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Agents without Agency: A Study of Archetypes and Society in Works of Edith Wharton

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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Declaration

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně, že jsem řádně citovala všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného či stejného titulu.

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Permission

Souhlasím se zapůjčením magisterské práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the MA thesis being borrowed and used to study purposes.

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Edith Wharton was a prolific author of the turn-of-the-20th-century United States who famously utilized society that had surrounded her for the majority of her childhood and early adulthood to create a variety of novels and short stories that elevated the atmosphere of a book over any particular situation happening in it. Scholars shy away from determining whether Wharton's texts were realist or naturalist because her fiction involves elements of both literary genres. However, for the sake of this thesis, I will presume that Wharton was a naturalist who also implemented determinism in her fiction to establish the presence of society in the characters' lives. Wharton was "an unusually penetrating critic of the social conventions of her time, including taboos, social roles, the function of money, and the position of women […]."[1] This criticism permeates her New York fiction, in which she most visibly partakes in dismantling the rhetoric of individuality, as she diligently portrays her characters in a uniform fashion. "[It] is New York society itself, the organism of the tribe, that is her chief actor."[2] Furthermore, I believe that there is no individuality whatsoever in Wharton's text, as everything revolves around and succumbs to New York's leisure class, the society in the texts, and that while, at first, certain characters might be perceived as originals, with an in-depth analysis it can be proven that there are only four types which Wharton implemented in her fiction to depict the strength of society as such. Moreover, society of the late 19th and the early 20th century was interwoven with capitalism and consumerism, and these tendencies have a prevalent nature within the description of the social practices of the novels as well. Her works in question for this thesis are *The House of Mirth*, *The Custom of the Country*, *The Age of Innocence*, and remotely also *Old New York* and some of her short stories.

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[1] Justin Quinn, et al., *Lectures on American Literature* (Praha: Karolinum, 2011) 164.

[2] Millicent Bell, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton*, ed. by Millicent Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 6.

It is integral for the thesis to involve an abundance of texts in the analysis as barely any scholar has taken into consideration more than two of the large works in their criticism, limiting their analyses by not considering the works with similar settings as a starting point of a conversation. I argue that it is particularly the involvement of all of the texts mentioned above that allows for the argument to be precisely delineated and proved, with the help of some significant theoretical criticism, such as that of Claude Lévi-Strauss or Thorstein Veblen. However, this thesis does not involve all of Wharton's fiction since that would have been counterproductive to what it tries to prove, insofar as Wharton did not implement the archetypes in all of her lives' work, but solely on those texts that specifically criticize New York society. Still, only by engaging more than three major works can this thesis show the similarities between behaviors of specific characters, to show that while marginally their behavior might be perceived as original, it is, in fact, the opposite, as all of the major characters pose as a means to an end for Wharton. The inability to separate oneself from the upper class infiltrates the message of the novels and shows Wharton's portrayal of society was the central topic even for the writer. While archetypes have been elements of literary theory and philosophy ever since Plato,[3] their definition changes slightly with each theoretician. This thesis considers archetypes to be the basic elements comprised of multiple entities, coinciding with J. A. Cuddon's definition of them being "the abstract idea of a class of things which represents the most typical and essential characteristics shared by the class."[4] The individual characteristics of the class have been established by the author of the thesis with the help of Lévi-Strauss's structuralist theory, creating a set of new archetypes pertinent solely to Wharton and her New York fiction. Each chapter of this thesis will engage with a part of the

[3] J. A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (Chichester: Wiley&Blackwell, 2013) 52.

[4] Cuddon, 51.

overall argument of the thesis to create a whole picture of Wharton's text in relation to the tribal society and the redundancy of the individual self.

Chapter II will serve as a base point for the discussion of Edith Wharton and her relationship with the society surrounding her in New York, as she utilized this knowledge in the majority of her works and implemented the same physical and mental denominators on her characters. As she often reminisced in her biography *A Backward Glance*, New York society of her youth was "a little set"[5] and, overall, afraid of any innovation and innovators,[6] and these fears then later translated in her work. The ideas of naturalism and determinism will also be introduced, as Wharton is often likened to writers such as Theodor Dreiser when people see beyond the similarities with Henry James,[7] and it is, in a sense, more sensible comparison—one that is not based solely on mutual friendship a few topical similarities. Historical background for the turn-of-the-century society will also be provided since this thesis is set on the notion of society working as an invisible presence in the lives of the characters, resulting in them not obtaining any individuality, solely working as marionettes in a play orchestrated by the organ of society. Moreover, Wharton's feminism will be lightly touched upon as well as it was not a movement particularly close to the author, but, still, it permeated into her portrayal of several characters in her books.

The third chapter will conduct a structural analysis based on Claude Lévi-Strauss's "The Structural Study of Myth" in which Lévi-Strauss concentrates on the inherent similarities of myths, but not only them, as he later revisited his own theory to state that his theory is applicable on works by multiple authors with the same core as well as the works of one

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[5] Edith Wharton, *A Backward Glance* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1934) 79.

[6] Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, 22.

[7] Lori Merish, "Engendering Naturalism: Narrative Form and Commodity Spectacle in U.S. Naturalist Fiction," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 29.3 (Spring, 1996): 321. JSTOR<http://www.jstor.com/stable/1345592> 19 Feb 2021.

author.[8] His theory is not widely used for the study of archetypes, as he coined his own term —mythemes—and did not necessarily connect it with the more popular term used in literature, maintaining the course of his study at the collective consciousness and the inherent similarities between myths told throughout the world. However, this thesis proves that "The Structural Study of Myth" could be used to analyze topically similar texts by one author and apply the structure of direct opposites as well as melody and notes on literature. As the majority of archetypal works and analyses are connected with either C. G. Jung or Northrop Frye, their theories will be lightly touched upon as well to show why it would be insufficient in terms of overall structure to use either of their theoretical works. After the theoretical explanation, an in-depth analysis of Wharton's works ensues, which have been divided into four archetypes: "The Fated Heroine," "The Cowardly Rebel," "The New Man," and "The Rule Keeper." These categories are crucial as their existence proves Wharton's idea of New York's society and its elements, proving that individuality is a construct unknown to the naturalist writer as all of her characters are barely changed takes on the same archetype. In order to maintain Lévi-Strauss's theory, four tables have been created to offer a visual aid to these categories, each table analyzing one of the three major novels, *The House of Mirth*, *The Custom of the Country*, and *The Age of Innocence*, and these are complemented with a finalizing table comprising all similar features in one detailed chart. These charts are attached in the appendix of this thesis.

Each of the categories consists of at least three characters and an explanation of why they belong to the same category tailored specifically to Wharton and her take on New York's society. "The Fated Heroine" consists of Lily Bart, Undine Spragg, and Ellen Olenska, as well as some other minor characters to strengthen further the argument of the encompassing nature

[8] Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Structuralism and Myth," *They Kenyon Review* 3.2 (Spring, 1981): 65. JSTOR<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4335186> 20 Feb 2021.

of Wharton's texts. What these three young women share is their beauty which is praised above all else, their struggle with money, as well as their addictions, which vary in the addictive goods but not in their intensity. Moreover, their relationship with fate will be discussed as well, as the deterministic nature of the novels stands out with these characters the most; and the subsequent end of their lives as unfulfilled and never happy will also have a devoted part in the subchapter. "The Cowardly Rebel" is an archetype including Lawrence Selden, Ralph Marvell, and Newland Archer, and talks mainly about their opposition to "The Fated Heroine," which is the main focus of this archetype. These men share their beliefs that they are above the society and its rigid rules, that they are the rebels of the society; however, as the novels show, these ideas are incorrect as "The Cowardly Rebels" are unable to overstep the boundaries set by society and think for themselves. Moreover, they all fall in love with an idea and not with an actual human being, which is one of the reasons all of their love affairs end in an unsuccessful manner. "The New Man" talks about the nouveaux riches of the novels, which are Simon Rosedale, Elmer Moffat, and Julius Beaufort, who are all first introduced to the reader in connection with "The Fated Heroine," therefore, sharing characteristics with "The Cowardly Rebel" as both these archetypes are juxtapositions of the female leads of the novels. Furthermore, "The New Men" are discussed in connection with Wall Street and the world of money and their ability to survive where the old society cannot. Lastly, "The Rule Keepers," which are the majority of characters in Wharton's book, are discussed, analyzing the matriarchy of the society as well as the reservation towards other characters being accepted to the highest class, which is one of the reasons the society as such struggles to survive by the end of the novels.

Which is why chapter four will be devoted to the society as such and its relation to capitalism, consumerism, and the spectacle, which are notions clearly stated in Wharton's texts, as the background of her novels is always determining a value of an object or a person,

while, at the same time, monetizing on sociability. To further establish the validity of the claim that Wharton used her text as a mirror of society where capitalism was on the rise, the thesis will inquire critics such as Jean Baudrillard or Guy Debord. Their novel ideas and comprehensions of consumerism and the spectacle were summarized in the latter half of the 20th century, which would, for some, disqualify them from helping the argument of such work as Edith Wharton's. However, consumerism has already been quite developed even by the end of the 19th century, and with the help of Thorstein Veblen and *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, consumerism can easily be connected with the newer ideas of Baudrillard.

The concluding chapter will straightforwardly summarize the intention of the thesis, pointing at the most integral parts of the analysis supporting the argument of the non-existent individuality in Edith Wharton's text, strengthened by the in-depth analysis of the capitalist society and its influence on the particular archetypes, that were created specifically for this text. The conclusion will also offer a reflection on the usage of Lévi-Strauss and his theory on other literary texts, where a theory of archetypes could be fruitful.

2. Wharton and New York

Scholars tend to criticize Edith Wharton for her unchangeable portrayal of leisure in New York and the lack of diversity of races and social strata in her works.[9] However, it was so because she best wrote about what she knew, so she never truly resorted to writing about the working class that was so prominent on the other side of the scale in the Gilded Age. The divide between the classes was striking and on the rise during the Gilded Age, as historians point out. "While rich ladies shopped on the lower floors, eight hundred women toiled at sewing machines and dress forms on the upper floors, earning pennies to sew everything from ball gowns to military uniforms."[10] Wharton chose to limit her fiction to her own experience, and the society she knew best from an early age, which is why the majority of the plot of her New York stories take part within the bourgeoisie, examining their customs, and manners. This chapter will further discuss the society surrounding Wharton and the influence it had on her fiction, as well as making the comparison between her and her friend Henry James, to whom she has been compared ever since she started publishing.[11] Simultaneously, the notion of a novel of manners will be briefly pointed out as well, as it seems to be a part of Wharton's novels that the critics do not often discuss. Moreover, naturalism and determinism and their involvement in Wharton's texts will be established as well, as these genres had a tremendous impact on the author, and they strengthen further a part of the argument that states that Wharton's characters were solely driven by the society without any individuality or originality. Lastly, Wharton's relationship to feminism will be briefly examined, for the author was not an explicit supporter of female rights, but her fiction is interwoven with progressive feminist thoughts.

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[9] Bell, 10.

[10] Esther, Crain, *The Gilded Age in New York, 1870-1910* (New York: Black Dog & Leventhal, 2016) 62, Hachette Digital.

[11] Blake Nevius, *Edith Wharton: A Study of Her Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961) 30.

2.1. New York's Gilded Age

Gilded Age was an era in American history (roughly from the end of the Civil War to 1910, some even believe to the beginning of World War I)[12] which witnessed the most progress that has ever happened in America, and especially its big cities like New York. "[It's] hard to imagine an era in Gotham's history more transformative than the Gilded Age."[13] In an era filled with industrial, cultural, and monetary progress, the old society struggled for survival. Such struggle is best depicted precisely in Wharton's fiction since she diligently portrayed the old society as a remnant of history challenged by the new money coming from Europe, for the most part. "[She] made the most of her opportunity–limited though it was by her point of view–to enforce a contrast between the old culture and the new, to illuminate […] a major aspect of our social history through the dramatic conflict between the ideals of the old mercantile and the new industrial societies."[14] Moreover, the struggle was not solely limited to the people of money, either old or new, but also to the differences between classes that grew exponentially after the war, which uncovered the gap between the highest and the lowest classes. While the war created a new manufacturing sector and thus created new jobs, especially making "food, clothing, engines, tents, warships, artillery, and other items, and city factories happily took on military contracts,"[15] the wages were minimal, and only the richest monetized on the given situation.[16] Even after the war ended, America's development grew, enthralling many wealthy Americans as well as foreigners, giving way for the stock market on

[12] Crain, 7.

[13] Crain, 7.

[14] Nevius, 8.

[15] Crain, 52.

[16] Crain, 62.

Wall Street to flourish.[17] Edith Wharton generously remembers these days in her autobiography, pointing at the fact that the majority of the families did not disclose where their wealth came from, yet many of them monetized on the prospect of new businesses of the Gilded Age.

> In the case of some of its member, such as the Astors and Goelets, great fortunes, originating in a fabulous increase of New York real estate values, had been fostered by judicious investments and prudent administration; but of feverish money-making, in Wall Street or in railway, shipping or industrial enterprises, I heard nothing in my youth.[18]

That capitalism was the epitome of the era will be further discussed in chapter four; however, its consequences on particular parties, especially on the leisure class, should also be mentioned. The recession struck during 1876, and the unemployment rate climbed up to 14 percent, but this affected mainly the working class.[19] The leisure class continued to live lavishly and luxuriously, managing to maintain their family wealth despite the general setback of the country. When the economic crisis ended, they emerged victoriously and could flaunt their money even more conspicuously, striving on the difference their money provided them against their neighbors, already utilizing Guy Debord's concept of the spectacle, of which "separation is the alpha and omega."[20] Esther Crain points to James D. McCabe and his book on the Gilded Age society, where he talks about the spectacle of the time. "Each member of society strives to outshine or outdress his or her acquaintances, and to do so requires a continual struggle, and a continual drain on the bank account."[21] As the quote insinuates, the continual drain on bank accounts was handled by the male population, the husbands, while it was the women who had to "outdress" each other and maintain a certain level to keep their

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[17] Crain, 93.

[18] Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, 56.

[19] Crain, 153.

[20] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1994) 9.

[21] Crain, 164.

household within the social circle.[22] Apart from the lavish dinners and pompous houses, clothing was one of the most significant expenses in the leisure-class New York society, as there were strict rules about the materials and the shapes, just like with everything else within this particular stratum of society. "A fashionable woman "must have one or two velvet dresses which cannot cost less than $500 each; she must possess thousands of dollars worth of laces, in the shape of flounces, to loop up over the skirts of dresses, as occasion shall require."[23] Whence such dresses were in possession of a woman, she was deemed more respectable and was more prone to be invited to particular parties—to be a valuable and constant part of the closed-off social circle. Therefore, consumer goods were much more appraised than any intellectual greatness, and the dinner tables were always set around the looks and never around an exciting and genuinely curious conversation.

> New York in those days, though more cosmopolitan than in my youth, was still a small lace, with so limited a range of intellectual interests and allusions that dinner-table talk was a good deal like the "local items" column in a country newspaper; and I remember depressing evening when the hosts, contributing orchids and gold plate, remained totally unconscious of the royal gifts their guests had brought them in exchange.[24]

The general custom seems to have been concentrating solely on the looks and the money, but, at the same time, money was never supposed to be a part of the conversation. It was supposed to be held and showcased in the form of clothes, decorated houses, and extraordinary dinner tables, but never to be discussed directly, as Wharton's mother made clear early in Edith's life.[25] Customs such as this were crucial for the existence of the old generation of the leisure class, so it should not come as a surprise that people uneducated within the particular society were unable to master them perfectly and were, therefore, often shunned from the circle. As

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[22] Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 119.

[23] Crain, 224.

[24] Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, 195.

[25] Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, 57.

Crain called it, "[they] pressed their noses to the glass, hungry for social acceptance,"[26] but rarely any of them were actually accepted and looked upon as equal. They were often ridiculed by satirists as well as the specific members of the society, yet their numbers grew, as did their insistence on being a part of a society that promised the most fruitful social relationships, including marriages. The nouveaux riches permeated New York, and as they grew in numbers and influence, the old society realized that they needed the new money for their own survival, which is best portrayed by the character of Julius Beaufort in *The Age of Innocence*. The more money they made and the more they paid to be welcomed by the "old money," the better chance at survival they had, and the more likely they were to emerge victorious even after the Gilded Age ended, just like the prolific "robber baron" Cornelius Vanderbilt,[27] whose influence is still palpable in contemporary America.

Such struggles influenced Wharton in her fiction, where she passionately describes the old society as rigid and "set," but at the same time, the nouveaux riches are portrayed as "the Other" and those that the heroines should fear for their vile nature, which they utilize in their businesses. "Mrs. Wharton is the only American novelist who has dealt successfully and at length with that feudal remainder in New York society which hardly survived the beginning of the present century."[28] Wharton wrote solely about what she experienced directly, even including the people she knew within her fiction; the most famous example of such behavior is in *The Age of Innocence* in the character of Mrs. Manson Mingott, who is an authentic portrayal of Mary Mason Jones, "a society dowager with a bold spirit and an enormous bank account."[29] The authenticity of the character could be why some critics argue that Mrs. Manson Mingott is the one character in the novel Wharton never genuinely criticizes and is

[26] Crain, 168.

[27] Crain, 117.

[28] Nevius, 8.

[29] Crain, 251.

seen as the most true to herself.[30] Her own life similarly served as the basis for many of her characters, as she was able to implement a part of herself within her heroines, most notably in Ellen Olenska as Wharton, just like her character, found the pressures of the society unattainable and unbearable and resigned to Europe, where the customs were more restrained, and her creativity and intelligence were appreciated much more.[31] She utilized the creative distance by constructing a social satire on all strata of the highest society.

> [It] consistently suggest that the seeds of her capacity to grow, and to benefit from her own alienation, were sown in that 'local patch' where exposure to the higher 'culture' of European art, literature, ideas and manners […] helped her develop the rich, agonistic inner life that modernist cultural criticism so assiduously promoted and often despaired of finding.[32]

Her creative distance was, most probably, also caused by the fact that she was never so intrinsically rooted within the society she later described in her fiction, and while she grew up in it, she was able to break ties with it to discover a life in Europe that suited her much better, as Nir Evron argues in their essay. "Though an Old New York-bred elitist to the marrow, Wharton had no illusions about her milieu and was never as beholden to its strictures as are the New Yorkers she depicts."[33] As France represented everything New York strived to be and more,[34] Wharton found a perfect escape from the rigidness and stoicism of her old life there.

As was already suggested, Wharton had a life-long comparison in an author who later in her life became one of her closest friends—Henry James. Their novels are compared to this day as they both take on society of the turn-of-the-century New York with which they were

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[30] Janet Beer and Avril Horner, "'The Great Panorama:' Edith Wharton as Historical Novelist," *The Modern Language Review* 110.1 (January, 2015): 79. JSTOR<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5699/modelangrevi.110.1.0069> 15 Apr 2020.

[31] Percy Lubbock, *Portrait of Edith Wharton* (London: Alden Press, 1947) 23.

[32] Micheal Nowlin, "Edith Wharton's Higher Provencialism: 'French Ways' for Americans and the Ends of *The Age of Innocence*," *Journal of American Studies* 38.1 (2004): 101-102. JSTOR<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27557465> 22 Mar 2019.

[33] Nir Evron, "Realism, Irony and Morality in Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 35.2 (2012): 38. JSTOR<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/jmodelite.35.2.37> 19 Feb 2021.

[34] Nowlin, 103-104.

both grossly familiar. However, while Wharton admired James and his early work and never feared approaching him for a piece of advice, she was abashed at the constant comparison of their works and their popularity. “The assertion that she was James’s literary heiress annoyed Wharton. James’s more rarefied late writings did not appeal to Wharton at all, though, paradoxically, even while she was reading them, the older novelist himself was becoming one of her most cherished friends.”[35] While, seemingly, their works and their sole focus might look quite similar, critics like Millicent Bell see valuable differences in them, which differentiate each writer. James concentrated on the inner battles, as well as moral comparisons between characters while Wharton was more intrigued by the organism of New York’s society and its relations to the characters, while using irony and satire to undermine the notion of society as such.[36] It is apparent from Wharton’s autobiography how important James was to her personal and literary life, as she devoted the whole fifth chapter solely to him. She admired him and valued his opinion, as she admitted. “I was naturally much interested in James’s technical theories and experiments, though I thought, and still think, that he tended to sacrifice to them that spontaneity which is the life of fiction.”[37] Wharton resolved to not including much of James’s experiments, as she genuinely depicted the same society in all of her books, relying solely on what she knew rather than taking on the experimental theories James implemented in his later modernist works, such as *The Beast in the Jungle* and others. One could argue that Wharton understood that her strength laid in the portrayal of society surrounding her, even if such portrayal later became less appealing to her audience. Especially after the triumph that *The Age of Innocence* was, her later works were deemed less favorable and a little too similar to all of her other works. “Her quartet of novelettes […] under the title

[35] Bell, 4.

[36] Bell, 6.

[37] Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, 190.

Old New York, must have been designed to win back the joined critical and popular support that had met *The Age of Innocence*, and the responses were at least respectful. It began to be felt, however, that her talent might be running thin."[38] However, it is precisely her consistency that gives way for in-depth analyses of her characters because they remained unchanged and authentic to Wharton's own vision. It is among many reasons why scholars believe that Wharton, alongside such writers as Dreiser, is the most prolific naturalist writer of the times.

What also needs to be pointed out when regarding Wharton's fiction is the fact that she is considered to be one of the most notable writers to have taken on the genre the of novel of manners and how that related to the society in which she was raised. The novel of manners has emerged during the 17th and especially the 18th century and, in general, it regards to the importance of behavior, customs, and manners within a society and its particles, and the insistence that culture and the implications of subtle behaviors are what creates the atmosphere of the society.[39]

> [Manner] is that part of a culture which is made up of half-uttered or unuttered or unutterable expressions of value. They are hinted at by small actions, sometimes by the arts of dress or decoration, sometimes by tone, gesture, emphasis or rhythm, sometimes by the words that are used with a special frequency or a special meaning. They are the things that for good or bad draw the people of a culture together and that separate them from the people of another culture.[40]

That Wharton chose the template of the novel of manners as the basis for her fiction should, therefore, come as no surprise, as society surrounding her was, in reality, revolving around culture as well. In *A Backward Glance*, Wharton often reminisced about the manners that constituted New York society of the Gilded Age. "I used to say that I had been taught only

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[38] Bell, 8.

[39] Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Novel Beginnings: Experiments in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) 161-165.

[40] Lionel Trilling, "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," *The Kenyon Review* 10.1 (Winter, 1948): 12. JSTOR<http://www.jstor.com/stable/4332909> 12 Apr 2021.

two things in my childhood: the modern languages and good manners."[41] Accordingly, her novels explicitly discuss dinner-table manners, and such cultural references are what is now considered one of the crucial parts of her fiction. Wharton is now deemed to have done the same for the American novel of manners as Jane Austen did for the English one a century sooner.[42] While it has been argued that the novel of manners was a genre alien to American writers,[43] Wharton proved that it could have been done in a novel way where the manners and customs are satirized while, at the same time, glorified as a thing of the past. The satire could be argued, is a part of the reason Wharton is now considered to be a naturalist writer, while the fact that she was a novelist of manners is often marginalized.

2.2. Wharton as Naturalist and Feminist Writer

Naturalism is a genre of literature that developed from realism, especially at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. "It should be used to describe works of literature which use realistic methods and subjects to convey a belief that everything that exists is a part of nature and can be explained by natural and material causes – and not by supernatural, spiritual or paranormal causes."[44] However, what such general definitions do not include in their analyses of the genre, is the gender of naturalism in America. "It deals with the problem of the feminine consumer precisely the moment when American culture was beginning to see itself as more dependent on consumption than on a form of production that could be understood as masculine in character."[45] Hence, one could string up the argument that

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[41] Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, 48.

[42] Jennie Hann, "Perverting *Pride and Prejudice*: Wharton's American Alternative to the Novel of Manners: An Essay on *The House of Mirth*," *Edith Wharton Review* 24.1 (Spring, 2008): 2. JSTOR<http://www.jstor.com/stable/43513004> 21 Feb 2021.

[43] Hann, 4.

[44] Cuddon, 462.

[45] Merish, 324.

naturalism and feminism were related fields when Wharton was writing, and it would, therefore, be limiting if one concentrated solely on one or the other when discussing Wharton's fiction. Moreover, Wharton also utilized the notion of determinism, which is a theory that states that "everything that happens must happen as it does and could not have happened any other way."[46] The interconnectedness between naturalism and determinism in Wharton's fiction comes in the form of fate which is implemented throughout all of her fiction and is the looming presence over all of the characters, implying that no matter the chosen route, the outcome would still be as it is, as the fate wanted it. "Fate, as in the old one-reelers (or nineteenth-century melodramas), appears with the sensational rescue of telegram, a letter, a check, a chance meeting, the deal of a hand."[47] Moreover, fate is often synonymous with society in her works, further delineating the importance of the influence of society on the individual characters. Therefore, these characters lose their individuality altogether, acting only according to society's customs and fate's instructions, becoming agents without agency, insofar as they are unable to break free and live their lives as they imagined them. Fate is the determinant and a constant in the lives of Wharton's characters, just as much as it was a constant in the lives of the characters of more prolific naturalist writers, such as Theodor Dreiser. "The writing of classic naturalist authors such as Dreiser tends to accentuate a determinist scheme in which chance, circumstance, and fate wreak havoc on individual lives."[48] Similarly to Dreiser and Norris, Wharton applied such characteristics on her own novels, most notably on *The House of Mirth,* in which she connected all of the above-mentioned genres and topics, and employed them in the character of Lily, who was the victim

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[46] Cambridge Dictionary, "Determinism," *Cambridge University Press*<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/determinism> 15 Apr 2021.

[47] Maureen Howard, "*The House of Mirth*: The Bachelor and the Baby," in *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton*, ed. by Millicent Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 141.

[48] Richard A. Kay, "Literary Naturalism and the Passive Male: Edith Wharton's Revisions of *The House of Mirth*," *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 56.1 (Autumn, 1994): 49. JSTOR<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26509261> 13 Apr 2020.

of her environment connected with fate as well as a female destroyed by consumption.[49] Even though Donald Pizer applied his naturalist theory solely on the one novel, similarities are palpable throughout Wharton's whole fiction, accentuating the idea of archetypes within the New York stories by the same author. The victimization of the lead character is ever-present within Wharton's texts, and one could further argue that she drew from her own experience, where she felt to be the victim of the society as she married young and to a man who could not have managed to keep up with her intellectually.[50] However, unlike her characters, Wharton was able to escape from the confines of New York City and its oppressive society.

Her feminism, then, lies in the fact that her female characters are on the outskirts of the society, questioning the roles which they are supposed to play within the system. Moreover, it is not solely her female characters that establish feminist readings of her works, but also her male lead characters, which often undermine their own male identity by their constant cowardice, which is further described in chapter three. "Unlike most writers of her generation, who accepted the notion of male superiority, she created men who had feet of clay."[51] It is the juxtaposition of male and female characters, but also characters of the same genre that serve as a basis for Wharton's feminism, as Margaret McDowell argues in her essay. "Because of her sympathy with her women characters and her insight into their lives, she reveals an implicit feminism and they relate, ordinarily at some disadvantage, to individual men or to a society which men control and dominate."[52] Like other feminists of her time, Wharton's

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[49] Donald Pizer, "The Naturalism of Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 41.2 (Summer, 1995): 243, JSTOR<https://www.jstor.org/stable/441649> 13 Apr 2020.

[50] Elizabeth Ammons, *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 142-145.

[51] Margaret B. McDowell, "Viewing the Custom of Her Country: Edith Wharton's Feminism," *Contemporary Literature* 15.4 (Autumn, 1974): 527. JSTOR<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1207776> 12 Apr 2021.

[52] McDowell, 521.

female characters were portrayed as existing solely next to men.[53] However, the argument could be made in a way to say that male characters were also always portrayed solely next to women, and even more so as their existence is always tied to the female leads. What is meant by that is that it is not the women whose sole existence is tied to the men, as some critics tend to argue, but that the male characters, "The Cowardly Rebels," as this thesis argues, are those whose identity is connected with the females, and their egos cease to exist outside of the relationship with "The Fate Heroines." "The Cowardly Rebels" always think in terms of their relationship to the women, while the women have other interests than falling in love with the men. The typical role of the woman following the men is reversed to a certain extent in Wharton's fiction and could be viewed as one of the intrinsic elements of her feminism. Moreover, Wharton succeeds in reversing the roles also at the end of the books, where none of her female characters succeed in their tryings. "In a hostile or indifferent society women find no complete victory."[54] But unlike the men in Wharton's fiction, it is not for the lack of trying that the women do not succeed. They are portrayed as courageous and firm, willing to sacrifice a part of themselves in order to come closer to their goals, even if it results in failure. This is undeniably true for the female character in the novella "The False Dawn," where Charlotte sacrifices the right to be called a mother for the wellbeing and success of her daughter. Women are the dynamic parts of Wharton's New York fiction, as they provide the fluidity of her books which would have been nonexistent had it been solely for her male characters. Even though Wharton never directly fought for equality and women's rights in her fiction, she was able to implicitly promote her belief that women deserved more than a loveless marriage and that they could be valuable members of society, just like men.

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[53] McDowell, 524.

[54] McDowell, 524.

3. The Structuralist Theory and the Archetypes

It is hardly ever the case that critics talk about the connection between Lévi-Strauss and archetypes because even the linguist himself did not identify with categorizing types of people or objects in a way that would perfectly describe them. Moreover, one is keener to apply the theories of such academics as C.G. Jung or even Northrop Frye regarding the theory of archetypes. Whilst it is understandable to do so when explaining the relations between the characters of Edith Wharton, one must gather more critical evidence and create a more in-depth structure in order to see the linearity and similarity between her works. "The Structural Study of Myth" offers such an outlook: it combines linguistics, literature and music, and creates an amalgam of charts that, upon closer reading, unfolds the core of human existence, which differs from society to society. Lévi-Strauss bases his theory on the expectation that, in their base, myths of the same kind are similar across the planet and cultures, pointing out the fact that the similarity is not coincidental but purposeful and natural.[55] The Jungian archetypes are still praised to this day, and rightfully so; however when one wants to combine different works, and the goal is to combine the works to discover their similarities and analyze them, Lévi-Strauss's theory appears to be a more significant example through which one can dissect the work into the smallest possible parts, only to then combine these parts in a new and empirical way. "The Structural Study of Myth" offers a way to question the relations between a broad scope of characters under one particular society and to make sense of each and every one of them. Naturally, there are many questions to be asked about the relevance of the particular theory used on the case of Edith Wharton's texts, stemming from the fact that the theory is based on studying a myth, and as much as Wharton's New York City now might be perceived as almost mythical, it is not a myth in the usual sense of the word. This theoretical obstacle and others will be addressed in this section of the work, as well as the definite

[55] Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," 429.

dissection and description of the particular archetypes based on the recurrent characters in Wharton's works, and that namely "The Fated Heroine," "The Cowardly Rebel," "The Rule Keeper," and "The New Man." A subchapter is devoted to each of these archetypes, to thoroughly analyze the similarities between the characters in each of the categories, constructing four new studies based on Lévi-Strauss's theory, even going as far as creating charts for the three primary sources, *The Custom of the Country*, *The House of Mirth*, and *The Age of Innocence*, and, just like Lévi-Strauss, producing one conclusive chart that comprises all the archetypes, and establishes a starting point for the conversation that will ensue in later chapter. Furthermore, the discussion will be enriched with other characters from Wharton's lesser-known novellas and short stories, formulating an empirical analysis of the archetypes.

3.1. The Structure and Its Relations

Claude Lévi-Strauss introduced what is now perceived as one of the crucial structuralist theories, "The Structural Study of Myth," in 1955, and the primary goal of the study was to establish a universal structure on the collective mind, creating a possible reading of the human mind and its processes.[56] The issue at hand, at the time, was the definition and description of a myth as an individual entity.

> Mythology confronts the student with a situation which at first sight appears contradictory. On the one hand it would seem that in the course of a myth anything is likely to happen. There is no logic, no continuity. Any characteristic can be attributed to any subject; ever conceivable relation can be found. With myth, everything becomes possible. But on the other hand, this apparent arbitrariness is belied by the astounding similarity between myths collected in widely different regions.[57]

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[56] Roy C. Calogeras, "Lévi-Strauss and Freud: Their 'Structural' Approaches to Myth," *American Imago* 30. 1 *Gustav Bychowski: A Memorial Issue* (Spring, 1973): 64. JSTOR<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26302762> 24 Feb 2021.

[57] Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," 429.

He bases his analysis on the similarity between a myth and a melody, coming to the conclusion that the similarities are easily transcribed into a chart of linear and vertical elements, all of which come together to create a unit that is easily translated and, therefore, easier to work with and compare with others of the same origin. As Lévi-Strauss was interested in linguistics as well, his definition heavily relies on the distinction between the *langue* and the *parole* introduced by Ferdinand Saussure, and that *langue* is the structural side of the language belonging to the revertible time, while *parole* is the statistical aspect of language, which belongs to the non-revertible time.[58] He believes that a myth combines these two notions of time, inasmuch as it often refers to a time long time ago, sometimes even to the creation of the world, and, at the same time, it is perceived as everlasting, with elements applicable to the past, the present and the future,[59] hence merging both the revertible and the non-revertible timeframe. Moreover, it is the unit that is crucial to the structural analysis and not the individual elements constructing the unit.[60] However, the individual elements of each myth are necessary for formulating what the unit stands for and how it regards to the other units of the evaluated myth. "The technique which has been applied so far by [Lévi-Strauss] consists in analyzing each myth individually, breaking down its story into the shortest possible sentences, and writing each such sentence on an index card bearing a number corresponding to the unfolding of the story."[61] Hence, a system is created in which the researcher can view all the elements as well as all the units together and establish an empirical analysis based on all the available information. Moreover, Lévi-Strauss invented a neologism

[58] Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," 430.

[59] Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," 430.

[60] Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth", 431.

[61] Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," 431.

regarding to the "gross constituent units" of the myths, which he called the *mythemes*.[62] Like phonemes in linguistics, mythemes are the smallest units enabling any analysis, and the number of mythemes is infinite, just like the number of myths. The mythemes are then shaped in a way that allows for the researcher to see the similarities as well as the differences between them, which is crucial for comparing not only the mythemes between each other but also myths and other superordinate units of both folklore and fiction.

Furthermore, the fact that Lévi-Strauss applied his theory solely on myths is disputable and disputed, mainly by Alan Dundes in his essay "Binary Oppositions in Myth: The Propp/ Lévi-Strauss Debate in Retrospect," where he compares Lévi-Strauss to a Russian folklorist, Vladimir Propp, and their varying approaches towards the study of a myth. On the topic of Lévi-Strauss's myth, he says, "if folktales are constructed on weaker oppositions than those found in myths, why did Lévi-Strauss choose folktales rather than myths to demonstrate his theory of binary oppositions? It seems to me that Lévi-Strauss is hoist by his own petard!"[63] Dundes continues to analyze the "myths" used by Lévi-Strauss for the demonstration of his theory, and comes to the conclusion that barely any of the so-called myths are by definition a myth, and would more often be identified under the terms of tales, folktales, and fiction.[64] However, when the term *myth* is sought in a dictionary, one sees that one of the primary descriptions is, "[nowadays] a myth tends to signify a fiction, but a fiction which conveys a psychological truth."[65] In this sense, what Lévi-Strauss analyzed, from the Oedipus myth to the Cinderella tale, is all under the umbrella term of a myth, since all of them convey a certain amount of psychological truth, coming to the conclusion that myths are yet another term

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[62] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Naked Man, Introduction to a Science of Mythology*, Vol. 4 (New York: Harper & Row, 1981) 559.

[63] Alan Dundes, "Binary Oppositions in Myth: The Propp/Lévi-Strauss Debate in Retrospect," *Western Folklore* 56.1 (Winter, 1997): 45. JSTOR<http://www.jstor.com/stable/1500385> 23 Feb 2021.

[64] Dundes, 47.

[65] Cuddon, 453.

under the umbrella definition of *fiction*. What Dundes also points out is the insistence of Lévi-Strauss on the value of binary oppositions in myths, in general. Each of his studies relies heavily on the fact that every two mythemes are in direct opposition to each other. While Lévi-Strauss believes that the oppositions are strongest in myths and that in every other genre, they grow weaker,[66] the fact that a myth can be defined as any fiction involving psychological truths strengthens the idea that the myth simply exaggerates universal oppositions surrounding all beings, such as life and death, or day and night.[67] Hence, binary oppositions are crucial to myths, but, on the other hand, they are also a significant part of the human experience leading the conversation of defining a myth toward an even clearer one, where the reader could insist that while it is fiction with psychological truth, it is also rooted in a fundamental human experience and environment. Even Lévi-Strauss himself later reformulated his statement, in an essay "Structuralism and Myth", stating that his innovative study could be applied on more general topics than just that of a collective myth.

> In this respect, structural analysis can be legitimately applied to myths stemming from a collective tradition as well as to works by a single author, since in both cases the intention is the same: to give a structural explanation of that which can be so explained, and which is never everything; and beyond that, to seek to grasp, in varying degrees according to circumstances, another kind of determinism which has to be looked for at the statistical or sociological levels, that is, in the life-story of the individual and in the particular society or environment.[68]

Since Lévi-Strauss revisited his own theory some 25 years later, a shift in his thinking is palpable; where he once was preoccupied solely with myths and was insisting on the prime value of the myth, his own revision shows that he understood the theory he invented was relevant in other literary fields as well. His theory's crucial identifier is the empirical and statistical explanation of a variety of texts, either on the same topic or by the same author.

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[66] Vladimir Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) 176.

[67] Dundes, 43.

[68] Lévi-Strauss, "Structuralism and Myth," 65.

Moreover, as Lévi-Strauss states later in his essay, it is natural and unavoidable for the particular elements to change slightly as every narrator of a myth adds or redacts certain parts. This, however, does not necessarily mean that the myth changes altogether. "[Some] elements drop out and are replaced by others, sequences change places, and the modified structure moves through a series of states, the variations of which nevertheless still belong to the same set."[69] The myth remains the same as long as the particular variables are still present if only slightly changed and if the overall message of the myth remains in its core.

Both structuralism and the idea of changeability are the main reasons why is Lévi-Strauss's theory the most inviting one among those that delve into different archetypes. Indeed, "The Structural Study of Myth" does not belong to the theories widely discussed in connection with personality archetypes, which is yet another reason why it should be, at least, taken into consideration. His idea of barring any text of its redundancies, such as the picturesqueness, and solely concentrating on the basic plot elements allow for an analysis reduced of dogmatic precision when it comes to the names of the archetypes as well as the slight changes in chronology and character development. The advantage of this theory, compared to all the others based on archetypes (namely C G. Jung's *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, and Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*) is that the rigidity is not yet present, giving way for the new analysis to establish its own rules, without the fear of straying from the acclaimed analyses, which, in turn, leads to a certain amount of creative freedom in comprising the analysis by the example of Lévi-Strauss. Jung believes, and rightly so, that all people could be easily divided according to their inborn characteristics into a vast number of types, the "representations collectives,"[70] judging any situation on the "archetypal events and motifs" besides the prolific "archetypal figures." Doubtless, his ideas could be

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[69] Lévi-Strauss, "Structuralism and Myth," 77.

[70] C. G. Jung, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1980) 5.

implemented on the books of Edith Wharton and her characters as well as could Lévi-Strauss's theory. However, the issue arises whether, according to Jung's study, all characters that can be grouped under the Lévi-Strauss tables could also be established under the same Jungian archetypes. Where Lévi-Strauss's theory finds similarities between the characters of Ellen, Lily, and Undine, Jung would probably not, at least not to the fullest potential of these characters. Such analysis is possible, without a doubt; however, the freedom of choice that structuralism offers in this sense is of much greater value in Wharton's texts, especially where the characters' archetypes are tightly linked to the society which moves them. Jungian archetypes would probably fit the three characters in three different categories: Lily would become an Explorer, Ellen would be either a Lover or an Artist/Creator, according to Elizabeth Ammons,[71] and Undine would be a Ruler. Such analysis could be fruitful; however, it is much more advantageous for this thesis to look for similarities in their approach to their lives, the society, and other characters, rather than the individual differences. In the case of Northrop Frye's archetypal theory, he, just like Lévi-Strauss, likened his archetypes to music, believing that there are elements of fiction that could be compared to elements of music, such as "tonality, simple and compound rhythm, canonical imitation, and such like."[72] Unlike Jung, Frye is concerned with the idea of a myth and how mythical allegories can be transported to romance and fiction, in general—just like Lévi-Strauss; and while his analysis is much closer to that of Lévi-Strauss, the main difference lies in the empirical and structuralist approach. Moreover, Frye is not particularly concerned with archetypal characters, but according to the appendix of his work, he defines an archetype as "a symbol, usually an image, which recurs often enough in literature to be recognizable as an element of one's literary experience as a

[71] Ammons, *Conflicting Stories,* 144.

[72] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957) 133.

whole."[73] Where Frye deals with archetypes in relation to old texts and scriptures, most notably the Bible, and ponders about the idea of archetypal relevance towards the real-life as well as similarities between the archetypes,[74] Lévi-Strauss is more attentive to the binary oppositions and the psyche that connects the opposing elements, and how that relates to particular mythemes. Hence, their approaches differ in their methodological processing but also in the fact that still, Frye labels his archetypes, whereas Lévi-Strauss does not confine his mythemes in particular categories., at least not in the general sense of the word. He does, of course, name his mythemes in each of the myth he analyzes, and while they often revolve around the notions of life and death, and day and night, there is not a universal formula Lévi-Strauss inflicts on his myths. Thus, his mythemes are based on the same premise of a symbol recurring often enough in the gross constituent unit for the mytheme to be able to begin to exist in the first place. Such freedom of categorization is crucial when analyzing a society of a particular era as portrayed by one author. Lévi-Strauss himself pointed out that his theory is applicable not only to various myths across the globe but also to the works of one author, and if the author concentrates on one topic throughout a part of their writing career, it is only natural that such comparison should be established.

As was already mentioned, Edith Wharton's works revolve around the society in which she grew up, devoting a plethora of space to the topic of the manacles that the said society inflicts on its individuals. However, looking closer at her texts, a pattern arises that immediately diverts the attention from the particular individuals to a collection of repetitive symbols, which could be summarized under the terms mythemes or archetypes. While some critics believe that each of the characters is original and individual,[75] using Lévi-Strauss's

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[73] Frye, 365.

[74] Frye, 139-140.

[75] Jay Martin, *Harvest of Change: American Literature 1865-1914* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967) 271.

theory of reducing the plot to its most general sentences and completing a chart made solely of such phrases, it is apparent that all of the characters fit under one of the basic mythemes created for this purpose. Such mythemes have to be invented in order to create a wholesome analysis. Moreover, as Pamela Knights points out in her essay included in *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton*,

> [readers] soon discover that any observation about an individual character - about his or her consciousness, emotions, body, history, or language - also entangles us in the collective experience of the group, expressed in the welter of trifles, the matrix of social knowledge, within and out of which Wharton's subjects are composed.[76]

Unlike in Jung's theory, or even Frye's theory, these are not rigidly set, allowing for new archetypes to arise from the mythemes and to continue with the Lévi-Strauss theory of binary oppositions where the characters are all in direct opposition to all of the others. In Jungian theory, there would not be a possibility of connecting Ellen, Lily and Undine under one archetype because, according to him, they would have slightly different individualities, which would, inevitably, assign them to different categories. But since Lévi-Strauss is not as adamant on the means of the analysis, a new fitting category can be created in order to compare these three ladies not only to their male counterparts but also to society, in general. Such notion is applicable to all of the characters of Wharton's, answering the question of whether Lévi-Strauss's theory, which even though it is not as prolific amongst the archetypal scholars, much more is suitable and beneficial. Moreover, it opens a wide field of undiscovered territory in which the academics could create their own archetypes under the security of Lévi-Strauss's structural study.

> In this sense, it can be said that mythic analysis is in a symmetrical and inverted relationship to statistical analysis: it tends to replace quantitative precision by qualitative precision, but in either case precision is only possible as an aim because of

[76] Pamela Knights, "The Social Subject in *The Age of Innocence*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton*, ed. by Millicent Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 21.

> the multiplicity of other cases which display a similar tendency to organize themselves spontaneously in space and time.[77]

The spontaneity of organization is crucial to the analysis of Wharton's New York novels because while the characters might not immediately seem to be of similar descent, the structural analysis of the plot as well as the relations show the linking chains between each of the characters and their respective archetypes.

For this purpose, four original categories, or archetypes, have been created summarizing the majority of the characters of Wharton's book, and, if one wanted to compare Wharton with, for example, Henry James's characters, it is believed that these categories could still be highly valuable, if only with slight alterations to some of them. These archetypes have been created in relation to the action portrayed in the texts, as well as the relation to the society and other archetypes created for the same reason. They comprise four categories, which then mostly include three characters each, although one of the archetypes, the archetype of "The Rule Keeper" seems to comprise the majority of Wharton's characters, as this is the New York of her childhood: the old aristocracy and a few fortunate families to be able to afford the life on the Fifth Avenue.[78] Still, the other three archetypes, or, as the structuralist method states, mythemes, are designed around three characters each, and these archetypes are: "The Fated Heroine," "The Cowardly Rebel," "The Rule Keeper," and "The New Man." "The Fated Heroine" consists of the characters of Ellen, Lily and Undine, as stated earlier, and while these characters are often described as contradictory, their fates and their connections to society are akin. "The Cowardly Rebel" encompasses Newland Archer, Lawrence Selden, and Ralph Marvell, each of whom believes themselves to be an original man of their time, but as the conversation will follow, all of them are simply constructs of the time and the society.

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[77] Lévi-Strauss, "Structuralism and Myth," 77.

[78] Mona Domosh, "Those 'Gorgeous Incongruities': Polite Politics and Public Space on the Streets of Nineteenth-Century New York City," *Annals of the Association of the American Geographers* 88.2 (1998): 209, Blackwell Publishing.

Lastly, “The New Man” archetype involves Julius Beaufort, Simon Rosedale, and Elmer Moffat, who are all shunned, to a certain extent, from the society because of their status, which is not perceived as important as the old generation of Old New York. Overall, all strata of the high-society in New York City in the late 19th century will be gradually delved into as described by Edith Wharton. Lévi-Strauss’s theory serves as a backbone for the analysis of Wharton’s works and will provide crucial information about the characters and the archetypes that would not have been as easily extracted had there been a different theory in use. “The Structural Study of Myth” is applicable on a variety of texts not only of mythical or folklore origin, and while most academics still lean towards the archetypes as described by C.G. Jung and his thesis that “certain human symbolic and other behavioral patterns recur despite manifold cultural differences among individuals,”[79] Lévi-Strauss offers a different way of looking at the same topic of the interconnectivity between different cultures, statuses, or mentalities. He does not confine his theory to generalized categories but lets his students establish their own labels, suitable solely for the one purpose of a study. The more general and widespread a theory is, the more ambiguities it will necessarily create. However, this aspect has been eradicated by Lévi-Strauss, which is why his theory is the most suitable for all the ideas implemented by Wharton in her characters mirroring the Golden Age society. The method used in the analysis ensuing is the dissection of all the plots of Wharton’s major New York novels in four categories that regard to the established archetypes. In these categories, the characters and their actions will be compared and likened to each other, explaining why it is precisely these characters that have been chosen to fit under the particular archetype. Their relations to the society are briefly mentioned; however, the analysis of the society and its

[79] Eugene Williamson, “Plato’s ‘Eidos’ and the Archetypes of Jung and Frye,” *Interpretations* 16.1 (Fall, 1985): 96. JSTOR<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43797850> 5 Mar 2021.

involvement in the archetype's decision-making process and other daily struggles will be discussed in chapter four.

3. 2. "The Fated Heroine" Archetype

It is rarely so that all of the main female characters of Wharton's New York novels are mentioned and likened in one analysis, as most of the critics see similarities always only between two of them, mainly between Lily Bart and Undine Spragg.[80] However, when one looks past the rigidness of their differences in terms of their feminine characteristics and considers them as parts of the equation in society, their similarities start to arise. This subchapter will take into consideration Ellen Olenska, Lily Bart, and Undine Spragg, the major similarities between their lives, as presented in tables one to three, as well as the minor details that help to establish the characters in one category, such as the commodification of their bodies and their substantial reaction to this, their addictions, and the treatment they got from both the fate and the society. Also, Lévi–Strauss's idea of binary oppositions will be utilized, inasmuch as the heroines will be inherently compared to "The Cowardly Rebel" and "The New Man" archetypes, as these two archetypes seem to serve as mirrors for the heroines, in a sense. Their overall role in the consumer society will be delved into in greater detail in chapter four later on.

Each of the novels starts with the introduction to the financial situation of each of the heroines. The notion of establishing one's financial status could relate to the era where wealth was on a pedestal against the majority of other virtues, and those who sought after being accepted in the highest strata of New York's society had to be financially extraordinary to be deemed interesting enough to entertain.[81] Undine is introduced to the reader as a clueless but

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[80] Elaine Showalter, "*The Custom of the Country*: Spragg and the Art," in *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton,* ed. by Millicent Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 96.

[81] Martin, 11.

driven young lady, who had just moved to New York from the midwestern city of Apex, and while she tries to get established in the high society, her father hits a setback in his business. "Nothing worse than what I can see to, if you and Undine will go steady for a while,"[82] he discloses to his wife in the introductory chapter of *The Custom of the Country*. While this issue is solved relatively quickly, the reader is immediately warned that the situation in the Spragg family is not as comfortable as Undine herself would wish and that her mindless spending and manipulation of her father might not be in her best interest. Similarly, Lily, although introduced to the reader through Lawrence Selden's eyes, points out very early on that she is "horribly poor and very expensive,"[83] and while Undine can, at least, count on her parents to give her financial relief whenever necessary, Lily is not as fortunate, being an orphan in the care of her elderly aunt, of whom she is somewhat afraid, and with whom she has a rather superficial relationship.

> Lily had no heart to lean on. Her relation with her aunt was as superficial as that of chance lodgers who pass on the stairs. But even had the two been in closer contact, it was impossible to think of Mrs. Peniston's mind as offering shelter or comprehension to such misery as Lily's.[84]

Like Undine, Ellen has a family to support her when she needs it the most, at least in the character of Catherine Manson Mingott, who loves her granddaughter dearly and supports her financially as we as socially. "'Oh, that's part of the campaign: Granny's orders, no doubt,' Lefferts laughed. 'When the old lady does a thing, she does it thoroughly."[85] While Ellen's struggle for money is not as outstanding as, for example, in case of Lily, she still does not possess any personal money, as she left everything behind with her husband, Count Olenski,

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[82] Edith Wharton, *The Custom of the Country*, in *Three Novels of New York: The House of Mirth, The Custom of the Country, The Age of Innocence* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012) 269.

[83] Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth,* in *Three Novels of New York: The House of Mirth, The Custom of the Country, The Age of Innocence* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012) 10.

[84] Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, 117.

[85] Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, in *Three Novels of New York: The House of Mirth, The Custom of the Country, The Age of Innocence* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012) 568.

and, therefore, she must rely on her family to situate her in New York, and later in Washington and Paris. In a sense, all of the heroines are presented as those in need of help which mostly comes from their family members, but this help is fickle, as all of them later learn, as their families hold reigns over the heroines and their lives would have been vastly different without their families stepping in. Where Undine would not have been able to marry Ralph Marvell without the help of her parents, Mrs. Peniston's decision to obliterate Lily from her will resulted in the turn of her fate for the worse. In Ellen's case, her family first encourages her to postpone the divorce from her brute husband, only for them to later insist on Ellen's return to the same husband, whom they first understood to be unsuitable for her. "The matter has been gone into by the family. They are opposed to the Countess' idea, but she is firm and insists on a legal opinion."[86] It is, in a sense, not up to Ellen to decide about her fate, but up to her family to decide what they deem to be most suitable for the image of the whole clan.

The monetary motif comes into question also in the bodies of the novels, where all of them are affected by the prospect of a "good" and suitable marriage, that would result in not only happiness in their lives but that would also bring some financial and social advantages, which seemed to have been the custom of the time.[87] Moreover, despite their financial situations, all of the women are praised solely for their beauty, and it is their beauty that helps them succeed in the society at least once in their novels. They become the objects of praise, the commodified body that is seen as a vantage point of social ascendency for "The Cowardly Rebels" as well as "The New Men," as all the men are driven to "The Fated Heroine" not solely because of their intellectual beauty (of which they all have but an ounce, expect, maybe, Ellen, who is the one able to hold a conversation about more than a pretty dress or a famous painter), but because their beauty is generally known and prolific. In *The Consumer*

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[86] Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, 613.

[87] Elizabeth Ammons, "The Business of Marriage in Edith Wharton's *The Custom of the Country*," *Criticism* 16.4 (Fall, 1974): 328. JSTOR<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23099547> 5 Mar 2021.

Society, Baudrillard says, the body becomes a commodity and serves as a part of the exchange market, to a certain extent. "And, even more clearly, the body is glorified precisely as its real possibilities are atrophying and it is increasingly harassed by the system of urban, professional and bureaucratic control and constraints."[88] Such commodification of the young female body is closely connected to the society's mentality that saw marriage as an exchange and a part of the growing consumerism in America of the mid-and late nineteenth century.[89] Each of the characters monetizes their beauty differently; however, the fact remains that they all benefit from it and use it to their advantage, inasmuch as it is her beauty that helps Undine attract as many male suitors as she does and also maintain them despite her obvious lack of empathy and, in a way, lack of the traditional manners. As Jay Martin exclaims in his book on American novels of the late 19th and the early 20th century, Undine is a superficial character whose superficiality and externality are both utilized by her in obtaining all that she sets her mind at, such as men or wallpapers.

> [Undine] named after a hair-waving lotion which her father had marketed, she is essentially a product. The imagery of gilding of light, of money, jewels, of unopened books, and of the surfaces and textures of objects-particularly the reflection which Undine always seeks in her omnipresent mirrors-declare and define her externality.[90]

This externality is praised by her parents and all her husbands, who support her in choices that lead to her strengthening the stereotypical notion of herself as solely a beautiful object. Of all the suitors, it is only Elmer Moffat who "spoke her language, who knew her meanings, who understood instinctively all the deep-seated wants for which her acquired vocabulary had no terms,"[91] as she points out at one point in the novel, and, in a sense, he is the only one who is

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[88] Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (Sage: London, 1998) 100.

[89] Ludger Brinker, "The Gilded Void: Edith Wharton, Abraham Cahan, and the Turn-of-the Century American Culture," *Edith Wharton Review* 10.2 (Fall, 1993): 3. JSTOR<http://www.jstor.com/stable/43512824> 12 Jan 2021.

[90] Martin, 271.

[91] Wharton, *The Custom of the Country*, 527.

not interested in her solely because of her novelty in the society and her staggering looks. Ralph Marvell, Peter Van Degen, and Raymond de Chelles were all mesmerized by Undine's beauty, but not by her behavior, one could argue.

Lily is quite similar to Undine as she also gains personal favors from men in the novel by attracting them to her through her beauty. Once again, her manners and behavior are looked down upon, and it is her everlasting beauty that helps her survive many of the downfalls she encounters throughout the novel. Even Lawrence Selden agrees that it is Lily's beauty and nothing else that separates her from all the other women in New York. "He was aware that the qualities distinguishing her from the herd of her sex were chiefly external: as though a fine glaze of beauty and fastidiousness had been applied to vulgar clay."[92] Such demonstrations early on in the novel emphasize the importance of Lily's demeanor against the intelligence she thinks she possesses. On the other hand, Ellen is less conspicuous in using her looks, but still, she manages to shock her audience with her style and her unconventional beauty, which leads to Archer's infatuation with her in the end. She even overshadows May at the very introduction of the novel, at the prolific opera house, where it Ellen and her mysterious looks combined with an unusual robe that attracts all the attention, especially from the male audience.

> It was annoying that the box which was thus attracting the undivided attention of masculine New York should be that in which his betrothed was seated between her mother and aunt; and for a moment he could not identify the lady in the Empire dress, not imagine why her presence created such excitement among the initiated.[93]

Ellen manages to bewitch the men of the novel from beginning to the end, from Julius Beaufort to Newland Archer, strengthening the idea that it was the charm of a lady that intrigued the suitors, and not the intellectual and emotional intelligence, to a certain extent.

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[92] Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, 7.

[93] Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, 565.

The heroines' way of life and their learned behaviors is also something that is loosely shared between the characters of this particular archetype. All three of the women are addicts, in a sense, even though each of them is addicted to something entirely different. Addictive behavior has begun to be noticed by specialists of the late 19th century, as they soon called it a "spiraling national problem,"[94] and Wharton was a direct audience of the developing issue in New York City. "By the late-nineteenth century, legal drugs like cigarettes, patent medicines, and alcohol were widely available, and illegal drugs like heroin and cocaine were often accessible in patent medicines in distilled form."[95] However, addictive behavior did not refer solely to consumer goods but was also indulged in another sense of the word, as represented here by both Undine and Ellen. Still, Lily Bart poses as the epitome of addiction, for she partakes in every activity that is now connected to addictive habits in the book, as Meredith Goldsmith points out in her essay on addictive behavior in *The House of Mirth*.

> As much as seemingly innocuous consumer practices as smoking and tea-drinking by Wharton's characters represent an endpoint of leisure-class indolence, they provide the stimulus necessary for working- and middle-class productivity. Similarly, behaviors like gambling drive the characters' forays into the consumer economy and compensate for losses and disappointments in the marketplace.[96]

Hence, Lily is seen smoking at the very beginning of the novel, as well as seen gambling from which the majority of her downfall stems and these strengthen the idea that Lily as a leisure-class woman has the born notion of her class' acceptance of such vices. However, as even Thorstein Veblen indicated in *The Theory of the Leisure Class,* these vices were accepted in a man, "the master," and so when a woman openly took part in such behavior, the patriarchal

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[94] Timothy Hickman, *The Secret Leprosy of Modern Days: Narcotic Addiction and Cultural Crisis in the United States, 1870-1920* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007) 2.

[95] Hickman, 12.

[96] Meredith Goldsmith, "Cigarettes, Tea, Cards, and Chloral: Addictive Habits and Consumer Culture in The House of Mirth," *American Literary Realism* 43.3 (Spring, 2011): 243. JSTOR<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/amerlitereal.43.3.0242> 20 Jan 2021.

culture fought against it,[97] which is demonstrated by Lily's cousin Ned Van Alstyne. "Now that women have taken to tobacco we live in a bath of nicotine. It would be a curious thing to study the effect of cigarettes on the relation of the sexes. Smoke is almost as great a solvent as divorce: both tend to obscure the moral issue."[98] This, and other demonstrations similar to it indicate that Lily's addictive behavior was not as acceptable as she perceived, and while she is thought to be one of the most versed players of the social game, she was clearly able to misread a situation which, later on, turned against her. Neither Undine nor Ellen showed symptoms of consumer consumption connected to addiction; however, they were both addicts, in a sense. Undine's vice was money: her sole purpose in life was to strive for a better life, a more luxurious life at that, and her unwillingness to let go of her personal standards is one of the reasons, it could be argued, that she was, indeed, addicted to money and the power that arose from it. Likewise, Ellen was unhappy without her own addiction, which was love. As Jung's archetype showed, Ellen is a Lover, and her addiction is alluded to many times in the book, where she clearly does not remain in a relationship void of love, but, rather, seeks a loving embrace in those who are friendly to her. Her vice is falling in love with the wrong men, and, as Aldo Scaglione mentions in his essay on Petrarchan love, Ellen is a willing participant in her own tragedy when it comes to her love life.[99]

Another link between the three characters is their ability to reverse fate, even if the reversal is only temporary for some of them. Fate, in general, plays a considerable role in Wharton's books and is present with all her characters. This notion also applies to "The Fated Heroine" archetype, as none of them could outsmart fate. Blake Nevius, one of the most devoted Wharton critics, have specified the problem of the era in his book *Edith Wharton: A*

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[97] Veblen, 51.

[98] Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, 125.

[99] Aldo Scaglione, "Petrarchan Love and the Pleasures of Frustration," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58.4 (1997): 566. JSTOR<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3653960> 5 Mar 2021.

Study of Her Fiction, where he states that "[it] was the discovery of the nineteenth century, as someone has said, that Society, rather than God or Satan, is the tyrant of the universe."[100] Society has become equivalent with fate because it was the society's rules that one had to willingly or unwillingly follow and on whose signals one had to react. Lily is the character who comments on this fact the most, realizing that her life is not her own but that everything is determined by society and by the fate imputed on her. "I was just a screw or a cog in the great machine I called life, and when I dropped out of it I found I was of no use anywhere else."[101] Lily is unable to stretch beyond the environment she knows best, and this inability then results in her fate entangling with the society, which inevitably pushes her away for her social game is not as strong as that of the other players.

> Lily, in short, is a completely and typically the product of her heredity, environment, and the historical moment which found American materialism in the ascendant as the protagonist of any recognized naturalistic novel. […] Through no fault of her own, she has—can have—only the loosest theoretical grasp of the principles which enable Selden to preserve his weak idealism from the corroding atmosphere in which they are both immersed.[102]

However, the involvement of the society as such will be further discussed in chapter four concerning all the archetypes. Still, fate greatly influenced both Undine and Ellen as well, as it was because of fate, one could argue that Undine's life took a turn for the better thanks to the annulment of her marriage to Marvell. Had it not happened, she would not have been able to marry de Chelles, and, in turn, she might not have ended the circle back with Moffat. "Undine may to a certain extent be understood, and perhaps even sympathized with, as a symbolic victim of the forces which at the turn of the century were shaping the new America. She can hardly be other than what she is, the spirit of materialism incarnate."[103]

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[100] Nevius, 56.

[101] Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, 242.

[102] Nevius, 57.

[103] Nevius, 152.

Similarly, Ellen's life choices were guided by fate, from her mysterious marriage to Count Olenski to her return to New York, and later her expatriation once again. "Ellen Olenska, who represents another kind of threat to the tribal security, is vanquished when society closes about the Newland Archers like a Roman wall. What one notices about this little world is that it is hermetically sealed against contamination."[104] Moreover, the idea of the threatening Other is also something shared within "The Fated Heroine" archetype, as all three women are seen as a threat to society and receive treatment according to this notion. Ellen "contaminates" the society with her novel ideas of divorce and separation, as well as the possibility of a division of a marriage of two important New York families. Lily is a threat to the rich husbands, as Julie Trenor insinuates at the beginning of the novel, but she is also a threat because she is unwilling to settle down for solely business reasons. "In *The Custom of the Country*, Undine is the monstrous Other that embodies threat and renewal alike, a necessary opponent through which an established order might revitalize its own cultural power."[105] Each of the characters poses a threat to the "natural" order of the society established by the wealthy families as a protection system to prevail no manner the regime or world's situation.

The overall similarity is concluded by the ends of the novels because they all relate to a similar topic, and that is the overall dissatisfaction of the heroines. Their endings are handled in an evolutionary manner, which, in a sense, could be ascribed to Wharton's fascination with Darwin and other evolutionists of the time, whom she read diligently.[106] The evolution of the characters follows the idea of their unhappiness in society by the end of the books. It could be

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[104] Nevius, 178.

[105] Nancy Bentley, "Edith Wharton and the Science of Manners," in *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton,* ed. by Millicent Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 64.

[106] Wisam Chaleila, "The Collapse of the American Upper-Class Collective Identity: Capitalism and the Nouveaux Riches in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 6.1 (2019): 2. Taylor & Francis<https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2019.1594515> 15 Jun 2020.

argued that Undine was the one happiest by her novel's end; however, she still believed that life was supposed to look differently and that she aspired for something she knew she could not attain. "She had learned that there was something she could never get, something hat neither beauty not millions could ever buy for her."[107] Blake Nevius goes as far as to say that, "Undine may to a certain extent be understood, and perhaps even sympathized with, as a symbolic victim of the forces which at the turn of the century were shaping the new America. She can hardly be other than what she is, the spirit of materialism incarnate."[108] The next step in the evolution of "The Fated Heroine" archetype is Ellen, whose fate is sealed when she decides to let go of Archer and resort to a personal exile in France. Her unhappiness lies in the fact she gave up her love addiction for the good of the old society and decided that Platonic love is enough for her, and loving from afar is an option, even though it brought misery to both Archer and her.[109] Lastly, it is Lily whose fate is the worst because unbeknownst to her, she takes a lethal dose of sleeping medicine by the end of her book, and, what is more, her ending is overshadowed by Selden's thoughts and mourning. She eventually ceases to be the heroine of her own story, as it is Selden and his point of view that introduces and closes the book. However, it is Lily's final addiction that destroys her and robs her of the possibility of obtaining happiness in her life. All three characters might seemingly transpire as very different; however, their actions in the plots of their novels indicate that they have more similarities than some critics care to admit. They stripped themselves of the possibility of personal happiness in the process of attaining their addictions and social positions. "The opposite of Lily Bart, with her exquisite taste and refined moral sense, too scrupulous finally to survive in the crass social jungle, Undine has no ladylike instincts at all. Yet she and Lily

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[107] Wharton, *The Custom of the Country*, 555.

[108] Nevius, 152.

[109] Scaglione, 567.

are sister under the skin, even if Undine's skin is thick and Lily's thin."[110] Equivalently, Ellen is their sister, for she possesses characteristics similar to both Undine and Lily, inasmuch as her ladylike instincts remind the reader of Lily Bart, to a certain extent, and her ability to survive the society without deceasing are just like Undine. They are "The Fated Heroines" because neither of them is able to remove the shackles the society has put on them, and their fates follow them to the end. Their beauty cannot save them, and neither can their ability to play the game set by the society surrounding them. Undine is the one who concluded her fate on the happiest note; however, she herself is, in a sense, miserable because there is no attainting of the ultimate goal: becoming the Ambassador's wife. Ellen's fate is fickle and dependent on various elements other than herself, which inevitably leads her toward running away from the conformities of New York's society and towards the more open-minded atmosphere of Europe, of which Wharton was a great admirer.[111] Lastly, Lily is stripped off the title of a heroine of the story by the end, as the inconsequential Lawrence Selden brings attention back to himself as he perceives himself as the ultimate victim of the society. Still, Lily's journey poses a threat to society, hence why she must have been eliminated. All their endings are in direct opposition to "The New Man" archetype, where the characters become the winners by the end of the novels, and even a direct opposition with "The Rule Keeper," which prevails in each of the novels as well, even though with some difficulties on their own.

Albeit the majority of the analysis relies heavily on the three primary New York novels, Wharton used the archetype of "The Fated Heroine" in her other fictions as well, most notably in her novella "The Old Maid," where it is the character of Tina who represents this particular archetype. She fits under table four perfectly, for her story begins with the reader's understanding of her financial situation as fickle, to say the least because she is an illegitimate

[110] Showalter, 96.

[111] Lubbock, 23.

child who is not aware of her parentage. She, just like all the other characters in this archetype, gets help from her family members, in the form of her aunt, whom she calls "mama," and it is because of fate that she does not end up as miserable as Lily Bart by the end of her story. Even though her story has a seemingly positive ending, one could argue that the idea of not knowing the truth about one's mother is just as horrific as ending up in an exile like Ellen Olenska. Tina's naivety obscures this fact diligently throughout the novella; however, the anxiety surrounding her must have had some effect on Tina as well. Moreover, this character is to be recognized even in some of Wharton's short stories, for example "A Cup of Cold Water," where the main love interest, Miss Talcott, could also be classified as "The Fated Heroine," as she struggles for love as the main character, Woburn, rather runs away than truly try for her heart, and she is denied the possibility of happiness with him. Thus, the archetype of "The Fated Heroine" could be found throughout Wharton's fiction, signaling the importance of such a lady in her fiction; a lady, who was, to a certain extent, both the reflection and the worst nightmare of Wharton's. She understood the society perfectly and could relate to all of her characters, no matter how monstrously she portrayed them. Her looks were similar to those of Undine, she was as free-spirited and inclined to live in France as Ellen, and she understood the process which drove Lily to "penury and despair."[112] It was, once again, Wharton's upbringing and understanding of the rigidness of the society that led her towards constructing an archetypal heroine with a negative twist to it. As Lévi-Strauss specified in one of his essays, the relationships between the plot and the characters are what makes the analysis so meaningful.

> The myths are only translatable into each other in the same way as a melody is only translatable into another which retains a relationship of homology with it: it can be transcribed into a different key, converted from major to minor or vice versa; its parameters can be modified so as to transform the rhythm, the quality of tone, the

[112] Bell, 10.

emotive charge, the relative intervals between consecutive notes, and so on.[113]

Similarly, Wharton's "Fated Heroines" and their action can be slightly modified; they do not always correspond to the fullest, but the melody and the core remain: they are all just beautiful, sad women whose fates determined their lives even before they had the actual notion of individuality instilled in them. The importance of their vices and merits was eradicated by the tribal actions of the society, which turned against this specific archetype because each of them posed a threat to the natural and austere order of New York's society.

3.3. "The Cowardly Rebel" Archetype

In contrast to "The Fated Heroine," "The Cowardly Rebels" have often been discussed in a way that celebrates men's heroism and masculinity against the coarseness and manipulativeness of the female characters. Such analyses were prevailing in the contemporary 19th and 20th-century criticism where, for example, "[Lawrence Selden] represented a positive alternative to the materialistic and manipulative characters surrounding Lily Bart."[114] Joseph Coulombe believes that Lawrence Selden is the only positive male character of Wharton's because "he is less fearful than Ethan Frome, less self-deluded than Ralph Marvell, less exploitive than lawyer Royall, and less conventional than Newland Archer."[115] However, this subchapter argues that whilst there are differences between the main male characters, neither of them is particularly positive, as all of them share the traits of a coward and a man driven by society, unable to break free. Several critics have the need to justify the male characters' behavior by stating that they were the proactive ones, while the female characters,

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[113] Lévi-Strauss, "Structuralism and Myth," 70.

[114] Joseph Coulombe, "Man or Mannequin?: Lawrence Selden in The House of Mirth," *Edith Wharton Review* 13.2 *Edith Wharton at Yale: A Special Issue, Part I* (Spring, 1996): 3. JSTOR<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43512879> 15 Apr 2020.

[115] Coulombe, 3.

primarily "The Fated Heroines," were making individual choices to jeopardize their relationships. Coulombe goes as far as to state that fate does not play any role in Lily Bart's life at all, and while Selden is insistent on helping her to free herself from society, she chooses not to do so.[116] He says that "[although] Selden has been criticized for his passivity, he repeatedly offers an escape for Lily who repeatedly chooses to rebuff him."[117] The emphasis on the innocence of the male characters in the books is repelling since its sole purpose is to strengthen the already existing misogyny of the turn-of-the-century New York society. What this part of the thesis aims to do is to name all the similarities in the plot between the male characters of Wharton's most famous era while, at the same time, being objective without the need to justify one's action solely on the basis of their gender.

The interconnectedness between Ralph Marvell, Lawrence Selden, and Newland Archer is, for the most part, linked to the relationship between "The Cowardly Rebel" and "The Fated Heroine," inasmuch as the majority of their actions in the story is associated with the heroines and their social positions. In all three cases, such association comes early in the novels as all three men become infatuated with the idea of the heroines. The importance of this claim lies in the word *idea* because none of "The Cowardly Rebels" falls in love with the real person in front of them; rather, they all inflict an idea on the women that suit their image of love, which in all three differ vastly. In Ralph Marvell's case, he falls in love with Undine, not because of her ambition nor her inability to conform to the traditional values, but because she poses as something different, something that excites Ralph and stirs the monotonous people surrounding him. While he wants to believe that Undine's only assets are being beautiful and smart, knowing how to play the social role, she is anything but that. She is not able to be what Ralph wants her to be, as she is set in her ways, although these ways do not correspond with

[116] Coulombe, 5.

[117] Coulombe, 5.

those of Ralph's. Even though he wants to think he is different from those belonging to "The Rule Keepers," the fact is he is embedded in the society too much to be able to see past its traditional behavior and escape it.

> He seemed to see her—as he sat there, pressing his fists into his temples—he seemed to see her like a lovely rock-bound Andromeda, with the devouring monster Society careering up to make a mouthful of her; and himself whirling down on his winged horse—just Pegasus turned Rosinante for the nonce—to cut her bonds, snatch her up, and whirl her back into the blue…[118]

Ralph sees himself as the ultimate hero, the savior on which Undine waits; however, he does not realize that he is simply a means to an end, and very bad at that as well because while Undine believes he is well situated, Mr. Spragg needs to offer a financial injection for the marriage even to begin. Elizabeth Ammons believes that Ralph suffers from a Pygmalion-like impulse which leads him to want to brush off the boorishness of Undine and create an entirely new being.[119] What he ceases to realize is that it is not Undine's wish to be changed, and by implying she needs to change her ways, he only pushes her further away from him. Moreover, it is seemingly the challenge each of the female characters, "The Fated Heroines," offer to "The Cowardly Rebels" on top of the idea of a perfect love created from the stodginess of the society surrounding them.

Similarly, then, Newland Archer falls in love with the idea, with a challenge represented by the newly-arrived Ellen Olenska. She is mysterious in a way other women in New York are not; she asks him unexpected questions, as well as gives him nontraditional answers, and thus, Archer begins to feel like his identity, which has been closely connected to the society surrounding him, is transforming into hers. "From the beginning of *The Age of Innocence* Newland Archer evinces a romanticism that causes him to expect transformation through

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[118] Wharton, *The Custom of the Country,* 301-302.

[119] Ammons, "The Business of Marriage in Edith Wharton's *The Custom of the Country,*" 333.

passion and thus renders him susceptible to Ellen's exotic and scandalous allure."[120] Moreover, Archer is infatuated with the type of characteristics that are opposed to those within the rigid society. However, his own identity is so rooted within the same society, which is why his romanticism is misplaced and, therefore, predestined to fail, because, as Scaglione argues in his essay, "they are above all products of a society which conspires to prevent 'scandalous' unions."[121] Archer's persistence to remain in a platonic relationship starts to strip him of his old New York identity, which is embedded in him, and, hence, its complete removal would be catastrophic for him and his wellbeing. "In Archer's world, identity is formed within social consciousness, and when Archer is confronted with a challenge to his categories, he begins to come apart, losing his sense of himself, his language, position, bodily space."[122] In this sense, Archer's insistence on changing the established rules within the society of New York is counterproductive for him, and the fact that he falls in love with an idea of a woman and the challenges she offers to him, rather than with a woman herself, further establishes the impossibility of the situation that he himself inculcated.

The "negative hero,"[123] Lawrence Selden, is no exception in falling in love with what he wants and not with whom stands in front of him. He even confesses to this vice in the middle of the novel, where he wantonly sighs when he sees Lily, but the "old Lily he used to know,"[124] and he is obviously in love with that person. His inability to admit that Lily has changed and that what he is willing to offer is not what Lily craves shows that Lily's lack of courage in pursuing their love affair is rooted in Selden's behavior. Blake Nevius believes that

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[120] Lloyd M. Daigrepont, "The Cult of Passion in *The Age of Innocence*," *American Literary Realism* 40.1 (Fall, 2007): 2. JSTOR<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27747269> 3 Mar 2021.

[121] Scaglione, 564.

[122] Knights, 36.

[123] Coulombe, 3.

[124] Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, 107.

Selden "maintains his integrity at the cost of any nourishing human relationship,"[125] pointing at the fact that whilst critics like Coulombe fight for the recognition of Selden's behavior as manly and courageous, it is, in fact, just a defensive mechanism to keep away all people who would be able to see past his mask of indifference. He falls in love with Lily and the idea of her changing for him; in a sense, he also believes in his ability to transform Lily as much as Ralph believes he can change Undine, even though neither of them has the ability nor the right to do so. Unlike what many critics say, Lily is not a character obsessed with marriage and the idea that marriage is a simple business deal; had it been so, she would have married Rosedale the very first time she had met him.[126] This is the main reason why Selden is wrong in his impression of Lily and why his competence to read people is not as extraordinary as he postulates, because, ultimately, Lily wants to be loved for who she is, and it is the one thing Selden is incapable of giving her. While he believes that their marriage is impossible because Lily expects too much from it, it is, in fact, his fear of something real and tangible that eradicates the possibility of a happy relationship for him, strengthening the long-standing argument of Selden comfortably sitting in his bachelor apartment, letting Lily die.[127] Despite his emotional immaturity, Selden, just like all the other "Cowardly Rebels" feel the need to try and prove their identities are not linked with the society by rebelling against the traditional ways, either successfully or not.

The name of the archetype is derived from the notion of an unsuccessful rebellion of these characters as well, as it is a topic not as discussed but equally as important as the reasons for the fruitless love affairs of the three leading male characters. All Ralph, Selden, and Archer believe that they are the rebels of society, pushing through the boundaries and

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[125] Nevius, 59.

[126] Howard, 143.

[127] Kaye, 48.

acting out of their own volition. But as these characters are not singular and are repeated even in the short novellas, in characters such as Lewis Raycie in "False Dawn." They, once again, pose as an evolution of the rebellious man, of which Lewis is the most advanced since he is the only one keeping to his promise and principle and the only one who survives this choice. On the other hand, Woburn, a character from "A Cup of Cold Water" could similarly be seen as "The Cowardly Rebel," even though his social position is slightly lower than all the previously mentioned gentlemen. However, even he falls in love with an idea of a rich young beautiful woman, never truly acts on it and his story ends by him being abandoned and without a home. As Blake Nevius says in his book, "all of Mrs. Wharton's men are made increasingly hollow by the new,"[128] and this hollowness is here presented in the context of their lack of bravery and determination.

Lawrence Selden is at the very bottom of the hierarchy of evolution since he is the only one sabotaging the relationship from the very beginning, even if he has a few moments of quasi-clarity, which, however, pass very quickly, and he returns to himself and his old ways of cowardice once again. His moments of lucidity come whenever he is alone with Lily, and he is almost able to see past the mask she wears for everybody else. However, as William Moddelmog argues in his essay on subjectivity in *The House of Mirth*, "Lily's desire to reveal herself and Selden's inability to interpret her signs form the backbone of their tortured relationship and highlight the fact that their minds never fully meet."[129] The relationship between Selden and Lily remains platonic, mainly because Selden is too prone to accept rumors about Lily rather than seeking the truth from her directly. His love is superficial, and while he is often given the agency of being an independent man rejecting Lily because he is too aware of the traps of marriage and the expenses Lily would expect him to do, the truth is

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[128] Nevius, 272.

[129] William E. Moddelmog, "Disowning 'Personality': Privacy and Subjectivity in *The House of Mirth*," *American Literature* 70.2 (Jun., 1998): 337. JSTOR<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2902841> 15 Apr 2020.

that it is his cowardice and emotional distance that put all of his relationships in jeopardy in the book. As Elaine Showalter says, "[Selden] demands an even further moral perfection that she can finally only satisfy by dying."[130] Lily can never be what Selden asked of her because his own demands are too high and, arguably, high enough for him to rationalize their separation. His only act of "bravery" comes at the end of the book, where he has decided to pursue Lily despite all the inconveniences it might bring to him, only to find her already deceased.[131] That he directs everything that happens to fate shows that the inability of his actions is symptomatic of his looking for excuses why the relationship could not have worked out in the first place. Wharton was aware of Selden's behavior which could be why she made it look like his own feelings overshadowed the fact that Lily was dead, and the reader was made to concentrate not on the trauma of the unwanted suicide but the implications this had on the male hero. "It is Selden's dramatic last moment, not hers. This ending beyond Lily Bart's death scene once again lays open the problems if true felling against the postured or calculated moment, artifice opposed to authenticity, with which the novel began."[132] He makes it seem as though he was ready to rebel against society, but Lily's death made it easier for him to abandon such thoughts, and he could easily return to his old manners.

Newland Archer is one step above Lawrence Selden on the scheme of evolution since he is apparently ready to terminate his old, New York-society kind of life and start anew with the woman of whom society is not too fond. The motive behind such behavior might be that he is not able to choose between the old ways of the society in which he grew up and the new society on the rise, represented by the character of Ellen Olenska.

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[130] Elaine Showalter, *Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 87.

[131] Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, 258.

[132] Howard, 153.

> In many ways, May Welland figures the old, traditional New York of Newland's youth while Countess Ellen Olenska figures the new progression, a world where people look forward rather than backward. May is repeatedly described as the fair, blonde innocent while Ellen is the dark foreigner who poses a threat by her potential to evoke transition, to destroy the old.[133]

Moreover, Archer is "inept at making his way without a clear distinction between what is said and what is meant,"[134] resulting in the inefficacy of his decision-making process throughout the novel. He introduces the novel by believing May to be the most transparent of the people in New York since he always knows what she means, and he feels there are no social games between them. However, when the progression comes in the form of Ellen, Archer suddenly changes his behavior so much even he does not recognize himself at certain points in the novel, such as when he is jealous of the Duke's presence in Ellen's apartment and the consequent yellow flowers signifying jealousy sent to Ellen.[135] Still, he never resolves to really acting on his emotions, always struggling to find the balance between his life in New York and the new possibilities proposed by Ellen's exoticism. Many critics are led to believe that Archer's behavior by the end of the novel was altruistic, his motives more than generous when he decided to stay with his wife May because of her pregnancy.[136] Nevertheless, one could also argue that the decision has been made for him, and not by him in the sense that May had told Ellen about her supposed pregnancy even before she told her husband, playing the social game well enough to know the symptoms of dismay; and Ellen, as the dutiful and moral character departed even before Archer had the chance to speak with her, leaving him with no other viable option than to stay with his wife. Hence, the decision was not altruistic,

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[133] Margaret Jay Jessee, "Trying it On: Narration and Masking in Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 36.1 (Fall, 2012): 38. JSTOR<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/jmodelite.36.1.37> 27 Feb 2021.

[134] Jessee, 37.

[135] Daigrepont, 4.

[136] Nevius, 109.

but rather logical and, even more importantly, not Archer's decision at all; it was May and her pregnancy that determined his fate, after all.

It is, however, Ralph Marvell who is the one surpassing the expectations of "The Cowardly Rebel," insofar as he manages to momentarily break through the barrier of society and marry the woman with whose idea he falls in love, only to wake up to reality moments later. In the novel, Ralph admits to momentarily feeling as though the old society is not his kind, but then realizing it is not the case.

> He too had wanted to be "modern," had revolted, half-humorously, against the restrictions and exclusions of the old code; and it must have been by one of the ironic reversions of heredity that, at this precise point, he began to see what there was to be said on the other side—*his* side, as he now felt it to be.[137]

As mentioned above, Ralph is in love with the idea of changing Undine to his own image and not with the ambitious heroine herself. This also leads to his determination to marry her before somebody else realizes what could be done with her. However, his determination is not enough in this case, and when he realizes that Undine is much more challenging to handle and that it is not in his abilities to make her happy and maintain this state of mind, he gradually becomes depressed. Similarly to Newland Archer, Ralph's identity is deeply rooted within the Old New York's society, and with the arrival and consequent falling in love with Undine, who, just like Ellen, is the epitome of the new generation in a sense, Ralph's identity starts to fade away. He has even been called "the novel's most extreme hysteric,"[138] as his identity is constantly threatened, and the trauma of such a threat creates hysteria in him, which results in his suicide. Ralph's rebellion, therefore, is the most successful of the three characters as he attains the object of his desire, Undine, but, at the same time, this object destroys him more than anything else in other of Wharton's novels. However, it is not only Undine who causes

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[137] Wharton, *The Custom of the Country*, 297.

[138] Phillip J. Barrish, "The Remarrying Woman as Symptom: Exchange, Male Hysteria, and *The Custom of the Country*," *American Literary Realism, 1870-1910*, 27.2 (Winter, 1995): 2. JSTOR<https://www.jstor.org/stable/27746610> 3 Mar 2021.

his dismay, but also Elmer Moffat, whose confession to the previous marriage to Undine seems to be the last straw in Ralph's imbalanced psyche.[139] This brings the segment of the thesis to its final point, and that all of "The Cowardly Rebels" suffer an unhappy ending by the end of their books.

As was mentioned above, Ralph's destiny is the most cataclysmic, in that he is the only male character who dies as a result of following the steps of his own fate. Without Undine, his life is seemingly less and less relevant, and he laments the situation of not being able to be close to his wife, whose touch is the only one he wants and craves. Still, for Undine, Ralph has given up his passion—literature—to provide for her and her luxurious needs.[140] When even that is not enough for her, his life is reduced to taking care of his son, and while he has the need to provide for him and be a role model, Undine's fights for custody, ultimately, takes everything Ralph has to live for from him, and, inevitably, kills him with her actions. From a respectable citizen and a son and grandson of a traditional New York family to a miserable wreck-of-a-man, whose wife has left because he was unable to provide, Ralph's journey is concluded in a ghastly act of shooting himself. In a sense, Ralph does not have enough resolve and courage to continue to fight against fate and society, and the only means to an end is to end his own life on his own terms. "He said to himself: 'My wife… this will make it all right for her…' and a last flash of irony twitched through him."[141] His fate is interwoven with that of Undine till the very last moments of his existence, when he thinks of her and how he alleviates the obligations from Undine by his act. At the same time, however, he realizes that everything he has done ever since he met Undine was wrong; he could never have succeeded, and his blind belief in being a chivalrous hero fades away with the prospect of a prosperous

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[139] Barrish, 4.

[140] Barrish, 5.

[141] Wharton, *The Custom of the Country*, 496.

life after divorce. For Ralph, there is no way out of the situation he found himself in other than suicide.

No other character's fate is as tragic as that of Ralph, which, however, does not particularly mean that their endings are not unhappy. For Archer, his fate is determined, as was already described, not by himself but by the people around who act as if on his behalf, creating a situation where only one possibility is available. The last chapter of *The Age of Innocence*, however, shows that even when provided with the option of a happy ending, Archer chooses the other way. He chooses not to see Ellen Olenska again despite being mere meters away from her, resigning to life as his wife and the old society would have wanted. No matter how progressive Archer believed himself to have been, he still never acts on his emotions, as he is too afraid of the repercussions he might face afterward. Arguably, some critics, such as Scaglione, believe that their "souls" unified in the parting moments in New York and that "their union was perfect without any physical contact, indeed, without the danger that physical contact could spoil it."[142] The danger of spoilt romance coalesces with the idea of the lack of bravery, of which all of these characters are accused, and which is why they are called "The Cowardly Rebel" archetype. Like Ralph, Archer chooses to continue to be reduced to traditional roles within society, such as the Father, the Husband, the Lawyer, and other roles, never opting to escape such labels by going directly against them.[143] While his ending is not as tragic as that of Ralph, the reader is left with the feeling of incompleteness as there is no reunion happening, signifying that Archer was complacent in the oppressive society and adopted its ways after Ellen's departure from New York. Lastly, Lawrence Selden and his fate are once again one step behind Newland Archer because while Archer evidently suffers and his life has not taken turns he would have liked in a perfect universe, Selden

[142] Scaglione, 567.

[143] Knights, 23.

laments but is seemingly the least affected of the male heroes. His determination and love are not as soul-consuming as Ralph's and Archer's; hence his ending is seemingly the most positive out of all the main characters. Still, Wharton ends his story on a note that makes the reader feel sorry for Selden, despite it being constructed in a way that takes the spotlight from the dead heroine and transforms it so that the regret is directed at Selden.

> It was this moment of love, this fleeting victory over themselves, which had kept them from atrophy and extinction; which, in her, had reached out to him in every struggle against the influence of her surroundings, and in him, had kept alive the faith that now drew him penitent and reconciled to her side.[144]

Only in the moment of death could Selden let go of his cowardice and prejudice and see what their lives could have been, had fate and their own limitations not stepped between them. Demonstrations such as this show that his life, if only momentarily, is miserable because the only relationship worth abandoning his weak principles for ceased to exist with Lily's death, and Selden is, once again, pushed to mangling with taken women of the highest society.

"The Cowardly Rebels" are interconnected not only because they are the main male characters of the novels, but, most importantly, their behaviors and understanding of the world are intrinsically similar, if not always the same. They choose to believe they evade the moralistic and stiff ideas of the society surrounding them and want to think they are the better people with more progressive ideas. However, each of them is influenced by New York's leisure class in their decision-making processes, especially those regarding their jobs and their future wives. Their rebellion is rooted in the fact they all fall in love with women who are on the invisible margins of the society, for whichever reason, and Ralph, Archer, and Selden would like to think they are the ones changing their statuses. However, they fall in love with ideas and the challenges posed by such women, not with the women themselves, which is why none of the relationships is real or lasting. Their fates are interrelated as well, as each of

[144] Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, 258.

them ends up alone and reminiscent of the past and what could have been had they not let society and its ways push them towards the final decisions. Still, it is the reason why they are the agents without agency because no matter what they believed or wished for, their fates were determined for them without a possibility of escape for any of the three gentlemen.

3.4. "The New Man" Archetype

In contrast to both previously mentioned archetypes, "The New Man" could be described as that who escapes the traditional customs of the highest society because he is an outsider to whom some rules do not apply. In this type of archetype, three main characters reside, and that Elmer Moffat, Julius Beaufort, and Simon Rosedale, all three of which are often described as the nouveaux riches of the turn-of-the 20th century; the class which came into existence primarily because of the economic boom and their ability to profit on various businesses.[145] They create their own type because they do not fit within the society from which all three other archetypes are derived and are, therefore, a stand-alone archetype; however, they are still juxtaposed with both "The Rule Keepers" and "The Fated Heroines" as they come in contact with these archetypes the most. It is their inability to be fully assimilated within the highest society alongside their natures, work ethics, and luck that contrasts them with all of the other characters in the books. Moreover, similarly to "The Rule Keepers," not many studies have been conducted regarding the three characters comprising this particular archetype, as the majority of scholars concentrate solely on the male and female heroes of the stories. However, to achieve an all-encompassing analysis of Wharton's works and her characters, one must discuss all the strata involved within the highest society of New York, to better understand the intrinsic relationships and the overall atmosphere of the society,

[145] Thomas Haden Eriksen, *Small Places, Large Issues: An Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology* (London: Pluto Press, 2015) 218.

especially then regarded to the rise of capitalism, with which "The New Man" is connected the most.

The similarities can be found between the introductory portrayals of the three men, which are always in relation to "The Fated Heroine." Here, Lévi-Strauss's theory of direct opposites is utilized by Wharton, since the reader is introduced to all the crude men, "The New Men," with "The Fated Heroines" and their monetary, customary, and class differences are pointed out in each case. The juxtaposition is straightforwardly demonstrated by Wharton, who portrays the heroines at the beginning of the novels as the beautiful and innocent on the one side, while "The New Men" are shown as the threatening "Other" on the other side of the spectrum. Elmer Moffat is introduced to the reader through an association: Mr. Spragg meets him in the city and is bewildered by his presence and what it can mean to his daughter. "'He can't do anything to her, can he?' 'Do anything to her?' He swung about furiously. 'I'd like to see him touch her—that's all!'."[146] Already in the first chapter, it is demonstrated that Moffat is a danger to Undine and that she needs protection against his vile nature. That she had been smitten by him and even married him is a fact offered to the reader much later on, feeding the feeling of a threat whenever Moffat is at the center of the stage. Simon Rosedale is described to the reader in a similar manner as Moffat, as he is also seen as an imminent threat to the heroine, Lily Bart. He does not necessarily pose a threat to society early on, but the reader sees him questioning Lily's motives for exiting a bachelor building. "That Simon Rosedale knows "it's an old word for bachelor" only because he owns the building is a clever introduction to the theme of cultural possession."[147] Rosedale is portrayed as the person who owns parts of the city and is inclined to own Lily as well. He, just like Beaufort, knows what it means to be seen with the heroine in the city, but it is the one thing Lily is unwilling to give

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[146] Wharton, *The Custom of the Country*, 270.

[147] Howard, 139.

to him. Julius Beaufort is introduced in a similar light, with the exception that he is, in fact, seen parading with the heroine on the streets. His motives are guessed by the other members of the society because of Beaufort's reputation as a womanizer. "It's a mistake for Ellen to be seen, the very day after her arrival, parading up Fifth Avenue at the crowded hour with Julius Beaufort."[148] In Beaufort's case, the society had partly accepted him because of his marriage into a prominent New York family; however, there are still reservations when it comes to his character, which is often under scrutiny from the other characters, as the explicit question is asked early on: "who *was* Julius Beaufort?"[149] He is both a mystery and a threat to society because he was able to climb the social ladder while maintaining his own customs, bridging the insurmountable distance between the nouveaux riches and the old leisure class. The society only accepts Beaufort because "[it] preserves its health and its definitions by attributing the inclusion of Beaufort to "miracle", a sudden and inexplicable transformation in nature."[150] Still, the acceptance is never complete, and his downfall is not perceived as a tragedy by society.

The most prominent characteristic shared between the three men is that they are ostracized and marginalized by the other archetypes because they are neither a beautiful young woman with delicate features, like Undine (who is also often described as the nouveaux rich),[151] nor a part of the original families ruling over New York for the majority of the 19th century, like every other character in the books. Moffat, Rosedale, and Beaufort are the new money; those who decided to ascend the hierarchy ladder by doing business most often on Wall Street. Even that was seen as preposterous since most of the men in "The Rule Keeper" category and those belonging to "The Cowardly Rebels" are men unwilling to

[148] Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, 577.

[149] Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, 570.

[150] Knights, 28.

[151] Nevius, 148.

multiply their family fortunes by actual work. Wharton drew her motives from her experience, and, as Blake Nevius recalls, “none of [the men] was ‘in business.’ They were trained to be lawyers or bankers or stockbrokers, but, like Newland Archer and Ralph Marvell, they kept to office hours and their profession was mainly an ornament.”[152] On the other hand, “The New Men” were those whose work had more meaning than sitting in an office, delegating their responsibilities and dealing with family drama, like Archer, but those who made money by consistent hard work, even if some critics point out that their businesses might not have been solely legitimate, as in the case of Rosedale, whose business is implicitly questioned by the narrator throughout the whole book. “The tips he pays to make his way through society and the deals he makes in the mysterious world of Wall Street indicate the corrupt enterprises he ventures.”[153] Moffat and Beaufort come under similar scrutiny not only from the narrator but from the other characters as well, and while Beaufort is, in a sense, a part of the society by the time *The Age of Innocence* begins, Moffat and the nature of his enterprise is scrutinized till the end of *The Custom of the Country*. “Nobody knows how it’s coming out. That queer chap Elmer Moffatt threatens to give old Driscoll a fancy ball—says he's going to dress him in stripes! It seems he knows too much about the Apex street-railways.”[154] Moreover, Moffat’s business is often juxtaposed with other characters and their moral beliefs, as in Mr. Spragg and Ralph Marvell, whom both fall under Moffat’s spell and threats, making him a dangerous player of the game of money. “Moffatt blackmails Mr. Spragg in a bid for control of the municipal services of Apex and uses Ralph Marvell, who knows nothing of his wife's former marriage, to complete a real estate deal.”[155] Also, Julius Beaufort, despite his relative

[152] Nevius, 179.

[153] Chaleila, 5.

[154] Wharton, *The Custom of the Country*, 359.

[155] Beverly R. Voloshin, “Exchange in Wharton’s *The Custom of the Country*,” *Pacific Coast Philology* 22.1/2 (Nov, 1987): 102. JSTOR<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1316663> 7 Mar 2021.

acceptance, is perceived as somebody with "a shady past"[156] and often "viewed in terms of spending, with all its suggestions of fluidity, bleeding, giving out too much, being used up."[157] As will be discussed later, all three men also represent the capitalist part of the society, valorizing on the potential of the market and the "mysterious Wall Street," inevitably pointing at the change that is undergoing within American society as such—the change against which the leisure class tried to defend itself.

The business is also what is mostly discussed concerning "The New Men," as both their luck and their undoings are closely connected to not only Wall Street but investment and entrepreneurship, in general. As with the other two previous archetypes, "The New Man" also undergoes a certain amount of evolution when it comes to both the acceptance in the society and the luck of their investments, which are two elements closely connected in the case of this particular archetype. The first level of evolution is represented by Simon Rosedale of *The House of Mirth*. He is on the threshold of the society, which is aware of his existence but reluctant to invite him to share their lifestyle with them. Unlike the portrayal in *Old New York* novellas, where hardly any nouveaux rich is portrayed as the ascendancy on the social ladder was almost impossible in the middle of the 19th century, in *The House of Mirth*, Wharton shows that the society has shifted enough to be willing to accept people from the outside if their wealth was substantial. "Veblen's predatory test facilitates changing the rules of permitting or dismissing a class member and thus class becomes more contingent on capital rather than on lineage."[158] Since Rosedale obtains such capital that is marveled upon by the men of the leisure class, the way towards acceptance is slightly more encompassing for him. However, there is a price to be paid to receive a general consent of inclusion, as Wai-Chee

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[156] Knights, 28.

[157] Knights, 34.

[158] Chaleila, 4.

Dimock argues in his essay on capitalism in *The House of Mirth*. "In fact, 'payment in kind' is never expected in transactions in the social marketplace, and this unspoken rule makes for a plethora of business opportunities. A 'society' dinner, for instance, is worth its weight in gold."[159] Rosedale diligently pays this price and is, inevitably, included in social events that would have otherwise stayed closed off to him, such as the Van Osburgh wedding. The general idea of everybody's involvement in each other's businesses also meant that the society was aware of Rosedale's activities on Wall Street, and even when the majority of investors were losing, Rosedale and his investing craft surged as winners. "This particular season Mrs. Peniston would have characterized as that in which everybody 'felt poor' except the Welly Brys and Mr. Simon Rosedale."[160] The more money Rosedale obtains, the more he is seen as a valuable part of the society if only for the money he could bring to them, and not particularly as a suitable future husband for any of the old families' daughters. "'Oh, confound it, you know, we don't *marry* Rosedale in our family,' Stepney languidly protested."[161] Precisely that is the reason why Rosedale portrays the first step of the evolution: "The Rule Keepers" are aware of him and his existence, they are beginning to see his importance within the society, and they behave accordingly, but still, they do not perceive him as a suitable match to be married to any of the old families.

Elmer Moffat portrays the second level of "The New Man." Similarly to Rosedale, Moffat is portrayed on the outskirts of society at the very beginning of the book, seen as a "shady" businessman from Apex trying to win over New York. Just like Rosedale, Moffat's finances are looked upon closely by the members of "The Rule Keeper" archetype, as they see the new rising blood that could potentially threaten their lineage and stability. As the book

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[159] Wai-Chee Dimock, "Debasing Exchange: Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*," *PMLA* 100.5 (1985): 783. JSTOR<https://www.jstor.org/stable/462098> 15 Apr 2020.

[160] Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, 95-96.

[161] Wharton, *The House of Mirth,* 124.

progresses, Moffat's business is taken more seriously, and he is soon considered a necessary evil, just like Rosedale.

> Moffat recovers from public embarrassment in Apex to control, from New York, the Apex municipal services. He becomes one of the most successful Wall Street financiers. The brash, bold American also becomes a connoisseur, collecting oriental and European objects d'art, even raiding Europe to do so.[162]

He becomes the epitome of the nouveaux rich inasmuch as he quickly makes his way through the ranks of Wall Street, entangling his life with prominent New York names, such as the Marvells, when Ralph needs more money to keep Undine from attaining guardianship over their son, Paul. It could be argued that the step to succeed within the society is not much greater than that Rosedale had made in his book, because *The Custom of the Country* still shows the reader that "The New Men" cannot marry within the old families, hence Moffat's marriage to Undine—an also newly arrived specimen in New York. However, an inevitable step has been made since the capitalist could marry "The Fated Heroine" by the end of the book, and some critics, such as Elaine Showalter in her essay comprised in *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton,* claim that Moffat was more favorable to Wharton than the main female character was. "But Wharton is much more tolerant of Elmer's backwoods grossness than of Undine's Midwest ignorance. She respects the ideals of the men - however pretentious, grasping, impractical, derivative, or stale - much more than those of the middle-class women in the novel."[163] Moffat is compared to Undine by many scholars, which strengthens the idea of direct opposites, as "The New Man" is always a contradiction, both positive and negative, of "The Fated Heroines" and their behavior. Moffat and both his action in Apex and on Wall Street are perceived by the characters as cunning, but they are unable to keep him at a distance that would provide "The Rule Keepers" to keep their society unchanged and unhinged by a character like Moffat. "[Undine] had been surprised by a vague

[162] Voloshin, 100.

[163] Showalter, 95.

allusion to Elmer Moffatt, as to an erratic financial influence, half ridiculed, yet already half redoubtable."[164] That he became a formidable opponent for the majority of "The Rule Keeper" men is yet another sign of "The New Men" rising through the ranks of society to, ultimately, attain its reigns.

Which is why Julius Beaufort of *The Age of Innocence* could be seen as the last stage of the evolution of "The New Men" category. Where Rosedale and Moffat were still seen as the ultimate "Others," never truly accepted by the society and the notion of marriage between the nouveaux riches and the old family lineage was perceived as unthinkable, Beaufort pushed through all these boundaries to emerge victoriously. Before the beginning of the novel's plot, Beaufort managed to seduce a young woman from one of the most prolific families in New York, Regina Dallas, which immediately lifted his status from a mere businessman to Dallas' son-in-law, and this ascendancy bore its fruits through the majority of the novel. The fact is that Beaufort was still looked upon with a certain amount of disdain and was never a genuine part of "The Rule Keepers" because of his own lineage and his behavior; however, he still miraculously breached the society, which none of the other "New Men" could. Pamela Knights indicates that the New York society survived Beaufort because it had decided to alter his status slightly. "Society preserves its health and its definitions by attributing the inclusion of Beaufort to "miracle", a sudden and inexplicable transformation in nature."[165] Hence, the society remains unchanged, and so does Beaufort, as many of the characters observe, but because he utilized the most profitable exchange in the 19th-century society—marriage—he was able to force "The Rule Keepers" to momentarily change the rules for him specifically. With his lavishness, luxurious clothes, and pompous house, Beaufort gives back to the community by providing novel entertainment as he tries to maintain the established manners

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[164] Wharton, *The Custom of the Country*, 359.

[165] Knights, 28.

and customs, which are the backbone of the whole society. "[For] over twenty years now people had said they were 'going to the Beaufort's' with the same tone of security as if they had said they were going to Mrs. Manson Mingott's."[166] As with the previous two men belonging to this archetype, the true victory lies in their investments on Wall Street and their ability to capitalize where the majority of people cannot. Nevertheless, while both Rosedale and Moffat were shown in a way that highlighted their wins rather than their losses, in *The Age of Innocence*, Wharton denoted the other side of capitalism when Beaufort's investments failed, bringing him and his family shame and shunning from the society. "That afternoon the announcement of the Beaufort failure was in all the papers. It overshadowed the report of Mrs. Manson Mingott's stroke."[167] However, as the reader expects the end of luck for Beaufort, Wharton ends her novel on another note, as she transforms the society and transits it to the 20th century, where even Beaufort's illegitimate children are seen as valuable and suitable partners to the old families' children. "Nobody was narrow-minded enough to rake up against her the half-forgotten facts of her father's past and her own origin."[168] The ending of the novel could be interpreted as a victory for "The New Men" since even after Beaufort's downfall and his exile from New York, his children were welcomed there a generation later, and they got to marry easily, unlike Beaufort in his own times.

"The New Man" could, therefore, be perceived as the new hero of the era, in which customs are no longer enough to keep oneself in the society, and in which the more cunning a person is (while maintaining a certain level of integrity), the more fruitful their trying is in terms of attaining a spot at the prolific "dinner-table," where only those with a certain amount of status are welcomed. Furthermore, by the end of each novel, Wharton indicates that while

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[166] Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, 571.

[167] Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, 722.

[168] Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, 765.

the old society is still ruling, and it is still their word that matters the most in any conversation, "The New Men" are slowly taking over and transforming the society into one driven by capitalism. As has been mentioned, Wharton was on the lookout for new evolutionary theories, and some critics believe that it was this particular reason that connected "The New Man" with evolution and the survival of the fittest, as Wisam Chaleila indicates in her essay. "Rosedale who represents the manufactured force of capitalism survives although he is thoroughly delineated as genealogically the least fit. Thus, Rosedale's survival as the economically fittest complies with the competitive nature of people in the economic realm where the "fittest" prevails."[169] Likewise, Moffat and Beaufort survive because they are the economically fittest of the whole New York, and even in Beaufort's case of failure, the last chapter shows how victorious capitalism and he truly are. Moreover, Rosedale is seen giving a helping hand to Lily on multiple occasions, and had she accepted his offers, she probably would have ended up like Undine. However, Lily decided that money was not her ultimate goal, and she died because of this decision, while Rosedale emerged victoriously.

> Rosedale is in ascendancy when he opens this vision of manners to Lily, and his perspective productive troubles traditional boundaries between private and public, business and social life, even ethics and pragmatics. Lily will ultimately devote herself to the more rarefied vision represented by Laurence Selden, but the novel is unequivocal about Selden's increasing irrelevance in Rosedale's New York.[170]

In fact, it is not solely Rosedale's New York; it is the New York of "The New Men" in general, the men who capitalize on investments and hard work (which, of course, is not manual because "The New Man" is still a part of the leisure class, and manual work would have disqualified him), and who, therefore, become the new-age heroes who survive where the old society cannot.

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[169] Chaleila, 3.

[170] Cyrus R. K. Patell and Bryan Waterman (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of New York* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 124.

3.5. "The Rule Keeper" Archetype

Unlike all the previously mentioned archetypes, "The Rule Keeper" archetype is not comprised of three individual characters but, instead, of the majority of people that can be found in Wharton's novels. Each work has significant "Rule Keeper" in it that can be elevated above others; however, Wharton wrote her books according to her own memory, which was mostly made of such people. They were prone to dismiss any sign of progress because they arguably feared what such innovation could bring to their comfortable lives. As Wharton herself points out in her biography, *Backward Glance*, "the weakness of the social structure of my parents' day was a blind dread of innovation, and instinctive shrinking from responsibility."[171] Thus, Wharton included such characteristics in the prevailing archetype of her work to strengthen further the importance of manners and how the core of the society was shaped by the invisible and unspoken rules, with which the other three archetypes fought so wholeheartedly. In a sense, it could be argued that "The Rule Keepers" were the only ones maintaining the course of their actions set by the beginning of their texts, never straying or evolving, as it had been shown on "The Fated Heroine," "The Cowardly Rebel," and "The New Man." "The Rule Keepers" are crucial for the overall tone of the book and for the portrayal of what the society expected from its participants, since "The Rule Keepers" were the characters abiding society's rules from beginning to end, carefully protecting it from the outside forces. However, when the class is threatened—when "The Rule Keepers" and their position within the society is threatened—it causes insecurity and even questions the identity of the class as such.[172] However, this general description is not the only characteristic these characters share, as exhibited in tables one to four. What can also be seen in the tables is that

[171] Wharton, *Backward Glance*, 22.

[172] Chaleila, 4.

"The Rule Keeper" is, for the most part, closely connected to "The Fated Heroine," often portrayed as a juxtaposition to this particular archetype.

However, the most credible, and often, the most discussed feature of this archetype could be described as a matriarchal tendency, where while it is the man who provides financial stability for the family, it is the woman who holds the reigns and is, for the most part, responsible of the family's good name, as Scaglione briefly discusses in his essay. "These families were matriarchal by nature (remember the domineering old ladies of *The Age of Innocence*), and their fortunes were based on real estate speculation."[173] However, it is not only *The Age of Innocence* that provide this analysis with viable material, even if the matriarchy might be the most tangible in the latest of Wharton's books, as can be read early on, with Archer's inner monologue, "[whatever] man dared (within Five Avenue's limits) that old Mrs. Manson Mingott, the Matriarch of the line, would dare."[174] Matriarchy is portrayed everywhere in Wharton's texts, going as far as Ethan Frome even, but especially in the luxurious and claustrophobic environment of New York City, the reader sees the tendency of women being the outspoken parties in the family dynamics. Wharton's tendency to involve women in the decision-making process probably stemmed from the fact that the turn-of-the-century literature was indeed filled with up-and-coming women. "If there is a single dominant emphasis in the fiction of the decade and a half preceding the First World War, it is on the drama of social aspiration—a drama managed, I should add, almost entirely by women."[175] It shows even in *Old New York*, particularly in the novellas "False Dawn" and "The Spark." In "False Dawn," it is once again the juxtaposition of "The Fated Heroine" and the two women raising her, without a masculine element to intervene, that is central to the plot of the novella.

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[173] Scaglione, 565.

[174] Wharton, *The Age of Innocenc*e, 566.

[175] Nevius, 61.

"The Spark," on the other hand, shows a woman, Mrs. Delane, who is popular among her friends, female and male alike, not letting her husband leave her while she enjoys all that life has to offer. Similarly, it is the women in *The House of Mirth* and *The Custom of the Country,* who shape the society's trends and consciousness, inasmuch as they are looked upon when any other character needs guidance. Therefore, the first similarity between "The Rule Keepers" begins with strong women having more moral and social power than the majority of men. Moreover, the men almost look like they are implemented in the plot solely for the portrayal of leisure class men, whose work is not manual, and often their wealth comes from familial heritage, strengthening the idea that men are the financial providers without any other role, which is a prolific tendency in the works by the end of the 19th century.[176] This is best portrayed by Gus Trenor, whose wife, Judy, is in the epicenter of the society; their house Bellomont is the epitome of high standards and everything a participant of the society wants to achieve. Gus, on the other hand, is always described regarding his money or his dullness, never for the possibilities he could have in the society as such. "She finds compensations, no doubt— I know she borrows money of Gus—but then I'd pay her to keep him in good humor, so I can't complain, after all."[177] His role in the book is substantial since his fate is closely connected to that of Lily's; however, in comparison with his wife and her involvement within the stability of the leisure, Gus is a mere figure in the bigger game, while his wife and her friends are those setting the rules. It could even be argued that men, in general, were the ones defining the society from the outside, especially on the streets and in the public spaces,[178] while women were the ones defining the society from its core. Such idea corresponds with Veblen's description of the leisure class, in which he puts emphasis on the fact that while it is

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[176] Merish, 334.

[177] Wharton, *The House of Mirth,* 35.

[178] Domosh, "Those 'Gorgeous Incongruities'," 211.

the man, who provides the money to the household, it is the job of the wife to advertise the husband's wealth, in a way that would elevate the whole marriage.

> The women being not their own masters, obvious expenditure and leisure on their part would redound to the credit of their master rather than to their own credit; and therefore the more expensive and the more obviously unproductive the women of the household are, the more creditable and more effective for the purpose of reputability of the household or its head will their life be.[179]

While Veblen insists on the importance of men in all societies, from barbarian to the contemporary one, Wharton takes the argument a step further towards feminism, inasmuch as she marginalizes men and their role while elevating women and their cunning powers. As was already mentioned, Wharton was a diligent reader of Darwin and other evolutionary scientists; however, she was also fairly familiar with Freud and his work, so it comes as no surprise that she shared some of his pessimism about the rigidity of the female psyche. "Woman of [thirty], however, often frightens us by her psychical rigidity and unchangeability. Her libido has taken up final positions and seems incapable of exchanging them for others."[180] This idea corresponds with what Wharton included in her books, where the society, rigid and unchanging, is driven by the same women who are incapable of changing themselves. Moreover, they pass this inability over to their daughters, creating a generation after generation of the same time of women, "The Rule Keepers." Fredâ Asya believes it is the case in her essay on *The House of Mirth*, and especially the case of young May, who is the living example of such psychical heredity. "May's purity is not a conscious performance but is "cunningly manufactured by a conspiracy of mothers and aunts and grandmothers and long

[179] Veblen, 119.

[180] Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, *vol. XXII, New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, trans. by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1981) 134-135.

dead-ancestress."[181] Thus, Wharton assembled society in her books in a way that is matriarchal, and, as such, the New York society resembles a utopian community.

What "The Rule Keepers" also have in common is their relationship towards "The Fated Heroines." As the tables show, most of the plot that revolves around "The Rule Keepers" ties to the heroines, their acceptance within society, and the prejudice they face because of the stiff generation. It is the crucial element of the archetype, as their identities are intertwined with that of the whole society, and as Ellen, Undine, and Lily all pose as threats to that society, "The Rule Keepers" are on the lookout for anybody who would want to bring progression—the evolution these people feared and avoided wholeheartedly. Not many studies concentrate on this particular archetype, nor on the individual characters belonging to the archetype, as they are perceived as a naturalist portrayal of the society surrounding Wharton.[182] However, it is particularly this archetype that constructed the society for the most part, and, thence, it is crucial to understand its relationship to the others, and, in return, the understanding of the other archetypes in regards to the society then is much easier as well. The relationship with the heroine could, then, be described in three stages: reservation, rejection, and reconciliation, and these three stages are shared between all three major New York novels, as well as some of the shorter fiction.

In *The Custom of the Country,* the reservations are the most straightforward and explicit, as Undine is literally an outsider breaching the borders of the society by her sheer presence and her lack of manners, best represented by two occasions: before Undine's marriage with Ralph and after marriage with Raymond. In the first instance, Undine is, once again, praised for her beauty, but when the society realizes that she is quite rebellious and extraordinary,

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[181] Ferdâ Asya, "Resolutions of Guilt: Cultural Values Reconsidered in *The Custom of the Country* and *The Age of Innocence*," *Edith Wharton Review* 14.2 *International Perspectives* (Fall, 1997): 17. JSTOR<http://www.jstor.com/stable/43512890> 21 Jan 2021.

[182] Nevius, 8.

their reservations rise. "[Every] face at the table, Ralph Marvell's excepted, reflected in varying degree Mr. Dagonet's pained astonishment."[183] The Dagonets perceive Undine as a unique but coarse individual with whom they never truly find common speech. Later in the novel, Undine herself admits to believing that it was not hers or Ralph's fault that their marriage did not last, but the fault of the society, the environment that surrounded them that knowingly orchestrated their unhappiness.

> She could console herself only by regarding it as part of her sad lot that poverty and the relentless animosity of his family, should have put an end to so perfect a union: she gradually began to look on herself and Ralph as the victims of dark machinations, and when she mentioned him she spoke forgivingly, and implied that 'everything might have been different' if 'people' had not 'come between' them.[184]

New York society is here, then, closely compared and connected with the fate that has been in the center of all Undine's failures; and it is because the society was oppressing to all newcomers as well as protective of any kinds of changes within the manners and customs inherited generation by generation in an unchanged manner. On the other hand, Undine's second husband's family is reserved to the point of dismissal, as they do not see Undine as a fitting match for Raymond, especially before Ralph kills himself, freeing Undine from the obligation to finalize their divorce. That marriage and divorce were valuable capitals within the late 19th century will be discussed in chapter four; however, in regards to de Chelles and Undine, it is clear that not only is she banished from the old society because of her past, but also because she is, yet again, perceived as "the Other," as an American coming to France to conquer the old continent, and, as had been described, "The Rule Keepers" on both sides of the Atlantic were vigilant to anyone disturbing the natural order of things. These reservations, naturally, escalate in rejection by the majority of the individual characters in the archetype, rejecting the sole existence of the intrusive element by either ignoring them or by insisting

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[183] Wharton, *The Custom of the Country*, 307.

[184] Wharton, *The Custom of the Country*, 445.

that the element must be ejected from the environment. It is especially the case of the Dagonets, who see Undine enjoying her life without a care for either her husband or her son, that makes them question her motives, and later, result in their utter renunciation of Undine. The reconciliation, in *The Custom of the Country*, comes in the form of other characters than those performing the rejection, as Undine is a legitimate part of the society by the end of her novel, a hostess of marvelous dinners,[185] the wife of a prolific businessman, and "The Rule Keepers" evidently relented in her rejection because, suddenly the importance of friendly relationships even with people like Elmer Moffat and Undine Spragg, often called "the new capitalist speculators,"[186] were integral for their survival.

A similar sequence of action also ensued in *The House of Mirth*, even though the prior reservations were not as pronounced as with Undine because Lily, after all, was a part of the society through her familial connections and was not perceived as the ultimate Other at the very beginning. At first, Lily is a valued member of the society as she brings eloquence and beauty to the dinners and the following games, integrating into the society, which later banishes her from its confines. "It is [Lily's] genealogy [Lily's ancestors have always belonged to the highest class], combined with her famous 'beauty' that gives Lily value, even when she is financially destitute."[187] As Lily has her ancestors, as well as living relatives, such as Mrs. Peniston, who are valued members of the society, she cannot be repented solely on the basis of few missteps, as, arguably, Undine was. However, some individuals of "The Rule Keeper" archetype are reserved against Lily and her manners, especially in connection with their children. This particular case is that of Mrs. Gryce, who convinces her son not to marry Lily for her poor choices and addictive habits. "Mrs. Gryce told me herself that it was her

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[185] Wharton, *The Custom of the Countr*y, 552.

[186] Christopher Gair, "The Crumbling Structure of 'Appearances': Representation and Authenticity in *The House of Mirth* and *The Custom of the Country*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 43.2 (Summer, 1997): 355. JSTOR<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26285703> 21 Feb 2021.

[187] Gair, 363.

gambling that frightened Percy Gryce—it seems he was really taken with her at first."[188] Arguably, it was Mrs. Gryce that repented Lily's behavior, and her upbringing caused Percy Gryce to share her reservations of such behavior in a respectable woman. The rejection then comes for similar reasons, as Lily's habits and spending adventures push her into borrowing money and lending her presence to people solely for their praise, as with the Dorsets on their yacht. Arguably, the reconciliation comes only after Lily's death and is only presented to the reader from the point of view of a character belonging to a different archetype, Lawrence Selden. However, it could be said that society's reservations are dismissed under the weight of the news of Lily's death, especially after her debt to Gus Trenor is paid. "The Rule Keepers" survive this unintentional attack on their integrity orchestrated by Lily by their insistent obedience to their tacit laws, such as borrowing money and favors from this archetype is seen as an agreeable deed only if the retributions are paid and heeded, as could be seen in the case of husbands of both Judy Trenor and Bertha Dorset.

Lastly, the stages in *The Age of Innocence* are concentrated in the familial circles, between the Mingotts, the Wellands, and the Archers, and occasionally the van de Luydens. "The Rule Keepers" here are the most outspoken, as the reader can see many layers of the leisure class, from the van de Luydens, who are perceived as the top of the hierarchy, with all the other families coming after them in the food chain of New York's society. "The society reproduced in the novel consisted of a small number of families, ranked in a strict angelic hierarchy according to ancestry and financial means [….]."[189] Similar to the other two novels, "The Rule Keepers" are the backbone of the story, inasmuch as they represent the only correct behavior accepted within the circles both Newland Archer and Ellen Olenska try to coexist. The reservations against the heroine are pronounced very early on in the novel—the moment

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[188] Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, 100.

[189] Nevius, 179.

she is introduced to the broader society as well as the readers—and it is understood that Ellen is considered to be the "black sheep" of the family because of the estrangement from her husband. She is not banished yet, but "The Rule Keepers", in a way, sense a threat in her since she can disturb the natural peace instilled by the old families and their traditions. The only person not entirely against Ellen's reintroduction to society is her grandmother; everybody else is hesitant to be affiliated with Ellen and her past in fear of the rumors it might spike. Even Newland Archer, whom himself thinks he is above "The Rule Keepers" and their rigid rules, confirms this fear when he thinks to himself, "[he] hated to think of May Welland's being exposed to the influence of a young woman so careless of the dictates of Taste."[190] However, the more Ellen participates in the social circus of dinners, walks, and visits, the more society relents and warms up to her, as long as she listens to them and plays by their rules. The moment she tries to be an individual and stand out of the rails set by the tribal community, she is, once again, felt to be too different to ever fully integrate and assimilate the way "The Rule Keepers" wish her to, and so she never really reaches the status that Lily or even Undine were able to because the society never sees a true intent of assimilation from Ellen. It, inevitably, results in the rejection of Ellen from the society, as she is exiled to France, where she cannot threaten "The Rule Keepers," here led by the now married May Archer, who takes on the role of the matriarch of the family, and she cunningly makes sure that Ellen receives the message of her to vast of a difference to fit within the society truly.

So, while "The Rule Keepers" are often portrayed as those inactive in all of the novels, their role is to keep the society pure and structured, hence why they are often likened to the Puritans.[191] However, their importance reside in the fact that they act quietly but effectively, getting rid of all the elements threatening them, while, at the same time, understanding the

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[190] Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, 567.

[191] Nevius, 111.

need to prevail by opening their minds to "The New Men," as they can bring the value in the form of money inside the old society, even if their manners are not as elevated. Still, the importance lies in the fact that those willing to assimilate and listen to the set rules will be accepted, to a certain degree, while those with progression on their minds will be banished and diminished because the old society always prevails. The only book that questions the ever-lasting effect of the society is particularly *The Age of Innocence*, where Wharton offers the readers a look into the future, in which Dallas Archer marries "his own Ellen,"[192] signifying that the society has moved forward inasmuch as even those with not particularly popular surnames could climb the social ladder. On the other hand, this particular climbing through marriage is also demonstrated by Beaufort by the beginning of the novel, so the argument could still be made that the old society prevailed solely with more outspoken and determined participants playing the old roles. What was more, was that these roles were tightly connected with the rising phenomenon of capitalism enveloping the majority of the United States, reaching as high as the top of the hierarchical pyramid of New York's society, while slowly dissolving "The Rule Keepers" and exchanging them for "The New Men."

[192] Patell and Waterman, 125.

4. Capitalism as the Ruler of the Society

As has already been insinuated in the previous chapters of this thesis, capitalism and the consumer society strongly influenced the Gilded Age, and such influence translated into the literary works of the time. Capitalist values permeated into all strata of New York life and were the common denominator for all social classes, which either monetized on the quick rise of money after the Civil War in case of the middle and high class or were heavily employed and economically castrated because of it in the case of the working-class citizens.[193] Even though many critics, especially in the 20th century, argued that "the Gilded Age had become, for a whole generation, the symbol of a national loss of innocence and quest for wealth, its politics corrupt, its art and literature a pale degeneration from the heroic days of New England's dominance,"[194] scholars now recognize the importance of the age of affluence and its portrayal in contemporary art, and especially literature. This chapter will take a closer look at the rise of capitalism in America and how that influenced society, especially in the city of New York, as the Gilded Age was also the era when Wall Street gained its name as the prime stock market.[195] The chapter will also utilize the division of Wharton's characters into archetypes, as these categories will be contrasted with capitalism and how the rise of such monetary values influenced each of them, but, most importantly, "The New Men," who were the capitalists of the novels. Moreover, notions such as marriage as a business contract, as well as the commodified body in the case of "The Fated Heroines" are crucial for the discussion of capitalism in Wharton's works, as she implemented the idea that while money is important, the exchange can happen on more fronts than just the obvious monetary one.

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[193] Crain, 62.

[194] Neil Harris, "The Gilded Age Reconsidered Once Again," *Archives of American Art Journal* 23.4 (1983): 12. JSTOR<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1557327> 2 Apr 2021.

[195] Crain, 101.

4.1. Gilded Age Capitalism

Unlike in many European countries, where the rise of capitalism is explicitly connected with the end of the colonial era,[196] in the US, the rise has more to do with the overall tone in the country rather than with one specific event. Where Europe, and especially Britain, were primarily concerned with the establishment of their colonies in the late 19th century, America's interest was in the expansion of the market.[197] The expansion, then, inevitably, also came in the form of new means of transport of the newly manufactured goods, especially the railroad, which gave way for the economy to rise exponentially. "Carrying goods, not people, was the railroad's principal contribution to economic growth."[198] The vast majority of these railroads were financed by the new national banks, which also put money into telegraph networks and mining projects,[199] boosting the economy with new industries, steadily shifting the focus from agriculture to industry as the main focus of American economic growth, which is one of the critical elements of a capitalist society, according to Marx.[200]

Moreover, historians argue that America was one of the fastest industrial societies that maintained a certain level of agriculture to feed the country while shifting its focus to more consumer-friendly goods and their manufacturing.[201] Naturally, the growth in the city was that much more palpable as the newly built infrastructure concentrated mainly on big American cities, like New York and Chicago, with New York obtaining one of the largest sugar

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[196] Mona Domosh, "Selling Civilization: Toward a Cultural Analysis of American's Economic Empire in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 29.4 (2004): 453. JSTOR<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3804368> 12 Mar 2021.

[197] Domosh, "Selling Civilization," 456.

[198] Ballard C. Campbell, "Understanding Economic Change in the Gilded Age," *OAH Magazine of History* 13.4 *The Gilded Age* (Summer, 1999): 18. JSTOR<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25163305> 1 Apr 2021.

[199] Crain, 91-92.

[200] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production, Vol. I,* ed. Friedrich Engels (New York: International Publishers Co, 1967) 146-55.

[201] Campbell, 17.

refineries on the East Coast, which employed thousands of men and provided them with industrial wages.[202] However, it was the middle and the highest class who profited on the exponential growth the most. As was already stated in chapter two, the gap between the classes grew with the growth of capitalism, where only a small percentage of citizens were able to monetize on the rapidly changing economy, especially during the recession years in the 1870s. Still, the consumer society that has developed during the Gilded Age in America prevailed, and the higher classes began to regard the goods as more remarkable for their lives than human relations, as Jean Baudrillard argues in his book *The Consumer Society*. "Strictly speaking, the humans of the age of affluence are surrounded not so much by other human beings, as they were in all previous ages, but by objects."[203] It had begun to be felt that it was the quantity of the new objects that mattered within the specific social circle and the objects will be in the center of the evaluation of the prosperity of a household. "Gilded Age consumption and broader Victorian materialism certainly included ostentatious symbols of excess and some deluded aspirations to wealth, but focusing on these factors alone risks ignoring the rich meanings of the mass-produced things."[204]

It also relates to Baudrillard's idea of the unimportance of the significance of a single object, unless it is in connection with a set of objects that they attain a certain significance.[205] Hence, solely when a person was in possession of a large number of what had been considered luxurious goods was the significance strong enough to portray the overall wealth of the family. The desire to be the owner of a vast amount of goods that proclaim the wealth

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[202] Crain, 90.

[203] Baudrillard, 25.

[204] Paul R. Mullins and Nigel Jeffries, "The Banality of Gilding: Innocuous Materiality and Transatlantic Consumption in the Gilded Age," *International Journal of Historical Archeology* 16.4 (Dec., 2012): 746. JSTOR<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23355816> 1 Apr 2021.

[205] Baudrillard, 27.

of the family was one of the most significant forces that could be found in the upper-class New York society, as Beverly Voloshin points out.

> The market economy—the exchange of commodities—creates new desires for things seen and creates a new desire to be seen, to be part of the spectacle of desirable things, thus drawing commodities and, more importantly, their affects into the private realm and drawing the private self into the display of commodities.[206]

As the Gilded Age was also the age of inventions, most notably electricity,[207] the significance was not only assigned to material things, such as the example of dresses in the second chapter. "In three decades, technology drastically changed the city and the way New Yorkers experienced day-to-day life. Machines and devices that first seemed like curiosities became household staples for the city's middle and upper classes."[208] The more conspicuous the consumption of goods was, the better regarded was the owner in possession of such goods, implying that the upper-class society was created solely around the possession of goods while intrinsically insisting that these goods must be purchased by familial aristocracy money. It is the general difference between all other capitalist societies because the upper classes of New York contributed to the growing consumerism with the display of their wealth on a daily basis, but they were unable and unwilling to accept that the same capitalism that acted as a mediator between their money and the outside world, acted in the same way to other people outside of the inner social circle. However, even though the men of the highest classes participated within the stock market exchange, they were not the primary victors of the era, as such title was usually ascribed to those men who were willing to devote a portion of their lives to work and not solely to leisure, which is, however, their ultimate goal. They are vastly different from the typical men of the particular society, especially because of the willingness to work more, as even Veblen marginally comments. "These *nouveaux arrivés* have recently

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[206] Voloshin, 98.

[207] Crain, 94-95.

[208] Crain, 94.

emerged from the commonplace body of the population and owe their emergence into the leisure class to the exercise of traits and propensities which are not to be classed as prowess in the ancient sense."[209] Since manual labor and industry are supposed to be the signifiers of the lower-class workers,[210] it might have been so that the leisure-class gentlemen avoided these particular fields altogether. Nevertheless, the nouveaux riches were less prone to disregard such jobs, as long as the labor was not, in fact, manual in nature, and profited from this decision later on. The goal of the nouveaux riches, "The New Men" in Wharton's fiction, is to achieve the level of leisure New York's old generation inherited because such life is "the readiest and most conclusive evidence of pecuniary strength, and therefore of superior force."[211] Hence, all parts of the society strive to achieve a leisure life, in which the flow of money is significant enough to satisfy all leisure-class needs, which inevitably enabled the consumption of the goods to grow and become the center of the middle-and upper-class citizens' lives. As Voloshin states, "[consumption] is not so much a completed act as it is a contemplated act, every actual purchase being only one of a large number of contemplated ones,"[212] pointing at the fact that as the economy grew and there was an abundance of consumer goods, the consumers had to make a decision of what to buy to be regarded as wealthy—ideally purchasing a set of objects which relate to each other signifying a pecuniary strength.

Tightly connected to the idea of consumerism in the Gilded Age (as well as later) is the notion of the spectacle, introduced and described by Guy Debord in his book *The Society of the Spectacle*. "The whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that once was directly

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[209] Veblen, 162.

[210] Veblen, 8.

[211] Veblen, 30.

[212] Voloshin, 98.

lived has become mere representation."[213] As he says, the spectacle is the notion that all that surrounds human beings is a mere representation of something else, and in the age of capitalism, it could be argued that the spectacle is everything representing wealth on the outside. "[Spectacle] makes no secret of what it is, namely, hierarchical power evolving on its own, in its separateness, thanks to an increasing productivity based on an ever more refined division of labor, an ever greater comminution of machine-governed gestures, and an ever widening market."[214] The more capitalism and capitalist society grow, the more visible the spectacle becomes, and the more governing it is over people's lives. The consumption of the goods in the Gilded Age would be fruitless without it then being transformed into a spectacle, insofar as the value of the goods would not have been established and appraised by other members of the society if it had not been for the explicit exhibition of the goods. Moreover, the spectacle also serves as the scale for all other owners of goods to yearn for more and to try and mimic the spectacle with their own. Therefore, as Debord discusses, "the perceptible world is replaced by a set of images that are superior to that world yet at the same time impose themselves as eminently perceptible,"[215] creating a world full of spectacle which then ultimately serve as the representation and hence the world itself. However, the spectacle is not solely constructed by the material things as the consumer goods but also by abstract notions such as beauty, especially in the Gilded Age and in Wharton's fiction. Beauty has been regarded as one of the crucial marketed values since women's future lives often depended on it. Even Wharton herself mentions the striking on person's beauty by pointing at the various methods to protect oneself from the environment,[216] which helped the women to prolong the period in which they were considered beautiful, and hence prolonged the period in which they

[213] Debord, 5.

[214] Debord, 9.

[215] Debord, 11.

[216] Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, 46.

could handle their beauty as a commodity and a spectacle. Similarly to the material goods, beauty as a spectacle serves as a representation of the person, but, at the same time, of the whole family, meaning that the more care and protection a young girl receives, the more beautiful she appears on the outside, and the more considerable chance she has in attaining a lucrative marriage proposal. Likewise, the aforementioned sociability in the form of the set customs and rules could also be viewed as a part of the spectacle since the less customary one's behavior was, the less likely was the person to be accepted within the upper circles. Therefore, the spectacle influences all societies, but especially those that concentrate on commodity culture so intently that the representation through objects and other adherent values is considered the equidistance of such society.

4.2. The Archetypes and Capitalist Values

Wharton naturally implemented many of the capitalist values of the time in her own fiction, as she had been surrounded by capitalists all of her life and saw that it was not just the goods that were a part of the social market in New York. Wharton herself was a "shrewd businesswoman, managing her own estate as well as her publishing affairs."[217] She injected the business ideas into her male characters, especially those belonging to "The New Man" archetype, as she deemed "The Cowardly Rebels" too preoccupied with themselves, their troubles in love, and their indecisiveness regarding their identities to take on the issues of the capitalist world. However, even her other characters could be considered as crucial elements in creating all parts of what it meant to be a part of the upper class in capitalist society. Thus, traces of exchange are palpable throughout the whole New York fiction, and even such

[217] Wendy M. Dubow, "The Business Woman in Edith Wharton," *Edith Wharton Review* 8.2 (Fall, 1991): 11. JSTOR<http://www.jstor.com/stable/43512780> 15 Apr 2020.

characters as “The Rule Keepers” are seen in the process of exchange in multiple stories, most often regarding “The Fated Heroine.”

“The Fated Heroines” are sometimes seen as prime capitalists by the critics, as they, arguably, market themselves throughout the books.[218] They accept that their bodies are viewed as a commodity and valorize on it, to a certain extent, as they try to draw suitable matches for marriage to them through their bodies and looks. As Voloshin specifies, “[t]he self can be, then, a protean commodity whose essence is to be seen,”[219] drawing attention to the fact that the commodified body of “The Fated Heroine” becomes a spectacle at the same time, becoming a representation of what the society craves, which is a young, beautiful maid. “Indeed, the ‘pretty girl picture’ was a pervasive presence in American advertising by the turn of the century.”[220] What such bodies do not include is the representation of the inside, which is the one thing “The Fated Heroines” lack as they do not conform to the customs and can never truly become the pinnacle of the female portion of society. Thus, it is the body that serves both as a subject and an object. “The body emerges as something that can be used to sell commodities and services as well as being itself a consumed object.”[221] This is particular solely to “The Fated Heroine” because no other archetype works as much with their body, profiting from other attributes than the physical ones on which “The Fated Heroines” have to rely. As Wharton knew that beauty must be preserved, he wrote her heroines in a way that they protected their looks and saw to their hair and skin were cultivated.[222] However, the issue of their beauty is twofold, as it is not only the heroine who sees her body as a commodity but also other characters of the books, who then change their vocabulary from the usual social

[218] Voloshin, 100.

[219] Voloshin, 99.

[220] Merish, 321.

[221] Ritzer, 14.

[222] Merish, 326.

speech to a market talk when they are in a conversation with the heroines. This applies especially to "The New Men" and the male part of "The Rule Keepers," who insist on interchangeable favors when helping the heroines, resulting in wanting to use the body as a sexual commodity. Even though the books cease to deliver the bodies of the heroines to the male counterparts for free use, the vocabulary utilized in their interactions is capitalist enough for the reader to realize that the society works solely on the level of exchange, even when it comes to human relations.“ 'Investments' and 'returns,' 'interests' and 'payments': these words animate and possess Wharton's characters, even in their world of conspicuous leisure."[223] It is the body as a commodity that enables the men to address the heroines in such a way. It is particularly visible in *The House of Mirth*, where Gus Trenor insists on Lily's payment for her debt to be paid by her body. "Lily 'owes' Trenor the payment that he now demands only according to his rate of exchange."[224] However, the rate of exchange varies from person to person and is created by a set of changeable rules designed by "The Rule Keepers." Hence, every other archetype must adhere to their power if they want to continue to exist within the upper-class circle. In the case of "The Fated Heroine," the exchange rate is always connected to their bodies, which inevitably results in the body becoming a commodity in the market of marriage.

Marriage was, as already stated, one of the most lucrative and sought-for businesses of the Gilded Age. A successful marriage was the vantage point of the upper class, as it either tied two wealthy families or, less often, enabled an outsider to gain access to the advantages of New York's society. It is one of the reasons "The Fated Heroines" are criticized for their approach to marriage in general, as Undine is especially seen as cold and calculating, as she

[223] Dimock, 783.

[224] Dimock, 784.

sees marriage for what it is rather than for what people say it is.[225] Likewise, according to some scholars, Lily and Ellen are calculating, manipulative, and too easily influenced by society's opinion on marriage, which is why they never marry the men who propose to them.[226] While such notion is disputable and disputed in chapter 3, they nevertheless point out the importance of marriage and the insistence of the surrounding society on the best possible outcome of such union. However, as Debra Ann MacComb writes, the centrality of marriage in society gave way for divorces to start to bloom in the same period, even though the Gilded Age society was still condescending towards it, and such notions were reinforced by the literature of the time.[227] "Wharton's deeply ironic novel proves that divorce is the logical mechanism for market expansion, providing women with the means to forge nuptial careers based not on a single liaison but on successive-and ever more successful-unions."[228] In *The Custom of the Country*, what Indiana Rolliver expresses to Undine, is the fact that there was "a contemporary trend in American advertising that emphasized the benefits derived from consumption of a product rather than the qualities of the product itself."[229] Moreover, in her short story "The Reckoning," Wharton utilizes the advantages of marriage and shows the character of Julia Westall, who, albeit divorced, is still a valuable asset to the upper circles. Hence, marriage could be considered yet another constituent of commodity and spectacle in the Gilded Age, consumed by both genders equally, making capitalists and businesspeople out of the whole society without exception.

The last piece of capitalism protruding into the daily life of the wealthy was sociability

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[225] Ammons, "The Business of Marriage," 328.

[226] Coulombe, 5.

[227] Debra Ann MacComb, "New Wives for Old: Divorce and the Leisure-Class Marriage Market in Edith Wharton's *The Custom of the Country*," *American Literature* 68.4 (Dec., 1996): 766. JSTOR<http://www.jstor.com/stable/2928137> 17 Feb 2021.

[228] MacComb, 765.

[229] MacComb, 768.

and its impact on both finances and the general status of the elements of society. Sociability is described by Baudrillard as a crucial part of the exchange market and also its inevitable part.

> It is the production of communication, of human relations in the service sector style. What it produces is sociability. Now, as a system of production, it cannot but obey the same laws as those of the mode of production of material goods. It cannot but reproduce in its very functioning the social relations it aims to transcend.[230]

The production of sociability in the Gilded Age comes in the form of dinner and wedding invitations, conjoint holidays in Europe, or sharing a carriage. Only those valuable enough are invited to keep the customs of the highest stratum of society by adhering to the rules that "The Rule Keepers" set decades ago and that the contemporary generation keeps for the sake of survival. As has already been briefly mentioned when discussing "The New Men," there was a price for outsiders to pay to be able to enter the high society. However, just like with the sexual favors, the price is set by the patriarchal power of "The Rule Keepers,"[231] destroying the notion of fairness, as one could not be sure what price would be asked of them. "Prices will remain arbitrary as long as the exchange rests on a negotiated parity between the exchange items- negotiated according to the bargaining powers of the contracting parties."[232] The arbitrariness of the prices allows "The Rule Keepers" to manipulate the market of sociability, having the ultimate power over who is invited and remains in the society and whose qualities are not deemed fitting. In Wharton's books, this usually shows as dinner invitations but is also connected to the visibility of a character on the outside, especially those not directly involved within the upper strata yet, like "The New Men." It is their insistence to be seen with "The Fated Heroine," of which they have a notion that would help them in terms of dinner invitations. Especially Simon Rosedale wants to valorize on Lily Bart's position in the society, where he clearly wishes to be seen with her riding through the summer New York.

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[230] Baudrillard, 162.

[231] Dimock, 784.

[232] Dimock, 784.

He realizes that his opportunity lies in creating social relationships that would help him secure his position in the upper class, alongside paying the hefty prices for a single dinner invitation. Wai-Chee Dimock believes that had Lily taken up Rosedale's offer to be seen driving with him, she would have purchased his silence in return.[233] However, Lily declines once again missing the opportunity to become the perfect capitalist as she lets the men hold power over her on multiple occasions, even though she could have employed the same tactics on oppressive social prices. "The Fated Heroines" are then both the capitalist and the blind consumerist, as they all have instances of monetizing on opportunities and the others, while there come situations, like Lily's dismissal of Rosedale that slightly pushes them from the notion of them being successful businesswomen. It could be so because Wharton saw that the business was usually dealt with by the men of the society, just like Veblen described in his social criticism. "The upper class women, on the other hand, although not allowed to work, are expected to have far-reaching financial means. Thus, they are faced with a conflict between being decorative objects […], and controlling their destinies."[234] Hence, the women find themselves in between the tendencies to be financially stable while not having the advantage of obtaining a job, which results in their monetizing on successful and lucrative unions, just like most of "The Fated Heroines" wanted, and like Undine successfully attained. However, as Erik S. Roraback argues in his book on Balzac and James, "[i]n these contrasting nineteenth-century cultural texts, genuinely divine love extra-capital by contrast, constructs feminine worlds of progressive and resisting counter-power, of subversive if not only revolutionary minded non-power."[235] Thus, by adhering to the extra-capital insistence on love, the character, and also Wharton, picture the feminine power in the capitalist society, which,

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[233] Dimock, 786.

[234] DuBow, 11.

[235] Erik S. Roraback, *The Dialectics of Late Capital Power: James, Balzac and Critical Theory* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007) 80.

however, is oftentimes fruitless, as Wharton portrayed all of “The Fated Heroines” as unsuccessful in their seeking for the ultimate merriment. “The Rule Keepers” are seemingly the only ones with any capitalist power within the society, as they hold the reigns of the sociability as consumer goods within the particular circle, but it is “The New Man” who is the leading capitalist of all books. Not only does this archetype valorize on the market through astute investments, it is ultimately he who victoriously emerges as both the man receiving the most money as well as the man who has to be accepted by the old generation in order for “The Rule Keepers” to survive. Therefore, capitalist tendencies are palpable not only through the actual market exchange but also because consumerism and capitalism, and inevitably even the spectacle, are social constructs that help society keep the high standards. Each archetype has a different role even within the capitalist spectrum, but all of them have vital parts in depicting the society as realistically, while, at the same time, as ironically, as Wharton allowed them.

5. Conclusion

The society acts as the ultimate main character of all of Edith Wharton's books and stories set in New York City, marginalizing the role of the characters whose individuality is disputed throughout her fiction. Wharton established herself as an author of multiple layers, implementing the popular elements of naturalist and determinist fiction in her texts, relying on the fact that she grew up in the society she so expertly portrayed in her fiction. Her own upbringing in connection with the creative distance she established by emigrating to France in the early 1900s helped her construct her vision of the upper-class New York society, with all its merits and vices. She was able to portray the particular elements with irony; however, she never condescended even if she took a critical stance toward one or the other character. Moreover, she even utilized certain formulas of the nineteenth-century feminism, inasmuch as she let her heroines be outspoken to a fault with clear goals on their mind and even assigned a few addictive habits to them to underline the multidimensionality of female participants of the social games. However, what she also ascribed to her characters was the notion of non-existent individuality, as all of her characters inevitably become the agents without agency as, on the outside, they are portrayed in control of their lives and their fates, but upon a closer look, the reader realizes that none of their activities and behaviors are original, and all adhere to a certain structure and plan, resulting in similar, if not identical, outcomes in all of her three major books, as well as some of the shorter texts.

The core of the thesis is composed of a structural analysis according to Claude Lévi-Strauss, and how his theory can apply to a literary work by the same author. While Lévi-Strauss is not the typical archetypal critic who is used in such analyses, in utilizing his study, one can deepen the archetypal study of one's own reflections, not strictly adhering to enforced categories—solely understanding that Lévi-Strauss was adamant on structure, the similarity of the plots of analyzed fiction and the possibility of transference to other topically similar

works. By using his theory, four archetypes for each group of characters that together create an overall image of not only Wharton's books but New York society, in general. When the archetypes and their similarities and differences are established, the thesis takes on the description of the capitalist tendencies in the book as well as in the Gilded Age, providing a wholesome outlook at the entire stratum of society with which Wharton is concerned. All characters are seen as partaking in the consumerist nature of society insofar as they comply with the arbitrariness of customs set by "The Rule Keepers," whose patriarchal power is ever-present and oppressive. The conspicuous consumption of the upper class is not strictly tied to material goods, as their consumerism is also linked with sociability, the commodified body (in the case of "The Fated Heroine"), and marriage, which were all parts of the exchange market. These particular sides of consumerism are also described by Jean Baudrillard, whose in-depth analysis broadens the possibility of the conversation about such topics even within the Gilded Age. Moreover, the idea of the spectacle is discussed as well, as it directly relates to all consumerist tendencies, serving as the outer representation of the peak of capitalism and consumerism. All of the above are clearly articulated in Wharton's texts, as the Gilded Age was an era of economic boom, especially for the upper classes, and she could easily transcribe her own experience with being a successful businesswoman on her characters, most notably "The New Men," whose cunning nature Wharton clearly respected as they were men of action, if only sometimes morally questionable. Further, the usage of Debord's idea of the spectacle also relates to structuralism, which he clearly admired and applied some aspects of this widespread theory in his own idea of consumerism. Debord believes in the transference of ideas between classes and generations, insisting that structuralism is only possible through the process of the spectacle.

> In seeking to understand structuralist categories, it should always be borne in mind, as in the case of any historical social science, that categories express not only the forms but also the conditions of existence. Just as one does not judge a man's value according

> to the conception he has of himself, one cannot judge—or admire—this specific society by taking the discourse it addresses to itself as necessarily true. […] Thus it is not structuralism that serves to prove the transhistorical validity of the society of the spectacle; but, on the contrary, it is the society of the spectacle, imposing itself in its massive reality, that validates the chill dream of structuralism.[236]

Hence, to connect a structuralist theory, like that of Lévi-Strauss, and the notion of the spectacle is the only viable option for any analysis of a capitalist society.

The theory could also be applied to other texts than just Edith Wharton, especially those concentrating on a similar topic throughout their careers. The one author that immediately comes to mind is Henry James, whose fiction partly also revolves around New York society and its fluidity. While his archetypes would slightly differ from those created for this thesis, it would, nevertheless, be an exciting thesis to write, concentrating on the similarities between characters such as Christopher Newman and Lewis Lambert Strether. The novelty of such analysis lies in the openness of interpretation that Lévi-Strauss allows his scholars. While Northrop Frye is also considered a structuralist, his ideas are, nevertheless, still stricter and, therefore, slightly oppressive when it comes to the application to the particular texts. What "The Structure of the Myth" allows for is the concentration on other topics in the book than just primary similarities, but also reaching deeper into the characters, their behaviors, and their connection to the other characters, which all result in the way they act, and the way they are then perceived by the readers. This thesis offers a naturalist, determinist, and capitalist reading of Edith Wharton's New York fiction, believing that all three of the descriptions are crucial for Wharton and the analysis of her work, in which her characters have no say over their lives. They are all mere archetypes and categories of the real society in the Gilded Age, never straying from the structure society had inflicted on them.

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[236] Debord, 59.

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Appendix

1

The Custom of the Country			
The Fated Heroine	**The Cowardly Rebel**	**The New Man**	**The Rule Keeper**
Struggle for Money			
Praised solely for her beauty, but not the greatest social standing		Appears early on in the company of the heroine	
	Falls in love with new and exciting- with an idea		Matriarchal reservations about the heroine
	Rebels in his Love		
Unsatisifed without money		Profits on Wall Street	
	Kills himself		Change of heart, divorcee x widow
Almost losing social standing- "fate" that she didnt			
Re-marries			Matriarchal reservations about the heroine
Almost losing social standing- "fate" that she didnt		Offers to help the heroine	Society against the heroine as a person
Re-marries		Seems to be the winner- wife, position, respectability, money	
Never happy			Old society struggles to prevail

The House of Mirth			
The Fated Heroine	**The Cowardly Rebel**	**The New Man**	**The Rule Keeper**
Struggle for Money			
Praised for her Beauty, but not the greatest social standing		Appears early on in the company of the heroine	
			Matriarchal reservations about the heroine
	Falls for the idea of the heroine		
Unsatisfied without the money		Profits on Wall Street	
			Offers money to the heroine- expects too much in return
	Too afraid to act on his love	Offers money to the heroine	
Almost losing social standing - "fate" that she didn't			Rumour against logic
	Tries to be chivalrous for the heroine		
			Society against the heroine as a person
Fate no longer at work, loses everything			
	Rebels in his love- too late	Offers money to the heroine	
Kills herself = never happy		Is the only one acting the way he feels, his position allows him to do so - the winner	Old society struggles to prevail

The Age of Innocence			
The Fated Heroine	**The Cowardly Rebel**	**The New Man**	**The Rule Keeper**
Struggle for Money			
Praised for her Beauty, but not the greatest social standing		Appears early on alongside the heroine	Reservation as to how she affects the society
	Falls in love with an idea		
Almost loses social standing: Archer "saves" her	Battle of old and new ways inside him, bored with his life	Offers "help" to the heroine	
			Complacent about the heroine because she does no harm to anyone, is obedient
	Rebels in his love	Wall Street as the downfall	Reservation as to how she effects the society
Almost loses social standing: the Archer's "save" her			
			Reconciled with the fact the heroine divorces —> is away from New York
Has to return back to Europe, never happy	Affected but not broken by the end	His children are once again on top of the society	Old society struggles to prevail

Complete Table			
The Fated Heroine	**The Cowardly Rebel**	**The New Man**	**The Rule Keeper**
Praised solely for their beauty		Appears early on alongside the heroine	Matriarchy
Struggle for Money			
	Falls in Love with an Idea		
Unsatisfied without her addiction		Offers help to the heroine	
			Reservations about the heroine and how she affects the society
	Tries to rebel in his love		
Almost losing social standing: fate that she didn't			Society against the heroine
	Inability to escape the society's way	Wall Street as the main actor in life (downfall, victory)	
			Reconciliation with the heroine
Never Happy	Failure in love	The Winner	Old Society Struggles to Prevails

Abstract

The primary focus of this thesis is the New York fiction by the prolific American writer Edith Wharton. The particular works discussed in this thesis are *The House of Mirth*, *The Custom of the Country*, and *The Age of Innocence*, completed by the collection of four novellas, *Old New York*, and also a selection of Wharton's short stories set in the city of New York. The main argument of the thesis could be encapsulated to say that Wharton's fiction lacks the individuality of the characters, and the main focus of the texts is on society and how society affects the archetypes of the characters created solely for the purposes of this thesis. It is divided into three intersecting chapters, the first topical chapter concentrating on New York as such and how the Gilded Age influenced the Big Apple. Moreover, Wharton and her own relationship with the city is discussed in this chapter as well, pointing at the fact that she was intimately familiar with the custom and the manners of the upper society of New York, which she later implemented in her fiction. Also, the description of naturalism and determinism are provided as those seem to be the genres most utilized by the author.

The next chapter revolves around the notion of archetypes as Claude Lévi-Strauss introduced in his "The Structural Study of Myth," which is described and later implemented on four archetypes found in Wharton's texts, which had been given the names of "The Fated Heroine," "The Cowardly Rebel," "The New Man," and "The Rule Keeper," looking for similarities between the characters belonging to the same category as well as explaining their evolution. The last chapter then closes the discussion by drawing Wharton's work towards the ideas of capitalism, consumerism, and the spectacle, all of which are demonstrated on particular situations in the texts. The thesis tries to broaden the discussion of archetypes with Lévi-Strauss's structural theory as well as to prove that individuality is a myth and is completely redacted from Edith Wharton's fiction.

Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá knihami z pera slavné americké spisovatelky Edith Wharton, jejichž dějištěm je New York. Konkrétně se jedná o tituly *Dům radovánek*, *Místní zvyk* a *Věk nevinnosti*, doplněné souborem čtyř novel vydaným pod názvem *Starý New York*, a taktéž výběrem z autorčiných povídek odehrávajících se v New Yorku. Tezí této práce je tvrzení, že díla Wharton a její postavy postrádají individualitu vzhledem k tomu, že dominantní část pozornosti je věnována společnosti a jejímu vlivu na archetypy postav, jež byly vytvořeny za účelem analýzy v této práci. Práce je rozdělena do tří tematických kapitol, z nichž první se soustřeďuje na město New York a jak jej ovlivnilo období pozlaceného věku. Kladen je i důraz na autorčin vztah k New Yorku a zejména pak i na její důvěrnou znalost zvyklostí a způsobů vyšší společnosti, kterou zúročila ve svých dílech. Tato práce také bere v potaz naturalismus a determinismus, jež Wharton aplikovala ve svých textech.

Následující kapitola se soustřeďuje na pojem archetypu tak, jak jej představil Claude Lévi-Strauss ve své práci „Strukturální studie mýtů."[237] Tento pojem je popsán a použit pro vytvoření čtyř archetypů, které se vyskytují v dílech Wharton. Těmito archetypy jsou „Osudová hrdinka" ("The Fated Heroine"), „Zbabělý rebel" ("The Cowardly Rebel"), „Nový muž" ("The New Man") a „Správce pravidel" ("The Rule Keeper"). Práce dále zkoumá podobnosti mezi postavami spadajícími do jednotlivých kategorií a komentuje jejich vývoj. Poslední kapitola se zabývá vlivy kapitalismu, konzumerismu a spektáklu na vybraná díla Edith Wharton, které demonstruje na konkrétních příkladech. Cílem této diplomové práce je podnítit diskusi v souvislosti s archetypy a strukturální teorií Léviho-Strausse, a dokázat, že individualita je mýtus a dílo Edith Wharton ji konceptuálně odmítá.

[237] This is a working translation by the author of the thesis, from the original "The Structural Study of Myth," for the essay has not yet been translated into Czech.