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The Depiction of the Changing Consciousness of Women in Three Novels of the Turn of the Century

(Proměny vědomí žen ve třech románech z přelomu století)

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně a pouze na základě uvedených pramenů a literatury.
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(I declare that the following MA thesis is my own work for which I used only the source and literature mentioned.
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(I have no objection with this MA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.)

Abstract

The aim of this work is to document how the substantial change in the social status of women that took place at the turn of the twentieth century is reflected in three novels of that period, The Portrait of a Lady by Henry James, The Awakening by Kate Chopin and The House of Mirth by Edith Wharton, and in the lives of the authors. The essential and common themes of these texts are marriage and motherhood, the two institutions which reflect the most the changing consciousness of women. The historical background of the period provides evidence for the division of roles in the marital institution, which was strongly established in the preceding centuries, and for the unequal position of women in general, resulting from the male superiority, mostly fortified by men's financial dominance. The heroines, akin to the authors, come from the upper or upper-middle classes which were the most active in the feminist movement because these classes had time and education to assess the situation and propose transformations. Art and sexuality are in various ways essential to the process of self-realization. The creative and sexual drives can be both an opportunity for a woman's liberation as well as an incentive for rejecting to submit to men that is enforced by men's habit of collecting works of art (inclusive of women) or their lust (Gus Trenor's claims on Lily or less explicitly, Goodwood's passionate good-bye kiss). As Elizabeth Ammons pointed out, the historian Eileen Kraditor had observed that for privileged American women by the end of the nineteenth century "[t]he issue of abstract equality had been settled, and the debate now concerned the *meaning* of equality."[1] The attempt at actualizing the desired independence is central to the three female protagonists of the above-mentioned works. On the one hand, Lily Bart, Isabel Archer and Edna Pontellier reject the role that is prescribed for them by society; on the other hand, none of these has a clear vision of what she wants instead. They face a two-fold conflict of social and personal character: they have to fight against the conventions, the general rejection of their conduct, and at the same time they balance constantly between the excitement of the new prospects and the doubts about the future course of their actions. This very uncertainty, together with the social pressure and inflexibility, leads to their tragic ends. In other words, the idea of an independent woman is entirely new to the woman herself as well as to the society, which strongly opposes such a concept and does not allow any place for a person who disclaims her role.

[1] Elizabeth Ammons, Conflicting Stories: American Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 5.

CONTENT

1 Introduction

I intend to analyze in this study the depiction of the changing consciousness of women in three novels of the turn of the century[1], The House of Mirth by Edith Wharton, The Portrait of a Lady by Henry James and The Awakening by Kate Chopin. My focus is the changing perception of the institution of marriage and motherhood, although I also touch upon other issues, such as the meaning of social classes, race, setting, place of origins, art and sexuality, which all play a significant role in transmuting comprehension of the marital bond. The choice of the three specific literary texts has been made upon two criteria: the theme of the novels and the gender of the authors. Most importantly, the works were selected for their treatment of marriage. The common underlying feature of this union is its obligatory character (it was supposed to represent to women the highest achievement of their ambitions), which makes it the most restrictive bond for a woman's freedom – intellectual, emotional as well as material. Matrimony is captured in each text from a different perspective and thereby the three novels provide an overall picture of what wedlock meant to a woman at the end of the nineteenth century and in what ways a woman at the beginning of the new century endeavored to break its limitations. The order of the novels is not chronological in terms of the date of publication, but rather, it is determined by the way each depicts marriage. In this fashion the three novels create a line of the process of facing the requirement of marrying and the roles following from it, illustrating the initial, premarital position, then the moment of entering marriage full of ideals and lastly, the effort at freeing oneself from the confinement of the institution.

The first chapter is dedicated to Lily Bart, the heroine of The House of Mirth, who faces the inevitability of entering wedlock. To get married means for her to secure her future because, without succeeding in making a match, there is no chance at a life for her – as is confirmed at the end of the novel. Lily represents pre-marital life, which is also partly described in The Portrait of a Lady. In this case, the reader encounters Isabel at the point when she has decided never to marry (unlike Lily who fully accepts the necessity of doing so) and she enjoys rejecting very prosperous proposals. Surprisingly, however, she marries in the course of the novel and the central motif becomes the realization of her mistake of confusing her romantic ideas with the reality of the limiting nature of the union. The last novel to be discussed in this work does not directly addresses the premarital phase of a woman's life, but describes in depth the heroine's attempt at freeing herself from the restrictions of marriage. In

[1] The term "turn of the century" denotes roughly the period between the years 1880-1910.

The Awakening, Edna takes the most radical steps towards liberty, which in the end prove as unsuccessful as Lily's constant postponing and Isabel's determination to never marry. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper" is briefly discussed in connection with the last novel for its presentation of the reaction of the husband to his wife's behavior. In each of the three stages – premarital, entering marriage and the realization of its limitations (which the heroines endeavor to contradict) – the woman must confront the opposition present in her surroundings.

Apart from the central marriage of the heroines, each novel depicts several other unions in order to exhibit its various forms. For example, the Trenors in The House of Mirth manifest the standard principle of a man earning money and a woman organizing the display of his success (including herself); the Ratignolles in The Awakening embody the perfection of roles division; the Dorsets in The House of Mirth, and the Geminis and the Merles in The Portrait of a Lady, point out the disguised, but quietly-assented-to disruption of marriage by frequent adulterous affairs; and the Touchetts in The Portrait of a Lady present a total failure of the union demonstrated by permanent separation. These malfunctioning matrimonies symbolize the absolute deficiency of such an artificial institution and justify indirectly the heroines' striving for an alternation of such a destiny.

The theme of the liberating attempts of the heroines is closely linked to the social developments of that period. Janet Beer and Elizabeth Nolan remark that "this was the era of the 'New Woman': she rejected traditional stereotypes of woman as delicate, passive and domestic; she demanded, and began to move towards obtaining, education, careers, dress reform and suffrage."[2] The notion 'New Woman' has been invented by sociologists and other theoreticians at the end of the nineteenth century to characterize the new social phenomenon of a woman who refuses the traditional domestic roles. "Borrowing the term from Henry James [significantly the only male representative studied in this thesis] and intending by it to evoke his image of female independence and rebellion, [the historian Carroll] Smith-Rosenberg uses *New Woman* to describe a specific group of privileged white women."[3] The three novels accordingly, by focusing on a typical woman from the upper or upper-middle class, overlook to a large extent the working classes, yet each hints at its existence. The most is revealed by Edith Wharton, who paints the conditions of the laborers after Lily is abandoned from the leisure class. Similarly, race is not dealt with in detail it only operates as

[2] Janet Beer and Elizabeth Nolan, "Contextual Overview," Kate Chopin's The Awakening: A Sourcebook, ed. Janet Beer and Elizabeth Nolan (London: Routledge, 2004) 5.
[3] Elizabeth Ammons, Conflicting Stories: American Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 7.

the background of the stories. The lower class is just an instrument for the heroines to be able to care for nothing else than their own freedom.

Male dominance in all fields is obvious for the lack of training for women and thus their constant incapacity to compete with men. This separation of spheres was, however, attacked with increasing vigor towards the turn of the century, when, supported in all directions by the feminist movement, women decided to take part in "[…] the territory of Art – powerful, difficult to negotiate – that in western culture had been defined and staked out by white privileged men as their own."[4] Elizabeth Ammons studies thoroughly a group of seventeen women writers, among them Kate Chopin and Edith Wharton, who were determined to rival male writers. In her book Ammons takes into consideration the unconventional lives of the writers (only three of them stayed in their marriage and when Kate Chopin and Edith Summers Kelley, who had many children, are excluded, the remaining fifteen women produced four children all together), while concentrating on their determination to become artists. Yet even Ammons, with her specific focus on women, notices "that Myra Jehlen argues that generalizations about women writers need constantly to be tested against writing by men, since after all 'women cannot write monologues'"[5] because the world is composed of both sexes and thus by separating women from their male counterparts, the unequal picture, exactly in the same way as when only men are represented, is projected. Consequently, Henry James is included in this work, on the one hand, for this very balance of showing both sides of treating one theme; on the other hand, for his indirect influence on the restrictions of Edith Wharton's career. Wharton was for a long time in his shadow and dismissed on the grounds of gender discrimination by literary critics for the resemblance of their topics.

Although this work is specifically oriented at the close reading of the texts and finding evidence for the meaning of and attitude towards marriage in the three novels, the historical development of the feminist movement together with feminist criticism cannot be disregarded. Without the social struggle for the change of women's positions, male writers would not have concentrated on heroines whose lives according to the nineteenth-century standards were rather insipid. Significantly, the fact that Henry James, who is considered to be one of the best American realist authors, wrote about women confirms the importance of the historical events that were shaping the society and the literary texts produced in this period. The two female writers discussed in this study were not active in the feminist

[4] Ammons 10.
[5] Ammons 12.

movement, nor were they calling for the rights of women, unlike Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who argued "that genuine literary value is inseparable from 'social' value"[6]; but they both pursued art as a vocation and a means of self-expression. Each lived a rather unconventional life for that time – Wharton divorced without children, Chopin was widowed and even with six children never remarried – but both were still able to provide for themselves sufficiently. Moreover, without feminist criticism the works of Kate Chopin and Edith Wharton might have remained in oblivion. Disregarding the various reactions towards the two novels in their time, both texts were dismissed in the first half of the twentieth century. The House of Mirth, after the positive reception by the contemporary readers and critics, was discarded as a novel of manners, a genre that was poorly appraised by the American literary critics, and The Awakening, which was rejected from the very moment of its publication for its depiction of fallen morals, might have remained unnoticed by the next generations, if it had not been rediscovered by the feminists. I will try to prove in my study the importance of these texts for the next generations, not only for their direct contribution of depicting the process of the changing woman's position in society and its hardships, but also for their influence on the following generations in terms of the art of literature.

[6] Beth Sutton-Ramspeck, Raising Dust: The Literary Housekeeping of Mary Ward, Sarah Grand and Charlotte Perkins Gilman (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004) 32.

2 Historical Background

A quick glance at any anthology of American literature published in the first half of the twentieth century illustrates clear male dominance; there are only a few renowned women writers in comparison with the male representatives. Female authors have always had a harder time gaining recognition and to most writers they represented "what Nathaniel Hawthorne infamously called the 'damned mob of scribbling women' whose bestselling, sentimental trash kept him and other serious male artists from finding readers and buyers."[1] Women's works were not taken seriously even after the increased force of the feminist movement. The academic ground was predominantly male and it has been argued that:

> the national literary canon fashioned by the first generation of academic professionals in the 1920s, and therefore destined to shape the field for half a century, was resolutely white and masculine. Thus even as writers such as Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, and Jessie Redmon Fauset were crowning their careers […], powerful forces had been set in motion in the academy to scatter, trivialize, and finally to bury them. Not until the profession of professor in the United States opened up at least a little to people of color and white women in the 1960s and seventies would the model drawn in the reactionary twenties begin to receive widespread, revisionary scrutiny.[2]

This tendency of disregarding the high literary achievements of women affected, as mentioned above, the recognition of the two female writers discussed here. The accompanying component of this male-orientated attitude towards literature is the narrow depiction of female characters in most works of the literary history up to the nineteenth century. Josephine Donovan in her essay claims that "women in literature written by men are for the most part seen as Other, as objects, of interest only insofar as they serve or detract from goals the male protagonist."[3] In majority of the literary works they personify the decorative or, to the contrary, destructive element. Both the scarcity of appraised women writers, more precisely the disregard of their abilities, and the flat portrayal of heroines, is tightly linked to the position of women in society. In this way the turn of the twentieth century, witnessing the peak of the feminist movement's activity, culminating in 1920 when the suffrage to women was granted, recognizes strongly "that male dominance means women's silence and that society can no longer afford to neither hear nor heed the voice of

[1] Elaine Showalter, "The Female Frontier," The Guardian 9 May 2009, 27 Mar. 2010 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/may/09/female-novelists-usa>.
[2] Elizabeth Ammons, Conflicting Stories (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 17.
[3] Josephine Donovan, "Beyond the Net: Feminist Criticism as a Moral Criticism," In: Twentieth-Century Literary Theory: A Reader, ed. K. M. Newton (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1993) 264.

half of humanity."[4] The literary works of this period both of women writers and men writers pay attention to female protagonists and their newly shaped desires.

Although the process of gaining the right to vote took thirty years, gradual changes in women's situations were occurring, which were supported by the industrialization that provided new job opportunities for women who as a result obtained the prospect to become more independent. The novels reflect women's quest for freedom at the time when they were still limited by and judged by the conventions of the old order of things. In other words, the literature of this period depicts the struggle of women to defend their new rights, their equal right to independence, against the society, which persistently presses them to their former dependent positions. The authors present different stories of women of various backgrounds, largely of the upper class, and in diverse situations, but all with the common obligation of marriage that is expected from them despite their opposing desires. At the turn of the century women's perception of the institution of marriage entirely transforms. Marriage no longer symbolizes the wished-for achievement in which the maturing girl finds the security of her future life; to become a wife signifies no more the highest accomplishment and the fulfillment of a woman's life. Women begin to realize their own potentials (outside the domestic environment) and they aspire for the possibility of self-expression, either through their own way of thinking, art or an affectionate relationship that is in the period ruled by the focus on appearances almost diminished – certainly it is not the principle of marriage. The nineteenth-century model of matrimony for the new woman epitomizes the limitation of her individuality that she begins to understand, that she wishes to develop and that she refuses to subordinate to her husband any longer.

The heroines of the three novels analyzed in this work deal with this new dimension of freedom in different ways and the loss of it implies devastating consequences to them. Either like Lily Bart they accept the necessity to marry, but they strive to postpone it for as long as possible; or like Isabel Archer, the young ladies decline very prosperous proposals for the sake of liberty, which is "as yet almost exclusively theoretic"[5], but nevertheless appealing to the highest degree. The novels of the turn of the twentieth century also portray how the desire for independence influences already married women, such as Edna Pontellier, who having an adulterous, not based-on-love affair outside marriage, exercises her freedom to its fullest by moving away from her family to live by herself. Lastly, the woman affected the most by the

[4] Dale Spender, "Women and Literary History," The Feminist Leader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism, eds. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1989) 32.
[5] Henry James, The Portrait of a Lady (London: Penguin Books, 1986) 217.

limits of marital status is the narrator of Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper", who loses her sanity after being deprived of any remnants of liberty by being restrained to four walls and no activity. The literary picture of such a female protagonist emerges from the changing status of women that was being achieved by the feminist movement.

2.1 Feminism

"The Woman Movement by the turn of the century, in addition to having yielded some socially and politically influential organizations and symbols […] was stimulating a new literature in America. In the imaginative realm, fiction about the New Woman burgeoned"[6]. A brief history of feminism illustrates the development of the process of women's struggle for their equal place in the society, subsequently in literature, beginning with the women's rejection of the domestic roles, fighting for their right to be formal members of the society, up to their equal rights for education and job positions. Feminism, the contest for women's equality, is founded on "the belief in the social, economical and political equality of the sexes."[7] Throughout history, women worldwide were, and in many parts of today's world still are, confined to the domestic environment and denied the rights of men, such as education, writing or voting. Up to the nineteenth century, the protest against the unequal position of women was small and scattered, only in the 1840s did the women in America start to stand up for themselves more collaboratively and their efforts culminated in the first Women's Rights Convention in 1848 in Seneca Falls. The first feminist movement related itself to the right of education and voting, which were the privileges of the upper-class men, thereby ignoring the conditions of lower-class women, exactly like the literature portraying the personal struggle for woman's rights. Likewise the feminists did not pay attention much to the black people's situation. At first, the two groups had worked together, supporting each other in the debates; however, when the African-Americans were given the right to vote in 1870 and after women's petition to be included in the 15th Amendment was rejected, the cooperation fell apart, as former slaves formally became equal members of the society, superior in their rights to women. Literature, mirroring the events of this period, in the majority of cases treats the two groups utterly separately (either the literary text is concerned with the struggle of a white woman, leaving the representatives of other races in the

[6] Elizabeth Ammons, "Edith Wharton's Hard-Working Lily: *The House of Mirth* and the Marriage Market," The House of Mirth: Authoritative Text Backgrounds and Contexts Criticism, ed. Elizabeth Ammons (New York: W. W. Norton and company, 1990) 346.
[7] Laura Brunnell, ed, "Feminism," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2010, Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, 28 Mar. 2010 <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/724633/feminism/216004/History-of-feminism>.

background, or in an opposite manner, the story is fully concerned with the situation of the minorities, disregarding the situation of white women). Only in 1890 did some states grant suffrage to women, yet only after thirty more years in 1920, the right to vote for women was extended to the whole country by the 19th Amendment to the Constitution. After this significant achievement, however, the women's movement silenced itself and its tendency was toward regression in the direction of domestic life once again. The weakened feminist effort also affected literature in the way that the above-mentioned male dominance was not being contradicted in their judgments, thus often forming biased opinions about women's writing, which was the case of Edith Wharton and Kate Chopin, who were rejected for decades. Only in the 1960s and 1970s a noticeable activity targeted at the women's status in the society commenced again.

This new revival of women's striving for equality is called the Second Wave of Feminism, "gaining momentum as issues of unequal pay for men and women, unequal access to managerial jobs and other aspects of gender inequality and sex discrimination became national issues."[8] The concern of the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s was focused on the civil rights of women; nevertheless, in a similar way to the ignorance of the earlier feminists, the second-wave activists in advocating their further rights did not take much notice of the situation of minorities. As Hill Collins pointed out, women of color have not felt as "full participants in white feminist organizations,"[9] despite – as Pamela Aronson noticed – "these organizations' claims that their concerns are universal to all women."[10] Regardless this exclusion within the movement, the revitalized incentive gave rise to the foundation of many women's associations, women's studies programs were started up by many universities and the debate was not only oriented on the present-time situation but also looked back and tried to identify the reasons for the gender distinction as such. The expansion of feminist ideology onto the academic ground during the second wave of feminism gave rise to feminist criticism, concerned with the influence of the male-dominated culture of the past (and unquestionably still of the present) on literature. The rise of feminist criticism was caused by the awakened fascination for literary criticism as a whole.

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[8] Lois Elfman, "A Second Wave of Feminism," Diverse: Issues in Higher Education, a CMA publication, 5 Mar. 2009, 24 Mar. 2010 <http://diverseeducation.com/article/12354/a-second-wave-of-feminism.html>.
[9] Patricia Hill Collins, Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness and the politics of empowerment (New York: Routledge, 1991). Quoted in Pamela Aronson, "Feminist or "Postfeminists"?: Young Women's Attitudes toward Feminism and Gender Relations," Gender and Society, Dec. 2003: 907.
[10] Pamela Aronson, "Feminist or "Postfeminists"?: Young Women's Attitudes toward Feminism and Gender Relations," Gender and Society, Dec. 2003: 907.

2.2 Feminist criticism

"The second-wave feminist movement […] adopted [The Awakening], rediscovering its powerful theme of a woman's search for self and quest for autonomy."[11] The role of feminist criticism in the process of advocating for women's equality is essential for its achievement in enriching literature with works by female writers that were otherwise absolutely dismissed by the majority, as is clearly documented in the case of Kate Chopin. Literary critics decide what literature should be like and they select its representatives, thus forming the literary canon. Each critic concentrates on different themes or aspects of a text and therefore, each criticism brings new findings, just as it overlooks other things. This explains not only the authoritative construction of the canon, but also the various omissions that are consciously made by one group, yet complained about by another. An example of such a one-sided selection is the exclusion of women's literature. Elizabeth Meese draws conclusions about literary authorities from Leslie Fiedler's comment on the process of selecting the representative texts:

> "literature is effectively what we teach in departments of English; or conversely what we teach in departments of English is literature. Within that closed definitional circle, we perform the rituals by which we cast out unworthy pretenders from our ranks and induct true initiates, guardians of the standards by which all song and story ought presumable to be judged." The effects of this kind of exclusion are transparent: it places literature almost entirely in the service of white, male elite culture….[12]

It is obvious that choosing particular literary texts over others from the enormous production of world writers is to a certain degree arbitrary, appointed only to "superior" individuals; therefore, it permanently alternates as the social situation, which it reflects to a certain extent, changes.

> […] The institutionalization of American literature at the university level took place at the turn of the century; and […] the authority over what was worthy and 'best' passed out of the hands of readers, who were chiefly women, into the hands of a new, expanding, highly ambitious 'professional' professoriat, which was overwhelmingly white, male, and middle to upper-middle class.[13]

With men dominating the literary field, there was no room for women, either as critics or as studied writers. Dale Spender recounts her personal experience how her ideas about literature were shaped in a gender-based way during her university studies: "For my introduction to the

[11] Janet Beer and Elizabeth Nolan, "Contextual Overview," Kate Chopin's The Awakening: A Sourcebook, ed. Janet Beer and Elizabeth Nolan (London: Routledge, 2004) 11.
[12] Elizabeth A. Meese, "Sexual Politics and Critical Judgment," Twentieth-Century Literary Theory: A Reader (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1993) 273.
[13] Ammons, Conflicting Stories 16.

'greats' was (with the exception of the famous five women novelists) an introduction to the great men. Even in the study of the novel where women were conceded to have a place, I was led to believe that all the initial formative writing had been the province of men."[14] The inadequate attention that was paid to women resulted in shaping two main subjects of interest of feminist criticism, particularly strong in the second half of the twentieth century.

These two approaches can be identified in connection with the feminist survey of the male impact on literature: the portrayal of women and the position of women writers in the literary tradition. Elaine Showalter specifies these two varieties of feminist criticism:

> The first type is concerned with *woman as reader* – with woman as the consumer of male-produced literature, […] its subjects include the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconceptions about women in criticism, and the fissures in male-constructed literary history.[15]

This kind of feminist literature is concerned with concrete pieces of writings as products, which express and present biased ideas about women and their place in the society. Josephine Donovan explains in more detail the limitations of the depiction of women caused by male ignorance of a woman as a full character, as pointed out above, arguing that "[s]uch literature […] denies her essential selfhood…."[16] Feminist criticism complains about the narrowed picture of women in male-dominated literature.

At the same time, feminist critics with their close attention to the portrayal of women also concentrate specifically only on a certain class of women, as pointed out above, overlooking the other characters: servants, in some cases black, nurses, governesses – "figures that have often remained consigned to the background of discussions of feminism and psychological analysis."[17] The notion of conscious selection for the purpose of making one's point is in this way more than evident; male critics of the past were interested in the writings of men, because the society was correspondingly structured. There were clear cultural definitions of the position of a man and a woman: the intellectual head of the family takes care of it, whereas his wife is in charge of the household and children (there are alternations of this concept in the different classes; an upper-class woman is relieved of the domestic services because her husband can afford servants and governesses, yet she is still expected to fulfilled the social duties, such as entertaining the socially influential guests). A woman is

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[14] Spender 21.
[15] Elaine Showalter, "Towards a Feminist Poetics," Twentieth-Century Literary Theory: A Reader, ed. K. M. Newton (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1993) 268.
[16] Donovan 264.
[17] Barbara Johnson, "Is Female to Male as Ground Is to Figure," Theory into Practice, ed. K. M. Newton (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1992) 223.

stripped of any access to other forms of self-realization, except the domestic sphere, which is illustrated in the case of Lily Bart, who is kept in complete ignorance of the business world and therefore unable to function by herself. The roles were strictly distributed and thus the life of a woman was not of much interest to male writers, yet this completely changes at the turn of the century when women began to realize their restrictions. Returning to the example of Lily Bart, the very fact that she attempts to take action and try to provide for herself, although assisted by a man, makes her experience unique and interesting. This is also proven by the male representative, Henry James, who concentrates in his writing on the destiny of a young woman and thus gives evidence of this shift in the perception of women's lives and new ways of thinking. Although Henry James cannot be reproached for the shortcoming in the depiction of a female character because, as I have already argued, it is rather the shortcoming of the past, the second focus of the feminist criticism can be surely detected when comparing the three writers. To return to Showalter:

> The second type of feminist criticism is concerned with *woman as writer* – with woman as the producer of textual meaning, with the history, themes, genres and structures of literature by women. Its subjects include the psychodynamics of female creativity; linguistics and the problem of a female language; the trajectory of the individual or collective female literary career; literary history; and, of course, studies of particular writers and works.[18]

This part of the movement is concerned with the literary canon, which it, unsurprisingly, finds unsatisfactory; because when the feminist critics started to point out the male dominance, the canon had fully lacked any women writers, except for Jane Austen, who deserved her inclusion by her undeniable achievements and her firm place in the Victorian Age literature. Showalter further identifies three phases of women's literature: Feminine, Feminist and Female; "during which women first imitated a masculine tradition (1840-80), ["the distinguishing sign of this period is the male pseudonym"[19]], then protested against its standards and values (1880-1920), and finally advocated their own autonomous, female perspective (1920 to the present)."[20] These three stages of women's writing evolution document well the development of women's self-consciousness; throughout the progress of their writing they felt more secure and that is why they gradually moved from only imitating the male authority to an articulation of disagreement and arrived lastly at the point when they dared to express their own ideas.

[18] Showalter, "Towards a Feminist Poetics" 268.
[19] Showalter, "Towards a Feminist Poetics" 270.
[20] Ross C Murfin, "What is Feminist Criticism?," The House of Mirth, Edith Wharton (Boston: Bedford Books, 1994) 395.

"[…] Serious women writers at the turn into the twentieth century were determined to invade the territory of high art traditionally posted in western culture as the exclusive property of privileged white men."[21] The subject of art is treated in all four works, including Gilman; however, there is a clear distinction in the way it is viewed by the female writers and the male author. Wharton, Chopin and Gilman portray art as an important element in the process of awakening of their heroines. While Lily still takes a rather passive approach to art by placing herself in the society as a "thing" to be admired; Edna and most vividly Gilman's narrator identify art as a fundamental tool of their expression and self-realization. In the initial phase of Edna's awakening, art strengthens her mentally by providing her with an occupation of her own. Simultaneously, it also supports her financially. Lily also has an ambition, or more precisely, a dream to be creative – she fantasies about opening her own millinery where she would design beautiful hats – but contrary to Edna, she never even gets close to the realization of her wish because she is halted at the very beginning by her manual incompetence. In contrast, Isabel Archer does not produce art in any way: she becomes a part of Osmond's art collection. Henry James presents art as a male domain. Each man in the novel, when giving Isabel a tour of his house, shows her his gallery, for men are the collectors who judge art. The male author does not really perceive the obstacles women authors have to face, therefore art is not depicted as an essential component of Isabel's self-realization; by contrast, the female authors react in their writing to the limitations established by male social dominance and must constantly oppose this reality by making art vital aspect of women's independence.

As can be seen from the historical account of the changing position of women, for the most of the past centuries women were made utterly dependent on men and only recently the strong feminist movement has accomplished securing at least a partial equality for women. The only way for women to assure their existence was by entering into the institution of marriage, not founded on mutual liking, much less on love, but rather on the conventionality of the wedlock. The only "property" of women in most cases was their physical appearance that was the only commendable quality of theirs in order to prosper in finding a good match. The meaning of marriage for a young girl is portrayed in the most detailed manner (from the three literary texts I discuss) in Edith Wharton's The House of Mirth, in which the old and new ideas clash, and the struggle of a young lady in between the social pressures and one's desires and aspirations is described – a novel to which I will now turn.

[21] Ammons, Conflicting Stories 5.

3 The House of Mirth: "Isn't marriage [a woman's] vocation?"

Edith Wharton's The House of Mirth, published in 1905, "was planned as a full-scale study of contemporary life, a realistic, even sensational, presentation of the hidden world of the rich." [1] The novel depicts seventeen months in the life of its heroine, Lily Bart, who is twenty nine and endeavors to establish herself comfortably in the upper-class society by means of finding a rich husband. Regardless of her being brought up in the belief that marriage is her only duty, Lily attempts to oppose such social predestination by not falling for any proposal by a wealthy man. In the end, she is nevertheless conquered by her surroundings, when left alone without any future ahead. Lily is a member of the elite society not because she is rich, on the contrary, throughout the novel she faces serious financial problems; yet, "there was room for her, after all, in this crowded selfish world of pleasure whence, so short a time since, her poverty had seemed to exclude her."[2] Her membership is granted due to her beauty, but this makes her position unstable. Lily must please her prosperous friends in order to receive expensive dresses that she can then display; simultaneously, she is dependent on her wealthy relatives for money, so that she can take part in the immoral entertainments (from the point of view of the traditional segment of the upper class) such as playing bridge. Her situation is even more difficult due to the collision of values in the changing structure of the society: the old order with its traditions and conventions is disrupted by the invaders with their millions that they want to show and enjoy. This outline of the story points out the main themes, such as marriage and gender roles in connection with class division, that determine a young woman's life and her endeavor for freedom. I will also address motherhood in relation to the leisure and working classes because a mother-child bond is fundamental for the better future that Edith Wharton hopes to outline as the necessary alternative in order to enable women to find some other more solid and independent purpose of their lives.

3.1 Beauty as the only asset of a young woman

Edith Wharton's original title for the novel, "'A Moment's Ornament,' captures the decorative role that a beautiful, wealthy woman played in Lily Bart's era as well as the brevity

[1] Millicent Bell, "Wharton as Businesswoman: Publishing *The House of Mirth,*" The House of Mirth: Authoritative Text Backgrounds and Contexts Criticism, Edith Wharton, ed. Elizabeth Ammons (New York: W. W. Norton and company, 1990) 315.
[2] Edith Wharton, The House of Mirth (New York: Penguin Books, 1993) 50.

of her reign."[3] The second intended name 'The Year of the Rose' also refers to the limited time that a woman is given in the society to arrange her destiny. Both notions – "moment" and "year" – anticipate the fact that time plays a significant role in the story. Lily enters the society when eighteen years old and the story captures her when she is turning thirty, the age when she "sees eligible 'girlhood' slipping into spinsterdom and faces the impending destruction of her beauty by physical encroachments of adulthood – not simply the aging process, but also anxiety, sexuality, and serious work."[4] During the seventeen months the reader observes Lily, she changes. While at the beginning of the story, Lily seems confident, well-aware of her beauty and role in the society, gradually, as her financial situation gets worse, she pays a great deal of attention to her looks and worries about every wrinkle until at the end she loses control over her life and fails to find a place for herself.

The extraordinary beauty of Lily Bart is acknowledged immediately in the first paragraphs, when the reader is informed that the surrounding "dinginess [of the railway station], the crudity of this average section of womanhood made [others] feel how highly specialized she was."[5] At the age of eighteen "she [makes] a dazzling début fringed by a heavy thunder-cloud of bills"[6], but her perfect entry into the society lasts only one year, when it is interrupted by the bankruptcy of her father. After his death, she lives two years with her mother, who reminds Lily constantly of her beauty and who values this attribute; "as though it were some weapon [… she wants] to instil into the latter a sense of the responsibility that such charge involved."[7] Lily in conformity with her training rejoices at any opportunity "of displaying her own beauty under a new aspect: of showing that her loveliness was no mere fixed quality, but an element shaping all emotions to fresh forms of grace."[8] Mrs. Bart dies mentally ruined, because she cannot accept the dinginess that she hates and against which she always warns Lily, but which, after losing her money, enters her life. "Determined to survive where her parents had perished, Lily has a single course open to her: she must make the marriage for which she has been groomed and for which she is so well qualified by her beauty and charm."[9] Lily, financially supported by her aunt, finds a place for herself in that particular

[3] Melissa McFarland Pennell, Student Companion to Edith Wharton (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003) 77.
[4] Elaine Showalter, Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 90.
[5] Wharton 5.
[6] Wharton 30.
[7] Wharton 34.
[8] Wharton 131.
[9] Diana Trilling, "*The House of Mirth* Revisited," Edith Wharton: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Irving Howe (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1962) 108.

society, yet she is tolerated only as long as her fortunate marriage is awaited and consequently, this position is threatened concurrently with her aging and the narrowing chances to marry.

3.2 The lost self

"To be a woman […] is an art that involves being what one is not […] the nature of woman is defined precisely in terms of being something *for others*."[10] The pressure on a woman to be an ornament of the society, to embody the ideal that is set by the society, overshadows a woman's own character. Lily is a perfect example of this confusion and the way Selden perceives her shows that a woman is not understood. The best example of the confusion between the reality and the pretence is illustrated in the *tableaux vivants*, where Lily greatly enjoys her part because she can personify the ideal beauty and be substituted for it. Selden demonstrates the perfection of Isabel's mystification when he falsely thinks that in the performance he for the first time "seemed to see before him the real Lily Bart"[11]. Wharton analyzes the problem of the lost self that arises from the immense expectations the society places on women. The heroine does not, however, substitute only her self, but often Lily "permits the pleasing aesthetic *appearance* that she can give a situation to substitute for its reality."[12] Lily for a long time avoids seeing the truth about her unsettled affairs and those misconceptions of reality characterize the best the tragedy of the heroine. Her environment strips her completely of any self and her intention to please everyone destroys every bit of her real nature.

Although Lily looks for a husband she needs in order to continue the leisure life, she is not too worried; she flirts and does not want to give up her joys. She tries to resist the unwritten social norms, which bothers her. As she complains to Selden, admiring his apartment, "How delicious to have a place like this all to one's self! What a miserable thing it is to be a woman."[13] But the time runs and she becomes aware of the fact that her beauty is not eternal and even more pressing is her financial situation. Step by step, because of her attempt to maintain at least at a certain portion of freedom, she loses the support of her rich and traditional old aunt and in this way, under the pressing conditions, Lily permits even the thought of marrying Rosedale, the one she already refused and whom she dislikes greatly.

[10] John Goode, "Woman and the Literary Text," The Rights and Wrongs of Women, eds. Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (London: Penguin Books, 1976) 225.
[11] Wharton 135.
[12] Cynthia Griffin Wolff, "Lily Bart and the Beautiful Death," In: The House of Mirth: Authoritative Text Backgrounds and Contexts Criticism 326.
[13] Wharton 7.

"With that decision, even though the marriage never comes to pass, we see that Lily has been forced, finally, to give up all ambition for independence; the social system has triumphed."[14] Lily sees that there is no other way for her future than to marry, which is, however, by now no option for her because her reputation is damaged and no man is willing to unite with her (except for Rosedale under a condition that Lily morally refuses). Gilman explains in her work on women's roles that "failure to marry is held a clear proof of failure to attract, a lack of sex-value. And, since [women] have no other value, save in a low order of domestic service, they are quite naturally despised."[15] Lily plays her role well at the beginning, when she is so close to marrying Percy Gryce, but she deviates from the conventional course of a woman's life by meeting with other man, especially with Selden, and therefore she loses her "value". Lily, failing in both classes (with no opportunity to marry and incapable of any craft, which she tries after her expulsion from the leisure class) is left with no future, the only solace that is left to her is the chloral, which brings her the final rest.

3.3 Leisure class – the constrictive paradise

The House of Mirth, tracking Lily's life, mirrors predominantly the upper class, "the world of privilege and decorum"[16], in which Wharton herself grew up and which she knew best. The elite operate on the basis of the leisure principle that according to Thorstein Veblen connotes "That time is consumed non-productively (1) from a sense of unworthiness of productive work, and (2) as an evidence of pecuniary ability to afford a life of idleness."[17] In accordance with this rule there are only small hints toward any kind of labor performed by the leisure class; the idea of toil is carefully abandoned and money-making is a vague concept, not discussed publicly. Meaningfully, New York is the setting of the novel, because "it had the feeling of gross and blissful and parading self-indulgence. It was as if self-indulgence whispered to you that here was its true home; as if, for the most part, it was here secure."[18]

Wealth is taken for granted; however, there is a difference between the old and new New York: the old, traditional families, in which property is inherited from one generation to

[14] Elizabeth Ammons, "Edith Wharton's Hard-Working Lily: *The House of Mirth* and the Marriage Market," In: The House of Mirth: Authoritative Text Backgrounds and Contexts Criticism 353.
[15] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Women and Economics: A Study of Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution (Boston: Small, Maynard & Co., 1898). <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/gilman/economics/economics.html>.
[16] McFarland Pennell 1.
[17] Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1924) 43.
[18] Theodore Dreiser, "[New York]," Sister Carrie: an Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Criticism, Theodore Dreiser, ed. Donald Pizer (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991) 408.

the next, and "the new millionaires […] who had been so fabulously enriched by the business growth following the Civil War."[19] The old families, whose life is based on traditions and principles, inherit money, which they take for granted and effortlessly live on. On the other hand, the newly rich have had a personal experience of earning money and their maxim is a rather simple delight in the fruits of their businesses. Lily is confronted by both worlds; her father was a descendant of an old family, but he was also required by Lily's mother to make more money in the modern world of business opportunities. This collision of money conceptions creates contradictions in Lily's behavior because she is uncertain about the moral code upon which as a daughter from a traditional family she is judged, but which is not followed by the rich people she is encircled by.

> Her rich friends, who use her as a social secretary to write notes and as a blind to shield them from importunate and suspicious husbands, cannot understand the squeamishness which keeps her, at the critical moment, from extracting a proposal from the rich bachelor whom she has not been too squeamish to pursue. Her respectable relatives, on the other hand, of an older society, cannot understand her smoking or gambling or being seen, however briefly, in the company of married men.[20]

The two categories of the upper class are mingling at various parties, balls, travels and visits, and other exhibitions of wealth, but the newly rich must be helped into the closed circle. This is where women like Carry Fisher and later on, Lily as well, make a living; accompanying the rich pairs and acquainting them with the well-known and established. The task of introducing those who gained their property from modern industry businesses is, however, not easy and not without the risk of losing one's credit, as is the case of Lily when she works for Mrs. Hatch. "Compared with the vast gilded void of Mrs. Hatch's existence the life of Lily's former friends seemed packed with ordered activities."[21] This complaint of Lily refers to the clash of the two groups that form the upper class in New York in the early twentieth century.

Edith Wharton portrays these contradictions that are fatal to Lily and satirizes the conduct of the members of the upper class. The division of the leisure class that is at the turn of the century at its highest but that will melt later under the power of money victimizes the orphaned Lily, who without any parental guidance, must judge every step she makes. Lily was instructed by her mother as any young woman of that period to adapt to everything that is required from her, so that she impresses the crowd, especially its masculine half, yet at that

[19] Louis Auchincloss, "*The House of Mirth* and Old and New New York," In: The House of Mirth: Authoritative Text Backgrounds and Contexts Criticism 316.
[20] Auchincloss 317.
[21] Wharton 276.

moment of history this adaptation to the social requests demands decisions that Lily is incapable of making. Her self is suppressed in the same way as the self of Pansy Osmond in The Portrait of a Lady, who does everything only to please the others and who never stands for her own desires. The effacement of a young woman's character leads to her being inferior in terms of her will and her exposure to being taken advantage of.

3.4 The baseness of luxury

Lily is left alone in this ruthless society with her mother's sole advice to make use of her beauty in order to find herself a solid place in society and to avoid the awful dinginess, symbolized by everything outside the leisure class. Lily tries her best; she is incredibly apt at adjusting herself to any situation.

> On the surface she perfectly embodies society's ideal of female as decorative, subservient, dependent, and submissive; the upper-class norm of the lady as a nonassertive, docile member of society. But only on the surface. In fact Lily has merely learned to suppress and camouflage her own impulses and ambitions.[22]

Lily was educated to please the society, specifically men, because to become a wife is her only vocation.

Lily, disregarding her will to be a part of the upper class, does not idealize it, she views it as a "great gilt cage in which they were all huddled for the mob to gape at. […] Most of the captives were like flies in a bottle, and having once flown in, could never regain their freedom."[23] She understands that the upper class is a spectacle for the lower class, which is proven by the talk in the millinery and even more confirmed by Nettie's confession that she has "always thought of [Lily] as being so high up, where everything was just grand."[24] Everything is a kind of a performance, but under the harmonious surface, various discrepancies go on, which are more or less the outcome of the profitable marriage without any affection. The story overflows with adulterous affairs, carefully hidden, but simultaneously known about by the whole society (usually with the exception of the ones affected by it). This is the case of Bertha and George Dorset. Lily is even used by Bertha to cover up for her affair and to distract George. The most vulgar and simultaneously the most fundamental sexual behavior of a married man towards another woman is the episode when Gus Trenor attempts to seduce Lily. Her naivety brings her into a tricky position – she is

[22] Ammons, "Edith Wharton's Hard-Working Lily: *The House of Mirth* and the Marriage Market" 349.
[23] Wharton 54-55.
[24] Wharton 312.

actually bought by Mr. Trenor, who stands up for his rights by explaining to Lily that "the man who pays for the dinner is generally allowed to have a seat at table."[25] Lily's ignorance of the business world, caused by the male dominance that does not allow for women to handle serious matters, results in her doom; she blindly attempts to make money, but it is misunderstood and instead of a sheer bargain, she ends up selling herself; consequently, she loses, rather guiltlessly, her reputation.

The reader follows the growing exploitation of Lily by the society. First, she serves the purpose of ornamenting her hosts' houses; later, she can also be useful to those who newly enter the society, and lastly, she becomes the object of the ill social talk and the target of scorn for her "immoral" behavior. In spite of the fact that it is only a game for the rich because their own conduct is much worse and Lily is rather a victim, the society dictates the rules. Lily's flaw is that she cannot speak for herself. Mrs. Peniston, Lily's aunt, representing the old New York, clarifies the verdict, when she troubles herself with the gossip about her niece. "It is horrible of a young girl to let herself be talked about; however unfounded the charges against her, she must be to blame for their having been made."[26] Lily's hard situation, founding herself constantly between what she must do and what she might wish for, does not matter because in compliance with Mrs. Peniston's principles she always has to foresee the consequences. According to the moral code of Mrs. Peniston, Lily is the one to blame for the exclusion from the upper class, the only sphere in which she can function. Her desire for at least a small portion of freedom, lightheartedness and naivety, along with outer circumstances, force Lily to decline from the privileged group and to try to become a member of the working class.

3.5 Working class – the exploited humanity

The working class is not totally excluded, however, it is dealt with only on the surface in comparison with the detailed picture of the leisure class and it serves rather to the purpose of showing Lily's decline on the social ladder than seriously considering the problems of the lower class. There is a constant reminder, however slight, of the working class throughout the novel. Although Lily is accepted as a member of the upper class, from the first chapters it is apparent that her situation differs from that of the rich. She enjoys traveling to the country-houses, attending balls, wearing rich dresses and other leisure activities, except that Lily

[25] Wharton 145.
[26] Wharton 127.

experienced the bankruptcy of her family and "the last asset in [her] fortunes, the nucleus around which [her] life was to be rebuilt"[27] is her beauty. This unstable characteristic qualifies her to savor the advantages, but the position it grants her is tinged by her dependence. After ten years "in bondage to other people's pleasure [she is] considerate of those who depended on hers, and in her bitter moods it sometimes struck her that she and her maid were in the same position, except that the latter received her wages more regularly."[28] The conditions of the life of upper-class women and of working-class women cannot be compared on the material scale, but the degree of mental exploitation might be considered in some cases identical. Lily's empathy for the lower class foreshadows the course of her descent and gradually, while following the heroine, the reader encounters briefly the working class.

At first, the workers are presented only by means of quick glimpses, such as Lily's dishonest deal with Mrs. Haffen, who personifies the base need to make a living in any possible way, laying aside any morality. At the same time, the bargain points out to the need for self-centered fighting for one's place in the society, when the letters conceivably might serve as a ground for blackmailing or dishonoring their authors. The letters throughout the whole novel epitomize Lily's moral conflict with her unscrupulous surroundings, but also her irresoluteness to take action. Later on, when Lily obtains money, she visits the Girls' Club. Although Lily is not like the others, unconsciously "clad in fine raiment, the work of others' fingers; fed on luxurious viands, the result of others' toil, waited on and tended by the labour of others"[29]; her idea of the workers is indefinite. "She had always accepted with philosophic calm the fact that such existences as hers were pedestalled on foundations of obscure humanity. […] But it is one thing to live comfortably with the abstract conception of poverty, another to be brought in contact with its human embodiments."[30] The only definition of anything opposite to what she shall achieve is expressed by the word "dinginess" against which Mrs. Bart cautioned her strongly.

The final encounter with the working class is when Lily meets Nettie Struther, a woman from the Girls' Club. The visit in Nettie's apartment and the hearing of her life story with the happy culmination has a profound effect on Lily. She is extremely perceptive after her own unsuccessful experience as a hat-maker and her realization of the absolute loneliness

[27] Wharton 34.
[28] Wharton 27-28.
[29] Olive Schreiner, "Sex-Parasitism," In: The House of Mirth: Authoritative Text Backgrounds and Contexts Criticism 294.
[30] Wharton 150.

(in terms of understanding because Gerty who is always there for her can only sympathize with Lily and not comprehend her conflicts). The typist by the short narrative depicts the exploitative nature of the tie between the two classes: the rich and the working people. The upper class not only takes advantage of the products of the workers' toil, but it abuses them as persons as well. Nettie was seduced by her employer and deserted afterwards, which is reminiscent of Lily's own fate. Her beauty, helping with writing invitations and skills in entertaining and establishing contacts were made useful, when profitable, but it is clear that it is not to last very long. Lily's place in the elite is not assured, as mentioned above, and because of her age she should hasten to find a husband and thus "be able to arrange her life as she pleased, to soar into that empyrean of security where creditors cannot penetrate."[31] Lily, however, delays her final consent to get married (by digressing from the proper behavior of a single, religious girl in front of Percy Gryce, who is charmed by her up till then or by refusing Rosedale) because she is "incapable of marrying for money [solely], but she [is] equally incapable of living without it."[32] Lily is aware that there are other ways of living, the nearest example being Gerty Farish, the only devoted friend of hers, but she cannot imagine living otherwise than surrounded by luxuries, and that is why she accepts the role she is supposed to play – to settle herself by means of marrying. She acquiesces with "the future she had chosen, and she was content with it, but in no haste to anticipate its joys."[33] For that reason, she is selective and rejects some proposals at the beginning.

However, Lily "pays for her fastidiousness by finding herself abandoned by the vivid crowd; and she pays for her courtship of the crowd, so carefully taught her by nearly all the conditions of life, by discovering that her independence is only strong enough to destroy her and not to remake her."[34] Lily, by postponing the duty to marry for too long, becomes a bore to the high society and perhaps a threat to the order of things and therefore, she is abandoned. "People were tired of her. They would welcome her in a new character, but as Miss Bart they knew her by heart. […But] she could not figure herself as anywhere but in a drawing-room, diffusing elegance as a flower sheds perfume."[35] Lily voices the fact of her being around for too long to Selden – the one who might have saved her already in the first chapter, but who never takes any resolute step to support her – and thus the mere sigh about the state of things becomes fatal to her future. Despite her acknowledgement of the danger of tiring the elite,

[31] Wharton 49.
[32] Wharton 162.
[33] Wharton 49.
[34] Percy Lubbock, "The Novels of Edith Wharton," In: Edith Wharton: A Collection of Critical Essays 49.
[35] Wharton 100.

Lily loses track of time and while she wants to stay just a little longer independent before she would subordinate to a rich husband, she falls victim to the self-interested society. True to her words, there is nothing new or surprising coming from her – no refreshment to the stereotyped life of the rich and for that reason they can dispose of her.

3.6 Labor – the striving for freedom

Lily knows well that "she was not made for mean and shabby surroundings, for the squalid compromises of poverty. Her whole body being dilated in an atmosphere of luxury; it was the background she required, the only climate she could breathe in."[36] After being abandoned from the privileged class, Lily finds support in the two independent women of the novel, Carry Fisher and Gerty Farish. Carry, divorced and with one child, takes advantage of whatever she can and by serving the rich in making important acquaintances, which allows her to earn a living, she effaces any ambitions of her own. Carry does not lead any life; her seeming independence based on her skill to obtain financial means only makes her wholly dependent on the favors of the wealthy. Gerty Farish, on the other hand, even though living modestly, realizes herself in charitable work. She admires Lily for her beauty and she sacrifices her love of Selden for the friendship with Lily. Gerty is the one person to whom Lily voices all her doubts and she is the one to understand the relationship between her cousin and Lily. In spite of this, "[f]or all the outward freedom, Gerty is hardly a New Woman; and, sure enough, when we enter her vision, she is confirmed as a nineteenth-century saint, with a strength born of patience, self-effacement and renunciation of secret romantic hopes."[37] Although Gerty is independent in terms of living on her own (not dependent on the favors of the rich), she is limited in her way of thinking. Gerty depends on the outer appearance of things and fails to see under the surface. She does not have the slightest idea about other motives for a charity than hers but she has also not experienced Lily's training – to become the rose admired by everyone. To Lily, charitable work is a touch of perfection to her goddess-like nature. As I have already suggested, the nineteenth-century woman of the upper class was trained wholly to please the society and her self was diminished to the extent that the woman did not have any idea of her own desires. To Gerty, Lily represents the most beautiful and pure person in the world but she does not grasp her pretty friend's inner clash of wishing to be independent, yet desire to maintain the high standard of living. Lily Bart, the

[36] Wharton 25-26.
[37] Pamela Knights, "Introduction," The House of Mirth, Edith Wharton ([New York]: Everyman's Library, 1991) xxviii.

heroine of the early twentieth century, is still completely shaped by the ideal of passive femininity, but she dislikes the limits of conventions and she realizes faintly that a woman should be allowed to stand for herself not complying unquestioningly with the dictate of society.

Lily, trying to provide for herself, commences to work in a millinery establishment. She experiences, while "hearing [the co-workers talk about the familiar] names, the seeing the fragmentary and distorted image of the world she had lived in reflected in the mirror of the working-girls' minds."[38] By means of her job she is distanced from the upper class, but not isolated. Lily finds herself on the other side of the social scale and she turns into, or precisely endeavors to turn into, the invisible force that furnishes the wealthy with the items of luxury, with which they are supplying themselves. Despite her effort to integrate herself into the working class (she finds a job and lodges in a boarding house), she is incapable of physical work. Her polished hands were never meant to perform any craft, except for refinement and exhibition. Her elegant nature is horrified by the shabbiness of existence in such a crude environment, full of noise and dirt. Lily learns "by experience that she ha[s] neither the aptitude nor the moral constancy to remake her life on new lines; to become a worker among workers, and let the world of luxury and pleasure sweep by her unregarded."[39] The working class is not dealt with in detail because its harsh life is not a matter of interest to the story. The point Wharton makes by depicting Lily's trying to become the member of the lower class is to show that her dream of an independent designer of fashionable hats is infeasible. Lily at the beginning understands her descent to the millinery as the initial step for her career. "She wants to escape – she wants to govern her own course in life. Her problem is that she is equipped for no life except the one she"[40] has been disciplined for.

Only when with the time passing Lily's clumsiness does not recede does she realize that she cannot endure the grey surroundings and that she does not have the capacity to become the active artist because she has been predestined to be the art itself – the object of admiration. To digress, the idea of liberation by performing art is also pronounced in The Awakening. However, even Edna Pontellier, who is more advanced in her painting than Lily in sewing – she cannot perform the easiest task of making a straight line – does not choose the independent existence of an artist, because she is not willing to part with an aspect important to her life (to Edna, the indispensable aspect is represented by her sexual passion, while to

[38] Wharton 285-286.
[39] Wharton 301.
[40] Ammons, "Edith Wharton's Hard-Working Lily: *The House of Mirth* and the Marriage Market" 350.

Lily, it is the life of luxury). Lily after her job trial realizes that she does not belong to either of the two classes because she is not able to qualify – she does not want to subordinate to the restrictions and immoral conduct of the upper class, yet she does not have the will to live in the shabby environment or the manual ability to progress from it.

3.7 The business of marriage

The working class, which is only roughly delineated in Wharton's novel, as was analyzed above, serves in The House of Mirth as the contrast to the upper class, which is portrayed in great detail. There are several reasons for Wharton choosing the setting of this particular part of the society. First of all, as was said in the introduction, Wharton herself comes from a rich and traditional family, which "lived by a code of decorous reserve."[41] Lily Bart's family background is reminiscent to Wharton's own. Wharton's mother focused on Edith's lady-like behavior and forbade her any unconventional occupation, such as writing and reading romances. "Her parents, like others of their class, lived off accumulated wealth rather than having to labor for an income."[42] The writer was brought up with the objective of being successful in the social world, which meant marrying favorably and gaining good reputation. This expectation of Wharton's parents, against which she had to struggle, presents another topic that she treats in her novel – the marriage business of the upper class. A profitable marriage is the sole aim of a woman's existence.

"The economics of being a woman in Lily's world amount to working as a wife, and working hard, to translate financial power into social power by displaying a particular man's wealth for him."[43] The perfect example of such a woman is Judy Trenor, whose husband makes money at Wall Street, and who makes use of it by organizing various dinners, entertaining in their country house, and importantly by buying expensive dresses, so that she is herself part of the display. The characteristics of the marriage in the upper-class society and the position of a woman in this bond have been studied by many theorists from various perspectives, but they all agree on the motive of such a marriage – business deal, both for women and men. Thorstein Veblen in The Theory of the Leisure Class states that "the ownership of women begins in the lower barbarian stages of culture, apparently with the

[41] McFarland Pennell 1.
[42] Elizabeth Ammons, "Preface," In: The House of Mirth: Authoritative Text Backgrounds and Contexts Criticism vii.
[43] Ammons, "Edith Wharton's Hard-Working Lily: *The House of Mirth* and the Marriage Market" 350.

seizure of female captives."[44] Historically women have always been accepted as the weaker of the two sexes and thus they have been regarded as trophies. The place for a woman has been in the household where she was supposed to serve her husband. With the development of the leisure class a woman was relieved of her domestic services only to perform the elaborate task of being the decoration of her household and of demonstrating her husband's success. Charlotte Perkins Gilman in her work Women and Economics similarly elaborates on the unjustified economic dependence of women on men. Throughout the history the separation of spheres resulted in an impotent woman, who must make everything out of her physical attributes in order to attract her donor, the profit-making man, in order to secure her living.[45] Gilman, however, argues that the concept that a wife earns her right to her husband's wealth is not valid as far as a woman receives her "wages" irregularly.

The elite society of The House of Mirth nevertheless exercises this principle to its full content. There are numerous examples given throughout the novel: the way Mrs. Bart behaves and educates Lily, the separation of roles of all the married couples and most distinctly, the notions of the outsider, Simon Rosedale, who with his money attempts to establish himself securely in the sphere. He plainly tells Lily: "I wanted money, and I've got more than I know how to invest; and now the money doesn't seem to be of any account unless I can spend it on the right woman."[46] Rosedale clearly states how the upper class functions: men make money, but they need women to spend it. Marriage is a contract not based on fondness, as Rosedale concludes his proposal to Lily: "I'm just giving you a plain business statement of the consequences. You're not very fond of me–*yet*–but I'm fond of luxury, and style, and amusement, and of not having to worry about cash. […] What I propose to do is to provide for the good time and do the settling."[47] The expectations of a woman follow from this deal; the husband requires nothing else of her than being the decoration.

3.8 Affectionate marriage, yet thwarted by conventions

"Marriage to Selden, though the two do love each other in some ways, clearly would involve what Lily fears from any prospective husband: proprietorship."[48] From the first chapter, which opens the novel with the very encounter of Lily and Selden, her wish for a heterosexual relationship is articulated clearly. Lily by consciously breaking all the

[44] Veblen 23.
[45] Gilman.
[46] Wharton 175.
[47] Wharton 177.
[48] Ammons, "Edith Wharton's Hard-Working Lily: *The House of Mirth* and the Marriage Market" 352.

conventions of visiting a man alone demonstrates her desire to behave as she feels and not as she ought to. Her motivation is to be able to talk to someone openly, to find a real friend, an aspiration that is constantly repeated by Lily when meeting Selden. His intellectual and external seclusion from the shallow upper class impresses Lily, to whom he presents the individual who is not dictated by the society. Selden is the one who makes Lily to say loud and ponder more about the limits of her position, he is the one with whom she feels the need to justify her quest at finding a husband and he is the reason why she fails to marry prosperously, when being so close to it. At that point it seems that Selden perhaps saved Lily from making a socially good match, but one that would not satisfy her; the readers even get the impression that Selden might represent the ideal husband for Lily. Selden, however, only adorns Lily as an object of admiration, but he does not allow for her inconsistencies and does not accept her need for support through the phase of uncertainty she is facing, because "he would not, in other words, yield to a growth of an affection which might appeal to pity yet leave the understanding untouched"[49]. He is astonished at Lily's beauty that is at its highest during the *tableaux vivants*, only to idealize Lily to such a degree that he cannot allow for any flaw.

Selden admires Lily but he is not willing to take the risk of losing his secured position, which is exactly the peril that Lily involves, as she is an easy target of gossip. Sequentially, when he sees her leaving Gus Trenor's house, he falls easily under the wrong impression that turns out to be fatal for both because it rules out any further possibility of their love. "Selden moves from a totality of adoration to a totality of disdain; and though Lily is, ironically, not guilty of transgression he imputes to her, his capacity for understanding and his tolerance for imperfection is so slight that he is rendered incapable of knowing her true situation."[50] The double measure of accepting his affair with a married woman and reprobating Lily for a sole suspicion of such a relationship makes him no better from the others he despises. Selden realizes his mistake only when it is too late, only underlining the tragedy of Lily's fate. The last conversation is the most revealing and tragic of the whole novel because Lily opens the most to Selden who, however, completely fails in understanding her. His total failure at comprehending Lily is confirmed by his only reaction to her confession of her realization that she "can hardly be said to have an independent existence"[51] and her appeal for support. He asks her whether she is to marry, although this thought makes him nervous, he does not reveal any of this to Lily. Although Selden might have offered Lily a positive future, he is too much

[49] Wharton 153.
[50] Wolff 333.
[51] Wharton 308.

influenced by the society he disapproves of. Moreover, it can be argued that "[n]o doubt Selden, the product of his upbringing and environment just as Lily is, would like to remodel his beloved in the image of his mother."[52] Selden's parents provided him with the example of overlooking the financial matters and still retaining the display. In this manner, Selden appreciates Lily's beauty but he is utterly disregardful of her materialistic concerns because he has the ideal of his mother, succeeding in this image of wealth without struggle.

3.9 Maternal emotions – the wealth of the workers

Lily's journey across the social order symbolically ends shortly after her visit at Nettie, where she for the first time encounters the home of a working-class couple. Lily spent her whole life in the upper-class families concerned only with leisure, which ruled out any domestic labor that was performed exclusively by servants. The shift of all duties to others resulted in the elimination of maternity and the removal of one of the strongest human feelings, maternal affection. Yet in Nettie's kitchen a new dimension emerges,

> Such a vision of the solidarity of life had never before come to Lily. She had had a premonition of it in the blind motions of her mating-instinct; but they had been checked by the disintegrating influences of the life about her. […] Her first glimpse of the continuity of life had come to her that evening. [53]

Nettie's child plays a role of great significance in the moments of Lily's awakening.

"Selfishness and self-seeking is the spirit of the time, and its chilling poison has infected womanhood, and touched even the sacred principle of maternity."[54] Leisure excluded childcare, which is documented throughout the novel, where no children are taken care of. Lily is a grown-up daughter who needs to succeed in the society, and the relation to her mother is reduced to pure instructing in connection with the compulsory triumph. The readers learn at one point that Carry Fisher has children, but due to her busy social schedule, she spends very little time with them. Lastly, there is a mention of Trenors' children, but they are just hushed up from a room, which points to their separation from the life of the adults and the scene rather indicates that their education is handled fully by governesses in isolation from their parents. Symbolically, Lily falls into her eternal sleep with the impression of holding a baby in her arms – a baby from the working class and she feels "a gentle penetrating thrill of

[52] Ammons, "Edith Wharton's Hard-Working Lily: *The House of Mirth* and the Marriage Market" 352.
[53] Wharton 319.
[54] Amelia E. Barr, "Good and Bad Mothers," Kate Chopin's The Awakening: A Sourcebook, ed. Janet Beer and Elizabeth Nolan (London: Routledge, 2004) 22.

warmth and pleasure."[55] The child from a working class fills her with happiness because she understands that only in that class with all the hardship of living the child can find a real home and tenderness, without hypocrisy. More importantly the child signifies companionship, the security that one is not left alone, as Lily, who despite being constantly surrounded by people, never finds a solace in another person. The closest persons are Gerty Farish and Lawrence Selden; however, as I have pointed out already, the first rather blindly admires Lily and does not really understand her, while the latter often confuses Lily with the ideal she wishes to personify.

Ammons wrote, "The House of Mirth does not idealize motherhood per se. It uses an image of motherhood to reinforce its criticism of American marriage, especially in the leisure class, which is so obsessed with producing ornamental wives that the companionate potential of the institution is missed."[56] Up until the visit at Nettie, Lily saw men and women only as business partners, who make a deal, which is convenient for both, exactly as Rosedale explained. Only when hearing Nettie's confession does she comprehend that marriage can also grant trust, support and even love. Nettie's story shows Lily a completely new concept of life and she perceives that "it had taken two to build the nest; the man's faith as well as the woman's courage."[57] Lily learns the true values of life in the place that she, in accordance with her upbringing, feared and strove to escape. Although deep inside, she felt that money is not the only thing needed in order to be happy, she has never been certain what she was looking for. The debates with Selden, the critic of the upper class – who, however, participated in it as well – make Lily to further contemplate her ideas about what else she might achieve, in what ways she might change the route, determined for her in advance, especially by her mother. Unfortunately for Lily the expressed thoughts remain only in words, she never finds any feasible possibility to escape.

3.10 The infeasibility of a young woman's freedom

The title of the novel originates "from a Biblical verse, "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of the fools is in the house of mirth" (Ecclesiastes 7:4)"[58] and it possibly alludes to the foolishness of spending one's life solely in pleasures. In the same line of thought, the name of the protagonist, Lily, was often interpreted in relation to a flower;

[55] Wharton 323.
[56] Ammons, "Edith Wharton's Hard-Working Lily: *The House of Mirth* and the Marriage Market" 356.
[57] Wharton 320.
[58] McFarland Pennell 77.

Ammons refers to another passage in the Bible, "the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin"[59]. Elizabeth Ammons finds the allusion cynical, because the lilies certainly toil and it is "the appearance of carefreeness [which] is one of the things that makes both flowers and beautiful women valuable"[60]. This allusion only confirms the assumption analyzed throughout this work: that women's role in the society was diminished to the sole purpose of "serving" the male half by their beauty or, if lacking this arbitrary quality, by the domestic service. Edith Wharton's task was to reveal the everydayness of the privileged circle of the society, which is falsely admired and seen as the perfect state of being. More significantly she uncovered the subservient position of women, whose only mode of providing for themselves is their physical appearance, after the upper-class society reached the point when any toil had been removed in order for women to fulfill the decorative function of an artistic object. Wharton definitely succeeded in providing the readers even today with the idea of the mechanism that was based on the criteria of gender and on which the society operated. Similarly, as we will observe in the following chapter, Henry James tells the story of Isabel Archer, who has a much clearer idea of her desire for freedom, which is caused, unlike that of Lily's, by her liberal upbringing rather than solely by her personal opposition to the social limitations. Henry James adds to the requirements of women the play of differences between the English conservatism and American liberty of manners.

[59] Ammons, "Edith Wharton's Hard-Working Lily: *The House of Mirth* and the Marriage Market" 348.
[60] Ammons, "Edith Wharton's Hard-Working Lily: *The House of Mirth* and the Marriage Market" 348.

4 The Portrait of a Lady: "There are other things a woman can do"

This chapter is devoted to the novel The Portrait of a Lady by Henry James, the only male author discussed in this work. The book was published in 1881 and it is hence the earliest one from the three texts that deal with the issue of marriage and that are interpreted in this thesis. This part is the longest because it pictures apart from the central matrimonial bond of the heroine several types of other marriages. After the previous chapter that focuses on the restrictive expectations of a young, single woman whose only task is to marry in order to be able to function comfortably in a society, the idea of a life without marriage is introduced here. The young woman's determination to succeed in establishing herself in the society without making a match with a representative of the opposite sex is later laid aside under the illusion of a romantic union that provides her with the certainty of her behavior that she lacks as a single woman. The ideal of this marriage is constantly contradicted by the portrayal of other matrimonies and by the protest of the female protagonist's surroundings, until the false conception of the ideal marriage is proven. The theme of motherhood and parenthood in general is also depicted to a greater extent than it was done in Wharton's novel. Unlike in The House of Mirth, where solely two whole families, the Barts and the Seldens, are mentioned, and only in connection with the personal history of the two characters, not really functioning in the story as such, The Portrait of a Lady depicts the families as an actual sphere. The Touchetts and the Osmonds represent the relationship of parents and their children; and moreover, the situation when a mother is missing and the father becomes the beloved single parent to his daughters is elaborated upon. Whereas Wharton, never a mother herself, does not delineate any parental bond until the very end, when she identifies the continuity of life ensured by affectionate parenthood as the only hope for the future; James portrays various forms of motherhood, yet without any prospect of its ideal version. For these differences, outlined above, this chapter will be continually juxtaposed with the preceding parts of this study in order to point out directly the diversity of treating the same themes. The intention of the constant comparison is to see the similarities that might be the result of the occurring historical shift and, simultaneously, to see whether the differences between the two novels might be explained by the opposite gender of their authors.

"The conception of a certain young woman affronting her destiny, had begun with being all my outfit for the large building of The Portrait of a Lady."[1] Henry James in this sentence sums up his initial thought for the plot, which consisted of the idea of a young woman facing and deciding the future developments of her life. He continued:

> The first thing she'll do will be to come to Europe; which in fact will form, and all inevitably, no small part of her principal adventure. Coming to Europe is even for the 'frail vessels', in this wonderful age, a mild adventure; but what is truer than that on one side – the side of their independence.[2]

Although to travel to Europe does not present anything dangerous in itself, James suggests, it implies a substantial change in the life a young woman. "What it would bring with it was as yet extremely indefinite; but Isabel was in a situation that gave a value to any change. She had a desire to leave a past behind her and, as she said to herself, to begin afresh."[3] For this very reason, the opening of the novel takes place in England and from that point on, the setting is exclusively in Europe – the scene of Isabel's transmutation.

4.1 Setting as the determinant of a young woman's destiny

There is only one flashback, when the narration goes onto the American soil, at the time of Mrs. Touchett finding Isabel in her family house and proposing her a tour to Europe. Nevertheless, America is throughout the text referred to in varied contexts, mostly as the country of origins of the expatriates, the territory of a distinct order of things, both from the positive and negative perspective, depending on the position of the characters. America is the land of free manners, without any restrictions of the society, that are emphasized predominantly by Henrietta Stackpole: without any "arbitrary standards, […Americans] take everything more naturally"[4]; in an opposite manner, it is the capitalist society, for which Caspar Goodwood stands, embodying the things that Isabel is running away from. Lastly, it is the far-away land of exile, the place where Madame Merle, exposed and desperate, escapes to.

The story stretches over the period of six years, during which we observe the alternations in the ideas and subsequently, in the character of the main protagonist, Isabel Archer. As her cousin, Ralph, summarizes, when he meets Isabel after a lapse of time: "The free, keen girl had become quite another person; what he saw was the fine lady who was

[1] Henry James, "Preface," The Portrait of a Lady (London: Penguin Books, 1986) 47.
[2] James, "Preface" 53-54.
[3] James, The Portrait of a Lady (London: Penguin Books, 1986) 86.
[4] James, The Portrait of a Lady 172.

supposed to represent something."[5] The transformation of a young American girl, whose head is full of various images and to whom freedom is the most important thing in her life, into a serious, unhappy woman, living in Europe, yet strongly determined to carry the hardship of her situation, which is the consequence of her naïve beliefs; constitutes the central theme. "Figuratively speaking, the story told in the novel is of Isabel's leaving an American house – a way of life, that is – for a European house. Ostensibly she conceives this as an escape from frustrating and cramping confinement to a fuller, freer, more resonant and significant life."[6] The readers are constantly reminded of the shift in Isabel's personality that is brought up by the new environment by the comments of her compatriots, Henrietta Stackpole and Caspar Goodwood, who follow her to Europe and who are the only protagonists that knew her in the native surroundings. Henrietta, after joining Isabel, is aware of the influence the new scene has had on Isabel. Drawing on her own experience, she insists:

> I've changed the scene too, and the effect of it has been to make me care more for my old associations than ever. It's my belief that the sooner Isabel changes it back again the better. I know her well enough to know that she would never be truly happy over here, and I wish her to form some strong American tie that will act as a preservative.[7]

Henrietta's comment carries a great weight to the rest of the story for two reasons: firstly, she anticipates the future course of Isabel's stay in Europe; secondly, Henrietta schemes to marry Isabel off, introducing in this way the predestination of any pretty young girl, as developed in the previous chapter. Furthermore, Henrietta articulates James's concept of the Puritan America that is confronted by the European strict rules that might lead to the corruption of manners. Yvor Winters generalizes in terms of morality "that the moral sense as James conceives it is essentially American or at least appears to James most clearly in American character; that it can be cultivated by association with European civilization and manners; that it may be weakened or in some other manner betrayed by an excess of such association."[8] The outcome of this deforming influence is embodied in the character of Gilbert Osmond, the American who loses any connection with his land of origins and who is for that reason altered by the axiom of keeping appearances.

James's setting is a whole continent that allows him for generalizations about the conventions of the old world. His interest is in the presentation of the two related nations and

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[5] James, The Portrait of a Lady 444.
[6] Richard Chase, "The Lesson of the Master," Critics on Henry James, ed. J. Don Vann (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1974) 91.
[7] James, The Portrait of a Lady 176.
[8] Yvor Winters, "Henry James' Moral Sense," In: Critics on Henry James 53.

their virtues and vices. Wharton, on the other hand, is devoted to the thorough study of the New York society within which the same conflict of morality and vulgarity takes place, but on a smaller scale in relation to classes, not nations. James does not notice the different morals of a particular class because his primary concern is the difference between the American capitalist society and the traditional European nobility. James alludes to a class division, but the difference between the rich and the workers is not depicted as in Wharton's novel.

4.2 Class division

The topic of wealth is settled from the initial chapters, when the three characters – Mr. Touchett, Ralph and Lord Warburton – carry their discussion over the meaning of affluence, each holding a different view. The old American represents the capitalist idea of "working tooth and nail"[9] to avoid idleness. In contrast, the young nobleman represents the English aristocracy that passes their estates on from generation to generation without any particular toil, except for holding an honorary place in the House of Lords. The conflict between the aristocracy and the capitalist laborers is reminiscent of the clash between the old and the new New York in The House of Mirth, but James pays to this theme only a fraction of Wharton's attention. As Stephen Spender points out, "The morality, which is the true subject his novels illustrate, requires for his purpose an ordered society, an aristocracy, and statesman-like figures commanding positions of power."[10] Apart from introducing the motif of morality, which was outlined above, Spender makes a point about the class of the society the novel deals with, affirming that The Portrait of a Lady ignores the middle and the lower classes.

The characters Isabel encounters in Europe are notably members of the high society because they enjoy the entertainments of the leisure class, such as attending the balls and having open visitation hours, but James does not draw any contrast to their luxurious life as Wharton does when portraying Lily as a worker. Mr. Touchett reveals to Isabel that "it sometimes appears as if the young women in the lower class were not very well treated; but I guess their position is better in the upper and even to some extent in the middle."[11] In one sentence he thus explains the system of the English society, which to James's Americans is quite foreign. Although the class division is depicted in detail in Wharton's New York, James's characters from the new world are not connected with the city that Theodore Dreiser

[9] James, The Portrait of a Lady 64.
[10] Stephen Spender, "The Contemporary Subject," Henry James: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Leon Edel (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963) 109.
[11] James, The Portrait of a Lady 110.

describes as making one to sense everywhere "either a terrifying desire for lust or pleasure or wealth, or a dogged resignation to deprivation and misery."[12] Mr. Touchett explains to Isabel that he "never took much notice of the classes. That's the advantage of being an American here; you don't belong to any class."[13] Isabel, who comes from Albany, and her uncle, who is as "a native of Rutland, in the State of Vermont"[14], are both detached from the social capital. Although the surroundings in which Isabel finds herself are wealthy, she is, as the readers are to find out, quite to the contrary poor; a revelation she makes, like Lily Bart, only after the death of her father.

4.3 The significance of money

Isabel has a very warm memory of her father; even though he was accused of not bringing his daughters up properly, he always tried to provide her and her sisters with an easy life. "Later, when the journeys to Europe ceased, he still had shown his children all sorts of indulgence, and if he had been troubled about money-matters nothing ever disturbed their irreflective consciousness of many possessions."[15] Isabel has in this fashion never been aware of the material concerns and she has never had to face the limits of poverty. Her false idea of poverty is revealed in her debate with Caspar Goodwood when she asserts that she belongs "quite to the independent class. I've neither father nor mother, I'm poor and of a serious disposition; I'm not pretty. I therefore am not bound to be timid and conventional; indeed I can't afford such luxuries."[16] Isabel naively believes what she is saying, but it is unquestionable that without any means she would not be at liberty to do what she chooses. "Isabel is not free because she is poor. She has never, we are told early on, known anything about money, and it is typical of this novel that this fine, romantic indifference to wealth should be one of the basic factors in Isabel's tragedy."[17] Isabel has no concrete idea of the significance of money. Lily, in reverse, has been living many years on the favors of others and she is clear about the power of money. She knows that truth "where a woman is concerned, [lies…] in the story that's easiest to believe. In this case [when the false gossip

[12] Theodore Dreiser, "[New York]," Sister Carrie: an Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Criticism, Theodore Dreiser, ed. Donald Pizer (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991) 409.
[13] James, The Portrait of a Lady 110.
[14] James, The Portrait of a Lady 91.
[15] James, The Portrait of a Lady 88.
[16] James, The Portrait of a Lady 214.
[17] Arnold Kettle, "Henry James: *The Portrait of a Lady*," The Portrait of a Lady: An Authoritative Text, Henry James and the Novel, Reviews and Criticism, ed. Robert D. Bamberg (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1975) 681-682.

about Lily is spread] it's great deal easier to believe Bertha Dorset's story than [Lily's], because she has a big house and an opera box, and it's convenient to be on good terms with her."[18] In the same line of thought, Mrs. Touchett states the power of wealth and the dependency it creates for a receiver of benefits when she tells Isabel after she inherits a great fortune.

> Now, of course, you're completely your own mistress and are as free as the bird on the bough. I don't mean you were not so before, but you're at present on a different footing – a property erects a kind of barrier. You can do a great many things if you're rich which would be severely criticized if you were poor.[19]

In both works money is granted the dominant part and functions as the driving force of the actions. Money represents the primary cause of the downfall of the heroines, psychological in both cases, material for Lily, in the two novels. Although at the beginning fortune seems to be the path to independence (from the submission to men), later being rich makes both heroines susceptible to even more villainous victimization by men (Lily is in fact never rich, but only under the illusion of making profit).

4.3.1 Rich but dependent

The situation of Isabel and Lily is identical because both after being orphaned are taken care of and provided for by a rich aunt. The girls in return are obliged to comply with the wishes and rules of their benefactresses, because as Lily Bart understands her own energy "was restricted by the necessity of adapting herself to her aunt's habits. She saw that at all costs she must keep Mrs. Peniston's favor till, as Mrs. Bart would have phrased it, she could stand on her own legs."[20] Mrs. Touchett informs Isabel in the same sense that: "I shall always tell you, […] whenever I see you taking what seems to me too much liberty."[21] A significant difference in the duties imposed on the girls, emerges from the diverse backgrounds of them: the Touchetts see themselves in a way as teachers of the young American niece, who was brought up in the environment of their youth, so varied from the present European setting. In reverse, there is no such benevolence on Mrs. Peniston's side because Lily was brought up in compliance with habits of the upper class of New York City. The future ruin of Lily is partly caused by Mrs. Peniston's failure to see the shift in demands of the high society.

[18] Edith Wharton, The House of Mirth (New York: Penguin Books, 1993) 226.
[19] James, The Portrait of a Lady 271.
[20] Wharton 38.
[21] James, The Portrait of a Lady 120.

"[Mrs. Peniston] belonged to the class of old New York who have always lived well, dressed expensively, and done little else […] She had always been a looker-on at life."[22] Due to Mrs. Peniston's passive interest in life, Lily was left on her own to the task of "exhibiting" herself to the society and finding a husband. Lily however finds herself in an intricate situation, for although Mrs. Peniston "had all the American guardian's indulgence for the volatility of youth,"[23] she has strongly condemned the entertainments of the new upper class society. Because of this miscomprehension, Lily is disinherited and left completely with very little means for living and with debts to pay. In contrast, Mrs. Touchett comes for Isabel of her own accord (in opposition to Mrs. Peniston, who assents to take Lily only after it is clear that no one otherwise will); therefore, Mrs. Touchett is interested in Isabel and does not consider the custody as an obligation. The new environment provides Isabel with the excuse for her violations of conventions, and it also renders her with the possibility to seek freedom. Isabel is made aware of the importance of money much later than Lily, who after her father's death is for two years constantly reminded by her mother of the necessity to marry in order to avoid shabbiness. "She was beginning to have fits of angry rebellion against fate, when she longed to drop out of the race and make an independent life for herself. But what manner of life would it be? She had barely enough money to pay her dress-makers' bills and her gambling debts"[24]. Lily wholly apprehends that without her aunt's support her life would not fulfill her high standard. Isabel, on the other hand, never really faces the meaning of dependence and the hardship of finding herself without means. As Ralph explains to his father, "Isabel will learn [the meagerness of her finances] when she's really thrown upon the world, and it would be very painful to me to think her coming to the consciousness of a lot of wants she should be unable to satisfy."[25] At the moment, when Isabel is to realize the restrictions of her financial situation, she inherits a large fortune. The deathbed discussion between Mr. Touchett and his son about the will and the division of property signifies the culmination point of the story.

[22] Wharton 37.
[23] Wharton 38.
[24] Wharton 39.
[25] James, The Portrait of a Lady 237.

4.3.2 The treacherous condition of freedom

Ralph "should like to put it into her power to do some of the things she wants. She wants to see the world for instance. I should like to put money in her purse."[26] Mr. Touchett would like Ralph to marry Isabel, but Ralph, although he loves Isabel, opposes this idea. For one, they are cousins and then he is terminally ill, yet he succeeds in "translating his affection into something paternal and fraternal instead."[27] Ralph decides on distancing himself from Isabel to the point that he can observe her course of actions, because he is thrilled at her desires and her will to explore life. Isabel fascinates her cousin with her extraordinary wishes; she rejected two prosperous marriages and now her surroundings are awaiting her career, which to Ralph is based on the unexpected. When Ralph describes the usual track of women's lives, he ironically predicts the "unexpected" course of Isabel's life. Ralph is eager to observe Isabel, who voices such extraordinary ideas, only to be disappointed in the end by her "ordinary" destiny that disastrously corresponds with the general unhappy fate of women. Ralph asserts "that there is nothing [a woman] can do so well"[28] as marrying, but to the very contrary, unfortunately this is the one task at which Isabel (just as Lily) fatally fails. Although each of the two heroines ends up differently, both are hopelessly unhappy. Isabel is confined in a miserable marriage and Lily is left alone, without any bright perspective. In both cases, the ground of the failure lies in money: for Lily, it is the deficiency of it, whereas Isabel's life is ruined because of her immense fortune.

Ralph wants to enable Isabel to be free by providing her with immense means. "If she has an easy income she'll never have to marry for a support."[29] The young sick man articulates the mechanism of marrying, analyzed in the previous chapter, and wishes to save Isabel from the fate of Lily who has "the reputation of being on the hunt for a rich husband"[30]. Ralph is thrilled by the unconventionality of his cousin because Isabel's ideas arouse him from the sluggishness of his own life, limited by invalidity. "Ralph is, as he confesses engagingly – but in view of his feelings poignantly – an Isabel-watcher"[31]: he follows this extraordinary young woman's proceedings. The problem the enthusiastic cousin overlooks is that Isabel does not have a clear idea about what she aspires to do. Isabel declares to Henrietta that she does not have the least idea where she is drifting and that she finds "it very

[26] James, The Portrait of a Lady 235.
[27] Laurence B. Holland, "The Marriage," In: The Portrait of a Lady: An Authoritative Text, Henry James and the Novel, Reviews and Criticism 730.
[28] James, The Portrait of a Lady 203.
[29] James, The Portrait of a Lady 234.
[30] Wharton 45.
[31] Geoffrey Moore, "Introduction," The Portrait of a Lady, Henry James (London: Penguin Books, 1986) 15.

pleasant not to know. A swift carriage, of a dark night, rattling with four horses over roads that one can't see - that's [her] idea of happiness."[32] Henrietta, knowing Isabel best, accordingly recognizes the danger of money, when she warns Isabel that "the peril for you is that you live too much in the world of your own dreams. You are not enough in contact with reality – with the toiling, striving, suffering, I may even say sinning, world that surrounds you.[33] Henrietta, who thus again confirms her role of the cautionary agent of Isabel, perceives Isabel's naivety and her liability to succumb to illusions.

Isabel, on the one hand, "presently made up her mind that to be rich was a virtue because it was to be able to *do*, and that to do could only be sweet. It was the graceful contrary of the stupid side of weakness – especially the feminine variety."[34] Quite in accordance with Ralph's expectations, she appraises the liberty contained within the power of money; her will is absolutely without limits, as far as she can see. Pursuing the one clear actualization of her liberty, she travels all over Europe, accompanied by various persons: at first, although no more obliged, she goes with Mrs. Touchett; at other times, she tours with Henrietta. Her last tour she makes as a single woman; her companion is in a foreshadowing manner Madame Merle. On the other hand, it is after this trip that Isabel gets acquainted intimately with Gilbert Osmond, whom she met before and who was the first one that made her feel it necessary to justify her plans: "You've no respect for my travels – you think them ridiculous. […] You see my ignorance, my blunders, the way I wander about as if the world belonged to me, simply because – because it has been put into my power to do so. You don't think a woman ought to do that."[35] Her debates with Osmond reveal Isabel's uncertainty about her present occupation and she betrays the signs of losing the previous exhilaration of her independence and of the doubts of her further route.

4.4 Marriage – the only achievement expected from a young woman

In the Preface, Henry James informs us that his heroine is to stand against her fate. "Within the macrocosmic destiny of all girls of twenty-three in the 1870s – to get married – there is the microcosmic personal destiny of Isabel, she fears, to fall into the clutches of Caspar Goodwood."[36] Geoffrey Moore in this way identifies the main conflict of the novel: Isabel Archer, like Lily Bart, must cope with the requirement to marry that is expected from a

[32] James, The Portrait of a Lady 219.
[33] James, The Portrait of a Lady 267.
[34] James, The Portrait of a Lady 262.
[35] James, The Portrait of a Lady 358.
[36] Moore 14.

young woman by the society; and moreover, she is indefatigably pursued by her American suitor, from whom she is escaping from the beginning till the very end, because the "thing in the world [she's] fond of [… is her] personal independence."[37] This high esteem of one's liberty also connects Isabel to the heroine of The House of Mirth, but with the difference that Isabel is, when first encountered, resolved never to marry, whereas Lily does not reject this prospect, but rather she entirely accepts her duty to give herself to a husband. Lily just wants to take the liberty to postpone the wedlock for some time. In both cases the outcome is quite contradictory to the original wishes of the heroines: Isabel unexpectedly marries, while Lily lingers too long for being able to make any match.

The heroines' desired freedom is resisted by "one male suitor after another who attempts to capture, clarify and crystallize Lily Bart"[38] and Isabel Archer. No matter whether Simon Rosedale offers Lily the unlimited means she would have at her own disposal, or whether Caspar Goodwood wants to give Isabel freedom that in his view she as a single woman lacks; the men propose to the women confinement in their arms, disguised as their conception of freedom. However, to take what Rosedale and Goodwood offer would mean to accept the complete dependence on them and the need to keep constantly their favor. The very risk emerging from such a proposal is the cooling down of the fascination for the woman or the disillusion as to her true nature, which is exactly what happens in the relationship of Isabel and Gilbert Osmond.

"The main themes indicated in the first chapters [of The Portrait of a Lady] are the importance of wealth, the difficulty of marriage and – fundamental to the other two – the problem of freedom and independence."[39] Clearly the marriage of Isabel is the most essential union in the novel and it is alluded to from the very beginning, when Isabel's sister intimates to her husband that she wants "to see her safely married."[40] Shortly after the topic is repeated, when Ralph asks his mother whether her intentions are to marry Isabel, Mrs. Touchett quickly replies to the contrary: "Marrying her? I should be sorry to play her such a trick! But apart from that, she's perfectly able to marry herself. She has every facility."[41] Regardless of Mrs. Touchett's distancing herself from the prospect of marrying Isabel, the perspective of Isabel entering a matrimonial bond is distinctly defined, only to be sequentially confirmed by

[37] James, The Portrait of a Lady 213.
[38] Frances L. Restuccia, "The Name of the Lily: Edith Wharton's Feminism(s)," The House of Mirth: Complete, Authoritative Text with Biographical and Historical Contexts, Critical History, and Essays from Five Contemporary Critical Perspectives, Edith Wharton (Boston: Bedford Book, 1994) 404.
[39] Kettle 678.
[40] James, The Portrait of a Lady 85.
[41] James, The Portrait of a Lady 98.

Henrietta during the discussion with Ralph, when she claims that "it's every one's duty to get married. […] it looks very exclusive, going round all alone, as if you thought no woman was good enough for you. […] In America it's usual for people to marry."[42] Apart from expressing the convention of marriage, Henrietta also hints at another reason for Isabel's delight at the prospect of leaving the States. The rejection of Goodwood's proposal as the very last act Isabel does before going to Europe only sketches in her yearning for escape the fate that presses on her personified in the figure of Caspar Goodwood; and for remaining single.

Isabel remains true to her desires to see the world and do whatever she wants. She declines two marriage proposals, both considered very fortunate, and in the first volume the world is just open for her to do as she likes. In Volume II her notion of freedom is transformed into the desire of uniting with another person whom she admires. One of "Isabel's reasons for marrying Osmond […] is her ardent desire to enlarge and enrich her experience of life, to grow in wisdom and virtue under the guidance of this most superior of men."[43] Isabel loses her confidence in the course of her independent life and thus the unconventionality of her behavior is disrupted by the news of her engagement that is revealed to us in the conversation with her persistent suitor. On the one hand, the significance of Isabel's wedlock consists in the unexpectedness of the broken conviction on the part of Isabel, who throughout the first volume permanently asserts that she doesn't want to marry. At a glance it gives the impression that she stands up to her words when she declares: "I don't like to have everything settled beforehand, […] I like more unexpectedness"[44]; for this marriage is a shock both to the characters and to the readers. On the other hand, its meaning lies in the consequences of her so surprising a commitment. At first it seems that this particular proposal by the Italian American fulfilled her "belief [expressed at the beginning] that if a certain light should dawn she could give herself completely"[45]. Later it becomes clear that her consent to the matrimony in fact represents the very "ruinous expenditure"[46] she thinks of so lightly, when pondering on marriage that, however ironically, turns into a harsh reality of her life.

[42] James, The Portrait of a Lady 144-145.
[43] Dorothea Krook, "The Portrait of a Lady," In: The Portrait of a Lady: an Authoritative Text, Henry James and the Novel, Reviews and Criticism 718.
[44] James, The Portrait of a Lady 111.
[45] James, The Portrait of a Lady 107.
[46] James, The Portrait of a Lady 106.

4.4.1 Premarital training

Lily affirms that the ruin of her life has originated already when she was still a little child: "the beginning was in my cradle, I suppose – in the way I was brought up, and the things I was taught to care for."[47] Lily conveys the principle upon which women were educated. "Marriage is the woman's proper sphere, her divinely ordered place, her natural end. It is what she is born for, what she is trained for, what she is exhibited for."[48] Lily Bart is the perfect example of such instruction, her mother provided her with no other meaning of her life other than to make a good match, after which everything shall be solved. Isabel does not undergo any teaching of this kind quite to the contrary she perceives that "there are other things a woman can do."[49] Nevertheless, the next girl in the novels, Pansy Osmond, complies with the tendency when while still almost a child, she has a clear idea of the marriage-making. She discusses with Isabel the financial situation of her father, the potentiality that her father terminates her education in the convent and the story of a girl that was taken away from the convent because her parents "wished to keep the money to marry her. I don't know whether it is for that that papa wishes to keep the money – to marry me. It costs so much to marry!"[50] Unconsciously Pansy relates to her father's conception of his daughter's marriage that is supposed to be highly prosperous without any attention to Pansy's feelings. As I argued in the second chapter, the highly specialized premarital training that concentrates on forming a girl into a pleasant, beautiful woman that is willing without any doubts to subordinate to her husband leads to the lost self.

4.5 Social delusion

Apart from Isabel's changed status from the free-minded young woman to an unhappy but proud wife, there are numerous other marriages in the novel, each signifying a lack of transparent motives for the life-time tie between a man and a woman. The presentation of the diverse unions commences with the Touchetts, officially a couple, but practically fully separated; going over the unhappy marriages of young women such as Countess Gemini and Madame Merle, marriages that include adulterous affairs as their indissoluble part; to the

[47] Wharton 216.
[48] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Women and Economics: A Study of Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution (Boston: Small, Maynard & Co., 1898). <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/gilman/economics/economics.html>.
[49] James, The Portrait of a Lady 203.
[50] James, The Portrait of a Lady 367.

scheme of arranging a prosperous wedlock, as in the case of Isabel, but also very clearly in the case of Pansy.

4.5.1 Unequal conditions of marriage

From the very beginning of the novel the questionable nature of marriage is personified by the old couple of the Touchetts. "They display the main outline of its significance, the interconnection of marital and familial, monetary, and aesthetic concerns"[51]. There is no deeper insight into their relationship and the readers are not provided with any details of the incentives that brought them together, except for the information that now Mrs. Touchett

> was virtually separated from her husband, but she appeared to perceive nothing irregular in her situation. It had become clear, at an early stage of their community, that they should never desire the same thing at the same moment, and this appearance prompted her to rescue disagreement from the vulgar realm of accident.[52]

At various points the Touchetts nevertheless comment on matrimonial arrangements in general, and thereby reveal at least to a certain degree their ideas about the reasons for and the function of this particular union.

Disregarding the fact that his marriage was not fulfilled with his wife living in another country, coming to visit him only for one month out of a year, Mr. Touchett's remarks on the institution are valuable and foretelling to the story as such. "The ladies will save us, […] that is the best of them will – for I make difference between them. Make up to a good one and marry her, and your life will become much more interesting."[53] It is evident that to Mr. Touchett a husband and a wife can supplement each other and make each other's life more enjoyable; on the other hand, in the next sentence he adds that Lord Warburton, the English nobleman, must not marry his niece that is coming from America.

> Old Touchett admires and respects Lord Warburton and Lord Warburton's world, while, at the same time, the quite different standards he himself represents […], and the free play of mind and spirit that, with his son, he introduces into that world, constitutes […] an implicit criticism of it.[54]

It might seem to a certain degree strange that Mr. Touchett warns the gentleman at first sight so groundlessly, when his niece has not yet even arrived, but it complies fully with his

[51] Holland 730.
[52] James, The Portrait of a Lady 75.
[53] James, The Portrait of a Lady 66.
[54] F. R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (London: London: George Allen & Unwin, 1962) 164.

convictions. From his further statements, the reader gets the notion that Mr. Touchett is not in favor of mixing the old and the new continent. As he remarks that "she hasn't come here to look for a husband, I hope; so many young ladies are doing that, as if there were no good ones at home."[55] Only later the readers recognize the prophecy of his words, when Lord Warburton in his declaration of love to Isabel confesses: "Of course I've seen you very little, but my impression dates from the very first hour we met. I lost no time, I fell in love with you then."[56] Mr. Touchett predicts not only Lord Warburton's falling in love with Isabel; he also points out the distinctions still maintained between the natives of the two countries. Isabel "feels very deeply the attraction of the aristocratic standards. But she feels also the limitations of Warburton and his sisters"[57]. It is the American free mind that is common to Mr. Touchett and Isabel, and that makes them different from the European setting. Later, even more importantly, Mr. Touchett unconsciously forecasts Isabel's destiny in connection with marriage, when discussing at his deathbed the matters of his inheritance.

Equally, Mr. Touchett's wife takes great interest in her niece's matrimonial prospects; however, Mrs. Touchett stands for the convenient marriage that is based on mutual advantages. To her, Lord Warburton would be a good match for Isabel because of his fortunes. Because Mr. Touchett dies before Osmond enters the scene, we never learn about his opinion of him, but because he foreshadowed already at his deathbed the danger of fortune-hunters, it might be expected that he would, in this case, agree with his wife. Mrs. Touchett warns Isabel about the distorted nature of her union, when "people usually marry as they go into partnership – to set up a house. But in your partnership you'll bring everything."[58] She tries to talk Isabel out of her false illusion that by marrying Osmond she does a good deed by providing this noble spirit with the means he lacked throughout his whole life. Mrs. Touchett believes that Isabel "ought to marry some one of whose disinterestedness she shall herself be sure; and there would be no such proof of that as his having a fortune of his own."[59] Not only does Mrs. Touchett bring to light the conceivable motivation of the marriage, but she also vocalizes the chance that Isabel's wealth shall serve to young Pansy Osmond. Because "having no fortune she can't hope to marry as they marry here; so that Isabel will have to furnish her either with a maintenance or with a dowry."[60]

[55] James, The Portrait of a Lady 68.
[56] James, The Portrait of a Lady 158.
[57] Kettle 681.
[58] James, The Portrait of a Lady 385.
[59] James, The Portrait of a Lady 325.
[60] James, The Portrait of a Lady 326.

Mrs. Touchett touches on issues that were essential for that time: that the marital union is never separated from financial conditions of the partakers.

Mrs. Touchett is close to the idea of Gilman, who also classifies marriage as a "partnership," but each looks at it only from one perspective: Mrs. Touchett sees the inequality of the marriage in Isabel bringing all the financial backing, not very much pondering on the reversed situation, when the man is the one having all the money. Mrs. Touchett herself probably lives on the riches of her husband because, although her family background is not mentioned, her dowry was probably not so big as to furnish her for the rest of her life and there is no mention of her working. Furthermore, by giving thought to the fifteen-year-old Pansy's dowry, Mrs. Touchett pronounces the social expectation that a young girl's greatest ambition consists in the act of finding a prosperous husband. "Where young boys will plan for what they will achieve and attain, young girls plan for whom they will achieve and attain."[61] Mrs. Touchett identifies the danger that Isabel is one part of Osmond's plan to marry Pansy prosperously. By stressing the importance of financial provision of brides, Mrs. Touchett implies the situation of Lily Bart, who being poor must make the most of her beauty – the only property of hers. The experience of the old woman is to be appreciated only towards the end, when Isabel finds out for herself that she was really married for her money and that Pansy was certainly concerned in the scheme as the person who shall profit by the fortune brought by Isabel.

Mrs. Touchett's thinking of the financial inequality is one-sided. She considers it to be wrong when a woman brings a much bigger fortune to her married life but she does not oppose the fact that the woman is afterwards fully economically dependent on her husband. In other words, she accepts that a woman should have a good dowry in order to be considered a suitable match for a rich husband, so that he can provide for her for the rest of their lives. In reverse, Gilman, who does not ponder on the possibility of a woman having a greater property than a man, criticizes the idea that wives earn their right for their husbands' money through domestic services. "Their labor is neither given nor taken as a factor in economic exchange. It is held to be their duty as women to do this work; and their economic status bears no relation to their domestic labors, unless an inverse one."[62] Gilman disproves of the idea of partnership in marriage because it is not founded on any rules. A wife is absolutely dependent on her husband's will to give her money and he decides the amount. Mrs. Touchett, although correctly capturing the falseness of Osmond, accepts the husband's financial superiority.

[61] Gilman.
[62] Gilman.

Mrs. Touchett, admitting her economic dependence, is lucky because her husband is a free-minded American intellectual who allows for their separation. Countess Gemini, Osmond's sister, whose husband is an Italian count who gambles and has no manners, embodies the disastrous consequences of a woman's financial insufficiency. The Geminis clearly dislike each other but the Countess depends on her husband materially and apart from her adulterous affairs, there is no chance of another life for her. "The Countess Gemini, though, so well done, is a weakness in the book in the sense that she is too simply there to serve as a piece of machinery."[63] She hints from the beginning that the marriage between Osmond and Isabel is going to be difficult because her brother "is very hard to satisfy."[64] At the same time, she is sure that her own husband is much worse and she considers Isabel's situation to be better than hers. "She's more fortunate than I! I'm as unhappy as she - I've a very bad husband; he's a great deal worse than Osmond. And I've no friends. I thought I had, but they're gone."[65] Her own ruinous situation might be the cause why she does not prevent such an unhappy marriage when knowing all the time about the trickery of Merle (a fact of which, however, the reader is unaware until the moment Isabel learns about it and which overall is a part of James's plan for the shocking disclosure). Countess Gemini plays a rather unimportant role during the whole novel: she symbolizes an unaccomplished marriage, filled by adulterous affairs, of which infamous stories accompany her everywhere; only to clarify at the end the fall of Isabel – her victimization for the very instrument that was supposed to set her free. This figure, not very likeable, is the one to shed light on Isabel's case by pronouncing her "a woman who has been made use of."[66]

4.5.2 The illusive happiness of a union

The critics admit that it is difficult to explain Isabel's sudden decision to marry Osmond; nevertheless, a certain pattern of her course can be detected in this unexpected act. Isabel intimates to Ralph that "a large fortune means freedom, and I'm afraid of that. It's such a fine thing, and one should make a good use of it. If one shouldn't one would be ashamed. And one must keep thinking; it's constant effort. I'm not sure it's not great deal happiness to be powerless."[67] The very freedom she spoke and dreamed of, appealing

[63] Leavis 168.
[64] James, The Portrait of a Lady 322.
[65] James, The Portrait of a Lady 504.
[66] James, The Portrait of a Lady 593.
[67] James, The Portrait of a Lady 274.

although "almost exclusively theoretic"[68] , makes her unsure. After the first shock and fear of the vague, Isabel indeed begins to value her inherited fortune exactly in the way Ralph expected her to do, as the medium through which she can be free. "The world lay before her – she could do whatever she chose. There was a deep thrill in it all, but for the present her choice was tolerably discreet; she chose simply to walk back from Euston Square to her hotel"[69] unattended. However, her cousin did not take into account Isabel's consciousness. She enjoys the travels only up to the time when they begin to lose the quality of discovering something new and unknown. Isabel becomes "afraid of the uncompromising passion of Caspar Goodwood, afraid of escaping from that passion into the eligible embraces of Lord Warburton, afraid of the money that is meant to set her free. She sees in fear, the burden of wealth."[70]

Besides her "fear of freedom," Isabel wishes to do something useful with her money and she discerns this desire to be embodied in Gilbert Osmond – "a man who has borne his poverty with such dignity, with such indifference. Mr. Osmond has never scrambled nor struggled – he has cared for no worldly prize."[71] Isabel recognizes in Gilbert Osmond the next mission of her liberty, because by being rich she can fulfill her "only ambition – to be free to follow out a good feeling"[72] and marry a poor man. Her idea of freedom in this way corresponds to Gilman's declaration that "the mercenary marriage is perfectly natural consequence of the economic dependence of women."[73] The excitement of being freed from the very necessity to marry for money makes Isabel forget that money might prove a strong attraction to her suitors. She is so fascinated by Osmond's unique character that she fully accepts everything he says. Osmond assures Isabel of his pure motives and he himself talks about the illusion that he might be marrying her for money that diminishes any slightest doubts Isabel might have had after all the criticism from her relatives. "Freedom to Isabel and Ralph (for he has been as much concerned in the issue as she) has been an idealized freedom."[74] The opposition Isabel faces with regard to her engagement in fact makes her decision irreversible, because doing something of her own will and contradicting everyone bestows her the much valued feeling of freedom, yet it only brings her to unhappiness and confinement that she could not even imagine.

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[68] James, The Portrait of a Lady 217.
[69] James, The Portrait of a Lady 373.
[70] Judith Woolf, The Major Novels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 48.
[71] James, The Portrait of a Lady 397.
[72] James, The Portrait of a Lady 397.
[73] Gilman.
[74] Kettle 683.

"It is Ralph, finally, who empowers her flight and in doing so draws the attention of the hunters."[75] The inherited money meant to safeguard Isabel's freedom causes in the end her imprisonment. Although Osmond does not marry her solely for her fortune, it is of great importance in their match. Isabel during their courtship charms him by her beauty and character. He is astonished by her unconventionality and he realizes that "it would be proper that the woman he might marry should have done something of that sort"[76] , like rejecting a proposal by an English lord. This very quality that is so appealing to him at the beginning, however, becomes the reason for their alienation because Osmond begins to feel the superiority of Isabel's mind. He discerns the strong capacity of her ideas before the marriage, but he is sure that he can erase them, only to find out how much he erred. "In particular […] it is impossible for her not to express her opinions about the degenerate morals of fashionable Roman society in which her husband chooses to live; and since he identifies himself with the values of that society, it is unavoidable that her criticism should be implication be directed also against him personally."[77] Isabel is free by her origins because she has been taught to say what she has on mind. Osmond, although he was also born in America, has lived most of his life in Europe, thus separated from his native country and therefore not affected by it. He dislikes Isabel's free-mindedness and her confidence at expressing her opinions.

Eventually, however, as Gass wrote, "[a]s Osmond's wife, Isabel recognizes that she is a piece of property; her mind is attached to his like a small garden-plot to a deer park."[78] James skips the first three years of their marriage, about which only scattered information is given, avoiding thus the supposedly happy first years of the lovers, only to bring the readers to the present situation, in which the discord of the couple is self-evident. The discord of their minds becomes apparent after the charms of courtship dissolve; Osmond as the typical husband expecting his wife to subordinate entirely to his habits of living and even thinking despises of Isabel's strong personality.

4.5.3 Prosperous marriage

The first scene occurring after the leap of three years meaningfully depicts young Ned Rosier confessing his love for Miss Osmond to Madame Merle and it is the most essential episode of the novel because, although it might be passed unnoticed at the first reading, it

[75] William H. Gass, "The High Brutality of Good Intentions," In: The Portrait of a Lady: an Authoritative Text, Henry James and the Novel, Reviews and Criticism 710.
[76] James, The Portrait of a Lady 354.
[77] Krook 712.
[78] Gass 710.

reveals the motives for the intrigues played on Isabel Archer and in general, the business of marriage. Mr. Rosier falls in love with Pansy Osmond, the sweet daughter of Gilbert, and the person to whom he confides his liking is the very ambiguous Madame Merle, who was so eager for Mr. Osmond to marry Isabel. Although according to Madame Merle Isabel has no influence who Pansy will marry, later she is the one held responsible, by Osmond and Madame Merle, for the failure of marrying Pansy to Lord Warburton. "Her own ambitions and desires, like Isabel's, are channeled, by the plot she does so much to instigate, into the prospects for Pansy's marriage."[79] Madame Merle, who as James wished her, gives the impression of "her profundity, her self-control, her regard for appearances"[80], had failed thoroughly in her life. Not only was her marriage of which the readers know very little unsuccessful because she had an adulterous affair with Gilbert Osmond; but she was also made to deny the role of motherhood by social convention, when she rather chose to keep her reputation than to destroy her marriage and become a dishonorable mother.

From the first encounter Gilbert Osmond stresses that he has an idea what his daughter should be like: obedient without a word of opposition, exactly as he would want Isabel to be. He fails to perceive that Isabel "from her own childhood has put such a high value on personal liberty"[81] and that there is no feasibility for her to change. To the very contrary "Pansy, his child, never had the chance to grow up as a person"[82], most of her comments are restricted to the overall conviction that she is to do nothing else than to please her papa. Osmond controls her life altogether, each step she is to take is on his command. This condition is not questioned at the beginning, when he is to decide whether her education at the convent is to be finished or continued, because at that time she is still a child, but with the progress of the years, Pansy should mature. Yet Osmond, "who held her by the hand when she was in her sixteenth year and told her to go and play"[83], does not alter his view of her. Even when the prospect of her marriage presents itself as a proof of Isabel's approaching adulthood he utterly dismisses her inner feelings and acts only of his own accord. Ned Rosier is next to nobody in his eyes, although Isabel clearly likes this young gentleman, whereas the much older English peer, who could rather be Pansy's father and for whom she feels no affection, represents to Osmond the ideal man his daughter should marry. Isabel is not to meddle with his resolution

[79] Holland 735.
[80] Henry James, "Appendix: From The Notebooks of Henry James," The Portrait of a Lady (London: Penguin Books, 1986) 641.
[81] Woolf 47.
[82] Adeline Tintner, "The Museum World," Henry James: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Leon Edel (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963) 144.
[83] James, The Portrait of a Lady 404.

but she is to act in harmony with what he tells her, and therefore she, as the person who once refused the English suitor and now "must have a great deal of influence with him"[84], shall enforce that Lord Warburton marries Pansy.

As Holland notes, speaking about Isabel, "The plot has created a situation which complicates the relation between her roles as wife and parent and her relation with her former suitor"[85]. Isabel has to clarify first the relationship between her and Lord Warburton, a relationship that has never been transparent after she declined his proposal. Regardless of her initial doubts she comes to enjoy the promise of pleasing her husband by managing the marital affair. Her ardor at the vision of doing something for her husband last just to the point they confront each other. Osmond, too disgusted by Isabel's originality that he is no longer able to see clearly, ends up taking everything she does or says as an opposition to him. Isabel, despite her persuasion, cannot comply with her husband, yet she acts on the outside as if obeying him. It is obvious, however, that she is interested in what Pansy wants and consciously does not force her into changing her mind. Although Isabel plays a double game, she cannot be accused of any treachery. She only secretly wishes to prevent another unhappy marriage: because neither Lord Warburton, whose aim is to be near Isabel, nor Pansy, whose motive is solely the desire to please her father, wants to marry out of the fascination for the other.

4.5.4 Conventions versus fascination

The Portrait of a Lady closes with two more marriages announced. Lord Warburton is supposed to marry a certain lady, whose unimportance is illustrated by the uncertainty of her name, which forecasts her insignificance to the English nobleman himself. He is engaged with her after only three weeks of courtship and from the way he behaves, it is clear that the lady is to be a weak substitute for Isabel, whom Lord Warburton will never forget and cease to love. The last marriage the story tells about is the engagement of Henrietta Stackpole and Mr. Bantling, which makes Isabel rather melancholic, because "Henrietta, after all, had confessed herself human and feminine, Henrietta whom she had hitherto regarded as a light keen flame, a disembodied voice. It was a disappointment to find she had personal susceptibilities, that she was subject to common passions"[86]. Isabel is in this way disillusioned completely, even this person who "for Isabel, was chiefly a proof that a woman

[84] James, The Portrait of a Lady 471.
[85] Holland 732.
[86] James, The Portrait of a Lady 612.

might suffice to herself and be happy"[87], in the end chooses to bind her life to a person of another sex. Those two allusions to other marriages in the end are significant for their message about the institution of marriage in general. Lord Warburton, the representative of the aristocracy, marries because his love for Isabel is unrequited and thus he resigns at romantic love and accedes at a conventional match. He is a young and handsome lord and he should have a family to fit in the society. His engagement is a confirmation of the continuity of the old social order – marriage as a conventional union. To the contrary, the announced marriage of Henrietta, the independent woman, suggests that the marital bond can fulfill what Mr. Touchett wished for.

The American journalist, who epitomizes the great opportunities for a young woman of her nation and many times warns Isabel against falling for a European, is the last one who marries an English man, whereas the origins of Isabel's husband are at least American. Henrietta, however, explains to Isabel that Mr. Bantling is rather confused about Henrietta's personality and that in fact the temptation to solve the riddle is probably the reason he wants to marry her; at the same time, Henrietta is also very much interested in his character, which she did not explore thoroughly so far. This mutual fascination of Henrietta and Mr. Bantling is potentially the purest incentive for marriage, exclusive of any economic interest. At least, it is not hinted at, as Henrietta is a self-sufficient working woman and Mr. Bantling is also not portrayed as a man of low means, and that is why this union kindles hope that it might be successful. This is not however perceived by Isabel, who is determined to carry the consequences of her mistake, and she comprehends Henrietta's remark that "a woman has to change a good deal to marry"[88] as an absolutely negative feature. Isabel is not willing to change and sacrifice her own way of thinking. For this she does not accept Goodwood's offer to leave with him; apart from being repulsed by the manhood he represents, "she shares with [Osmond] a belief in 'appearances'."[89] So when the two compatriots of Isabel advise her to leave Osmond, she emphatically rejects, because she would never admit her mistake publicly and secondly, she made a promise to Pansy, and thus she is coming back to be there for her. The question why Isabel made that promise is hard to answer, yet her maternal feeling towards Pansy certainly plays a great role.

[87] James, The Portrait of a Lady 106.
[88] James, The Portrait of a Lady 612.
[89] David Galloway, Henry James: The Portrait of a Lady (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1967) 49.

4.6 Deficient motherhood

"Like Isabel, Pansy is made the daughter of a dead mother whose absence is preserved; a mother moreover, who is replaced by a father – one who is himself idealized by his daughter."[90] The two women like each other very much; Isabel likes her stepdaughter's youthfulness and purity, while Pansy admires Isabel for her beauty and she wishes to please her, like her father. Isabel, shortly after being granted the role of motherhood, was deprived of it. "She had lost her child; that was a sorrow, but it was a sorrow she scarcely spoke of; there was more to say about it than she could say to Ralph."[91] Death is a big part of Isabel's life, which is interwoven with events of mourning, but there is never much attention paid to her grievance. The reader encounters her after she had lost her beloved father, but her grief is shadowed by the excitement of going to Europe – one life ends, so that another one can begin. In England she finds a kindred spirit in her uncle, Mr. Touchett, who explains to her a lot about the customs of her new environment, only to be parted again by death.

The loss of Isabel's child is mentioned as an occurrence without any details about the child or the cause of its death. The brief note of this event, however, imparts very important information that Isabel has acknowledged maternal feelings. It can explain her responsible relation to Pansy, because it is her stepdaughter for whom "in returning to Osmond she rejoins the living dead, the wholly conventionalized elements of life."[92] In the last discussion of Isabel and Ralph, Isabel's readiness to accept the consequences of her mistake are imparted and the mutual tragedy of the two pronounced. The misconception of freedom has been fatal for their relationship as well as their lives. The loss of Ralph, in spite of its foreseeability, is the most significant one for two reasons: the discussion between Ralph and Isabel on his deathbed and the coldness of Mrs. Touchett toward Isabel after Ralph dies.

Everything is cleared up between Isabel and Ralph in his last moments, when Isabel admits to his cousin that she had made a mistake when marrying Osmond, who really made her his wife for money. Ralph reveals to Isabel that it was his idea to provide her with such enormous means and although he then allowed for the risk that Isabel "may fall a victim to the fortunate-hunters […still rather] small, and [he was] prepared to take it."[93] This is the only time when Isabel lets her tears flow freely and she yields to her emotions, so suppressed in all other instances. Ralph in his last minutes also discloses his love for Isabel, against which he

[90] Beth Sharon Ash, "Frail Vessels and Vast Designs: A Psychoanalytic Portrait of Isabel Archer," New Essays on The Portrait of a Lady, ed. Joel Porte (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 130.
[91] James, The Portrait of a Lady 443.
[92] Richard Poirier, Henry James: The Portrait of a Lady (Washington: The Voice of America) 9.
[93] James, The Portrait of a Lady 236.

decided from the very beginning and that he rather transformed to passive worship. Quite in contrast to the warm sentiments expressed by the cousins, Isabel's aunt acts exceedingly insensitively. She utters a single sentence to the offered compassion by her niece: "Go and thank God you've no child"[94]; wholly disregarding the fact that Isabel herself underwent this very experience of losing a baby. Mrs. Touchett is one of the mothers portrayed in the novel, just as she almost dissolves her marriage by living in a far-away country, she also detaches herself from her son – there is again a certain amount of time granted for their mutual visits. Mrs. Touchett is immensely systematic and strictly undeviating in her plans, even the death of her husband does not make her to postpone her departure to her beforehand appointed destination. Lydia Touchett is an old woman, arguably independent: she is not free because her income originates from her matrimony, but certainly she is at liberty in regard to her beliefs. She utterly disregards any internal marital or paternal duties adhering only to the external show of being there for her husband and son when they are dying.

The novel introduces one more mother, whose maternal identity is for the most part concealed. Madame Merle is the real mother of Pansy Osmond, but she has rejected completely any relation to the girl because the conception was of an adulterous character, as was mentioned earlier. Madame Merle's ability to recommend herself and make people to want her to stay with them provides for her living. Her mindfulness of appearances in the society accounts for her renounced motherhood; she disclaims her maternal role for the necessity of keeping her status and position in the society and to prevent the revelation of her immoral behavior. The social pressure, the insufficient means and surely to some degree the fear of being denounced, make Madame Merle step aside from the natural vocation.

As much as maternity represents the limits the society places on Madame Merle, the acquired maternal role of Henrietta Stackpole, who adopts three children of her widowed sister, displays the independent position of the journalist, who by her own labor is able to provide not only for herself, but in fact for a whole family. Henrietta negates the division of the roles of a man and a woman. Yet although this act manifests the self-sufficiency of women, it proves simultaneously the inability of the true mother to take care of her children after the loss of the husband. There is a clear discrepancy and implausibility of blending the two alternatives of womanhood. Henrietta can pursue her career and earn enough, like a man, to support a family, yet she has not the time to take care of the children, which is left for their biological mother to do. Vice versa the mother cannot work and provide for her family while

[94] James, The Portrait of a Lady 625.

taking care of three children. In this respect, Henrietta, therefore, importantly demonstrates that a woman has the capacity to be financially successful, at the same time, however, always two are needed in order to secure the life of children.

4.6.1 Continuity of life versus its corruption

Although Henry James devotes much more thought to motherhood than Edith Wharton, he does not give any ideal example of it and he rather points out the deficiency of maternal feelings. Each of the mothers either loses the gift of motherhood or denies, voluntarily or under social pressure, her maternity. Disregarding the fact that The House of Mirth introduces much fewer mothers, at the end there is one good example, or at least a hope given; because there is a child that is wanted and loved, born of a true affectionate marriage, yet this child is of the lower class. Both novels portray a deformed parenthood which is the result of the upper-class defected morals. On one hand, Wharton and James reflect on the consequences of an absent mother that results in a young woman left without any maternal guidance. On the other hand, they picture motherhood as the projection of parents' ambitions that is best exemplified by Gilbert Osmond and Madame Merle and partly by Mrs. Bart. Caspar Goodwood offers the last comment in connection with motherhood by liberating Isabel from any duties for her to return to her husband by asserting: "You've no children; that perhaps would be an obstacle."[95] (Goodwood overlooks Isabel's parental obligation to Pansy.) Children represent a responsibility that is not accepted by almost any of the mothers in The Portrait of a Lady and The House of Mirth, because the wish to marry a daughter prosperously, regardless the child's inclinations, cannot be considered as an understanding of the daughter as an individual, but rather just fitting her to the society as the ornamenting element.

4.7 The masculine perspective

The analyses of the two novels provide examples of a male and a female author dealing with an uncommon heroine with regard to her unconventional desires. It was argued by the feminist critics that men used to treat the female protagonist flatly; however, from the first reading this claim fails when applied to Henry James's novel. Leon Edel affirms that "she is beautifully painted;"[96] and Kettle adds that Isabel Archer is portrayed in a full depth

[95] James, The Portrait of a Lady 634.
[96] Leon Edel, "Introduction," The House of Mirth, Henry James (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956) xx.

because "Henry James's purpose in the novel is not to put Isabel between the reader and the situation […] but to reveal to the reader the full implications of Isabel's consciousness. For this to happen we must see Isabel not merely from the inside (i.e. know how she feels) but from the outside too."[97] Isabel Archer is depicted in the same depth as Lily Bart; the third person narrator reveals to the readers their thoughts as well as the events happening around them. The narrator is omnipotent to the effect that the readers know more than Isabel but still are kept in ignorance of other characters' motives, which is the instance of Madame Merle's scheming or Gus Trenor's dealings with Lily's money. The heroines are not depicted as mere flat objects, serving as an instrument to the story's end (which is one of the two concerns of feminist literary criticism), yet the novels are echoing the social requirement that "the nature of woman [shall function] as object of appreciation"[98] and that wishes her self to be shallow, however, with the purpose of exhibiting the impact that this expectation has on a woman's consciousness.

James and Wharton take the way women are perceived by society and analyze it in connection with what it means to the woman by showing us their minds and explaining "the suffering that underlies the image."[99] The one female character the readers learn about exclusively from the outside is Pansy Osmond, but this was the intention of Henry James, as is proven in his Notebooks, where he entered: "As regards Pansy the strangeness of her conduct is greater; but we must remember that we see only its surface – we don't see her reasoning."[100] Pansy Osmond personifies the complete subordination and suppression of her own character in order to fulfill the role of a valuable aesthetic object that functions as a piece of an art collection. The reduction of her personality to the ways of her conduct exhibit the restricted roles of women in the society that requires them to be submissive to the dominance of men and void of any ideas of their own; the failure of this expectation is pictured in the character of Isabel Archer. The turn of the century clearly creates a complete female character that was so scarce up to that time.

Although women characters are portrayed in great depth in the two novels, independent of the gender of the authors, the position of the writers in the literary history is determined by their sex. The second focus of feminist critics – the reception of female writers by literary criticism – certainly points out to the case of Edith Wharton. Regardless of her

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[97] Kettle 673.
[98] John Goode, "Woman and the Literary Text," The Rights and Wrongs of Women, eds. Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (London: Penguin Books, 1976) 227.
[99] Goode 228.
[100] James, "Appendix" 640.

success in her life-time, she had to endlessly defend herself against the assertion that she is the follower of Henry James, which resulted in the disregard of her achievements during the following years.

> Most critics and teachers from the 1920s to the 1970s, when they thought of Wharton at all, which was seldom, dismissed her either as a novelist of manners, a lesser genre in American literature to the prevailing mid-twentieth-century academic preference for male psychological dramas and escape fantasies, or as an imitator and inferior version of Henry James.[101]

The changing attitude towards her achievement is the very example of disregarding the female writers for their male counterparts. The lack of interest in Wharton's writing corresponds to the fading effort of the first wave of the feminist movement. In spite of the formal equal position that was granted to them later by the suffrage and following with their participation in determining the shaping of public affairs, women were unceasingly confined to the domestic environment and not considered capable of significant achievements. The marginalization of Edith Wharton documents the superficial approach towards the work of female authors; because her novel deals with a similar theme, many critics concluded that she just follows what Henry James already discovered without studying the work in depth so as to see the diversities.

Later the distinctions began to be discussed and in the 1960s Alfred Kazin compares the multiple layers each of the two writers adds to the subject of a woman's role in the society.

> Wharton's "[g]reat theme, like that of her friend Henry James, became the plight of the young and innocent in a world of greater intricacy than they were accustomed to. But where James was obsessed by the moral complexity of that theme and devoted his career to the evaluation and dramatization of opposing cultures, Edith Wharton specialized in tales of victimization.[102]

The story of Lily Bart ends with her death, which stresses her exploitation by the society and the termination of her life. Lily is required to comply with the immoral standards of the sphere in which she was brought up and which represents the only possible place for her existence. The corruptness is accepted as the basic mechanism in which Lily has to function; she is cruelly treated and her life is the price for her naivety. Isabel's case is different in the way that she enters the European society from the outside, innocent and full of desires for a new life only to be crushed by the depravity of the old world. The vulgar world is however

[101] Elizabeth Ammons, "Preface," In: The House of Mirth: Authoritative Text Backgrounds and Contexts Criticism viii.
[102] Alfred Kazin, "Edith Wharton," Edith Wharton: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Irving Howe (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1962) 89.

not exclusively represented by Europeans; quite to the reverse, Isabel is betrayed by her fellow countrymen, who nevertheless are fully molded by European manners, because they were exhibited to them for their whole lives. Isabel is not to die at the end, but she decides to go back to the unhappy life and accept "the incalculable price she must pay for consciousness of the moral intricacy of the world."[103] Yet, The Portrait of a Lady has an open ending and the rest of Isabel's life is to be imagined, regardless the negative tone of the process of her losing the ideals, the ending might signal the plausibility of her awaking to the reality of life and with this new experience she might be there for Pansy to protect her from being victimized. Whereas Wharton fully concentrates on the narrow depiction of the fall of a young woman who is exploited and disposed of by the upper-class society in general and therefore the only option for her is death in the end, James is more concerned with the conflicting interests of each individual based on various personal backgrounds. Death is not the ending because Isabel is not simply a victim; rather the tragic outcome is the result of misunderstanding based on different cultural habits. Unlike Isabel Archer who accepts her mistake and the perspective of a constant struggle for the preservation of her independent mind, Edna Pontellier does not accept marriage as life-long confinement. She endeavors not only to free herself in abstract terms but to realize herself by performing activities of her own.

[103] Galloway 54.

5 The Awakening: escape from "the soul's slavery for the rest of her days"

Kate Chopin's The Awakening is the third novel discussed in this study concerned with the portrayal of the changing status of women that has resulted from the increasing effort of the feminist movement and was captured in the works of the turn of the twentieth century. This novel was published in April 1899, which is symbolic of both the social as well as the literary shifts that were to come with the new century. "It is advanced in theme and technique over the American novels of its day, and it anticipates in many respects the modern novel."[1] It breaks all the norms of the conduct of women in the nineteenth century and the division of the roles of women and men, similarly as we have seen in The House of Mirth and The Portrait of a Lady, yet it introduces an absolutely new aspect of this process. In The Awakening the desire of a woman for independence and her rebellion against the conventions of the society are grounded in an incentive not discussed until then, or at least not to such an extent – the sexuality of women, a passion almost entirely excluded by majority of writers, both male and female.

5.1 Innovation of style

Additionally, "*The Awakening* differs strikingly from most other nineteenth-century novels in one very obvious way: it is just about short enough to read at one sitting."[2] The length of each chapter varies, with some that are only one paragraph long, and much less room is given to the third person narrator. Whereas the surroundings and the state of Isabel's mind are depicted in a minute detail in The Portrait of a Lady, the settings and Edna's thoughts are in comparison described briefly. Much more information about the outer scene and the inner feelings in The Awakening is revealed through dialogues. As Sue Asbee wrote, "[…] plot is also pared down, the number of locations, cast of characters, incidents and episodes are less profuse."[3] There are only two places and one community, connected by one of the locality, and traveling is much less the focus of interest; it serves only to the purpose of separation, while the heroine always stays in one of the two locations. The form is in this way unusual, even in comparison with the two novels of the same period by Edith Wharton and

[1] Kenneth Eble, "Introduction," The Awakening, Kate Chopin ([New York]: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1964) vii.
[2] Sue Asbee, "The Awakening: identities," The Nineteenth-Century Novel: Identities, ed. Dennis Walder (London: Routledge, 2001) 243.
[3] Asbee 244.

Henry James, analyzed in the previous chapters, which treat the same theme of a heroine, who strives for liberation from her confinement in the prescribed roles for women.

All three novels employ the third person narration; in each of the texts the readers are informed about the outer settings but also the inner thoughts of the characters. However, the omniscience of the narrators varies, the least is imparted in The Awakening, in which only the thoughts of Edna are revealed and even then, in some instances, the expression of her mind is left to her. For example, all of her reactions to Robert's sudden departure to Mexico are disclosed only in her dialogue with her lover and the readers do not learn more about her inner feelings than Robert. This method of switching between the insights into Edna's thought and, at other times, her own communication of emotions contributes to the process of her awakening. Edna is encouraged by her conversations, especially with Madame Ratignolle, to think about her role and thus the readers are to witness the awakening of her mind together with her outer behavior. She does not have the courage to talk with Adele about her youthful loves, but she begins to allow the thoughts about it, then later she tells everything she has on her mind to Robert because she feels that she can tell him everything. Edith Wharton, on the other hand, does not make this difference. She is constant in her narration of the events and of Lily's moments alone when she ponders on her situation. Henry James has an elaborate style of fusing the omnipotent narrator who is telling the story, yet sometimes he himself steps into the text and interrupts the line of the story by commenting on issues outside the story, for example on the manners of Englishmen. The technique of Edith Wharton, who wrote her novel a year after Kate Chopin's death, is more similar to Henry James than to Chopin, keeping the realist mode of writing. Chopin in contrast to her contemporaries experiments with writing, uses symbolism extensively, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

5.2 Personal background – formative element

Comparing Edna with Isabel, it can be argued that the latter, unlike Edna, has a clear desire for freedom, no matter how abstract, at least throughout the Volume I, which depicts her new life after the death of her father and her move out of her native land. Lily Bart also has some idea of independence, although developed to a much lesser degree than Isabel; she vaguely perceives that marriage will limit her life in some ways. The significance of the place of origins of the young women, linked to their comprehension of liberty, was discussed in detail in connection with James's novel, because in The Portrait of a Lady the contrast of the European traditional society and the more relaxed albeit puritan America is essential to

Isabel's story. There is not much known about Edna's past, except that she comes from Kentucky and her family was vigorously Presbyterian. The specificity of the geographical regions in which Isabel and Edna originate is certainly not random for both authors; although only as children, they experienced the Civil War and thus the division of the North and the South that connotes the ideas of differentiation in terms of liberal ideas. James, like Wharton, was a native New Yorker, whereas Chopin was born in an immigrant family in the conservative South. The freedom-conscious Isabel and the strictly-brought-up Edna, who attempts to escape the dominant influence of her religious father through marriage, hence follow from the personal experiences of the authors.

Edna was raised, akin to Isabel, only by her father with her two sisters; her father, however, brought up his daughters, unlike Mr. Archer, with a strong hand. Although Edna like Isabel marries partly because of the opposition from her family, she, however, does so without any fancy illusions. "As the devoted wife of a man who worshipped her, she felt she would take her place with a certain dignity in the world of reality, closing the portals forever behind her upon the realm of romance and dreams."[4] From this very allusion to her premarital ideas and the memories of her girlish fantasies of an ideal man she would give herself to, the readers learn that Edna dreamed about romance; unlike Isabel who at first sees the romance in retaining her liberty. "Edna recalls (but does not relate to Madame Ratignolle) her first passion, which was for the cavalry officer"[5], who had visited her father. The other two instances of her early affectionate emotions were directed towards a young man, an engaged friend of her sister; and later "she was a grown woman when she was overtaken by what she supposed to be the climax of her fate. It was when the face and figure of a great tragedian began to haunt her imagination and stir her senses."[6] Although the novel does not tell about the time when Edna became aware of the marital options and her ideas on that subject directly, the memories picture very much in detail her inner feelings about the intimate nature of a bond of a man and a woman. Edna, again in contrast to the naïve ideas of Isabel, when faced with Léonce's devotion, accepts to face the reality of a union, based on mutual sympathy, but void of passion; she does not believe in any extraordinary experiences coming from her wedlock. She married Léonce when she was twenty two and she has already two boys with him by the time the reader encounter her. The process of awakening therefore begins after six years of her marital life and she necessarily only gradually starts to realize

[4] Kate Chopin, The Awakening (London: Everyman's Library, 1992) 35.
[5] Asbee 260.
[6] Chopin 34.

that her situation has not been fulfilling and that there exist things that she thought that she could give up, but that she has been missing.

5.3 The falsity of social marriage

The topics that were analyzed in the previous two chapters; i.e., marriage, women's roles, proper behavior, motherhood, a class division and race, are also dealt with by Kate Chopin. Let us start with marriage. The age of the heroines implies for their change; by the nineteenth-century conventions women should be married by the age of thirty because it is the dividing line between girlhood and womanhood. The main protagonist of The Awakening, Edna Pontellier, who is a woman of 28 already married and with two children, complies the most in comparison with Lily and Isabel with the standard behavior of a woman in the nineteenth century. Edna, only one year younger than Lily Bart when we encounter her, celebrates her twenty-ninth birthday close towards the end of the novel and the party she gives is supposed to be the celebration of her new life because it is on the eve of her moving to a separate house. Edna is at first older than Isabel Archer, but the reader follows Isabel over the period of six years, as was mentioned above; and thus the age of the heroines at the time when the process of their quest for independence ends in various outcomes is twenty nine, just before the age of womanhood is reached.

At the same, as mentioned above, the position of Edna Pontellier is obviously quite different from that of the other two female characters. The reader knows her only as a married woman for the novel is not concerned with her as a single girl, even though there are important allusions to her premarital state. Unlike Lily and to a certain extent Isabel, Edna faces a situation in which the society requires her to fulfill the role of a wife and a mother to which she has been already formally assigned. The readers do not observe her effort to postpone or even reject the act of marriage, but rather her endeavor to discover a way out of this institution that is the reason for her death in the end. Edna dies because there is no satisfactory life for her outside her marriage which she rejects; Lily, on the contrary, dies because she cannot live without being married and there is no one who would marry her due to her bad reputation.

The opposite treatment of the meaning of marriage is, nevertheless, a critique of the same things. Neither of the writers wholly disclaims marriage, yet they attack the financial and social foundations of this institution. Each text alludes to the need of a kindred soul, of mutual admiration and, most importantly, of affections, and to the dangers of loneliness. The

Portrait of a Lady depicts this ideal harmony of an engagement, seemingly void of any dishonest designs; it is, however, later disrupted by the corruption of the society. This initially perfect union is also founded on financial and social principles because one of the reasons for the marriage of Isabel is to provide means for another profitable wedlock, that of Pansy. All three novels point out the falsity and disastrous consequences of marriage in the form of a financially-profitable union, prescribing different spheres to each of the two partners, supporting male dominance and lacking emotional and physical affections. "Indeed, *The Awakening*, which Chopin subtitled 'A Solitary Soul,' may be read as an account of Edna's evolution from romantic fantasies of fusion with another person to self-definition and self-reliance."[7] Mrs. Pontellier questions the potential realization of a married woman, akin to Isabel who in the end due to the naïve drives finds herself in an unhappy bond with her husband, and hence rejects a full subordination and tries to solve her oppressed state.

5.3.1 Confined, yet unnaturally separated

The novel commences with a passage that describes a parrot in a cage making noise, which it was allowed to do, because the bird was a property of Mrs. Lebrun, the landlady of the pension. This opening is symbolic for its image of a kept animal that belongs to someone who decides what it can and cannot do. "At the turn of the century, when *The Awakening* was published, marriage in New Orleans was based on Napoleonic Code, which defined a wife and everything she possessed, including her clothes, as her husband's property."[8] Allowing for a little exaggeration, a woman is in the same situation as the parrot, given a place in a cage, her house, where she is permitted to talk, but with no one listening to her or understanding her. The idea of male ownership is later in the first chapter confirmed by Mr. Pontellier "looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage."[9] Although Léonce clearly expresses his demand for the dominance over his wife, their marital life is quite separated, corroborating in this way the isolated spheres of a husband and a wife.

The portrayal of the disunion of the couple is enforced by the accepted practice of family separation at the summer site of Grand Isle, where "women and children, sent to the island in summer retreat from the city's heat, discomfort and disease, are joined by their men

[7] Elaine Showalter, Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 66.
[8] Wendy Martin, "Introduction," New Essays on *The Awakening*, ed. Wendy Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 17.
[9] Chopin 3.

who drink together at Klein's Club, read market reports, then leave thankfully for 'a lively week in Carondelet Street' (Ch. 3)."[10] In this manner, the men lead a life of their own not only during the week, which is obvious in consideration with their business professions, but they follow the entertainments of their own even in the summer resort – gathering in the local club and taking interest solely in the news, connected to their weekly occupations. The relationship of Edna and Léonce completely lacks any kind of love emotions; the whole bond is founded on the acceptance of the irrefutable fact of their belonging to each other and of performing their individual duties, emerging from the institution of marriage and parenthood.

5.3.2 Separation – the cause for self-realization

Kate Chopin is the one of the first authors to express the unnatural character of such a union for a young woman by portraying that an unemotional and separate life of a wife and a husband cannot serve as a strong foundation for their union. It is not fulfilling for a woman to be confined to the domestic sphere (Edna's sexual craving is caused, on the one hand, by Mr. Pontellier's constant absence, on the other hand, by the lack of affections). Adulterous affairs of married women were depicted in the past, but feminine sexual passion and the deliberate abandonment of one's own children had scarcely been pictured favorably before and therefore it was utterly shocking to the contemporary readers and caused the condemnation of the novel for several decades, even by women. "The general belief was that – of all American womanhood – white Southern women were immune to sexual desire: Chopin threatened this matter of faith by depicting the opposite."[11] For her husband's frequent absences Edna quite innocently becomes close with Robert Lebrun, who spends the whole summer at the island as one of the few men there. The first to point out the growing intensity of the formal relationship of Edna and Robert is Madame Ratignolle, who asks Robert to "let Mrs. Pontellier alone. […] She might make the unfortunate blunder of taking you seriously."[12] Besides hinting at the prospective affair of the two, Madame Ratignolle directs the reader's attention to two other important aspects. Firstly, Edna differs from the community and secondly, she might confuse the flirtation with something more. There are several occasions when the readers are informed that Edna has a different background than her husband, who is a Catholic Creole. Edna, even after six years of marriage with a Creole,

[10] Helen Taylor, "Walking through New Orleans: Kate Chopin and the Female Flâneur," Kate Chopin's The Awakening: A Sourcebook, ed. Janet Beer and Elizabeth Nolan (London: Routledge, 2004) 79.
[11] Asbee 243.
[12] Chopin 38.

does not feel as one of them. "A characteristic which distinguished them and which impressed Mrs. Pontellier most forcibly was their absence of prudery."[13] The openness with which the Creoles narrate about events of quite intimate nature is shocking to Edna at first, but she becomes accustomed that there would be always something to wonder about. This very atmosphere of freedom of speech about sexual matters furnishes the proper environment where Edna is to awaken to her sensual needs. Being exposed to the casual talk about subjects she used to blush even to think silently about makes her to ponder on those topics in connection with her own life and she begins to discover new prospects that she might explore.

"One of the first acts of rebellion that anticipate Edna's sexual awakening is her refusal to obey her husband's command."[14] The first time when she does not comply with what her husband asks her to do occurs, meaningfully, the night when she learns to swim. She expressively compares herself after acquiring the skill to a stumbling child, "who of a sudden realizes its powers, and walks for the first time alone, boldly and with over-confidence."[15] Although she was instructed almost by everyone, it was Robert who "had pursued a system of lessons almost daily."[16] Swimming is the symbol of Edna's new independence, of doing what she wants and of the total freedom of being alone, and Robert, subsequently, is the instructor of her awakening – literally by teaching her to swim, metaphorically, arousing her potential of accomplishing a fulfilling existence outside her marriage. The sea is a major element in the process of her awakening, sketched in by the recurring statement that "the voice of the sea is seductive"[17]. All the three factors explained above – her growing affection for Robert, the breaking of the taboos about the things of intimate nature and her acquired ability to swim – represent a significant component of her growing self-reliance. The realization of liberty, of not being under someone's dominance, is new to Edna, who was brought up strictly by her father in compliance with the religious norms of conduct.

5.4 Romance as a part of liberation

As Martin wrote, "[…] although Edna has freed herself from the domestic imperatives of her husband's house, she becomes ensnared by romantic love, which masquerading as

[13] Chopin 17.
[14] Martin 20.
[15] Chopin 52.
[16] Chopin 52.
[17] Chopin 25.

freedom, actually undercuts her possibility of autonomy."[18] Edna quite unconsciously grows attached to Robert, enjoying his presence and suffering at his absence. The warning of Madame Ratignolle is to come true when Robert suddenly announces his decision to leave for Mexico, deserting Edna who has taken their affair quite seriously by that time. Exactly at the point when Edna feels very comfortable with Robert and enjoys every moment she spends with him, he departs. Edna voices her emotional dependence to Robert: "I've grown used to seeing you, to having you with me all the time, and your action seems unfriendly, even unkind. You don't even offer an excuse for it. Why, I was planning to be together, thinking of how pleasant it would be to see you in the city next winter."[19] Edna liberates herself from her marriage but only to the extent of binding herself to another man. A significant part of this initiating affair constitutes the fact that "each of her 'reasons' [for loving Robert] is based on a physical characteristic"[20]. The emphasis on Robert's appearance suggests his masculinity, plainly linked to a sexual attraction. Mr. Pontellier is to an extensive degree aware of the closeness between his wife and the young man; however, he quite accepts it and even talks openly with Edna about her feelings. After Robert leaves, Edna has all the space to think about herself; encouraged by the new experiences of the time she spent with him, she realizes that there are things she has been lacking in her life and that she is able to make decisions for herself without obeying her husband. Significantly, the next chapter to follow Robert's leaving depicts the encounter of Edna and Mademoiselle Reisz, foreshadowing in this manner Edna's future direction of her awakening.

"A concomitant of Edna's erotic attraction to Robert is that she becomes increasingly aware of her personal preferences. During the time she is waiting for Robert to return from Mexico, she begins to paint seriously."[21] Mademoiselle Reisz is an old, single woman who plays the piano masterfully and who is to guide Edna through the phase of full liberation from her domestic roles. "In *The Awakening*, [Chopin] carefully delineates both the possibility for women's happiness within marriage (Mme Ratignolle) and the possibility for their independence from it (Mlle Reisz)."[22] Edna's awakening begins at the island by her confidential attachment to a man outside her marriage, but the real self-realization and emancipation takes place in the city, New Orleans, the hometown of the Pontelliers. She did not associate with Mademoiselle Reisz often during her stay at the island, where her closest

[18] Martin 23.
[19] Chopin 85.
[20] Asbee 262.
[21] Martin 24.
[22] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "The Awakening in the Context of Experience, Culture and Values of Southern Women," In: Kate Chopin's The Awakening: A Sourcebook 63.

companion was Madame Ratignolle – the prototype of a mother. The division of the spheres – the summer resort and the city – in connection with the prevailing influence over Edna by each of the women sketches in the two possibilities that Edna is facing.

5.5 Alternatives of womanhood

At the island Edna is one of the mothers who spend the summer with their children outside the city; so there is no other reason for her to be at the island than to accompany her children in a pleasant area where they can enjoy the hot months. Edna grows a close relationship with expressions of affections, quite unknown to her up till then, with Madame Ratignolle. "Early in the novel, Chopin makes clear Edna's distance from the mores of the Creoles summering at Grand Isle"[23] and, as was explained above, the openness of the community plays an important role in enriching Edna's new consciousness of matters subdued before. The figure of Madame Ratignolle, the devoted mother, whose ambitions are fully realized in a maternal role, demonstrates to Edna one of the forms of womanhood. That this is not what would fulfill Edna is asserted quite in the beginning, when the readers are told that "Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman. The mother-women seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle. […] They were women who idolized their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels."[24] This description of the mother-women, among whom Edna does not belong, is significant in two ways: it informs the readers not only that Edna does not adore her children, which does not mean that she does not love them, but more importantly that she is not the female to fully subordinate to her husband and sacrifice her life for the family.

5.5.1 Symbolism of freedom

The symbol of wings is used often in the novel, but in this case it is quite to a contradictory purpose in comparison to the other instances when it is mentioned. Wings in this case are the attribute of the "ministering angel" – the woman who devotes her life to the protection of the domestic harmony, suppressing entirely her own ambitions, which is exactly what Madame Ratignolle consciously yields to. In contrast to the wings of an angel who obliterates his character in order to serve others, the wings signify the freedom of a bird that is enabled by them to fly everywhere. Meaningfully, however, the bird is never capable to

[23] Nancy Walker, "The Historical and Cultural Setting," In: Kate Chopin's The Awakening: A Sourcebook 64.
[24] Chopin 14.

enjoy the freedom granted to him by its wings because there is always some obstacle. Apart from the parrot that is prevented to make use of its skill by being confined to a cage, the readers face a highly expressive statement of Mademoiselle Reisz, who comments on Edna's moving out of the family house: "The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings. It is a sad spectacle to see the weaklings bruised, exhausted, fluttering back to earth."[25] Mademoiselle Reisz is by this metaphor foreshadowing the course of Edna's future. The climax of the whole symbolism of the desire to be free as a bird, but being made incapable of exercising one's will in its fullest comes in the ultimate chapter when, before her fatal swimming, Edna stands alone on the beach and observes a bird with a broken wing, fighting against its disability until it falls into the water. The very words of Mademoiselle Reisz come to be true in the end and Edna, like the bird she watches, is to drown after the inadequate fight for self-realization and freedom.

5.6 Two sides of art

5.6.1 Improvement of the domestic sphere

One substantial component of Madame Ratignolle's maternity is art that in relation to the two alternatives of female life accomplishments also takes two forms. "[Madame Ratignolle] was keeping up her music on account of the children, she said, because she and her husband both considered it a means of brightening the home and making it attractive."[26] Art is a part of the greater purpose of Madame Ratignolle's to create a perfect domestic environment and she "rationalized her own 'art' as a maternal project. […] Women's art, as Adèle presents it, is social, pleasant, and undemanding. It does not conflict with her duties as a wife and mother, and can even be seen to enhance them."[27] Although Edna does not consider Madame Ratignolle's music to be art, clearly because she does not play the piano for its sake, but in order to create a pleasant environment for her children to grow up in; the encouragement she receives from her maternal friend signifies a great value for her further development. At the same time, Madame Ratignolle does not represent any inspiration for Edna and even though she witnesses the harmonious life of the Ratignolles, she does not regret that her life is not like that. "Yet the relationship with the conventional Adèle educates

[25] Chopin 158.
[26] Chopin 46.
[27] Showalter 74.

the immature Edna to respond for the first time both to a different kind of sexuality and to the unconventional and difficult art of Mademoiselle Reisz."[28]

5.6.2 Art for art's sake – the instrument to independence

After the first initiation at the island, as I have already pointed out, it is in the city where Edna realizes further steps towards becoming independent by learning about the true art and its performer. In the city, where the major part of her awakening takes place, Edna gets close with the unconventional Mademoiselle Reisz and she often seeks refuge in her small solitary apartment. As a complete opposite to the maternal Madame Ratignolle, Mademoiselle Reisz represents to Edna a more appealing realization of her ambitions. "She has no patience with petty social rules and violates the most basic expectations of femininity."[29] Edna is drawn to the old artist partly because of her excellent playing, partly for the letters from Robert, but most importantly because she can find with her a hiding place from all the pressures the society puts on her, and because she can discuss with this extraordinary lady her steps towards freedom: becoming an artist and moving to live alone. Edna picks up her painting and considers it quite seriously, encouraged rather than intimidated by Mademoiselle Reisz, asserting that "to succeed, the artist must possess the courageous soul."[30]

To digress again to the previous two works discussed in this study. In comparison with both The House of Mirth and The Portrait of a Lady, the conception of art is unique in The Awakening because painting represents for Edna the possibility of providing herself with the financial means that are vital for her liberation. Art is an essential instrument for Wharton and James as well, but it does not offer any self-revelation to the heroines. Lily, as was suggested in the former chapters, is happy at the opportunity to exhibit herself in the live performance of a canvas, yet it confines her even more into the restricted position of an object of admiration. Art in The Portrait of a Lady functions only as a collectible possession that is to be shown to guests. "The man who worships art exclusively will, in adjusting people to his museum scale of values, destroy their freedom."[31] Gilbert Osmond does not limit himself to things, but he appraises human beings also from the point of view of an owner and Isabel is thus supposed to be just another valuable piece of artistic value. However, in spite of The

[28] Showalter 74.
[29] Showalter 75.
[30] Chopin 120.
[31] Adeline Tintner, "The Museum World," Henry James: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Leon Edel (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963) 144.

Awakening's presenting art as one of the options for Edna's independent existence, it is only a temporary project of her ambitions, lasting just to the point when she realizes that this path to freedom is also defected as that of the birds. "As an artist Edna will never be more than a dabbler, despite the fact that she sells her drawings and sketches; and even if she were brilliantly gifted, she is not interested in being celibate."[32] In fact, despite all her admiration, Edna has very mixed feelings about Mademoiselle Reisz's personality, who although independent is alone in the world; and additionally, Edna learns about her need to fulfill her sexual desires, of which she is made conscious by the relation with Alcée Arobin.

5.7 Recognition of sexuality – the culmination of liberation

The sexual awakening so frequently mentioned above as an essential part of Edna's search for independence is ripened after her affair with Arobin, the man she got involved with, but whom she did not love. This aspect of women's nature was completely new for "the true woman was passionless"[33]; the sexual act was one with a reproductive end and not to be considered as some kind of amusement. The mixed emotions of Edna after this new sexual experience cannot be dismissed because rather surprisingly, they are not positive in the way that Edna would feel the freedom of doing whatever she wants; rather to the contrary, she was unsure and "felt somewhat like a woman who in a moment of passion is betrayed into an act of infidelity, and realizes the significance of the act without being wholly awakened from its glamour."[34] To be guilty would be only natural in such a situation, but in the next thought it is revealed that her reproaches were connected with Robert Lebrun; that is, not with her husband but her lover. Regardless of the mixed feelings about her falling for the young seducer, Edna succumbs to his charms and caressing. Her submission to the sexual passion opens her eyes and from that point on she acts resolutely from leaving the family residence till the last protest against the social order.

[32] Elizabeth Ammons, Conflicting Stories: American Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 72.
[33] Martin 16.
[34] Chopin 147.

5.7.1 Conscious separation – the act of independence

Edna moves out of her husband's house and settles for an independent life, but as Michelle A. Birnbaum observes, "her sexual awakening is a white middle-class luxury."[35] Edna's financial situation is not much dealt with, although there are important references that she has been almost fully provided by her husband. The reason she gives to Mademoiselle Reisz for moving out is that "the house, the money that provides for it, are not mine."[36] Her plans at becoming independent calculate with the money inherited from her mother and the earnings from her paintings. The best illustration of her making use of the finances is "on the threshold of a new life in her little house. The dinner, as Arobin remarks, is a *coup d'état*, an overthrow of her marriage, all the more an act of aggression because Léonce will pay the bill."[37] The most evident revolt against the male economic dominance is realized by making extreme use of the money to which she is supposed to have the same right as her husband just because of being his wife. Edna declares, in contrast to Lily, that she does not need any of the luxuries she has been used to and she seemingly does not show a similar resentment to "dinginess," but her notion of living at low cost still counts with a servant.

5.7.2 Invisible hands – prerequisite for the quest for liberty

Edna can allow herself to focus all her energies on her inner changes, while the children are taken care of by others: "[…] the very duties of motherhood, which were all the constitution of her life left her, became distasteful, and, from the instant when her infant came damp from her womb, it passed into the hands of others, to be tended and reared by them; and from youth to age her offspring often owed nothing to her personal toil."[38] Olive Schreiner in this manner criticizes the society for reducing women to the social "parasites", deprived of any other activities than the sex functions and sustained on the toil of others. The woman is no longer required to take complete care of her children because she is accepted to fulfill the social duties (the importance of the visitation days is documented by his reaction to Edna's failure to "take care" of the guests). Edna not only does not take care of her children (there is only one instance when she is supposed to assist the nurse and put her children to bed) but she is horrified by the act of giving birth. She does not feel anything special in "a little new life to

[35] Michelle A. Birnbaum, "Alien Hands: Kate Chopin and the Colonization of Race," In: Kate Chopin's The Awakening: A Sourcebook 71.
[36] Chopin 152.
[37] Showalter 80.
[38] Olive Schreiner, "Sex-Parasitism," The House of Mirth: Authoritative Text Backgrounds and Contexts Criticism, ed. Elizabeth Ammons (New York: W. W. Norton and company, 1990) 294-295.

which she had given being, added to the great unnumbered multitude of souls that come and go"[39], quite in reverse she regards the act as a torture of Nature. Although she is not required to carry out any of the physical duties, she is supposed to follow all the formalities expected from a wife of the upper-middle class. The performance requested of her is to be there for her husband as a part of his life; he has the unquestionable right to ask of her whatever he wishes in return for providing for her financially. Her husband considers one her duties to be taking care of their children because: "If it was not a mother's place to look after children, who's on earth was it?"[40] Yet this is partly a confirmation of his ignorance of the household order, resulting from his extensive absence, and partly his superiority to take notice of the lower classes; for the answer to his question is: the nurse.

"The background of *The Awakening* is filled with nameless, faceless black women carefully categorized as black, mulatto, quadroon, and Griffe"[41]. The novel is quite precise in making all the distinctions of racial division by taking into account all the alternations of one's parentage, nevertheless these figures are just as if items, listed in the events but without any further relevance to the overall scheme. This illusion that characterizes Edna's own perceptions is proven false by the very fact that without those invisible persons Edna would not be able to dive in her own self, disregarding her surroundings, including her two boys. Edna never betrays any sign that she is conscious of the fact that "her freedom comes at the expense of women of other races and a lower class"[42], unlike Lily Bart, whose balancing between the rich establishment and threatening poverty makes her aware of the workers, furnishing the wealthy with their toil. Wharton portrays the lower class at least to the extent that Lily for a short period of time becomes a member of that class; Chopin, in contrast, does not pay any attention to the working class because Edna, more talented than Lily, finds the option of earning some money by her painting and secondly, luckily, her family has not been ruined, therefore she is not required to seek other ways of providing herself outside her realm of the upper class. Whereas the workers in The House of Mirth are invisible to everyone, except for Lily who, due to her position, was analyzed in the second chapter, empathizes with the lower class, the nurses and servants in The Awakening form a completely invisible background of the Creole community.

Although thanks to these unseen laborers Edna is freed from the domestic services as such, there are other duties expected of her as a member of the upper-middle class. "The

[39] Chopin 211.
[40] Chopin 10.
[41] Elizabeth Ammons, Conflicting Stories (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 74.
[42] Ammons 75.

good and beautiful scheme of life, then – that is to say the scheme to which we are habituated – assigns to the woman a 'sphere' ancillary to the activity of the man; and it is felt that any departure from the traditions of her assigned round of duties is unwomanly."[43] Léonce Pontellier finds Edna's rejection of her tasks, which begins with her ignorance of the Tuesdays as the reception day, shocking. "Why, my dear, I should think you'd understand by this time that people don't do such things; we've got to observe *les convenances* if we ever expect to get on and keep up with the procession."[44] Edna exhibits her freedom by disregarding the tasks that are expected of her. Mr. Pontellier's impulse for curing this is to consider it a disease and consult a doctor.

5.8 Free but uncertain

"By stepping out of the protected space of home, which in the nineteenth century was imbued with an almost religious sanctity, Edna experiences an exhilarating sense of possibility and frightening uncertainty."[45] Edna, akin to Isabel, yearns for liberation but her conception of it is very unclear. "She wanted something to happen – something, anything; she did not know what."[46] A very important part of the feeling of independence is to do things up till then unusual: she enjoys walking around the city alone much, her "awakened sensuality is given full rein in the city as she walks, talks, gambles, eats and drinks in the public spaces of New Orleans."[47] Although she is sure that she does not want to be confined in the institution of marriage because she finds no personal satisfaction in being a wife and mother, at the same time she does not want to be the solitary, cold and unappealing artist living in a shabby environment quite in the similar way as Lily does not want to be Gerty Farish, because for each the companionship of a man is essential. While Edna refuses celibacy, Lily is not willing to part with the luxuries that only a man can provide her with. Edna, even after becoming independent to the extent that she begins to live alone, is oscillating between the opposite emotions of excitement at her new existence and of despondency at not knowing what to do with her life.

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[43] Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1924) 354.
[44] Chopin 96.
[45] Martin 20.
[46] Chopin 143.
[47] Janet Beer, "Walking the Streets: Women out Alone in Kate Chopin's New Orleans," In: Kate Chopin's The Awakening: A Sourcebook 96.

"Edna, in short, is a woman in thwarted pursuit of partnership, and as her search proceeds, she is more and more infected by loneliness."[48] She awakens not to freedom as such but to love and "she could picture at that moment no greater bliss on earth than possession of the beloved one."[49] There is, however, no man ready to give and accept such a love that Edna offers. The last drop of evidence of the hopelessness falls upon her when Robert leaves her forever and she realizes that there is no man prepared for the New Woman. Her husband does not comprehend her and he considers her ill; Robert's "face grew a little white"[50] when he listens to her freedom, of standing for her self, of belonging to no one and of her husband having no right over her. This idea of someone's wife's emancipation frightens Robert. The last man Edna is involved with does not understand her in the least and she even does not allow him to, he is just a step on her way to seeing the immensity of freedom and realizing the unfeasibility of her succeeding in her quest for liberty. Her idea of independence without becoming a solitary soul can never be accomplished in its maximal degree in her time for the society, because especially the men are not ready.

5.9 Suicide – failure or eternal freedom

"The sea itself seduces, it becomes a lover."[51] The heroine of The Awakening realizes that there is nothing in her life to last forever, except for the relationship with her children, "who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul's slavery for the rest of her days. But she knew a way to elude them."[52] She decides to take the last step to save her self. "Edna resolves to commit suicide because she can find no room for her newly awakened self in the present social system."[53] Death signifies the end for Edna, for whom the trial at free life after the rejection of her domestic roles only conveys the impossibility of such a living; likewise there is no future for the twenty-nine year old single Lily with no means and bad reputation. There is no possibility of combining the two desires Edna has in her life: the creativity of doing something that she wants to do without being obliged to sacrifice for someone else, and sexual fulfillment. Those two wishes are utterly new to the patriarchal society that even the two lovers who are the main figures participating in her awakening are unable to accept. This incompatibility causes the reader to understand Edna's decision to terminate her life without

[48] Michael T. Gilmore, "Revolt Against Nature: The Problematic Modernism of *The Awakening*," In: New Essays on *The Awakening* 96.
[49] Chopin 214.
[50] Chopin 207.
[51] Asbee 271.
[52] Chopin 219.
[53] Gilmore 62.

any further struggle against the social claims. The comprehension of her suicide as a failure is confirmed by her vision of Mademoiselle Reisz, sneering at her and her pretensions to be an artist who must be courageous.

Yet "critics have sharply divided opinions about the end of *The Awakening*"[54] and they have interpreted Edna's suicide from various perspectives. The negative understanding of her death, previously explained, accepts Edna's death as the defeat of her striving to find an independent position in the world that does not allow for a free woman. "For Gilmore [on the other hand] Edna's suicide is not a capitulation but an act of rebellion against her claustrophobic world."[55] The voluntary end of her life was also analyzed along a positive note that swimming to exhaustion, overcoming the feeling of terror from the unknown, makes her even freer because while standing at the beach naked, "she felt like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known."[56] The fact is that she does not die literally in the novel – she swims, fatigue begins to prevail, and she is captured by the memories of her past, which are significant for the understanding of her motives. She thinks of all those she has been trying to liberate herself from – her husband and children, previous "lovers", father and sister – and these farewells while swimming – her first major achievement of the liberation process – are expressive of her absolute freedom.

Both of the interpretations, although from opposite angles, consider Edna's death as inevitable because there is no room for the independent woman in the American society. With the new century "a period of social adjustment which would see women's roles change remarkably"[57] commences. The extreme difficulty of this transformation in the perception of women by the society is demonstrated by today's situation of women, when even one century later the position of women, although much improved, is still not equal to that of men. The three novels discussed in this thesis point out the difficulty of the transformation of the women's position in society. As mentioned above, Lily and Edna die because they cannot continue with their lives, Lily literally because she is poor and not able to provide for herself and Edna metaphorically because she refuses to go back to her husband and accept her social role. Isabel does not die, yet the advancement of her mind is strongly opposed and she, acknowledging her mistake, accepts the life in death which is personified by the marriage to a husband who hates her. The three women are completely rejected by their contemporaries for

[54] Asbee 258.
[55] Martin 26.
[56] Chopin 220.
[57] Janet Beer and Elizabeth Nolan, "Contextual Overview," In: Kate Chopin's The Awakening: A Sourcebook 5.

their innovative ideas for which there is no room and which are dangerous to the established order of things.

5.10 Misconception of the desire for independence

In addition, the incomprehension of the women's new desires – of their wishes for self-realization and for casting aside their fixed roles – is pictured in the literary depictions of the reaction of the heroines' husbands, which is extensively dealt with also by Charlotte Perkins Gilman in her short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper", the last work considered here , albeit briefly. Whereas The Awakening is concerned with the process of self-realization as such, with the description of Edna trying to free herself from the boundaries of her society and to do what she wants, Gilman's story portrays the response and treatment of her surroundings towards the "strange" behavior of the woman who acts in a non-conformist manner. Disregarding the different approach towards women's protest, the two women who do not, and do not want to, fit into their role, are equally considered disordered and treated by a physician. Even though Doctor Mandelet comprehends Edna's "peculiarity," she does not allow him to help her. The husband of the narrator of the "The Yellow Wallpaper" does not have the slightest idea about his wife's thoughts.

The story depicts a middle-aged woman who is kept in one room by her husband-physician, who considers her as having just a "temporary nervous depression". Her husband treats her with care but rather like a helpless child and he completely fails to see the truth of her state – the fact that she wants to write and be herself, not the common wife and mother. He cures her by total confinement and as Elizabeth Ammons points out, Gilman by relating her own experience reacts in her short story to the treatment of the late-nineteenth-century American rest-cure specialist S. Weir Mitchell. The neurologist is mentioned in the story as almost a threat to the narrator by her husband, to whom she will be sent if she does not get well faster and whose "therapy then consisted of isolation, inactivity, and excessive feeding"[58] (therapy that Gilman herself underwent). Edith Wharton also suffered several nervous breakdowns for which she was treated. She has probably not been directly under Mitchell's supervision but she left discreetly to Philadelphia, where he was working. It is believed that she did not go through the rather crippling "rest cure" which "drove Gilman nearly mad"[59]. Wharton in fact, to the contrary of Gilman, was cured by the seclusion from her husband and

[58] Ammons 36.
[59] Lynne Sharon Schwartz, "Introduction," The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Writings, Charlotte Perkins Gilman (New York: Bantam Books, 1989) xv.

"by her establishing an independent intellectual and creative life for herself as a writer."[60] Similarly to Wharton, Chopin was supported by writing to which she was "encouraged by the family doctor and friend, Dr Kolbenheyer, less as a means of providing a living for her six children than as a way of coping with grief"[61] after losing her husband. Gilman's experience was therefore unique, which is reflected in the oppressive atmosphere of her story. Her heroine is on the outside perfectly ruled by her husband because everything she talks about was arranged and decided by him. Yet it becomes apparent that she does not submit mentally to everything he tells her and she is actively thinking all the time, about which her husband, John, does not know in the least.

After rejecting her domestic roles, the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" is forbidden any activity, she just needs rest and country air. Her husband "hates to have [her] write a word"[62] because in his opinion it is not good for her condition, even though it relieves her mind. John tells everyone as he himself believes that there is nothing wrong with his wife, except a slight nervous breakdown, which was caused by the exhaustion under the burden of new tasks (taking care of a baby, being a responsible wife) and which will pass with time. Likewise Léonce, after Edna's declination of her duties and her moving, quickly begins to rearrange their house, believing that her state is only temporary, and in this fashion covering up for the unconventionality of his wife. Both ignore, though, the fact that their wives' desire to express themselves in a creative way, which is strictly forbidden by John, for whom any such work is unfit for a woman.

Edna's awakening is more of a conflict between the two desires identified above, which she is dealing with independently of her husband. Although Mr. Pontellier questions her, protests many times and seeks professional help, he is quite weak against anything Edna decides; she is her master from the time she realizes her possibilities and real wishes. Edna is saved in a way by Doctor Mandelet, with whom Léonce consults her condition and who, silently comprehending the reasons for Edna's behavior, advises to leave her alone, until the whim passes. The narrator of Gilman's short story is in reverse immediately considered ill. The husbands make it clear that society was not paying attention to women's needs because it was taken for granted that the roles of the proper wife – maternity (in rather a formal way such as assisting to the nurses) and the social duties – are fulfilling enough. The woman was not supposed to require more because she was well provided for by her husband. Dr.

[60] Elizabeth Ammons, "Preface," In: The House of Mirth: Authoritative Text Backgrounds and Contexts Criticism vii.
[61] Asbee 273.
[62] Gilman 4.

Mandelet, the only person that comprehends the process Edna is undergoing, functions as a hope for the future. Despite his brief appearance in the novel, his words are extremely important for their message. He offers Edna help pointing out the fact that there not many people who would understand her but he will. The wise doctor is advanced for his era and although we know little about his personal life, his marriage is perhaps the one of the future because he listens to his wife and plans with her (when he accepts the invitation to dinner at Pontelliers, he accedes but warns that his wife might have some other engagement for him).

Interestingly the women do not reject, or attempt to reject, only the dominance of their husbands, but they both neglect their children, who as they feel would possess them and thus limit their creativity. As I have mentioned above, Edna realizes that she is not a "mother-woman" and to Gilman's narrator, her baby is dear but she "*cannot* be with him, it makes [her] so nervous."[63] Similarly Madame Merle and Mrs. Touchett also disclaim their mother role – the first completely, the latter by her isolation in a different country, pursuing a life of her own (even leaving for another continent, when her son is on the verge of dying). Isabel's responsible conduct towards Pansy might be explained by her consciousness of her stepmother role, but at the same time her pride plays an importance in her decision to return to the commanding husband. Wharton is the only one to offer hope through motherhood in the character of Nettie, the worker, who personifies the continuity of life (similarly to the minor but highly significant role of Dr. Mandelet, Nettie's child is possibly the embodiment of hope for the marriage of affections and understanding). Wharton did not have any children, unlike Gilman and Chopin, which might account for her idea of the liberating potential of motherhood – Lily dies with the feeling of warmth from Nettie's child – because the ideal vision of the working girl and her child is questionable at least to the degree that the labor class is from its essence constantly facing existential problems.

It is true that Edna does not do much from the beginning, except for providing the family background for her husband and associating with other wives and a great part of her rebellion against her roles relates to her sexual passion. The reason for not playing the woman's role for Gilman's narrator is, to the contrary, her quest for self-realization as a rational being. She is driven solely by her creative passion: she wants to write and there is no sexual desire functioning as a drive for her independence. The main mistake John makes is that he does not consider more seriously what she says about the wallpaper, to him "nothing was worse for a nervous patient than to give way to such fancies"[64]. He is certain that it is a

[63] Gilman 5.
[64] Gilman 5.

good place for her to recover and "he knows there is no *reason* to suffer, and that satisfies him."[65] The wallpaper provides for her a field for a mental activity during her confinement and forced rest; at first it is an object of resentment in which she at last discovers a woman crawling and shaking her cage, represented by the pattern of the wallpaper. "Literally crawling, she offers a horrible picture of what the bourgeois white nineteenth-century ideal of femininity often really meant: bondage, masochism, madness."[66] John faints as the first response when she finds his wife crawling around the room, transformed into a mad woman because he cannot understand what has become of his wife. He was not paying attention to her needs and changes. Until the moment he finds her crawling, he was sure about his treatment and her possible recovery because to him it was just a "temporary nervous depression".

Ammons suggests that "forcibly stripped of choice and voice, Gilman's narrator furiously affirms her right to self-determination – in the flesh, in the written word."[67] Gilman and Chopin encoded in their text allusions to the male dominance of the literary history, making it almost impossible for women to find a place for their creative expressions. In The Awakening there are numerous allusions to the composer Chopin that "function as what Nancy K. Miller has called the 'internal female signature' in women's writing, here a self-referential pun that alludes to Kate Chopin's ambitions as an artist"[68]. The texts are therefore doubly significant for the changing position of women at the turn of the century because they not only document the restrictions of women by the society by picturing the struggles of their fictional heroines, but simultaneously they refer to the position of women writers in the literary world – a world almost wholly ruled by men, who occupied nearly all the positions that determined the publication of a text.

[65] Gilman 4.
[66] Ammons 39.
[67] Ammons 35.
[68] Showalter 76.

6 Conclusion

The main concern of this MA thesis was to depict the shifting character of the turn of the century that caused a fundamental change in all spheres of life, most significantly in the new conception of the gender division. My focus was three literary texts of this period. The House of Mirth, as Pamela Knights wrote,

> comes out of a nation in a hurry. It is possessed by change, by mobility of all kinds. Everyone seems to be in rapid transit; one century seems to be swirling into the next. As we read, we begin to feel that we are in many different worlds at once, encountering carriages and motor cars, candles and electric light, telephone calls and notes sealed with wax, coexisting even within a single page.[1]

In a similar way, The Portrait of a Lady and The Awakening reflect the progressive change in all directions – social, economical and technological. The industrialization that was accompanied by urbanization resulted in two major transformations of the domestic sphere: in the lower class, new jobs for women were created, and in the middle and upper classes, fathers and husbands were more separated from their families because their work outside the house had been increasingly time-demanding, which is illustrated by Mr. Pontellier, who travels to New York for extensive periods of time on business.

The three novels acknowledge this unsettled conception of gender division by dismissing any positive masculine character.

> As historians now recognize, the period 1880-1920 redefined gender identity for American men as well as for American women. Among the characteristics of progressivism and of the masculinity crisis was the increased specialization of men as workers marginal to the family and culture[2].

The best example of a man deformed by excessive demands on him to earn money is Mr. Bart, a sad and quiet figure we never encounter at home during daylight. The other men are in each case defected somehow; either their intellectual and advanced views are restricted to the level of talk and they never find the strength to act, which is the case of Selden and Ralph, or their character is distorted by the social assurance of their dominance – for example when Osmond feels that he should be Isabel's superior and Gus Trenor does not question the morality of his sexual claims on Lily. None of the men in The Awakening is better; Mr. Pontellier mostly separated from his family, as was mentioned above, never understands Edna and in the same way neither of her two lovers is ready to accept Edna as an individual with

[1] Pamela Knights, "Introduction," The House of Mirth, Edith Wharton ([New York]: Everyman's Library, 1991) ix.
[2] Showalter 366.

her own views and desires. The last and most depressing example of a man's failure to understand his wife is the husband of the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper". The negative portrayal of a man in this case is drawn by the authoritarian nature of his dealing with his wife's "disorder" (her wish for creativity and her rejection of the confining domestic tasks). The men figure in the novels to show that the society is not fit to accept a woman as an active, independent being.

These progressive changes of the period also influenced women in a way that they were made conscious of their restricted position, as their household was no longer a place that would fulfill their desires and the unified feminist movement, in comparison to the former individual resistance, succeeded in being heard, thus gained new opportunities for women. The great historical developments were based on the lower scale of personal self-realizations. The three authors participated in this process of alternation, on the one hand, by their writing that pictures the impact of the transitional era on a woman, and on the other hand, by their personal lives, either by establishing themselves in the society as independent female writers who pointed out the essential topics, such as women's individuality (the need for their own way of thinking in contrast to the absolute subordination to men) and female sexuality, or by their contributions to the art of literature as a discipline.

I intended in this study to record and analyze the reflection of this significant transient historical period in the three novels that describe women's awakening from the confinement of marriage and their striving for freedom, as yet entirely abstract. One common feature of the novels, in addition to the themes of marriage, motherhood and other themes that were already outlined in the introduction, is the age of the heroines and their similar position in the society (a white woman in the upper class), which was essential for the comparison of their developments. As Showalter wrote, "[t]he threshold of thirty established for women by nineteenth-century conventions of 'girlhood' and marriageability continued in the twentieth century as a psychological observation about the formation of feminine identity."[3] The three novels foreshadow the new focus on the psychological processes of characters in the fiction of the twentieth century, the best example of this tendency being Virginia Woolf, who experimented with stream-of-consciousness. Each of the texts concentrates on the process of its heroine's awakening by noticing in detail her ideas and doubts that are essential to the readers for understanding the actions that she takes on the outside. The deviation from the typical conduct of a woman is emphasized by different strategies of narration. Whereas Edna

[3] Showalter 86.

seems to comply from the outset with the nineteenth-century standard – she is twenty-eight, six years married and with two children – Lily and Isabel violate the traditional ways of behavior at the start of the novel. They express ideas that are extraordinary to their surroundings, which in turn represent the common views about the usual ambitions of women. Lily defies the social norms in the opening of the novel by visiting a man alone and by complaining of her unjust position and Isabel rejects completely, at first, her "obligation" to marry. Yet for all three the age of twenty nine is the crossing line of their lives when they fully realize their position in society. Lily, Isabel and Edna undergo a change that is the central issue of the three texts in an era of substantial shifts related to the approaching century. They grow up from the ideals of youth and their romantic ideas about freedom, and they realize fully the limits which the society imposes on them and of which they had only a misty notion before. Yet through the experience of their attempt to stand up for their liberty, they comprehend the irreversibility of their situation in the contemporary rigid society which, still at this moment of the initiation of the process of disproving the stereotypical delusions about women's narrow ambitions, functions on the nineteenth-century rules.

However, to borrow from Showalter again, "[t]he fiction of this transitional phase in women's history and women's writing is characterized by unhappy endings, as novelists struggled with the problem of going beyond the allowable limits and breaking through the available histories and stories for women."[4] Lily and Edna die because there is no more room for them in the present conditions. Although Edna takes this lethal step willfully, Lily unconsciously lets herself fall into the world of dreams, distancing herself in this way from the harsh and impossible reality. Isabel does not terminate her life literally but metaphorically; she accepts the "life in death" because by accepting the intolerable confinement of her marriage with Osmond, who feels only hatred for her, she surrenders all her ideals about freedom and life, ideals that used to present her with so many unspoken opportunities. I have documented these heroines' awakening, comparing their situation in detail. It can be concluded that despite the factual nuances of their liberation as such, all three women desire to free themselves from what is expected, but the unsurpassable obstacle becomes their own uncertainty and doubt as to what they really want. Only Edna in the end finds out what she needs in life, but she realizes at the same time that it is impossible to achieve.

[4] Showalter 87.

"Unlike some other heroines of the fiction of this transitional phase, Lily Bart is neither the educated, socially conscious, rebellious New Woman, nor the androgynous artist who finds meaning for her life in solitude and creativity […] Her skills and morality are those of the Perfect Lady."[5] Neither are Isabel and Edna. Clearly Edna is at one point the closest to become an independent artist, like Mademoiselle Reisz, only to realize that she cannot live in isolation. George Moore calls Isabel "the New Woman of the 1870s, perhaps the first feminist in English fiction"[6], yet this statement is arguable because, despite her progressive ideas in the first volume, Isabel becomes unsure about herself and her actions, and she seeks support in a union with a man whom she can admire and learn from. None of the three writers centers their novel on the New Woman of the new century, the confident and active female. Instead, they concentrate on the process as such.

The reasons why Henry James, Kate Chopin and Edith Wharton portrayed heroines who fail during their process of self-realization may be that they lived the greatest part of their lives in the nineteenth century, still confronted with its traditions. That is why the process in itself is essential to them and not the outcome. The heroines do not succeed in their quest for freedom because, as was mentioned above, the society was not ready to accept a woman who was independent in her way of life (visiting men alone, walking the streets by herself and most importantly not submitting herself to anyone through marriage). Charles Feidelson notes that for Henry James at this moment in his career the combination of a big subject and a form was essential, as James himself affirmed in the Preface to the New York edition of The Portrait of a Lady. Feidelson continues by observation that "[f]rom beneath both the comedy and the pathos of the book there gradually emerges a theme that is hard and grim, yet grimly affirmative – the outline of a tragedy of consciousness."[7] The inward process of self-realization was the subject that James proposed in the novel about Isabel Archer.

In a similar manner, The House of Mirth is not simply a social novel that points out to the vulgar and egoistic behavior of the upper class, but more importantly it concentrates on the awakening consciousness of the heroine. Both Isabel and Lily through their evolving train of thoughts reflect the baseness of the society which they had the will to oppose, only to be defeated later. Similarly, the inward processes of Edna's awakening are fundamental to the

[5] Showalter 87.
[6] Geoffrey Moore, "Introduction," The Portrait of a Lady, Henry James (London: Penguin Books, 1986) 16.
[7] Charles Feidelson, "The Moment of The Portrait of a Lady," The Portrait of a Lady: an Authoritative Text, Henry James and the Novel, Reviews and Criticism, ed. Robert D. Bamberg (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1975) 749.

story and the advanced character of her own feelings and wishes is the tragedy of her life as well as of those of Lily's and Isabel's.

The heroines become aware of the fact that "[h]istoric, economic, social conditions produced situations where women had little choice but to cope if they were to survive"[8]. Marriage is the concrete institution in the lives of the three heroines which symbolizes the imprisonment of personal freedom and the embodiment of the social order that they endeavor to conquer. Each of the writers depicts matrimony at a different point, as was thoroughly explained in the introduction, exhibiting in what way a woman might attempt to resist her predetermined life. Marriage as such is not rejected by any of the authors, yet the social criteria upon which the union is to be entered and then according to which it shall function are the object of criticism. The heroines are aware of this limiting and calculative character to a different extent. Lily accepts marriage based on the nineteenth-century rules, defining the roles as an irreversible reality of her life, and except for the little wish of postponing it, she is ready to make such a match. Isabel despite of all the impressions of freedom feels in the end that in marriage she can find what she was looking for and accomplish in this way a satisfactory combination of her desires. Edna Pontellier already at the beginning grasps the falsity of any romantic ideas and perceives the restrictions of her position of a wife, and she comes to the realization that marriage does not satisfy her life. Out of the three women, she is the most conscious of the situation and the most active in the struggle for her freedom. Marriage, historically assigned to women as the goal of their lives, is portrayed as an institution that creates a division of roles, based on gender, and that presents an impediment to a woman's development. If a woman wishes to live comfortably (not in a shabby, little apartment) and desires a love relationship with a man (unlike the celibacy of Mademoiselle Reisz), the institution cannot be rejected completely as yet, no matter whether a woman tries to resist before or during marriage, because it is unshakably entrenched in the society.

Other themes, such as motherhood in relation to class division, are related to the matrimonial union. Maternity was also perceived as a limitation and one of the forms of confinement to the domestic environment, due to the fact that it was often imposed as a requirement (to bear a child for the men) and because it seemingly demanded women's time. Ironically, this is a rather artificial feeling of the upper-class women whose maternal obligations are passed onto the nurses. This fact that the role of a mother is not really time-demanding, however, makes the rejection of motherhood even more significant because it

[8] Asbee 277.

alludes to the social confinement and to the limits imposed on women's development. They are supposed to be fully satisfied with their undemanding maternal duties and fulfill their social requirements, therefore any other tasks are considered undesirable; women are imprisoned by stereotypes of their active domestic life, while they are in fact degenerating in boredom. The best example of this deforming influence depicted in its extreme is the confinement of the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper," who is prevented from any activity because of her desire to write, at the time when she neglects her role of a mother and a wife. Edith Wharton, as the only author of the four discussed in this work, hints at a positive concept of motherhood, when the continuity of life is emphasized, yet Lily does not hallucinate about her own child, but rather about another woman's child and thus it does not really support the ideal of motherhood because she does not see it in her future.

Another common theme that the three novels address is sexual desire, each taking a different attitude towards it. "Unlike *The Awakening*, [… The House of Mirth and The Portrait of a Lady do] not offer eroticism as a way to self-realization. Lily's aloofness seems the only option in the world, where, without exception, sex is seen as threatening and exploitative."[9] To Lily and Isabel, sex is masculine and therefore restrictive; sexual passion represents the things they are escaping from. This view makes Kate Chopin unique in comparison with James and Wharton because it is the realization of Edna's sexuality that is the culminating point in her awakening. She realizes that her marriage confines not only her creativity, but it also does not fulfill her needs as a passionate woman. Similarly, art is an important element in all three novels. In each, it symbolizes either the possibility of self-realization or, on the contrary, the confining artistic value of a woman as an object which was discussed in depth in relation with the most artistic heroine of the three, Edna. Sexual desire and creativity make Edna the most advanced in her quest for liberty because at the end, she is the one who knows exactly what she wills yet cannot receive in the present conditions. On the other hand, Lily and Isabel never really grasp what else they could do to satisfy their wishes; the first loses by not finding a place in either of the classes, incapable of any labor; the latter falls under her romantic ideas to a confinement that she is determined to endure. Isabel is proud to admit her mistake, but at the same time, she does not have many other options for her life: she refuses to exchange her present marriage for a union with her other two suitors, which means the rejection of returning to America in itself. There is no other

[9] Knights xxiv.

alternative for her in Europe (she traveled excessively to learn that it is not the purpose of her life).

There are several reasons, both professional as well as artistic, for the authors to treat the themes of marriage in relation to the position of a woman in the society. Edith Wharton's depiction of the theme is the most personal; in a letter to an editor of Scribner's, her publishing house, she justified her choice and confessed that "the assumption that the people I write about are not 'real' because they are not navvies & char-women, makes me feel rather hopeless. I write about what I see, what I happen to be nearest to"[10]. Her intention was to show the outer world the invisible egoistic principles of the upper class and the restricted position of a woman. Edith Wharton was herself experiencing the clash of the social requirements and her artistic aspirations. She married, as was expected of her, and complied on the outside with the social decorum; however, quite expressively, in her thirties she underwent a mental breakdown which determined the further course of her life. Edith Wharton wrote The House of Mirth at the point when she herself was "awakening" after the medical treatment she was sure that writing was her biggest ambition that she wanted to pursue and slowly began to realize the confining nature of her marriage with Teddy Wharton, whose mental health was also poor. Edith Wharton's increasing confidence in her skills is documented in the letters to her publishing house, which show that she was quite apt in business when she bargained her profit from the sold copies. Eventually, she divorced in 1913, sealing her independence and following without personal restrictions a professional career of a writer crowned by the Pulitzer Prize in 1921 and in 1923, by an honorary doctorate of letters from Yale University, both of which were awarded for the first time in their history to a woman.

Unlike Wharton, Kate Chopin did not react directly to her own situation. She grew up in the American South and was brought up in a convent where her desire to write was formed. "The academy though, was primarily an institution which promoted duty and submissiveness as true feminine qualities, the sisters there preparing their charges for a life of marriage and motherhood."[11] Chopin's biographers agree upon her rebellious nature and questioning mind that was developed under a matriarchal influence of the women in her family. Kate Chopin married, had six children in the nine years of her union and became a widow at the age of thirty two. She became independent at the very age that divides girlhood from womanhood,

[10] Edith Wharton, "Selected Letters," The House of Mirth: Authoritative Text Backgrounds and Contexts Criticism, ed. Elizabeth Ammons (New York: W. W. Norton and company, 1990) 259.
[11] Janet Beer and Elizabeth Nolan, "Contextual Overview," Kate Chopin's The Awakening: A Sourcebook, ed. Janet Beer and Elizabeth Nolan (London: Routledge, 2004) 7.

and faced the necessity to provide for her children alone. She pursued her writing as a vocation, allowing her to earn money and address the themes of life that were much advanced of her time, which is confirmed by the adoption of her text only by the feminists of the seventies, seven decades after its publication. She experimented not only with themes but also with the form as was analyzed in detail in the fourth chapter. There are two possible explanations why Chopin – a woman quite conventional for her time (a never-remarried widow, with six children) – addressed such a radical theme. Firstly, it might account for her artistic concerns to try to experiment with themes that were silently overlooked in the past and her wish to extend the function of literature by taking it further from simple documenting to the aspect of reveling – literature as an instrument of exposing taboos. Secondly, she doubtlessly experienced drawbacks in her personal life as a single mother as well as in her career as a female writer that she wished to react to. Her personal life also accounts for a love affair with a married man that certainly played a role in her recognition of the boundaries of such a social institution as marriage.

Henry James also drew on his personal experience and as David Galloway points out, "certainly there are numerous parallels between James and Ralph Touchett – in their detachment, the desire to test the resources of imagination, and their unfulfilled love for a cousin from Albany."[12] James never married and thus had personal considerations about the institution that he decided to avoid for various, disputable, causes. As was discussed above, James's life-long ambition was to portray a great subject which, beginning with Isabel Archer, he found partly in the depiction of the inner life of his characters. The ideal figure that allows him to develop the conflict between an individual and a society is a woman rejecting social conventions. Although James's heroines are not the typical new women striving at equality and consciously refusing male superiority, their naïve ideas of freedom that is extremely appealing to them make the young women of his stories quite prototypical of the criticism of the rigid stereotypes about gender divisions. Another example of such a woman is Daisy Miller, whose naively free behavior with men disregarding any conventions is censured by the society. A unique aspect of James's in comparison with Wharton and Chopin is his constant juxtaposition of Europe and America which is based on his own "double" life.

Apart from the personal relations to the topics and the new perspectives introduced, all three writers had a serious influence on the following generations. Kate Chopin influenced the later generations rather indirectly, solely through her fiction, as was mentioned above, and

[12] David Galloway, Henry James: The Portrait of a Lady (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1967) 13.

after a considerable gap in time. Her advanced treatment of femininity was adopted by the feminist movement. Her advanced views about a woman's desire for creativity and, more particularly, sexual passion could be accepted by the inflexible society only after the scientific studies of sexuality of the twentieth century, most importantly of Freud, were slowly recognized. On the other hand, Wharton and James both studied the art of writing and published their instructions. Wharton had a direct influence on F. S. Fitzgerald and other writers who consulted her personally. James's critical essays are highly appraised still today. The three writers are therefore prominent representatives of the turn of the century because their texts depict the impact of the changes on the upper class society that influenced the roles of its members and at the same time, their literary technique instructs their successors and foreshadows future developments.

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Shrnutí (Czech Summary)

Přelom dvacátého století[1] je doba velkých historických změn, které ovlivnily všechny oblasti lidského života – společenské, ekonomické a technologické. Tato diplomová práce se zaměřuje na tři romány, The Portrait of a Lady (Portrét dámy) od Henryho Jamese, The House of Mirth (Dům radovánek) od Edith Whartonové a The Awakening (Probuzení) od Kate Chopinové z tohoto období, které zachycují, jak se v návaznosti na probíhající celospolečenské změny mění povědomí ženy. Ve své práci jsem se soustředila na jedné straně na měnící se chápání instituce manželství a mateřství v souvislosti s třídním rozdělením společnosti, původem, rodinným zázemím hrdinek a na straně druhé jsem chtěla poukázat na obtížné postavení spisovatelky v mužském světě, jejíž ambice pod vlivem dynamické doby rostou. Na základě těchto dvou záměrů jsem konkrétně vybrala tři romány, které odrážejí celkový charakter společnosti, jež se snaží postavit novým způsobům v novém století na odpor. Na konkrétních osudech hlavních hrdinek, Lily Bartové, Isabel Archerové a Edny Pontellierové, které se snaží čelit svému osudu, jež je pro ně společností předurčený. Umění a sexualita jsou důležitými články v procesu měnícího se chápání manželského svazku, který představuje překážku ve vývoji ženy, neboť právě manželství do této doby znamenalo pro ženu splnění jejích ambicí – vdát se symbolizovalo pro ženu životní cíl – a z tohoto důvodu zásadní omezení jejích ostatních přání. Symbolický je věk hrdinek, neboť každé z nich je v průběhu románu dvacet devět, a tudíž proces sebeuvědomění probíhá právě v době, kdy se z hrdinky stává žena. Elaine Showalterová poukazuje, že ve dvacátém století se práh třicátého roku v životě ženy, který byl v devatenáctém století pevně spjat s dívčí povahou a schopností vdát se, vyznačoval jako období duševního utváření její ženskosti[2], jak všechny tři hrdinky svými osudy a touhami po sebevyjádření dokládají.

Manželství je v každém díle zachyceno z různého pohledu a tímto způsobem všechny tři romány dohromady tvoří celkový obraz toho, co tento svazek pro ženu na konci devatenáctého století představoval a jakým způsobem se žena na počátku nového století snažila tomuto manželskému „uvěznění“ postavit. Romány nejsou v práci seřazeny chronologicky podle data vydání, ale právě podle toho, v jaké fázi zobrazují manželství. Tímto způsobem The House of Mirth, The Portrait of a Lady a The Awakening vytváří osu procesu, kdy žena čelí nutnosti vdát se a přijmout role, které z této povinnosti vyplývají: od předmanželského stavu přes moment vdávání, kdy žena podléhá svým idealistickým

[1] Termín „přelom dvacátého století“ označuje období přibližně mezi lety 1880-1910.
[2] Elaine Showalter, Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 86.

představám, až po snahu vymanit se ze svazujícího postavení manželky a matky. Každá kapitola je tak zaměřena na konkrétní předmanželskou či manželskou situaci: Lily Bartová, hrdinka románu The House of Mirth si je plně vědoma nezbytnosti vdát se a nespravedlivého postavení ženy ve společnosti, ve které bez toho, aniž by se vdala, nemůže pohodlně žít, jak závěr románu ukazuje. Lily zastupuje předmanželské dilema mladé dívky, které je zachyceno částečně i v Jamesově románu, The Portrait of Lady. Isabel Archerová, na rozdíl od Lily, je v první části románu plně rozhodnuta se nikdy nevdat a v návaznosti na své přesvědčení odmítne několik výhodných nabídek k sňatku. Avšak k úžasu jejího okolí i čtenářů se Isabel vdá a ústředním tématem románu se stane její rozčarování a uvědomění si své chyby, když mylně zaměnila své romantické představy za omezující manželství. Poslední román, který ve své práci rozebírám, se nezaobírá přímo předmanželskými představami a postoji, ale zobrazuje již vdanou ženu, která si začíná uvědomovat své společenské neuspokojení a snaží se z této pozice osvobodit. Edna Pontellierová je nejblíže ve svém boji za osvobození, avšak její konkrétní kroky k osamostatnění se ukážou stejně neúspěšné jako neustále odkládání sňatku Lily a Isabelina víra ve věčnou svobodu. Ve své práci se také zčásti věnuji povídce „The Yellow Wallpaper“ (Žlutá tapeta) od Charlotty Perkins Gilmanové v souvislosti s románem Kate Chopinové, neboť výmluvně zobrazuje odstrašující reakci manžela na netypické chování své ženy.

Základním rysem všech čtyř literárních textů je snaha ženy postavit se proti společenskému nátlaku na její začlenění se do rolí, které jsou předurčené skrze instituci manželství. Kromě ústředního hrdinčina předmanželské anebo manželského stavu se práce zaměřuje také na ostatní manželství v těchto třech románech, která dokreslují společenskou funkci této instituce a zároveň její nepřirozený charakter. Každý manželský pár slouží jako názorný příklad důvodu, kvůli kterému je tento svazek ženy a muže, založený na společenských kriteriích devatenáctého století, neúspěšný. Manželství již pro ženu nepředstavuje konkrétní cíl jejího života, který ji uspokojí po zbytek život, ba právě naopak žena na konci devatenáctého století si plně uvědomuje omezení, která manželství bez lásky s sebou přináší, a proto se tento svazek snaží odmítnout. Na přelomu století žena postupně začíná objevovat nové možnosti, které se před ní otevírají, a cítí tak nutkavou potřebu odporovat očekávanému podřízení se manželovi a chce rozvíjet sama sebe.

Druhé kritérium pro výběr těchto tří autorů bylo jejich pohlaví, neboť příslušnost k mužské nebo ženské části populace silně ovlivnila osud spisovatelů na přelomu dvacátého století. Konkrétní osudy E. Whartonové, H. Jamese a K. Chopinové na jedné straně dokreslují povahu doby, ve které tvořili a která byla zásadní pro postavení žen ve společnosti,

na druhé straně, každý z nich svým zpracováním tématu osamostatňující se ženy znamenal velký přínos i pro literaturu samotnou. Ženy tohoto období bojovaly za své právo být přijaty jako umělkyně na stejné úrovni jako muži, odmítaly stereotypní závěry mužské nadřazenosti. Stále častěji se ozývaly hlasy, jež kritizovaly jednostranné zastoupení názorů i uměleckých děl těch, kteří znevažují anebo zcela ignorují ženská díla. V druhé polovině dvacátého století sílil názor, který zrazoval od čistě feministického pohledu na věc, neboť hrozilo, že by v jeho důsledku došlo ke stejně zkreslenému pohledu na skutečnost, jaký nabídla literární kritika počátku dvacátého století, zastoupena výhradně bílými heterosexuálními muži. Henryho Jamese tudíž ve své práci zahrnuji ze dvou důvodů: za prvé, abych vyvážila ženský a mužský pohled na dané téma manželství a za druhé, abych poukázala na konkrétním příkladu vliv zaujatého hodnocení literární kritiků a spisovatelů vůči spisovatelkám, neboť Edith Whartonová byla po dlouhou dobu ve stínu Henryho Jamese a z důvodu podobnosti jejich témat byla literárními autoritami přehlížena až zavrhována.

Ačkoliv se ve své práci soustředím zejména na detailní interpretaci jednotlivých děl, snaha hrdinek o své osamostatnění a vymanění se ze závislosti, jak finanční, tak psychologické (Gilbert Osmond vyžaduje, aby se mu Isabel podvolila i ve svém způsobu myšlení), je v přímé úměře k právě probíhajícím společenským změnám, které se tak úzce dotýkaly postavení ženy ve společnosti. Mužská převaha byla zřetelná ve všech vědních oblastech, což bylo zapříčiněno důsledným rozdělením ženských a mužských rolí ve společnosti, které se právě na přelomu dvacátého století začalo zásadně měnit. Sociologové a další teoretici přišli s konkrétním termínem, který označuje nově vznikající fenomén sebevědomé, aktivní a nezávislé ženy: „New Woman“ (nová žena), která svým konáním vyvrací představu pasivní ženy v domácnosti. Velkou roli v této době sehrálo feministické hnutí, které bylo právě v této době sjednocené, a tudíž silné. Bez feministického boje za zlepšení postavení žen ve společnosti by se mužští autoři nevěnovali osudům ženský hrdinek, které byly založeny na normách devatenáctého století a byly tímto spíše nezáživné. Skutečnost, že Henry James, který je považován za jednoho z nejlepších amerických realistů, se ve svých románech věnoval právě ženám, dokládá na důležitosti přeměnám přelomu dvacátého století. Zároveň spisovatelky, jako Edith Whartonová a Kate Chopinová, by bez aktivního boje feminismu, přesněji feministické literární kritiky, zůstaly v zapomnění. Ačkoliv se ani jedna z nich přímo feministického hnutí neúčastnila, na rozdíl od Charlotty Perkins Gilmanové, pro niž psaní představovalo určitou formu boje za práva žen a jehož neoddělitelnou součástí pro ni byla právě společenská funkce, pro E. Whartonovou a K. Chopinovou psaní znamenalo poslání a formu sebevyjádření. Jelikož je tento historický

vývoj zásadní pro všechny tři romány, které ve své práci rozebírám, nastiňuji v první kapitole stručný přehled feminismu a s ním spjaté feministické literární kritiky.

Laura Brunnellová definuje feminismus jako boj za rovnoprávnost žen, který je založen na víře ve společenskou, ekonomickou a politickou rovnost obou pohlaví.[3] V průběhu minulých staletí byly ženy omezeny povinnostmi starat se o domácnost a byla jim odepřena většina práv, které byly zaručeny mužům, jako například právo na vzdělání, volební právo či jim nebylo povoleno vykonávat povolání, kromě těch, která jsou spjatá s domácím prostředím (uklízení či výchova dětí, která se také v mnoha případech považovala pro ženy za nevhodnou). Až do devatenáctého století byl boj za práva žen roztříštěný, v polovině tohoto století se však ženy začaly sjednocovat a v roce 1848 se v Americe konalo první Shromáždění za práva žen. První feministické hnutí se soustředilo zejména na získání volebního práva a práva na vzdělání, která byla předností mužů z vyšších tříd společnosti a tudíž podmínky žen z nižších tříd byly zcela přehlíženy a pomíjeny. Stejným způsobem se feministky této první vlny neohlížely na situaci Afroameričanů, kteří přitom ve stejné době také bojovali za svá práva. Zpočátku tyto dvě skupiny spolu částečně spolupracovaly, když však v roce 1870 bývalý otroci získali právo volit a návrh, aby byla i ženská práva k 15. Dodatku k americké ústavě zahrnuta, byl zamítnut, jejich cesty se zcela rozešly, což je doloženo i v literatuře, která společenská dění reflektuje – literární díla zobrazují buď útrapy bělošky a nezabývají se tak problémy Afroameričanů anebo zcela obráceně, sleduje úskalí menšin a nevěnuje pozornost problémům bělošských žen. Všechna tři díla tento jev potvrzují, neboť se plně soustředí pouze na osudy hlavních hrdinek a jejich okolí a zcela přehlížejí nižší vrstvy, až na Edith Whartonovou, která nastiňuje prostředí pracujících, když sama Lily se na chvíli snaží stát jednou z nich. V roce 1890 bylo v některých státech přiznáno volební právo ženám, ale až po dalších třiceti letech, v roce 1920, bylo toto právo na základě 19. Dodatku k americké ústavě uznáno plošně pro celou zemi. Dosažení tohoto cíle však vedlo k utlumení snah celého hnutí, které mělo za následek tendenci k navrácení se do „starých kolejí“ společenského řádu, kdy ženy opět zůstávaly uzavřené v domácím prostředí. Oslabené feministické hnutí ovlivnilo literaturu, kdy mužská převaha v oblasti literární kritiky, která ve svých názorech nebyla ženami konfrontována, často docházela ke zkresleným závěrům, což mělo za následek právě zavrhnutí mnoha významných děl pouze na základě toho, že byla napsána spisovatelkami, jako například naše dvě autorky, Edith Whartonová a Kate Chopinová. Až v šedesátých a

[3] Laura Brunnell, ed, “Feminism,” Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2010, Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, 28 Mar. 2010 <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/724633/feminism/216004/History-of-feminism>.

sedmdesátých letech dvacátého století došlo k opětovnému oživení feministického boje za práva žen, který se soustředil na rovnocenná občanská práva žen. Druhá vlna feminismu se zasloužila zejména o založení mnoha ženských spolků, genderových studií na univerzitách a o celkové přenesení debaty o nerovnoprávné situaci žen na akademickou půdu. Významných důsledkem toho, že se debata o postavení žen ve společnosti dostala do vysokoškolských kruhů, byl vznik již několikrát zmiňované feministické literární kritiky, jež se zabývá nejen současnou situací, ale zároveň se ohlíží i zpět a analyzuje dopady tohoto jednostranného rozdělení na literaturu v minulosti..

Feministická literární kritika se zasadila velkou měrou o to, jakou dnes máme literaturu, neboť právě ona se zabývala a bojovala za spisovatelky, které byly na počátku dvacátého století mužskými autoritami přehlížené či zcela zamítnuté. Elaine Showalterová rozlišuje dva základní okruhy, na které se literární kritika zaměřuje: na způsob, jakým je ženská postava zobrazena v románech spisovatelů, a na pozici spisovatelky v literárním světě. V prvním okruhu se E. Showalterová soustředí na „ženu jako čtenářku“[4] a kritizuje skutečnost, že ženy jsou v dílech spisovatelů zobrazovány jako „ti druzí“[5], jak Josephine Donovanová upřesňuje, kteří nejsou pro děj důležité jako osoby, ale slouží pouze pro dokreslení okolí – buď hlavnímu hrdinovi napomáhají k jeho cíli anebo mu naopak stojí v cestě. Toto zaměření feministické literární kritiky není pro rozbor díla, The Portrait of a Lady, relevantní, neboť Henry James se vykreslení své hrdinky podrobně věnuje, protože její vnitřní procesy jsou osnovou celého románu. Druhý okruh feministické literární kritiky se děl E. Whartonové, H. Jamese a K. Chopinové konkrétně dotýká. E. Showalterová uvádí, že tento okruh se soustředí na „ženu jako spisovatelku“[6] a zabývá se nedostatečností literárního kánonu, který je silně ovlivněn mužskou nadvládou, jak v ohledu zastoupení děl tohoto reprezentativního souboru, tak i ve smyslu, kdo tento model vytváří – ženy jsou ignorovány v obou pozicích, spisovatelek i literárních kritiček. E. Showalterová rozlišuje tři fáze tohoto směru feministické literární kritiky: femininní (1840-1880, kdy spisovatelky imitovaly mužskou tradici), feministické (1880-1920, ženy ve svých dílech protestovaly proti mužským hodnotám) a ženské období (1920 až do dneška, kdy autorky zastávají svá nezávislá, ženská stanoviska).[7] Edith Whartonová a Kate Chopinová patří podle Elaine Showalterového členění

[4] Elaine Showalter, “Towards a Feminist Poetics,” Twentieth-Century Literary Theory: A Reader, ed. K. M. Newton (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1993) 268.
[5] Josephine Donovan, “Beyond the Net: Feminist Criticism as a Moral Criticism,” In: Twentieth-Century Literary Theory: A Reader, ed. K. M. Newton 264.
[6] Showalter 268.
[7] Libora Indruchová, „Elaine Showalter a gynokritika,“ Aspekt – feministický kultrúrny časopis (Písanie žien), 1/1995, 1 Apr. 2010 <http://www.aspekt.sk/cit_det.php?IDcit=166>.

do druhého období, kdy ženy proti mužským hodnotám protestovaly. Obě dvě věnovaly literatuře celý svůj život a usilovaly o prostor v uměleckém světě, který byl zcela ovládán bílými privilegovanými muži. Umění také hraje významnou roli v jejich románech.

Zatímco Lily Bartová spíše stále zastává pasivní přístup k umění tím, že sama sebe společnosti představuje jako předmět obdivu, Enda Pontellierová a ještě ve větší míře vypravěčka povídky Charlotty Perkins Gilmanové pokládá umění za základní formu sebe-objevení a sebevyjádření. Na počátku posílí Ednu umění duševně, protože jí poskytne činnost, kterou může samostatně vykonávat a která se liší od stereotypních omezujících povinností, které má plnit, navíc ji umění zajistí i finanční samostatnost. Lily také sní o umělecké dráze, když si představuje, že jednou bude vlastnit své vlastní kloboučnictví, kde bude navrhovat úchvatné klobouky, avšak její sny jsou vyvráceny již v úplném počátku, kdy si uvědomí svou manuální neschopnost. Naproti tomu, Isabel Archerová v žádné míře umění nevytváří: stane se pouze další trofejí do Osmondovy sbírky. Henry James zobrazuje umění jako mužskou doménu, což dokládá tím, že všichni muži, když ukazují Isabele svůj dům, ji zároveň představují svou sbírku umění. Spisovatel nezaznamenává překážky, se kterými se jeho ženské protějšky musejí potýkat, a proto umění pro Isabelu nepředstavuje zásadní prvek v procesu jejího sebeuvědomění, naproti tomu autorky ve svém psaní reagují na omezení, způsobená mužskou převahou, kterým musí neustále čelit, a tudíž umění je elementárně důležitý faktor v boji jejich hrdinek za osamostatnění.

Historický přehled dokazuje, že ženy byly v průběhu staletí plně závislé na mužích a úspěšnost jejich existence se odvíjela od schopnosti vdát se. Manželství však nebylo založeno na vzájemných citech, či dokonce lásce, ba zcela na finanční a společenské výhodnosti svazku. Často jediným majetkem, který žena měla, byl její fyzický vzhled, jež byl jejím hlavním klíčem k „výdělečnému“ manželství, což je nejdetailněji zobrazeno v románu Edith Whartonové, The House of Mirth, který zachycuje střet starých a nových představ a úsilí mladé ženy najít určitý kompromis mezi svazujícím společenskými tlaky a svými vlastními tužbami. Druhá kapitola, která je věnována předmanželskému postavení mladé ženy, která má již vzhledem ke svému věku nejvyšší čas se vdát, neboť ji hrozí, že se stane starou pannou, nucenou žít skromným životem. Tato část diplomové práce, která se věnuje životním osudům Lily Bartové, uvádí ústřední témata, která jsou poté postupně rozváděna do větších podrobností v porovnání s romány Jamese a Chopinové.

Román, The House of Mirth, ačkoliv byl ze tří románu, které ve své práci rozebírám, vydán jako poslední, v roce 1905, poukazuje nejpodrobněji na postavení svobodné mladé

ženy ve společnosti a v návaznosti na tento ústřední motiv poodkrývá celkový obraz společnosti s mnoha svými nedostatky. Kromě již zmíněné závažnosti fyzického vzhledu dívky, je v románu zobrazen způsob, jakým funguje vyšší třída společnosti, jež pro ostatní slouží jako ideál nebe na zemi, jejíž morální zásady jsou však v skrytu nízké a sobecké. Lily Bartová je pod vlivem své matky vedena k bezmezné víře v luxus, neboť jak paní Bartová často opakuje není nic horšího než omšelost (dinginess) a Lily musí udělat vše proto, aby se životu v nuzných podmínkách vyhnula. Lily nejenže od samého počátku plně chápe a přijímá manželství jako svou povinnost, ale do určité míry ztrácí i své vlastní já, neboť vzhled je pro ni nejdůležitější (když se potřebuje o sobě ujistit dívá se do zrcadla a její představa o sobě samé je do značné míry závislá na tom, jak ji vnímají ostatní). Nejlepším příkladem Lilyiny snahy o ztělesnění ideálu ženskosti je její role v živém zobrazení malby, kterého se nadšeně zhostí. Lily avšak není pouze bohatou slečinkou, která se stará pouze o svůj vzhled, ba právě naopak její pozice ve elitní společnosti je velmi nejistá. Lily ze své vlastní zkušenosti, kdy je na plně závislá na milodarech svým bohatých přátel, pro které na oplátku plní malé služby, jako psaní pozvánek, role „ozdoby" jejich večírku, a na nepravidelných finančních obnosech, které dostává od své tety, jež se jí ujala, si uvědomuje tenkou hranici mezi bohatstvím a chudobou a soucítí s nižšími vrstvami. Lily, poté co je z vysoké společnosti na základě lživých obvinění „vyhnána", se pokusí osamostatnit se a vydělat peníze, aby mohla splatit dluhy, do kterých se kvůli své naprosté neznalosti světa peněz dostala. Její snaha je naprosto marná, neboť byla vychovávaná jako poupě, jehož hlavním údělem je vykvést a obohacovat tak svět pouze o svou krásu a vůni, což je potvrzeno i jedním ze dvou původních názvů, které Whartonová pro své dílo zamýšlela: The Year of a Rose (Rok růže), i druhý název poukazuje na Lilyinu předurčenou funkci ve společnosti, A Moment's Ornament (Chvilková ozdoba). Oba tyto tituly narážejí na omezení v čase a předpovídají tak Lilyin osud, který se právě točí okolo její snahy odložit manželství, jehož svazující povahu přijímá, pouze na nějakou dobu, která se však pro Lily stane nakonec osudnou. Odkládání a vyhýbání se splnění společenské povinnosti vede k tomu, že se pro společnost stane nezajímavou, až nudnou a proto se jí lehce zbaví.

Lily si je nízkostí této privilegované vrstvy společnosti plně vědoma, avšak i přesto se chce stát její součástí, protože si od začátku uvědomuje (a na konci je pouze utvrzena), že není schopna přijmout nuzné prostředí. Gerty Farish, zakladatelka charitativního spolku pro pracující ženy, je příkladem samostatné ženy, která nepodléhá společenským konvencím manželství, na druhou stranu její prostředky jsou omezené, a tudíž pro Lily představuje spíše protiklad toho, co by chtěla ve svém životě. Gerty, ačkoliv člověk Lily nejbližší, nerozumí

Lily o nic víc než ostatní postavy románu, protože si Lily plně idealizuje a to, co vidí (Lilyinu krásu a dobročinné cítění) pokládá za celou pravdu. Gerty nevidí Lilyin vnitřní konflikt mezi tím, co musí (oženit se), potřebuje (bohatství) a chce (určitou svobodu od společenských konvencí). Důležitou součástí románu je Lilyin vztah se Seldenem, který román otevírá i uzavírá. Skrze rozhovory s ním se dozvídáme o Lilyině nespokojenosti s jejím nespravedlivým postavení i o jejích pochybách svého chování (snaha najít si manžela, za čímž se snaží pevně jít; ačkoliv nakonec nikdy nedotáhne svůj plán do konce). Chvílemi se zdá, že Selden by mohl být „ten pravý" pro Lily, neboť jejich vzájemná náklonnost je od samého počátku zřetelná, avšak Selden ve své podstatě není o nic lepší než Gus Trenor, který si Lily doslova koupí (pod záminkou, že obchoduje s jejími penězi na burze, jí půjčuje své peníze, za které si však poté dělá na Lily nároky). Selden stejně jako Gerty nikdy nepochopí Lilyin vnitřní konflikt a nikdy ji nenabídne podporu, kterou tak často u něho hledá. Selden je intelektuál, který kritizuje společnost, i když není o mnoho lepší než ona (má poměr s vdanou ženou, ačkoliv Lily zavrhne na základě podezření ze vztahu se ženatým mužem) a Lily si idealizuje natolik, že není schopen přijmout jakékoliv její pochybení. Selden není schopen poskytnout Lily oporu, kterou po celou dobu hledá, neboť je ovlivněn ideálem své matky, která uměla propojit bezstarostný život s nedostatkem financí, a tudíž Selden odmítá vcítit se do Lilyiny zoufalé situace. Téma mateřství je v románu zobrazeno jako zcela vedlejší, neboť děti jsou přenechány na výchovu chůvám a matky tak mohou plnit svou společenskou roli. Z tohoto důvodu je závěr, kdy Lily umírá s halucinací, že drží dítě dívky z pracující vrstvy, Nettie, symbolický. Lily si na návštěvě u Nettie uvědomila, že manželství není pouze výhodný obchod, ale že může poskytnout oporu a zajistit kontinuitu života. Ačkoliv tento obraz lehce zavádí k závěrům o idealizaci mateřství, nelze opomenout, že Lily si nepředstavuje své vlastní dítě, ale právě dítě z nižší třídy. Tato skutečnost symbolizuje Lilyinu touho po spřízněné duši a její vizi ideálu nižší vrstvy, která, ačkoliv žije v nuzných podmínkách, které Lily byla naučena razantně odmítat, má šanci na život bez falešných iluzí.

Falešné iluze jsou základem i dalšího románu, The Portrait of a Lady, který v této práci rozebírám, neboť osud Isabely Archerové je tragický zejména proto, že tato naivní Američanka podlehne romantickým ideálům a nevěří varování svého okolí. Na rozdíl od Edith Whartonové, Henry James zakládá konflikt své hrdinky se společností na střetu dvou kontinentů. Jamesova hrdinka stojí mezi dvěma různými kulturami, což má zásadní vliv na její osud, podobně jako Lily zaplatí za svou snahu fungovat v obou vrstvách vyšší třídy (starého New Yorku, založeného na konzervativních hodnotách, a nových milionářů, kteří se

snaží včlenit do aristokratické společnosti a přináší s sebou i nové způsoby zábavy, jako je např. hraní karet). Isabel plná představ odjíždí se svou tetou na starý kontinent, kde ji očeká nový život založený na svobodě, o kterém má však velmi nejasnou představu, pouze si je stoprocentně jistá, že se nikdy nevdá. Třídní rozdělení není v Jamesově románu zdaleka tak podrobně rozebráno jako v The House of Mirth, avšak určité povědomí o takovémto rozdělení společnosti je naznačeno v úvodních kapitolách, kdy se Isabel informuje o britské povaze od svého strýce, Američana, který však dlouhodobě žije v Anglii. Isabel se v Evropě evidentně pohybuje ve vyšší třídě společnosti, ale sama je taktéž chudá, na rozdíl od Lily si však svou chudobu nikdy plně neuvědomí, protože v době, kdy pomalu zjišťuje hodnotu peněz, zdědí velký majetek po svém strýci. Peníze, stejně jako v případě Lily, hrají zásadní roli v Isabelině životě. Bratranec Ralph, invalidní mladík, je nadšenou svou „exotickou" sestřenicí, jejíž tužby jsou naprosto nekonvenční a jež pro něj představují zpestření jeho mdlého života. Svoboda, na které Isabel tak lpí, je pro ni stejně jako pro Ralpha velmi nejasná a ve svém důsledku zapříčiní Isabelin tragický osud. Isabel se má díky dědictví vyhnout „povinnému" manželství pro peníze, na rozdíl od Lily, které je předurčeno. Zděděný majetek se přitom stane samotných důvodem jejího „uvěznění". Isabel, která se právě ocitá v nejistotě, co pro ni vlastně svoboda znamená, protože cestování a poznávání světa, které ji do této doby zaměstnávalo, ji neuspokojuje, vidí ve sňatku s Osmondem ušlechtilý cíl, jak zužitkovat své jmění, a zároveň možnost přiučit se od šlechetného muže. Odpor, který její rozhodnutí u jejích blízkých vyvolá je zásadní, z toho důvodu, že poukazuje na jednotlivé aspekty manželství. Nejdůležitější je varování paní Touchettové, která Isabel varuje před nerovnocenným manželstvím, kdy všechno bohatství je její. Paní Touchettová tak zajímavě odporuje stavu, kdy finanční prostředky přináší žena, ale skrze své vlastní chování, akceptuje tradiční rozdělení rolí, kdy manžel svou ženu plně zaopatřuje, ustálený zvyk, jehož neopodstatněnost a nerovnost ve svém díle Women and Economics (Ženy a ekonomika) kritizuje Ch. P. Gilmanová. Sňatek Isabely a Osmonda se prokáže jako katastrofální, protože Osmond jako typický muž očekává plné podrobení se své manželky, která avšak na základě svého amerického původu, je zvyklá své názory otevřeně vyjadřovat. Isabelina tragédie nevyústí v její smrt, neboť na rozdíl od E. Whartonové, která se plně soustředí na zobrazení ženy jako oběti v sobecké společnosti, H. James se soustředí na zachycení morálního konfliktu dvou kultur.[8] Isabel není „jen" obětí chamtivé společnosti, ale zároveň střetu dvou

[8] Alfred Kazin, "Edith Wharton," Edith Wharton: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Irving Howe (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1962) 89.

odlišných světů: Osmonds, ačkoliv Američan odmítá akceptovat její volnomyšlenkářskou americkou povahu.

Henry James na rozdíl od Edith Whartonové vykresluje kromě několika různých neúspěšných manželství, jež dokládají falešnost této institute, také několik variant mateřství, které je avšak zcela bez jakékoliv naděje pro lepší budoucnost. V Portrait of a Lady je mateřství zobrazeno odmítavě, jak dokládají příklady paní Touchettové, která většinu času žije odděleně od svého syna i manžela, a Madame Merle, jež se vzdá svého nemanželského dítěte kvůli zachování své dobré pověsti. Negativní pohled na rodičovství jako takové je vykreslen ve vztahu Osmonda a jeho dcery Pansy, která je zcela podřízena svému otci. Stejně jako v The House of Mirth, The Portrait of a Lady kritizuje sňatek, který je společností předurčen a jež je nefunkční. H. James nastiňuje pozitivní povahu toho svazku v postavě Henrietty Stackpolová, která je na začátku prototypem „nové ženy" (úspěšná novinářka, která zaopatřuje rodinu své ovdovělé sestry), která se však na konci překvapivě také zasnoubí, což pro zrazenou Isabelu, jež je odhodlána trpět za svou chybu, znamená ztrátu veškerých iluzí, neboť právě Henrietta pro ni představovala ztělesnění ženské samostatnosti. Přestože Isabel neshledává na sňatku Henrietty nic kladného, skutečnost, že toto manželství je uzavíráno na základě vzájemného zájmu jednoho o druhého a ne na společenských výhodách, představuje určitý optimismus, co se manželské instituce jako takové týče.

Čtvrtá kapitola je věnována románu, The Awakening, který zobrazuje samotné manželství a procitnutí ženy, která si uvědomuje, že svazek, který se rozhodla akceptovat, ačkoliv již na začátku věděla, že nepředstavuje realizaci jejích romantických představ, ji neuspokojuje. Čtenář pozoruje Endnino procitnutí od samého počátku, kdy otevřenost kreolské společnosti ji přiměje zamýšlet se nad vlastním životem, až po uvědomění si, nemožnosti spojit dvě věci, o nichž pochopila, že ve svém životě potřebuje: umění a vášnivý vztah. Edna je od samého počátku představena jako žena, která není stvořena pro to být matkou, na rozdíl od Adèle Ratignolle, zároveň však postupně zjišťuje, že ani umělecká dráha, která vyžaduje celibát, ji neuspokojuje, protože potřebuje mužskou lásku. Manželství není funkční ze dvou důvodů: pan Pontellier je v podstatě zcela oddělen od své rodiny, buď kvůli své práci anebo svým častým návštěvám v klubu, a za druhé, právě kvůli neustále nepřítomnosti své ženě Léonce nerozumí. Edna postupně naváže mimomanželský poměr, který ačkoliv nemá dlouhé trvaní (její milenec se zalekne její lásky) je důležitým bodem v procesu jejího sebeuvědomění se. Sexuální vztah bez lásky je vyvrcholením jejího sebeuvědomění sebe samé.

Román Kate Chopin je důležitý ze dvou důvodů, na jedné straně pojednává o tématech, která byla do té doby spíše tabuizovaná jako ženská sexualita, a za druhé pro experimentální povahu jejího psaní. Román je v porovnání s díly devatenáctého století a i s romány E. Whartonové a H. Jamese krátký a využívá mnohem více formy dialogů než dlouhých popisů. Chopinová zároveň užívá symbolismu, který je pro román významný. Od prvního kapitoly až po poslední se setkáváme s obrazem ptáka, který je z různých důvodů, neschopen volného létání: ať už je to papoušek uzamčený v kleci anebo pták se zlomeným křídlem. Právě tento pták se zlomeným křídlem je symbolem celého procesu procitání Edny, která je přímo varována Mademoiselle Reisz, že pták, který létá na hranicí konvencí, musí mít silná křídla.[9] Zejména v závěru když Edna stojí na pláži před svým sebe-destruktivním plaváním a pozoruje marný boj ptáka se zlomeným křídlem. Velkou roli v Ednině příběhu hrají neviditelné ruce, díky nimž se ona může plně věnovat sobě samé, protože kromě společenských povinností Enda se nemusí starat ani o děti ani o domácnost, neboť vše obstarají bezejmenné míšenky. Edna spáchá na konci sebevraždu, která je interpretována z různých pohledů – buď jako její osobní prohra, kdy není schopná postavit se sama proti společnosti – anebo naopak jako její naprosté osvobození se od svazujících závazků. Bez ohledu na to, jestli je její smrt vnímána pozitivně anebo negativně Edna si vezme život, protože v současné společnosti pro ni neexistuje možnost uspokojivé existence, stejně jako Lily, která není schopná fungovat ani v jedné společenské třídě. Isabel sice nezemře doslovně, avšak obrazně se ocitá v „životě ve smrti“, kdy bude celoživotně čelit omezujícím požadavkům a nenávisti svého manžela.

Edith Whartonová, Henry James a Kate Chopin psaly o problém hrdinek na přelomu dvacátého století ze dvou důvodů: osobního a profesního. Každý z nich reagoval na své okolí, zejména spisovatelky z vlastní zkušenosti, jak kariérní, kdy musely nepřetržitě obhajovat svou pozici v literárním světě, tak i ze svého osobního života, kdy každá byla spíše netypickou ženu té doby (E. Whartonová rozvedená a K. Chopinová, ovdovělá matka šesti dětí), která si sama vydělávala. Edith Whartonová napsala The House of Mirth v době, kdy sama prodělávala zásadní období svého života. Poté co se jako mladá vdala, což se od ní jako ženy vyšší společnosti očekávalo, prodělá psychické zhroucení, ze kterého se léčila pomocí psaní, a jež si v té době přisvojila jako svůj životní cíl. Po léčbě si pomalu začala uvědomovat, jak silné omezení manželství pro ni představuje a za několik let po vydání

[9] Kate Chopin, The Awakening (London: Everyman's Library, 1992) 158.

románu o Lily Bartové se sama rozvedla. Kate Chopinová na druhé straně vedla relativně tradiční život, kdy následovala svého manžela, avšak když nečekaně zemřel a zanechal třiceti dvouletou Kate se šesti dětmi, musela se začít starat o svou rodinu sama. Kate Chopinová, stejně jako Edith Wharotonová, byla odmala literaturou fascinována a už jako malá psala. Jejím hlavním zájmem bylo experimentování, jak s tématy, tak i s formou, jak bylo již výše uvedeno. Ačkoliv K. Chopinová působila jako spořádaná žena, prošla si zkušeností vztahu se ženatým mužem, což mělo nepochybně vliv na její představy o manželství. Všechny tři hrdinky skončí tragicky, neboť společnost na přelomu století není ještě připravená na samostatnou ženu, ačkoliv ani jedna z nich není sebevědomá „nová žena“, protože jejich proces seberealizace je pln pochybností a každá z nich hledá vztah s mužem, jejich osud dokládá charakter tohoto přechodového období. Edith Whartonová, Henry James a Kate Chopinová ovlivnili budoucí generace nejen zachycením měnící se doby a jejího vlivu na postavení ženy ve společnosti a na její měnící se povědomí o sobě samé, ale ovlivnili i budoucí generace spisovatelů, ať již přímo (jako Whartonová a James, kteří vydali i publikace k tématu umění psaní) tak i nepřímo (jako Chopinová, která svými experimenty naznačila nový vývoj literatury).