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Edith Wharton's novel *The Age of Innocence* (1920) represents love not as a pure emotion but an artifact by narrating Newland Archer's marriage to May Welland and his affair with May's cousin Countess Ellen Olenska vis-à-vis the artistic space of the 1870s New York—the Academy of Music and the Metropolitan Museum—as well as Newland's favorite European art and literature. The novel portrays the politics of love as the successful lawyer Newland's marriage to a beautiful but simple-minded maiden from his class maintains the social hierarchy and traditional gender roles. Imprisoned by Old New York's rigid codes of sexual conduct, he escapes into European art, which paradoxically stands for both cultural refinement and moral corruption, due to its common theme of adultery. An art-connoisseur, he falls for an art lover from Paris, who represents the exciting art scene he misses in his stiff circle. However, his forbidden love for the artistic, self-confident, and bilingual Ellen is not more "innocent" than his sham marriage but artistically inspired. The novel prevents the readers from being pulled into Newland and Ellen's passionate affair by self-reflexively drawing attention to its status as a discursive construct inspired by his reading of Victorian literature. The love triangle in the novel is intertextual as he, like George Eliot's protagonist in *Middlemarch* (1872), falls for his wife's cousin, and is torn between his duty for his wife and his love for a married woman. Indeed, the narrative structure that begins and ends with the French composer Charles François Gounod's opera based on *Faust* lays bare the fictionality of the text, erasing differences between the love performed on stage and the one narrated in the novel. The theme of aesthetically constructed love shows how artifice lies

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at the heart of an upper-class New York that pretends as if its strict moral values are sacred and universal. Art then is not confined to the Academy of Music, Metropolitan Art Museum, and Newland's library; the whole city itself is an artistic space where characters perform virtue and wealth. The Old New York conventions also seem as immortal artifacts that haunt the post-World War I era: although Newland and May's son Dallas marries out of love, he chooses a mate within his wealthy circle.

The repetition of the word "form"[1] in the first chapter set at the Academy of Music suggests that the *fin de siècle* is not the age of innocence but of style and aesthetics. Oscar Wilde writes that "every century that produces poetry is, so far, an artificial century,"[2] suggesting that the rigid conventions are socially and historically constructed. Friedrich Nietzsche also argues that individuals are experts in the "art of dissimulation," "deception," "keeping up appearances," "wearing masks," "play-acting" and "their eyes merely glide across the surface of things and see 'forms.'"[3] He believes that individuals perform honesty as they pretend that "forms"—ideals of decorum, propriety, and fashion—are natural rather than invented. A New Yorker herself, Wharton also displays the art of hypocrisy in the city where "all lived in a kind of hieroglyphic world" governed by "arbitrary signs" (29); she anticipates structuralism by suggesting that there is no intrinsic connection between words and their referents. The Statue of Liberty, for example, is an arbitrary sign: New York is not the city of "peace and freedom" (110) that Ellen once imagined but one that molds its residents into accepted forms of physical appearance and social manners. Indeed, the first chapter repeats the word "form" four times to highlight the power of social structures and the God-like treatment of Lawrence Lefferts, "the foremost authority on 'form'" (6), who often scrutinizes New Yorkers' dress and style. Ironically, Lawrence's fame as the supreme judge of morality and taste itself is arbitrary as he turns out to be an unfaithful husband who wears "good clothes so carelessly" (6). The novel dissolves differences between the artistic venues—museums and theaters—and commonplace reality by depicting New York as a city of art that lives by the artificially constructed conventions.

The narrator's insistence on the word "form" renders love a formalistic device to preserve domestic ideology. Clifford Geertz challenges the romantic view of emotion as being instinctual and argues that "not only ideas, but emotions too, are cultural artifacts in man."[4] Lila Abu-Lughod and Catherine Lutz also discuss emotion in the context of "sociability and power" and "the politics of everyday life" rather than "internal states."[5] Wharton too presents love as an aesthetic element by introducing a love triangle in the outset that served as "a marriage market, where young men and women met under the eyes of their elders."[6] New Yorkers play house

in the opera house by matching white upper-class singles like Newland and May. The Academy, however, is not simply a building but a social actor that defies domestic ideology by staging *Faust* with themes of temptation and infanticide: Marguerite kills her child after being abandoned by Faust. The Academy also destabilizes the marriage institution by becoming the setting where Newland first meets his fiancée's cousin on the verge of divorce.[7] The Academy has a powerful force on Newland, who fantasizes about teaching the lovemaking scene in *Faust* to his virgin bride during their honeymoon and identifies himself with Faust as he dreams of wooing Ellen. However, he can never realize his art-inspired fantasies; although he despises the old-fashioned domestic ideology, he believes "it would be troublesome—and also rather bad form—to strike out for himself" (6) and to pursue romantic love. The novel's opera setting lays bare the artifice of love that is inspired by *Faust* but confined to marriage.

The opera setting of the first chapter also renders love a discursive construct. The narrator does not let the readers be drawn into the love scenes in *Faust* by self-reflexively highlighting its status as an opera based on Goethe's play, composed by Charles Gounod and played by Christine Nilsson as Marguerite and Victor Capoul as Faust. Indeed, love is lost in translation as the narrator translates the Italian "M'ama" into English ("he loves me") and explains why Nilsson sings in Italian to an American audience: "since an unalterable and unquestioned law of the musical world required that the German text of French operas sung by Swedish artists should be translated into Italian for the clearer understanding of English-speaking audiences." By explaining the arbitrary laws of music, the narrator strips the passion from the soprano's "final burst of love triumphant"; the way she presses "the dishevelled daisy to her lips" and lifts "her large eyes" to Faust seems not a spontaneous overflow of feeling but a self-conscious and deliberate act. She further destroys the illusion of romance by abruptly shifting back and forth between Marguerite's love for Faust and Newland's physical appearance that conforms to the dictates of form, such as his duty of parting his hair with "two silver-backed brushes" and wearing a flower in his buttonhole (4). The juxtaposition of the stage lovers with traditional form of male dress codes renders love an artifact rather than a genuine feeling.

Newland's feelings for May and Ellen seem as performative as Faust's for Marguerite and Martha as the narrator draws attention to the male gaze that puts the female audience on stage. Laura Mulvey argues that women "are being turned all the time into objects of display, to be looked at and gazed at and stared at by men."[8] John Dizikes also writes that "the boxes were for display and it was women who were displayed."[9] Wharton attacks the Old New York custom that puts women on stage by introducing female

characters through the male voyeuristic gaze. Men exchange the opera-glass to judge women based on the dictates of "Form" and "Taste," which are capitalized due to their sacred treatment. Although Newland feels superior to New York gentlemen, who turn "their opera-glasses critically on the circle of ladies," he too spies on women as he "scan[s] the opposite side of" the theatre instead of watching *Faust*. He takes part in the "masculine solidarity" to police women's appearance and sexual conduct: he turns his eyes from the soprano to the "monstrous obesity" (4, 6) of May's grandmother, Catherine Mingott; he proudly confirms May's innocence symbolized by her white dress; he then turns his attention to her Bohemian cousin, who violates the etiquette of the opera by wearing a revealing gown. The narrator, however, returns the male gaze by watching Newland watching women at the opera. His narrative authority is undermined as the story is told from the narrator's and not from Newland's perspective as it is often assumed. The narrator is an all-seeing and all-knowing figure that puts the male voyeur on display.

The "masculine New York" (8) sustains the social hierarchy as the small Academy of Music prevents interclass relationships by offering limited seats of thirty boxes, which "rarely changed hands, and then only within a very limited social circle."[10] The elite opposes the possible erection of a larger Opera house (the Metropolitan Opera) that will welcome the newly rich with "relaxed mores and brash displays of wealth."[11] Ironically, praised by the daily press as "an exceptionally brilliant audience" (3), the elite regards the Academy as a symbol of "social standing"[12] and attends the opera to see and be seen. New Yorkers simultaneously become art objects and art critics as they exhibit their riches—jewelry and "family landau" or "Brown *coupé*" (3)—and judge one another based on their wealth. The novel, however, unsettles class distinctions as Newland's mother comments that their so-called aristocratic grandparents were indeed "English or Dutch merchants," that "New York has always been a commercial community, and there are not more than three families in it who can claim an aristocratic origin" (32). New Yorkers both "dread" and are "drawn to" the "new people" (3) as they eagerly attend the annual after-opera party of the newly rich financier Julius Beaufort, whom Mrs. Archer considers "vulgar" (23).

Love preserves demarcations of not only class but also of nationality by disavowing intercultural relationships. Sara Ahmed writes that love is an obligation to maintain the racial quality of future generations: "Love is conditional, and the conditions of love differentiate between those who can inhabit the nation, from those who cause disturbance."[13] Ellen disturbs the white American opera house with her "Empire dress" (8) that evokes the style of Josephine, the French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte's Creole

wife from Martinique; her "Josephine look" likewise defies white supremacy. Indeed, the narrator shatters their perception of the opera house as an all-American space by recalling cross-national relationships in one of the most prominent families in New York: Catherine Mingott's father mysteriously disappeared with "a beautiful Spanish dancer" (7); her granddaughter Ellen married a Polish count and moved to Paris; her daughters are regarded as foreigners who live abroad with their Italian and English husbands. The narrator references the word "foreigners" (9) to question differences between American and European identities and Ellen's desire "to become a complete American again" (42) by returning to her hometown New York. The Academy itself does not glorify Americanness by putting a German play on stage and inviting Swedish soprano Christine Nilsson to sing love songs in Italian.

Although Newland feels superior to the old-fashioned New York due to his love for art, he sustains ideologies of ethnicity and class by imagining love through canonical texts by white European writers. His favorite Victorian texts endorse white supremacy by avoiding the theme of interracial love. The forbidden love stories he admires—*Faust* and the Irish playwright Dion Boucicault's melodrama *The Shaughraun* (1874)—take place between white European characters. Ironically, Newland's library of European literature is "gothic," which, for the Victorian critic John Ruskin, brings together "the imaginations of the Western and Eastern races." Although Ruskin sustains the Orientalist association of the West with "facts" and East with "the harmony of colours and forms,"[14] he elevates the unity of the two cultures by favoring the Venetian gothic architecture with Byzantine and Arab influences. Newland's gothic library, however, is exclusively European. He neither reads non-Western and non-canonical texts nor engages with the art of the post-American Civil War period. Like the white upper-class heroes in novels, he falls for the two granddaughters of the prestigious Mrs. Mingott; his fantasies of eloping with May or having an affair with Ellen are shaped by his artistic taste for the works of white European artists.

Living an imagined life, Newland thinks of both his wife and lover as pictures rather than agents: he reads May's presumed innocence based on her photograph and thinks of Ellen as an "imaginary beloved in a book or a picture" (219), symbolizing the European artistic life he misses in New York. Teresa de Lauretis argues in the context of Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* that in Western discourse women are often produced as texts, "as pure representation[s];"[15] Newland too treats May and Ellen as stock characters, the virtuous maiden and the exotic beloved. The narrator, however, undermines his male authority by rendering him a discursive construct: he pictures himself in a drawing-room discussing such Victorian writers as

William Makepeace Thackeray and Robert Browning. He further resembles a static artwork as his journalist friend describes him as "The Portrait of a Gentleman" (80) in an empty house without any visitors. Wharton's characters seem as "slippery" as New York's "snowy streets" (3) due to their ambivalent status between life and art; the love triangle then is an artifice confined in Wharton's "textual museum"[16] that treats the characters as relics of Old New York.

The love triangle in the novel is depicted as art due to the transitory and ephemeral status of women both there and not there. Newland imagines May and Ellen as apparitions or ghosts; their liminal existence stands for the *fin de siècle* between the Victorian and the modern and for the dark and grim post-World War I era. The beautiful but helpless May seems like a "dazzling apparition" (125), as she expresses her anxiety in talking to foreigners during their honeymoon. For Newland, the artistic Ellen does not seem more solid and real than his childlike wife. He initially thinks of her as "the faint shadow" whose "unhappy past might seem to shed on" his "radiant future" with May (19). Ellen later remains in Newland's "memory simply as the most plaintive and poignant of a line of ghosts" (131) upon his realization that they can never get married. She is an "imagined figure" or a "vision" (141) he fantasizes about while watching the moonlight. Ellen has a fleeting existence in Newland's memory as she seems absent upon moving to Washington and later becomes "a living presence to him again" (136) when her aunt Medora mentions her name at the archery match. The shadowy existence of May and Ellen represents the restless *fin de siècle*, which Homi Bhabha describes as "the moment of transit," "here and there, on all sides, *fort/da*, hither and thither, back and forth."[17] In Wharton's novel, the apparition-like faces and the ghostlike butlers in tomblike houses suggest that Old New York's politics of love haunts the post-World War I era.

This article analyzes the artifice of love shaped by Victorian art as well as the moral precepts of Old New York. While Newland's marriage endorses gender and class ideologies, his love for Ellen is not innocent or authentic either: he is in love with his vision of Ellen, not the actual Ellen. Literary critics primarily focus on representations of the interior design and architecture,[18] the museum space,[19] the opera *Faust*,[20] visual arts and intertextuality,[21] racial mixture,[22] social mobility,[23] French culture,[24] and history.[25] In terms of the politics of love, critics often discuss the strict morality and prejudice against divorce in the 1870s[26] and Newland's duty to May and love for Ellen.[27] Jean Witherow provides a Lacanian analysis of the language of unattainable sexual desire, deception, and failure of communication;[28] Lloyd Daigrepont observes "the latent narcissism" of Newland's "fascination with Ellen."[29] Although these studies rightly discuss Newland's conflicting

feelings for May and Ellen in the backdrop of Old New York, they tend to disregard how love itself is represented as an artifact. Carmen Trammell Skaggs draws parallels between "the artifice of opera"[30] and the artifice of Old New York; however, she does not extend her argument to love. The novel's intertextual structure that narrates the story with respect to art renders love a discursive element rather than a pure emotion. The following two sections discuss how the novel presents love as a socially and textually constructed artifact: Newland's feelings for May are shaped by Old New York custom that expects him to marry a young maiden from his class; his love for Ellen is inspired by the theme of adultery and the figure of seductive women in European art and literature.

## The Art of Marriage

May seems to be on stage as Newland turns his eyes from the opera to his sexually pure fiancée, who blushes and drops "her eyes to the immense bouquet of lilies-of-the-valley on her knee," as Faust seduces Marguerite. However, the narrator's choice of the lily-of-the-valley—poisonous flowers that blossom in May—suggests that, unlike Newland, she is not taken in with May's presumed innocence. Indeed, the narrator casts her as a performer rather than a "pure and true" maiden by drawing parallels between her white dress and "fair braids" and the soprano's white cashmere and "yellow braids" as well as May's white bouquet and the daisies on stage. Newland and Faust falsely imagine their lovers as "artless" (4–5): Marguerite commits infanticide after Faust's abandonment for Martha; May cunningly announces her pregnancy first to Ellen to preserve her marriage. Newland's possession of the opera-glass, then, does not make him a good reader; he misreads May as a virtuous wife—not an actress, who pretends as if she is ignorant of his affair. Narrations of Newland and May's wedding, honeymoon, and their house with respect to art render marriage an artificial institution and New York as a city of strict morality.

Watching the seduction scene on stage, Newland imagines himself as Faust as he fantasizes about wooing his virgin bride during their honeymoon in Italy. Helena Michie argues that the honeymoon in Britain served "as the privileged scene of instruction" for the virgin brides. For Michie, the virginal female body can be transformed into being "legibly sexual"[31] in an unfamiliar or Oriental landscape that is free from Victorian morality. Newland too dreams of explaining May the lovemaking scene in *Faust* in Italy, which, from his brief stay in Florence, remembers to be a place of "complicated love-affairs" that are not accepted in New York (124): "'We'll read *Faust* together . . . by the Italian lakes . . .,' he thought, somewhat hazily

confusing the scene of his projected honeymoon with the masterpieces of literature which it would be his manly privilege to reveal to his bride" (5). His expectations from the honeymoon are textually constructed by many Victorian novels in which husbands sexually and intellectually educate their brides in exotic landscapes. Newland's projected honeymoon fails as May, who is not much into traveling, prefers to update her wardrobe in Paris and London rather than canoodle by the Italian lakes. He fails to take May away from the moral taboos of New York as they visit London, Switzerland, and France that hold to traditional gender roles. He is frustrated as he cannot teach *Faust* to his lovely but "incurious" (123) and "infantile" (125) wife or reenact Faust's seduction of Marguerite. During their passionless honeymoon, Newland can no longer "picture his wife" in the Italian lakes; his desire for sexual fulfillment remains a lovely picture that he cannot put in motion either with May or Ellen.

The art lover Newland lives in the world of pictures as he prefers reading May's large photograph, which she gave him at the beginning of their romance, to gazing upon her actual face. An expert of form, the photographer depicts May as a lovely child in need of a guardian. However, her virtuous pose at the camera is far from natural: her "serious eyes" should not wander, her mouth should not be lascivious, and her "frank forehead" should symbolize her youth and honesty. She further seems like an artwork as Newland describes her as the "terrifying product of the social system" which expects "marriageable" girls to possess feminine virtue but not "freedom of judgment" (28–29). Newland is discouraged by the idea that May's candid pose may not stand for her actual character. "Untrained human nature was not frank and innocent, it was full of the twists and defences of an instinctive guile" (30), the narrator writes and implies that May performs innocence to be eligible for marriage. The narrator notes the performance of femininity in New York where women are "versed in the arts of the enslaved" (193). Newland marries May because he is trained by his mother and aunts to choose a mate with an everlasting but artificial radiance and smile and to be her "soul's custodian." As May's "familiar features" in the picture seem artificial products of society, Newland regards marriage not as "the safe anchorage he had been taught to think, but a voyage on uncharted seas" (28). Although he questions the truthfulness of May, he conforms to his family by presuming the unknown and dangerous voyage of marriage with a stranger, who plays the role of a pretty and obedient wife.

Indeed, the marriage ceremony itself is described as an artistic performance that evokes the opera. The wedding venue, the Church, looks like the Academy as classical music plays in the background and the semicircular shape of "stone vaulting" (114)—the arched form that covers the

ceiling—resembles "the proscenium arch" in opera that "frame[s] the action."[32] The architectural similarities between the two buildings render marriage not sacred but artificial. As Newland overhears Handel's *March*, he describes his marriage ceremony as an opera he attends with "cheerful indifference" (114); he becomes a spectator to his own wedding as he scans the guests he often sees at the opera boxes:

> "How like a first night at the Opera!" he thought, recognising all the same faces in the same boxes (no, pews), and wondering if, when the Last Trump sounded, Mrs Selfridge Merry would be there with the same towering ostrich feathers in her bonnet, and Mrs Beaufort with the same diamond earrings and the same smile—and whether suitable proscenium seats were already prepared for them in another world. After that there was still time to review, one by one, the familiar countenances in the first rows.

As Newland reviews the wedding guests—"the same faces in the same [opera] boxes"—the narrator presents both the Academy and the Church as artistic spaces that endorse ideals of appearance and form. The "deity of 'Good Form'" (114–15), Lefferts scrutinizes women at the Church as he often does at the opera; the ladies wear the same jewelry and pretentious smiles on both occasions. Both the opera audience and the wedding guests are described as reviewers or art critics, who read Mrs. Mingott's "monstrous obesity" (4) as defiance of decorum. Indeed, the buildings are not designed for the overweight, who are considered physically disabled: the opera box is too small and her "enormous bath-chair" (115) is too wide to pass through the entrance door. The similarities between the opera and the wedding ceremony destroy the illusion of romance and render marriage an artifact that endorses rigid codes of appearance, class, and morality.

Other than its operatic atmosphere, what renders marriage as art is its uncanny quality which Sigmund Freud relates to "the subject of aesthetics" due to its ambivalent meaning that evokes oppositional sentiments: "on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight."[33] Ironically, Newland's wedding seems unfamiliar despite its being the most familiar tradition. The novel represents marriage as uncanny, an "*aesthetic* experience," or a "poetic metaphor"[34] that simultaneously suggests romance and repulsion. At the altar, Newland is nauseated when the scent of the lilies mix with that of orange-blossoms and the organ music with the Rector's murmuring voice:

> The music, the scent of the lilies on the altar, the vision of the cloud of tulle and orange-blossoms floating nearer and nearer, the sight of Mrs. Archer's face suddenly convulsed with happy sobs, the low benedictory murmur of the Rector's voice, the ordered evolutions of the eight pink bridesmaids and

> the eight black ushers: all these sights, sounds and sensations, so *familiar* in themselves, so unutterably *strange* and meaningless in his new relation to them, were confusedly mingled in his brain. (my emphasis)

The marriage turns uncanny as the narrator describes the sights, sounds, and smells both familiar and strange. The ceremony seems dreadful as the organ is played at both weddings and funerals; Mrs. Archer's face looks agitated due to her tears of joy; beautiful lilies at the altar might cause a toxic reaction in the couple. The fragrant flower of the orange tree also seems disturbing as it floats "nearer and nearer" to the altar as if drowning Newland with its strong smell. Indeed, he sinks into a "black abyss" and "adrift[s] far off in the unknown" (117–18) as he nervously makes his marriage vows of eternal love. Marriage seems not a fairy tale but a nightmare as Newland imagines seeing among the spectators the glimpse of a witch-like woman with a long nose, dark hair, and a hat. The novel demonizes marriage as he feels estranged from the institution that stands for home and family.

What makes Newland perform his role as a groom are the social conventions he despises as medieval; he belittles his "little tribe" agitated over "trifles" (115), such as the wedding decorations: "The things that had filled his days seemed now like a parody of life, or like the wrangles of mediaeval schoolmen over metaphysical terms that nobody had ever understood" (115). His gothic library suggests that, though he condescends to New Yorkers as medieval scholars, he himself is confined within the strict morality of the Dark Ages. That Ellen and Newland are "chained to their separate destinies" (154) also evokes the medieval Christian doctrine of predestination. Their fate is "sealed" (46) as it is in Newland's vain dream of living in a place where categories like "mistress" and "wife" do not exist and where love is not sanctioned by the Church. The medieval art and architecture of his house also imply that he can never pursue the free love that he admires in Victorian art. His Pompeian vestibule that stands for "a stifling restriction of manners"[35] foreshadows his "entryway to a moribund phase of life."[36] The Pompeian decoration of Newland's "stuffy" (124) apartment hints that medieval morality has a haunting force in the 1870s New York.

The New York that perpetuates the hypocrisy of marriage is a city of art where Newland's circle acts as if they are ignorant of his affair. "Does no one want to know the truth here, Mr. Archer? The real loneliness is living among all these kind people who only ask one to pretend!" (50), Ellen sobs as she cannot communicate with her family, who disapprove of divorce. She once assumed New York to be "so straight up and down—like Fifth Avenue"; however, there is nothing authentic in the famous fashion street other than its "big honest" street numbers (49). She considers New York

a "labyrinth," where she cannot decipher anyone's character. The seemingly innocent May, for example, artfully announces her pregnancy first to Ellen to drive her away from New York. As she hosts Ellen's farewell party, Newland notices "the glitter of victory" (214) in his wife's observing and vengeful eyes. Ironically, Newland, an art connoisseur, is blind to the artifice of New Yorkers, who have all along known of his affair. The alleged city of liberty takes Newland's "life 'without effusion of blood'" (212) by granting poetic justice to Ellen and by celebrating his hypocritical marriage. The novel does not distinguish New York's art scene—musicals, "picture shows, and celebrities" (77)—from the rest of the "real" and "genuine" city; the whole city seems like a motion picture as the characters are always on stage to perform decency, decorum, and innocence.

## The Art of Forbidden Love

"You gave me my first glimpse of a real life, and at the same moment you asked me to go on with a sham one" (153), Newland says to Ellen; however, his textually constructed love for Ellen is no more "real" than his "sham" marriage. Indeed, upon their first encounter at the opera, Ellen defines her relationship with Newland as mere performance as she narrates her memories of how they frolicked together as children: "'We *did* use to play together, didn't we?' she asked, turning her grave eyes to his. 'You were a horrid boy, and kissed me once behind a door'" (12). The parallel narration of the love performed on stage and Newland's first glance at Ellen suggests that the childhood playmates continue the love game as adults in the opera house. The narrator foreshadows their affair as Newland arrives late in "Act 3, when Faust, accompanied by the Devil, has successfully wooed Marguerite (the soprano), who sings of his love" (231). However, instead of watching the opera, Newland peeps at the "new figure" (6), who sits right next to May, and treats Ellen as an art object as he judges her form and shape. Ellen seems to be on stage as Newland places her under his opera-glass and regards her head-dress "unusual," her "dark blue velvet gown [. . .] with a large old-fashioned clasp" (7) theatrical, and her low-cut dress as distasteful. He ceases to be a powerful male voyeur as the narrator portrays him as a pathetic type who uses art as a vehicle to escape from the old-fashioned morality that censures sexual desire. Paradoxically, Newland dreams for "real people" (115) but his image of Ellen is artistically shaped by the femmes fatales in the paintings of the French artist Carolus Duran. His love for Ellen is inspired by the theme of forbidden love in Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872), Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *House of Life* (1870), and Dion Boucicault's melodrama *The Shaughraun*. Their intertextual love becomes

an artifact as the couple often meets at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and as he holds on to his vision of Ellen rather than visit her at her Paris apartment. Regarding his parents as relics in a glass vase, Newland's son Dallas cannot escape from the artifice of love as he fulfills his obligation to choose a mate from his class and nationality.

Ellen is on stage not only at the opera box but also in American houses, paradoxically private sites with limited access. "The house is the stage for the theater of the family," Beatriz Colomina writes.[37] Ellen too compares her residences in New York to theatres where she performs feminine virtue for the conservative audience who dread her ambivalent position as a potential divorcée. The novel portrays domestic voyeurism as Ellen complains to Newland about the impossibility of enjoying privacy at Henry van der Luyden's Italian villa in Skuytercliff on the Hudson River:

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

Ellen's comparison of the villa to a seminary (a school that prepares students for priesthood) as well as to a stage dissolves differences between art, religion, and domestic ideology; the seemingly sacred spaces of the house and the convent are indeed control mechanisms that police individuals.[38] The domestic routine is an art of surveillance at the villa where doors are always open and servants regularly interrupt the household by bringing tea, newspapers, and fuel for the fire. With its "pale green and white" walls and "cast-iron ornaments," the country home, the icon of domestic happiness and pastoral innocence, resembles a prison and even a tomb that signifies their doomed love: as Newland rings the bell to visit Ellen, "the long tinkle seemed to echo through a mausoleum" and the butler responds to the door "as though he had been summoned from his final sleep." The cold, dark, silent, and "airless" house under "the greyish winter sky" (83–84) does not live up to its stage name, the Italian villa, which stereotypically evokes summer and romance. Cynthia Falk writes that "the pseudo-Italian villa" with its "tongued and grooved walls," "a Corinthian portico, and fluted pilasters between the windows," was "fundamentally an American interpretation based on vaguely Italian, or classical, designs."[39] Ellen does not feel at home but on a stage in the gruesome villa that performs Italianness but remains American in its aesthetics and morality.

An art-lover, Newland is ironically blind to the fact that his love for Ellen is aesthetically or textually constructed: "Ellen Olenska was like no other woman, he was like no other man: their situation, therefore, resembled no one else's" (193). Their forbidden love affair is a common theme in Victorian literature rather than something unique. Among a multitude of books in Newland's library, the narrator draws attention to Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872) and Dante Gabriel Rossetti's sonnet sequence *House of Life* (1870); neither text imagines love as an ever-fixed mark. In *Middlemarch*, the intellectual Dorothea Brooke controversially falls in love with her husband's cousin during her honeymoon and, after her husband's death, she gives up her social status and inheritance to marry a younger man without a set profession. Unlike Dorothea, Newland is not courageous enough to follow his heart even after May's death. Rossetti's poetic voice, on the other hand, narrates his doomed love for his wife, who dies two years after their marriage, and for his mistress, the wife of a colleague. Newland is drawn into the "warm," "rich," and "tender" sonnets that portray the fluidity of love and sexual desire that cannot be confined in marriage. "All through the night he pursued through those enchanted pages the vision of a woman who had the face of Ellen Olenska" (89), the narrator writes; however, he wakes up in the morning to realize that his affair would not be tolerated in the law firm, family, and the Church. Ironically, the library where he reads love stories and thinks of Ellen is the room "in which most of the real things of his life had happened" (217) such as May's announcement of her pregnancy and his son's christening. Repressed by Victorian domestic ideology, Newland can imagine a relationship with Ellen only within the world of fiction.

Newland's perception of Ellen as a helpless woman to be rescued from a scandalous divorce is also reminiscent of the damsel in distress stories. He hopes to prevent Ellen from losing her reputation by talking her out of divorce: "she stood before him as an exposed and pitiful figure, to be saved at all costs from further wounding herself in her mad plunges against fate." He feels "a great wave of compassion" (61–62) for her, who will be a social outcast in New York where an adulterous wife is considered a criminal. A divorcée herself, Wharton, unlike Newland, does not portray Ellen as a victim in need of a hero but a strong woman determined to leave her husband: His partner tells Newland that "she is firm, and insists on a legal opinion" and has consulted a law firm "for the settlement of her financial situation" (60–61). "Her hand was firm and free" (63), as the narrator describes Ellen's script in the letter that accepts Newland's offer to discuss her lawsuit. However, he fails his profession as a lawyer as he gives Ellen not legal but moral advice to save her unhappy marriage: "Our legislation

favours divorce—our social customs don't" (71). Her defiance of customs is evident in her provocative red velvet gown bordered with "glossy black fur," which reminds Newland of a sensational portrait by the nineteenth-century French painter Carolus Duran. While objectifying her "muffled throat and bare arms" as "undeniably pleasing" as an artwork, he does not realize that Ellen in a dress "heedless of tradition" (67–68) is not the damsel in distress. On the contrary, he is the one who needs to be saved from the mores of Old New York.

Their discussion of the divorce suit turns artistic as Newland replays their conversation while watching the lovers' farewell scene in the Irish playwright Dion Boucicault's *The Shaughraun*, first performed at Wallack's Theatre in New York in 1874. Newland often returns to Wallack's for the "silent parting" scene and empathizes with Harry Montague's hesitation to leave with Ada Dyas:

> When her wooer turned from her she rested her arms against the mantel-shelf and bowed her face in her hands. On the threshold he paused to look at her; then he stole back, lifted one of the ends of velvet ribbon, kissed it, and left the room without her hearing him or changing her attitude. (73)

In the play, Harry says goodbye and turns to go only to come back unnoticed and kiss Ada's ribbon; his back-and-forth movement also embodies the turbulence of the *fin de siècle* between modern and Victorian. Boucicault and Wharton portray the liminality of the characters on the threshold. Harry's ambivalent position of being and not being in the room, for example, resonates with Newland's problematic status as Ellen's lover and lawyer. Seated behind Ellen in the theatre box, Newland tries to repress his heartbeat by reminding himself that she is his client. Like Harry, he has an unnoticed presence in his lover's apartment where he anonymously sends yellow roses. Art and life are intermixed as Ellen, moved by the melodrama, acknowledges Newland's gift by asking him whether Harry will send Ada yellow roses the next morning. However, Newland and Ellen's love seems as unattainable as Harry and Ada's as the narrator ends the chapter by recalling May's letter from St. Augustine to her fiancé, rendering May, who is physically absent in the theatre, always already present in Newland and Ellen's relationship.

The novel further shatters the innocence of love as Ellen and Newland meet at the Metropolitan Museum of Art,[40] whose cast-iron objects suggest that domestic ideology will not bend or change. Ironically, the museum built in 1870 conforms to the standards of Old New York as its cast-iron decoration evokes both "the cast-iron railings" (46) at the door of Newland's cage-like house and the cast-ornaments of van der Luyden's house

where the inhabitants are policed. Although the lovers avoid the "Wolfe collection" with its cast-iron tiles, they cannot escape the Old New York represented by the "Cesnola antiquities" room where the past haunts the present and they stare at "the recovered fragments of Ilium." Upon many cabinets in the room, Ellen stands before the one with "hardly recognisable domestic utensils" (195), which connects the domestic ideology of classical antiquity with that of the 1870s. The art museum does not stand for the upcoming century but embodies the manners of Old New York by surveilling the visitors: As Newland takes a step nearer to Ellen, a guardian walks "listlessly through the room like a ghost stalking through a necropolis." The museum endorses social conformity as the lovers remain silent and stare not at each other but at the artifacts until the guardian is out of sight. The new museum does not invoke novelty but death as the ghostlike guardian vanishes "down a vista of mummies and sarcophagi" and Ellen sadly realizes that the objects made of "time-blurred substances" (195–96) endure while their owners are forgotten. The display of the stone coffins of the ancient Egypt and Greece in *fin-de-siècle* New York also implies the daunting presence of the "pre-historic" morality that the lovers cannot escape.

A metaphor for the old-fashioned norms that dominate New York, the glass case sheltering art objects also stands for the aesthetic distance that marks their relationship. The glass that is simultaneously solid and transparent, there and not there, resembles their "being together–and not together" (182). The glass that stands for the ambivalence of their relationship is repeated four times within the same page as they look at "the glass cabinets" and "glass shelves" that shelter little ornaments "made of glass" whose shapes and purposes "have to be guessed at under a magnifying glass." The status of their relationship is as "unknown" as the function of the "small broken objects" in the cabinet. Newland similarly observes "the light movements" of Ellen's figure and the "delicious details that made her" under his "magnifying glass." While he admires her as an original artwork, the narrator suggests that she is no different from the displayed objects: she too is "in reach and yet out of reach" as he is close enough to notice but not to hold her uneasily stirring hands. She is as translucent as glass due to "her veil drawn down like a transparent mask." With her veil that resembles a transparent mask, she seems like an art object in a glass case, which simultaneously displays her beauty but also forbids Newland's touch. Although the lovers are outside the glass cabinets they are inside the museum where their secret encounter becomes an artifact that can never be realized in actuality. Their love is confined within the walls of the museum as they can neither express what they want nor stop meeting "on the sly" (195–96). The multilayered narrative erases differences between

art and the characters as Newland observes Ellen, Ellen looks at the glass cabinets, and they both become art objects in the museum to be analyzed by the narrator and the readers.

While admiring Ellen as an *objet d'art*, Newland is as immobile as an artifact in the Museum. His journalist friend Ned Winsett compares the stiff New Yorkers, "the last remnants of the old European tradition," to fixed and static artworks: "You're like the pictures on the walls of a deserted house: 'The Portrait of a Gentleman.' You'll never amount to anything, any of you, till you roll up your sleeves and get right down into the muck" (80). Indeed, the portrait without spectators stands for Newland, who leads a lonely and unhappy life. Instead of taking Winsett's advice to take charge of his life, he simply shrugs his shoulders and turns the conversation back to books, which suggests that he will ever remain a spectator rather than an actor. Ellen reflects on his immobility by complaining that he cannot "lift a finger" to be with her. Even upon their meeting in Boston, both seem paralyzed as they cannot get closer at the lobby of the Parker House: "Half the width of the room was still between them, and neither made any show of moving" (153–54), the narrator writes, suggesting that, in the absence of their acquaintances from New York, they regulate their own sexual conduct. The narrator hints at Newland's desire but his inability to fight against social conventions by pointing out the "bronze and steel statuettes of 'The Fencers'" (28) in his study. Newland is not a fencer but a statue of a fencer, not a gentleman but a portrait of a gentleman, as he cannot act upon his feelings for Ellen.

Art precedes reality as, instead of visiting Ellen in Paris, the fifty-seven-year-old widower wonders at her favorite museum, the Louvre, how she might have "lately been" (226). What Newland actually sees in the paintings is Ellen who, for the narrator, is "the composite vision of all that he had missed" (219): "one by one the pictures burst on him in their half-forgotten splendour, filling his soul with the long echoes of beauty. After all, his life had been too starved." The "half-forgotten" paintings stand for his fleeting vision of Ellen that nourishes his lonely "starving" life. Before the portrait of the Italian Renaissance painter Titian, Newland says to himself, "I'm only fifty-seven—" but he cannot complete his sentence expressing his wish to start a new life. He turns away from Titian only to hold on to his vision of Ellen as an unattainable lovely picture and walks to her neighborhood thinking of "the theatres she must have been to, the pictures she must have looked at, the sober and splendid old houses she must have frequented" (226–27). Newland is not more real than his beloved; he regards himself as an artifact by comparing his place in her memory to a relic in a small forgotten church. He is more drawn to his vision of Ellen rather than Ellen

herself as he sits on "an empty bench" in front of her apartment, stares at her balcony, and imagines his son entering into her drawing-room where she "would be sitting in a sofa-corner near the fire" just like Ada in *The Shaughraun*. "The twilight" and "the thickening dusk" in the evening also picture his life at the threshold of fantasy and reality and of present and the past: "'It's more real to me here than if I went up,' he suddenly heard himself say; and the fear lest that last shadow of reality should lose its edge kept him rooted to his seat as the minutes succeeded each other" (228–29). Art and life are intertwined as he holds on to his fantasy of Ellen as a lover in a book or painting rather than uniting with her after thirty years. The lovers silently communicate as Newland reads Ellen's servant's closing of the shutters as a sign for him to leave and he walks back to his hotel.

Dallas Archer and his fiancée Fanny Beaufort view their relationship as modern and compare Newland and Ellen to ancient artworks that do not speak to their generation. "Dad, don't be prehistoric!" Dallas exclaims twenty-six years later in Paris, as his father blushes to hear his son talk about the "awfully lovely" Ellen. The novel highlights the historical contingency of social manners as Dallas regards his shy and old-fashioned father as ancient as the Greek antiquities in the Metropolitan Museum. Dallas considers his parents as relics as he fails to understand their lack of communication and compares their silent marriage to "a deaf-and-dumb asylum." Fanny, on the other hand, treats Ellen as an artwork by asking Dallas to do three things in Paris: retrieve "the score of the last Debussy," the founder of the Impressionist School of Music; visit Grand-Guignol theatre; and "see Madame Olenska" (224–25). Ellen seems like an artifact as Fanny brings her name together with the theatre founded in 1897 and with the composer of the famous "Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun" in 1894. Fanny, however, is not original or authentic; her identity is as discursive as Ellen's: she took her name from her notorious mother Fanny Ring and she was often in the company of Ellen in Paris. The mother and daughter's shared name as well as the fact that Dallas feels for Fanny exactly as Newland felt for Ellen suggest a continuity and problematize differences between the sexual politics of two generations.

The parallels between Newland's and Dallas' love stories also bridge the generation gap between father and son. Simone Belli, Rom Harré, and Lupicinio Iñiguez view love as a story that is shaped by language and environment: "we tend to fall in love with people whose stories are complementary to ours."[41] Wittingly or not, Dallas chooses a mate whose story is similar to Ellen's. Thirty years apart, both father and son fall in love with multicultural women who have lived abroad. Newland is enchanted with Ellen's exotic apartment where he admires French, Greek, and Italian art, drinks tea in Japanese cups, and smells "the scent of some far-off bazaar, a smell made up

of Turkish coffee and ambergris and dried roses" (46). Whereas Newland suppresses his desire for "the strange foreign woman" (16), his son marries Fanny, the orphaned daughter of the duplicitous financer Julius Beaufort and his notorious wife, who has lived in Istanbul, Russia, and Buenos Aires. The narrator suggests sexual emancipation as New Yorkers in the 1920s are too busy with "reforms and 'movements'" (223) and do not have time to investigate Fanny's dubious past as they did Ellen's. Dallas' New York, however, may not be entirely new after all; although he follows his heart, he is not totally liberated from Old New York as he marries a wealthy white American woman.

Overall, Newland's feelings for both May and Ellen are not natural but discursive as he fancies eloping with his fiancée, like the characters in the novels, and kisses Ellen's palm as if he kisses a relic. His doomed love reveals how educated and upper-class American men in *fin-de-siècle* New York are sexually repressed, as Ellen remains unattainable. The novel ends not with Dallas but with Newland, who walks alone to his hotel without seeing Ellen in Paris. The image of a solitary man in a novel published in 1920 suggests that the new century has not liberated New Yorkers from strict morality. Both the ill-fated romance of Faust and Marguerite and of Ellen and Newland suggest that happily-ever-after love is not even possible in art. While set in *fin-de-siècle* New York, the novel's publication in 1920 suggests that Old New York haunts the post-World War era as Dallas too is obliged to choose a mate from his race, class, and nationality. Traditional domestic ideology is still predominant in the early-twentieth century as love is confined to conventional marriage. Wharton's novel concludes that love is never natural or innocent but remains a discursive practice that conforms to socially constructed ideologies of gender, class, and nationality.

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## *Notes*

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1. Wharton, *The Age of Innocence* (Ware, England: Wordsworth, 1994), pp. 6–7. Subsequent references cited parenthetically.

2. Wilde, "From the Critic as Artist," in *The Norton Anthology: Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: Norton, 2001), p. 900.

3. Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense," in *The Norton Anthology: Theory and Criticism*, p. 875.

4. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 81.

5. Abu-Lughod and Lutz, "Introduction: emotion, discourse, and the politics of everyday life," in *Language and the Politics of Emotion*, ed. Lutz and Abu-Lughod (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), pp. 1–2.

6. John Dizikes, *Opera in America: A Cultural History* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1993), p. 286.

7. Wharton divorced her husband on the grounds of adultery in 1913 and regarded marriage a social obligation. Despite the social prejudice against divorce, "between 1870 and 1920, the number of divorces granted nationwide increased fifteen fold" and "by 1924 one marriage out of every seven ended in divorce" in the United States (Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, "From 'Domestic Revolutions,'" in *The Age of Innocence: Complete Text with Introduction, Historical Contexts, and Critical Essays*, ed. Carol J. Singley [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000], p. 343).

8. Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (New York: Palgrave, 1989), p. 13.

9. Dizikes, pp. 285.

10. Dizikes, pp. 216.

11. Carol J. Singley, "Introduction" to *The Age of Innocence: Complete Text with Introduction, Historical Contexts, and Critical Essays*, p. 3.

12. Dizikes, p. 216.

13. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2004), p. 16.

14. Ruskin, "The Nature of Gothic," in *Unto This Last and Other Writings*, ed. Clive Wilmer (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 100.

15. de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism Semiotics Cinema* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 13.

16. Nancy Bentley, "'Hunting for the Real' Wharton and the Science of Manners," in *The Age of Innocence: Complete Text with Introduction, Historical Contexts, and Critical Essays*, p. 426.

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18. Ada Van Gastel, "The Location and Decoration of Houses in *The Age of Innocence*," in *The Age of Innocence: Complete Text with Introduction, Historical Contexts, and Critical Essays*, pp. 318–32; Cynthia G. Falk, "'The Intolerable Ugliness of New York:' Architecture and Society in Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*," *American Studies*, 42 (Summer 2001), 19–43; Ann Jacobsen, "Edith Wharton's Houses Full of Rooms," *Women's Studies*, 44 (June 2015), 516–36.

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25. Maureen Montgomery, "Edith Wharton: Narrating the Past," *Edith Wharton Review*, 26 (Fall 2010), 11–15.

26. Mintz and Kellogg, pp. 338–44.

27. Elizabeth Ammons, "Cool Diana and the Blood-Red Muse: Edith Wharton on Innocence and Art," in *The Age of Innocence: Complete Text with Introduction, Historical Contexts, and Critical Essays*, pp. 393–403; Judith P. Saunders, "Becoming the Mask: Edith Wharton's Ingenues," in *The Age of Innocence: Complete Text with Introduction, Historical Contexts, and Critical Essays*, pp. 404–08; Kathy Miller Hadley, "Ironic Structure and Untold Stories in *The Age of Innocence*," *Studies in the Novel*, 23 (Summer 1991), 262–72; Evelyn E. Fracasso, "The Transparent Eyes of May Welland in Wharton's 'The Age of Innocence,'" *Modern Language Studies*, 21 (Fall 1991), 43–48; Margaret Jay Jessee, "Trying it On: Narration and Masking in Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*," *Journal of Modern Literature*, 36 (Fall 2012), 37–52; Ira Halpern, "Secret Love, Private Space, and Inner Sanctuary: The Concealed in *The Age of Innocence*," *Explicator*, 73 (April-June 2015), 133–36.

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31. Helena Michie, "Victorian Honeymoons: Sexual Reorientations and the 'Sights' of Europe," *Victorian Studies*, 43 (Winter 2001), 230, 234.

32. Dizikes, p. 37.

33. Freud, "The Uncanny," in *The Norton Anthology: Theory and Criticism*, pp. 929, 933.

34. Anneleen Masschelein, "A Homeless Concept: Shapes of the Uncanny in Twentieth-Century Theory and Culture," *Image and Narrative*, 5 (2003), n.p.

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37. Colomina, "The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism," in *Sexuality and Space*, ed. Colomina (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), p. 85.

38. D. A. Miller remarks in *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1989), pp. viii–ix, that the Victorian home, a "less visibly violent [mode] of 'social control,'" was as repressive as the law enforcement: policing moved "into the closet—I mean, into the private and domestic sphere on which the very identity of the liberal subject depends. Though ordinarily off-limits to the police, this sphere is nonetheless, I argue, a highly active site for the production and circulation of a complex power [. . .]."

39. Falk, p. 33.

40. Singley, "Bourdieu, Wharton and Changing Culture in *The Age of Innocence*," 517: "The Metropolitan Museum of Art was one of many museums founded after the Civil War by a handful of artists, writers, merchants, lawyers and financiers inspired by a combined love of the arts and sense of civic responsibility. Incorporated in 1870, it opened in Central Park in 1880 [. . .]. The Cesnola collection, named for Luigi Palma di Cesnola, an Italian-born, Civil War Brigadier-General, consisted of some 6,000 Cypriot objects that he acquired while serving in the Turkish consulate after the war. The collection was purchased by the museum in 1872 and was placed in the grand hall. Cesnola was the museum's first director."

41. Belli, Harré, and Iñiguez, "What is Love? Discourse About Emotions in Social Sciences," *Human Affairs*, 20 (2010), 253.