

The Imperceptible Flow:

Dialogic Thought and Male Intruders in Edith Wharton

by

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IV

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to discuss implications of applying a postclassical perspective on the fictional mind to readings of Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, *The Age of Innocence* and "New Year's Day". The author's emphasis on depicting social aspects of thinking is discussed in relation to characterization, by understanding narrative as a rhetorical act, and by reference to Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic inner utterance. Two supplementary frameworks are provided to discuss the moral implications of Wharton's strategy: firstly, the thesis argues that Wharton's renderings of dialogic thought enable individualization and a sense of independent agency in settings which otherwise threaten to reduce characters to abstractions of their culture. Secondly, the thesis connects central male characters' idolizing visions of the heroine to her self-concept and subsequent development. The visions are discussed in light of their function as embedded narratives and in the context of discursive authority. The visions form a recurring pattern, which shows how Wharton adapts her mind designs to each specific rhetorical purpose, as well as the development of her strategy over time. The failure of each of these visions to capture its subject illustrates Wharton's tendency to assume male voices of authority with the intention of criticizing them.

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1 Introduction

In her essay “Forms of Disembodiment: The Social Subject in *The Age of Innocence*”, Pamela Knights discusses the function of “social details” and “cultural furnishings” such as clothes, manners and interior design in *The Age of Innocence*. According to Knights, these details function not primarily as picturesque or oppressive background for a characterization, but as “social inscriptions” that the characters need to exist. To Knights, the dramatic effects on the individual when the social setting changes suggest that “without . . . the social mold, there may be no self at all” (21). Wharton felt that the novel had found its form when authors became aware that “the bounds of personality are not reproducible by a sharp black line, but that each of us flows imperceptibly into adjacent people and things” (*The Writing* 10). For the sake of practicality, I refer to this phenomena as the “imperceptible flow”, or simply “flow”. For Knights, the flow is an expression of Wharton’s critical attitude to modern fiction that “took its bearings entirely within the flux of the subconscious” and that she wanted to integrate the social aspect of consciousness in fictional discourse (21). Knights’ observation is meant to describe *The Age of Innocence*, but I will argue that it is useful to consider its implications for some of Wharton’s other New York stories as well. I will argue that the tendency of “disembodiment”, understood as the disappearance or fragmentation of the self as it is disengaged from its native culture, is balanced against a variety of narrative strategies providing significant psychological individualization. One of these forms of characterization, I will suggest here, is the depiction of the fictional mind engaged in “dialogic thought”, understood as the narrative depiction of social influence blending with and reacting to individual character minds. If Wharton’s New York novels question “where and how far [the social entanglement] extends” (Knights 21), this mental arena illustrates that it stops short of complete permeation. In other words, social inscriptions are shown to exert a powerful influence, but they never completely overturn individual values, identity and agency in the narratives discussed here. The reader’s experience of Wharton’s central characters as no more nor less than *semi-independent* agents – heavily influenced by social inscriptions but still in possession of agency – is an essential aspect of a characterization strategy that produces a peculiar fluctuation in the reader’s response to character and the narratives as a whole.

This thesis will discuss Wharton’s engagement with the debate about the social basis of consciousness in the novels *The House of Mirth* (1905), *The Age of Innocence* (1920) and the novella “New Year’s Day” (1924). I will approach this task by attempting to show how

characterization is defined by various representations of mental processes in which social influence interacts with individual traits. Despite the dominating presence of location in Wharton's New York stories, it is possible to over-emphasize the influence of "cultural furnishings". In the narratives discussed here, I hope to demonstrate, the characters themselves are as important transmitters of social inscriptions as the cultural artifacts they are surrounded by. Wharton's tendency to introduce male focalizers as a screen between the implied author and the heroine is an example of social inscription reflected in narrative form. In the narratives examined here, one important function of the male focalizer is to be a transmitter of social inscriptions. The male focalizers have been interpreted as distancing device or as a way to lend authority to the act of telling (Nettles 249), but they also highlight problematic ideas and actions of men who somehow fail the women who rely on them. This thesis will examine some of the causes and effects associated with these failures. The three texts discussed here all feature leading male characters who are attracted to the heroine, because she shows what they perceive as an unrealized potential in themselves or the woman in question. These notions lead the men to form visions of who the women "really" are; visions they want the heroine to live up to. The visions influence the heroines by interacting with their future 'possible selves', understood as hypothetical narratives that coexist and potentially compete with the heroines' own hopes and fears about their future. The vision is also a contributing factor in the males' failure, because it pacifies them in their role as helpers. Ultimately, Wharton's depiction of thought as inherently social calls our attention to the moral responsibility to be aware of other people's self-concepts and how we influence them – both when we speak directly to people and when we insert subjective versions of people we know into our own narratives. The call for such awareness should be understood as a moral implication of the imperceptible flow Wharton sees between people. The parallel between these two insights highlights an interdependence between ethics and characterization in Wharton's art.

1.1 An Ethical Approach to Edith Wharton

In this section, I will explain the specific purpose of choosing an ethical approach to Edith Wharton's art. I will then proceed by outlining the main instrumental influences on my approach to the ethics of narrative. I became interested in the ethical aspect of Edith Wharton's narratives after discussing them in study groups. In particular, I noted the varying

and complex ethical responses some of her central characters elicit. This experience, in concordance with the present activity in the field of ethical criticism outlined below, made me decide to revisit Wharton's characterization with some of the more recent ideas as framework. I will here suggest that the complex reader response is triggered by the reader's encounter with what I can here only preliminary describe as a moral ambiguity, an ambiguity closely related to Wharton's depiction of consciousness as an interplay between private and social mental processes.

Recent years have seen an increased interest in the idea of individual consciousness as both individual and shared (Palmer, Zunshine, Vermeule). For example, Lisa Zunshine refers to the notion that we "live in other people's heads" because we have – and constantly apply – an ability to "explain people's behavior in terms of their mental states", an evolved ability cognitive scientists refer to as "theory of mind" (Zunshine 13). Theory of mind is not limited to real people, it is also more or less expressed in fictional characters. In Henry James' *Portrait of a Lady*, for instance, Ralph Touchett finds that "our ears, our mouths, are stuffed with personalities" (305). Wharton is another author who is eager to integrate what is today understood as theory of mind in her fictional mind designs. This affords an interesting opportunity to reassess some of her narratives where the values of the upper echelons of New York society both inform and are juxtaposed to the consciousness of central characters. The purpose of this focus is to show how the depiction of cognition as a combination of social and private activity has fundamental implications for the reader's ethical response to characters and the narratives as a whole. As a result of this aim, my study falls within the field of narrative ethics.

The "ethical turn" in narratology is associated with the increased interest in understanding narrative in the context of moral philosophy since the 1980s. This trend has meant that established moral philosophy has been applied to literary criticism, but it can also refer to the recognition that narratives have a unique potential to contribute to the development of moral philosophy. Lisbeth Kothals Altes distinguishes between three main tendencies in the "explosive growth of ethical criticisms" after the turn of the century (142). These are still (1) the humanist tradition, (2) ethics of alterity and deconstructive ethics and (3) critics focusing on race, gender class and multiculturalism. The two latter traditions are often skeptical of what is perceived as authoritative humanistic ethics, which is associated with "patriarchal and colonial Western tradition" (142). My claim above about Wharton's call for moral responsibility places my approach within the humanist tradition, while I attempt to

be mindful of any moralism myself. More specifically, this thesis will operate within the humanist tradition by adopting perspectives suggested by Martha Nussbaum and James Phelan. Nussbaum has argued that literature is an invaluable source of ethical cultivation, because it can make us “capable of entering imaginatively into the lives of others and to have emotions related to that participation” (*Poetic Justice* xvi). She also informs this thesis with her idea that “literary form is not separable from philosophical content, but is, itself, a part of content” (*Love’s Knowledge* 3). I will attempt to show how Wharton’s formal strategies are value choices and as such integral parts of the moral philosophy of the narrative.

James Phelan has informed this thesis by providing a framework for discussing the ethics of form and the interplay between character, form and reader judgment. He also represents a precedent for my approach to Wharton, because he has used his theoretical framework on Wharton’s fiction specifically (*Experiencing* 95-108, “*Age of Innocence*” 39-60). To a greater degree than Nussbaum, Phelan is interested in “the formal aspects of literary communication, [a] rhetorical narratology [that] studies the devices through which narrative texts construct value-effects and elicit the reader’s ethical engagement (Altes 142). Rhetorical approaches to narrative understand narrative as an art of communication. The present thesis adopts Phelan’s definition of narrative as a rhetorical act in which “somebody [is] telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened” (3). The definition signals a wish to focus on the intentionality of narrative. There are many reasons for being interested in unintentional results of an author’s choices, but this definition chooses to deemphasize them. Understanding the act of, for instance, writing a novel as “for some purpose” also implies that the author is aiming for a certain reader experience. This does not imply a belief that all reader reactions to any given fictional narrative are the same. It does, however, signal a belief and interest in the possibility of a “shared experience” – an intellectual interpretation or emotional reaction that corresponds to the intention of the author and that the narrative can be said to encourage. This is what I will be referring to when I argue that the narrative at a specific location encourages a certain reader reaction, such as increased sympathy with a character.

The notion of a “shared experience” is important, because it provides the critic with additional analytical tools. Once it is assumed that certain reader judgments are intended and will be shared by many, these judgments can be treated not only as product of a literary device, they can also be used as starting points for narrative interpretation. Phelan outlines three main types of judgments, defined as interpretive judgments (about the nature of actions

and other elements), ethical judgments (about the moral value of characters and actions) and aesthetic judgments (about the artistic quality of the narrative in relation to its project). In a corresponding system, Phelan distinguishes three different components of the narrative that the audience can respond to. These are defined as the mimetic, thematic and synthetic components. When responding to a character, for example, responses to the mimetic component involve “interest in the characters as possible people . . . [and include] evolving judgments and emotions”. Responses to the thematic component involve “interest in the ideational function of the characters”, while responses to the synthetic component involve “interest in the characters . . . as artificial constructs” (*Experiencing* 5-6). Phelan’s tripartite model, in combination with the insistence on “shared experience” is helpful in this thesis, because it provides a context in which the interrelationship between form and ethics in narrative can be discussed. I accept that narrative judgments can be fruitfully understood as a “point of intersection for narrative form, narrative ethics, and narrative aesthetics” (7) and therefore choose to use such judgments as point of departure for ethical and formal interpretation. Because of his focus on narrative as communication in which the reader takes an active part, Phelan insists on supplying the term “plot” with “progression”:

Progression, as I use the term, refers to a narrative as a dynamic event, one that must move, in both its telling and its reception, through time. In examining progression then, we are concerned with how authors generate, sustain, develop, and resolve readers’ interests in narrative. I postulate that such movements given shape and direction by the way in which an author introduces, complicates, and resolves (or fails to resolve) certain instabilities which are the developing focus of the authorial audience’s interest in the narrative. (*Reading* 72)

The main reason that I have chosen to treat the three narratives discussed here in separate chapters and from start to finish is related to this use of the term “progression”. The purpose of sacrificing a thematic approach for a separate treatment is to retain the original progression when examining the development of the reader’s judgment in relation to the reading process. Phelan has developed his idea of progression by assigning specific textual and readerly dynamics to three parts of a narrative, referred to simply as ‘beginning’, ‘middle’ and ‘end’. For instance, a beginning provides information, but it also “generates the progression of the narrative by introducing unstable relationships between characters (instabilities) or between implied author and authorial audience or narrator and authorial audience (tensions)”

(*Experiencing* 16). Thirdly, it initiates “rhetorical exchanges among implied author, narrator and audiences” (21). Finally, it marks the start of “the reader’s evolving responses to the narrative” (21). The model is helpful here as it provides a system for seeing narrative judgment in the context of other narrative components. The ethical approach, in a more general sense, is necessary in this thesis to build a thorough understanding of reader judgments before I attempt to connect these judgments to Wharton’s fictional mind designs.

My choice of an ethical approach, and my application of Phelan’s term ‘progression’ in particular, are also motivated by the fact that gender is a central operational factor in the thesis. Rachel DuPlessis’ term “writing beyond the ending” is therefore an interesting perspective to combine with Phelan’s ideas about plot. Her term attempts to capture how the narrative strategies used by women writers of the twentieth century “delegitimate romance plots and related narratives” (xi). She defines the quest plot as a “progressive, goal-oriented search with stages, obstacles and ‘battles’” (200), which has typically been used in the depiction of male characters. By contrast, she defines the romance plot as “scripts of heterosexual romance, romantic thralldom, and a telos in marriage” (2). In other words, this is a plot script where the female character is “completely subordinated to the [goal-orientation] of love and marriage” (Dannenberg 400). The rightful ends of women in these plots are either “social – successful courtship, marriage – or judgmental of her sexual and social failure – death” (DuPlessis 1). All three narratives selected here represent interesting variations of this pattern. As an extension of the dichotomy between romance and quest plots, DuPlessis goes as far as reserving the term ‘hero’ for the protagonist in a quest plot and ‘heroine’ for the protagonist in a romance plot. One of the ways in which Wharton is “writing beyond the ending”, I will suggest here, is by creating male characters who are unaware of or trivialize the consequences of substituting the gendered script. Each of these men envision the heroine in a quest plot rather than a romance plot and suggest that she should, or should have pursued, other goals. These male observers neglect their moral responsibility when they fail to understand the full implications of suggesting a more subversive goal.

1.2 Dialogic Thought and Possible Selves

This section will describe the central cognitive concepts I apply when interpreting Wharton’s fictional mind designs. The cognitive concepts have been selected to help me discuss fictional minds that emphasize interaction between private and social elements. The cognitive

approach to narrative informing this thesis implies support to Alan Palmer's claim that "the most important sets of instructions that allow the reader to reconstruct the fictional world, are those that govern the reader's understanding of the workings of characters' minds" (*Fictional Minds* 34). One significant aspect of Wharton's fictional mind designs is that they highlight social inscription by other characters, for example by how male focalizers share ideas about what the heroines are and can be in the future. This process resonates with certain trends in cognitive narratology. For example, in the introduction to his book *Fictional Minds* (2004), Alan Palmer outlines his postclassical approach to consciousness representations by stressing how the Western tradition "generally assumes that human minds are inherently separate in their purposes and experiences, seeking rational clarity, autonomous skills, and self-betterment" (5). In this tradition, people "construct an awareness of the self in society but remain single subjectivities" (5). This classical tradition is contrasted to a different conception of human consciousness, which "perceives interpersonal awareness, cooperative action in society, and cultural learning as manifestations of innate motives for sympathy in purposes, interests, and feelings" (5). In this perspective, a human mind is "equipped with needs for dialogue [and] intermental engagement with other similar minds" (5). Palmer refers to this contrast as the difference between intra- and intermental activity or the internalist and externalist perspective. He ties this distinction to the field of narratology by claiming that structuralists have had a tendency to neglect the externalist perspective. More precisely, he argues that "the speech category approach of classical narratology does not give an adequate account of either the form or the function of the constructions of characters' minds by narrators and readers because it is based on the assumption that the categories that are applied to fictional speech can be unproblematically applied to fictional thought" (13). By limiting the field of study to inner speech, Palmer argues, critics neglect to study what he refers to as "the whole mind", "the social mind" or "the mind in action" (Palmer, *The Construction* 30). Palmer's idea that the social aspect of consciousness should be stressed more is summed up in his term "situated identity", the idea that "our identity is distributed among the minds of others" (168). To sum up: Palmer includes both the internalist and the externalist perspective in his postclassical approach to consciousness representation in fiction. Furthermore, his definition of 'mind', a usage I shall adopt here, includes both controlled and reactive processes in our brains; that is, "not just cognition and perception but also dispositions, feelings, beliefs, and emotions" (Palmer, *The Construction* 19). For the sake of practicality, I will use the collective term 'mental act' to refer to deliberate processes the mind actively

initiates and maintains, and ‘mental state’ to refer to mental modes of being that are not consciously initiated or maintained. This does not imply that the character cannot be conscious of them. In this context, ‘thought’ and ‘consciousness’ are understood as necessary but not sufficient components of the mind. As a result, ‘mind’ will here be used as a synonym to ‘personality’.

In the externalist perspective, according to the definition above, the mind “is equipped with needs for dialogue”. Those who wish to emphasize that the mind involves ‘dialogic thought’ – an interaction between its intra- and intermental activity – are likely to go further than this and argue that the mind is inherently dialogical. Palmer turns to Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories related to the social nature of consciousness, in particular the dialogic nature of “the inner utterance” to develop this position. Bakhtin’s contribution lies here in showing how our thoughts consist of “responses to, and anticipations of, the thought of others” (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 174). Because thought is “conditioned by the culture in which we live”, all thinking is, in an important sense, not internal but part of a continuing “social and public dialogue with others” (174). As a result, our thought is, in many ways, “social, public, overt, and observable” (174). Palmer concludes that

a postclassical perspective on the construction of fictional minds should be concerned with this complex relationship between the inaccessibility to others of a character’s thought, and the extent to which the same thought is social, public, and available to others in the storyworld. This relationship is very clearly shown when a character is anticipating, speculating on, reconstructing, misunderstanding, evaluating, reacting to, and acting upon the thought of an other. (*The Construction* 39)

This thesis will examine forms and uses of dialogic thought in Wharton’s characterization. This does not imply claims that the narratives are dialogic in the Bakhtinian sense on a global level. Novelistic dialogism is something more than characterization strategy because it defines the ideological framework(s) of the narrative as a whole. For instance, Charles Lock interprets Bakhtin’s contribution to the understanding of novelistic discourse as seeing “not one world which has to be ascribed to one of two or more speakers. Rather, the one word holds two voices, perpetually, without hope or fear of resolution” (86).

I will attempt to address one recurring type of dialogic thought in particular; a type that I argue is typical of Wharton’s fictional mind designs. The thought category in question involves two combined aspects: (1) “possible selves” understood as projections of the

protagonist's self into the future and (2) the act of influencing or imagining another character's possible selves, either by speaking directly to the character about their future or by creating fictional narratives that involve ideas about what the other character should be or could have been. The concept of possible selves was introduced by the social psychologists Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius as a complement to self-concept research (954). "Self-concept" is usually defined as "an idea of the self constructed from the beliefs one holds about oneself and the response of others" (Stevenson) and can be distinguished from a person's degree of "self-awareness" or "conscious knowledge of one's character, feelings, motives and desires". The concept of possible selves has been defined as "personal representations of one's self in future states" (Cross and Markus 230) and is a fundamental part of identity formation and motivation:

Possible selves represent individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming, and thus provide a conceptual link between cognition and motivation. Possible selves are the cognitive components of hopes, fears, goals, and threats, and they give the specific self-relevant form, meaning, organization, and direction to these dynamics. (Markus and Nurius 954)

The authors argue that the concept is important because they "function as incentives for future behavior (i.e., they are selves to be approached or avoided) and second, because they provide an evaluative and interpretive context for the current view of self" (954). In the context of fictional narratives, information about a character's possible selves can be considered a type of hypothetical "narrative prospection" (the opposite of retrospection) involving future constellations of story events and existents. 'Events' are here understood as the common denominator for actions and happenings, while 'existents' include characters and items of setting (Chatman 19). A reader can expect to encounter many types of indirect references to a character's possible selves, such as stress reactions when an event suggests an undesired future becoming reality. Explicit references can, for instance, occur when a character's future is discussed in dialogue. The panic attack in the carriage after Lily Bart has escaped Gus Trenor's mansion in *The House of Mirth* will be interpreted as an example of the former (117), while Newland Archer's conversations with Ellen Olenska about their future together in *The Age of Innocence* represents the latter (197). Explicit or indirect references to possible selves also contribute to the illusion of uncertainty and choice in fiction. Chatman argues that characters ideally appear as "open constructs", because this contributes to the aesthetic

experience of the narrative (116). I will suggest that Wharton, when she depicts characters engaged (privately or in dialogue) in negotiating possible selves, is enhancing the impression of characters as “open constructs”, and that this is an important contribution not only to the aesthetic but also the ethical aspect of the reading experience.

The notions of inter- and intramental activity, dialogic thought and possible selves are employed here to enable a more thorough investigation of the reader’s ethical response to central characters. More specifically, the concepts are intended to assist in demonstrating the nature and influence of the male perception and their corresponding inability to establish more meaningful and durable connections with their romantic interests. Furthermore, the concepts help to investigate the resulting dynamic between freedom to act (mentally and physically) and loss of agency.

1.3 Naturalism and Vision-Building

My claim that Wharton depicts her characters as “semi-independent” agents makes it necessary for me to outline her relationship to American naturalism. Edith Wharton’s contribution to American naturalism is substantial. Donald Pizer has demonstrated how she helped overcome the notion that American naturalism must be associated with social realism and hard times; that it is exclusively the domain of male authors like Frank Norris, Stephen Crane and Theodore Dreiser; that it presents an early, primitive version of an author’s craft, and that the degree of naturalism in a work of art is in inverse ratio to its literary craftsmanship. She also helped draw the focus away from “the extraordinary, the excessive and the grotesque”. In *The Age of Innocence*, Pizer found a sophistication in the narrative voice and the characterization of Newland Archer that led him to call the result “naturalism in its ‘perfected’ state” (127). A vital aspect of this naturalism is that “the depiction of internalizing of external forces such as manners, social customs, or gender expectations replaces the more overt forces of imprisonment with psychological ones” (Campbell 361). The internalized depiction of interaction between individual and environment allows Wharton to present her characters with choices that can seem relatively free in the context of their material worlds, but much less so psychologically. The combination of external appearance of relative freedom and inner confinement is critical for Wharton’s discussion about the male visions. Firstly, the internal nature of the conflict helps to explain the male observers’ misconceptions. Secondly, Wharton’s insistence on recording the heroine’s inner conflict in

the discourse puts the reader in an ideal position to identify and gauge the extent of the male misconceptions. At the same time, the inner conflict demonstrates that the social inscriptions do not lead to a complete loss of agency.

The hero in American naturalism has been described as “someone [who strives] to assert their human dignity even within a deterministic universe, and the American naturalist hero’s tragedy is that an innate potential for ‘fineness’ is blocked by circumstance” (Campbell 354). This description certainly fits Wharton’s narratives, but is likely to reduce the complex fictional minds she creates to a unified block reacting to external stimuli. One of the aims of this thesis is to provide a more accurate description of Wharton’s mind designs. In Wharton’s protagonists, even this innate “fineness” is never complete, always conflicted. The author is not satisfied by amassing a group of character traits that react directly to external input; she is eagerly engaged in depicting the interaction between character traits. She consequently highlights how the struggle between citizen and society is not limited to personal encounters or the conflict between individual and external social pressure. The struggle within the mind of the individual is equally important. For example, dialogic thought in the present selection of narratives is realized as an internal interaction between character traits drawn from a range of sources, such as inherited family traits, upbringing and the wider assimilated culture. A note on contemporary social evolutionary theory is needed in this context. Wharton did, for instance, “not define race merely in terms of physical characteristics but primarily in terms of cultural sensibilities, which she believed to be physiologically encoded and transmitted” (Kim 189). In addition, and especially in *The House of Mirth*, “belief and value” are included as “conditions of environment” (Pizer 42). In Wharton’s depiction of dialogic thought, then, unique individual aspects of the mind are shown in dialogue with those that are a product of the environment, including other characters. Often, the dialogue can therefore be said to be one between independent dispositions and internalized social norms. As a consequence, Wharton’s emphasis on dialogic thought encourages the reader to understand determinism and freedom in terms of categories or degrees, not as absolutes.

Wharton’s reference to “vision-building” in *The House of Mirth* can serve as an example to illustrate the impression of graded freedom outlined above. The term “vision-building faculty” appears in Chapter XII of Book I of *The House of Mirth*, in the narrator’s description of Lawrence Selden’s reaction to the tableau vivant (106). This is probably Wharton’s single most famous scene throughout her writings, and it has been commented on extensively. For instance, the scene has been understood in the context of American realism

and naturalism with reference to Lawrence Selden as the “detached, masculine viewer [who] attempts to produce an impartial, even scientific description of the world” (Saltz 18). Laura Saltz notes a troubling tendency to “deny Lily status as a viewing subject” (18-19) in these readings. For example, Cynthia Griffin Wolff emphasizes a “feminine injunction to passivity in *The House of Mirth* (254). Saltz’ purpose is to redefine the novel’s representations of the gendered gaze. She finds that the novel “challenges the very possibility of an objective or omniscient view [and that vision in the novel is] always a negotiation between individual subjectivity and material reality”. This is a view that is almost compatible with my interest in Wharton’s depiction of dialogic thought. I agree that the heroines retain agency despite oppressive social context, but not that subjectivity is depicted as only individual – it is too influenced by processes incorporating other characters’ ideas and values. I cannot agree with Saltz, therefore, when she goes on to state that “the problem of the novel . . . is not that Selden’s vision is inaccurate (it is), but that Lily’s vision-building has been stunted by her upbringing”. I will argue that Selden’s perception and general world view, as well as that of the other male focalizers in the other narratives discussed here, are problematic because they further contribute to the distortion of their own as well as the heroine’s vision-building. Selden’s notion of a “republic of the spirit” (55), for instance, reinforces latent tendencies in Lily and unsettles her immediate and long-term plans. In *The Age of Innocence*, Newland Archer’s subjective understanding of himself and Ellen Olenska leads him to pursue a romantic relationship that undermines her future plans. In “New Year’s Day”, the male observer’s narrative reconstruction of Lizzie Hazeldean after her death is intended to restore her reputation, but his commentary also questions her preference for a quiet, domestic life. In short, Lizzie does not live up to the vision that the male narrator has projected unto her. In this case, the male vision does not affect her in life, but it does affect her posthumous reputation.

1.4 Structural Layout

I have now outlined how I will discuss the reader’s response to Wharton’s fictional mind designs and in particular the limitations of the male focalizers. This section will explain the text selection. *The House of Mirth*, *The Age of Innocence* and “New Year’s Day” have been selected because of certain common traits and some interesting differences that will help me illustrate different modes in Wharton’s characterization. For the sake of this thesis, the most important common element is Wharton’s fictional mind design that, as I will argue,

incorporates dialogic thought as an ethical discourse strategy. Secondary common traits motivating the selection are the setting, the motif of the male observer and his vision-building faculty. The specific conceptualization of the focalizers in each narrative is the most important difference in the comparison made here.

The narrator in *The House of Mirth* uses the heroine as dominant focalizer in combination with, among others, a male focalization highlighting a specific vision of the heroine. The narrative is especially focused on Lily's reception of this vision and "social inscriptions" originating from other sources. Her awareness of the vision implies that it invades her consciousness as it is suggested as a 'possible self' to her. This influence becomes one of many sources of internal conflict, conflicts that force her to objectify herself, thereby undermining her ability to pursue her original agenda. Contrastively, the narrator in *The Age of Innocence* remains connected to the consciousness of the male responsible for the vision-building faculty. The focus of the narrative has here shifted to a study of the inception and maintenance of the vision rather than its reception. This closer examination of its causes enables further elaboration on the observer's misconstrued idealism. This time, the narrative examines a vision incorporating the male as well as the woman he perceives as mysterious and different. Attention is divided between the vision's effect on him as well as the woman who is partially caught up in its momentum. In "New Year's Day", the male vision-building faculty has expanded to encompass the entire narrative, giving the male observer a status that can be described as a "secondary author" in addition to the implied author. The strategy implies that the fictional mind design, including the process of dialogic thought, is depicted as imagined by the male observer. I will attempt to demonstrate that this peculiar realization of the vision-building faculty justifies the inclusion of "New Year's Day" in this selection of texts despite its smaller scope as a novella.

The term "male intruder" in my title is a reference to Carol Wershoven's book *The Female Intruder in the Novels of Edith Wharton*. Wershoven defines the female intruder as a woman who is "in some way outside society [and] different from other women, . . . because of her background or lack of social status or because she has violated some social taboo" (xv). The cognitive approach of this thesis highlights another intrusion; one that is more psychological in nature. In each of the narratives discussed here, the male intruder's ideology and self-concepts are depicted as social inscriptions that first influence the heroine's thought processes, and in turn her agenda and self-concept. It is particularly important to note that these male intruders do not fall into the (much more common) pattern of conscious

oppression; Wharton chooses instead to examine personal intrusion in the form of idolization and unsuccessful attempts to help. The purpose of the present selection of texts is to outline three modes in Wharton's attempt to critique the male perspective on women through the use of narrative voice. I will argue that the three texts, seen in chronological order, suggest a growing confidence and familiarity with the male voice that enables Wharton to draw the men close, while she simultaneously lets the heroines pass into the distance. This development reveals another motivation for Wharton's use of male focalizers as screens between the implied author and the heroine, a purpose related to Susan Sniader Lanser's comments on "discursive authority", understood as the narrative's "intellectual credibility, ideological validity and aesthetic value" (6). Lanser argues that "even novelists who challenge . . . authority [as modern Western cultures have constructed it] are constrained to adopt the authorizing conventions of narrative voice in order, paradoxically, to mount an authoritative critique of the authority that the text therefore also perpetuates" (7). When Wharton employs the voice of male narrators and the experience of male focalizers, she is, in effect, "standing on the very ground [she] is attempting to deconstruct" (Lanser 7).

2 Vision-Building and Dialogic Thought in *The House of Mirth*

My drama lies entirely in this one thing ... In my being conscious that each one of us believes himself to be a single person. But it is not true ... Each of us is many persons ... Many persons ... according to all the possibilities of being that there are within us ...

Luigi Pirandello, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (25)

Our identity is distributed among the minds of others

Alan Palmer, *Fictional Minds* (168)

The House of Mirth is the story about the social decline and death of Lily Bart, a young woman trying to make her way in New York at the time of the novel's publication (1905). Living with her aunt after she became an orphan, she has been brought up to find a rich husband, but she is still unmarried and dangerously close to 30 years old as the novel begins. Many readers and critics alike have found "the single most powerful aspect of [*The House of Mirth* to be] the extraordinary appeal of its heroine" (Lidoff 519). R.W.B. Lewis recounts how contemporary readers wrote to Edith Wharton to beg her to "allow Lily Bart to live and marry Lawrence Selden" (341). After the first great success of the serial and novel, Lily lived on "almost like a celebrity" (Hoeller 101) and became "sort of a cult" (Griffith 108). All the same, there are also those who seem to downplay the role of the heroine. Blake Nevius, for instance, emphasizes Lily's feeble powers of influence. He writes that "there is nothing in her life to encourage rebellion", and that "she is . . . completely . . . the product of her heredity, environment and the historical moment" (57). He also finds that "we are deceiving ourselves if we try to account for the compelling interest in *The House of Mirth* by the nature or intensity of the moral conflict" (58). Nevius, then, sums up the plot of the novel as "all denouement" (56), because Lily's rebellion is "defeated from the start" by society's "narrow ideal" and "her mother's example and training" (56).

I will argue that a postclassical approach to the fictional mind makes it necessary to adjust this description of Lily's function in the narrative. Not surprisingly, Nevius, and other critics operating within the classical approach to consciousness representation, seldom distinguish between anything equivalent to mental states and mental acts. They also seem unprepared to accept that mental acts can be as important as physical acts in a narrative. A postclassical approach to the fictional mind, stressing the social nature of consciousness, sets

a higher value on Lily's mental acts as opposed to her physical acts. This is a vital perspective to help explain the reader's fascination with Lily. Furthermore, an interpretation of the interplay between Lily's mental acts and states provides an important framework for reassessing her joint status as independent agent and product of her times.

In a fictional narrative, depictions of mental acts are as real as depictions of physical acts. Readers respond just as powerfully to depictions of mental states and acts as to their physical counterparts. The existents and events referred to are all language, and therefore equally real. In fiction, the perceived centrality of the characters' acts, be they mental or physical, must be understood in the context of the overall rhetorical purpose of the narrative. If the central concern of a narrative is, for instance, a character's struggle with a phobia, the character's mental act of finding a new, helpful way of thinking about the phobia can be more crucial to the reader's experience of the narrative than any physical acts following from that breakthrough. *The House of Mirth* is a narrative that places significant importance on Lily's mental acts and states. Nevius' characterization of Lily underplays how conflicted she is, and how much the moral conflict of the narrative depends on her inner conflict. It may be true that Lily "remains, so far as the moral significance of her actions is concerned, until almost the end of the novel, a lightweight and static protagonist" (55), but this static element implies a successful struggle against further moral deterioration. Each time Lily chooses to uphold her moral standards, it impairs her ability to defend herself and succeed as a social climber, but it is likely to enhance her integrity in the eyes of the reader. Lily's lack of lasting inner change is the result of a struggle to avoid becoming like the social elites she is forced to interact with; a struggle the reader is a witness to in the depiction of the moral negotiations of her mind. Considering that she is burdened with extreme specialization and, eventually, social displacement, her mental acts, her struggle against the social inscriptions, is likely to make her "[tower] like some dark angel of defiance" (Wharton, *The House of Mirth* 176) in the eyes of many a reader.

Despite the narrative's focus on mental states and acts, the portrayal of Lily Bart is also characterized by a grounding in material reality. Joan Lidoff argues that the fascination with Lily Bart implies a power that "far succeeds her role as a pawn of hostile forces" and that this is because the narrative "is primarily a romance of identity . . . [purporting to be] a novel of social realism" (520). Lidoff refers specifically to the type of romance that "makes its external world out of its hero's inner world . . . [and] populates a hero's journey of self-discovery with token figures representing aspects of himself which he must learn to confront

and accept” (521). In this reading, the conflicts Lily faces are “all internal”, appearing as aspects of “her own needs and feelings” (521). Wharton offers a rich dialogue with the romance tradition in *The House of Mirth*, but I fail to see how it is necessary to see the social realism of the narrative merely as a masking effect for an allegory to justify the narrative’s focus on mental acts. The depiction of the mind Wharton places at the center of *The House of Mirth* draws its power as much from its realistic sophistication as its thematic functions. When Wharton wrote that successful novels depicted characters as “[flowing] imperceptibly into adjacent people and things” (*The Writing* 10), her argument was not primarily grounded in aesthetics, but in the need to create the impression of unique and believable individuals anchored in a material reality. According to Wharton, previous depictions of character had tended to be “hung in the void, unvisualized and unconditioned (or almost) by the special outward circumstances of their lives”, a criticism showing that she wanted to create more than “subtly analyzed abstractions of humanity” (*The Writing* 10). One reason for the powerful responses to Lily Bart is that her thoughts and feelings are so responsive to her material reality, despite the narrative’s emphasis on describing her mind. If the narrative is characterized by this kind of negotiation between “individual subjectivity and material reality” (Saltz 19), we must ask what Wharton intends with this strategy.

Wharton uses her focus on mental acts to depict a struggle to maintain moral integrity in an exclusive society challenged by moneyed interests. Wharton shows the negotiation between Fifth Avenue and Wall Street ideologies reflected in thought processes. This demonstrates how the interplay between these two social hierarchies affects individual minds as profoundly as the actual interaction realized in physical encounters or by writing and reading letters. In her study *Women and Economics* from 1889, Charlotte Perkins Gilman argues that women are burdened with “a childish, wavering, short-range judgment” (337), because they live in economic dependence. In Lily’s world, women’s dependencies similarly deny them the “full potential of humanity” (Flohr 6), keeping them in an immature state, especially in terms of their moral judgment. However, Wharton insists that similar forms of immaturity are equally present in men. This idea is reflected in instances of what I will refer to as ‘dehumanized communication’ characterized by limited solidarity and visions of the self and the other that are distorted by this a moral immaturity. Even though Lily and her romantic interest in some ways possess more developed moral instincts than most of the other characters, they are incapable of converting these instincts into a language that enables trust, risk, and the “wholesome roughness of life” (213). One of the main causes of dehumanized

communication exemplified in *The House of Mirth* is the extreme emphasis on strategic self-representation. After working with Lily in preparation for a 'tableaux vivant', a show where living people imitate famous works of art, the painter Paul Morpeth praises the heroine's immense "plastic possibilities". He hastens to add, however, that her face is "too self-controlled for expression" (186). The paradoxical notion that you have to sacrifice control over yourself to be able to express yourself is a central notion in *The House of Mirth*. Personal risk is a necessary condition for a communication marked by authenticity and integrity. Lily's experience illustrates how improbable this kind of expression is when you are a beautiful, unmarried woman who acts alone. Because of the particular interest the leisure class has in controlling their marriageable women, Lily's efforts at personal expression are met with an extreme form of this community's "force of negation", the force which "[eliminates] everything beyond their own range of perception".

When Morpeth identifies an appearance divided between a flexible and a self-controlled aspect, he provides a precise model of Lily's conflicted self and the cause of her exile. Lily may be uncommonly impressionable, but she is also characterized by the presence of an old-fashioned moral code, that is maintained in spite of the pressure to abolish idealism in a ruthlessly materialistic and individualistic society. The term 'self-concept' is usually defined by its origin in two distinctive but interacting sources. The first of these is the "idea of the self constructed from the beliefs one holds about oneself", the second "[the idea of the self constructed from] the response of others" (Stevenson). Lily's internal conflict is often realized as a dialogue between these two sources. The narrative traces her struggle to maintain a favorable self-concept over time, while responding to traumatic experiences related to objectification, ostracism and loneliness. In this, Wharton seems inspired by the Stendhal characters who "become who they are because of the society they want to get into" (Wharton, *The Writing* 10). Lily is a character who deviates from this pattern by fighting to keep what she feels is the best in herself. The struggle is presented in encounters between the protagonist and her environment, but the heroine's mental post-processing after each experience is equally important. When the protagonist senses what someone thinks about her or is saying about her, the narrative will often linger in her dialogical thought where an idealistic, moral imperative negotiates with class-based aversions, adaptability and pride in self-representation. Not least of all, this post-processing is important in terms of the reader's ethical evaluation of Lily. In *The House of Mirth*, the external, heterodiegetic narrator invites the reader to make very different ethical judgments about the heroine, and the narrator's attitude towards the

heroine is surprisingly varied. Narrator commentary is at times quite severe, depicting Lily as “weak, greedy, proud, idle, snobbish, narcissistic, self-deceiving and artificial” (Lee 202). At other times, the narrator is full of sympathy for “poor Lily”, for instance when she has the audacity to pursue privileges not available to her, or when she becomes “as malleable as wax” (44) at critical moments.

Wharton has commented that the main challenge when writing *The House of Mirth* was “how to extract from such a subject the typical human significance which is the story teller’s reason for telling one story rather than another. . . . The answer was that a frivolous society can acquire dramatic significance only through what its frivolity destroys” (*A Backward Glance* 207). To allow a thorough study of *how* this frivolity destroys, the heroine is the focalizer in a majority of the narrative. *The House of Mirth* is the only narrative among the three discussed in this thesis that provides access to the heroine’s mind via non-figural narration. The default mode in the novel is the personal revelation of the female experience, a central concern in New Woman literature. This chapter will examine scenes from the beginning, the middle and the end of the narrative that illustrate how Wharton combines a depiction of Lily as society’s product with individualization through her focus on depiction of dialogical thought, a process that is also used to illustrate the shortcomings of the male helper. My treatment will therefore focus on scenes related to Selden’s vision and his influence on Lily’s self-concept.

2.1 Beginning: Establishing Lily’s Mind

The present section examines how Lily’s conflicted self is introduced in selected scenes from Book I Chapter I-VIII. This self includes character traits that go beyond the impression that Lily is simply a product of her time. A central element in this respect is her moral questioning of what she is and should strive to be. Wharton’s portrayal of her mind when she is the focalizer is compared to Selden’s partially diverging vision of her. Selden is used to set up expectations about her personality that are both confirmed and disproved.

Lily is introduced to the reader as she is spotted by her bachelor acquaintance, standing alone apart from the crowds at Grand Central Station. Introducing Lily by way of Selden’s reaction to her shows how vision-making can both project and influence self-concepts. One particularity related to Selden’s perspective is that he is not very interested in

the mundane realities of what he actually sees. The habit of the art connoisseur makes him more interested in his own aesthetic appreciation of Lily. It is clear from the start, then, that we are not dealing with the perspective associated with classic American realism, in which a detached, masculine viewer . . . attempts to produce an impartial, even scientific description of the world” (Saltz 18). Selden’s reaction is better described in terms of his “vision-building faculty”, a trait inherited from his parents that tends to lead him “down the vistas of fancy” (106). The motif of a man watching and interpreting a woman’s appearance and actions introduces a cluster of activities central to the ethical judgments the characters will make about each other, including the interplay between the acts of setting up appearances (performing) and taking them apart (spectating, guessing, gossiping). Both activities are aesthetic as well as ethical in nature, but the deconstruction of a performance involves the most sensitive ethical responsibilities. The choice of being a spectator can be motivated by aesthetic interests, but it can also be driven by an overpowering need to unveil or recreate that which is hidden behind the performance. The constant attention Lily’s world and its inhabitants direct at her usually belongs in the latter category; she exists in a culture of “compulsive voyeurism” (McCarthy 87). This activity has much more serious ethical ramifications, since it combines entertainment and other forms of self-interest with a lack of respect for the well-being of the object studied. It typically comes after the aesthetic evaluation and is characterized by absence of acknowledgement or consent. When the performance ends and the imagination and gossip begin, the asymmetrical power between performer and spectator is reversed and greatly amplified. Crucially, the act of interpreting a performance entails creating a narrative about a person, or at least adjusting or affirming a pre-existing one. The phenomenon exemplifies how the self as agent is engaged not only in “world- and self-making” (Bamberg), but that this world-making includes making narratives about other people. The moral responsibilities associated with the performer and observer roles are closely related to their reflection of power. The narrative shows the heroine engaged in both roles, but it is typical of Lily that her power resides primarily in the role of the performer, much less in exploitation of the observer role. A major reason for this vulnerability is that her old-fashioned moral “fastidiousness” forbids her to forward or make up negative narratives about other characters; her ideals even forbid the assertion of her own narratives about herself in public. When a character’s power is limited to the performance, it is also limited to the present. Lily’s limited ability to envision and implement plans projecting beyond the current personal encounter also leaves her with little influence over her future.

Selden's thoughts during the first scene illustrate how ingrained social habits can have a subconscious influence on value judgments and the interpretation of objective reality. Selden and Lily are exceptions in that their spectatorship is motivated by the joy of experiencing poetic beauty, but while Selden watches Lily, the reader is shown how his sensibilities are in a constant dialogue with what others think of her. When he reflects that "he hardly knew why the idea [that she was waiting for someone] arrested him" (5), his role as detached, poetic connoisseur is in the process of being undermined by a culture of voyeurism. It is an example that his view of Lily is "coloured by any mind in which he [sees] her reflected" (126), making him unable or unwilling to take in information about Lily's reality in the present. Selden, much less so than Lily, seems unaware of the distinction between his own experience and others'. This lack of awareness creates confusion. For example, Selden first admires Lily's appearance, finding that "everything about her was at once vigorous and exquisite, at once strong and fine" (7). Apparently feeling a need to justify his role as critic by finding some fault with her, the assessment of appearance as if it were art leads him to call the raw material "vulgar clay". Unsatisfied with the metaphor, he reverts the image, deciding instead that "the material was fine, but that circumstance had fashioned it into a futile shape" (7). When he finds her looks and performance both "exquisite" and "futile", he avoids reflecting further on the inconsistencies of his views. Selden sees himself as a social critic, but his great appreciation of this society's aesthetic ideals undermines his criticism; a vulnerability he shares with Newland Archer in *The Age of Innocence*. Selden's aesthetic enjoyment of watching Lily is dependent on the impression of her as a larger-than-life figure. He cannot bear the idea that the glamorous Lily Bart is merely standing around alone, clueless and with nothing to do but wait. He is surprisingly unwilling to consider whether she is more normal than her reputation and appearance suggests. This is a situation where cognitive dissonance, understood as an uncomfortable "experience of inconsistency" (Cooper 2), triggers mental actions that rationalize his original ideas about her. In Selden's mind, the process merely results in ignoring what Lily tells him about her very real difficulties. This allows him to keep the original vision of her as intriguing planner and manipulator. The idea that her bracelet looks "like a manacle chaining her to her fate" (8) conflicts with this vision, and suggests that his impression of her as a noble captive does not disappear. The subsequent dialogue in his apartment confirms this notion that women are both influential and confined.

Lily's first focalization outlines her character and current situation by contrasting the spectator's curiosity and enjoyment with her fears that her reputation will be compromised.

The dialogue at Selden's flat after their encounter at the station provides a transition to the first passage where Lily is focalizer. The private setting enables Lily to voice her frustration about her future, but it also shows her as committed to this future. The conflicted attitude resembles Selden's view that she is both "exquisite" and "futile" (7). Lily explains how the confining expectations make it "a miserable thing . . . to be a woman" (8), but while she does so, she demonstrates that she is thoughtful and has self-insight and wit. Selden's powerful response to this attitude makes him see a "streak of sylvan freedom" in her. The application of this metaphor is a sign that Selden is adding to his vision of Lily. This mental act lays the ground for Selden's speech about freedom in Chapter VI, but also the reader's gradual realization that Selden's vision is inaccurate. For example, the narrator's later comment that Lily has "no real intimacy with nature" (51) targets Selden's vision of Lily as a magical forest creature specifically.

The contrast between Selden and Lily's perspectives starts a process in which reader expectations about Lily as a fashionable woman are altered. The accuracy of Selden's vision becomes questionable by the same process. The lives of pretty, unmarried women like Lily are not filled with leisure, but with extreme surveillance and hard work. Lily is the focalizer for the first time when she leaves Selden's apartment. At this point, the narrative has moved from presenting Lily from afar as a stranger, then up close in conversation, before now finally revealing her thoughts. The strategy is discretely mimetic in that it emulates the increasing intimacy that occurs when we make an acquaintance. It avoids the jolt of explaining her nature too suddenly and artificially. Most importantly, the perspective reveals that the life of an aspiring society lady involves precious little idling, if your family does not help you. The heroine has to compensate by being a "hard-working Lily" (Ammons, *The Marriage Market* 345). Lily's near impossible task, given her modest income, is to show off what Thorstein Veblen famously called "conspicuous consumption" (265), while at the same time appearing carefree and limiting herself to activities appropriate for young marriageable women. This is the only possible path to the possible future self she and her mother have envisioned. What the new degree of intimacy between heroine and reader reveals, then, is not so much an error in Selden's judgment, as a contrast in orientation, that is, a contrast in what a single man and woman of the American leisure class can afford to spend their energy on. Selden's haughty comment that marriage is Lily's "vocation" (10) will serve as a source of sympathy between Lily and the reader, because she "works" at least as much as he does. She will later be compared to a "wayfarer [who] picks up a heavy load and toils on after a brief rest" (25).

When Lily exits Selden's apartment, her lunchbreak is definitively over. As she exits Selden's apartment, she tries to calm her nerves by desperately telling herself that there are "a thousand chances to one against her meeting anybody" (13), and is subsequently spotted for the second and third time that afternoon. After the first three chapters, it will have dawned on the reader that risk assessment (financial risk and the risk of being seen) is a vital part of the heroine's day-to-day business. Up until and including the first Bellomont visit, the activity of risk-assessment is developed in the hansom, on the train and finally and most explicitly through the gambling at Bellomont. By comparison, Selden is free to follow his own recommendation and only "take society as an escape from work" (56) to the extent that he is never seen actually working. It is typical that Lily's and Selden's paths first cross when he is returning from a vague "hurried dip in the country" (5), while Lily's nomadic trek between rich families is revealed as nothing but tedious business obligations. The amount of control needed for a woman in Lily's situation to perform correctly with this kind of social surveillance involves a mental discipline that internalizes a far greater catalogue of norms, and other categories of human behavior than conscious acts. Despite this social context, both Selden and Lily will exaggerate how much of what Lily does is a conscious act. For instance, Lily's blushes and tears are repeatedly described as strategic self-representation. She also deplores that she can never "do a natural thing without having to screen it behind a structure of artifice" or almost never "allow herself the luxury of an impulse" (15). The absurdities play with the difference between mental states and acts, and suggest that Lily is either confusing them or laughing in her frustration.

In Book I, Chapter III, the full extent of Lily's difficult situation is emphasized in a claustrophobic revelation of the heroine's financial crisis, her physical aging and oppressive upbringing. This sense of the walls closing in, or the crushing weight of the golden shields, as in the Tarpeia myth Rosedale later alludes to (140), is a mental state that will be evoked several times during Lily's social descent. During the train ride in Chapter II, Lily builds trust with Percy Gryce, the rich young bachelor she plans on marrying. She soon becomes certain that "she could marry [him] when she pleased" (41). Lily's success does, however, trigger the ambivalent feelings towards marriage that has made her break off promising relationships before. She knows that "her whole being dilates in an atmosphere of luxury", but also that Gryce will bore her to death. Furthermore, it is revealed that "the gambling passion is upon her" and that she is broke. Expecting to soon have to make important choices regarding Gryce, the heroine is desperate to delay her lonely "self-communion" (22) and enjoy the bliss

of forgetting her worries when she gambles. The realization that she is broke and that Gryce shows that “her ambitions had shrunk in the desiccating air of failure” motivates a lengthy analepsis to her childhood to justify that she has failed, because it is her “destiny” and not “her own fault” (25). The narrator interjects to explain certain character traits from her upbringing. Her deeply ingrained revulsion against “dinginess”, understood as anything associated with the “crudity of [the] average section of womanhood” (6), is the most powerful of the influences inherited from her mother. From her father, she has inherited “a vein of sentiment . . . which gave an idealizing touch to her most prosaic purposes” (30). The setting of this passage is a classic setup for an extended, inner monologue: Lily is alone in her room at Bellomont, as she prepares to go to bed for the night. Her solitary thoughts, however, illustrate Bakhtin’s claim that the “inner utterance”, including our most private reflections, are social in nature, because they consist of “responses to, and anticipations of, the thought of others” (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 174). In this case, the thoughts of her mother and father are consulted in an effort to justify her current sense of failure. The passage emphasizes the moral responsibility of parents by showing how we carry with us the people we have known. Lily’s upbringing has served to make her self-concept and impede her ability to imagine a variety of positive visions of herself in the future. The narrator’s description is partly sympathetic, partly condescending, when describing Lily’s character in light of her background. She is described as an “illuminated intelligence”, but Lily thinks that her desire for “wordly advantages” is ennobled by refinement, good taste and a vague idea that she will try to use her beauty as a “power for good” (30). In a ruthlessly materialistic society, moral scruples like these will be shown to be a serious obstacle. Lily is ashamed of her mother’s passion for money, but knows that she has become just as dependent on “breathing [money]” (56) herself. The description of Lily’s hopes for the future is revealing at this point in the narrative. Despite the absence of success, her ideal husband is still an English gentleman “with political ambitions and vast estates” or an Italian prince “with a castle in the Apennines and an hereditary office in the Vatican” (30). The romantic inclination for lost causes, inherited from her father, is here just as crippling as the influence of her mother. It is the incompatible combination of the new and old world, the juxtaposition of sentimental romanticism to an uncompromising entitlement to wealth that is especially crippling. The result is a very improbable vision of her future self that seeks to join romantic and financial longing – and no plan b. As a result, all the options available to her in her real world must seem like failure.

Selden's interaction with Lily in Chapter V illustrates how a "frivolous society", in the form of a male representative, can have a problematic influence on sensitive subjects. When the double crisis of money and the aging process seems finally to have made Lily willing to commit fully to "capture" Percy Gryce, Lawrence Selden turns up and tilts the scales back, tempting Lily to postpone the meeting with Gryce. The Chapter V dialogue between Lily and Selden in the fields near Bellomont is a central example of how the male observer's vision of the heroine can influence her. In a scene following closely after Selden's arrival, the narrator explains that Lily's intentions

had never been more definite; but poor Lily, for all the hard glaze of her exterior, was inwardly as malleable as wax. Her faculty for adapting herself, for entering into other people's feelings, if it served her now and then in small contingencies, hampered her in the decisive moments of life. She was like a water-plant in the flux of the tides, and today the whole current of her mood was carrying her toward Lawrence Selden. (44)

As one of these decisive moments is reducing Lily to "wax", it becomes clear that her ability to "enter into other people's feelings" is a vulnerability, because she is not always conscious of the effect it has on her self-concept. After she has admired Selden's alleged achievement of not "[forgetting] the way out" of the "great gilt cage", she concludes that this is the "secret of his way of readjusting her vision". She sees her fellow dinner guests as "dreary and trivial" (45) and is shocked when she realizes that she is considering what kind of men she will have to consider in the future "if she did not marry Percy Gryce" (46). She has changed her mind without even being conscious of the fact.

After Selden's surprise arrival at the Trenors' country home Bellomont at the close of Chapter V, Lily and Selden's walk alone in the following chapter demonstrates the result of dogmatic adherence to a narrative one has created about another person. In short, Selden undermines Lily's self-respect by showing her "how poor and unimportant [her] ambitions [are]" (75). Throughout the encounter, Selden consequently ignores Lily's protestations, as he tells her what she is like. He intends to express admiration and an offer advice, but he only succeeds in bolstering the dangerous idea that Lily is exceptional enough to only use society as a means to reach a nobler goal. She protests when he repeats the claim that she is always scheming and that her "genius lies in converting impulses into intentions" (54). When the discussion turns to the nature of success, Lily's view is that it is "to get as much as one can out of life", while Selden swears to "freedom" (55). The central argument of his advice is that

success is “to keep a kind of republic of the spirit”, understood as the attainment of freedom from “everything”, meaning freedom “from money, from poverty, from ease and anxiety, from all the material accidents”. As an extension of this point, he asserts that society should be taken as “an escape from work” and never “the thing worked for” (56). He again seems to be offering social criticism, were it not for the wildly exaggerated notion of freedom and the assumption that Lily shares his privileges as a man, including a job that provides leisure time and an independent income.

The dialogue presents a prototype of the critique of the American frontier myth that Wharton would develop further in *The Age of Innocence*. The myth emphasizes the value of individualism and a quest to find oneself outside society. The critique of the myth is present in Lily and Selden’s ideas of success, but also in the irony in having two very self-centered individuals find themselves in an intensely romantic setting that makes the reader expect expressions of affection. Their two notions about the meaning of life are conspicuously devoid of references to love or friendship. Selden shows nothing like his insight about the “hidden god in [his] neighbour’s breast”, that he longs for in the aftermath of Lily’s performance at the tableaux vivant (121). Given the couple’s equally vague philosophies, the narrator could just as well have described them both when commenting that the heroine has “no real intimacy with nature” (51). When Lily responds positively to Selden’s talk about freedom, he finds her emotional reaction “interesting”, because it reveals “how she looks when she is alone”; it does not lead him to reevaluate his views of her. What is striking here is that he still limits his interaction to the role of observer that he first assumed when spotting her at Grand Central Station at the start of the narrative. He is just an observer, when the reader expects a fellow human being who is negotiating meaning and assisting the heroine. The most important consequence of his remaining an observer is that Selden is still in complete control of his narrative about Lily. An enforcement of Selden’s ideal of freedom, then, seems to lead to a greater asymmetry and dehumanization in personal relations. Contrary to his and Lily’s belief that he “has never forgotten the way out [of the great guilt cage] (45), he is also enforcing the very culture of “compulsive voyeurism” (McCarthy 87) that holds society as a goal in itself. The connection between the two encourages the reader to wonder how long he can go on in this mode before their affection breaks down his habits.

While Selden demonstrates too little adaptability, Lily’s challenge seems to be the opposite at this early stage in the narrative. At the Van Osburgh wedding in Chapter VIII, she sums up Selden’s influence as “cheapening her aspirations, of throwing her whole world out

of focus” made all the worse by a manner that conveys a sense of “complete understanding” (75). Because she idolizes him in this manner, “she [longs] to be to him something more than a piece of sentient prettiness, a passing diversion to his eye and brain” (75). Lily’s thoughts in this matter reveal how she overcomes a dissonance between two conflicting ideas. Despite the fact that she rejects his views of her in dialogue, she is later shown to have retained the idea that he understands her completely. In a negotiation between the idea of him as insightful, and the perceived reality of his misperception, the original idea has persisted. How is the reader expected to respond to this inconsistency in Lily’s thoughts? In attempting to answer this, it is worth remembering that the intermental (external) process associated with the reception of Selden’s central idea has already been introduced in the heroine’s intramental (internal) processes. For example, when Selden claims that freedom should be one’s ultimate goal, the reader has just witnessed Lily dreading marriage with Percy Gryce, fearing that he will “do her the honour of boring her for life” (23). Lily’s response to Selden’s claim about freedom is: “I know—it’s strange; but that’s just what I’ve been feeling today” (55). Given the previous scene in Selden’s apartment, this should not seem like a case of mind-sharing or Selden embodying an idea in Lily’s mind. It is not surprising that Selden succeeds in gauging her mood, since Lily complained about marriageable women’s lack of freedom when visiting his flat. Seemingly forgetting this, Lily takes his talk about freedom as a confirmation that he understands her completely. This makes her agree with his vision of her, despite her awareness that she does not have as many hidden agendas as he thinks. The destructive results of this acceptance are emphasized by the nearness and direct causal relationship between this act and the introduction of two conflicts with Bertha Dorset and Gus Trenor as soon as the encounter with Selden is over. Mrs. Dorset will put an end to Lily’s marriage plans, because she considers Selden hers. Trenor represents an alternative source of income, but eventually expects a physical relationship with Lily after he has lent her money and invested it for her. It is typical that Lily is unaware of the full price she is paying in her relationship with each of the characters. Lily’s self-concept includes a belief that she is “above narrow prejudice”; her mistake is to assume that others have the same moral compass. This is one of the junctures that is constructed so as to trigger very different reader judgments. Some will feel that Lily’s arrogance and materialistic outlook mean she will get “what’s coming to her”, while others will sympathize with her inability to see the consequences of her actions. Those who see through Selden’s posturing will most likely sympathize with Lily on grounds of his inability or unwillingness to make a personal sacrifice and really help her.

Lily's situation starts to develop past its first complete revelation when she starts to compensate for the lack of marital opportunities by making the investment deal with Gus Trenor at the end of Chapter VII. At this point in the narrative, the original characterization of Lily can be summed up. The first seven chapters of the novel have primarily depicted Lily as a symptom of her materialistic environment, but it has also served to individualize her beyond a type associated with her social class. Lily's self-concept is still dominated by the belief that she is "jewel-like" and therefore entitled to a life of "fastidious aloofness and refinement in which every detail should have the finish of a jewel" (72). Lily feels she is exceptional not so much because of a natural beauty, but because of "her . . . power to look and to be so exactly what the occasion required". This idea makes her irrationally feel that "other girls [are] plain and inferior from choice" (70). Readers attuned to the mimetic component of her character will judge her negatively as a consequence of this arrogance, while those responding to the thematic component will tend to see her as victimized or devoid of a proper self and only a "product of her heredity, environment and the historical moment" (Nevius 57). The first chapters have, however, also presented Lily with challenges to this original self-concept. The challenges to her self-concept can be understood as falling into three categories: (1) a realization that she is running out of time and that her standards have deteriorated; (2) blunders that undermine her self-image as skillful planner; and (3) Selden's views, including his vision of her as "worthy of better things" (138). Selden's vision and Lily's response to it are particularly dangerous, because he is offering his own ideal (freedom), apparently without taking Lily's particular challenges resulting from gendered restrictions. In Rachel DuPlessis' terms, he is suggesting that she should strive to be like a male hero in a 'quest plot' oriented towards individual triumph, rather than a heroine in a 'romance plot' geared towards resolution in marriage. Selden's evaluation of Lily is dangerous, because it "[measures her] against a moral standard which seemingly takes no account of sexual politics and economic reality" (Fetterley 210). Lily's following decision to enter the Stock Exchange, even if by a male proxy, reflects a corresponding masculinization in her behavior.

Halfway into Book I, then, the three types of influences on Lily's self-concept are starting to challenge, but have not yet permanently altered her behavior or her original faith in herself. Furthermore, she has retained the ability to hold on to her old possible selves, if only barely; the investment payments provide only irregular, unreliable and temporary "buoyancy to rise once more above her doubts and feel a renewed faith in her beauty, her power, and her general fitness to attract a brilliant destiny" (69). Her actions are still "moves in a game

played against heavy odds” (Nevius 59), but as a result of her failure to consider other goals or foresee the consequences of her risky moves, her agency is less marked by personal initiative than reactive, defensive moves. Finally, Lily shows clearer signs that the two competing aspects of her personality seem to be more evenly matched than before: Eleven years in, Lily is growing tired of the marriage market, and is more open than ever to the suggestion that society is only a necessary evil she must manipulate while waiting for other options. After all, her aunt Mrs. Peniston is affluent and aging, and Gus Trenor’s money is bridging the gap to the future where she is still unmarried, but in possession of enough funds to be independent. Still, the divided self is making her vulnerable, because it is making it impossible to lay plans or follow them through. In chapter VI, Lily changes her mind about Percy Gryce because of Selden, but in Chapter VIII, she is terrified when she finds out that she really has lost Gryce. This vacillation leaves her in a subversive middle position, where she is perceived as trying to cheat the system. The social and psychological consequences of remaining for too long in this limbo are developed further in the middle part of the narrative.

2.2 Middle: Crisis and Changing Self-Concept

This section will discuss a selection of scenes from Book I Chapter IX to Book II Chapter IV. This corresponds to the part of the story from when Lily has learned that Percy Gryce will marry another and the investment deal with Gus Trenor starts to escalate up until when Lily is cut off both from the leisure class and the inheritance from her own family. At the beginning of this central phase of the narrative, Lily sees only “a future of servitude to the whims of others, never the possibility of asserting her own eager individuality” (80). This section examines how dehumanized interaction leads to loss of stable self-concepts. Despite Lily’s lack of influence over her future, the central part of the narrative also demonstrates her power in the present.

Book I, Chapter XI expands the metaphor introduced to describe Lily as a “water-plant in the flux of the tides” (44), so that the “tides” of Lily’s life can be placed in the context of the “new people” who “rose to the surface with each recurring tide, and were either submerged beneath its rush or landed triumphantly beyond the reach of envious breakers” (95). The narrator employs a panoramic perspective throughout the chapter, summarizing the daily concerns of secondary characters such as Mrs. Peniston, Rosedale and Lily’s cousin

Grace Stepney. The multifaceted perspective highlights how preoccupied each individual is with his or her little project; projects that all depend on forms of dehumanized interaction with Lily. Rosedale needs Lily to ascend the social ladder, while Miss Stepney seeks revenge by using her “fly-paper” mind to store damaging gossip about Lily. Mrs. Peniston’s obsession with sanitation and moral hygiene, symbolized by her white linens and black mourning brocade, as reduced Lily to advisor on social matters. Lily is allowed to speak, but never about her own concerns, placing Lily in a position where she is used as a silenced courier. Factors like Mrs. Peniston’s age and social class mean that she does not so much disapprove of “modern fastness” and refuse to acknowledge it; it is “one of the conceptions her mind refused to admit”, despite the fact that her niece must grapple with the world that she can watch from afar. Mrs. Peniston has a mind of “panoramic sweep”, that overlooks “the minutae of the foreground”, such as the human being she has promised to care for. The final effect is an outlook and a treatment of Lily that strangely resembles Selden’s; a similarity that bodes ill for his potential as friend or partner. It is against the background of limiting relationships like these, that Lily’s self-concept and struggle to influence the direction of her life must be understood. In this context, her achievements of protest and personal expression are considerable. Two related scenes in particular in the central part of the narrative show how Lily’s power of influence amounts to more than a “feeble and intermittent flutter of the wings against the bars of the ‘great gilt cage’” (Nevius 56): The tableaux vivant scene in Book I, Chapter XII and the confrontation with Gus Trenor in the following chapter.

The tableaux vivant scene is arguably the most famous scene in all of Wharton’s writings, and has been subject to vast amounts of critical attention, some of which is relevant to my attempt to examine the depiction of Lily’s mind while understanding narrative as a rhetorical act. For instance, critics have read the scene as an illustration of her specialized function in a consumer society, arguing that the only time she succeeds at production rather than consumption is when she [produces herself as ornament] (Flohr 10). The coercive nature of this role has also been discussed more specifically in terms of gendered self-objectification, for instance by seeing Lily as an embodiment of the “cult of woman as beautiful object” (Fetterley 201). I will argue that the scene and the two surprisingly similar reactions it triggers in two of the male spectators (Selden and Trenor) demonstrate both the power and vulnerability of her moral integrity. The communicative act of the performance, independent of how it is interpreted, illustrates how Wharton injects individualizing elements in characterization to counteract the sense that her characters are hollow vessels of social

environment (Knights 21). In this case, it is characteristic of Lily that she assumes others are as innocent as her. It is also typical that she is so caught up in the joy of the preparations and the performance, that she ignores the possibility that some among the audience will find her performance to be scheming and vulgar rather than high art. The former reading is made the more likely by the context, since the event itself is motivated by the Wellington Brys' attempt to enter the social elite by hosting an elaborate reception. The show is an opportunity for Lily to show off her artistic skills while imitating a work of art. Lily's performance is different because of her minimalist approach, but this also means revealing more of herself, both literally and in terms of her artistic ambitions. The theme of unsuccessful communication has also been prepared by other narrative strategies. For instance, the motif of a scene within the scene of the narrative can bring to mind Selden's comment from the Bellomont encounter in Chapter VI that "the audience may be under the illusion [that society is an end and not the means], but the actors know that real life is on the other side of the footlights" (56). One of the ironies of the tableaux scene is that he is also under an illusion, although it is unique: while most of the audience is under the illusion that Lily's performance is only that of a desperate social climber, he sees his vision of her as great artist confirmed, in what is, basically, an imitative act in a gaudy setting. Lily remains an artist who can only paint herself.

Lily's state of mind and motives during the scene are elided by Selden's focalization, but can be better understood in comparison with a contrastive scene preceding it. Lily has also been shown in the role of the confused spectator "on the other side of the footlights" (56), most clearly when she is forced to attend Gus Trenor and Simon Rosedale at the opera two chapters before the tableaux scene. During the opera scene, Lily is "inspired by the prospect of showing her beauty in public". When everyone is watching her with "admiring looks" (91) she feels lifted "to a height apart by that incommunicable grace which is the bodily counterpart of genius" (91). The ecstatic joy of the moment is abruptly broken, when Trenor starts complaining about her lack of attention to him. By contrast, the buildup to the tableaux scene is completely devoid of this type of narcissistic enjoyment. She is less the giddy attention-seeker, than an independent, serious artist. The preparations have seen Lily's "vivid plastic sense" nurtured on a "higher food" (103) than the usual display of beauty. This point is not to be exaggerated, since the task at hand still is to design a representation of herself, but the effect on Selden is indicative of her potential influence on her surroundings. For all his talk, Selden's overpowering attraction to Lily is not far off from the other men's. The morning after the show, Selden's letter will bring back "the culminating moment of her

triumph: the moment when she had read in his eyes that no philosophy was proof against her power” (110). Ultimately, Selden’s reaction reinforces her original self-concept as influential social schemer, making her more comfortable with postponing the work involved in planning and materializing her preferred future. Gus Trenor’s response to Lily’s performance will have the opposite effect of bringing a new, horrifying self to her attention.

When Lily barely avoids Gus Trenor’s sexual assault in Chapter XV, the authority needed to calm her assailant illustrates the power of her moral integrity in the here and now of the scene. This victory is undermined by her feeling that “the words were worse than the touch” (116). The words in question are Trenor’s assumption that Lily already has “settled her . . . scores” with other men. Since this rumor is apparently going the rounds, Lily fears that the public no longer sees her as a marriageable woman, but a mistress to wealthy men. In the narrative’s moral universe, where “each of us flows imperceptibly into adjacent people and things” (Wharton, *The Writing* 10), the operation of the “flow” does not need to coincide with the presence of the individual in question. As a result, the multiple narratives about the heroine that she does not own or control are shown to invade, blend with and become indistinguishable from the persona she is trying to present. Furthermore, the gossip affects not only how others perceive her, it also alters her self-concept.

Lily’s emotional reaction after the incident shows that she finally understands that her power does not extend beyond the moment, particularly because a “good looking girl with stingy relatives” (202) will always produce gossip. The depiction of Lily’s reaction, once the immediate danger is gone and she is seated in a hansom, illustrates Wharton’s use of dialogical thought to examine the psychological effects of trauma and confusion. The narrator employs internal monologue, the quintessential form of intramental activity, but the mental activity depicted is also intermental (social) in that it shows post-processing of other people’s ideas about the heroine. The setting of the hansom, a small private space both part of and separate from the public sphere, emphasizes this duality. The foreign idea being processed is that she is perceived as a “fast” girl of the modern kind that her aunt refuses to even contemplate. The idea is equally foreign to Lily; her mind therefore has to resort to analogy by way of metaphors when attempting to start a negotiation between the foreign and her established self. The two metaphors her mind instinctively form are the furies from *The Eumenides* and the “new abhorrent being”, a second self that does not immediately replace, but attaches itself to the first. The relentless pursuit of the furies represents the permanent taint resulting from a transgressive act, but also the terror of always being seen and judged.

The revelation of the new self represents the terror of doubting that one is a good person, but most fundamentally, it represents Lily's reduced belief in her ability to understand who she is and can be. This explicit emergence of the second self in Lily's consciousness can also be understood in the context of the nineteenth-century convention of female doubling that Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar drew critical attention to (quoted in Sapora 371). One way in which Wharton is "writing beyond the ending" (DuPlessis xi) in *The House of Mirth* is her adaptation of this convention to her own needs. Wharton's revision is related to the conflict she felt between her roles as woman and public artist, a conflict that resonates with Lily's challenge. Carol Baker Sapora argues that Lily's double does not exist as a physical duplicate, but "a division of a single personality" resulting in one part of her that seeks a husband and one part that is tired of this race (371). In this reading, the double is an ever-present factor in her mind that causes all the confusion as to who "the real Lily Bart" really is. This interpretation resonates with my argument that Wharton emphasizes dialogical thought processes. However, Wharton also employs a physical double in the form of Ned Silverton, the young man who "had meant to live on proof-reading and write an epic, and who now lived on his friends and had become critical of truffles" (45). To Lily, Ned is a vision of a possible self she does not want to become. Wharton's choice of revising the convention by creating a double of the opposite sex is also an expression of her wish to show how men can be "denied their full humanity" in many of the same ways as women.

Wharton also adjusts the convention of doubling by allowing its expression in Lily's mind to change as the narrative progresses. This change reflects Wharton's favorite Stendhal characters, who "become who they are because of the society they want to get into" (Wharton, *The Writing* 10), but her technique is also a striking conceptualization of "situated identity", the idea that "our identity is distributed among the minds of others" (168). Lily's feelings when discovering new facets of her identity in the eyes of those who watch her range from joy to fear and disgust. The discoveries are more distressing the more she understands that she "has it in her to become whatever she is believed to be" (123).

This change is most pronounced after the encounter with Gus Trenor in Book I, Chapter XIII. The change involves an increased awareness of the second self; the "abhorrent being" has moved from the subconscious to the conscious part of her personality. One consequence of this development is that it forces Lily to activate some form of dialogue between it and her self-concept. It will therefore also hamper her ability to imagine what she will be in the future, a limitation that is symbolized by the chain that connects the two selves

in her metaphor. The new monstrous attribute of the second self in her mind is important, because it does not coincide with her original, private feelings about her need for independence. Most of the time, she has taken pride in this artistic, willful aspect of her personality. The monstrous element is evoked after her encounter with another monster: the passion of the “primitive man” she has awoken. It is her search for an alternate income that brings her to this monster – a force that damages both her reputation and self-concept despite her success in avoiding Trenor’s embrace. The core of the traumatic incident is the realization that what she is most proud of is despised by the society she needs to succeed. As a result of the new insight, Lily’s attempts to understand herself become more confused. Simultaneously, her success in bringing Trenor out of his passionate, selfish state demonstrates her ability to activate a dormant moral language in the men who idolize her.

Lily’s vulnerability when tricked by Gus Trenor is increased by the inefficiency of her helpers, and her unwillingness to take advice from anyone but Selden. Even though she finds temporary refuge in Gerty Farish’ flat, Gerty is not someone whose opinion on social matters Lily respects enough to seriously discuss her situation. Lily thinks Selden could have filled this role, but rather than approach Lily, he leaves the country after he has seen her leaving Trenor’s mansion. His reasons for not helping her in her crisis illustrate some of the central reasons why Wharton’s male focalizers fail their moral challenges. At this point in the narrative, Selden has just revealed that he understands how Lily “has it in her to become whatever she is believed to be” and called on Gerty to help her by “believing the best of her” (123). In this case, the problem is therefore not primarily a failure to judge character, but a failure to imagine a two-way conversation where he not only lectures and enjoys Lily’s performance, but is also humble enough to learn and change his views as he listens. Such a conversation implies discomfort, especially at a time when her reputation seems to be confirmed by her actions. In this manner, Selden faces his own version of the social contract challenge that Lily struggles with. Pursuing a romantic relationship with Lily entails personal sacrifice. As a result, such a relationship still seems impossible given the masculine, frontier ideal of complete freedom that he preaches.

Formal aspects of the narrative emphasize the implications of Selden’s failure to help Lily at this juncture. For instance, the incident coincides with the only example of repetitive telling in the novel – the result forces a comparison of Lily’s and Selden’s perspective that highlights his error. Just before Selden is hurt and travels abroad, the reader is also provided with more information about his background. The narrator keeps an ironic distance, letting the

passage function as a study of the causes behind his inefficiency as Lily's partner. Particular attention is given to his parents' ideal of seeing the spending of money not as a mark of distinction related to conspicuous consumption, but as a vulgar necessity that should be kept at an absolute minimum. The idea that Lily has compromised her honor to finance such consumption is therefore especially likely to alienate Selden. Just after a focalization has revealed his love for Lily, these inherited preferences cause his love to disappear. This is the first time he "[condemns] and [banishes] her without trial" (234). His hurt silence and departure, his failure to offer her "pity . . . and understand [her] and save [her] from loathing [herself]" (132) contribute to the subsequent direction of the plot, in which Lily continues to run away as soon as the public self she has to be becomes unbearable. The reason is her feeling that "moral complications existed for her only in the environment that had produced them" (153). She has already run away from Percy Gryce, from the deal with Gus Trenor, and from Selden the evening he kisses her.

Book II starts as she has run away from New York, to join the Dorsets on their cruise. The Monte Carlo chapters (I-III in Book II) emphasize Lily's main weaknesses: her love of luxury social ministrations, and her inability (or unwillingness?) to make plans for the future. The European section also offers a more elaborate presentation of Selden's inefficiency as helper. He does detect the trap in time, but only gives a vague warning to Lily. Given his history with Mrs. Dorset, he is uniquely positioned to influence Bertha Dorset, but never exploits his position to its fullest. When Selden understands that Lily will not defend herself against the false charges that she is Dorset's mistress, he reproaches himself for "his miserable silence [that has] forfeited all chance of helping her" (172). This crisis, and Mrs. Peniston's subsequent choice of altering her will, represent more permanent damage to Lily's precarious position, and introduces the part of her story that involves exclusion and more rapid social decline.

The combined effect of the strategies examined above is a pervasive mood of chaos and uncertainty. In addition to Lily's confused, dialogical thought in Chapter XIII and the seemingly stagnating plot, the narrative also intensifies its efforts to encourage a vacillation between reader sympathy and skepticism directed at Lily. After she is victimized by Gus Trenor's trap, her suffering is compared unfavorably to Gerty Farish's anonymous existence, before Selden's selfishness again increases our sympathy for her. The Monte Carlo section generally shows Lily in an unfavorable light, but Bertha's cruel revenge turns this around again.

2.3 Late Middle and End: Three Male Encounters

This section will discuss the continued characterization of Lily after her return from Europe in light of her encounters with George Dorset, Simon Rosedale and Lawrence Selden in Book II. Through these encounters, Wharton elaborates on the forms of male communication and their effect on Lily. The new phase of social and financial decline after Lily is snubbed in her aunt's will provides fresh incentive to break out of her habits, but Lily is made an offer to escape her present worries by assisting the Gormers, another nouveau riche family that seeks social advancement. Despite their lower status, Lily is overcome by "the insidious charm of slipping back into a life where every material difficulty was smoothed away" (184). Gerty Farish feels that Lily, "in drifting back now to her former manner of life, . . . [is] forfeiting her last chance of ever escaping from it" (185). Lily later breaks with the family, because she grows tired of finding faults in her companions. In this time of declining opportunities, Lily is also approached several times in private by George Dorset and Simon Rosedale.

The two encounters between George Dorset and Lily in Chapter VI highlight the ambiguous nature of both female and male power in Lily's world. Dorset represents someone who has both status and wealth, but is leading an unfulfilling life, because of the terrible relationship with his wife. His interaction with Lily shows that she is sought after for her moral instinct as well as her value as status symbol. Even though the reader learns that Lily does not have "continuity of moral strength" over time, she does possess a powerful moral presence that projects authenticity and nobility in her personal encounters. Since Lily was cast out from her old circles because Bertha Dorset claimed Lily tried to marry her husband, his request for Lily's help is highly inconsiderate. Given Lily's confining upbringing and current social status, it is also especially provocative that Dorset describes himself as unfree. Lily knows Dorset "[has] but one subject: himself and his wretchedness" (184); the encounters involve the type of dehumanized communication that results from the complete self-absorption of the leisure class. In her review of *The House of Mirth*, Virginia Woolf refers to a "certain gift" which holds the members of Lily's community together, defining it as "the force of negation which eliminated everything beyond their own range of perception" (McNeillie 67, quoted in Fedorko 11). Dorset is not only unaware of Lily's everyday challenges resulting from her poverty; he has been incapable of even conceiving that these kinds of issues could be a problem for anyone he relates to. Despite this starting point, Lily manages to change the nature of their communication, and challenge this "force of negation". Even with the damage Dorset's passivity has caused her, Lily manages not only to feign, but

also to feel and express sympathy. Her willingness to enter into someone's consciousness and change her impression of him or her is a humane aspect of her adaptability, and should not only be associated with etiquette and scheming. Both encounters paint Dorset as a pathetic figure, but also encourage the reader to see him as a someone who needs meaningful interaction with people who care about him and not just his money; this is why he is so desperate to keep Lily in his life. Lily's power of influence is demonstrated when "a faint realization of her plight penetrated the dense surface of his self-absorption" (193), but it does not result in any altered behavior on Dorset's part.

The encounters with Rosedale emphasize the effects on Lily's mind when the language of Wall Street informs communication. Rosedale's dehumanized language is more honest than Selden's, since he is a practical man with no illusions about who he is. Rosedale has money, but little social status. His money can provide some status, but only up to a certain point, when he needs marriage to someone with unquestionable social status to gain access to the "inner Paradise" (188). In contrast to Dorset, he offers her something in return for his request to marry her. Later, when Lily's reputation has declined, he has one demand: Lily should restore her reputation by letting Mrs. Dorset know she has her correspondence with Selden. Lily is tempted by the "escape from fluctuating ethical estimates into a region of concrete weights and measures" (202), but recognizes the "essential baseness of the act . . . in its freedom from risk" (203). Freedom from risk is the central trait of dehumanized communication in *The House of Mirth*: As in Selden's case, it takes the form of advice from a safe distance; Rosedale demands that Lily sort out her problem before they form an alliance; he does not trust her to do it afterwards. His language is also devoid of reference to the ethical sacrifice Lily must make by forcing forgiveness by the help of the letters. As in her confrontation with Gus Trenor, it is the words, even more than the man who utters them, which startle Lily out of her "tranced subservience" (203). The effect of language in these scenes illustrates Selden's observation that "names can alter the colour of beliefs" (57). It is a testament to Lily's ability to remain uncompromised morally that she notices and reacts to the cold language of money. As with Trenor and Dorset, Lily again inspires a moral consciousness in the man with whom she is communicating. In Book II, Rosedale approaches or accidentally meets Lily numerous times (in Chapters V, VII, X and XI). His moral conscience grows incrementally between each meeting. During their last meeting, she feels that her "unexplained scruples and resistances had the same attraction as the delicacy of

feature” (234). By her example and respectful rejections, she has changed the man who at first would use her.

Selden’s reappearance in the latter half of Book II takes the failure of the detached male perspective to its extreme in Lily’s death. Lily’s demise must be understood as a result of the anguish brought about by her social exclusion. Lily’s unwillingness to compromise with her ethical standards is one of the reasons for the protracted isolation, another is Selden’s failure to risk anything in his interaction with her. The juxtaposition of Selden’s and Rosedale’s interaction with Lily highlights that Selden’s refuge behind the impersonal language of his “republic of the spirit” (55) is much more hurtful than Rosedale’s financial perspective. After Monte Carlo, Selden meets Lily only two more times while she lives: at the Emporium Hotel in Chapter IX and when she revisits his apartment in Chapter XII. Seen together, the three last encounters between them, including the last scene when Lily is dead, form a mounting accusation against Selden. The first of the three introduces some extenuating circumstances. The Emporium and Norma Hatch, the rich divorcee from the West who is trying to break into the New York scene, represent everything Selden hates most about uncivilized rich people. It disgusts him that Lily is there, and it confirms the impression he has formed while watching her from afar since Monte Carlo. Her association with what he feels is the worst kind of vulgar people makes her more contaminated than Lily is to Rosedale. Selden approaches Lily only as a favor to his cousin Gerty, and she is hurt because he has avoided her for a long time and now suddenly “[breaks] into her life with [a] strange assumption of authority” (217). As usual when he is displeased with Lily, Selden’s communication is limited to observing and performing the “the universal right of a man to enlighten a woman when he sees her . . . in a false position” (218). The effect of his tendency to speak in generalizations is especially brutal now, because their history and her current predicament should elicit sympathy. The scene ends in a bitter cold front after she dismisses his offer to take her away. Like at Bellomont, his advice is counterproductive, since her pride now makes her stay on longer with Mrs. Hatch. Selden is angry, because he is forced to be in a place that disgusts him, but he also seems angry because he cares for Lily without being able to channel this affection. The main cause of his cold interaction is twofold: he is still convinced that his vision of her as scheming artist is true, and he is too civilized (or not brave enough) to trust her with an “explosion of feeling” (217). In this department, he comes out unfavorably even when compared to Dorset, who may be pathetic, but kindles Lily’s sympathy with the honesty of his desperation.

Lily and Selden's last conversation has at least three vital functions related to the depiction of Lily's mind and the male observer: it offers a partial resolution to Lily's feeling of a doubled self, it offers a poignant example of the social nature of identity, and it shows how the dehumanizing male perspective can be helped out of its confinement. At the time of the encounter, Lily has decided to use the letters like Rosedale suggested, but stops by Selden's apartment after finding herself on his street. Lily and her circumstances have changed since their last encounter. Lily has lost her job, and her "consoling sense of universal efficiency" (232) has been broken after she discovered the extent of her inability to perform practical work. She has concluded that she has "neither the aptitude nor the moral constancy to remake her life on new lines" (235). This is the description of a self-concept that has changed dramatically. Her ability to envision positive versions of herself in the future is also gone; her self-doubt has become so overpowering that she has to take chloral to sleep. The second Benedick scene again illustrates Selden's dehumanized communication. Up until the last moments of the scene, the dialogue is a painful study in unreciprocated sincerity. While Lily is struggling to remain honest, Selden retreats into silence, irony and bourgeois rituals involving pillows and tea. However, he finally responds to her serious tone, and this affects both his powers of perception and Lily's view of herself. The various implications of Selden's partial awakening are captured in the literal and symbolic function of the flames in his fireplace. It is only when Lily draws near to the fire she has asked him to make up, that he notices how thin she has become. This is a signal that he is allowing reality to seep through his habitual view of her. The newfound attention and replenished fire also make something "leap up in her like an imperishable flame" (241). The fire and his company provide a temporary alleviation from the cold, but most importantly, Lily now intends to use the fire to burn his letters. Selden has "always made her feel that she was worthy of better things" (138), and seeing that this is still the case, his belief reinvigorates her view of herself. It also makes her realize that the "abhorrent being" she feels she is becoming will not take her over completely as long as someone else keeps the embers of the other self in her from dying out. Despite this optimistic depiction of social reinforcement, the encounter ends, like all the rest between Lily and Selden, in frustration. The main reason is that Selden does not possess a language that can harness his affection and enable him to sacrifice control. The half-successes of their interactions have always contributed to Lily's vulnerable, intermediate position. The end result of their communication is negation; Selden's influence halts Lily's total integration into a morally stunted environment, but it offers no viable alternatives. This time, the

encounter contributes directly to Lily's death the following evening, because her risky status quo is maintained.

When Selden sits beside Lily's dead body in the closing scene of the novel, he has at last had his "vision of solidarity". In this vision, he has acquired the language – or word – with which he can perform his part in a more ideal communication. He feels that it has been "his very detachment from the external influences which swayed her", that has made it so difficult for him to "live and love uncritically" (255). Selden's insight serves a call for the need to engage the female material experience more fully. However, Selden immediately seems to revert to the habitual reverie of his vision-building faculty and perform his role as spectator in the most unequal situation imaginable. The act of "[kneeling] by the bed and [bending] over her, draining their last moment to its lees" (256) suggests a vampiric embrace, reminding us that the spectator in Lily's world is, more than anything, a consumer who uses other people for his or her own purpose. Selden's final lapse into this mode suggests that his apparent rejection of his former ideals of freedom and detached judgment is not necessarily enough to stop acting on them. In the present situation, he does not yet connect his vision of solidarity to the moral responsibility of spectatorship and communication in general. Finally, Selden's act of imagining that he can communicate with Lily's lifeless shape shows that he is perhaps even more addicted to his habits of watching and interpreting than Lily was to performing. The male observer who continues to create the story about his object of attention after she has died is the ultimate expression of his immoral claim to own her narrative. It is a motif that Wharton would examine further in her novella "New Year's Day".

This reading of *The House of Mirth* has attempted to show why Wharton's emphasis on the dialogic mind is a vital part of the characterization of Lily Bart. Her hesitations and shifts between pride and self-loathing are not only political satire, but a realistic rendering of the mind as inherently social, a rendering that stresses the moral responsibility of interpersonal encounters. My treatment has therefore also focused on Lily's interaction with the detached male observer. Seen in isolation, Lily's interaction with Selden is not depicted as particularly asymmetrical or otherwise negative. However much Lily's fate ends up caught between society's judgment and her own judgment of herself, her story demonstrates the potential that social reinforcement has in building self-confidence and pockets of resistance in oppressive societies. The negative end result and the argument that Lily achieves some sort of victory, is dependent on the extreme pressure of the social inscriptions working on Lily and Selden from both within and without. The pressure extends from their Fifth Avenue

upbringing to the Wall Street ideals working its way into their world. Lily's moral scruples would not be so noteworthy in a less confining context. Wharton's depiction of Lily's mental processing as dialogic thought shows precisely why her sporadic but enduring reluctance to go with the flow is remarkable in her context. One of Lily's most important moral victories is perhaps her growing recognition that idolization is as confining as malicious gossip.

A major aspect of the narrative's criticism relies on redefining the "free" male observer as confined by his beliefs and habits. Above all, Wharton's subversion of the romance plot involves a reassessment of the causes behind gendered oppression. While Simon Rosedale and Gus Trenor represent the more conventional oppressive contexts of money and sex, Selden's function has been to highlight a less obvious source. His social training enables him to avoid burdening Lily with financial or physical demands. Instead, his oppression originates from the demand that Lily's mind should be an impregnable, moral fortress and not the social apparatus that builds its self-concepts as much from the responses of others as our own ideas about ourselves. Furthermore, Selden's phobias related to money and physical attraction lead to an overemphasis on control and a philosophical language that risks nothing, because it never engages material realities. This language is a form of communication that points ahead to the "hieroglyphic world" in *The Age of Innocence*, where "the real thing is never done or even thought" (29). It resonates more with Lily's own aesthetic tastes, but in Selden's version it is at least as dehumanized as Rosedale's language of money or Trenor's language of unchecked passion. Selden's weakness is evident in his inability to understand that his vision of Lily must take the material demands upon her gender into account. The most dangerous result of this neglect is that he suggests a philosophy of freedom that a young unmarried woman is not allowed to follow. Ultimately, this is a symptom that Selden's blindness extends to his view of himself; he is unable to accept that he exists in a world where is a part of the "adjacent people and things" (Wharton, *The Writing* 10). This particular idea would become one of Wharton's central concerns in *The Age of Innocence*.

3 Discovering Dependence: Voice and Embedded Narratives in *The Age of Innocence*

Vanity is the involuntary inclination to set one's self up for an individual while not really being one; that is to say, trying to appear independent when one is dependent. The case of wisdom is the exact contrary: it appears to be dependent while in reality it is independent.

Friedrich Nietzsche, Axiom 13, *We Philologists*

A simple premise lies at the heart of the argument presented in *The Age of Innocence*: Old New York's culture produced and depended on male innocence, not only female. Male innocence is presented as a romantic belief in the American hero's "complete self-definition" (Hadley 263) involving unlimited "possible selves" (Markus 954) on the frontier outside society. The idea that the individual can withdraw from culture is contrary to Wharton's idea that "the bounds of personality are not reproducible by a black line, but that each of us flows imperceptibly into adjacent people and things" (Wharton, *The Writing* 10). She wanted to incorporate the idea of the "imperceptible flow" into characterization, a challenge *The Age of Innocence* lives up to by allowing Ellen Olenska's story to destabilize Newland Archer's story. In Rachel DuPlessis' terms, Newland Archer is tempted by Ellen to trade in the romance plot of his life for a quest plot, but he is eventually forced back into the former. In this sense, his lesson involves a realization that he is a heroine and not a hero. The collective presence of New York and the embedded narratives of Ellen and May create a polyphony that dramatizes Newland's struggle between passion and duty. The narrative starts as the innocent male's quest to rescue and understand Ellen. Because of her foreign nature, this involves a journey into the unknown. Newland seeks to integrate her into the vision of who he wants to be, a goal that is complicated by her independent initiatives and his reliance on cultural stereotypes. The interest in displaying and exploring this male innocence motivates the choice of the male central consciousness, a consciousness that "expands" in the narrative as the reader relocates the narrator's ironic voice in the hero's mind. This relocation extends to imagery and "embedded fictions" (Ryan 108) that serve to emphasize the constitutive function of culture in the individual mind. In a final critique of the American frontier myth's

deprecation of civilization, Wharton argues that there are positive qualities that should be preserved in all societies, no matter how “stupid and narrow and unjust” (71) this society is.

John Arthos sees the main theme of *The Age of Innocence* as “the extent to which Newland’s life falls short of his impassioned imagination” (9), while Cynthia Griffin Wolff finds that Newland has “taken the best of [his unique moment in history] and built upon it” (333). Combining these readings, the narrative can be said to represent a man who achieves some measure of integrity through failure. In other words, he achieves independence by becoming aware of and acknowledging dependence. Newland Archer needs to admit to himself that the values and rituals of Old New York are integral parts of his identity, not something he can escape. In admitting this dependence, he can finally come to terms with his past and be a coherent self apart from the idea of Ellen Olenska, who has served as the “composite vision of all that he [has] missed” (208). In *The Age of Innocence*, Newland’s identity formation and the reader’s ethical evaluation of him is fundamentally tied to his subjective experiences of dependence and independence. This evaluation is complicated by the vague extent of his perception, as the narrator’s description, report and commentary often turn out to be focalized through him, making the narrator more difficult to spot.

The narrator blends nostalgia with satire in the depiction of the hero and his age; an ambivalent stance the hero reflects in his attitude towards his society, but not himself. The novel provides moral guidance, but a great part of this guidance is ironic, reflecting Newland Archer’s judgment rather than the narrator’s. More explicit moral guidance from the narrator is therefore toned down. A relatively covert narrator usually forces the reader to rely on Newland’s own ideas about himself and the world to evaluate these two entities. As a consequence, comparing what he thinks with what he does becomes especially important to understand and judge this character. On a thematic level, the reader’s judgment of Newland and his world comes down to his or her interpretation of the relationship between culture and personal freedom. The narrative depicts social context and mind (understood as synonymous to personality and character) as partially overlapping existents in the storyworld. It is therefore problematic to claim, as Judith Fryer does, that the narrative “is not about [Wharton’s] hero ... but about the ‘little hieroglyphic world’ in which Newland Archer lives”(154). Given Wharton’s understanding of character and environment as overlapping entities – how can it be about one and not the other? In *The Age of Innocence*, I will argue, the social nature of the human condition entails *being* your culture, not just being aware of it and performing its conventions. This does not mean, however, that Newland and his peers should

be understood as embodiments of their culture, and nothing more. The achievements of characters like Catherine Manson Mingott and Julius Beaufort prove that it is possible to alter Newland's society. His inability to exert a greater influence on his environment must therefore be understood in light of his unique character and struggle. To exhibit this struggle, the narrative stresses the dialogical processes of the mind, in particular how intermental (social) activity influences and is influenced by intramental (individual) activity. The narrative is concerned with how the dialogue between internalized culture and individual tendencies affects Newland's self-concept. This study will show how dialogical processes in Newland's mind give rise to different ideas of possible selves. The concept of possible selves "represents individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming, and thus provide ... the essential link between the self-concept and motivation" (Markus 954). An important difference between an abstract feeling like fear and the fear of a failed possible self in the future is that the latter is often expressed as a narrative. I intend to understand ideas of possible selves not only as states of mind, but also hypothetical narratives that tend to involve event sequences and existents, including other characters than the self. When occurring in narrative discourse, ideas of possible selves can therefore exist as embedded narratives and serve to characterize a focalizer or the culture he or she represents. These embedded narratives are a vital factor in the reader's ethical evaluation of both Newland Archer and Ellen Olenska. Until the very last chapter, Newland is characterized by his inability to let his dependence on New York culture inform his stories of what he is and can be. In the discussion below, embedded narratives will be seen in relation to Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of polyphony, understood as "a plurality of independent and equally valid voices" (Aczel 443). In relation to narrative, "polyphony involves a downgrading or sidelining of the very narrative which embraces it" (Williams 213), because "the plot is subordinated to the task of coordinating and exposing languages to each other" (Williams 213). In *The Age of Innocence*, the dominant narrative is revealed as a product of male innocence through its exposure to narratives representing the female experience, the social collective and the next generation.

3.1 Beginning: Establishing Newland's Mind

The first two chapters of *The Age of Innocence* are especially concerned with showing and questioning the boundary between individual and collective. This dual purpose is reflected both in external events and the blending of the narrator's and the focalizer's voice. Newland's conflicted feelings for his world also underline social and individualistic aspects of his mind. In attempting to see the mind at work as both social and individualistic, two aspects of the reader's first encounter with Newland Archer come to the fore. First, the collective that defines so much of his life is introduced before he is. Second, when Newland himself is introduced, he is described just as he is passing the threshold that separates his private life from his social life, triggering a shift from reflection to immersion. A short external analepsis underlines this development by presenting Newland in thoughtful self-communion in his private library before his departure. The reader will soon learn his specific reason for private reflection on this day; a second analepsis reveals that "it was only that afternoon that May Welland had let him guess that she 'cared'" (6), meaning that she has promised herself to him. Newland's transition from library to opera house, then, mirrors his impending transition from bachelorhood to marriage. In both cases, Newland's need to adjust the timing of the events becomes a symptom of his mixed feelings about the change. In *The Age of Innocence*, the transition to a life where the individual's social role is dominant is associated with a corresponding psychological transition to a life where the social aspects of the mind dominate the private. More precisely, the narrative reveals that the social aspect of Newland's mind has always been more influential than he imagines. His inability to alter or even become aware of many socially shared values also suggests that these should be understood as an integral part of the individual's consciousness, not a question of external influence that can be dismissed or nurtured at will.

The Age of Innocence employs a heterodiegetic, relatively covert narrator and a stable internal focalizer, also referred to as a central consciousness. The distinction between narrator and focalizer is complicated by the tendency of the narrator's passages to suddenly or gradually "relocate itself into Newland's focalizing vision" (Knights 21). The prologue immediately starts this gradual relocation of voice into Newland's focalization, even before the main character has been introduced. The narrative starts on a light note established by what seems to be a narrator amused by aristocratic Old New York's conventions. The humor establishes ironic distance to the leisure class, and the impression of a narrator who seems more concerned with justice and humanist values than the group described. After an efficient

transport to the 1870s by way of Gilded Age star Christine Nilsson, the narrator moves on to introduce the season and the salient characteristics of the age referred to in the title. The fashionable society in New York during the 1870s is introduced as a small but influential group of people that tries to keep out the “new people” (3) by sacrificing art and comfort for exclusivity at the Academy of Music. The ironic description of streets above “the forties” as “remote metropolitan distances”, the “playful allusion” to democratic principles and the contrast between the “slippery, snowy streets” and the “private broughams” are all comments that serve to outline the attention to exclusivity and control that characterizes the group (3-4). The repetition of the outside/inside dichotomy suggests the semi-public status of the social gathering and a delicate nature that would not endure full publicity. In these two first paragraphs, then, the narrator directs the reader’s attention to the paradoxical combination of power and fragility so typical of receding aristocratic societies. In doing so, the narrator starts to emerge as sociological observer and commentator as well as entertainer. The quality of the narrator’s voice will over time be recognizable as critical but civil, avoiding emotional outbursts. Negative and positive judgments are most often communicated indirectly through ironic commentary or by supporting or ridiculing the figural voice. The contrast to the emotional narrator in *The House of Mirth* is striking, and signals that Wharton has shifted her rhetorical strategy from displays of suffering to cultural and gender-based authority. The latter approach is likely to be considered less vulgar by more socially refined readers. The measured voice alters the readership expected to be swayed by the narrator and the fate of the protagonist.

On first reading Chapter 1, it is tempting to distinguish between a narrator who prefers anthropological imagery such as the “totem terrors” and Newland’s emotional outbursts, thought disruption and highly poetic and often binary imagery involving life and death, fire and ice, light and darkness. However, I will here side with critics who suggest that the anthropological model should be considered as Newland’s as well, and that it “has a distinctly old-fashioned air . . . next to the more sophisticated anthropological eye of the novel as a whole” (Knights 22). This would imply that *The Age of Innocence* employs a narrator who is more covert than first impressions lead us to believe. Consequently, Newland’s perspective and beliefs shine through in a much larger part of the narrative. Since Newland assumes he can look at his own culture from the outside, we should look for the narrator’s views in the signs that he operates inside the confines of his culture even as he claims and thinks he is not. The narrative also traces Newland’s development towards this insight that selfhood is

constituted by one's culture to a larger degree than he at first thinks. A reader who at first hears very little of Newland's voice in the narrator's descriptions, reports and comments, will have a similar experience when – or if – he or she starts to notice the hero's presence there. This attempt to involve the reader in Newland's experience by recreating a similar process of discovery on the readerly side is a typical element in Wharton's rhetoric of character.

The distance between the narrator (who we here read as partly overlapping with Newland's voice) and society is most marked when the relationship to art is criticized. The first jab at Old New York's view of art as boring but necessary instrument of survival is first demonstrated in the various untruthful reasons given for not wanting to abandon the impractical venue of the Academy of Music. In joking about the absence of genuine interest in art – as well as the “artless” (5) performance in question – Newland sets himself up as a connoisseur. Nilsson illustrates the social nature of creative expression; the opening scene suggests an audience who is more attentive to itself.

It is worth noting that the distance established between narrator and the object of attention is kept in a civilized tone. The narrator is condescending, but also gentle, painting Old New York as quaint rather than ruthless. Cynthia Griffin Wolff finds that “Old New York values are deplored, but with even humor, no longer bitter biting satire” (310). This is in part a result of the narrative's status as historical novel and its nostalgia, but even more understandable if we read Newland's voice into much of what many readers will have taken to be only the extradiegetic narrator. The idea that the narrator's mild criticism is an expression of Newland's presence in the voice is suggested in later comments, like the notion that he “cherished his old New York even while he smiled at it” (38). Newland is introduced in a transition from the narrator's to his own voice:

When Newland Archer opened the door at the back of the club box the curtain had just gone up on the garden scene. There was no reason why the young man should not have come earlier . . . but . . . what was or was not “the thing” played a part as important in Newland Archer's New York as the inscrutable totem terrors that ruled the destinies of his forefathers a thousand years ago. (4)

The narrative first gives an external view of him through the narrator's report and description. It is more ambiguous in its comment in the commentary about the “totem terrors”. After the passage above, the narrative shifts to the narrator's commentary explaining why his social experience makes the complicated ritual on the stage seem natural to Newland before it reverts to a second description. In this description, the tone is altered. The Faust actor is

“vainly trying, in a tight purple velvet doublet and plumed cap, to look as pure and true as his artless victim” (5), in the focalizer’s private critical opinion. The shifting back and forth gives the reader ample opportunity to compare Newland’s conflicting attitudes to the performance and, by extension, his world. The simultaneous presence of the two attitudes “it is normal” and “it is ridiculous” in one mind is an example of dialogic thought. Whereas ‘dialogism’ is understood as the ability of novelistic discourse to present one world that “holds two voices, without fear or hope of resolution” (Lock 86), dialogic thought holds the possibility of blending and eventual integration. At this early stage, however, and in spite of what he believes, Newland will not be able to resolve the conflict between his two attitudes by convincing himself that one is truer than the other or by marrying a woman who will lead him to the life implied by one of the attitudes.

In a related process, the narrative insists on the presence of the narrator’s voice in addition to Newland’s. The paragraph that explains the first reason for Newland’s late arrival includes the appellative “young man” (4) to assign the statement to the narrator. The comparison of conventions to “totem terrors” suggests that Newland sees his New York as a primitive and waning culture, but he is also unwittingly describing himself; the narrator here suggests that the consciousness the reader is about to enter will not always be characterized by reason, but by inexplicable signs that will have to be explained to the reader. As the narrative progresses, this lack of rationality will be identified as Newland’s inability to perceive that he cannot separate himself from his culture, the main obstacle in his identity formation.

When the second reason for Newland’s late arrival is given in the next paragraph, it becomes much clearer that the perspective is no longer limited to the narrator; the language and syntax here start to reflect Newland’s own impassioned state of mind – a blend that indicates free indirect discourse. The narrative is careful to communicate Newland’s thoughts as verbalized inner monologue as well as a swell of emotion at the moment of arrival. I quote the paragraph in its entirety to capture this progression:

The second reason for his delay was a personal one. He had dawdled over his cigar because he was at heart a dilettante, and thinking over a pleasure to come often gave him a subtler satisfaction than its realisation. This was especially the case when the pleasure was a delicate one, as his pleasures mostly were; and on this occasion the moment he looked forward to was so rare and exquisite in quality that— well, if he had timed his arrival in accord with the prima donna's

stage-manager he could not have entered the Academy at a more significant moment than just as she was singing: "He loves me— he loves me not— *he loves me!*—" and sprinkling the falling daisy petals with notes as clear as dew.
(4)

Newland's proper name and the "young man" from the previous paragraph are here substituted by the consistent use of the third-person pronoun "he". The style is at first detached, but becomes more spontaneous and emphatic as it shifts from general reflection about Newland's personality to the event in question. The impression of an excited mind is achieved by adding a catalogue of qualifying subclauses after the first statement about personal preference. Agitation turns to incoherence the interruption "so rare and exquisite in quality that— well . . ." before an emotional crescendo is reached in conjunction with a literal crescendo on the stage. The passionate, over-the-top romantic comparison between song and dew forms the conclusion to the reader's first encounter with Newland's mind.

These markers of Newland's mind coexist with elements that retain the impression of the narrator's voice. The comment "he was at heart a dilettante" (4) in the passage above can be understood as an instance of Newland "[probing] . . . his vanity" (6), but it can also be read as the narrator's explicit description of the essence of the character; an extreme case of telling in the midst of showing by way of figural thought. Reading it as narrator comment, it frames the act of the late arrival – Newland's first act in the story about his life. More specifically, the frame emphasizes that the late arrival is only partially a consequence of convention. The reader is informed that it is not "the thing" (4) to arrive early, but Newland seems to be the very last person to arrive. The arrival during the "Daisy Song", when the boxes are silent, fits his self-image as a romantic hero in the spotlight on the day of his successful wooing of May Welland. It also amounts to an extremely late arrival and is therefore also a result of his personal preference for "thinking of a pleasure to come" (4). By enacting but also subtly exaggerating convention, Newland's action initiates the interplay between social convention and individual interpretation that is central to the narrative. Secondly, the dilettante comment establishes the cognitive privilege of the narrator. The contrast between Newland's enjoyment of his arrival and his later criticism of the performance is the first hint that we are dealing with "fallible filtration", understood as incidents where "the character's perceptions and conceptions of the story events, the traits of other characters, and so on, seem at odds with what the narrator is telling or showing" (Chatman 149). The impression of fallibility is

strengthened as the process of introducing the New York collective and Newland turns to aspects marked more explicitly as masculine.

The introduction of May Welland complicates the reader's sympathy for Newland, but the passage can also cause the reader to start questioning Newland's influence over his own life; a development that is likely to increase sympathy for him. The introduction of May consists of two major parts before their actual encounter. The first is Newland's sentimental celebration of innocence as absence of personal history. Newland's sense of well-being dominates the description. His spontaneous reaction is captured in the quoted monologue "The darling! ... She doesn't even guess what it's all about" (5) and reveals that he sees himself as an experienced man. In the follow up, an elaborate use of figural description captures how Newland imagines (or somehow sees, from afar) how a blush spreads across May's face and neck at an appropriate moment. The blush sequence foregrounds Newland's perception in favor of an objective description of May, to whom Newland has not even assigned a name at this point. The foregrounding of Newland can be interpreted as if he is peculiarly attentive to his own action as a successful man who is enjoying the "thrill of possession" (5). More precisely, then, young Newland is foregrounded as ethically deficient. He is proud of his affair with the older, married Mrs. Rushworth, and seems to think it is part of what makes him an experienced man. His lack of awareness of the potential damage he has wrought invites reader antipathy. The carefree attitude also represents a gendered double standard that is underlined by the proximity of the passage where he expects May to be pure.

The second phase of May's introduction functions as a contrast to the romantic fervor of the first and illustrates Newland's hypersensitive response to potential discomfort. His satisfaction with what he sees makes his subsequent description of her purity as "abysmal" (6) especially jarring. The reader is left confused in the wake of a restless imagination that is "leaping ahead" (6) to dream and instantly doubt the dream. This readerly experience serves as an effective introduction to habitual interaction between mental states and acts in Newland's consciousness. His ambiguous reaction resembles Lawrence Selden's description of Lily Bart as both "exquisite" and "futile" (*The House of Mirth* 7), but in Newland's case, the reaction is intensified by the fact that he is engaged to be married to the woman in question. The surprising emotional reaction to seeing his future wife illustrates another, darker side of his dilettantism. The reader has already learned that he consciously chooses to spend time "thinking of a pleasure to come", because it gives him "a subtler satisfaction than its

realization” (4). When the future event involves potential discomfort, he apparently spends even more time “[dawdling] over his cigar” (4). The potential for neglecting ethical considerations seems all the greater. Put together, the two parts of May’s introduction outlined above are set up to shock the reader. The admiring gaze of the first part lowers the reader’s guard before the jab of the egotistical cynicism on display in the second.

Newland’s reflections on what kind of man he is in comparison to the men who make up the “chosen specimens of New York gentility” (6) provide a vital extension of Newland’s fallibility. He wishes to make May “wordly-wise” (6), a plan he fears will be impossible because of her training. The image he chooses in his daydream about his ideal wife is the “miracle of fire and ice” (6) – a woman who is worldly as well as pure. The paradoxical image highlights that Newland is deploring a contradiction in New York’s social demands. He overcomes the discomfort of his absurd phantasy by assuring himself that the conflicting qualities he expects in a wife is something he shares with his male peers. Psychologists refer to this type of social influence as “group inhibition” or “responsibility diffusion” in bystanders during moments of emergency (Latane 215). Newland’s mental act of reducing himself to a bystander suggests that he sees the imagined emergency concerning his future wife as a matter to be solved by the family and the New York collective rather than by himself. Interestingly, Newland combines the reliance on comfort in numbers with a need to distance himself from the very same “masculine solidarity” (6). The description of these men as “all the carefully brushed, white-waistcoated, buttonhole-flowered gentlemen” (6) is marked as Newland’s by the insertion of the tag “he knew” just prior to the description and “he instinctively felt” at the end of the paragraph. The list of adjectives emphasizes the uniform nature of the men as well as the effeminate nature of the trappings used to mark allegiance to the group. This distancing is an avoidance strategy used to construct selfhood apart from the collective. Once Newland has decided that the collective is responsible for the uncomfortable paradox, he externalizes the group, turns it into a “they” (6).

The comparison of May’s part in Newland’s life with Madame Nilsson’s part in the play has prepared the ground for Newland’s presentation of himself as a Faustian man of the world. Young Newland finds that “he had probably read more, thought more, and even seen a good deal more of the world, than any other man of the number” (6). Even if this were true, it will soon become evident to the reader that this would hardly be a great accomplishment. The notion that Newland is different is undermined by how perfectly his description of the men fits himself. The reader’s suspicion that he is indistinguishable from them in beliefs and

action as well as appearance will be momentarily halted as the opera scene continues. The incoherence between his criticism of New York and views of women illustrated in this passage is a vital characteristic of the hero throughout the narrative. Identifying the causes behind this incoherence will be one of the most important conditions for understanding Newland Archer.

In the last part of the opera scene, the main source of characterization shifts from exposition of ideas to external events. The central act, Newland's decision to show his support for May's family, leaves the reader with the impression that Newland's values may not be in complete alignment with the majority of the collective after all. The main conflict in *The Age of Innocence* revolves around Newland's attraction to Ellen Olenska, May's cousin, who has returned from Europe after leaving her husband under potentially scandalous circumstances. She complicates Newland's relationship with May and poses a threat to both of their families. When this conflict is introduced during the first opera scene, Newland perceives himself as an independent agent who chooses to support the Wellands and the Mingotts in their wish to reintegrate Ellen. By doing this, he commits his own family to support these other families.

At the launch of the conflict, Newland's entry as focalizer has brought the narrator down into the thick of the action. The global instability of the narrative lies in the love triangle and, by extension, Ellen Olenska's encounter with New York. The launch is underlined, like in *The House of Mirth*, with a man expressing surprise as he spots a woman perceived as an intruder. The amused tone from the first paragraphs is reactivated in the sketches of Lawrence Lefferts and Sillerton Jackson; the residing authorities on fashion and family. Now, however, Newland's voice has joined the narrator's more explicitly, so they can form a critical duet. The descriptions of Lefferts and Jackson carry Newland's disapproval of their effeminate fields of expertise. The reader will remember the serious tone from the previous passage where it becomes clear that Newland, like the narrator, distances himself from the New York Aristocracy, priding himself in being better and more manly than his peers. His show of support for May and her family is therefore likely to first be interpreted by the reader as an example of Newland's self-professed individuality and experience. Nonetheless, the action is also subject to the narrator's irony. The result is that the narrative simultaneously ridicules and sympathizes with Newland. The rest of the scene – and indeed the narrative as a whole – thrives on this dialectic between the narrator's view of the focalizer and the focalizer's two conflicting views of himself. In the present case, Newland sees himself as a gallant man of action, yet the initiative is not triggered by his own perception.

Lefferts is the one to spot Ellen, and Newland's first reaction is annoyance that May and Ellen are sitting in the same box. Only when gossip starts to get out of hand does he feel obligated to show his support. Furthermore, it is later revealed that May has been brought to the opera with the express intention of forcing Newland to support her family. This also suggests that May's signal to proceed to the engagement phase (only hours before Ellen is brought to the opera) has been provoked not by her feelings for Newland, but by her family's need to secure backing for their plan.

By directing attention towards the social context of the action, the narrative questions whether Newland is in possession of any meaningful agency or whether his mental, physical and social actions are as scripted as the stage performance. The disparity between the reader's and Newland's impression of this causality invites a discussion of agency ownership. Who or what causes the action Newland performs here? Is it primarily the result of intra- or intermental activity? Are the authorities within the collective the actual movers, completely disenfranchising young members of the tribe like Newland? No matter how little Newland understands of himself and the motives behind his actions, it is indisputable that it is Newland who performs the act that binds the Newlands to the Wellands and Mingotts. The plan hatched by the matriarch Catherine Manson Mingott hinges on the idea that Newland's character "holds nothing mean or ungenerous" (9) and that he respects the Mingotts' "resolute championship of [their] black sheep" (9). Old Mrs. Manson Mingott has seen something in Newland that the narrator invites the reader to see as well. As the introduction of Newland comes to a close, the reader has been invited to criticize his ethical deficiencies, but may also find herself with a faint hope that Newland will positively influence or even transcend his social context. After reading the two first chapters, the reader might decide that Christine Nilsson's voice in the first lines of the novel should be understood not only as the repeated ritual of the Faust opera as entrenched social occasion, but also the singular, creative voice within each performance engaged in perpetual dialogue with tradition. Similarly, the narrator's evocation of the period introduces a dialogue between nostalgic lamentation for a lost world, the predominant, critical view of the period, and ethical re-evaluation. The potential of multiple motives behind the telling of the story creates a tension in the relationship between the narrator and the authorial audience. The reader is at this point unsure whether to expect a moralistic tale of personal failure or a naturalistic tale of social causes and effects.

The narrator's relationship with the storyworld is further complicated by the introduction of Ellen. The most striking aspect of her first encounter with Newland is how similar Ellen's attitude towards New York is to the narrator's. Furthermore, her attitude resonates powerfully with Newland's satirical inclination. Since this is one of two conflicting attitudes that define his relationship to his society, his reaction to Ellen is ambivalent from the start. After Newland has experienced the play as both interesting and ridiculous, these two attitudes are encountered in the flesh in the Mingott box; May's eyes are "ecstatically fixed on the stage-lovers" (5), while Ellen jokes about the audience. Newland finds a rare companion in this attitude, but it also makes Ellen a potential storyworld representative of the narrator's views. Ellen's comment about seeing "everybody here in knickerbockers and pantalettes" (12) is in the same line as the narrator's (and Newland's) joke at the self-aggrandizing reasons for attending the Academy of Music. The comment also signals that Ellen will function as an "undresser", whose outsider status allows her to speak the truth and challenge Newland's society. The narrator's irony will sometimes be directed at her too, though, as in her naïve comment that this "dear old place is heaven" (12).

Newland's reaction to Ellen's attitude is telling. The narrative has just shown him attempting to mentally distance himself from his peers, but his reaction to Ellen's reveals that his view of himself as "cosmopolitan" (21) is either fantasy or an emerging potential. The impression of an innocent young man who is not familiar with the world outside Manhattan is confirmed in the conflict between a private wish to be worldly and his flustered reaction to an encounter with someone radically different from himself and the women he is used to. In her discussion on transformative masking, Margaret Jay Jessee sees a doubling of May and Marguerite, the part Nilsson is playing (49). The doubling of Ellen is perhaps even more striking; she is a woman who commits the "crime" of creative expression. In each of the staged performances in the narrative, *Faust*, *The Shaughraun* and *Romeo and Juliet*, Wharton draws our attention to female creative expression. Newland's response to the actresses as well as Ellen is passionate, because they have something May does not have. The only problem, seen from Newland's vantage point, is that May has purity, something the female artists, including Ellen, do not have. A hybrid of the two, the "miracle of fire and ice" (6), would to his mind have been perfect.

3.2 Middle: The Male Intruder

The Age of Innocence is concerned with how New York and Newland respond to Ellen's presence. Like his response to the opera performance, Newland's reaction to Ellen's arrival is conflicted; the idealism of his dialogue and parts of his private reflection are in opposed to values and physical acts which demonstrate his conservatism and dependence on New York culture. Newland tests this self-conscious passion and idealism to see how far it can take him towards independence and Ellen. The exploration reveals the nature of his innocent vision. It is primarily revealed to the reader, but in glimpses also to himself. Before Newland takes on Ellen's case as her legal advisor in Chapter XI, his innocence emerges as a double standard. His liberal political stance that "women ought to be free— as free as we are" (27) is undermined by his previously announced thoughts on how to train May and his privileged position in the household. His mother has the final say about many family matters, but Newland has a whole library to himself upstairs, while his mother and sister Janey are usually to be found downstairs together in the dining room or the kitchen. Similarly, it is his public act of supporting the Wellands and Mingotts that confirms the Archers' position. His statement about gender equality is also ironic in that men in his world are not free in the sense he believes.

Newland's development towards self-knowledge is set in motion in Chapter V by a spontaneous reaction to the cynical treatment of Ellen; an event that coincides with a scene where the narrator takes sides with the hero and uses him to speak for her. Until Chapter V, Newland's view of himself is not challenged by Ellen's presence. Like his mother, he is "afraid that the Mingotts might be going too far" (15) and finds that "in spite of the cosmopolitan views on which he prided himself, he thanked heaven that he was a New Yorker, and about to ally himself with one of his own kind" (21). When he invites Sillerton Jackson to dinner, it is not to defend Ellen, but to enjoy watching his guest and his family suffer as they talk about her in his presence. Since he is about to marry into her family, he is considered closer to her than any of them. Newland's thoughts reveal that he initially does not care about Ellen's fate, only the effect on him and his family. Both he and his witnesses are surprised when he suddenly leaps to Ellen's defense and says he hopes the rumor that she will file for a divorce is true. When his view is challenged by Jackson, he declares that he is "sick of the hypocrisy that would bury alive a woman of her age if her husband prefers to live with harlots" and that "women ought to be free— as free as we are" (27). The angry outburst, the narrator explains, leads him to "[make] a discovery of which he was too irritated to measure

the consequences” (27). The scene illustrates how Ellen becomes a catalyst that forces Newland to criticize his family, friends – and himself. Consequently, he has become more uncomfortable with his own position within the group. Newland’s shift from amused to irritated marks the reaction as honest pathos. This is the first sign that his opposition to his family and acquaintances is something more than a young man’s need to show off that he is an adult. The spontaneous reaction, when compared to his thoughts on May’s “abysmal purity” in the opera scene, also betrays an incoherent set of values, to himself as well as the reader. Furthermore, the anger and the self-discovery it leads to shows how a dialogic thought process influences identity formation after Newland’s encounter with Ellen. It is clear that she will function as an “other”, or more precisely, a “differentiating foil” (Horatschek 12) in Newland’s dominant identity discourse. Newland’s anger is triggered by interpersonal awareness; he empathizes with Ellen’s situation despite the discomfort of the rumors. The instinctive response is therefore part of a typical individualistic response bubbling to the surface and disrupting the unifying, social ritual of the dinner. The scene captures how Wharton uses the negotiation between cultural norms and individual idealism to establish the protagonist as something more than a product of his culture.

After having served as an object of ridicule during much of the opera scene, Newland in most of Chapter V becomes less distinguishable from the narrator. The focus on Newland’s focalization has here been supplied with more plain exposition and a rare glimpse into Mrs. Archer’s life apart from Newland. She is even the focalizer in part of the paragraph where she contemplates “the miracle [of seeing] one’s only son safe past the Siren Isle” (24). The narrator is careful to add “all this Mrs. Archer felt” (24) at the start of the next paragraph to emphasize the departure from the usual perspective. In addition, the scene includes an analepsis to a scene in the Jackson household where Newland is not present. The aim of these perspectival shifts is to divert irony from Newland to his family and the New York collective, confirming the existence of a value-gap that he insisted on in the opera scene. This claim is backed by the narrator in the present scene and removes readerly doubts that Newland’s misgivings about his peers are nothing but a wish to view himself as more sophisticated than them. Since the narrator’s criticism is temporarily directed elsewhere, Newland is also free to step in as the mediator of opinions the narrator agrees with. By letting the hero voice the statement about women’s rights, the narrative avoids making the narrator too visible when this central idea is introduced. The fact that Newland is a man makes the statement less obvious, despite his connection to the family he also defends. His reaction does not impress

his audience in the storyworld, but is likely to win over quite a few readers. His failure to live up to his own statement makes it ironic in retrospect, but the statement seems honest at the time. Passages like these, where irony is not directed at Newland, illustrate how Wharton makes the vision-builder in *The Age of Innocence* more sympathetic than in *The House of Mirth*. The fact that the reader is stuck with Newland throughout the narrative may be an important motive, but the strategy also reflects the less confrontational tone that characterizes Newland's story.

After Newland's passionate defense of Ellen in Chapter V, the conflict escalates when New York resists an attempt to reintegrate Ellen. This local instability is resolved when the Wellands, Mingotts and Archers secure the support of Henry and Louisa Van der Luyden, the couple at the top of the "slippery pyramid" (31). Even after she is accepted in Chapter VIII, the rumors about Ellen continue unabated. As Newland's interest in defending and being with Ellen grows, the conflict between those who support and attack her becomes a conflict of competing narratives. New York's rumors about Ellen's past and current activities intensify the alienation between Newland and his society. The collective's story about her can be understood as an "embedded fiction" that functions as a competing narrative to his own view of Ellen. Marie-Laure Ryan offers the following definition of embedding:

[Plots are neither linear nor] limited to what objectively happened, they are bundles of "possible stories". Some actual and some virtual, whose interaction determines the behavior of characters... Insofar as they link states and events in a causal pattern, mental representations present the same structure as the story of which they are a part, and may therefore be called "embedded narratives" (or "embedded fictions", when they are not actualized). (108)

Three embedded fictions are especially influential in the story of Newland's development: (1) his imagined future with May; (2) the imagined story of Ellen's past; and (3) his imagined future with Ellen. These mental, hypothetical narratives influence each other and are subject to rapid adjustments in Newland's consciousness. For instance, the story concerning a future with Ellen starts as a hope that he can keep her in New York. The most obvious example of interaction between the stories is the causal relationship between Newland's growing fear of what his marriage with May will be like, and the need for an alternative hypothetical future with Ellen. It is significant that his skepticism about May precedes his interest in Ellen as a potential partner. The narrator regulates how these embedded fictions are introduced, sustained and actualized (or cancelled), and this influences the reader's ethical judgment of

the character or groups who are responsible for them. For instance, when the story of Newland's imagined future with May is introduced in Chapter I, the narrator mocks his fantasy that they will "read Faust together ... by the Italian lakes..." (6) by commenting that he is "confusing the scene with the masterpieces of literature which it was his manly privilege to reveal to his bride" (6). When Newland seconds later become aware of this mistake, the imagined story of his future with May starts to unravel, undermining the "possible self" he has envisioned with May. In this example, the effect of the quoted monologue and the free indirect discourse is to emulate Newland, but also to guide the reader's ethical judgment by showing that he judges himself, adjusts his fantasy, and consequently moves closer to the narrator's ethical position, if only temporarily.

Another, more obvious, example of dialogic thought (which also functions as a blending between narrator and focalizer) can be observed in the opening of Chapter VIII, where the use of ambiguous voice influences the reader's ethical evaluation of an embedded narrative. The chapter opens with the phrase "it was generally agreed" (38) and seems to proceed with the narrator's parody of New York's official and highly biased version of Ellen's life; giving the impression that the rumors Sillerton Jackson referred to in Chapter IV by now have been projected back into her childhood. The story is clearly designed to keep her out by explaining why she is dangerous. Its purpose of damaging Ellen's reputation is evident in the description of her parents and Ellen's ward Medora Manson as "wanderers", her clothes as those of a "gipsy foundling" and her education as "incoherent" (38). After six paragraphs, however, readers learn that "these things passed through Newland Archer's mind a week later as he watched the Countess Olenska enter the Van der Luyden drawing-room" (39). The act of temporarily suppressing the source of the thought process makes the diegetic act more overt. The reader has been tricked into confusing an externalized, collectively authored embedded narrative with Newland's private interaction with this story, demonstrating how indistinguishable inter- and intramental activity is. The passage before "these things passed . . ." is free indirect discourse; typical phrases such as to "settle down" (38) are in quotation marks to emphasize Newland's ironic use of New York language. Newland's act of blending their language with his makes the passage triple- rather than double-voiced. It is also worth noting that not only the identity of the voice, but the information specifying the location and the event triggering Newland's present state of mind is postponed. The reason that Newland goes through the story again now is his impression that Ellen's presence disproves the story. He finds that she has "the mysterious authority of beauty" and is "quiet in her movements

[and] her voice” (39). He will later learn that his fellow socialites were disappointed because they “had expected something a good deal more resonant in a young woman with her history” (40). New York socialites almost seem to expect that Ellen should try to live up to their exotic and scandalous narrative about her past. However, Newland is not allowed to get too comfortable with his first impression of the scene, and neither is the reader. In a few lines, Newland is found to “cherish his old New York while he smiled at it” (40), while Ellen is observed breaking New York custom by abruptly ending a conversation and “walking alone across the wide drawing-room” (41) to sit down at Newland’s side, instead of waiting for the men to come to talk with her. With this turn of events, the narrator is again making fun of the shocked Newland, who retreats into his habits and suddenly seems ready to believe the scandalous story he has just ridiculed. In contrast to the more gradual relocation of the narrator’s voice commented above, the present relocation is sudden. It is not a single occurrence, but can also be found, for instance, with “Newland Archer had been aware of these things” in Chapter XII.

In *The Age of Innocence*, the object of the vision is more experienced than the vision-builder. Ellen’s function of broadening Newland’s horizons is most explicit in personal encounters and when she is the topic of conversation, but her absences are also used to characterize Newland. During the two weeks between chapters X and XI, Newland has only seen her once from afar at the opera. Consequently, she has “become a less vivid and importunate image, receding from his foreground as May Welland resumed her rightful place in it” (59). He has “half-consciously collaborated with events in ridding himself of the burden of Madame Olenska” (59). He has changed his mind about the Van der Luydens’ reception and now thinks of it as “the comedy of her reinstatement” (59). The half-conscious nature of this ethical regression suggests a kind of cultural gravitational pull where even a conscious effort or powerful foreign influences can only momentarily draw someone away from their natural position. Ellen’s present insistence on divorce from Count Olenska is one such foreign influence. It first triggers Newland’s temper, because he is being denied his habitual mode of existence, which is to “languidly [drift] with events” (59). After reading the letters, however, a sudden change takes hold of him again; he realizes that “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” (60). The passage describes a temporary, intense awareness of identity brought on by exposure to otherness. The subsequent ethical dislocation is an inversion of the

relocation the reader has experienced in chapters I and VIII, when the narrator's voice is revealed as Newland's. In the present instance, Ellen's and the narrator's values are forced upon him, and "for the first time he [perceives] how elementary his own principles [have] always been" (61). The awareness of his masculine vanity leads him to feel uncomfortable with his calm conscience after his relationship with Mrs. Thorley Rushworth and his "undisturbed belief in the abysmal distinction between the women one loved and respected and those one enjoyed – and pitied" (61). Again, Newland is seen to distance himself from the "young men of his age" (61), but now also admits and is ashamed to be one of them. In particular, Newland is ashamed that he has to feel pity for Ellen to sympathize with her. Newland reaches the epiphany under an "innocent young moon" (60). The narrator's suggestive association of the traditionally female image of the moon with a man is a reminder that Newland is an incurable romantic, but also that the Victorian notion of female innocence has its male counterpart. Newland will not be able to use his moment of self-awareness to reform his behavior or his values. The idea that he can "go on rescuing her" appeals more to him than any sense of reform.

Despite moments of insight promising character development, Newland repeatedly falls back to his original worldview. This tendency demonstrates why the male visions are difficult to dismantle, even after the vision-builder has seen how they represent simplified versions of reality. Newland's particular vision is characterized by only having two frames of reference when attempting to understand women, summed up by Elizabeth Ammons as "Cool Diana" and "the blood-red muse" (433). Ammons shows how Wharton's critique of the "adventurous, ignorant, virtuous, self-assured" (436) American girl, a staple in popular culture by the late nineties, culminates in *The Age of Innocence*. The American girl was a source of national pride, but Wharton had always seen her as "the nation's failure, a deluded victim of a nation's obsession with innocence" (Ammons 437). In the present discussion about male innocence and vision-building, Margaret Jay Jessee's examination of these female binaries in *The Age of Innocence* is particularly relevant. She emphasizes the fact that the light May and the dark Ellen "appear to be direct opposites of each other, representing the familiar virgin/whore binary" (37), but that the narrative questions this binary by constantly reminding the reader that Newland is only "trying on" (39) what others see. A reader who keeps this in mind will be more likely to realize that May and Ellen transcend the categories assigned to them by Newland. In her investigation of male innocence, Wharton complicates the picture even further when she repeatedly allows Newland temporary awareness of the fact that his

perception is imprecise. One of the functions of this strategy is to enhance the reader's hopes and frustrations on behalf of the hero. For instance, it is not unlikely that the reader hopes Newland will attempt to progress beyond his "elementary principles" (61) in his next encounter with Ellen after he identified these as limitations in Chapter XI. The next encounter with Ellen in Chapter XII, however, dashes these hopes instantly. When Newland has an appointment with Ellen to talk about her divorce, the dangerous (according to Newland) Julius Beaufort is there with her. Newland is overwhelmed by jealousy and Ellen's erotic presence in her fur-lined red velvet robe. Ellen allows Beaufort to take her to parties and even refuses to deny the allegations in her husband's letter. To the reader, Ellen has been presented as caring and artistic, but with an innocent belief in New York's familial care for her. In Newland's eyes, her creative expression is interpreted as enticement. He therefore reads the following scene as evidence of her promiscuity, a conclusion that brings him back to apply the female stereotypes, the very mistake he has just berated his own male peers for. Newland's ethical deficiency is also serious because he should remember that Ellen is not aware of many of the rules she is breaking.

Spotting traits that conflict with the two culturally sanctioned views of women is even more difficult for Newland when it comes to May. This is in part due to his familiarity with the role she is playing and the absence of the transformative pity that he feels for Ellen. The closest he comes before his epiphany about May in the last chapter is his double take after her highly unconventional offer to break off their engagement in Chapter XVI. The offer comes after Newland has tried to persuade her to move up the wedding and she has signaled that she knows something is wrong:

His surprise at discovering that her fears had fastened upon an episode so remote and so completely of the past as his love affair with Mrs. Thorley Rushworth gave way to wonder at the generosity of her view. There was something superhuman in an attitude so recklessly unorthodox, and if other problems had not pressed on him he would have been lost in wonder at the prodigy of the Wellands' daughter urging him to marry his former mistress. But he was still dizzy with the glimpse of the precipice they had skirted, and full of a new awe at the mystery of young girlhood. (93)

Newland's narcissism, here represented in his "other problems", means he will never be interested in actually examining the unique individual before him; he has already decided what type of woman she is. When surprised by her initiative, his reaction is merely that she is

an even more extreme product of her upbringing than he thought. Once they are married, Newland reveals his innocence in believing her when she suggests she was here only offering to revoke her adoration “for his own good”. The reader, on the other hand, is invited to imagine the “untold story” about May (Hadley 262).

The narrative compares Ellen’s and Newland’s life to emphasize the injustice caused by male innocence. Ellen is Newland’s pet project, so her narrative is naturally more foregrounded than May’s. Since a gentleman “simply stayed at home and abstained”, the narrative also frequently relies on Ellen’s initiatives to drive the plot forward. At times, the sheer drama of Ellen’s story causes it to dominate over Newland’s in the reader’s consciousness. When Newland is bored and Ellen is fighting for her place in society, the reader is still stuck with Newland, with the strong sensation that something important is going on somewhere else. In a typical comparison of simultaneous events in Chapter XIV, the narrative’s focus on Newland’s story is undermined. Ellen’s developing understanding of New York is here contrasted to the absence of a career in Newland’s passive, static life. At the end of the chapter, Newland receives the letter that informs him that Ellen “ran away” (80) to Skuytercliff, the Van der Luyden country resort. The reader has to surmise that she has realized what it means to be involved in a society that is “shy... yet so public” (83). Ellen is apparently starting to decode the “hieroglyphics”, and understands what New York really thinks of her. When she tries to amend the situation by distancing herself from Beaufort and Newland, they both follow her. Beaufort does not seem to care that he is ruining her fragile reputation, and Newland is not aware of it. The men’s pursuit is a poignant example of “intruding males” in a very literal sense, the scene also reflects how Newland is starting to intrude by meddling with her emotions.

Earlier in Chapter XIV, the introduction of Newland’s journalist friend Ned Winsett illustrates the defensive negotiation of cultural concepts that feeds Newland’s innocence and vision. Furthermore, the chance meeting illustrates the relationship between external dialogue and Newland’s post-processing in dialogic thought. For instance, the gentleman’s ideal of apolitical idleness and dilettantism is understood (by Newland and men like him) as an excuse to indulge in personal gratification. This is one source of his innocence. Does this mean that he is innocent because he is unwilling or unable to engage with the world? Winsett argues that Newland is able, but unwilling. Newland’s defense is New York’s polarized view of “clever” and “fashionable” (77) people. The two categories are important because they include men, and can therefore serve as a male parallel to the pure and fallen woman. The idea of vulgar

“clever” people implicitly defines innocence as an honorable duty, a sacrifice to maintain purity, but also a duty that “unfitted one for doing anything else” (210). The creation of the categories “clever” and “fashionable” is an example of how cultural narratives “negotiate differences in meaning and interpretation” (Bruner 13) rather than impose them. The categories are not depicted as unavoidable influences upon the individual, but as negotiation between individual/group, and negotiation between a specific social group and the world beyond. Firstly, the idea of “clever” people and notions like “a gentleman couldn’t go into politics” (78) serve Newland’s personal interests as well as his group, much like the conscious exclusivity of the Van der Luyden receptions. Secondly, Winsett’s example makes “Archer take the measure of his own life, and feel how little it contained” (78). Newland both enjoys the talk and is ashamed of himself during his encounter with Winsett. His example triggers the same sense of wasted potential that reemerges when Newland looks back upon his life in the final chapter. Newland’s eagerness to revert to his vain “rescuing” of Ellen is emphasized when the chapter ends with the arrival of Ellen’s letter and his typical assumption that she cannot control her feelings for him. The effect of the scene is an invitation to see male innocence as dependent on an ability to compartmentalize life experiences to contain shame and justify projects that are ethically ambiguous.

The primary purpose of juxtaposing Ellen’s and Newland’s story is to underline the ethical inferiority of Newland’s project, undermining the narrative’s insistence on following his story. Ellen’s cause is her engagement with her own frontier; the quest for establishing a self-reliant and stationary home in New York, a quest inspired by the triumph of her grandmother, who can hardly move at all. The purpose is to break the curse of the lonely “wanderers” (38) – her parents and her guardian Medora Manson – and connect with her extended family, including Newland as her new cousin. Ellen’s plan is meaningful and honorable, but Newland’s and her projects both suffer from the same illusory belief in the ability to carve out a life independent of New York’s agenda. The greatest difference between them is the way in which Ellen learns, while “experience [drops] away” (128) from Newland. This is an expression Newland applies to May, but the reader will recognize that it fits himself best.

After a thorough examination of Newland’s innocence, Book I culminates in a long confessional dialogue between Newland and Ellen (Chapter XVIII). The dialogue does not involve a complete break with the figural consciousness, as the passage shifts between direct speech and free indirect discourse. This strategy underlines Ellen’s ethical and intellectual

authority and demotes Newland to a childlike status, reversing the roles of teacher and pupil from the persuasion scene in Chapter XII, where Newland persuades Ellen not to file for divorce. Newland complains about Ellen's possible departure and reveals his love for her, while she finally tries, unsuccessfully, to explain her side of the matter. The scene is a striking example of two worldviews and two narratives colliding. Ellen's experience of loneliness and oppression means she longs for a sense of belonging more than anything else, but she refuses to give up her freedom for it. The reason she left Europe was that "no one there took account of her life" (148). Newland's perception is still very limited by his self-absorption, his New York culture and its polarized view of women. When he discovers that he cannot categorize her as a fallen woman after all, he can do nothing but revert to the other category. This makes her equal to May in his world, and he promptly claims he will call off the wedding. Ellen's talk of freedom means something different in her world than his; to Newland, female freedom only means to be free to remarry. This low ebb of Newland's unethical behavior also involves being manipulated. Ellen tells Newland: "You knew; you understood; you had felt the world outside tugging at one with all its golden hands – and yet you hated the things it asks of one; you hated happiness bought by disloyalty and cruelty and indifference. That was what I'd never known before – and it's better than anything I've known" (107). These words "fall into his breast like burning lead" (107), but the reader is likely to see an attempt to control Newland by appealing to his vanity. There is some honesty in what she says; she uses her newfound understanding of New York to distinguish Newland from his culture. She sees his limitations as an expression of that culture and believes he has made the most of it. Still, she has just pointed out his tendency to say something because it is "the easiest thing to say at the moment – not because it's true" (106) – a vital personality trait that can also cause him to break with his society, since it enables indifference to "the dignity of marriage" (105), May, Ellen and their families. The first half of the narrative ends with an ironic situation in which Ellen persuades Newland to live up to New York's ideals. Her awareness of dangerous gossip means that she needs him married to be able to pursue her ambitions. The narrative thus highlights the inability of innocent males to acknowledge or even imagine a woman's own agenda. Ellen's insistence on continuing her quest again undermines the narrative of the American frontier myth. She is behaving more and more like the lead singer in what Newland feels should be an opera about him. All Newland can do is to shout: "I don't understand you!" (106, 107).

3.3 Late Middle and End: Newland's Lesson

Progression after Newland marries May is first dominated by the disappearance of Newland's possible selves in the future. On a thematic level, this is a consequence of Ellen's attempt to reduce his influence in her narrative. He feels as if a real experience with Ellen is replaced by a sham life. He focuses on the present and prefers to "revert to all his old inherited ideas" (119), because it is "less trouble" and "like a narcotic" (133). His awareness of the past is awoken when he watches Ellen on the shore by the lighthouse in Chapter XXI. The triggered memories are enough to make him see himself as "a man to whom nothing was ever to happen" (139) and reignite "an incessant and undefinable craving" (137) that he cannot see beyond. The craving leads him to seek out Ellen in Boston, where she claims she is still in America because of Newland. She promises not to leave and that they shall "be a part of" (148) each other's life. The most significant development at this stage is that Ellen falls in love with Newland. This is hardly a given considering their differing backgrounds. The escalation of their relationship towards the climactic museum scene is a sign that Newland, dominated by his male innocence, is invading and compromising Ellen's plans without being aware of the damage he is causing.

Newland is, more or less intentionally, about to succeed in establishing a stable husband-mistress relationship with Ellen when he persuades her to meet him at the Metropolitan Museum in Chapter XXXI, an arrangement that would mirror the relationship between between Julius Beaufort and Fanny Ring. The arrangement would also involve the success of Newland's quest to construct and possess the monstrous "miracle of fire and ice" (6), albeit in the form of two women rather than one. Newland is at first too ashamed to agree to have her "come to [him] once" (188) with the intent of then begging her to stay in America. His attraction to her quickly wins out over his moral misgivings, and he proceeds with the trap after all. Newland succeeds when he presents their future sexual encounter as a rewording of what Ellen had called "the duty to sacrifice one's self to preserve the dignity of marriage" (105). Just when he seems to be overcoming Ellen's ideals and ambitions, however, he is outmaneuvered by a second female agenda he has not been aware of – that of his wife. The event that finally forces him to control his plans with Ellen is partly the news that he is going to be a father, but also New York's decision to send Ellen away. Male innocence seems perfectly able to ignore that it is limiting the futures of adult women, but in Newland's case, the responsibility of parenthood is impossible to ignore. The collective, however, does not trust him and insists on removing Ellen from the scene, sacrificing her for the greater good.

The implication is that Ellen's plan fails because of Newland's meddling. Her dream of self-reliance and fellowship in New York could have been allowed, but not when Newland makes her the centerpiece of his vision. A key characteristic of Newland's vision is that it involves a vague dream of elopement. This melodrama is a result of Newland's need to escape and his innocence.

The last chapter rejoins Newland after 26 years, as he reflects on his life and accepts his son Dallas's invitation to go to Paris before he becomes a married man. Dallas is visiting Ellen, because he is marrying Fanny Beaufort, who has been taken care of by Ellen. Newland first agrees to join him, but changes his mind before they go up to her apartment. In his discussion on the "ethics of desire" in *The Age of Innocence*, James Phelan suggests two main reasons why Wharton needs the final chapter. The first is the need to outline the consequences of the resolution of the love triangle, the second is the demands of the historical novel to "give some sense of how the "old order" has given way to the new" (Phelan, "*The Age of Innocence*" 57). In addition to the demands of the historical novel as a genre, the historical perspective of the last chapter is important, because the new order, represented by Dallas, represents a new, independent voice, which alters the composition of the voices in Newland's mind. The narrative emphasizes how the voices of New York and Ellen are still engaged in dialogue with his individual beliefs. These voices are now joined by Dallas's, who has a "self-confidence that came from looking at fate not as a master but as an equal" (215). Newland also finds his son's generation too busy to "bother much about their neighbors" (211-212) or the past. With this perspective, Newland glimpses ancient wisdom behind some the New York habits he attacked so fiercely and finally succumbed to. His insight resembles one of Edmund Burke's arguments in his pamphlet *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. In this classic defense of conservatism, Burke argued that society is not like a simple trade contract to be dissolved at pleasure, but something

to be looked at with . . . reverence . . . a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are yet to be born. (96)

Our society, the argument goes, is simply too complex for one man or one generation to fathom. Like human intervention in ecosystems, lack of respect for cultural traditions can have wide-ranging consequences that are impossible to foresee. As Newland takes in the

historical panorama of Les Invalides and looks across to Dallas and the new age, he is humbled by his lack of knowledge and senses a new kind of duty that goes beyond the duty to marriage and family – he sees the duty to his generation, past generations, and future generations. The contrast to his narrow outlook as a younger man could not be greater.

This new, broader vision also informs his last act in the novel. By staying his course as it has been since Ellen's departure, Newland feels he can represent past generations and preserve their heritage. A part of Newland longs to meet Ellen again, but he is finally making the sacrifice for the common good that she always championed and he was too selfish to make. In this respect, Newland's last act in the narrative can be said to reinstate his role as something more than a passive bystander, to some degree undoing the loss of agency he suffered when he became a parent and when Ellen was sent away. Newland has become a more observant, humble and practical man, but he is also more attached to habit than ever. When he is tempted by the old dream, he successfully envisions a new possible self who joins Ellen in "a quiet harvest of friendship, of comradeship" (215), but eventually dismisses even this. Is it because he is more self-reliant, observant and realistic or because he is more attached to habit than before? Is he still doing what is comfortable or what he thinks is right? The fact that the final chapter involves a transition to a more consonant narrator, would seem to support the former interpretation. Throughout the narrative, the reader has experienced instances where the figural consciousness has "expanded" when the narrator's voice has been relocated in Newland's mind. Consequently, much of the moral guidance has been ironic; it has been revealed as Newland's more or less fallible instincts and rationalizations. The 26 years of added experience makes the blending of his and the narrator's speech less conspicuous. Another function of the last chapter is therefore to offer moral guidance that is less ironic. The last chapter is characterized by long stretches of free indirect speech marked by accurate rather than embarrassing observations, allowing the narrator and Newland to merge and direct some criticism at the younger generation together.

After using Newland to criticize many aspects of old New York culture, Wharton now turns the argument around and suggests that the predominance of culture over individual is not necessarily something to be lamented, even in light of Newland's sense of loss. The idea that culture constitutes personal identity is a notion that Western individualism naturally rebels against, and a reader used to a traditional American hero perhaps even more so. Kathy Miller Hadley associates Newland's exploration of Ellen and her life with the American Frontier Myth and the self-made man (263). The myth entails a belief in the "pure American

self divorced from specific social circumstances” (Baym 132, quoted in Hadley 263). The new land is “untrammelled by history and social accident” and will therefore allow “complete self-definition. Behind this promise is the assurance that individuals come before society” (Baym 131-132) and the warning that society always exerts a destructive influence that must be understood as an adversary. Wharton’s ironic treatment of this myth in Newland’s struggle for independence is an inspired project, that exposes sinister forces in his society, but even more so, the threat posed by the vain who think they can free themselves from society. Newland may think and feel his struggle is with society, but in his case, this particular struggle is meaningless, since the hero, despite his pretensions, is a middle-of-the-road man who only has the tools of convention at his disposal – even when he is trying to be unconventional. To many readers, the call to acknowledge cultural dependency may be uncomfortable, but the narrative has gone to great lengths to show the costs of the alternative. The voice that presents itself first as a consonant narrator, and only to reveal itself as a problematic, culturally biased figural voice, teaches the reader to be cautious of naïve ideas about objective truth. The dialogism between the hero’s idealism, egotism and social sense of duty constantly challenges the reader’s ethical evaluation of him. His tragically brief glimpses of insight into his own nature captures the challenge of directing conscious reflection towards one’s own unconscious beliefs. Most of all, the cost of being unaware of one’s innocence is shown in Newland’s inability to engage and understand the story of the women before him.

4 The Narrator's Vision in "New Year's Day: The 'Seventies'"

[Narrative] specializes in the forging of links between the exceptional and the ordinary.

Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (47)

The art of rendering life in fiction can never, in the last analysis, be anything, or need to be anything, but the disengaging of crucial moments from the welter of existence.

Edith Wharton, *The Writing of Fiction* (16)

Birgitte Flohr is one of many critics who have discussed *The House of Mirth* in the light of Thorstein Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899). Veblen's treatise argues that social superiority has become associated with "property or its excessive consumption and the exemption from industrial occupation" (Flohr 1). In her reading of the novel, Flohr notes a fundamental difference between Wharton's vision of the leisure class and Veblen's theory: For Veblen, the institution is established "for and by men . . . [measuring] their efficiency and superiority" (5). Those who depend on these men may profit from material comforts and relief from industrial work, but the comfort of the dependents primarily serves the comfort of the breadwinner. In this model, the woman is therefore servant-like or a "mere extension of the man" (Flohr 5). In comparison, Wharton's depictions of the leisure class of New York shows a tendency for the leisure class women to be much more interested in their own comfort as an end in itself. They also control "their husbands, the husbands of other women, the arrival of social newcomers, and . . . each other" to a surprising degree (Flohr 5). The two novels discussed in this thesis are full of leisure class men who are obsessed with their own comfort (happiness), but who leave more important decision-making to women. Bertha Dorset's infidelities and revenge drive the plot of *The House of Mirth*, and the ambitions of minor female characters such as Mrs. Bry and Mrs. Gormer dictate the lives of their husbands. The undermining of Newland Archer's intentions in *The Age of Innocence* is a similar case of women controlling a man. May Welland, together with her mother and grandmother, are a formidable force in Newland Archer's life. In "New Year's Day", the depiction of the powerful woman is turned on its head when the heroine, first admired by the narrator for a heroic and "bad" act of sacrifice, is abandoned by him when he feels she has been defeated and devolved into a boring, conventional woman. The reader is encouraged to compare this

subjective male vision in light of the heroine's own voice, glimpsed now and then as it emerges to the surface of the narrative, immersed in the narrators' language and ideology. A successful reconstruction of the heroine from these glimpses shows a woman who is empowered in her uncompromising will to pursue her goals, no matter how conventional or radical she appears in the eyes of those who watch her. This amounts to a significant departure from the narrator's vision, in which Lizzie's later life is, most of all, seen as a failure to rekindle her heroic potential. The result is that the implied author distances herself to the narrator, and the reader is encouraged to join her. Besides his insistence on drawing Lizzie into his own ideological framework, the charge against the narrator is also a reaction towards the authority he claims as self-appointed biographer.

4.1 Social and Discursive Authority

The novella centers on the "crucial moment" in Lizzie Hazeldean's life, the moment that sets her everyday life aside. For the people around her, including the narrator, this moment coincides with the revelation of her scandalous affair with the bachelor Henry Prest. For Lizzie, however, it is the death of her husband. The narrative examines the social forces that influence our identification of Lizzie's crucial moment and how it should be interpreted. After a short summary of the plot, this section will introduce concepts that will allow me to discuss how these forms of authority are reflected in the story, as well as in the act of the telling.

After her husband dies from an inherited heart condition, Lizzie rejects a marriage proposal from Henry and lives out her life as one of "those women" (305) who are excluded from respectable society, but attracts their own, mostly male, following. One of these men is the unnamed character-narrator, who I also refer to as "Parrett" below. In the story he relates, he sees Lizzie once when he is a boy, and is later reminded of her when his mother speaks disapprovingly of her. Despite the seventeen years between them, he falls in love with her. He refers to his love as an "incident" in their long friendship, never confirming whether the affair involved a physical relationship. Parrett eventually marries another woman; Lizzie remains a widow the rest of her life. The narrative ends with the image of a dying Lizzie confessing her sins, so that she can be reunited with her husband. The ambiguity of the power relationship between men and women in "New Year's Day" is reflected in the heroine as well as her environment. In her defining act, the choice of having an affair with Prest, the heroine seems, on the surface, forced to sacrifice herself for the sake of her husband's comfort. Women,

however, are also seen in positions of authority. The young narrator's mother is the undisputed authority of his closest family, and Mrs. Wesson's red fan has the finality of a judge's gavel when she pronounces society's judgment on the heroine. When Lizzie inherits, the legacy passes from one woman to another. Despite her attention to her husband's comfort, Lizzie's influence over her life is also greater than first impressions, and the narrator's claim, would suggest. Both her marriage and her relationship to Prest are in large part controlled by her, as is the first phase of the relationship with the narrator. The narrative reveals that Lizzie breaks the rules simply because she loves her husband, the primary attribute society expects in a woman. This makes her particularly dangerous, for people are liable to sympathize with her, if they are able to distinguish the woman from her reputation. The narrator seeks to draw this line between woman and reputation, but in doing so, his own judgment of her, his hopes of what she could have been, interferes with the presentation of the woman he knew.

The idea of female power in dialogue with the male vision is reflected in the formal aspects of the novella. In the introduction to this thesis, I suggested that Susan Sniader Lanser's theory on "discursive authority" is a helpful perspective in my attempt to understand Wharton's fictional mind designs, especially her rendering of the intrusive male gaze. The notion of discursive authority assumes that female authors must accept the "authorizing conventions of narrative voice" (Lanser 6) to increase the impact of her criticism. In "New Year's Day", Wharton's main strategy to establish discursive authority and enable criticism is to delegate authorial functions to a male character-narrator. The target of the criticism is the society that condemns Lizzie, but also the narrator. More specifically, the approach to establish the male gaze is a sophisticated solution that combines elements from the narrators and focalizers in *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*. Firstly, the character-narrator, somewhat like the extradiegetic narrator in *The House of Mirth*, seeks to mend the reputation of the protagonist, but also insists on including what he sees as problematic character traits. Secondly, limitations associated with the male perspective, a vital device in both *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*, are once again brought to bear on the heroine. Most importantly, Wharton's strategy this time depends on investing her first-person narrator with authorial privileges, a move that can be said to result in the presence of a second, fictional "author" of the entire novella.

Elsa Nettles points out that "New Year's Day" is one of a select few of Wharton's long stories that introduces "a first-person narrator who not only listens, talks and acts, but also creates or shapes another person's story" (254). The narrator's most important formal

choice is to shift from first- to third-person narration in the middle chapters (II-VI). When the narrator shifts back to his original mode, he explicitly states the purpose of his strategy:

I must go back now to this phrase of my mother's— the phrase from which, at the opening of my narrative, I broke away for a time in order to project more vividly on the scene that anxious moving vision of Lizzie Hazeldean: a vision in which memories of my one boyish glimpse of her were pieced together with hints collected afterward". (301)

The passage signals that the implied author wants the reader to understand the middle chapters as the narrator's creative reconstruction of Lizzie's perspective and experience, not a shift to Lizzie's actual, historical experience. Like Wharton's other male observers, Parrett also occupies a privileged position in terms of social class and cultural knowledge. In addition, Wharton invests Parrett with greater interest in the mental and physical realities of the female experience than a Lawrence Selden or Newland Archer. Parrett's motive actually seems to be to fully understand and explain her, not (primarily) to project his own ideals. Given the narrator's explicit agenda and creative privileges, "New Year's Day" has the most dense and complete filter between reader and heroine of the three narratives discussed here. The narrating situation is, as I have mentioned in a previous chapter, in the same category as the last scene in *The House of Mirth*, where Lawrence Selden continues to create and recreate his narrative about Lily and himself after she has died. From this point onwards, the vision can only become more him and less her. When "New Year's Day" is told, this process has been going on for years. The distant conversations with Lizzie and other witnesses are Parrett's only obvious external sources; all the rest is his "vision-building faculty" (Wharton, *The House of Mirth* 106). The telling of the story is a rhetorical act that is meant to justify his current views about society and himself. His memories of himself as a young man are a central part of this self-concept.

Wharton uses the narrator's authority to immerse the reader in his vision, but finally also to question it. All the elements associated with the act of narrating mentioned above enhances the narrator's authority, but there are factors disturbing this picture. The crucial moment in this respect is when the narrator in the last chapter changes from being a passionate young man to the "rational" grown man who replaces Lizzie with a "fresher face" (309), is disappointed that she spends her life as a rich widow with "trivial distractions" (311) and finally raises his eyebrow condescendingly at her conversion. Part of the criticism directed at the narrator becomes more identifiable in light of what I have referred to as a

postclassical approach to fictional consciousness. A crucial aspect of this approach is to understand that thought or the “inner utterance” is not only a private, but also a social activity, because any thought anticipates and responds to the thoughts of other people and is conditioned a specific culture. In short, the postclassical approach seeks to combine the classic internalist view of Western philosophy with an externalist perspective of the mind.

One of the limitations of the male observer in “New Year’s Day” is his tendency to set himself up as a judge with a strong belief in his mind as a private, autonomous entity. In my chapter on *The House of Mirth*, I examined the dialogic thought of the heroine, noting that much of her male observer’s communication with her had the function of advice implying one-way communication rather than dialogue. Parrett has the same tendency when he creates his version of Lizzie, but the effect is different for a narrator. Parrett’s act of telling is directed towards a contemporary audience, which does not (according to him) understand the past. On the other hand, he does not seem to be aware of all the implications following from the fact that his story is also a dialogue with Lizzie’s experience and her story as she related it to him. Bakhtin makes the point that “the speech of another, once enclosed in a context [such as a narrative], is – no matter how accurately transmitted – always subject to certain semantic changes” (340). One of the reasons for this, Bakhtin suggests, is that “each character’s speech possesses its own belief system, since each is the speech of another in another’s language; thus it may also refract authorial intentions and consequently may to a certain degree constitute a second language for the author” (315). In the present example, this second language is Lizzie’s, and it influences Parrett’s language as well as his intentions.

A related effect concerns the use of irony. In *The Age of Innocence*, the interplay between narrator and focalizer often took the form of free indirect discourse, often charged with an ironic distance at the expense of the focalizer. In “New Year’s Day”, the narrator is homodiegetic; he has a personal relationship with his focalizer, and his narrative is seemingly based on his role as confidant. This enables irony instigated by the focalizer at her narrator’s expense; an inversion of the effect in *The Age of Innocence*. The inversion of the genders means that the irony is always at the male’s expense. These devices reflect how female influence interacts with male privilege in Wharton’s vision of Lizzie’s time, but also at the time of the narrating. Men may feel that they are in charge, but are actually manipulated by cunning women. By questioning the narrator’s treatment of Lizzie in the last part of the narrative, Wharton enables a thorough investigation of persisting gender prejudices in more liberal-minded, well-meaning males of the 1920s, even as they seek to defend women of the

1870s by explaining their predicament. The narrator presents a tragic tale of society's brutal condemnation, but he also attempts to show the "real" Lizzie behind the stigma of her infidelity. The rhetorical act of the implied author, on the other hand, demonstrates some of the possibilities and limitations associated with our ability to understand and recreate the minds of others as we build narratives based upon the lives of people we meet. In particular, Wharton lets the narrator inadvertently reveal some of the reasons men fail their female friends and lovers.

The question of how much we can understand of other minds is in the present case illustrated by a narrative that can seem to shift between minds, before it emphasizes that Parrett is imagining Lizzie's consciousness. This development at once dismantles and emphasizes the boundary between the minds. Parrett's skill is so convincing that Lizzie's presence is felt, but the portrayal of his friend remains a rhetorical act where some aspects are highlighted with the express purpose of projecting a fictional character "more vividly on the scene" (301). The narrator recreates Lizzie's life to defend her, but he also chooses to include a moral ambiguity in his characterization of her. The perceived ambiguity centers on Lizzie's "crucial moment" (Wharton, *The Writing* 16): the decision to be someone's mistress "to provide comforts for her ailing husband and to secure for herself the luxuries he wanted her to have" (Fishbein 400). The narrator asks the reader to decide whether the adulterous arrangement is a "great . . . or abominable . . . thing" (310), but insists that it was "done heroically" (310). Lizzie knows that her husband has been "brought up in the old New York tradition, which decreed that a man, at whatever cost, must provide his wife with what she had always been accustomed to" (281). Lizzie insists that it was "the relief from anxiety that kept him alive, that kept him happy" for a "last good year" (297). Her partner in crime Henry Prest thinks her claim sounds far-fetched, and the narrative is structured to let the reader share some of his doubts, if only temporarily. The narrator trusts Lizzie's story, but allows himself to be somewhat let down that she was not, according to him, exceptional in more ways than the one.

In contrast to this view of Lizzie as a morally complex individual, there is a tendency among critics to react to New York's labeling of Lizzie Hazeldean as "bad . . . always" (237, 301) by simply reversing the judgment. For instance, it has been suggested that she "[rises] like a phoenix from the flames of the Fifth avenue hotel", "makes the best out of the situation" and "[soldiers] on despite the vicious cuts of society" (Rudkin 33). Another critic suggests that Lizzie's infidelity is "completely justified," because it is an "act of heroic self-

sacrifice to insure her husband's happiness in his final illness" (Tintner 78). In the latter view, New York's collective judgment "turns on itself," because the heroine "ends her life as a religious person" and because "her heroism in risking the ruination of her reputation for love reveals her, ironically, as a saint" (Tintner 81). Similarly, Leslie Fishbein suggests that the narrative must be understood in light of the era in which it was written, "an era critical of the pretensions of moral absolutism, an age whose ethics had been rendered increasingly situational" (402). She is interested in the moral relativism of the narrative, but limits it to Wharton's act of defending deviant behavior by "imbuing Lizzie Hazeldean's adultery with heroic qualities" and the fact that the narrative allows a shift to the consciousness of the deviant individual (404). The readings capture the narrator's central argument, but neglect to question his vision. The narrator sees Lizzie's affair as her most defining moment, not an exception that obscures her personality. For him, Lizzie appears to progress from free to civilized and suppressed. He likes her less the more innocent she seems. As a boy, he is transfixed by the forbidden face glimpsed beneath the veil. His later infatuation originates in his idea that she is a completely different kind of woman. At the end of their friendship, he seems bored with her. By the time of her conversion to Catholicism, he has discarded his old expectations and is primarily concerned with how "satisfying" (313), meaning morally and aesthetically appropriate, his last vision of her is for himself and his implied audience.

Wharton inserts the male narrator so that the transgressive act can be presented as an heroic effort on a level that is never again reached. I will, however, attempt to show that Wharton goes further than the critics above suggest: Lizzie deviates not only from social norms, but also from her narrator's hope that she is – or should become – a self-sacrificing rebel. When Lizzie does not do what the male narrator hopes she will do with her freedom as a rich widow, the reader is encouraged to question his ability and prerogative to judge her. A problem in the readings cited above is that they do not consistently draw a line between the implied author's and the narrator's act of telling. These critics are also strangely willing to accept the consciousness of Chapters II-VI as Lizzie's actual mind in the storyworld, despite the narrator's insistence that this is a creative reimagining of her consciousness. In the following reading, I attempt to distinguish between the implied author's rhetorical act and that of the narrator. As a result, it is also necessary to distinguish between the male narrator's vision of Lizzie and the lasting impression the reader is encouraged to have of her.

4.2 The Narrator's "Anxious Moving" Vision

This section will look closer at the actual implementation of the concepts and perspectives introduced above. In an effort to make the progression of the reader's response to Lizzie more visible, I try to comment on most scenes, but save the last chapter for the next section, where I focus on the final distancing between reader and narrator. The main purpose of the current section is to show how Wharton establishes and deconstructs discursive authority via the narrator's act of recreating Lizzie's experience. The characterization of Lizzie illustrates Wharton's emphasis on the social aspect of consciousness, for example in the depiction of Lizzie's and the narrator's tendency to project their longing and fears unto those we care about. After introducing the social setting in the first chapter, the narrator uses the next four to present his "anxious moving vision" (301) during the critical days when she was caught in the act and lost her husband.

The narrator starts his story by creating an unsympathetic view of his own family and closest social circle. They value group membership above all else, and are ruthless towards those who do not belong. The chapter culminates in the moment when Lizzie is expelled from this collective. The Wessons and Parretts are amused by the distress of people from out of town rushing from a hotel fire. They demonstrate classic bourgeois hypocrisy when they "[utter] uncharitable words", as they perform "benevolent actions" (237). When Lizzie is introduced, the reader's judgment of her is therefore cushioned by the pre-existing negative impression of the people who judge her. As in *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*, the instability between the heroine and her environment is introduced by the heroine's sudden appearance in a place she should not be. In "New Year's Day", the effectiveness of this launch is enhanced by the sudden transition from light social satire to the serious note in Lizzie's "grimace of terror" (242). The narrator's introductory reflection ends by emphasizing his own ignorance as a child and the promise of showing how he came to understand more about Lizzie. Like the child, the reader is provided with very little information about Lizzie at this stage; the focus is on the reaction of the boy's family. The look of fear is arresting, but it is his vague awareness of his mother's changed state of mind that makes a lasting impression and will enable him to remember the incident nine years later.

When Lizzie becomes the focalizer in Chapter II, the narrator emphasizes Lizzie's love for her husband, a love that is set off by her intense anxiety when she starts fearing that he knows. Lizzie's mind is at first characterized by an anxiety that seems to confirm her guilt. Her transgression is made worse in the reader's eyes by the revelation that she has been

deceiving people for so long that hiding her true emotions has become “almost a second nature to her” (248). On the other hand, the reader’s expectation of seeing her dread going home to a husband she despises is denied as she arrives on her doorstep. The expectation of seeing him makes a “curious change come over her”, a change that makes her “feel younger” and filled with an “inner lightness” (249). Given the extremely tense state of mind Lizzie was in just before she came home, the switch at the threshold leaves the reader with the impression that her love for her husband is enough to banish her other life from her thoughts. Between the three narratives discussed here, the marriage she returns to is rivaled by few in terms of tenderness, perhaps only the Struthers in *The House of Mirth*. The subsequent passages and chapters will, however, demonstrate how the strain has become too heavy. This demonstrates that she does possess a well-developed conscience. The revelation that Charles is still out watching the hotel fire causes a divided reaction; Lizzie worries about his health, but even more that he has seen her. It is difficult for the reader to assess how selfish this concern is, for she might be worrying that the shock of the revelation might be dangerous for him rather than her. A reader who considers this Parrett’s retelling of Lizzie’s story will find it confusing that he here describes her as someone to whom secrecy is “almost second nature” (248) when she is later, as a widow, defined by “her sincerity [and] her humble yet fearless estimate of her own qualities and short-comings” (307). Even though the need to pretend is diminished dramatically by then, the reader can get the impression that Parrett’s characterization (or Lizzie’s description of herself, since he seems to base his story on the story she told him) changes depending on the needs of the present scene.

The combined effect in the portrayal of the Hazeldean marriage is that Lizzie appears to live to make her husband happy, but not because she is being oppressed by him. It is hardly a politically correct vision of a happy marriage, even though it features a weakened man. The big difference between Charles Hazeldean and husbands such as the hypochondriac Mr. Welland in *The Age of Innocence* is that Charles’ illness is devastatingly real. Lizzie’s dominance is also emphasized by the description of Charles as childish in a way that connotes charming playfulness and innocence, rather than lacking mental skills. The narrator is careful to explain that the “boyish amusement” (254) remains despite of the illness; it is not a result of his condition. At the same time, Charles is described as prematurely aged, contrasting him to his vital and beautiful wife. Another apparent difference the narrator emphasizes is the notion that Charles prefers privacy, while Lizzie enjoys social settings. While he hopes there will be no visitors, so that he can read, she is later described as “incurably, disconsolately

sociable” (311). When Charles insists on moving the roses from the “desert air” (255) of his library to the more public drawing room, it reflects his request that she should go to the party. The combination of the two wishes compares her to the roses, implying that her precious vitality, like the blooming roses, is wasted on him. Charles surprisingly refrains from inquiring where the roses came from, possibly, she worries, because he wants to spare her the indignity of lying. This can suggest kindness as well as weakness on his part. At the same time, the communication between the two reveals that Charles often tells her what to do and that she strives to follow his bidding. For instance, she agrees to go to Mrs. Struthers, even though she would prefer not to. At the close of Chapter III, two ambiguities combine to create a sense of confusion: Charles seems to be weak as well as controlling, and the reader does not know the reason for Lizzie’s infidelity, or whether Charles is aware of it. Her relationship with Henry still seems like a completely selfish act. There is also lingering doubt as to whether Lizzie is more afraid for her own sake or her husband’s shock. The resulting reader confusion builds up to the later revelation of her character and the reasons for the affair. The intermittent doubt tempts the reader to make the same type of blind judgment the general public is guilty of.

The narrator sets up the scene at Mrs. Struthers’ to portray Lizzie as different from other women, but also to compare her situation to Henry Prest’s as a preparation for their confrontation in Chapter VI. The narrator argues that Lizzie is different, because she is honest, but also because she has spent her life retrieving information from men. She has the reputation of preferring the company of men, but this is only because their conversation is “based on more direct experiences” (261). She is bored when she has to talk to women, who have been “rocked to sleep” (261) like children all their lives. Lizzie has “such a sense of power” from “knowing almost everything better than they did” (262). Lizzie’s honesty is depicted when the narrator repeatedly shows her struggling to imagine “the ‘natural’ thing to do” (254, 267, 268, 270), marking her off as a forthright type who does not possess the con-man’s ability to be deceptive under pressure. The reader may remember that Lizzie earlier thinks to herself that such emulation is “almost second nature to her” (248), a judgment the narrator apparently would like to undermine. Lizzie is also presented as better than the other women because of her beauty; she feels “a thrill of pride” (262) in her looks and how she presents herself. The reader will also soon learn that Lizzie married Charles because of her conflict with her female guardian – his aunt Mrs. Mant. Lizzie’s sense of isolation from other women is made complete when Mrs. Wesson’s humiliating “cut” (274) with the red fan

confirms to Lizzie that the matriarchs know about her affair. The combined effect of emphasizing all these differences is to hold Lizzie up as an ideal. The narrator here comes close to Lawrence Selden's extreme idolization of Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth*, when he sees her as belonging to a different race when compared to other women. The extreme adulation suggests that both men describe a woman they love, and a vision as much as a reality.

The following scene has Lizzie return to her house and engage in a lengthy reflection on how she arrived at where she is. The setup and purpose of the reflection is very similar to Lily Bart's nightly self-communion in Book I, Chapter III of *The House of Mirth*. Like Lily, Lizzie regards herself as "adaptable", but she sees this as a weakness, not an asset. Lizzie therefore associates her adaptability with being "ephemeral" and possessing only a "simulated mind" and "simulated beauty" (279). The humble self-appraisal is a sign of her distress, but also comes across as an effort on the narrator's part to avoid reader alienation to his heroine by balancing the pride of the previous scene with humility. The reminiscence is interrupted when Charles seeks her out as his condition worsens. The chapter ends in an intense farewell scene and a mutual affirmation of love. Even so, the absence of forgiveness is painfully ambiguous, still implying the possibility that Charles knows but chooses not to speak of her infidelity. The scene is the only time Lizzie is face to face with her husband while knowing that she has been found out, but his worsened condition preempts any confession on her part. She will not be able to give this confession until she meets the narrator and, much later, the Catholic priest she calls for in her final days. The final narrated encounter between husband and wife before his death almost brings together the two fears of his knowledge and his death. The scene captures the contradictory element in Lizzie's relationship to her husband, combining two confused instances where she first thinks of Charles as an enemy, before displaying feelings of love. When Charles bursts into the room, she "[stares] at him as if he had been an enemy" (282) as she prepares for the long-expected confrontation. She later concludes that he is again becoming "the harmless helpless captive that sickness makes of the most dreaded and the most loved" (283). The coordinating conjunction cleverly allows that "the most dreaded and the most loved" potentially refers to everyone, two specific people, or just the one. The words and the situation therefore capture how a single person at once can be the one we love and fear the most. By stressing her suffering, that the affair has even turned Lizzie's thoughts and feelings about her husband into this mental anguish, the narrator continues to argue that her sacrifice is heroic.

The narrator finally shows why he sees Lizzie as a heroine in a climactic scene where Lizzie rejects Henry's offer of marriage six months after Charles has died. The scene illustrates how Wharton establishes "discursive authority" (Lanser 6) by her use of a liberal-minded male narrator who is defending Lizzie, but can also illustrate problematic aspects of this strategy. The rejection itself is the more remarkable because of the high stakes. It involves great social and financial sacrifice, because Lizzie is about to be declared a *persona non grata* and does not yet know of her inheritance. Henry Prest is probably her last chance at social reintegration. Her refusal to let herself be handed over to another man perfectly illustrates the difference between Thorstein Veblen's view of women in the leisure class and Wharton's vision of the same social environment. Lizzie's rejection of Henry is her most outspoken confrontation with patriarchal forces, proving that she is more than an extension of a man. The setting, Mrs. Mant's drawing-room, is the very same place she stood up to her guardian and first met her husband. The return to the same location recalls the previous event in Lizzie's mind, demonstrating to the reader that her affection for her last husband was something that did not signify submission to him.

The sense of righteous payback in the present scene has been prepared by the implicit comparison between Lizzie and Henry throughout the novella, and especially at Mrs. Struthers' social gathering in Chapter IV. The comparison emphasizes how different the consequences of extramarital affairs are for men and women. Unlike Lizzie, Henry may have been unmarried at the time of their affair, but he can make the affairs part of the adventurous image that young Hubert Wesson admires in the opening scene. He wrecks hearts and marriages with impunity, returning to social festivities like Mrs. Struthers' where he is very much included. The bachelor's expected lack of moral conscience in these kinds of affairs is a recurring Wharton theme. The same issue is raised, for instance, in Newland Archer's lack of concern for Mrs. Rushworth after their affair in *The Age of Innocence*. Newland and Henry's ability to remain emotionally unaffected by their affairs is considered a rite of manhood, while a woman with a similar tendency is classed as insensitive, sex-crazed or the catch-all euphemism "bad". Lizzie demonstrates precisely this ability to leave her emotions out of it. It is an instance of poetic justice, and an added bonus for the narrator, that Henry appears not to have remained emotionally untouched this time. He has been comfortable with using Lizzie's difficult position for his own enjoyment, but is shocked when she reveals that she has been using him. The reason she gives for rejecting him is that she only agreed to the affair to be able to provide her husband with "comforts, luxury [and] the opportunity to get away" (293).

Henry's surprise is so great that another uncertainty arises: was she such a bad woman, that she promised marriage in the long run so that he would provide her and her husband with money and gifts? The idea that the heroine may have turned the sacred vows of engagement into a stable income in her own marriage seems to delight the narrator. By all appearances, she would soon be a widow, after all. Henry claims that she has "made a fool of [him]" (293), which can imply an agreement of sorts beyond the affair itself. Conversely, his self-absorption and the cultural expectancy that women would remarry if they could does make his great surprise conceivable also without a broken promise.

By setting up Parrett as the pseudo-author of the passage, Wharton has created a situation where a man with social authority is punishing a male peer's hypocritical treatment of women, illustrating the effectiveness of using the established cultural power structures that you intend to criticize against themselves. One of the advantages of the male narrator is related to the effort to persuade the reader to not begin to doubt Lizzie, since her defense of her choice not to marry (because she apparently needs one) sounds very convenient. Despite Henry's unsympathetic traits, he is genuinely shocked, a fact that can potentially make some readers start to wonder if there is something in what he says. How does the narrator persuade the readers to believe Lizzie, even as Henry does not? The claim that Lizzie was not interested in the money for her own sake is so convenient that the narrator needs to back it up somehow. When she presents this claim in dialogue, it has therefore been shared with the reader in Lizzie's thoughts earlier. In the previous chapter, when she looks back upon her life after the evening at Mrs. Struthers', Lizzie reflects that Charles was "indifferent for himself," but "fretted ceaselessly at the thought of depriving Lizzie of the least of her luxuries. At heart she was indifferent to them . . . ; but she could not convince him of it" (281). In this case, the internal monologue is more likely to convince the implied reader than the dialogue, because of its private nature, illustrating a rhetorical advantage of emulating mental actions as opposed to speech. A reader who interprets Chapters II-VI as Parrett's strategic version of Lizzie's tale, however, should understand that her internal monologue implies as little privacy or reliability as conversation, since both passages are part of a story being told. Furthermore, the narrator is also forced to defend what amounts to a very unlikely act. Early response to the novella included a few hostile critics who felt it was a "psychological impossibility [for] a loyal loving wife [to choose] to become Henry Prest's mistress to provide comforts for her ailing husband and to secure for herself the luxuries he wanted her to have" (Fishbein 400). The reaction of these contemporary readers should not be dismissed. Lizzie's defense can

indeed seem like a case of “that’s my story and I’m sticking to it”, but it has been thoroughly prepared through the portrayal of Lizzie’s marriage and Parrett’s vision of her as an individual with unique qualities. For Parrett, her act is so heroic precisely because it would be a psychological impossibility for himself and his implied audience.

One of the strategies the narrator uses to defend Lizzie involves inserting doubt about her before contextualizing her action to justify it. One of these instances is the description of Lizzie’s bedroom, a scene that takes on a new meaning after the full extent of the Hazeldeans’ problems is revealed. Having just returned from the hotel in Chapter II, Lizzie is comforted by her “rosy room, hung with the new English chintzes, which covered the deep sofa and the bed with the rose-lined pillow covers” (251). She is proud that her husband keeps repeating how he “can’t think of how you managed to squeeze all this loveliness out of that last cheque of your stepmother’s.” (251-252). The check is of course from Henry Prest, and in this early part of the narrative, it looks like Lizzie is presented as comforting herself more than her husband when she is putting the money to use. However, the comment shows the effect that Lizzie depends on to keep her husband alive. He returns again and again to her, as if to a watering hole, to admire her skill and calm his nerves by seeing Lizzie. She is particularly comforting, because she is enacting the display of luxuries and thereby living up to the ideal associated with the women Lizzie calls the “children in the art of life” (261). It says much about the old New York tradition Charles was brought up in that he can take so much comfort from having all the trappings in place, despite his inability to fulfill his role of provider.

Despite the various advantages in terms of discourse authority from employing a male narrator in the novella, it also comes with a caveat. One of the problematic aspects is that the very idea of a male narrator’s authority strengthening Lizzie’s case is a notion originating in the same concept of male primacy that the scene and the novella undermine. While Henry assumes that a remarried woman is stronger than a widow, the narrator assumes Lizzie is stronger with his backing, when he is subtly altering the nature of her message. This effect is related to Bakhtin’s notion of transmission, which I referred to in the introduction to this chapter. The embedding of one character’s language inside another character’s language, Bakhtin argues, will always entail a distortion of the adopted language, if by language one means each character’s unique belief system and perspective. In the present example, where a man is recreating a conflict that revolves around misperceptions related to what it means to be a woman, this challenge of taking on another character’s language becomes particularly acute. The implied author’s awareness of this issue is demonstrated by her depiction of her

narrator's struggle to follow up his criticism of Henry in his own perspective. A problematic consequence of his interference in this scene is more apparent in the final chapter. The narrator may cheer Lizzie's refusal to marry just because she is available and Henry offers to do so, but in the last chapter, he will inadvertently reveal that he too assumes that she must have some reason not to marry, such as a specific cause that she wants to devote herself to, or a hope that she will meet the right man. The idea that she is not "incurably . . . sociable", that she actually prefers to be alone, is as much beyond the narrator as it is beyond Henry or even Charles. In this crucial scene, then, Wharton puts the gender-based authority of the narrator to good use, while also preparing to dismantle it.

4.3 The Reader Judges the Narrator

This section examines the implications of the narrator's project of depicting Lizzie as a heroine in the last chapter of the novella. In the final part of the narrative, Parrett reintroduces himself as character in his story and traces his own changing attitude towards Lizzie throughout the years he knew her personally. In focusing on the challenges of the act of telling, I examine the implications of discursive authority when the male narrator is in an intimate personal relationship with the woman whose story he is relating. In this part of the narrative, the reader is encouraged to shift attention from the heroine to the narrator and his evaluation of Lizzie. A reader who remains skeptical of aspects of the narrator's vision is encouraged to reassess Lizzie on the heroine's own terms.

As the narrator traces how his view of Lizzie changed over the years, his youthful infatuation is contrasted with mature friendship. In addition, there is a hint of disappointment, as the "goddess" (305) who dared to ignore convention prefers a quiet life with "trivial distractions" (311) and little interest in freedom or rebellion after her husband's death. The return to first-person narration draws Lizzie's life back into the context of the narrator's coming of age story. In the narrating present, the narrator's perspective is problematic, because he seems to think that he knows Lizzie better than she knew herself. In this belief, he is undermining his own stance in the scene where Lizzie confronted Henry. While that scene demonstrated that Lizzie knew herself best, the narrator starts doubting this notion as soon as he can base his views on personal encounters with her. This supports the impression that even the narrator, despite the wisdom of historical hindsight and good intentions, has some way to go before he fully accepts the final life choices she made.

As the first-person narration resumes, the narrator's gender becomes a central factor in the characterization of the heroine. His gender is part of a strategy to establish him as an authority on history and culture, but also as someone who can still, despite how well he knew her, misjudge Lizzie. In "Gender and First-Person Narration in Edith Wharton's Short Fiction", Elsa Nettels points out that Wharton "almost always" chose a male narrator when writing in the first-person. Nettels notes that these male narrators are "without exception, . . . equal or superior to the other characters in social position, and usually hold themselves superior in intelligence and accomplishment" (245). This holds true for "New Year's Day". The Winters are a "small and weak" (245) clan, while the Wessons and Parretts are highly respected. The narrator's superior insight (according to the narrator, and at the time of narrating, not as a young man) is implied by commentary correcting Lizzie's view of herself. For instance, the narrator comments that although "she did not value her money for itself, she owed to it – and the service was perhaps greater than she was aware – the power of mitigating solitude" (311). Wharton's male narrators are further established in the ruling class by their profession, which provides them with abundant leisure to develop sophisticated tastes. Parrett is a Harvard graduate, and before meeting Lizzie for the last time, he has "been away, travelling for a year at the other end of the world" (311). Aesthetic expertise is less pronounced in Parrett than in male narrators such as Lawrence Selden or Newland Archer, but he does exhibit the expected familiarity with literature, whereas Lizzie reveals that she does not have the patience for her husband's books and apparently no interest in books she may want to purchase herself. It is typical of Wharton to use literary tastes to characterize intellect, but in this instance, it is not only the implied author, but also Parrett who is employing the trope. The older narrator even makes a point of mentioning how his younger self temporarily sees Lizzie's inability to find solace and inspiration in literature as an exotic quality. When Wharton makes Parrett characterize Lizzie like she would have done herself, she is in effect lending the tricks of her trade to the narrator, as is the case when Lizzie's mind is so convincingly reanimated throughout chapters II-VI. This makes him seem a more sophisticated observer of human nature. I suggested above that a polyphonic voice emerges in Chapters II-VI when Lizzie's real, historical consciousness coexists with Parrett's rhetorical act that produces a fictional Lizzie. Given the gender-based social authority Wharton imbues Parrett with, the combination with Lizzie's uniquely female experience forms a potent force of persuasion.

While Parrett is being invested with the authority associated with his gender and social position, the last chapter traces how his relationship with Lizzie develops. Parrett falls in love with her at the start of their relationship. He is 21 years old at the time, she is 38 and has been a widow for nine years. The infatuation seems to be a continuation of the first glimpse Parrett had of her, as she came out of the hotel when he was 12 years old, the glimpse of the beautiful and mysterious other. The youth feels as if he has been living in a “warm pink nursery” when he encounters Lizzie’s maturity – her “calculated, finished – and just a little worn” beauty (302). He is surprised that “a great dignity prevailed in her circle” (305), because he assumes her affair had been motivated by “matrimonial miseries” (307). The mature narrator describes this early stage as “an incident of our long friendship” (307) that nonetheless saved him from “meaner beauties” (307). Lizzie is prompted to tell her story by Parrett’s spontaneous outburst upon hearing Henry Prest mentioned. Parrett’s reaction makes Lizzie cry, but it is not clear whether the cause is the memory of the embarrassing incident, the pain of her current exile, or a troubled conscience after using Henry.

The mature narrator believes the opportunity to tell her story “became the luxury of her empty life” (310) and he takes pride in the role he played. At this point in the narrative, Parrett has become something more than an observer, but her influence on him is far greater. In this part of the narrative, the age difference and the difference in experience between Lizzie and Parrett are used to communicate some of Wharton’s more general ideas about women’s position in the society she is describing. He provides the comfort of a confidant, but it is vital to keep in mind to what degree Lizzie controls this narrative situation. She is seventeen years his senior, and at the time of the narrating, she has become aware of how much he is in love with her. Parrett wipes her tears “as if [he] had touched a sacred image” (309), reinforcing a previous reference to Lizzie as “goddess” (305). This idolization enhances her influence on Parrett, but his vision of her also binds her to it as a script, a tendency that Lizzie seems to notice and reject. She therefore makes a point of emphasizing her disregard of books, the age difference between them, and so on. Lizzie’s unquestionable authority in their early relationship, combined with Parrett’s status as character-narrator, makes it possible for Wharton to direct irony at the narrator through another character in his story. For instance, she reads his mind easily, and knows before he does that he is in love. She seems to know him better than he knows himself. Despite the mature, narrating Parrett’s effort to distance himself to his younger self, some of this sense that Lizzie knew best spreads to the rest of his act of telling. If she knew him so well, the reader may ask, how has she adapted her story to him?

Lizzie does indeed seem to use the situation to her advantage. Most importantly, her story is not a confession. Parrett defines her by her “humble yet fearless estimate of her own qualities and short-comings” (307), but her motivation in performing the rhetorical act is to “relive the past” and to “explain and justify herself” (310). Lizzie seems to save her confession for the Catholic priest at the end of her life. The tale designed for Parrett reveals a deeply conflicted conscience. She insists that she is the victim of a ruthless punishment that is out of proportion to the crime, but she is also plagued by regret.

Given his great admiration for Lizzie, Parrett’s evaluation of her years as a rich but lonely widow is surprisingly condescending. Since the revelation of her relative poverty, this has been a reason to excuse Lizzie in Parrett’s eyes. The legacy from old Miss Cecilia Winter removes this excuse and affords a measure of freedom, but Lizzie’s upbringing makes her incapable of taking advantage of it. Parrett unsurprisingly blames society’s influence, but – perhaps confusingly to the reader – also expresses disappointment, as if the inheritance reveals a Lizzie that was not quite what he believed her to be. He finds that “her tastes, her interests, her conceivable occupations, were all on the level of a middling domesticity; she did not know how to create for herself any inner life in keeping with that one unprecedented impulse” (310). In short, the narrator believes she does not know what to do with her freedom (for there clearly is some, despite the ostracism). In Parrett’s narrative, she therefore, disappointingly to him, falls back upon devotion to her dead husband. He insists that her social gatherings were civilized, but reveals frustration when he thinks she becomes a useless “guardian of an abandoned temple”, who goes on “forever sweeping and tending what had once been the god’s abode” (310). The uncompromising devotion to her husband is the surprising twist and exoneration in the story she tells to Parrett. He uses this devotion as foundation in his own story, but he does more than pass on her story, as he makes clear at the beginning of Chapter VII. In his story about the years when he knew her, Lizzie’s devotion to her deceased husband is presented in a much more ambiguous light. Despite the social norms of the 1870s, he seems surprised that she was content with “cards and chatter and theatre-going” (311) and that she allowed herself to become someone who “oppressed people” as she “invented superfluous attentions” (313) to escape her loneliness. Lizzie’s conversion to Catholicism at the end of her life is first described as a “more satisfying” (313) picture than the decline of her parties, but Parrett proceeds by associating Lizzie’s religiosity with her father’s artificial “spectacle” and “eloquence” (314) as a minister. This is likely to leave the reader with the impression that Parrett wants the conversion to seem like a second marriage, a

last-minute bending of the knee to convention rather than an expression of the independent woman he wants her to be. According to Parrett, the conversion enables (at long last) the interrupted confession at the end of Chapter V and the subsequent reinstatement of marriage and communion with the man she loves. The implicit charge against the 1870s is that women in Lizzie's situation could only escape loneliness in death. At the same time, Parrett's judgment from on high forms a continuation of the condescending view that her activities as a rich lonely widow were "on the level of a middling domesticity" (310). He is proud of her when her face "grew white at the suggestion [that she had shut up Henry Prest in order to replace him]" (311), but her final act of conversion to reunite with her husband seems to prove to Parrett that Lizzie has never really wanted to think of herself as independent of her husband. I introduced this chapter by referring to Veblen's leisure class model where the ultimate purpose of female comfort is to contribute to male comfort. Lizzie's act demonstrates how this hierarchical system undermines itself. Lizzie's act reflects both Veblen's and Wharton's models of leisure class gender roles. She seemingly responds to a duty to her husband, but in doing so, she acts like a breadwinner. The appearance of duty masks the sense that she breaks the rules because she loves her husband. If women who genuinely love their husbands become threats to society, the narrator suggests, this society can only maintain itself by discouraging these positive feelings.

In this chapter I have attempted to show how Wharton's concept of the fictional mind is expressed when a narrator recreates the mind of a woman he knew. The social aspect of consciousness is evident in how he manages to evoke his vision of her, but this project is challenged by the narrator's wish to project his own ideology, a factor that fundamentally alters the rhetorical act of the telling, and sometimes makes him lose sight of who his heroine was. The dehumanization of the enemy implied by the labeling of Lizzie as "bad . . . always" is a defense mechanism that can be explained by reference to the human need to protect the family. For Wharton, it was always more interesting to examine how the men and women who admire and support her heroines nevertheless misjudge them. Despite all the expertise Wharton invests her first-person male narrators with, she also likes to burden them with the tendency to misjudge themselves as well as the woman they believe they understand. In the present case, the privileged male narrator wants her to continue to be the deviant woman and self-sacrificing rebel, in short, a "bad" woman, not someone who seeks comfort and solace in human company. In wanting this, he conveniently downplays that part of Lizzie's personality that "didn't care for the money or the freedom . . . only for [her husband]" (293). Parrett freely

admits that he misjudged Lizzie when he was in love with her, but he fails to see that his vision of her hidden rebellious potential has persisted in him as a mature man. He likes his early impression of her so well, that he refuses to adjust it to what he later learned about her. Not unlike Lawrence Selden in *The House of Mirth*, Parrett's limitation can be described as a failure to acknowledge the dialogic nature of the thoughts we have about other people. Since different aspects of an individual personality or mind appear in different settings, one should never assume to know its totality, especially since their language will always be altered as it is translated on its way to our minds. The visions we have of other people are always our narratives, not theirs, and we need to be aware of this fact. Expecting that someone should adhere to your vision of them is unethical.

When Wharton reinvents the male observer from *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence* as narrator, or, as I have suggested here, a kind of second or "pseudo-author", the challenge of distinguishing between one's own vision of someone and their own self-concept is complicated by the nature of the act of telling as a sustained rhetorical act. Selden's thoughts about and communication with Lily Bart represent glimpses of such telling, but the narrative act that Parrett designs involves a discursive authority that involves other advantages, as well as specific challenges related to the transmission of a mind with experiences that are further from his own than he seems to realize. His status as pseudo-author also involves formal authorial choices that fundamentally affect how Lizzie is perceived. His discourse is specifically crafted to recreate Lizzie's anguish and the confinement, but also the power of leisure class women in 1870s New York. Despite the narrator's apparent inability to fully accept Lizzie's choices in later life, his art is a tribute to our ability to anticipate and reconstruct the mind of another. Two of his most successful choices in his attempt to guide his audience's response are the shift to third-person narration and his strategy to delay the vital information about Lizzie's intentions, encouraging reader skepticism of Lizzie before her true intentions are revealed.

5 Conclusion

The main purpose of this thesis has been to examine the possibilities implied by an overlap between a postclassical approach to consciousness representation and Edith Wharton's self-professed goal to depict character as if "the bounds of personality are not reproducible by a sharp black line, but . . . [flow] imperceptibly into adjacent people and things" (*The Writing* 10). This section will compare and summarize some of my findings after having discussed Edith Wharton's depiction of fictional minds in *The House of Mirth*, *The Age of Innocence* and "New Year's Day". In the introduction to this thesis, I outlined my approach by adopting Alan Palmer's perspective on the fictional mind. My adaptation of his approach can be summarized in three parts: firstly, characters' minds are discussed by integrating externalist (social) and internalist (private) cognitive perspectives. Secondly, the fictional mind is understood as the depiction of active mental acts (cognition and perception), as well as passive mental states (dispositions, feelings, beliefs and emotions). Finally, this approach understands fictional thought as dialogic, because it is in a continual process of negotiation between external and internal as well as active and passive elements of the mind.

One of the advantages of a cognitive perspective, is that it allows a systematic model of a character's identity formation. For example, the most private dispositions in Wharton's mind designs tend to be defined by upbringing and biological inheritance. Since these character traits are also depicted as the most durable, Wharton also turns dialogic thought into a psychological encounter between private, historical values and social, contemporary values. Of the three narratives discussed here, this phenomenon is most prevalent in the last chapter of *The Age of Innocence*, when Newland Archer feels he has outlived his time, and reflects on the old and the new age. Lily Bart's "unexplained scruples and resistances" (234) are similar remnants from the past, but she is born into a society that is already incompatible with these instincts.

The cognitive perspective highlights how characters emerge as individualized despite the strong presence of social inscriptions that could lead readers to feel the character is only an embodiment of his or her culture, the tendency Pamela Knights refers to as "disembodiment" (21). Wharton attains individualization for the central focalizers discussed here by not only documenting what characters think, but by thoroughly recording unique psychological dispositions, such as causal patterns between mental states and acts. In other words: the narrative is organized so as to illustrate unique patterns in *how* the characters think,

not only *what* they think. For instance, it is typical of Lily Bart's ambivalence, because of her combination of adaptability (from her social training) and moral fastidiousness (from her noble heritage), that she has a conflicted response after an encounter with Percy Gryce. She first reacts with a feeling of joy and empowerment (because she succeeds in manipulating him), before this feeling is replaced by anxiety (because the success makes it more likely that she will marry him).

A cognitive focus also demonstrates the consequences of being more or less understood by other characters. I have previously referred to the general ability to make inferences about a person's mind from their behavior as "theory of mind" (Zunshine 13). If we assume that the difficulty of making such inferences vary, we could refer to this factor as the "mental transparency". Comparing this phenomenon as it is realized in the characterization of Lily Bart, Newland Archer and Lizzie Hazeldean highlights some of Wharton's characterization strategies and what a social mind approach can offer in the corresponding narratives. In this context, *The House of Mirth* can be understood as a novel about a misunderstood mind. The protagonist is, after all, misunderstood again and again by other characters; those who meet her come to different conclusions or remain confused. Carrie Fisher exclaims "I never could understand you Lily!" (222), and Gerty Farish wonders: "but what is your story Lily? I don't believe any one knows it yet" (176). Lily's idea of success, "to get as much as possible out of life", is typically obscure. Lawrence Selden interprets her goal as marrying as rich a man as possible, perhaps because he himself is not rich enough for her. She means to go "Beyond!" like the ship on her letterhead, or at least marry a romantically lost cause with just the right amount of resources at his disposal. Wharton's biographer Hermione Lee finds that "no one is as closely read as Lily, and no one is as hard to read" (Lee, *Obligations* 388). Given the reader's familiarity with Lily's mental acts and states, the novel is characterized by an asymmetry between the characters' and the reader's understanding of her mind. The narrative can also, paradoxically, be understood as a story about an ignored mind. When Lily chooses not to play her role, she encounters the "force of negation", the ability of the leisure class to ignore that which does not fit in. As soon as she is perceived as an outsider, understanding her mind becomes irrelevant. This does not mean that she is instantly thrown away; her story is instead seized on by external interests. Lily complains that the truth about a woman is "the story that is easiest to believe" (176). This is prejudice at work, but also a description of conscious misreading, since "easiest" can here be substituted with "most entertaining" or "most convenient". The general public does not want

the boring truth, but to read about people like Lily in Dabham's *Town Talk* or *Society Notes from the Riviera*. When she consciously tries to make her inner self visible, she only succeeds in making it daringly transparent, like her dress at the tableaux vivant. She shows them what she believes she is (the artist, the noble innocent), but in the social context, she is something else (an advertisement for marriage – or even prostitution). Ultimately, the collective belief about any individual is up for sale in Lily's world.

If Lily Bart's mind is too difficult to read for her own good, Newland Archer's problem is the opposite; the transparency of his dispositions and feelings becomes a central premise for the New York collective's hold over him. Despite his transparency to the collective, he is not all culture to the reader, having watched his need and struggle to define himself outside its field. Lily and Newland's misbehavior are met with the same basic type of social sanctioning, which is the negation or collective act of ignoring the offender's mental peculiarities. Still, Lily is ignored after an act of exclusion, while Newland is negated by an act of inclusion. Lizzie Hazeldean presents a case where the punishment of negation and exclusion is similar to Lily's, although Lizzie's inheritance and status as widow allow her to maintain an independent position in which daring members of society still visit her. Lizzie has none of Lily's reservations when it comes to planning ahead and executing these plans, but the defining act of Lizzie's affair is just as misinterpreted as Lily's tableaux vivant performance. The narrator's chief purpose in telling his story is to use the psychological transparency afforded by third-person narration to compensate for the previous inability to – and lack of interest in – understanding Lizzie's mind. Lizzie's fate confirms Lily Bart's complaint that the truth about a woman is “the story that is easiest to believe” (176). Lizzie's mind is hard to read because she is unusual, if not quite the heroic reformer the narrator wanted her to be.

The cognitive perspective has also been helpful in highlighting how Wharton uses the fictional mind to stage encounters between male and female scripts or norms of behavior. It is hopefully evident from the discussion above, that the cognitive perspective also emphasizes the moral responsibilities of social interaction. Wharton captures this ethical dimension in the detailed psychological descriptions of the consequences of social interaction; what I have referred to as the “post-processing” related to encounters. One recurring motif relevant to the moral responsibility of social encounters is how the heroines are put in positions where they respond, consciously or unconsciously, to male “visions” of them. (In “New Year's Day”, the reader rather than the heroine provides most of this response.) The three narratives I have

discussed here all feature male characters who attempt to understand the mind of a woman they care deeply about. As a result of this intense interest, they go beyond the rough and ready assessment we engage in when we form an opinion about another person. I have borrowed Wharton's own term "vision-building" to describe this activity and referred to it simply as "vision" or "the male vision". In the following, I will attempt to summarize how I understand the nature and function of the male visions in Wharton's three narratives. Obviously, vision-building in Wharton's stories is not limited to men forming visions about women. The heroines of the narratives I have discussed are also subject to many other influences than the male visions. Nonetheless, the pattern is so prominent, and important to the argument I am making, that it should justify the attention I give it here.

Wharton suggests several differences between vision-building and the normal process we all go through when we form an impression of someone. Firstly, as I have suggested in relation to the discussion on embedding in *The Age of Innocence*, these visions are so elaborate that they can be understood as narratives rather than loosely organized constellations of personality traits. For example, they contain ideas not only about who the woman is, but about who she has been and who she can become (in "New Year's Day", who she *could* have been). I have referred to this future element as the "possible selves", that are a feature of self-concepts as well as visions about other people. If we are looking for the implied author's intention with the visions, and if we accept the narrativity of the visions, the next question we should ask is: Why do these men create and sustain the visions? David Herman reminds us that "stories function as a powerful tool for thinking, i.e., a cognitive instrument used as an organisational and problem-solving strategy in many contexts" (Herman). To approach the question of the male characters' purpose with the visions, we also have to consider some formal aspects of voice in each narrative.

In *The House of Mirth*, the female main character is the object of the vision, while the male vision-builder is a supporting character who is absent in many chapters. The focalization shifts between the vision-builder and the object of the vision encourage the reader to compare the vision to the subjective experience of the woman. For Lawrence Selden, the vision serves his role as connoisseur of good taste, the moral "fastidiousness" he shares with Lily, and his physical attraction to her. He enjoys watching her social performances, but his main reason for maintaining the vision is to protect his love for her and glimpse the "real" Lily, the part of her he thinks is too good for her world. He wants her to abandon her pursuit of money, step outside her world, and join him in "freedom". The implied author's intention with his vision

becomes apparent when Lily is inspired to disdain society even more, postponing marriage. Selden's advice is dangerous, because he decides to risk nothing.

In *The Age of Innocence*, Wharton makes the vision-builder the central character and the stable focalizer. First and foremost, this strategy provides the best framework to examine the limitations of the vision. In Newland's case, the perspective emphasizes to what degree the vision can involve a projection of the vision-builder's longings. For Newland, Ellen becomes an extension of the adventurous "possible self" he sees in himself. The primary purpose of Newland's vision is to compensate for a feeling of confinement by providing an escape fantasy that Ellen comes to embody. Another aspect of Newland's projection, is his tendency to sort women into two contrasting categories, as evidenced by the "abysmal distinction between the women one loved and respected and those one enjoyed—and pitied" (61). It is worth noting that this dichotomy is a culturally defined idea, but Newland's romantic predisposition makes him characteristically eager when he applies it to the world. This exemplifies how culture constitutes personal identity in *The Age of Innocence*, while also allowing the individual character to add his or her twist to the social inscription. Ultimately, the function of Newland's vision on the global level of the narrative is to force the reader to see the moral responsibility it engenders when it starts to draw other individuals into its force field. Newland's projection of his self-concept is so dominant in his relationship with Ellen that his attention to her agenda beyond details pertaining to himself or his family becomes negligible. As a result, he persuades her to change her original trajectory, and unwittingly condemns her to exile.

In "New Year's Day", the main character is again the object of the vision, but this time, the vision-builder is narrator as well as supporting character. This strategy emphasizes the narrative aspect of the vision to a much larger degree. In a sense, making the vision-builder a "pseudo-author", as I have suggested Wharton does, encourages the reader to understand the entire novella as his vision of Lizzie Hazeldean. "New Year's Day" reintroduces the focalization shifts between the subject and the object of the vision that we saw in *The House of Mirth*, but this time they are realized as shifts between an external and internal focalizer. Furthermore, the shift in "New Year's Day" is an *emulation* of a shift rather than an actual shift between minds, since the narrator is explicitly recreating Lizzie's mind. The creative reimagining of the mind is the primary purpose of this vision-builder, allowing him to reveal Lizzie's intentions and justify his heroic vision. The fact that Lizzie's mind is emulated when she is focalizer means that the implied author's primary purpose is no longer

to enable the reader to compare the internal male and female perspective. Lizzie's focalization will not strike the reader as a masculinized version of her experience, but it must be considered an emulation nonetheless. What, then, is the implied author's intention with the vision-building voice in this case? There is certainly something of Newland Archer's projection of self in how the young narrator is fascinated with the otherness of Lizzie. As a coming-of-age narrative, the vision functions as a summary of a phase in his life from which the narrator feels he has learned a lot. In my reading of the novella, I also argued that the narrator's attitude to his heroine changes when he relates the last part of her story, and that this encourages the reader to shift her attention towards the narrator and the rhetorical act of narrating. In comparison to the two novels, the novella provides a better vantage point from which to identify the authorial aspects of vision-building. Because the narrative act is biographical, the moral implications remain distinct. I have argued that the three narratives discussed here reflect how Wharton became increasingly familiar with the male voice. She also seems to develop a corresponding willingness to let the heroine pass into the distance. I would suggest that the motivation behind this gradual development is related to her interest in the social aspect of consciousness, and in particular its realization in the male "vision-building faculty" (*The House of Mirth* 106). While the study of Lily Bart laid bare some of its possible consequences, the study of Newland Archer allowed the vision to occupy more of the narrative. In particular, it enabled a much more detailed examination of the causes behind the vision. In the third installment of the vision discussed here, the reader's and the implied author's attention turn towards the creative act itself, allowing the vision to envelop the entire narrative. The narrator exerts absolute power over his subject through the act of the telling, without incurring any risk. In this sense, this configuration reminds us why the creation of a narrative implies great moral responsibility. The problematic aspects of all the three vision-builders also highlight why it is wrong to treat fellow human beings as characters in the stories we keep writing in our minds.

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