

## CHAPTER THREE

### CONCLUSION

After analyzing the social conflicts in Edith Wharton's novel *The Age of Innocence*, I am going to draw a conclusion regarding the impact of rigid social custom to individual's life in New York's upper-class society.

The first social conflict happens between Newland Archer and May Welland about a different desire toward the implementation of their wedding. On one hand, Archer thinks that the tradition of long engagement is a waste of time. That is why, he pleads with May to hasten their marriage. On the other hand, May thinks that she cannot act against her parents' wish to keep their tradition. The conflict is solved because Archer finds that it is useless to convince May to hasten their marriage. Besides, May considers Archer's idea a vulgar thing which is against her parents' wish as well as the old tradition of long engagement.

The second social conflict happens between Newland Archer and Mr. Letterblair when Mr. Letterblair asks Archer to get involved and take care of Ellen's case. On one hand, Mr. Letterblair, who represents the Mingotts, wants Archer to give Ellen a legal opinion about her divorce. On the other hand, Archer feels

reluctant to get involved in Ellen Olenska's and gives a legal opinion in Ellen's divorce case because he thinks that there are still many men from the Mingotts to help Ellen Olenska. The conflict is solved, Archer cannot refuse because Mr. Letterblair and all the Mingotts want him to take care of Ellen's case. He needs to meet Ellen Olenska first before her scandal be bared into the society.

The third social conflicts happens between Newland Archer and Mr. Letterblair when they argue about Ellen Olenska's wish of getting divorced. On one hand Mr. Letterblair, who represents the Mingotts, does not agree with Ellen's intention of getting divorced because there is no advantage for Ellen to get divorced. It will only bring an unpleasant situation to their society if Ellen still insists to get divorced. On the other hand, Archer thinks that it is up to Ellen to decide what is best for her. Archer thinks that Ellen deserves to pursue her own happiness. The conflict is solved as Archer realizes that it is useless to tell the society that Ellen has the right to determine what is good for her life. Although Archer wants to support Ellen, there is nothing he can do except following his family's wish.

The fourth social conflict happens between Newland Archer and Ellen Olenska when Archer tries to tell Ellen about the fact and consequences of getting divorced. On one hand, Ellen thinks that she will get her own freedom by getting divorced from her unfaithful husband. On the other hand, Archer thinks that Ellen's wish to get divorced is against her family's wish. There are no advantages for Ellen. If she insists on a divorce, she will only ruin her family's reputation. The conflict is solved as Ellen finally reconsiders her wish and decides not to get divorced because she does not want to ruin her family's reputation.

The fifth social conflict happens between Newland Archer and Ellen Olenska when Archer asks Ellen to be together with him. On one hand, Archer thinks that there is still a chance for him to be together with Ellen because he is not married yet with May Welland. Besides, Archer thinks that May is ready to give him up because she refuses to hasten their marriage. On the other hand, Ellen thinks it is impossible because Archer is her cousin's fiancé and she is still the wife of Count Olenski. Ellen does not want to hurt May's feeling or to create another scandal which will disgrace her family. The conflict is solved as Ellen receives a telegram which says that May's parents finally agree to hasten their marriage. As a gentleman Archer should keep his words and marry May although he does not love her.

From the resolution of all the social conflicts above, it can be seen that New York upper-class society in the Gilded Age period is very strict and rigid in keeping their reputation intact. The individuals have to put aside their own desire and happiness and give the first priority to the society's convenience and acceptance. The society control individual's life to be the product of their society and to act based on the rigidity of their social customs and traditions. It can be seen from the resolution of the conflict between Archer and May. May refuses to hasten their marriage if it is against her parents' wish. She becomes the product of her society because she never fights for her desire. New York society at that time also pretends to act innocently in front of the individual who is against their old social customs and traditions but behind do many efforts to throw away those scandals only to keep their good reputation. The family in this society represses individual's desire and also sacrifices the life of their own family member who is

committing a scandal. It can be seen from the resolution of the conflict between Archer and Ellen. Although Ellen's family treats her nicely, still behind Ellen's back they try to make Ellen not to get divorced because it will disgrace their reputation. New York society at that time is unfair towards individual's desire. Like Ellen's case, the Mingott family does not care about Ellen's feelings and her desire to get her own freedom. Their priority is only to protect their good reputation from scandals not for individual's goodness. In the end Ellen decides not to get divorced because she wants to protect her family's reputation. Moreover, Archer and Ellen are the victims of their rigid society. They sacrifice their own desire, thoughts and feelings to love each other, in order to protect their family's reputation. If they still insist to be together they will become outcasts and it means that they will ruin their own as well as their family's reputation. From all the resolutions of the conflicts it can be seen that in the *Gilded Age* America, social customs, traditions and reputation are more important than individual's desire. It can be seen from how the individuals in the novel have to give up their desire in order to obey society's custom and tradition.

Through *The Age of Innocence*, Edith Wharton is criticizing the rigidity of New York upper-class society which restrains the freedom of individual to do what they want if it is against their rigid social custom and tradition. In my opinion, people have their own rights and freedom to show their feelings and opinion. Society does not have the right to dictate people what to say, think, and do. It is not right for society to interfere with individual's decision in determining what is good for their own life. I think that a rigid society may cause the individual to lose their freedom. Moreover, I think the restrictions from such

society become the reason why those individuals want to break away from the rigid social customs and traditions. Furthermore, those rigid social customs and traditions force the individuals to repress their desire and drive them to express it secretly since they cannot show it publicly. It turns out that a rigid society does not make the life of people who live in it become better. Even worse, the individuals feel unhappy because they have to follow those rigid social customs and traditions against their own will.