

Most Edith Wharton scholars have argued *The House of Mirth*¹ (1905) and *The Age of Innocence*² (1920) to be naturalist novels interwoven with and based upon socio-economic determinism. Feminist critics, such as Judith Fetterley and Cynthia Griffin Wolff, have depicted Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth* as a victim of patriarchal society; meanwhile, Marxist critics like Wai-Chee Dimock have been preoccupied with the omnipresent power of the marketplace in the novel. In the case of *The Age of Innocence*, the criticism has often focused on Wharton's usage of the tribal world of manners as the determining and inescapable force in an individual's life.³ This thesis will engage in reading *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence* as naturalist novels with an emphasis on the notion of human conduct and ethics.