a sense of women's collective identity which protests against patriarchal social standards and values, advocates minority's, especially women's rights and values, and demands women's personal and spiritual autonomy. Edith Wharton offers a study of this kind of women's rebellion and demand in *The Age of Innocence* and in her own living and writing experiences. Cicely Hamilton has once suggested in a feminist polemic that women writers are actually rebelling against their training by writing rather than superficially imitating: "any woman who has attained to even a small measure of success in literature or art has done so by discarding, consciously or unconsciously, the traditions in which she was reared, by turning her back upon the conventional ideas of dependence that were held up for her admiration in her youth". (Showalter: 1977, 225) Similarly, Edith Wharton's success in writing is achieved through her discarding the traditions with which she is schooled, and her persisting in her writing dreams.

In addition, R. W. B. Lewis has astutely pointed out that this novel movingly dramatizes "the losing struggle between individual aspiration and the silent, forbidding authority of the social tribe".⁹ And I would add that "individual aspiration" refers specifically to female aspiration to be mentally and economically independent and be equal to male. The "silent forbidding authority of the social tribe" mainly symbolizes the male's authority over female. It is a story full of irony and surprise, struggle and acceptance, suffocating and anti-suffocating, oppression and anti-oppression, though not radically and distinctly.

In *The Age of Innocence*, Edith Wharton tries to explore the "*terra incognita*" of the female psyche (Showalter: 1977, 211), both for the sake of raising women's consciousness about their lives and for the sake of confounding male complacency. She presents the feminine consciousness through the demolishing of male superiority by means of subjectively asserting the female protagonist's non-conformist

⁹ From R. W. B. Lewis, Introduction to *The Age of Innocence*, by Edith Wharton (New York: Scribner's 1970) ix

individuality and revealing the “unconscious” or the repressed “other”.¹⁰ This thesis attempts to explore the feminine consciousness in the novel from three aspects: deconstruction of the masculine superiority; characterization of the New Woman image and a detailed study of Edith Wharton’s life and writing experiences.

¹⁰ See Jennifer Breen, *In Her Own Write: Twentieth-Century Women's Fiction*, Macmillan, 1990, p.1.

“...you’re in a pitiful little minority: you’ve got no centre, no competition, no audience. You’re like the pictures on the walls of a deserted house: ‘The Portrait of a Gentleman’. You’ll never amount to anything, any of you...” (*Age*, 111)

Chapter One: Deconstruction of the Masculine Superiority

Newland Archer, a person who is indistinguishable in dress, manners and conception from the rest of his circle, observes the conventions of old New York strictly. His life is molded on all these conventions, which become a natural part of his life, such as “the duty of using two silver-backed brushes with his monogram in blue enamel to part his hair, and of never appearing in society without a flower in his buttonhole”. (*Age*, 5) As Carol J. Single notes, “like other bachelors of his set, he has latitude to attend clubs and socialize with individuals outside his intimate circle”.¹¹ However, he is unwilling to acknowledge his accordance with the others-- he disdains them because he “had probably read more, thought more, and even seen a good deal more of the world than any other man of the number”, he “felt himself distinctly the superior of these chosen specimens of old New York gentility” in matters “intellectual and artistic” (*Age*, 7). Despite his denial, Newland’s behavior and taste fall well within the boundaries of New York society. His sense of conformity has been so deeply rooted in his mind that he dare not stand out of the group to which he belongs:

Singly they betrayed their inferiority; but grouped together they represented ‘New York’, and the habit of masculine solidarity made him accept their doctrine on all the issues called moral. He instinctively felt that in this respect it would be troublesome---and also rather bad form---to strike out for himself. (*Age*, 7)

¹¹ From Single, “Bourdieu, Wharton and Changing Culture in *The Age of Innocence*”, *Cultural Studies* 17, 2003, pp506

1. Newland's Complacency over His Superior Position

It is said that Edith Wharton takes the title of *The Age of Innocence* from a painting with the same title by Sir Joshua Reynolds. This painting is the profile of “a small girl seated barefoot in a pastoral setting with bow in hair, eyes open and unquestioning, and hand demurely crossed over her breast”.¹² Therefore, the meaning of the title is twofold from the perspective of a male: the female is innocent and pure like a child and her hands are not to be applied to active endeavors; the female is easily to be manipulated, not manipulative. (Orlando, 1998: 70) Kate Fullbrook believes that the cultivation of female innocence secures women’s ignorance and their incapacity to choose wisely the right course of action. (1990: 17-18) As a representative of male society, Newland naturally thinks himself superior to female, he requires women around him to be innocent and easy to be manipulated. Therefore he can exhibit his power and authority without difficulty.

As for May Welland, Newland Archer believes himself as her possessor, spiritual guide, or even “soul’s custodian” (*Age*, 38) rather than as her husband with equal status. In the eyes of Newland, May, a creature of “abysmal purity”, is hardly an individual. She is merely a perfect match, the best and most suitable for him. When he contemplates May’s face, he is filled with “a thrill of *possessorship* in which pride in his own masculine initiation was mingled with a tender reverence for her abysmal purity”. (*Age*, 6, my emphasis) He even wants to create May as a miraculous product with the characteristics of “fire and ice”(*Age*, 7): on the one hand, May should be pure and innocent because that will make May more obedient and easily-controlled; on the other hand, he means her to be world-wise and to “develop a social tact and readiness of wit” under his enlightening companionship, in order “to attract masculine homage while playfully discouraging it”. (*Age*, 6) As Lev Raphael has put it, May’s beauty is “as much a reflection on him as it is something to admire in him”¹³, and

¹² See Emily J. Orlando, “Reading Wharton’s ‘Poor Archer’: A Mr. ‘Might-have-been’ in *The Age of Innocence*”, *American Literary Realism 1870-1910* 30.2 (Winter 1998), p.68. (hereafter cited as Orlando)

¹³ See Lev Raphael, *Edith Wharton’s Prisoners of Shame*, St. Martin’s Press, 1991, p.316. (hereafter cited as

Newland is “proud of the glances turned on her...” (*Age*, 72) May’s beauty and innocence have largely satisfied his masculine vanity. He delights in “the radiant good looks of his betrothed, in her health, her horsemanship, her grace and quickness at games, and the shy interest in books and ideas that she was beginning to develop under his guidance”. (*Age*, 40) Their marriage is regarded as the enviable ideal, and Newland feels that it “was undoubtedly gratifying to be the husband of one of the handsomest and most popular married women in New York, especially when she was also one of the sweetest-tempered and most reasonable of wives”. (*Age*, 183)

In the novel, Newland has hypocritically preached the equality of female and male, and exclaims for several times that “women ought to be as free as we are”. However, “such verbal generousities were in fact only a humbugging disguise of the inexorable conventions that tied things together and bound people down to the old pattern” (*Age*, 39), and it is impossible for Newland to give May the freedom to become something different. Actually, he never considers May as his equal. He thinks May is subordinate, inferior to him in matters economically and intelligently. Under the protection of the recognized double standard for moral behavior of old New York, males are allowed to have extramarital affairs before or even after their marriage if only it does not too violently rock the boat of the society; while females with the same affairs will be disdained as flirtatious. Nearly all people believe that any woman who loves imprudently as necessarily unscrupulous and designing, and mere simple-minded man as powerless in her clutches. These love affairs are simply thought of as foolish for man, but “somehow always criminal” for woman. (*Age*, 84) Newland is no exception to it--- he has once been fascinated by the married lady, and he has a secret love-affair with “poor, silly” Mrs. Thorley Rushworth before his engagement with May. As Blake Nevius has put it, there is “a lurking feminism” in Wharton’s writings, which can be detected in “her implied criticism of the double standard of morality” and “in the appearance in so many of stories of the emotionally low-charged, overscrupulous male protagonist”. (1953: 85)

If we assume that Newland’s marriage with May can satisfy his male vanity, then

his willingness to help and protect Ellen Olenska can arouse his paternalistic and chivalrous sentiments. In the initial stages of his relationship with Ellen, Newland is more concerned with saving Ellen, May and himself from embarrassment and scandal --in terms of his prospective relation with the Mingott clan. He defends Ellen strongly when Ellen is discussed publicly with a faint touch of sarcasm,

Why shouldn't she be conspicuous if she chooses? Why should she have to slink about as if it were she who had disgraced herself? She is 'poor Ellen' certainly because she had the bad luck to make a wretched marriage; but I don't see that that's a reason for hiding her head as if she were the culprit. (*Age*, 35)

And Newland is drawn into a more active role in defending Ellen while the whole old New York deliberately insults Ellen--most of the guests refuse an invitation to a Mingott dinner arranged in the honor of Ellen. Later, when entrusted by his law firm and the Mingott family with the mission of persuading Ellen from divorce, Newland feels "the blood in his temples" (*Age*, 83) and decides to take on the mission "rather than let her secrets be bared to other eyes":

A great wave of compassion had swept away his indifference and impatience: she stood before him as *an exposed and pitiful figure*, to be saved at all costs from farther wounding herself in her mad plunges against fate. (*Age*, 85, my emphasis)

Lev Raphael notes that, it is Ellen's shameful past that operates to make Newland feel superior to her. (1991: 310) Helping and protecting Ellen makes his chivalric spirit rising, and he sees Ellen as a victim of an unfaithful husband and an indifferent and cruel legal system that treats a wife as practically the property of her husband with no rights of her own. And Newland's desire to help and protect Ellen gradually blossoms into his falling love with her, who seems to offer an escape from his empty and meaningless martial life.

Actually, his male superiority comes not only from his relations with May and Ellen, but also from the respect and admiration of his own family members. As the only male of his family, Newland is the focus of attention and admiration of his mother and his sister. His mother, Mrs. Archer, "who had long been a widow, lived with her son and daughter in West Twenty-Eighth Street". (*Age*, 30) In the family,

Newland has undoubtedly got his male superiority realized. Mrs. Archer and her daughter “squeezed themselves into narrower quarters below”, while the whole upper floor “was dedicated to Newland”. (*Age*, 30) Mother and daughter revere their son and brother, and Newland loves them “with a tenderness made compunctious and uncritical by the sense of *their exaggerated admiration*, and by *his secret satisfaction* in it”. (*Age*, 31: my emphasis)

Newland’s struggling to display his masculine superiority reveals his lack of confidence with his authority and superiority and his incapacity. Only on female’s innocence, inferiority and helplessness can his superiority be based. But if females are not childish, innocent and talentless as he has expected, can he still remain the essentiality of man in man/woman binary opposition?

2. Confounding Male Complacency

Virginia Woolf has pointed out that “the enormous importance to a patriarch who has to conquer, who has to rule, of feeling that great numbers of people, half the human race indeed, are by nature inferior to himself”. (1929: 59) It is the case with Newland Archer: he feels the female---“half the human race” are by nature inferior to him, and he is always satisfied with his role of being women’s guide and protector. Once this kind of authority is challenged or even demolished, he will lose his masculine superiority. Emily J. Orlando argues that “Ellen and May work together to deconstruct Archer’s world in ways similar to Wharton, who deflates the myth of the American woman and challenges the tradition”. (1998: 73) By examining Newland’s relation with May and Ellen in depth, we can explore the frustration and defeat of a man. His illusion, his cowardliness, his emotional debility and indecision gradually undermine the superiority and divinity of a man, who is otherwise extolled in most of male writers’ writing.

For many centuries, women have served as “looking-glasses”, possessing the magic power of enlarging and perfecting the figure of man. (Woolf, 1929: 60) Thus, women are required to be innocent, simple, acceptant, and to love her husband with

admiring minds. The “looking-glass” is so important to men that if you “take it away, man may die, like the drug fiend deprived of his cocaine”. (Woolf, 1929: 62) Under the illusion of its magic, however, man can start the day confidently and proudly, believing himself competent and superior. Being no exception, Newland also takes May and Ellen as his “looking-glass”. Both May’s innocence and Ellen’s helplessness make his authority and superiority more outstanding. He is immersed in the illusion of being a soul guide and protector of them. He thought that he totally understands both May and Ellen, and he can have an insight into everything they do and everything in their minds. The reality and truth, however, have smashed his readings of them. Ironically, they read him more accurately, and both May and Ellen have broken Newland’s fantasy to be their protector and enlightener.

“he had the feeling that he had never yet lifted that curtain” (*Age*, 187)

As Orlando puts it, “an important part of the myth of the American Girl is that she is a perpetual child”. (1998, 69) Newland promotes this image of woman-as-child. His wife May is innocent, pure and lovely, and is always waiting to be guided and protected, just like a little girl---with her husband’s reassurance, she “had dropped back into the usual, as a too-adventurous child takes refuge in its mother’s arms”. (*Age*, 133) He persists in believing May’s possession of a “faculty of unawareness” that will never change: he is always confident that May would be predictable, so that he “would always know the thoughts behind her clear brow, that never, in all the years to come, would she surprise him by an unexpected mood, by a new idea, a weakness, a cruelty or an emotion”. (*Age*, 261)

On the contrary, May’s behavior has deconstructed and smashed Newland’s fixed reading of her as “innocent” and “guileless”. She shows her artfulness and her manipulation over Newland and their marriage in her striving for her own happiness step by step. Her opportune advancing of their wedding date prevents Newland’s love with Ellen from developing further: when Newland is ready to give May up and begin his love with Ellen, May’s wedding telegram has frustrated him greatly---“[he] crumpled up the yellow sheet as if the gesture could annihilate the news it contained” (*Age*, 154). Gradually, May makes him isolated in the family--- “her careless allusion

had no doubt been the straw held up to see which way the wind blew; the result had been reported to the family, and thereafter Archer had been tacitly omitted from their counsels". (*Age*, 223) When Newland determines to elope with Ellen to other country, May surprises him with the news that she has told Ellen she is pregnant "a fortnight" before she is certain. And May knows exactly that her pregnancy would force Ellen out of the love game. Meanwhile, she artfully keeps the details of her "really good talk" with Ellen hidden from Newland. Eventually, with the help of her family, she succeeds in expelling Ellen from their society and insists on giving a farewell banquet on the eve of Ellen's return to Europe:

...by means as yet unknown to him, the separation between himself and the partner...had been achieved, and that now the whole tribe had rallied about his wife on the tacit assumption that nobody knew anything, or had ever imagined anything, and that the occasion of the entertainment was simply May Archer's natural desire to take an affectionate leave of her friend and cousin. (*Age*, 297)

Confronted with all these, Newland finds himself utterly powerless, and feels like "a prisoner in the center of an armed camp", emasculated by the "inexorableness of his captors". (*Age*, 297) He catches "the glitter of victory in his wife's eyes" and reads in them "the conviction that everything had 'gone off' beautifully". (*Age*, 300)

May gradually makes Newland become a copy of her father, who is sensitive to everything horrible, afraid of taking any responsibilities, and absorbed in trifles to tie his thoughts to reality. After marriage, Newland's whole future has suddenly unrolled before him---"passing down its endless emptiness", there is "the *dwindling figure* of a man to whom nothing was ever to happen". (*Age*, 201, my emphasis)

Although Newland loves Ellen, his love is built upon his imagined fantasy world. In this fantasy world, Newland assumes Ellen as a helpless "damsel in distress". As I have discussed before, he imagines her "as an exposed and pitiful figure to be saved at all costs from farther wounding herself in her mad plunges against fate". (*Age*, 85) He fancies his role as an enlightener: "a longing to *enlighten* was strong in him; and there were moments when he *imagined* that all she asked was to be enlightened". (*Age*, 96, my emphasis) The fact, however, goes the other way around. Actually, Ellen

is the person who guides. Again and again, she reverses Newland's values and he develops under the lively immediate influence of her. With the help of Ellen, Newland has opened his eyes and gained a deeper insight into the society he lives in. Her thought, her dress, and even her method of room-decorating have surprised Newland intensely.

When he came to Ellen's house for the first time, what he saw was "faded shadowy charm of a room unlike any room he had known". (*Age*, 62) The atmosphere of the room is entirely different from what he has ever breathed. His male superiority is challenged for the first time, and he is somewhat unaccustomed to this kind of unusual state. Newland has all the time prided himself on his knowledge of Italian art---"he talked easily of Botticelli and spoke of Fra Angelico with a faint condescension", but "a couple of Italian-looking pictures" in Ellen's drawing-room have bewildered him. He feels his power of observation impaired by "the oddness of finding himself in this strange empty house, where apparently no one expects him". (*Age*, 63) The following conversation with Ellen makes Newland more amazed, and he seems to forget his sense of dignity: "it's you who are telling me, opening my eyes to things I'd looked at so long that I'd ceased to see them"---he has once said to Ellen. (*Age*, 67) Newland thinks he has secured the controlling gaze on her, but Ellen overrules it by seeing him through. With her simplicity and wisdom, Ellen has managed to make him "feel stupidly conventional just when he thought he was flinging convention to the winds". (*Age*, 255) Saying that "we'll look, not at visions, but at realities", Ellen tries to correct Newland's folly and break his illusion of getting away into "a world where they shall be simply two human beings who love each other, who are the whole life to each other; and nothing else on earth will matter" (*Age*, 257). This also accounts for Newland's renunciation of Ellen in the end: May is the "safe" alternative, and personifies all the evasions and compromises of his clan, whereas Ellen is so mysterious and unexpected.

In the novel, Edith Wharton also exhibits masculine predicaments and crisis through the presenting of male emotional debility and vocational indecision. As the

representative of male of his generation, Newland is deficient in “available passion and the habit but not the substance of correct behavior”.¹⁴ A “decent fellow” of this male-centered society as he is, Newland has no courage to undertake all the necessary obligations. He wants to be accountable to no one for his actions, and lends himself “with an amused detachment to the game of precautions and prevarications, concealments and compliances that the part required”. (*Age*, 270) Kenneth D. Pimple states that when Newland falls in love with Ellen and contemplates abandoning May, “he does not for an instant think of challenging society, but only of fleeing it”.¹⁵ Unwilling to face the reality, he even wishes May would die immediately,

What if it were *she* who was dead! If she were going to die---to die soon---and leave him free! The sensation of standing there, in that warm familiar room, and looking at her, and wishing her dead, was so strong, so fascinating and overmastering, that its enormity did not immediately strike him. He simply felt that chance had given him a new possibility to which his sick soul might cling. Yes, May might die-people die: young people, healthy people like herself; she might die, and set *him* suddenly free”.

(*Age*, 262)

His retreat from defiance of conventions is a sign of the declining masculine codes of power as well. All he wants to do is escaping and buried himself in his own fantasy world. He feels more comfortable with illusion rather than with reality. Even after his wife’s death, he is still powerless to envision a new life. Edith Wharton employs metaphors of death and ennui to convey Newland’s loss of vitality: from his “colorless voice”, to his observation about the “deadly monotony of their lives”, to his pained exclamation as he throws open a window, “I *am* dead---I’ve been dead for months and months”. (*Age*, 184-262) Equally, other young men, who are fairly well-off and without professional ambitions like Newland, are also inert. They often sit at their desks accomplishing trivial tasks, or simply reading the newspapers. Many of them have developed the mould of perfunctory---none of these young men have

¹⁴ See Cynthia Griffin Wolff, *A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton*, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 316.

¹⁵ See Kenneth D. Pimple, “Edith Wharton’s ‘Inscrutable Totem Terrors’: Ethnography and *The Age of Innocence*”, *Southern Folklore* (1994), p.147.

much hope of really advancing in his profession, or any earnest desire to do so. They seek for coziness and enjoyment, and have gradually sunk into “the placid and luxurious routine of their elders”. (*Age*, 113) They’re like the pictures on the walls of a deserted house, and will never amount to anything, until they “roll up their sleeves and get right down into the muck”. (*Age*, 111) These young men will all become the second Mr. Welland, Newland’s sensitive father-in-law, whose temperature rises at the hint of any changes and dangers; or just like Lawrence Lefferts and Sillerton Jackson who are more avid and influential disseminators of gossip than women are.

Male characters’ inability and inefficiency undermine their masculine superiority and authority, and makes it possible for female to struggle for freedom, independence and equality. Furthermore, some female characters of the novel act more actively and energetically. They are no longer passive and submissive under male control and manipulation. They are conscious of their inferiority in the society and manage to cast off the fetters and restrictions imposed by male-centered society. The “new woman” image begins to burgeon and emerge accompanying the deconstructing of the male superiority.

“How are we fallen! fallen by mistaken rules,
And Education’s more than Nature’s fools;
Debarred from all improvements of the mind,
And to be dull, expected and designed;”

(Virginia Woolf, 1929: 101)

Chapter Two: Characterization of the New Women Image

For women, traditions and conventions of the nineteenth century have prescribed strictly on how to play their proper roles---how to be a good girl, an eligible wife and mother. There are “four virtues served as the cornerstone of true womanhood: purity, piety, domesticity and submissiveness”. (Stephanie Lewis Thompson, 2002: 5) To be “Angel in the House” (Elaine Showalter, 1977: 14), they are expected to live their lives “comforting work-weary husbands, devoting themselves to molding young children into moral, upright citizens and fashioning homes”. (Ellen M. Plante: XI) The pervasiveness of the social expectations for the proper woman has rendered the women “the hostage in the home”, however. (Thompson, 2002: 5) They are confined to the house and continue to inhabit the domestic sphere. They should conform to the prescriptions, or they may be viewed as bad women or even “siren”. In *The Age of Innocence*, Ellen Olenska and other females of the novel, however, have transcended the traditional literary patterns on women: being neither “angel” nor “siren”. Their behavior and thoughts foreshow the emergency of a group of new woman whose values and moral standards are different from those in the traditional society: they cannot reconcile themselves to male-regulated conventions; they are against traditional customs and full of rebellious spirit; they are no longer unsophisticated and submissive. They are trying all the time to pursue freedom, independence, and their own happiness. In spite of all the possible difficulties and hardships:

“And if some one would soar above the rest,
With warmer fancy, and ambition pressed,
So strong the opposing faction still appears,

The hopes to thrive can ne'er outweigh the fears." (Woolf, 1929: 101)

they still yearn for psychological independence and self-identity. They represent both the author's and female's desire to smash traditional stereotypes on women.

1. Traditional or unconventional, which one is better?

In the novel, May Welland is an important character we cannot ignore. In one way or another, she exists as the opposite side of Ellen Olenska. May symbolizes the one Edith Wharton is supposed to be, traditional and innocent. According to Margaret Lawrence, May is "the conventionalized presentation of femininity". (Helen Killoran, 1996: 12) A good girl and ideal wife in the eyes of family and society, she is constantly regarded as a virginal figure, an emblem of innocence and a mirror of tradition. On the other hand, Ellen is depicted as the one Edith Wharton is actually to be, self-defining and intellectual. Like Edith Wharton, Ellen's orphanage, her guardianship by an eccentric aunt, her unhappy marriage to a Polish Count are alien and disruptive to old New York. Their different personalities lead to the different ways of life. A close study of their personality and their lives in the story can reveal Edith Wharton's preferences and viewpoint.

May is characterized as merely a "product of the social system". (*Age*, 38) All her frankness and innocence is only "an artificial product" (*Age*, 41), and it was full of the twists and defenses of an instinctive guile." (*Age*, 41) Her innocence is the kind that "seals the mind against imagination and the heart against experience" (*Age*, 129), she never speaks for herself, and she often echoes what is said for her. And she doesn't possess any "experience", "versatility" and "freedom of judgment". (*Age*, 39) To make the matter worse, May is accustomed to this situation, as Edith Wharton exclaims in the novel, "how many generations of the women who had gone to her making had descended bandaged to the family vault?" (*Age*, 73) What's more, Edith makes a pungent and revealing comparison: she compares the traditional women to the Kentucky cave-fish, which has ceased to develop eyes because they have no use

for them. In the same way, even if traditional women's bandages are taken off, or the restrictions of conventions are removed, "they could only look out blankly at blankness". (*Age*, 74)

Deeply and strongly influenced by the convention, May voluntarily gives up the pursuit of freedom and devotes herself completely to her husband and their family. Whenever and wherever, May is always employing social conventions as criteria to measure her action and her thought. Being a loyal defender of old New York convention, she has not the dimmest notion that she is not free. "May's only use of the liberty she supposed herself to possess would be to lay it on the altar of her wifely adoration. Her innate dignity would always keep her from making the gift abjectly...[her] conception of marriage [was] so uncomplicated and incurious ...Whatever happened, she would always be loyal, gallant and unresentful..."(*Age*, 173-174) Therefore she becomes the representative of the loyal and traditional woman, and "the tutelary divinity" of all the old traditions and reverences. (*Age*, 174)

Traditional custom makes May pay too much attention to her outward appearance and dressing (she is keen on making use of "the social advantages of dress" ---"it's their [women's] amour, their defense against the unknown, and their defiance of it"). (*Age*, 175), whereas neglect the cultivation of her inner thoughts. Her approximately perfect appearance is in sharp contrast with her interior paleness and superficialness---"Though her loveliness was an encouragement to admiration, her conversation was a chill to repartee". (*Age*, 176) Her paleness and ignorance make her marriage with Newland monotonous and suffocating. This may be a reason to explain why Newland will fall in love with not-so-nice Ellen.

In the last chapter of the novel, Edith Wharton clarifies her viewpoints on May:

As he [Newland] had seen her [May] that day, so she had remained; never quite at the same height, yet never far below it: generous, faithful, unwearied; but *so lacking in imagination, so incapable of growth*, that the world of her youth had fallen into pieces and rebuilt itself without her ever being conscious of the change. *This hard bright blindness* had kept her immediate horizon apparently unaltered. Her incapacity to

recognize change made her children conceal their views from her as Archer concealed his. (*Age*, 308, my emphasis)

There is an underlying sadness and anger in Edith's characterization of May Welland. May's factitious innocence, her lack of judgment and imagination, her pale and empty spirit, her physical and spiritual dependence on male and marriage can mostly be attributed to the old New York patriarchal society and social propriety.

On the other hand, Ellen has her own thoughts and feelings. She doesn't live the life in the way that the social convention has prescribed for female. She is pursuing the life she likes, and making her own fashion, instead of living blindly according to tradition.

2. Ellen---a typical "New Woman"

Elizabeth Ammons regards Ellen as a "New Woman", defined by her independence of thought and her desire for freedom, though unhappily rejected by old New York.¹⁶ In contrast to May, Ellen is portrayed as an emblem of freedom magnificent in her willingness to make moral choices while challenging definitions of traditional women's roles. Kathy Fedorko, likewise, reads Ellen as "the aware feminine self" and "a woman comfortable with autonomy and self-knowledge".¹⁷

In the eyes of old New York people, Ellen is faintly exotic, mysterious and unusual: her life on the Europe, her unhappy marriage and abrupt departure from it, her first appearance with old-fashioned dress, her Sunday soirees with people her family and friend despise and mistrust, and even the unorthodox cut of her gown set her apart from others. Kate Fullbrook argues that Edith Wharton wants to design Ellen as "a catalyst for discussion of women's increasing sexual and material self-determination". (1990: 29) She possesses many traits which are encouraged in the male and discouraged in the female. Her independence, intelligence and

¹⁶ From Elizabeth Ammons, *Edith Wharton's Argument with America*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980, p.146.

¹⁷ Cited from Jill M. Kress, ed. *The Figure of Consciousness*, Routledge, New York, 2002, p232.

strong-will give every appearance of the image of a new woman, which are illustrated in the novel from the following perspectives:

Self-consciousness: Elle's education, experience, and behavior have all constructed a very different woman with self-consciousness. When she was a little girl, she was "a fearless and familiar little thing, who asked disconcerting questions, made precocious comments". (*Age*, 53) Although her education is incoherent all along, she has been allowed to learn about the real world of art and music---she possesses "outlandish arts, such as dancing a Spanish shawl dance and singing Neapolitan love-songs to a guitar" (*Age*, 53). She has developed her own independent and original views on life, rather than echoing what males say. Carol J. Singley believes that Ellen "bravely follows her conscience without regard for her personal or material outcome". (167) She tries to make her own fashions instead of following others'. By taking the best materials at hand and making them uniquely hers, she makes her own fashions and constructs her own identity as an artist. Her sitting room is unlike any other women's: by a turn of her hand, Ellen has transformed a shabby hired house into "something intimate, foreign, and subtly suggestive of old romantic scenes and sentiments". (*Age*, 63) The paintings on her drawing-room make Newland bewildered, who has once prided himself on her knowledge of Italian art. Ellen's choice of art and selection of books illustrate "her intellectual independence and aesthetic sensibility". (Katherine Joslin, 1991: 93)

In such an age of innocence, traditional and nice woman should be simple and innocent. It is unbearable for female to have the insight of experience. For most women, that insight is usually subdued by social obligations. Ellen's mysterious and outlandish background of "something inherently dramatic, passionate and unusual in herself", however, makes her have a deeper and profounder insight into the society and social conventions. She is prudent and insightful---"it was precisely the odd absence of surprise in her that gave him the sense of her having been plucked out of a very maelstrom: the things she took for granted gave the measure of those she had rebelled against". (*Age*, 103) She is composed and self-possessed than ordinary women ---"there was about her the mysterious authority of beauty, a sureness in the

carriage of the head, the movement of the eyes, which, without being in the least of theatrical". (*Age*, 54) She is more willing to envisage the cruel realities and confront the responsibilities. More than once, she has corrected Newland's folly and broken his escapism and retreatism. Instead of blindly following the social convention, Ellen tries to seek for reasoned truth. And Ellen's pursuit of her own path suggests a self-conscious philosophy.

Non-conforming individuality: According to Virginia Woolf, "women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size". (1929: 60) Obligated to be inferior to men, women served as mirrors of men's superiority and heroic action. Mirrors are essential to all men. Without women's willingness to be inferior, "supermen and Fingers of Destiny would never have existed", and "the Czar and Kaiser would never have worn their crowns or lost them". (Woolf, 1929: 60-61) And it serves to explain how restless men are under women's criticism. If women begin to tell the truth, "the figures in the looking-glass shrink", and men's fitness for life are diminished. (Woolf, 1929: 61) Under the illusion of "the looking-glass", men can start their life and career with self-confidence and self-assurance.

Confronted with male superiority, Ellen is not willing to be a "looking-glass". She is not traditionally passive and submissive. Striving for smashing men's illusion, she tries to speak for herself, to be herself, be unaffected and true. Contrary to May, who is always going to say the right thing, Ellen dares to utter her true opinions and acts in the simplest manner "without being in the least theatrical". (*Age*, 54) In the old New York, the male desires a young female without experience or independent judgment, so that he can assume the role of educator and guide. However, Ellen is so sophisticated and penetrating that her words have often opened Newland's eyes to "things he'd looked at so long that he's ceased to see them" (*Age*, 67), and has given Newland an illuminating glimpse of truth:

"Oh, it's [my house is] a poor little place...But at any rate it's less gloomy than the van der Luydens'". [said Ellen] The words gave him [Newland] an electric shock, for few were *rebellious spirits* who would have *dared* to call the stately home of the van der

Luydens gloomy. Those privileged to enter it shivered there, and spoke of it as “handsome”. (*Age*, 65, my emphasis)

With her penetrating remark---“for their great influence, that they make themselves so rare” (*Age*, 67), Ellen has pricked the affectation and hypocrisy of the van der Luydens.

In accordance with the custom of New York, a lady should be an “idol”, or “an ornament meant to rest the gentlemen’s eyes”, and wait for gentlemen’s attention (Bell, 1995: 32):

It was not the custom in New York drawing-rooms for a lady to get up and walk away from one gentleman in order to seek the company of another. Etiquette required that she should wait, immovable as an idol, while the men who wished to converse with her succeeded each other at her side. (*Age*, 56)

Regardless of the rule, Ellen initiates her conversations with men at parties instead of sitting motionlessly as an idol: she “rose”, walked alone “across the wide drawing-room, and sat down at Newland’s side”. (*Age*, 56) Moreover, she revolts against men’s use of women as badges of respectability. Therefore, she has once given up a chance to take back a large sum of money that belonged to her on the condition that she just sit at the head of her husband’s table now and then.

Traditionally, marriage is the destination all women want to reach, and the only means to be a happy woman. For the new woman, however, marriage, especially unhappy marriage is something of a restriction. They value their own freedom, and they will ask for a divorce when their marriages are unhappy, though divorce isn’t favored by social custom and is thought to be unpleasant. Similarly, Ellen tries to get a divorce because of unhappy marriage, which is unavoidably against by the whole family. Her divorce case has stirred up old settled convictions. It may bring great harm to her because her husband would say unpleasant and offensive things. Still, she wants to get away from it, wipe out all the past, cast off the old life. In addition, Ellen refuses to elope with Newland beyond the constraints of old New York because she knows that such a world holds no promise for a woman, because she never wants to put herself and her happiness in the hands of man. She would rather live alone with

dignity. The renunciation of the love with Newland makes Ellen gain greater freedom.

Struggle for personal and artistic autonomy: “The enclosed and secret room” had always been a potent image in women’s novels since Jane Eyre. Psychologically, the room is usually taken as a refuge from “the harsh realities and vicious practices of the male world.” (Showlater, 1977: 33) In *The Age of Innocence*, Ellen’s room has been repeatedly portrayed in detail. Located in “a *strange* quarter” with “small dress-maker, bird-stuffers and ‘*people who wrote*’ as the nearest neighbors”, it is “a peeling stucco house with a giant wisteria throttling its feeble cast-iron balcony”. (*Age*, 60, my emphasis) Though despised by her relatives, it is heaven for Ellen, a harbor and shelter from outer scandal and social limitations. It is a world in which Ellen can make her own fashion and a space for exhibiting her selfhood. In the room, Ellen has given expression to her artistic autonomy and sensibility through furnishing the room with distinctive Italian paintings and odd adornments---“with its blighted background of pampas grass and Rogers statuettes, had, by a turn of the hand, and the skilful use of a few properties, [the house has] been transformed into something intimate, ‘foreign’, subtly suggestive of old romantic scenes and sentiments”. (*Age*, 63) At the close of the novel, Ellen ends up in a room where “a light shone through the windows” (*Age*, 317), a room that remains closed to Newland. She finds her community and her companionship there:

She had spent the long interval among people he [Newland] did not know, in a society he but faintly guessed at, in conditions he would never wholly understand...but she had doubtless had other and more tangible companionship. (*Age*, 318)

This indicates “Ellen embraces a self that carries its own light, though she must explicitly turn inside in order to preserve it”. (Jill M. Kress, 172) The image of house stands for a separate world, a flight from masculine conventions. And it has been identified with her attempt to hold on to a personal and inward cache, and her aspiration for freedom and independence.

Ellen has longed for a power of vision which might overpass social limitations and restrictions, and which might reach the dynamic world, cities or regions full of art and music. She yearns for being in a community, where she can have intercourse with

friends sharing the same interest. And she does realize her dreams in the closing of the novel. Three decades after her parting from Newland, Ellen has never gone back to her husband and made no change in her way of living even after her husband had died. She lives independently without economic support from her husband, without allowance from her granny, and without many things her relatives considered indispensable. She lives her own life alone in Paris, where can accommodate her intellect and soul:

For nearly thirty years, her life...had been spent in this rich atmosphere that he [Newland] already felt to be too dense and yet too stimulating...he thought of the theatres she must have been to, the pictures...the sober and splendid old houses ...the people...the incessant stir of ideas, curiosities, images and associations thrown out by an intensely social race in a setting of immemorial manners.... (*Age*, 318)

It's the independent life full of arts, inspiration and intellect she has pursued all the while. She has retained her intellectual liberty without selling her soul to the illusory love and marriage. "Is there nowhere in an American house where one may be by one's self?"(*Age*, 73), she has once asked Newland, and she is fortunate enough to find such place in the epilogue of the novel.

She flourishes in this community, where she can showcase, shelter and renew the self. Just as the room portrayed in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, Ellen has possessed a room of her own, with the artistic and personal autonomy, which also implies women's disengagement from social conventions and stereotypes.

3. Several other New Women

In addition to Ellen, there are some other unconventional women parading through *The Age of Innocence*. Though being merely minor characters of the novel, they generate a power of their own, bring freshness to the dull New York and capture our attention at various scenes. They live their lives in their unique manners, though being considered as eccentric and odd, or even being despised as fallen women. Their

different views on life, arts, and conventions illuminate their self-consciousness and self-confidence, and their pursuit of their own selves. They provide the only source of energy in the old New York, and animate an otherwise enervated society, though their discontent with society and their need for self-justification may sometimes lead them into extremity, emotionalism and fantasy.

Active Mrs. Struthers, a tremendous black-wigged and red-plumed lady in over-flowing furs, wants to “know everybody who’s young and interesting and charming”. (*Age*, 70) Her energy and interest in good music place her at the center of New York entertainment. Bold and brazen, she usually has something like good music going on every Sunday evening, when “the whole of New York is dying of inanition”. (*Age*, 77) She even dares to get up on a table and sing things which are sung at the places you go to Paris.

Medora Mingott, Ellen’s aunt and a wanderer, insists on seeking for her love and happiness, though repeatedly widowed. To flout the unalterable rules that regulated Americans is one of Medora’s many “peculiarities” and “eccentricities”. (*Age*, 52) She is also interested in art, music and literature, so she has once inaugurated a “literary salon” in her prosperous days. (*Age*, 91) When Ellen’s parents died, Medora adopted little Ellen and brought her up in her unusual manner. Under the direction of Medora, “the little girl received an expensive but incoherent education, which included ‘drawing from the model’, a thing never dreamed of before, and playing the piano in quintets with professional musicians.” (*Age*, 53) Undoubtedly, Medora plays an important part in the grown-up and personality development of Ellen, though being despised as “misguided” (*Age*, 52). It’s the unconventional education and her continuous exposure to art and music that offer Ellen with spiritual and artistic autonomy, different from other females.

The most unconventional of them is Mrs. Manson Mingott, who dares to do whatever men dare to do, and likes all the novelties. Her age, her spirit and all her wonderful attributes have been the focus of attention and gossip of all New York people. Just as Ellen’s little house on West Twenty-third Street, Edith Wharton offers a detailed description of Mrs. Mingott’s grand town house, which is the extension of

its owner's personality. This cream-colored house "in an inaccessible wilderness" is a visible proof of her moral courage, which symbolize her resistance to genteel middle-class norms and rules. With "strength of will and hardness of heart" (*Age*, 11), she goes her way fearlessly, mingling freely in foreign society and marrying her daughters to foreign countries. Regardless of convention and precedent, she makes the foreignness of the arrangement of her reception room, which recalls "scenes in French fiction and architectural incentives to immorality such as the simple American have never dreamed of" (*Age*, 24) and expresses her independence of mind. Aged, she established both her sitting room and bedroom on the ground floor, which is in flagrant violation of all the New York proprieties, and has "startled and fascinated" her visitors. (*Age*, 24) She has once elaborated on the lack of initiative of Mingotts family:

Ah, these Mingotts---all alike! Born in a rut, and you can't root 'em out of it. When I built this house you'd have thought I was moving to California! Nobody ever *had* built above Fortieth Street...No, no; not one of them wants to be different; they're as scared of it as the small-pox...but there's not one of my own children that takes after me but my little Ellen. (*Age*, 135)

Being heedless of the tradition and struggling for casting off the constrictions of the conventions are their commonness. All of these women have, more or less, worked at the creations of colorful personality and feminine self-identity. Their aspiring after personal and spiritual autonomy greatly shows the existing of the feminine consciousness.

“They tell us we mistake our sex and way;
Good breeding, fashion, dancing, dressing, play,
Are the accomplishments we should desire;
To write, or read, or think, or to enquire,
Would cloud our beauty, and exhaust our time”
(Woolf, 1934: 102)

Chapter Three: Living and Writing with Feminine

Consciousness

According to Elaine Showalter, “feminist criticism in the 1970s and 1980s has established the importance of women’s personal experience in relation to their artistic opportunities and choices”. Many aspects of women’s lives will affect the way they shape their literary careers, including their “childhood, relationships with mothers and fathers, sexuality, decisions about marriage and maternity, friendships with other women [and] the aging process”. (Showalter, 1991: vii) Therefore, combing a detailed study of Wharton’s life and writing experience with a thorough analysis of the novel will help us to have a deeper understanding of the novel.

Elaine Showalter argues that the mad wife locked in the attic in *Jane Eyre*, “symbolizes the passionate and sexual side of Jane’s personality, an alter ego that her upbringing, her religion, and her society have commanded her to incarcerate”. (1977: 28) Similarly, Ellen’s being expelled out of the family and her expatriation to France in *The Age of Innocence* symbolize the passionate and rebellious side of Edith Wharton’s personality. There are many similarities between Edith and Ellen: both are despised as alien by traditional people, both are self-conscious and independent in spirit and soul, both have unhappy marriage and have asked for divorce, both have expatriated to France in search of self, etc. In some degree, Ellen is a substitute for Edith Wharton.

Edith Wharton’s life and writing experience offers excellent notations on the

way women are affected by historical events, material changes and shifts in social and legal matters. Therefore, we can identify the feminine consciousness from Edith Wharton's life experiences and her writing experiences as well. How has she shifted from a shy and not pretty girl to a mature and independent woman with self-confidence and self-assurance, and even to one of the great female writers in American literature? This chapter tries to pinpoint the feminine consciousness and its influence on Edith's life and writing from the following perspective: Edith's awakening to the intellectual life, creating her own world and owning a room of her own.

1. Getting out of the confinement

Being one of the fashionable homes in Washington Square, Edith Wharton's family was "bastions of tradition but not necessarily of culture". (Showalter, 1991: 539) The great books in their libraries often went unread, and European diversions such as music and art were not part of the fashionable life until much later. A lady of old New York, Edith Wharton was educated to conform to the social conventions, which "prescribed a woman who would be a Perfect Lady, an Angel in the House". (Showalter, 1977: 14) Her parents preferred that their daughter follow the convention by marrying, having children, and accepting the social responsibilities of women of her class. Instead of following the determined course, Edith Wharton lived a different life.

For a female of old New York, Edith was essentially trained to regard herself as an ornament of society. She was educated that her appearance and her grasp of the skill of adornment were most important for a female. Just as a scene described in her autobiography *A Backward Glance*:

It was always an event in the little girl's life to take a walk with her father, and more particularly so today, because she had on her new winter bonnet, which was so beautiful that for the first time she woke to *the importance of dress*, and of herself as *a subject for*

adornment--so that I may date from that hour the birth of the conscious and feminine me in the little girl's vague. (*ABG*, 2, my emphasis)¹⁸

As a result, she also puts much emphasis on her appearance in her first two encounters with Henry James, a famous writer she had admired for a long time. Edith herself characterized their first meetings as her attempts to woo him as a woman might traditionally do to a man. Therefore she hoped to impress this revered writer by appearing as pretty and fashionable as possible:

I could hardly believe that such a privilege could befall me, and I could think of only one way of deserving it--to put on my newest Doucet dress and to try to look my prettiest!... [because] those were the principles in which I had been brought up, and it would never have occurred to me that I had anything but my youth, and my pretty frock, to commend me to the man whose shoe-strings I thought myself unworthy to unloose...But, it [my new dress and good-looking] neither gave me the courage to speak, nor attracted the attention of the great man. (*ABG*, 172)

In their next encounter, Edith had made the same mistake: she thought once more that how she could make herself pretty enough for Henry James to notice her. Despite a beautiful new hat, their second meeting “fell as flat as the first”. (*ABG*, 172) Finally, it was Edith's historical novel, *The Valley of Decision* (1902), set in eighteenth-century Italy, accomplished what the new dress and the beautiful hat had failed to do--it captured James's attention. Doucet frocks and beautiful hats were replaced by expressions of intelligence and literary force. This book echoed both Edith Wharton's search for identity and the trauma of the twentieth century's birth into modernism. In praising her efforts with the novel, James urged her to “Do New York! The first-hand account is precious”. And he expressed his desire “earnestly, tenderly, intelligently to admonish you, while you are young, free, expert, exposed...” (Lewis, 1970: 127) This makes Edith realize that the beauty and dress are not the essentials for a female, and the intellect is equally important to her.

Katherine Joslin notes that Edith Wharton's “awakening” to intellectual and literary life came in her contacts with her friends who shared her interests, including

¹⁸ From Edith Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964 (hereafter cited as *ABG*)

Henry James. (1991: 17) The friendships have had “the stimulating and enlightening influence” on her, eliminated her “intellectual isolation” from her childhood to youth, and immersed her into an atmosphere of “the rarest understanding, the richest and most varied mental comradeship”. (*ABG*, 171) With the help of her friends, she was conscious of the restrictions imposed on female by male society, and tried to condemn the tradition of teaching privileged women to be strictly ornamental beings. As implied in a parable entitled “The Valley of Childish Things, and Other Emblems”:

Once upon a time, a number of children lived together in the valley of Childish Things, playing all manner of delightful games, and studying the same lesson books. But one day a little girl...decided that it was time to see something of the world...as none of the other children cared to leave their games, she set out alone to climb the pass which led out of the valley. It was a hard climb, but at length she reached a cold bleak tableland beyond the mountains. Here she saw cities and men, and learned many useful arts, and in so doing grew to be a woman.¹⁹

This is a story Edith Wharton would retell throughout her life. She also left “the Valley”, where women were expected to be pure and innocent as children. She mapped out her own spaces, both figuratively---in her books, and literally---in her own houses in Massachusetts and in France. There, she began to build up confidence, recognize her own value, seize her own identity and create her own world.

2. Creating Her Own World Figuratively

For a long period of time, women writers were excluded by custom and education from achieving distinction in poetry, history or drama, etc. Women’s literature had been thought to be too much a literature of imitation. Like the Romans in the shadow of Greece, women were overshadowed by male cultural imperialism, just like George Henry Lewes and Hill have argued that: “If women’s literature is destined to have a different collective character from that of men. Much longer time is

¹⁹ From Judith Fryer, “Purity and Power in *The Age of Innocence*”, in *Modern Critical Views: Edith Wharton*, ed by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, 1986, p99-100

necessary that has yet elapsed before it can emancipate itself from the influence of accepted models, and guide itself by its own impulses.” (*Essays on Sex Equality*: 207) Therefore, women writers had a hard struggle to overcome the influence of male literary tradition, to create an original and independent art, and to write as women. Inevitably, Edith Wharton’s “literary sophistication” was also thought to have a strong resemblance with that of Henry James. (Millicent Bell, 1995: 4) When *The Greater Inclination*, her first collection of short stories was published, some reviewers formed “a critical chain gang” in agreeing that she was James’s imitator and his literary heiress---they thought that she copied his choice of motives and even his style.²⁰ She could not shake the shadow of Henry James in the eyes of reviewer until the publication of *The Age of Innocence*. The assertion annoyed Edith Wharton greatly, she once complained in a letter to Scribner’s editor, W. C. Brownell: “The continued cry that I am an echo of Mr. James (whose books of the last ten years I can’t read, much as I delight in the man) makes me feel rather hopeless”.²¹ After many years’ struggle, Edith Wharton has managed to break the spell, formed her own writing styles and techniques, and grew up to be an independent and sophisticated woman writer. *The Age of Innocence* has won the Pulitzer Prize for being “the American novel published during the year which best presented the wholesome atmosphere of American life and the highest standard of American manners”. (Millicent Bell, 1995: 7) From the perspective of a female, Edith Wharton offered us a fresh and profound view of the old New York society of the late 19th century.

On the other hand, Edith’s intellect and her aspiration for writing made her an anomaly, even an embarrassment to her conventionally minded family and society. The conventional old New York society included no female novelists in its ranks. Indeed, the society relegated writers and artists to the margins of its world. The old New York society and her family even despised her writing as something disgraceful, and tried to stifle her literary talent. Her literary success meant little to Edith’s social standing in New York. Among her relatives it caused puzzlement and embarrassment,

²⁰ Millicent Bell, *Edith Wharton and Henry James* (New York: Braziller, 1965), p. 217

²¹ Edith Wharton to W. C. Brownell, June 25, 1904, *The Letters of Edith Wharton*, ed. R. W. B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis (New York: Scribner, 1988), p. 91.

and in her own family it created constraints increasing with the years, just as she described in her autobiography:

None of my relations ever spoke to me of my books, either to praise or blame---the simply *ignore* them...the subject was avoided as though it were a kind of *family disgrace*, which might be condoned but could not be forgotten...At first I had felt this indifference acutely; but now I no longer cared, for my recognition as a writer *had transformed my life*. I had made my own friends, and my books were beginning to serve as an introduction to my fellow-writers. (*ABG*, my emphasis: 144)

Edith's depression, frustration and her longing for being acknowledged are implied in many of her works. The most famous one is the image depicted in a short story, "The Fullness of Life" (1891):

A woman's nature is like a great house full of rooms, there is the hall through which everyone passes in going in and out; the drawing room, where one receives formal visits;...but beyond that...are other rooms, the handles of whose doors perhaps are never turned; no one knows the way to them, no one knows whither they lead; and in the innermost room, the holy of holies, the soul sits alone and waits for a footstep that never comes.²²

This great house reveals Edith Wharton's mentality in these years and her longing for being recognized as a female writer, and being known to the public.

Nevertheless, she never gives up her passion, and pursues her dream with fiercer determination. She believes that she can seek her self-identity as a female living in the old New York and find her own position, rather than being merely an ornament of the male-centered society. When she was thirty-seven years old, Edith Wharton published her first book of short stories, *The Greater Inclination* (1899). For most ordinary women in Edith Wharton's era, thirty-seven-year means an age with staid and unalterable life. For Edith Wharton, however, thirty-seven-year means an age full of hope and passion, when her writing career just began to take shape. Her life is filled with literary work, social insight and prolific writing. The publishing of her first

²² From Edith Wharton, "The Fullness of Life", in *The Collected Short Stories of Edith Wharton*, ed. R. W. Lewis, vol. 1, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968, p.13-14.

book is a turning point in both Edith's life and her writing career: it marked her acquisition of a "real personality", and it "broke the chains" which had held her "so long in a kind of torpor". (*ABG*, 112, 122) Her real identity began to form, even to "blossom". She felt like "a homeless waif who, after...being rejected by every country, has finally acquired a nationality. The Land of Letters was henceforth to be my country, and I gloried in my new citizenship". (*ABG*, 119)

3. Literally Owning a Room of Her Own

Virginia Woolf had narrated the hardships women writers had to suffer: "In the first place, to have a room of her own, let alone a quiet room or a sound-proof room, was out of the question...since her pin money, which depended on the good will of her father, was only enough to keep her clothed, she was debarred from such alleviations as came even to Keats or Tennyson or Carlyle...from the separate lodging which, ... sheltered them from the claims and tyrannies of their families." (1929: 90-91)

With the same reason, Edith Wharton also craved for a room of her own, or a place to "make up" stories. And she made it. In 1901, she began to build a magnificent home, the Mount in Lenox, Massachusetts. At the Mount, Edith could control her social obligations and, therefore, devote more of her time to her writing. The Mount not only embodied her artistic taste but also expressed her desire for solitude and independence. The bedrooms on the second floor suggest considerable privacy: Edith Wharton placed herself in a separate wing, consisting of her bedroom, bathroom and boudoir, and it could be closed off from the rest of the house. It gradually became her refuge from society, even from her husband, and her spiritual haven, a sacred ground for the creation of her fiction. In her discussion of the architecture of The Mount, Sarah Luria claims that it reveals "an inwardly projected domestic order that seems determined to probe the inner life as it is to defend its sanctity". She argues that Wharton's domesticity is inseparable from her work and the

design of her house made possible the space she needed to create her life's work.²³

The Mount allows Wharton to maintain private space in her own home.

After the war, she left America and resettled herself in France, where she spent her last twenty-five years as an expatriate writer. France represented a better refuge from the world that had almost extinguished her. Edith settled herself into two houses there, one she called the Pavilion Colombe, a former home of courtesans in St Brice-sous-foret, just north of Paris, and the other Ste Claire, a former nunnery, nearly destroyed by German attacks during the war, situated in Hyeres on the Mediterranean. Like the Mount, these houses provided solitude and silence favorable for Edith's writing. She shuttled from one place to the other: she spent the warm months in St Brice and the cool ones in Hyeres, where she could write, garden, entertain, coordinate and command her material and fictive worlds. For Edith, these houses had all the characteristics of a satisfying lover---delicious, friendly and comfortable. They helped her write the fictions worthy of preservation, and seek her selfhood. As she said to her friend Bernard Berenson, "it's only at Hyeres that I own myself".²⁴

Apart from the private room, Wharton was overwhelmed by the longing to create an intellectual and literary circle of her own, full of people with the same interests. As she narrated in *A Backward Glance*, "what I wanted above all was to get to know other writers, to *be welcomed* among people who lived for the things I had always secretly lived for". (122, my emphasis) As I have mentioned, Edith's first novel has attracted Henry James's attention, and they became good friends after that. The friendship between Edith Wharton and Henry James brought together the group of people in the same camp:

In this group an almost immediate sympathy had established itself between the various members, so that our common stock of allusions, cross-references, pleasantries was always increasing, and new waves of interest in the same book or picture, or any sort of dramatic event in life or letters, would simultaneously flood through our minds. (*ABG*, 192)

²³ See Sarah Luria, "The Architecture of Manners: Henry James, Edith Wharton, and The Mount", *American Quarterly* 49(1997), p. 298-327.

²⁴ *The Letters of Edith Wharton*, Ed. R. W. B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis. New York: Scribner's, 1988, p.453

She was attached to the group, and the group produced “a collaborative vision of both reality and identity”, which helped to make Edith “feel ‘naturalized’ or less alien”.²⁵

Generally speaking, Edith Wharton had created her own world materially and mentally: she had possessed a room of her own, and she had established herself in a circle of cultivated and like-minded men and women who found intelligence and artistic creativity acceptable feminine attributes.

Millicent Bell believed that, though talented and rich, Edith Wharton had suffered “the persisting ordeal of all women struggling for personal and professional self-definition in a male-dominated world”. (Millicent Bell, 1995: 13) Through her abandoning traditional notions of marriage and her persisting in her passion for writing, Wharton tried to be herself, search for her self-identity as a female and create her own life. She showed by her example that women could achieve strength and self-sufficiency without the conventional supports of marriage. With her own experience, she also pointed the way for women’s autonomy from restrictive families. At whatever cost, she made herself into a “new woman” who seized her own identity.²⁶ Though Edith Wharton never declared herself as a feminist, she had expressed her own struggles in her writing which showed her clear and thorough understanding of what it had meant to her to be a woman and a woman writer as well.

Being a well-adjusted and independent woman and enjoying a satisfying and well-paying career as well as close and rewarding relationships, Edith Wharton’s life prefigures “a type of modern womanhood not widely seen until well into the twentieth century”.²⁷ After her divorce, Edith Wharton remained single because she was afraid that any subsequent remarriage would take time and energy from the independent, creative, and fulfilling life she fashioned for herself in her late middle age. What she had in her late middle age was talent, health, independence, plentiful income, and a group of supportive friends, both male and female.

²⁵ See Susan Goodman, *Edith Wharton's Inner Circle*, University of Texas Press, 1994, p. 3.

²⁶ Described in detail in Millicent Bell, “Lady into Author: Edith Wharton and the House of Scribner”, *American Quarterly* 9 (Fall 1957), 295-315

²⁷ See Carol J. Single, *A Historical Guide to Edith Wharton*, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 7.

Conclusion

History provides the subtext and necessary background for Edith Wharton's fiction. Not until August 26, 1920 was the major goal of the women's movement in the United States achieved: suffrage. With the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment, women gained the right to vote in all federal, state and local election. Furthermore, American women demanded entrance to higher education, the professions, and the political world as well.²⁸ Through their works, the women writers of this period sought freedom and innovation, introducing fantasy and allegorical modes into the novel, as well as experimenting with impressionistic narratives that attempted to explore the feminine consciousness. In *The Man-Made World*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman predicted that "the humanizing of woman" would lead to new subjects and plots in fiction: "The position of the young woman who is called upon to give up her 'career'...for marriage and objects to it;...it is not more love she wants but more business in life;...the inter-relation of women with women...the interaction between mothers and children, and the new attitude of the full-grown woman".²⁹

It is under this historical context that *The Age of Innocence* is published. Edith Wharton offers reader a fresh and different old New York from a female point of view. By detailed textual analysis, this thesis tries to explore feminine consciousness existing in the novel. The existence of feminine consciousness makes an ordinary triangle love story unusual, explains the old and new, tradition and rebellion, clashes and conflicts, choice and renunciation of the story, and renders this novel revealing and worth-reading.

Newland Archer, a male protagonist, has been obsessed with his superior roles as female's guide, enlightener, possessor and savior. Female's innocence and helplessness strengthen his self-confidence and self-assurance. The truth, however, is that they are not innocent and helpless as he has expected. His male authority is

²⁸ From Rita J. Simon & Gloria Danziger, *Women's Movements in America* (New York: Praeger, 1991), p3.

²⁹ See Elaine Showalter, *Modern American Women Writers*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991, p.xi.

challenged and shaken. Furthermore, his passivity, his vocational indecision and his deficiency in courage to love and to undertake any responsibilities undermine his masculine superiority. It is also a suggestion of masculine superiority's deconstruction.

May Welland is a nice girl and an ideal wife in the eyes of traditional people. She is merely the product of social conventions, though. Possessing no experience and no "freedom of judgment", she is destined to being male's adjunct, ornament and badge of respectability. By contrast, Ellen Olenska is portrayed as emblem of freedom. She is rebellious, self-conscious and independent. She makes her own fashion and lives her own life. Through suffering and struggle, she makes it, and ends up living alone in Paris and creating her own world with like-minded people. Two females with different character and opposite life imply Edith Wharton's viewpoint and preference.

Investigating the novel with the knowledge of Edith Wharton's life and writing experiences in mind can give us a more powerful and convincing explanation. In reality, there are many parallels between Ellen Olenska and Edith Wharton: having a miserably unhappy marriage, despised as being unusual, permanently expatriated and living in Paris, making friends with the people sharing the same interests; and there're some coincidences between the novel and Edith Wharton's life: the novel is set in the late 1870s, near the time of Wharton's social debut; the epilogue of the novel takes place thirty years later, in 1907, the moment when Wharton first settled in Paris. As R. W. B. Lewis has once commented: "she [Edith Wharton] was not only appraising her former New York world in tribal terms, but was also dramatizing her own gradual alienation and withdrawal from that world as an act of casting off by a society that could neither understand nor contain her." (Lewis, 1975: 432)

Edith Wharton's life and writing experience itself can illustrate the influence of feminine consciousness. Her life consists of a series of struggles and pains, failures and successes, picking-up and giving-up: she picks up writing as a woman, whereas giving up traditional female stereotype; she picks up economic and spiritual independence, while giving up marriage and dependence on male; and she picks up Ellen Olenska's life pattern, nevertheless giving up May Welland's. It is the process

full of her longing for independence and her struggle for realizing her “making up” talents. Thanks to her writing, she has broken out of the thick conventional shell, turning into a beautiful butterfly. She has created her own world consisting of artists and writers, which provides her with good talk and an atmosphere of intellectual freedom. And she has possessed a room of her own, through which she has acquired freedom and independence.

In spite of the existence of feminine consciousness in her life and her works, Edith Wharton’s attitudes towards old New York and her viewpoint on women’s freedom are somewhat ambivalent and even contradictory. She is critical of old mores that place restrictions on women’s freedom, but she is equally skeptical of new dispensations that left women without secure boundaries. As for old New York society, Edith Wharton may be looking with irony, but she is also looking with nostalgia. She will not go so far as to suggest that one can live without social forms. She sees the repression of the self in the old ways and fragmentation of the self in the new ways. Just as Newland Archer concludes at the end of the novel, when he looks back on his life, he utters: “after all, there was good in the old ways”, and that “there was good in the new order too”. (*Age*, 308, 309)

References

- Ammons, Elizabeth. *Edith Wharton's Argument with America*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980.
- Auchincloss, Louis. *Edith Wharton*. University of Minnesota Press, 1961.
- Bell, Millicent, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- . *Edith Wharton and Henry James*. New York: Braziller, 1965.
- . "Lady into Author: Edith Wharton and the House of Scribner", *American Quarterly* 9 (Fall 1957).
- Bentley, Nancy. *The Ethnography of Manners: Hawthorne, James, Wharton*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Bloom, Harold, ed. *Modern Critical Views: Edith Wharton*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986.
- Breen, Jennifer. *In Her Own Write: Twentieth-Century Women's Fiction*. London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1990.
- Clinton, Catherine. *The Other Civil War: American Women in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Hill And Wang, 1984.
- Colquitt, Clare & Susan Goodman, eds. *A Forward Glance: New Essays on Edith Wharton*. New York: U of Delaware Press, 1999.
- Erlich, Gloria C. *The Sexual Education of Edith Wharton*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

- Fryer, Judith. *Felicitous Space: The Imaginative Structures of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986.
- Fullbrook, Kate. *Free Women: Ethics and Aesthetics in Twentieth-Century Women's Fiction*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990.
- Goodman, Susan. *Edith Wharton's Inner Circle*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994.
- Joslin, Katherine. *Women Writers: Edith Wharton*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.
- Killoran, Helen. *Edith Wharton: Art and Allusion*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996.
- . *The Critical Reception of Edith Wharton*. Rochester: Camden House, 2001.
- Kress, Jill M. *The Figure of Consciousness*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Lewis, R.W.B. *Edith Wharton: A Biography*. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.
- , eds. *The Letters of Edith Wharton*. New York: Scribner's, 1988.
- Luria, Sarah. "The Architecture of Manners: Henry James, Edith Wharton, and The Mount", *American Quarterly* 49(1997).
- Nettles, Elsa. *Language and Gender in American Fiction: Howells, James, Wharton and Cather*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997.
- Nevius, Blake. *Edith Wharton: A Study of Her Fiction*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976.
- Orlando, Emily J. "Reading Wharton's 'Poor Archer': A Mr. 'Might-have-been' in *The Age of Innocence*", *American Literary Realism 1870-1910* 30.2 (winter), 1998.

- Pimple, Kenneth D. "Edith Wharton's 'Inscrutable Totem Terrors': Ethnography and *The Age of Innocence*", *Southern Folklore*, 1994.
- Plante, Ellen M. *Women at Home in Victorian America: A Social History*, New York: Facts On File, Inc., 1997
- Raphael, Lev. *Edith Wharton's Prisoners of Shame*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.
- Reynolds, Guy. *Twentieth-Century American Women's Fiction*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.
- Showalter, Elaine. *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelist from Bronte to Lessing*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977.
- , ed. *Modern American Women Writers*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991.
- Simon, Rita J. & Gloria Danziger. *Women's Movements in America: Their Success, Disappointments, and Aspirations*. New York: Prager Publishers, 1991.
- Single, Carol J., ed. *A Historical Guide to Edith Wharton*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- . *Edith Wharton: Matters of Mind and Spirit*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- . "Bourdieu, Wharton and Changing Culture in *The Age of Innocence*". *Cultural Studies* 17, 2003.
- Thompson, Stephanie Lewis. *Influencing America's Tastes: Realism in the Works of Wharton, Cather & Hurst*. University Press of Florida, 2002.

- Wharton, Edith. *A Backward Glance*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964.
- . “The Fullness of Life”, in *The Collected Short Stories of Edith Wharton*, ed. R. W. Lewis, vol. 1, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968.
- . *The Age of Innocence*, New York: Bantam Books, 1996.
- Wolff, Cynthia Griffin. *A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1934.
- 伊迪丝·华顿,《纯真年代》,赵兴国译,南京:译林出版社,2002年1月
- 弗吉尼亚·吴尔夫,《一间自己的房间》,贾辉丰译,北京:人民文学出版社,2003年4月

作者: [张建红](#)
学位授予单位: [南京师范大学](#)

参考文献(43条)

1. [References](#)

2. [Ammons Elizabeth Edith Wharton 's Argument with America 1980](#)
3. [Auchincloss Louis Edith Wharton 1961](#)
4. [Bell Millicent The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton 1995](#)
5. [Berger John Edith Wharton and Henry James 1965](#)
6. [Amirault C Lady into Author:Edith Wharton and the House of Scribner 1957](#)
7. [Bentley Nancy The Ethnography of Manners:Hawthorne,James,Wharton 1995](#)
8. [Bloom Harlod Modern Critical Views:Edith Wharton 1986](#)
9. [Breen Jennifer In Her Own Write:Twentieth-Century Women 's Fiction 1990](#)
10. [Clinton Catherine The Other Civil War:American Women in the Nineteenth Century 1984](#)
11. [Colquitt Clare.Susan Goodman A Forward Glance:New Essays on Edith Wharton 1999](#)
12. [Erllich Gloria C The Sexual Education of Edith Wharton 1993](#)
13. [Fryer Judith Felicitous Space:The Imaginative Structures of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather 1986](#)
14. [Fullbrook Kate Free Women:Ethics and Aesthetics in Twentieth-Century Women 's Fiction 1990](#)
15. [Goodman Susan Edith Wharton 's Inner Circle 1994](#)
16. [Joslin Katherine Women Writers:Edith Wharton 1991](#)
17. [Killoran Helen Edith Wharton:Art and Allusion 1996](#)
18. [Mais S P B The Critical Reception of Edith Wharton 2001](#)
19. [Kress Jill M The Figure of Consciousness 2002](#)
20. [Lewis R W B Edith Wharton:A Biography 1975](#)
21. [Carroll J B The Letters of Edith Wharton 1988](#)
22. [Luria Sarah The Architecture of Manners:Henry James,Edith Wharton, and The Mount 1997](#)
23. [Nettles Elsa Language and Gender in American Fiction.Howells,James,Wharton and Cather 1997](#)
24. [Nevius Blake Edith Wharton:A Study of Her Fiction 1976](#)
25. [Orlando Emily J Reading Wharton's 'Poor Archer':A Mr.' Might-have-been' in The Age of Innocence 1998\(04\)](#)
26. [Pimple Kenneth D Edith Wharton's 'Inscrutable Totem Terrors':Ethnography and The Age of Innocence 1994](#)
27. [Plante Ellen M Women at Home in Victorian America:A Social History 1997](#)

28. Raphael Lev [Edith Wharton 's Prisoners of Shame](#) 1991
29. Reynolds Guy [Twentieth-Century American Women 's Fiction](#) 1999
30. Showalter Elaine [A Literature of Their Own:British Women Novelist from Bronte to Lessing](#) 1977
31. Williams Merryn [Modern American Women Writers](#) 1991
32. Simon Rita J. Gloria Danziger [Women 's Movements in America:Their Success, Disappointments, and Aspirations](#) 1991
33. Single Carol J [A Historical Guide to Edith Wharton](#) 2003
34. Michel Pierre [Edith Wharton:Matters of Mind and Spirit](#) 1995
35. Goodlad J I [Bourdieu, Wharton and Changing. Culture in The Age of Innocence](#) 2003
36. Thompson Stephanie Lewis [Influencing America 's Tastes:Realism in the Works of Wharton, Cather & Hurst](#) 2002
37. Wharton Edith [A Backward Glance](#) 1964
38. Nostwich T D [The Fullness of Life](#) 1968
39. Ozick Cynthia [The Age of Innocence](#) 1996
40. Wolff Cynthia Griffin [A Feast of Words:The Triumph of Edith Wharton](#) 1977
41. Woolf Virginia [A Room of One 's Own](#) 1934
42. 伊迪丝·华顿. 赵兴国 [纯真年代](#) 2002
43. 弗吉尼亚·吴尔夫. 贾辉丰 [一间自己的房间](#) 2003

相似文献(10条)

1. 学位论文 刘玲 [伊迪丝·华顿《欢乐之家》和《纯真年代》中自然主义的初探](#) 2008

伊迪丝·华顿是十九世纪末二十世纪初美国杰出的女作家。尽管她严格意义上的创作生涯在四十岁时才开始，却给我们留下了很多宝贵的作品，特别是创作于1905年的《欢乐之家》和1920年的《纯真年代》。这两部作品不仅深受广大读者的喜爱，也吸引了众多文学评论家的注意，他们对其作品进行了多角度多侧面的阐释。

本论文试图从人物性格命运的角度分析《欢乐之家》和《纯真年代》中所体现的自然主义倾向。自然主义代表人物左拉的文学理论和文学创作对自然主义的基本理论和原则作了最好的阐释：自然主义强调对事实的细致科学的观察和描述，反对对现实进行道德说教和刻意美化。它把现实看成拥有强大的不可测量量的外部世界，人则是这个世界中的渺小的没有任何个人意志可言的被动的受害者。受制于遗传因素和不利的环境因素，决定论成了自然主义的内核。

本论文从华顿的生平出发，探究了她自然主义创作的內因和外因。无论是华顿生长的环境还是她所经历的剧烈的社会变动都从各个方面影响着她的文学创作：无论是《欢乐之家》中的丽丽·巴特还是《纯真年代》中的纽兰德·亚瑟，埃伦·奥兰斯卡和梅·维兰德，无不以各自的方式阐述着主人公的悲剧性命运。自然主义所关注的社会环境、经济环境、遗传因素和不可控制的命运巧合无不渗透到主人公的悲剧性命运中。丽丽·巴特的聪明与坚强换来的最后的死亡；亚瑟对现实的不满使他经历了短暂的反抗，但也最终以失败告终；埃伦的反叛精神导致了她被亲人的放逐和孤独的一生。自由意志的努力都没有抵得过命运的捉弄，表面上得到了一切的梅也不过是个没有自己思想的纯粹的社会的产物。

以往对华顿文学作品的研究多以爱情，婚姻或纽约上流社会的矛盾和冲突为主题，本论文则选取华顿的两部最具代表性的作品《欢乐之家》和《纯真年代》，从自然主义的角度，着手分析作品中的四个典型人物形象的悲剧性命运。鉴于有限的文章篇幅和自己能力的不足，我在论文最后则提出了一些有关进一步研究的建议。

2. 期刊论文 仲敏义. [ZHONG Min-yi 现实囚笼中的精神自由——从《纯真年代》的人物塑造看伊迪丝·华顿的女性意识](#) -湖南人文科技学院学报2005, "" (6)

女性意识在《纯真年代》中的三个主要人物形塑过程中起着重要作用，将伊迪丝·华顿在当时社会条件下的女性梦想最大程度地张显出来。而华顿的启示是：男权社会有一定的规则，女性如果超越这一规则，就有可能在精神领域实现一部分的梦想。

3. 学位论文 高苹 [论伊迪丝·华顿世界观的转变——从《欢乐之家》到《纯真年代》的主人公对比分析](#) 2008

伊迪丝·华顿是十九世纪末美国著名的女作家，她的作品多以描写美国上流社会的华丽仪态和风俗而出名。《欢乐之家》是华顿第一部成功的小说。《纯真年代》展示了华顿小说创作的顶峰，并荣获美国普利策文学奖。

两部小说是华顿在人生不同阶段的成功作，从《欢乐之家》到《纯真年代》，华顿的世界观在不断的转变，逐渐从心灵的废弃走向心理的成熟。本文主要通过通过对两部作品的写作背景，主要人物等的对比分析，展现了华顿对待女性，社会与个人理想的实现以及爱情等等世界观各个方面的转变过程，作者塑造的艾伦形象比莉蓀成熟完美，阿切尔和艾伦也经历了比莉蓀更为完善的自我实现过程。在主人公的感情关系中，女人逐渐摆脱了

受男人掌控的装饰品命运。对于作者个人而言，华顿的世界观经过了从《欢乐之家》中的完全否定到《纯真年代》中有批判性的接受的成长过程，同时华顿个人的成长也有助于读者了解当时的社会现状。

4. 学位论文 [陈晓红 冲出桎梏——伊迪丝·华顿的《纯真年代》的女权主义解读](#) 2008

作为二十世纪美国的最有影响力的主要作家之一，伊迪丝·华顿(1862-1937)运用犀利、尖锐的语言，对于上层社会礼仪、文化、习俗做出了细致入微的刻画，再现个人与社会，个人与个人之间深刻的不可调和的矛盾。透过华顿的笔端，读者随着人物命运的变化唏嘘不已，进而深入思考女性悲惨命运的根源原因。作为女性作家，华顿也成功地，全面地观察广大妇女在社会种种压迫、歧视下，如何坚强、勇敢地活下去。《纯真年代》正是关注女性命运的经典作品。

借助当代女权主义父权社会的理论框架，本文试图透析华顿探索男权社会压迫下，妇女如何冲破传统的束缚，实现自己的人生价值。本文分为五个章节：第一章节总体阐述论文的设计框架，以及文章的大概内容。第二章节详细分析女权主义理论对华顿产生的深远影响。第三章节以女权主义的视角分析小说中主要人物的悲惨命运、冲突以及其必然性。第四章节分析华顿如何解决棘手的女性问题，以及指出突破重围的方法。第五章节总结评价华顿解决问题的方法，以及分析其潜在的局限性。

女权主义对于女性痛苦的揭示激励并启发了华顿，使她对于大多数妇女所处的男性父权社会有了更深的洞察力。表面上看来，《纯真年代》的结尾，好像是一种妥协，一种合作，其实这正是一种有力的抗争。考虑到华顿所处的上流社会，受到传统礼仪的教化，在她的笔下，女主人公艾伦，能够毅然决然漂流海外，能够拒绝回到那令人窒息的婚姻中，能够拒绝阿歇尔的爱情，这一切都是对男权社会有力的反抗。同时毫无疑问，也为那些依然在黑暗中挣扎、困惑的女性点燃了一盏明灯，使她们踏上寻求自由的征程。

5. 期刊论文 [屈荣英 《纯真年代》的女性主义解读 -渤海大学学报\(哲学社会科学版\) 2009, 31\(3\)](#)

伊迪丝·华顿并不是女性主义作家，但在很多作品中描述了妇女的低下身份和被压迫的悲惨命运，表达了她对当时妇女的同情。同时也揭示了传统观念对于人性的束缚。这些作品在一定程度上反映出受压迫女性的反抗声音和日益觉醒的女性意识。在20世纪60和70年代妇女解放运动以及女性主义文学批评兴起的时候，伊迪丝·华顿再次成为评论界关注的焦点。伊迪丝·华顿在她的创作中关注女性命运和生活，她突出强调了女性受男权社会压迫和束缚的悲惨命运。这些妇女永远处于被控制、被奴役的地位。无论是在精神上还是经济上都处于劣势，不仅如此，女人与女人之间也会因为各自的利益而相互竞争、相互伤害。《纯真年代》这部小说讲述了主人公组兰·阿切尔与两位女人之间的爱情故事，旨在引起人们对当时妇女命运的同情，以及对女性地位的重新思考。

6. 学位论文 [马蕾 老纽约下的朝圣——对《纯真年代》中两类女性的分析](#) 2008

美国现代女作家伊迪丝·华顿是19世纪末20世纪初现实主义文学的代表人物之一，其作品以鲜明的背景，幽默的讽刺，犀利的笔锋以及深刻的含义而闻名于世。她擅长刻画社会对个人性格和命运的影响以及老纽约上流社会里各个不同人物的口常生活和他们所反映出来的社会问题。同时，作为一个女作家，伊迪丝·华顿对女性的命运和地位也有着深入的了解。为她赢得普利策奖的小说《纯真年代》就是一部刻画个人与社会之间矛盾以及男权社会里妇女的从属地位和悲惨命运的经典之作。

本文主要从女性主义视角对小说《纯真年代》进行分析，西蒙·波伏娃的《第二性》本文女性主义理论的重要来源作品。女性主义的一般观点是：人类社会是由一个男性主宰的社会，女性在家庭生活和社会生活中都遭受男性的压制。因此有了“父权制”这一术语。女性主义认为，政治在这个有男女两性构成的社会中已经形成了习惯规则和历史问题。女人可能在生理上处于弱者的状态，但是这并不意味着她们在心理上和文化上也处于弱势。在男人看来，女人是附属品，和自然物一样客观，她们的存在就是为了满足男人的需要，因此对男人来说是“他者”。波伏娃认为女性是社会的产物，因此并不是天生卑微的。她还认为女性总是被男性定义为他者。在她的真实自我和社会对她所期望的他者角色之间，总是有一定的冲突。因此整篇论文探讨了伊迪丝·华顿对十九世纪末上流社会的抨击以及对男权社会中女性命运的关爱，同时通过对文中两位性格对比鲜明女主角对理想的爱情生活及个人自由追求的心路历程，以及伊迪丝·华顿在描写人物和叙述故事时的矛盾心理的分析，充分展示男权社会中女性由于被置于“他者”地位所经历的生活的压抑与困境，并指出导致女性悲惨命运的根源是男权社会。

本文由五个部分组成。

第一部分:绪论概述了本文的写作目的、作者个性及经历对其文学生涯的影响。

第二部分:概述了当前女性主义研究现状以及本文的理论依据和批评模式。

第三部分:分析了文中两位女主人公起点对相异结局相同即均被挫败的追寻理想之爱及个人自由的心路历程，阐明了在男权社会中，纯洁的戴安娜与野性的阿芙洛蒂特均属于“他者”。她们从男权的神话中被唤醒，只是作为一个遵从的附庸而非是一个有着独立人格的个体。

第四部分:更进一步描述两位女主人公在“老纽约”中的经历和遭遇，从不同程度上反映了不同时期妇女对自我解放、自立自强的要求和斗争。不可否认这些“老纽约”中的女性们受各自生活的时代、环境所制约，有其自身的局限性。鉴于有限的文章篇幅和自己能力的不足，我在文末最后则提出了一些有关进一步研究的建议。

7. 期刊论文 [谢荣贵 美国“金字塔”里的女性悲剧——评伊迪丝·华顿的小说《纯真年代》 -外国语言文学](#)

2006, 23(3)

伊迪丝·华顿的《纯真年代》真实地展现了19世纪旧纽约上流社会的风貌。本文通过分析小说人物的命运揭示了当时男权社会意识的强大威力以及生活在这样社会下的人们尤其是女性受压迫和束缚的悲哀命运，进而窥探其反抗的声音以及日益觉醒的女性意识。

8. 学位论文 [罗焕 追寻爱情梦想的心灵之旅——论《纯真年代》中阿切尔的成长](#) 2007

曾经荣获美国普利策文学奖的美国现实主义女作家伊迪丝·华顿在她的作品《纯真年代》中，以女性特有的敏锐的洞察力和细腻的笔触表现和探索着美国年轻人在特定的历史时期的成长经历。

青少年时期是一个人身心成长的关键阶段，如何摆脱童年的无知走进复杂的成人世界，对于每一个青少年来说都是严峻的人生挑战。文学是人性，这就决定了文学必然要反映社会生活的现实。成长小说就是一种以反映青少年的成长为主题的文学类型。生活在十九世纪末二十世纪初的伊迪丝·华顿把自己对人生的感悟付诸笔端，创作了《纯真年代》这部意义深远的成长小说。国内外对华顿的这部著作的研究主要集中在女性主义批评、自然主义、存在主义、文体风格、主题和艺术技巧等方面的分析。在继承前人的优秀研究成果的基础上，本文另辟蹊径，从成长小说的角度来分析该小说。通过研究主人公组兰·阿切尔在追求爱情梦想的心灵之旅中不断获得成长的经历，我们可以了解到十九世纪末美国的社会秩序和道德规范及其对个人成长的制约作用。

整篇论文分为前言、主体和结束语三个部分。本文要解决的第一个问题是《纯真年代》是否属于成长小说，所以第一章详细阐述了成长小说这一概念及其发展。青少年成长的主题可以追溯到远古时代，《圣经》中亚当和夏娃因为经不起诱惑偷吃禁果而被赶出伊甸园的故事为成长小说提供了几个原型。作为重要文学样式的成长小说发端于德国，并在美国得到了长足的发展。分析《纯真年代》符合批评家巴克利提出的成长小说的几个特点以及它的主题是关于主人公阿切尔的成长之后，我们可以得出《纯真年代》属于成长小说的结论。第二章具体分析了主人公阿切尔的心灵成长。华顿着重在小说里描述阿切尔心灵方面的成长主要有两方面的原因：其一，华顿的文学创作受到与她同时代的现代主义先驱亨利·詹姆斯的影响；其二，由詹姆斯所创造的第三人称限知视角被华顿借鉴使用后可以更好地诠释阿切尔成长的心路历程。阿切尔的成长来之不易。几次恋爱之后，他发觉爱伦·奥兰斯卡才是他的真爱，因此他努力去实现关于真爱的梦想。作为小说的主题及主线，阿切尔的逐渐成长是通过三个阶段的心路历程来实现的。论文的第三部分主要分析阿切尔成长在老纽约社会（即当时的纽约上层社会）中的局限性。在华顿本人所属的上流社会

里，社会秩序极其森严，那些像埃伦一样的不守规矩“新人”是难以融入其中的。华顿将小说中与阿切爾的精神成长密切相关的两个女性人物梅和埃伦进行对比描写。梅是当时纽约上层社会的代表，她外表的“纯真”掩盖了她竭力维护纽约旧的社会秩序的真相，因此使得阿切爾与埃伦的爱情受到破坏。相反，埃伦是老纽约社会的叛逆者，为身边的人们所不容。同时，她也是阿切爾成长的引路人，她让阿切爾认识到了这个社会的残酷无情。虽然阿切爾因社会的限制无法实现他对爱情的梦想，但是他最终获得精神上的充分成长。

人是社会中的人，社会是个人存在和发展的条件，青少年的成长当然无法摆脱社会的约束。华顿笔下阿切爾的成长不仅反映了十九世纪末美国的社会现实，而且为今天的青少年如何处理个人与社会的关系提供了借鉴。我国成长小说的文学创作也具有悠久的历史，但是和欧美国家相比，我国对成长小说的系统研究相对滞后。通过研究美国的成长小说《纯真年代》，我们也可以把相关的理论和方法运用到我国成长小说的研究上。

9. 期刊论文 [覃始龙 兰·阿切爾的“爱情乌托邦”——解读《纯真年代》男主人公的感情历程 - 安徽文学（文教研究）2006, “”\(12\)](#)

在美国小说家伊迪丝·华顿的代表作《纯真年代》中，主人公组兰·阿切爾曾经面临过三次感情方面的重大决定，而他每次做出的决定，都与自己的感情背道而驰，这让读者深感迷惑。本文通过追寻他的感情历程，分析这些决定背后的原由，并且认为他在感情方面只有一个幻想的“爱情乌托邦”。

10. 学位论文 [陈蕾 双性同体：自性的完美整合——从荣格心理学视角解读华顿的《纯真年代》 2009](#)

伊迪丝·华顿是19世纪美国文坛颇具影响力的女作家，其作品多反映旧纽约的上流社会的风俗面貌。1920年出版的《纯真年代》是华顿一半自传体的小说，也历来被认为华顿最具有代表性的成功作品，国内外的评论家多从自然主义和女性主义方面对其进行阐释和解读。本文以荣格的分析心理学为视角，探讨了男主人公走向成熟，走向双性平衡，最终达到个体自我实现的心理历程。论文分为四个部分。

第一部分为引言部分，介绍了华顿的生活经历和《纯真年代》的简要内容，并简要回顾了国内外对这部小说的研究情况，指出本文的依据和目的。

第二部分为文章的理论框架，介绍双性同体的神话和宗教的历史渊源以及荣格的个性化进程中相关原型概念，为本文结论性理论双性同体是个体化中最高境界提供了理论依据。

第三部分细致分析了组兰个性化进程的四个阶段，指出人格面具，阴影和阿玛尼三个重要原型各自在其男性气质和女性气质不同作用，以及对最终双性同体状态的自我实现起到建设性作用。

最后一部分为结论，不同以往对华顿男性形象的负面认知，组兰双性同体自我的最终实现，不仅反映本身其内在无意识的完美整合，同时也表明作者并非是个激进的女性主义者，更多表达作者提倡一种完美和谐的精神状态。

本文链接：http://d.g.wanfangdata.com.cn/Thesis_Y801915.aspx

授权使用：上海海事大学(wf1shyxy)，授权号：4688f7f0-6fa7-4f06-b8a0-9e2100fc1f01

下载时间：2010年11月1日