

“WE CAN’T BEHAVE LIKE PEOPLE IN NOVELS, THOUGH, CAN WE?”
READING AND WRITING THE ROMANTIC HERO IN
THE OLD MANOR HOUSE AND THE AGE OF INNOCENCE

By

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¹ May to Newland, The Age of Innocence, page 53

The Thesis Committee for Jessica Leah Jessee certifies
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ABSTRACT

What does it mean, to “behave like people in novels”? More importantly, what does it mean for a novelist to put this comment in the mouth of one of her characters? Edith Wharton and Charlotte Smith, and their representations of readers and writers, illustrate the personal and social negotiations between romance, the sentimental novel, and realism. Conventionally placed as the reader of romance, rather than writer, the woman novelist explores how this anxiety plays out in the lives of her characters, particularly those characters most sensitive to literature. This study aims to show how the complex negotiations between romance and realism are played out through the figure of the romantic hero in Charlotte Smith’s The Old Manor House and Edith Wharton’s The Age of Innocence. I will suggest that Wharton owes more to romance and the sentimental novel than many critics have recognized, while Smith approaches realism more nearly than her critics have acknowledged. This study hopes to recover the complexity of their work in order to show their profound contributions to the novel form. Both authors perform rich social critique, showing the “real world” of the novel’s social norm to be as constructed and as un-real as the hero’s fantasies.

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INTRODUCTION

What does it mean, to “behave like people in novels”? More importantly, what does it mean for a novelist to put this comment in the mouth of one of her characters? What can fictions teach readers about feeling, knowing, and acting in the “real” world? Are some genres truer to reality than others? This study aims to show how the complex negotiations between romance and realism are played out through the figure of the romantic hero in novels by Charlotte Smith and Edith Wharton. I will suggest that Wharton owes more to romance and the sentimental novel than many critics have recognized, while Smith approaches realism more nearly than her critics have acknowledged. Realism is not a corrective for romance, but merely another mode of fiction. Both are modes of understanding the world and making meaning within in. Smith and Wharton, and their representations of readers and writers, illustrate the personal and social negotiations between romance, the sentimental novel, and realism. Conventionally placed as the reader of romance, rather than writer, the woman novelist explores how this anxiety plays out in the lives of her characters, particularly those characters most sensitive to literature. Narrator and reader are also implicated in the anxieties of knowing and judging, representing and interpreting. The reading and writing habits of fictional characters can illuminate important aspects of “real-life” reading and writing. Wharton, questioning the assumptions of realism in the same way Smith questions those of romanticism, suggests a recovery, to some extent, of the values of romanticism and the sentimental.

Charlotte Smith's The Old Manor House, published 1793, is set in 1775 in the countryside of south England. Edith Wharton's The Age of Innocence, published 1920, opens in the 1870's in New York City. Both stories portray cultures in crisis, with the established families and their "old ways" threatened by modern invaders and their "new money." In Smith's case, it is a move from property held and inherited through landed families to property bought and sold through trade. For Wharton, the aristocracy of Old New York is overrun by commodity culture and its purveyors. Both stories focus on a male protagonist, Orlando Somerive and Newland Archer, respectively, as he comes to terms with these social changes. Both are self-described romantics, who prefer private reading and contemplation to social activity and exchange. Both read extensively and voraciously, imagine themselves as characters in books, and even dream of or attempt writing, themselves. Orlando and Newland fantasize about teaching their innocent and "artless" female partners to read and appreciate literature, romance, and other delights of modern culture. In both novels, literature is central to the identity of the hero and his private world. It also helps to define his place and value in the larger public world of the novel.

Beyond the plot and character similarities of the two novels, there are important parallels between the authors, their approach to literature as both work and art, and, most importantly for this study, their attention to the experience and expectations of their readers. Both authors employ generic conventions to highlight the distance between the hero's worldview and the real world, as it is represented in the novel; Smith draws from romance, satire, gothic, and sentimental novels, while

Wharton employs realist, journalistic, naturalist, and romantic conventions. Through the narrative techniques of irony and free indirect discourse, the narrators/authors show the heroes to be little more than inept readers and frustrated poets, lost in a world of their own creation that is wholly incompatible with the “real world” around them. Irony, a technique which requires complicity between reader and writer, is particularly interesting in texts so focused on their characters’ readings and mis-readings. Our heroes, in trying to “write” their lives, are confounded by other writers/readers and, ultimately, the narrator/novelist. Smith and Wharton are quite modern in their understanding of reading and writing as social, rather than solitary, activities. Both write with an eye, and often a wink, to the reader.

There is no evidence that Edith Wharton read Charlotte Smith and, to my knowledge, no one has previously written on Smith and Wharton together. Smith and Wharton defy categorization as writers of sentimental novels, romance, or novels of manners. Both tend to be relegated to the periphery of great “novelists,” as both are seen as doing highly specialized (often highly gendered) writing of sentimental novels or the novel of manners. This study hopes to recover the complexity of their work in order to show their profound contributions to the novel form. Both authors perform rich social critique, showing the “real world” of the novel’s social norm to be as constructed and as un-real as the hero’s fantasies. Smith and Wharton, taken together, represent important benchmarks in the development of the novel, particularly the novel’s representations of reading and writing. Considered together, the novelists’ surprising similarities reveal as much as their expected differences.

They illustrate the development of the novel form as a whole and, more specifically, as it is undertaken by women writers. The Old Manor House and The Age of Innocence show how acts of reading and writing impact issues of identity, and how representations of reading and writing allow identities to “perform” in the fictional world of the novel. Both writers self-consciously explore how the techniques of fiction relate to techniques for interpreting, narrating, and understanding in “real life.” My goal is to show how romance and realism inform the work of both Smith and Wharton, and the development of the novel form as a whole. Using textual evidence from the novels, I will examine representations of the romantic hero and how he is defined by and through various acts of reading and writing; his own, those of other characters, and the author’s narrative framing.

It will be important to first define my terms clearly – romance, realism, sentimental, romanticism – and discuss how and why some terms take on new meanings over the course of the nineteenth century. Each genre should be considered as a mode of representation, a mode of thinking about and envisioning the world, rather than a mere literary form. Our treatment of the genres here is necessarily slight, but they should be understood as dynamic, rhetorical forms rather than stable, merely conventional ones. Romance is traditionally defined as a literary rendering of the chivalric quest or heroic love story. The romance plot is often improbable or implausible, and the story may employ supernatural and symbolic elements. The cult of sensibility stresses the reader’s sympathetic imagination. The sentimental seeks, and even requires, the reader’s participation in the emotional center of the story.

Romanticism tends to pull back into the writer's imagination and feeling, but can also be understood as modeling this movement for the reader. Conventionally, romanticism values nature as the source of all good, the individual over the social, and artistic and intellectual freedom over custom and traditional social forms. It seemingly rejects the artifice and rhetorical aspects celebrated in the earlier romance and sentimental forms, but Sarah M. Zimmerman has shown that these qualities remain in the form, though now "staged" through the poet's turning away from the reader (31). The self-centered, sentimental, and subjective qualities associated with the form are criticized as "excesses of romanticism," and call for a corrective that is more objective and realistic. Realism is touted as a more "accurate description" of life, marked by the objective presentation of details and events, where characterization is valued over plot and setting, and internal and external detail are key. M.H. Abrams suggests, "It is more useful to identify realism in terms of the effect on the reader: realistic fiction is written so as to give the effect that it represents life and the social world as it seems to the common reader" (174). A text "seems" realistic because of the reader's past experience with and naturalization of literary conventions and interpretations.

For this study, we are concerned with what romance and realism mean for the authors, one writing in the late eighteenth century and the other in the early twentieth century, and their readers. Our study involves both the readers *within* the novel and readers *of* the novel. This study necessarily involves a more sophisticated and critical view of genre than generally acknowledged by existing work on these writers. How

do romance and realism operate within the novel, and what does this tell us about the author's own negotiations with genre as a professional writer? The self-referential quality of both Smith's and Wharton's work is rich for further study. Our present study involves a recovery and re-evaluation of the romance form, readers of romance, and writers of romance. Fiction is not a mirror to reality, but a form of reality. The artist's imagination, and the reader's acts of interpretation, bring a world into existence. The creations of romance are self-consciously artificial and fictive, drawing attention to their status as such. Readers of romantic fictions, then, are highly skilled readers. Our popular notions of "romance novels" should not color our reading of earlier readers of romance. Recovering the form, then, also recovers the value of the reader of the form. Similarly, the writer, especially writers like Smith and Wharton, must be re-assessed for their contributions not merely to "women's literature" but to the novel form as a whole. The tendency to dismiss romance in favor of realism reveals a distrust of interiority, privacy and inner passion. By externalizing and projecting subjectivity, romance shows that these things are "real" and valuable in the world. Elissa Greenwald, author of Realism and the Romance, writes, "The continuing presence of romance in realism reveals not only the importance of imagination in creating a rich and intense representation, but the possibility that such richness inheres not only in representation but in experience" (9).

With these foundations established, the balance of my paper will consist of the following four sections: 1) Gender, genre and narrative authority, focusing on the author's relationship to her reader, and conventional characters and forms, 2) The

narrator's use of irony, free indirect discourse, incorporated genres, and the heroine to establish a social norm against which the hero is judged, 3) Representation of the romantic hero as reader and writer, and the hero's creative imagination, and 4) The Reader's experience of reading and being read, how narratives expose the innermost self for public view, and how this is staged in the space of the library.

I. The Woman Author – Gender, Genre, and Narrative Authority

Women writers are conditioned to write both with and against established conventions and expectations – conditioned as readers, themselves, and as they are read by critics and audiences. The woman writer is particularly sensitive to the differences between the private reading experience and the public writing experience, where one is “read” by others. Like the characters she creates in fictional worlds, she becomes a character, of sorts, in the narratives her readers construct to frame their own reading experiences. Edith Wharton's recollections of early writing experiences and Charlotte Smith's Prefaces to her Elegiac Sonnets reveal important issues related to genre, gender, and narrative authority. Both place the writer in the position of critic; based on their own readings of criticism, they perform self-criticism. Wharton learned about the expectations of readers and demands of critics very early on. As she describes in her autobiography, once she began writing, her governess gave her a copy of Quackenbos's Rhetoric, whose editors advised would-be authors to adhere strictly to conventional rules. Wharton recalls, “Always respectful of the rules of the game, I tried to cabin my Muse within these bounds, and once when in a moment of unheard-of audacity, I sent a poem to a newspaper (I think ‘The World’), I wrote to

the editor apologizing for the fact that my metre was ‘irregular’, but adding firmly that, though I was only a little girl, I wished this irregularity to be respected, as it was ‘intentional’” (A Backward Glance 74). Here Wharton links her intentional disregard for conventions with her gender, but states that her authority as an artist will, or should, excuse such creative license. Anticipating criticism from the editor, she writes him a letter to explain her irregularities as art, before he has a chance to reject her submission. This shows a sophistication well beyond her years, and an understanding of the complex relationship between gender, genre conventions, and authority. There is a sense that, for women writers especially, the work never stands on its own, but always needs an expression of contrition to precede or accompany it. The woman artist both courts public favor and resents it. As she displays herself and her work for public consumption, she fears becoming “merely” popular.

Charlotte Smith’s Prefaces to her Elegiac Sonnets are equally revealing, particularly in their concern with both the “buying” public of readers and the “selling” public of friends, critics, and patrons. She describes how her poems were not written for publication, but she is now forced to publish in order to correct illegitimate copies produced by well-meaning friends. Over the course of the five Prefaces, the writer reveals a developing awareness of her audience and the complex web of loyalties produced by divisions and distinctions within the group. She also comes to distinguish between herself as individual and as author, revealing a conception of herself as object, commodity, or performer. Her language suggests the theater when she describes, in the Preface to the Sixth Edition, “I am thus frequently

appearing as an Authoress” (6). In describing her situation with the trustees of her father-in-law’s will in her Preface to Volume II, she becomes the one written, rather than the writer – citing “the dreadful misfortunes they have been the authors of” (9). She sees herself “written into” her unfortunate position through the powerful agency of individuals and systems beyond her control. Similarly, in her note to Sonnet LXXXII, titled “To the shade of Burns,” she refers to herself as “one, herself made the object of subscription” (71). Smith also draws attention to her work as mere “copying” rather than original production. In the Dedication to William Hayley she writes of “dedicating these simple effusions to the greatest modern Master of that charming talent, in which I can never be more than a distant copyist” (2). In the Preface to the First and Second Editions, she draws attention to the generic history of the Elegy, criticism of the form as a whole, and her criticism of her own version of it. She writes, “The little Poems which are here called Sonnets, have, I believe no very just claim to that title: but they consist of fourteen lines, and appear to me no improper vehicle for a single Sentiment. I am told, and I read it as the opinion of very good judges, that the legitimate Sonnet is ill calculated for our language” (3). This expression of acknowledging the convention, and then asserting her authority in breaking it, is reminiscent of Wharton’s letter to the editor. These statements plead for the reader’s indulgence in terms of genre, but they merely frame the “real work” of the sonnets, themselves. As with Wharton, there is recognition of a difference between the work, itself, and the generic conventions used to package it.

Edith Wharton's self-reviews of her first novella, Fast and Loose, illuminate the complex interplay of Romance and Realism in her work. "Is not – the disgusted reader is forced to ask – is not Mr. Olivieri very, very like a sick-sentimental school girl?" asks the fourteen-year old Edith Jones in 1877 in the imagined voice of a reviewer for The Nation about her just completed novella, Fast and Loose, which she had just written under the pseudonym of David Olivieri" (Hoeller 38).

Jones/Wharton claims her novella is a revision of Owen Meredith's popular sentimental story Lucile, a text she both enjoys and takes issue with. In her re-writing, Wharton contends that love and marriage are incompatible, clearly working against the traditionally romantic vision in Meredith's book. Assuming the voice of a reviewer, she critiques her own work as feminine, juvenile, and sentimental. Wharton scholar Hildegard Hoeller notes, "From the very beginning, Wharton tries to find a way to tell a sentimental story *and* to express her misgivings about its conventionality. And in this double endeavor, her realist and ironic voice is not an antidote to such a story but rather an attempt to reinvigorate its visions, to free it from the pitfalls of its generic past" (44). As she does in later work, including The Age of Innocence, Wharton here opposes the sentimental not to realist fiction, but to the sensational and popular. Hoeller suggests that Wharton's work "can be read as a series of revisions of and commentaries on sentimental texts," and, throughout, she continues to believe in "the ideological possibilities of sentimental aesthetics" (201, 203). She retains the sentimental vision while rejecting the generic conventions readers, writers, and critics had come to associate with it.

Both authors also seem to question the value of their own work by representing it in their fictions. One interesting example in The Old Manor House is the Manor House caretaker, who fears that Orlando brings the law in order to prosecute him for smuggling (in fact, Orlando is bringing them to search the house for the lost will): “it was a great relief to him to learn, that it was only for a paper, which might occasion the house to change its master, but not for any of his effects that the intended search was to be made” (517). The contrast he draws between property rights and “real things,” in his opinion, is useful for our study, as it draws a clear line between those who hold property and those who do not. He does not care who owns the property he lives in, as long as there is no threat to *his* property, his effects. This draws the reader’s mind to Smith’s very real property rights case. But she also seems to link the work of the lawyers with her own work as a writer; both write toward an effect. The more literal contrast the scene draws between “paper” and “effects” implicates her own work in the question of what real value paper, or writing, can hold. As we will see later in this study, both novels deal with issues related to personal writing, usually in the form of letters, turned into legal documents.

In The Age of Innocence, when Ellen needs to write a note in Boston, Newland immediately produces a note-case and “one of the new stylographic pens” (143). He tells her, “There – steady the thing on your knee, and I’ll get the pen going in a second. They have to be humored; wait – ‘ He banged the hand that held the pen against the back of the bench. ‘It’s like jerking down the mercury in a thermometer: just a trick. Now try – “ (143). The fact that he provides her with the

means of writing, and must physically force the pen into working, seems to be a statement about women writers. Wharton seems to draw this comparison herself, when she has passersby pause “to stare at the unwonted sight of a fashionably-dressed lady writing a note on her knee on a bench in the Common” (143). As another fashionably-dressed lady writer, Wharton likely considers herself an unwonted sight to many. As Ellen says, New York society “considered literature compromising” (66). It is important to remember that Wharton, herself, acutely felt this American distrust of artists, and she spent much of her life living and writing in France.

Charlotte Smith, as professional author, aligns herself with Old Manor House characters Captain Warwick, Monimia, and Mrs. Rayland. Warwick, nephew of General Tracy and future brother-in-law to Orlando, attempts playwriting as a way to provide for his family. He is contrasted with Orlando, who is given the same opportunity (in his case, as a would-be poet) but rejects it as humiliating. Smith scholar Joseph Bartolomeo notes that it is Warwick, rather than Orlando, who responds in the same practical way as Smith did when faced with poverty (653). In the final pages of the novel, Warwick is rescued from opening the play, which would have appeared under an assumed name, by a wealthy uncle who refuses to allow his nephew to “become an author and write for support” (521). In an interesting twist, Orlando’s refusal to write for money is directly tied to Smith’s own literary production. Orlando’s “Ode to Poverty,” which his friend Carr encourages him to publish, is later published by Smith in one of her own collections of poetry (Bartolomeo 651). When Orlando refuses to take on literary work, and is

preoccupied with recovering the lost will through legal means, Monimia takes in sewing to support them. This links Smith to Monimia, whose “use of the needle results from the same material need that incites Smith’s use of the pen” (Bartolomeo 654). Viewed in a wider frame, even Mrs. Rayland’s hold over Orlando, and her attempts to control and direct his behavior, connects her to Smith, the author, who has created him and controls his fate/plot.

As a professional author, Wharton is clearly linked to the character of Ned Winsett, Newland’s journalist friend. The narrator explains that Ned was not a journalist by choice, but by necessity. “He was a man of pure letters, untimely born in a world that had no need of letters” (78). After a failed, but brilliant volume of “literary appreciations” he took a job as a sub-editor at Hearth-fires, a women’s weekly “where fashion-plates and paper patterns alternated with New England love-stories and advertisements of temperance drinks” (78). This linking of the domestic with sentimental writing and gender is typical of Wharton’s complicated relationship to writing’s more popular forms. Wharton suggests that Winsett is first demoralized by the publishing industry, and then further degraded by working for a silly women’s magazine. This poses the possibility that sentimentalism’s excess is not the fault of the writing, itself, but rather of its packaging and marketing. The genre as a representational form is distinct from the genre as a popular commodity. Hoeller notes that Wharton’s realism is never a simple rejection of the sentimental; rather, “Wharton’s case demonstrates how much literary categories – deeply ideological in nature – themselves are part of the writing, and critical rewriting, of fiction during

and after an author's life" (202). It is often not the work, itself, but what is done with the work in terms of criticism and canonization, that demeans its value and encourages cheap imitations. When Newland encounters Winsett at one of Mrs. Struthers's Sunday evenings (not at all unlike the eclectic literary groups assembled by Mrs. Manby in The Old Manor House, where Orlando finds Warwick), Winsett denies being a writer at all. Mrs. Manby asks, "It *is* poetry you write, Mr. Winsett?" and he responds, "Well, no; but I sometimes read it" (98-9). He makes a clear distinction between what one takes in, as a reader, and what one puts out, as a writer. His identity is reduced to consumption – his own, and the reading public's.

Charlotte Smith and Edith Wharton draw attention to the difficulties of accessing and representing the consciousness of others, often doing so by showing the failed attempts of their heroes in this regard. They also draw attention to their own claims of access and representational authority. As writers, they create their characters and their inner lives, so the question of accessibility may seem absurd, but Smith and Wharton are highly aware of overlaps between what they do to and with their characters and what their characters do to and with each other. In the above examples, they posit themselves, in fictional form, as characters in their narratives, and then comment on their own ability to perform in the given context. Both authors are coming to terms with the self as writer and as one who is read, and this is mirrored in their representations of their heroes and their heroes' negotiations with context, generic and otherwise. Both authors use generic conventions to question the validity of conventions, and employ narrative techniques such as irony and free

indirect discourse in order to both reveal inner lives and undercut characters' readings of inner lives. In the end, they implicate their own work in the problems of accessibility and representation. In this way, both writers are much more modern than commonly acknowledged by critics.

It is interesting that Smith represents herself in control of narratives, while Wharton questions her ability to do so in a world that does not value her work. Smith, as represented in *Warwick and Monimia*, writes to support her family, and this writing is intentionally undertaken as work. This kind of writing is contrasted with Orlando's writing, which is repeatedly presented as a spontaneous flow of emotion. Wharton, as represented in *Winsett*, desires to write in one way but is financially obligated to write in another. There is a distinction between the writing one does for oneself, and the writing one does for others. Suggesting her social determinism, Wharton's writers are often victims of a world that no longer reads, or no longer reads anything actually worth writing. Ultimately, her representation of readers and writers is a harsh critique of a society that allows the popular to prosper while the genuinely valuable fall silent.

II. The Narrator - Representing Public and Private Worlds in the Novel

Within the space of the novel, all events and personalities are equally accessible. Narration transcends the boundaries of the self and presents a readerly experience of time and inner lives that is completely fictional. The self of the novel, in fact, is constituted by the reader's response, which provides the "illusion of wholeness" (Starr 147). In addition, narrative techniques such as free indirect

discourse blend the inner life and outer world, signaling a crossing of boundaries of the single subject. When a character's mind fuses with the narrator's, a "composite image, half created and half perceived" results (Starr 157). It also results in a diffusion of narrative authority, as the narrator temporarily loses control of the text. With *Newland Archer* and *Orlando Somerive*, we have narrators attempting to "realistically" represent the inner lives of romantic heroes who are, themselves, writing themselves into fictions of their own and others' making.

The narrator is responsible for framing the overall narrative through devices like point of view, genre, tone, dialogue, narration, and sequencing; and guiding the reader toward evaluations of characters and situations. Our narrators employ genre in order to establish a "norm" or common worldview for the novel, and to represent and reflect the hero. The amount of distance a narrator maintains from her hero's worldview is important in determining the workings of genre in the novel. Smith's narrator is quite critical of Orlando, while Wharton's narrator is more sympathetic toward Newland. For the present study, we will explore how each author employs the genres of romance and realism to display both the hero's limitations and those of the larger novel world. We will also consider what these narrative constructions reveal about the author's own negotiations with romance and realism.

Julie Choi, author of "Feminine Authority? Common Sense and the Question of Voice in the Novel," argues that the third person narrator is not just a narrative technique, but a communicational model. "The most 'interiorized' subjectivity [. . .] becomes the most written one. The printed language of the novel is increasingly

perceived as the least mediated representation of human consciousness” (648). Novels about reading are particularly interesting in this regard, as they explore the link between consciousness, creativity, and representation. Perhaps most interesting for our purposes is that “the category of ‘voice’ is removed from the bodily presence of the storyteller to become a purely written manifestation of an other or third-person, subjectivity” (649). According to Choi, “the third person in the text-language of the period becomes a quickly naturalized new form of consciousness both on and off the pages of novels” (651). Understood as the very unnatural physical absence of a living voice, the third-person ‘voice’ is merely a function, “a writing effect” (653). It is “a sympathetic rather than an intrusive solution to the problem of narrating the internal operations of one other than oneself. In a period celebrated for the male flights of lonely genius (the thought that lies too deep for tears), novels, mere novels, written on the whole by women, exemplify the narrative workings-out of infinitely knowable subjectivities in the fluidity of boundaries between self and other” (658).

Following Bakhtin’s theory of discourse in the novel, genre is not simply a literary category; it represents a worldview, a way of conceiving reality and making judgements. The novel is not a mirror reflecting a stable reality, but a performance of the harmony and disharmony of languages, or genres, coming into contact with one another. Disparate voices are reified, objectified as characters and genres, allowing them to come into contact in the world of the novel. “The novel must represent all the social and ideological voices of its era, that is all the era’s languages that have any claim to being significant; the novel must be a microcosm of heteroglossia” (411).

Characters represent genres on one level, while “incorporated genres” are also displayed as literary conventions. When they are included as an example of literary discourse, they often face “parodic stylization,” which aims to define the discourse in relation to a posited reality (359). Bakhtin writes, “The novel, indeed, utilizes these genres precisely because of their capacity as well-worked-out forms, to assimilate reality in words” (321). Through this interplay of languages, this exhibition of genre, a “norm” is established. This norm, which represents a common view, is understood to be a created thing, a device used to play against competing views. In many cases, the representing language or “norm” is used to expose the limits and shortcomings of a represented language – both are reified, but one is given narrative control.

Wolfgang Iser’s conception of the norm is similar to Bakhtin’s, though his focus is on the reader’s processing of the norm rather than the author’s creation of it. Iser states: “Whenever the hero violates the norms – as he does most of the time – the resultant situation may be judged in one or two different ways: either the norm appears as a drastic reduction of human nature, in which case we view the theme from the standpoint of the hero, or the violation shows the imperfections of human nature, in which case it is the norm that conditions our view” (1680). While Smith’s novel illustrates the latter, Wharton’s illustrates the former, and in so doing suggests a recovery of romance conceptions of the self and world. As Elissa Greenwald states, romance becomes “the revisionary power of imagination against actuality” (151).

The narrator establishes a norm, a common view regarding reality, which may or may not reflect the author’s own values. In Wharton’s case, the “norm” is the

accepted social code of Old New York, which she both defends and questions. Her hero upholds the values of Old New York, but he believes this requires a sacrifice of his private passions. Newland's interiority is praised by Wharton at the same time that it is displayed as uncommon. Hoeller argues, "It is crucial to see that Wharton's satiric voice is always used to make space for a different reality, for a sentimental truth that is upheld in almost all of her novels and stories . . . [society's realist] economy is not the essence of but a hostile background to the stories she wants to tell" (47). Wharton's hero is presented as a private hero; champion of the personal rather than the popular. His society may value him for his adherence to custom, but his real value for Wharton lies elsewhere. Smith is equally critical of the social norm guiding her novel, as it represents an oppressive patriarchal culture, but she does not suggest that her hero represents a preferred alternative. He is deluded in relation to the norm, but the norm "allows" him to succeed in the end. The genuine reality, Smith suggests, lies outside of both Orlando and the norm, and resides in characters like Monimia and Warwick, who can balance their private passions with common sense and the demands of the everyday. While Smith and Wharton, at times, approach a post-structuralist denial of any ultimate reality outside of representations of reality, these novels do present a social critique, passing judgment on a society deemed "false" or lacking relative to the author's conception of reality.

Orlando is more clearly a Quixote than Newland, but a discussion of how the Quixote trope operates in the novel is useful for our discussion of both novels. Like Bakhtin, Scott Paul Gordon suggests that genre reflects not just a literary category,

but a shared way of seeing. While the communal vision is considered normalized, the private vision of the Quixote is considered aberrant or delusional. Anxiety about the private vision of the Quixote is related to larger social anxieties about isolation, solitariness, and things done in private, “anxiety about reading and readers” (33). Gordon suggests that texts employing the Quixote trope “effectively frustrate readers’ desire to assume the mantle of objective vision with which they might comfortably observe a deluded Quixote, and in so doing they seem to imply that we are all quixotes” (8). Quixote narratives seek to invalidate the hero’s efforts to make rather than find the real, dismissing it as misinterpretation, misconstrual, overreading (13). The “real” is defined against the hero’s overexcited fantasies. Gordon writes, “It is the active contribution that quixote’s imagination makes that marks him as an *illegitimate perceiver*, since in proper perception the subject contributes nothing” (22). This idea is echoed by William Roberson, author of The Ironic Space, who writes, “The hero possesses, by virtue of his very active imagination an essential artistic consciousness which makes both possible and necessary the quest for self-formation” (35). The reader is made to feel normal by recognizing the hero’s faults and excesses, thus we share a common reality with the narrative center. The texts explore the idea “that we may make what it feels like we find, that the very features of textual objects that seem empirically given or presented, existentially vouched for, attain that status only through our acts of making and interpreting” (185). The readers’ acts of creating and interpreting are echoed by the narrators’ and even the

characters'. In the novel, all parties – writer, reader, narrator, and hero – are implicated in the difficulties of knowing, creating, and representing.

- Genres and Conventions

Charlotte Smith's narrator draws attention to genre at several points in The Old Manor House. While her initial descriptions of the Raylands and Somerives tend toward a romance, she clarifies that she is really writing a history, and that the two appeal to different modes of authority and truthfulness:

But as history must conceal no part of the truth, from partiality to the hero it celebrates, it must not be denied that the young Orlando had, though insensibly and almost unknown to himself, another motive for submitting with a good grace to pass much of his time in a way, for which, thinking, as he thought, the prospect of even boundless wealth could have made him to compensation. -- To explain this, it may be necessary to describe the persons who from his ninth year, when he became first so distinguished by Mrs. Rayland, till his eighteenth, composed the household, of which he, during that period, occasionally made a part. (43)

A number of important distinctions are made here by Smith – the contrast between history and romance, between what Orlando thinks and what the narrator knows, and between Orlando's romance with Monimia and his romance with Mrs. Rayland. Smith often employs genre conventions only to undercut them. Gothic elements are used to reveal character inconsistencies and mis-readings, not as plot lines or

developments. Similarly, fairy-tale and romance elements, such as Monimia's turret room, are employed only to be undermined. As Jacqueline Labbe notes, "By utilizing tropes of law, genre, politics, and gender, Smith exposes them *as* tropes, as the thematics whereby a culture defines, and confines, itself" (Introduction 28). Anna Udden points out one additional "contest between genres" which occurs when Orlando goes to America; the documentary realism of the American episode contrasts with, and overtakes (temporarily), Orlando's romantic narrative. Udden comments: "The romantic hero thus goes to war in a situation conceived in terms of documentary, and the genres engage in open combat. There is no generic norm to guide the reader, no hierarchy between the different modes of fiction and non-fiction. Although documentary realism wins in this episode, it does not get the last word . . . since the plot rewards the hero in accordance with romantic conventions. The novel thus acquires a dialogic quality" (135). The hero's adherence to romance contrasts with other characters' modes of understanding.

History is the one consistent genre central to both novels. This does not mean, however, that Smith and Wharton's use of history is uncomplicated. History appears both as realist document, a genre of writing, and as family history, the stories a family tells about itself and which operate through memory. Framing the anxieties of romance and realism through the genre of history calls all of these forms into question. All are shown to be equally constructed, equally artificial.

The narrator of The Age of Innocence repeatedly draws attention to the fact that the events of the novel take place in the past. Narrator comments such as, "The

New York of Newland Archer's day . . ." and "New York society was, in those days, . . ." help to frame the story (31). Characters in both novels continue to "live in the past." The narrators of both novels question the values of the past, and look back with a mix of sentimental longing and critical distance. The Miss Lannings in The Age of Innocence, part of New York aristocracy, and the Miss Raylands in The Old Manor House, are the last representatives of a dying family. Both sets of women represent the failure to provide a male heir for their family fortunes. "The Lannings survived only in the person of two very old but lively Miss Lannings, who lived cheerfully and reminiscently among family portraits and Chippendale" (32). In Smith, it is clear that the Rayland sisters refused to marry, a willful act of arrogance and selfishness. In Wharton, the reasons are unexplained, and the sisters simply relegated to the status of mementos or heirloom furniture. Their bodies are useful only as repositories of family history; history made by others. Like customs and manners, themselves, which outlive the reasons for their existence, the family narrative is still strictly upheld. These women are an aberration of nature, eliciting a unique mix of reverence and pity. The Raylands, who alone control their family fortune, are treated with similar ambivalence by their relations.

Mrs. Rayland's presentation of her family history to General Tracy and Dr. Hollybourn at the tenants' feast is a revealing examination of history. The storyteller is literally lost in her story. "Addressing herself to her company, she said, 'That it had always been *her* custom in the time of Sir Hildebrand, *her* father, to lead down, with *her* dear deceased sisters, the first dance at the tenants' feast; that the custom *had*

been long since laid aside; but if any of the friends whom *I have now* the pleasure of seeing assembled, *will* condescend to go down a dance with the tenantry and domestics – ‘’ (210 emphasis added). The inconsistent pronoun use and verb tense could be dismissed as simply the author’s mistake, but I believe it reveals an important aspect of Rayland’s character. The shift from speaking of herself in the third person, as a figure in the history she is recalling, to using “I” may reflect Rayland’s habit of living in the past. Also, the past tense of “had been long since” to the present of “have now” and “will” reflects this same confusion. The narrator may be illustrating the fact that Rayland is more comfortable in her past, and her memories of her dead family, than she is in the present-day. Smith’s framing of her novel as history is mirrored in Mrs. Rayland’s endless recitations on her own family history. As Rayland idealizes and romanticizes the past, the notion of an objective, realist account of past events – for both Rayland and Smith – is called into question.

Smith scholar Joseph Bartolomeo writes that Smith’s naming of Orlando and Monimia, as well as Mrs. Rayland and Mr. Somerive’s re-naming of Monimia as Mary, “deflates the pretensions associated with ostensibly ‘heroic’ names and signals their inappropriateness for characters in realistic, even banal, circumstances” (648). Both Mrs. Rayland and Mr. Somerive insist on calling Monimia by Mary because it sounds “less romantic” and more suitable for a girl with no family or future (46, 173). In The Age of Innocence, Newland’s sister Janey wonders why Ellen didn’t change her name to Elaine to sound “more romantic” and more suitable for a woman who married a European Count (26). From naming to describing the characters, the

narrator's challenges and tasks are echoed by other characters. As Laurie Fitzgerald notes, in relation to The Old Manor House, "Orlando and Monimia have a formidable task: they are a hero and a heroine from a romance who must try to conduct their love affair within the limits imposed by the disparate generic worlds (comedy, formal realism, and Gothic fiction) of all the other characters" (100). The same might also be said of Newland and Ellen, though the variety of generic worlds has collapsed to one overarching power, Old New York society. As Carol Singley writes, "If realism is understood as the representation of bourgeois values, Wharton's portraits are ironic commentaries on the falseness and futility of family and social life" (232). It is in contrast to this cold but predictable world that Newland's visions appear – to him and to us – more genuine and real.

The narrator's use of irony to represent the hero is contrasted with her characters' uses of irony against him. The character of Warwick reveals the performative aspects of Orlando's romantic character. It is interesting that Warwick, in danger of becoming a playwright, is the one who stages Orlando's romance as theater. Warwick and Phillip use similar words to tease Orlando, but to much different effects. Bartolomeo notes that Warwick's "sophisticated use of parody, which extends to inserting the names of Orlando and Monimia into lines by Otway and Gray, also puts the reader on alert for artificial and clichéd literary conventions" (648). Warwick's gentle teasing of Orlando's romantic visions has an ironic undertone of affection. It is not meant to ridicule Orlando, but indicates an understanding between the two men. In contrast, Phillip and Woodward judge

Orlando's behavior in realist terms, and determine that he is wholly deluded, rather than imaginative or artistic. Phillip's sarcasm against Orlando is a crude use of apparent praise for the purpose of ridicule. Smith's ability to capture the correct tone of these varied examples of irony is impressive. To some extent, Warwick values Orlando in the same way that Wharton values Newland. Both see the creative, passionate inner life where others only see a deluded figure from romance.

Irony operates via reader's generic expectations, which reflect interpretations not facts, and these interpretations are often shaped by the reader's previous reading. The transcendent goals of the romantic hero no longer function in a realist framework – the genre conventions mirror readerly expectations for what passes as “real life” behavior.

- Narrative Commentary, Irony, and Point of View

Wharton uses parenthetical comments and ellipsis to indicate narrator's tone, and phrases in quotation marks to indicate public opinion. Wharton writes, “It was generally agreed in New York that the Countess Olenska had ‘lost her looks.’ She had appeared there first, in Newland Archer's boyhood, as a brilliantly pretty little girl of nine or ten, of whom people said that she ‘ought to be painted’” (38). Gary Lindberg notes that Wharton's framing of words in quotation marks, indicating the accepted attitude of society, “forces us to entertain the actions indirectly and tentatively, on a plane of refined discrimination; we contemplate and judge manners rather than simply observe them” (154). Wharton's use of the qualifier “of course,” as well as “generally agreed,” “everyone knew,” and “people wondered,” also

establishes this public voice. Wharton writes, “Of course old Jackson wanted to talk about Ellen Olenska, and of course Mrs. Archer and Janey wanted to hear what he had to tell” (23). Ellipses demand the reader to collaborate with the writer to produce meaning. The pauses mimic stilted speech, revealing a speaker’s insecurity or hesitation. For example, Medora Manson begins talking of Ellen and then turns her attention to the archery match, “Ah, if she had only listened to me when it was still possible . . . When the door was still open . . . But shall we go down and watch this absorbing match?” (127). It is interesting that ellipses used with Newland tend to show confusion of thought, rather than restraint of expression. “We’ll read Faust together . . . by the Italian lakes . . .’ he thought, somewhat hazily confusing the scene of his projected honeymoon with the masterpieces of literature which it would be his manly privilege to reveal to his bride” (6). Wharton’s narrator relates more to her readers than the ‘public” within the novel – exposing the hypocrisy of the social scene and expressing empathy for Newland’s predicament. Her frequent highlighting of social conventions through the use of quotations reveals public opinion, but presents it as a fiction, an object. Lindberg notes that Wharton’s irony doesn’t rest on assumed agreement between reader, author, and social order, but on its very impossibility. “Wharton’s irony does not single out deviant characters and lash them back into decorous conduct; rather it expresses her bitter judgment of a whole social order to which her ethical norms seem virtually irrelevant” (145).

Orlando’s description as “unconscious” and “insensible” suggests, initially, that he is artless and without malice but, as the narrator undercuts the romance

conventions that allow us to interpret those qualities in a positive way, we see that he is actually unaware and without good sense. Repeatedly the “insensible” Orlando is contrasted with the “sensible” Monimia. Orlando’s thoughts are often followed by and contrasted with Monimia’s thoughts on the same subject, revealing his folly and her good sense. Definitive and absolute language generally reveals Orlando’s point of view. Orlando considers himself “a stranger to all personal fear” and claims “he had never been guilty of a falsehood,” but the reader knows better (118, 172). Orlando’s moments of dishonesty and artfulness are highlighted for the reader, while Monimia’s seem justified.

Smith’s narrator further undermines romance conventions by suggesting the similarity between romance and thievery when she compares the signals of the lovers to the signals of the smugglers at Rayland Hall (153-5). Orlando asks Jonas, the smuggler, why he called out “Now! Now!,” secretly interrupting Orlando and Monimia’s meeting. Jonas answers, “Why, we thought that all was quiet; and as I and a comrade of mine was waiting for the goods, we were going to heave them up, and that was the signal; but you were plaguy quick-eared, and began to holla after us, so we were forced to let the job alone till to-night” (154). Orlando must “watch for the silence of the house, which was a signal for his going to the beloved turret” (70). Both types of intrigue require the protection of the Hall. Both Orlando and Jonas are interrupted in their secret exploits. Jonas observes, “Aha, Master Orlando! I think we’ve cotch’d one another” (153). Connecting the smugglers with the lovers suggests that romance may be nothing more than the work of merchants and thieves.

Smith's narrator's interjections and commentary provide momentary breaks in the fantasy, again highlighting the distance between a character's fantasies and the narrator's view of reality. When Orlando attempts to explain his absence to the obviously perturbed Mrs. Rayland, the narrator embeds her own commentary in parentheses. "I was detained all day by my father, Madam; and I do most truly assure you (and never was any declaration more sincere than this of Orlando), that I was very unhappy at being detained all day from the Hall" (184). Instead of highlighting Orlando's sincerity, it simply draws the reader's attention to the fact that he is telling the truth about regretting his absence, but his regret has to do with Monimia, not Mrs. Rayland. Orlando often claims sincerity and perfect honesty for himself, but the narrator's claim on his behalf helps illuminate what is merely a performance of virtue.

The technique of free indirect discourse, as explained by Roy Pascal, represents a mental activity that cannot be expressed through other narrative forms, "a level of awareness that cannot properly be put into words in the form of direct speech or narratorial explanation, and that even seems to resist grammatical and literate expression altogether" (45). Pascal describes the origin of the narrative form in the mind, "pre-articulate mental processes that precede literate consciousness," which is then truthfully transcribed through the technique of FID. More recent critics have questioned whether this literary technique may be the "cause" of this mode of consciousness, rather than the "effect" (Pinch, Starr). It is not the purpose of this essay to explore this issue in detail, but it is certainly an area for further study in these, and other, novels. Instead of a more truthful rendering of consciousness

A reference to Shakespeare's Othello is later used to describe Mrs. Rayland. When Orlando leaves for the army, Rayland becomes uncharacteristically emotional. Orlando is unable to speak and "the old lady herself, 'albeit unused to the melting mood,' was now so much affected, that she could only faintly utter the blessing she gave him" (266). A slightly altered allusion is used to describe Lennard's relationship with Mr. Pattenson. "Whenever she found Mr. Pattenson really angry, she, albeit unused to the condescending mood, began to palliate and apologize – and peace was generally made over some nice thing, and some fine old wine" (84). The shared allusion links Rayland and Lennard, but reveals Rayland's depth of emotion while suggesting Lennard's willingness to flirt in order to maintain domestic peace and, possibly, the upper hand. It serves to humanize Rayland, and to reveal Lennard's artfulness. Smith's doubled use of the allusion suggests that a literary figure can be both a genuine model for emotion and a measure of (in)sincerity. Serving such varied ends, Smith again highlights the construction as artifice. Words, even literary classics, are not imbued with stable meaning, but can be modified to serve multiple, and even contrary, ends.

- Narrator's Relationship to Hero

Wharton's narrator is complicit with Newland, to some extent. Both employ dramatic and theatrical motifs to highlight depth of feeling and emotional access. D. Quentin Miller writes, "Archer is content with the visual spectacle at the opera house – as well as his own imaginative vision – because he realizes it is impossible to have good conversation in this society. The narrator similarly subordinates dialogue in

favor of description, relying on descriptive power where the characters' words are inadequate" (20). All of these techniques highlight Wharton's uniquely "social" fiction. Gary Lindberg notes that Wharton often composes her characters in pictorial scenes or *tableaux vivants*, employing the metaphor of the theater to display moments of crisis. "Occurring repeatedly at moments when private lines of narrative development reach a crisis in public, such compositions set the stage for important choices. Constrained by codes of accepted behavior, watched by an alert and ever-present audience, Wharton's characters must commit themselves to serious actions" (168). In fact, narrator and hero are quite similar in their observations of events as dramatic performances. Both are making a statement about the hollowness of Old New York society – how like theater it is. In addition, theater is the only acceptable venue for public expression of extreme emotion in Old New York.

The action of Wharton's novel begins at the Academy of Music in New York, during a performance of Gounod's opera, Faust. The public, like the reader, is expected to be familiar with the "original," Goethe's dramatic epic in verse. The narrator draws attention to the fact that the opera is a translation of a written narrative into performance when she explains: "an unalterable and unquestioned law of the musical world required that the German text of French operas sung by Swedish artists should be translated into Italian for the clearer understanding of English-speaking audiences" (4). This explanation of the common understanding, the "law" of New York theater, undercuts the dreamy experience of the emotions onstage, as Newland's entrance will present. Newland is immediately introduced as "special."

Newland arrives late, timing his entrance to achieve the greatest effect – on himself:

He had dawdled over his cigar because he was at heart a dilettante, and thinking over a pleasure to come often gave him a subtler satisfaction than its realization. This was especially the case when the pleasure was a delicate one, as his pleasures mostly were; and on this occasion the moment he looked forward to was so rare and exquisite in quality that – well, if he had timed his arrival in accord with the prima donna's stage-manager he could not have entered the Academy at a more significant moment than just as she was singing: 'He loves me – he loves me not – he loves me!' and sprinkling the falling daisy petals with notes as clear as dew. (4)

We are not sure if the “pleasure” the narrator refers to is this scene from the opera, or the scene Newland enacts with his fiancée in the opera hall. Hilda Hoeller suggests that Wharton's frequent use of the dilettante figure reveals “the dangers of male literary taste,” the fine critical sensibilities and tastes rendering them unfit for real life (64). The narrator then confides, “She sang, of course, ‘M’ama!’ and not ‘He loves me’ (4) which immediately draws the reader's attention to the difference between the description of the event and the event itself, something is lost, or altered, in translation. This draws attention to both the characters' and author's own “translations.” Its realism also continues to contrast with Newland's romantic impressions of the scene. The movement from the flowers on the stage to the flowers

in May's hands further blurs the distinction, both for the reader and for Newland. Newland sees May across the hall and imagines them honeymooning in Italy and reading Faust together, "somewhat hazily confusing the scene of his projected honeymoon with the masterpieces of literature which it would be his manly privilege to reveal to his bride" (6). Newland is his own stage-manager. Is the opera house primarily a place for professional musical and dramatic performances, or a place for Newland to produce his own personal dramas? The narrator's remark that "no expense had been spared on the setting" first suggests to the reader that the setting is Newland's doing – he has dressed the event carefully to satisfy his pleasure. The details given are extensive, because the details are extremely important to this society and its members such as Newland. The techniques of romance and realism are deployed here by Wharton to powerful effect.

Newland's reaction to the spectacle of theater changes over the course of the novel, showing his break with Old New York society. Soon after discussing the divorce case with Ellen, Newland attends a performance of Boucicault's play, The Shaughraun. On this occasion, for Newland, the ribbon kissing scene "acquired an added poignancy by reminding him – he could not have said why – of his leave-taking from Madame Olenska after their confidential talk a week or ten days earlier" (73). The narrator explains that there was no resemblance between the two situations or the appearance of the characters concerned. "

Wherein, then, lay the resemblance that made the young man's heart beat with a kind of retrospective excitement? It seemed to be in

Madame Olenska's mysterious faculty of suggesting tragic and moving possibilities outside the daily run of experience. She had hardly ever said a word to him to produce this impression, but it was a part of her, either a projection of her mysterious and outlandish background or of something inherently dramatic, passionate and unusual in herself. (73)

The resemblance, then, is the impression each made on him. Not external or logical, but internal and emotional. The narrator's concerns with plot and character considerations are contrasted with Newland's concerns about feelings that can't be reified or communicated. By framing the depth of his inner thoughts with the simplistic concerns of plot and character resemblance, the narrator suggests that the most important resemblances are not seen, but felt.

Ellen also acknowledges a similarity between her relationship with Newland and the characters on the stage. This reveals the narrator's staging of Newland, rather than his own staging of theater. She asks Newland, playfully, if he thinks Montague/Molyneux will send Claire/Dyas yellow roses in the morning (as Newland has sent to Ellen). He reacts by thinking, "She had never before made any allusion to the flowers and he supposed she had never thought of him as the sender. Now her sudden recognition of the gift, and her associating it with the tender leave-taking on the stage, filled him with an agitated pleasure" (75). He admits he was also thinking of the connection, and says he wanted to leave "in order to take the picture away with me" (75). However, in response to Ellen's question about what he does while his

wife is away, “‘I stick to my work,’ he answered, faintly annoyed by the question” (75). Ellen’s words have destroyed the picture he hoped to take with him from the scene. Art only complements life when it remains silent and contained. This undercuts Newland’s romantic impression, revealing it as deep but ineffectual, unable to translate into action.

Perhaps most interesting in *Smith* are the moments of difficulty the narrator claims in trying to represent certain exchanges or episodes. She struggles to realistically present the events, but encounters various obstacles, both matters of access and representation. When Orlando returns from London after completing the paperwork for his commission, he and Monimia meet. The narrator’s framing of the narrative, and her choice to summarize rather than quote it directly, reveals Monimia’s frustration and Orlando’s impatience. “It would not be easy to describe the subsequent meeting between him and Monimia, who suffered herself to be persuaded to renew that clandestine intercourse, which they had both so often condemned as wrong, and renounced as dangerous; but when Monimia could prevail upon him to talk less of his present happiness, and to be more reasonable, she related to him all that had passed during his absence” (316). The narrator paraphrases and summarizes Monimia’s narrative, perhaps reducing it to mirror Orlando’s mood, which is dismissive of anything that does not reflect his fantasy. Monimia tells Orlando that his absence has afforded her more freedom of movement, and Betty’s disappearance has erased Mrs. Rayland’s suspicions about his indiscretions with a girl. Unlike so many other exchanges between Monimia and Orlando, this meeting

leaves him calm and content. “Again all the enchanting visions with which youth and hope had formerly soothed his mind re-appeared – never did they seem to him so likely to be realized” (317). All of this suggests that Smith’s narrative must follow Orlando’s romance conventions; but Smith also draws attention to the moments when it might, and perhaps should, go in another direction. Failing to give Monimia’s narrative full expression shows that her story (except where it emphasizes her damsel-in-distress status) is unimportant to Orlando’s fantasy and the overall plot. Anna Udden, in Veils of Irony, comments that “throughout the narrative the hero is engaged in a tug-of-war with other characters, and indeed with the narrator, about the mode of the narrative” (134). Like Monimia, Smith’s narrator must placate Orlando by allowing his fantasy to prevail.

Another example occurs when Warwick reveals his plans to elope with Isabella, and encourages Orlando to do the same with Monimia. “Warwick then walked away towards the house, leaving Orlando in a state of mind difficult to be conceived or described” (340). The narrator then recounts all of Orlando’s considerations – the chance to be with Monimia, the danger of leaving her in Lennard’s care, his parents’ potential misery, and losing Rayland’s favor. In the end, he agrees that it might be the best course for Warwick, “but with himself it was quite otherwise” as it would cost him Rayland’s favor, and his family’s future (341). Although the narrator claims difficulty in representing Orlando’s state of mind, she is really revealing Orlando’s difficulty in coming to terms with Warwick’s ability to act while he can only fantasize. Orlando again controls the movement of the narrative,

but not its import for the readers. “Conceiving” and “describing” are not the same thing, and this episode reveals that difference while at the same time suggesting the narrator’s point of view is one with Orlando’s. Orlando’s inability to clearly conceive of his situation does not prevent the reader from seeing it clearly. It also reflects the romantic dream of having feelings and thoughts “beyond description.” In the past, Orlando has compared his situation to those of literary figures, but here he considers modeling his behavior on a real flesh-and-blood man. It shows Orlando in a moment of “realistic” choice – how do we decide how to act? What do we use as a model or guide?

When Orlando learns that his family believes he is dead, he endures another difficult episode, but the narrator distances herself from his state of mind. “The variety of uneasy emotions which passed through the mind of Orlando, as he journeyed towards London, would be difficult to describe, since he himself could hardly discriminate them; but each, though not distinct, was acutely painful” (418). Here the narrator begins to separate her role from Orlando’s point of view. It is clear that Orlando cannot discriminate beyond the abstract impression of the overwhelming pain; and at this point in the narrative, readers have learned to expect this from him. The narrator claims the difficulty of describing another’s feelings. It is Orlando who repeatedly claims to know and understand everyone’s thoughts and fears, so when the narrator admits difficulty in describing his, we begin to understand how lost Orlando really is. William Roberson, author of The Ironic Space: Philosophy and Form in the Nineteenth Century Novel, writes: “Narrator and protagonist are dealing with

different aspects of the same problem: in the attempt to read and interpret phenomena, to what extent can a subject separate the object represented in consciousness from consciousness itself, and from the imagination that makes that representation possible? Narrator and protagonist struggle to give form to reality in order to make it comprehensible” (24). As we will see, both Orlando and Newland have difficulty distinguishing between their visions and their interpretations of others. We no longer see the confident, albeit deluded, hero of the romance who believes he can anticipate and meet every conceivable challenge. Stripped of his heroic persona, he is utterly lost.

The final claim of inexpressibility from Smith’s narrator concerns her own narrative, rather than Orlando’s feelings or understanding. After Orlando visits the dying Phillip, the narrator writes, “It might give too tragic a colouring to the conclusion of this narrative, were all the scenes of some days to be minutely described – it may therefore suffice to state, that Orlando could not conceal from his mother the situation of her eldest son, who, conscious of his approaching end, and conscious too of all his offences towards her, implored her pity and forgiveness” (505). The narrator quickly summarizes the resolution of several complex situations in one paragraph – Mrs. Somerive forgives and cares for Phillip on his deathbed, Orlando reveals his marriage to Monimia and Isabella’s return to London, Mrs. Somerive forgives him, continued difficulties with Woodford, and Phillip’s death and burial (505-6). This mirrors the narrator’s earlier compression of Monimia’s narrative. At this point, the narrative is turned over to Orlando, who will recover the

lost will and secure Rayland Hall for his family. It is important, I think, that the narrator hands authority over to Orlando by claiming not inexpressibility of emotions, but deciding against an overly tragic conclusion. It is an author's decision of how to end her tale; a matter of what effect she wants to leave with the reader. She hands the story over to Orlando. Like the narrator, the reader's relationship to Orlando's point of view varies throughout the novel. Udden points out that the "reader is required to adopt contrary attitudes to the hero. These contrary attitudes create a third one, a synthesis, in fact, of involvement and distance" (156). We view him both as sympathetic and deluded.

- Heroines' Silences and Untold Stories

Joan Forbes notes that "within the text, romantic love is presented as a dangerous luxury which women can't afford. In fact, the romantic position in these narratives can only be safely occupied by men" (297). Monimia and May are sophisticated, highly aware social beings, effective in maximizing their own success within the limits imposed by genre conventions and our heroes. They are not the innocent, "artless" girls that our heroes imagine them to be. In fact, it is often through or against these women that the absurdity and delusions of the heroes and other characters are revealed. Monimia wants security, not romance. Smith writes:

Monimia, secure of the tenderest affections of her lover, bore, without more repining, the little hardships to which her situation exposed her:- but her mind looked forward, in mournful anticipation to the time when she should not longer hear that soothing voice lending her

courage against every transient evil; no longer receive continual assurances of the ardour and generosity of his attachment; and find in his disinterested love, his attentive friendship, sufficient consolation against her uncertain or uneasy destiny. (204)

She would prefer “disinterested love” and “attentive friendship” to the oppressive and excessive attention he now offers. However, Monimia understands that she must support Orlando’s fantasies in order to secure her own future.

Both Monimia and May recognize the hero’s tendency to model behavior on what they have read in books, and both attempt to correct this perceived flaw, encouraging their men to be “more realistic.” The women demonstrate an understanding of the constructedness and representational nature of literary forms and figures. The women believe, and readers are encouraged to agree, that they know the difference between fictions and realities.

When they reunite in London after the war, Monimia tells Orlando about her adventures with Mrs. Newill and Belgrave, and Orlando can hardly maintain his composure. Monimia recalls, “Though I had often ridiculed the stories in novels where young women are forcibly carried away, I saw great reason to believe some such adventure might happen to me, for I was totally unprotected, and I believe, absolutely sold” (473). Monimia merely uses the reference to highlight how unbelievable the situation was that she found herself in, but Orlando believes she is truly a character in that novel. He imagines that she is “absolutely sold.” Monimia does not use the reference to guide her behavior, but only to illustrate her situation in

a narrative. Monimia refers to a type of writing – the stock plot of a defenseless woman dragged off by lecherous man – as an illustration of the distance between the believability of the situation when she first read it, and the believability of it in her current situation. The novel was originally an entertaining departure from reality, but now life is “like a book.”

When Newland proposes that they marry ahead of schedule, May “smiled upon the possibility; but he perceived that to dream of it sufficed her. It was like hearing him read aloud out of his poetry books the beautiful things that could not possibly happen in real life. ‘Oh, do go on, Newland; I do love your descriptions’” (92). When he suggests that they elope, she responds, “We can’t behave like people in novels, though, can we?” He answers, uncharacteristically, “Why not – why not – why not?” The reader sees that he protests too much. May suggests it would be “vulgar” and claims that Newland wouldn’t want that. She is more right than he realizes.

Monimia is an adept reader, and notices the reading habits of other characters. Monimia describes her exchanges with young Newill and Fleming and how their past reading guides their action. While Newill was at a loss for how to help Monimia, Fleming was able to plan an escape. Monimia attributes this difference to Newill’s long time at sea and Fleming’s more recent schooling. “Yet, recollecting not only his classics, but the romances he had delighted in at school, he had that natural and acquired tenderness of mind which made him sensible at once of all the discomforts of my situation. He saw in me a poor, deserted heroine of a novel, and nothing could

be in his opinion so urgent as my relief. – Accustomed in all emergencies to apply to his mother, to whom he is the most affectionate and dutiful of sons . . .” (481).

Monimia here “pulls out all the stops,” appealing both to Orlando’s image of himself as her knight in shining armor and his image of himself as the ever-dutiful son.

Based on her clear and insightful reading of Fleming, the reader imagines that she must also see Orlando quite clearly. Orlando is not suspicious of Fleming as he was of Newill or Belgrave. He does not demand to know what happened between them, as he did with the others, but calmly asks, “What is become of this Fleming? Is he often at home with his mother?” (481). In fact, he marries his beloved sister Selina, who he often compared to Monimia, to Fleming (522). Once Orlando is assured of Monimia’s faithfulness, he is uncharacteristically willing to leave her and let her rest. In considering her story, however, he reveals his continued preoccupation with Belgrave, and confuses his fears with her own. “If ever he was absent from her again, the insolent Sir John Belgrave would incessantly pursue her in imagination” (482). The reader wonders, in her imagination, or his? In Monimia’s mind the dangers conveyed in the narrative have passed, but for Orlando they remain alive and ever-present. He can not distinguish between the narrative and real life. This exhaustive, and exhausting, narrative is the last thing of any substance we hear from Monimia. After her “tender confession” she falls silent and spent, nothing more than a body. She is relegated to the background so that Orlando, and romance, can take their rightful place at the forefront of the reader’s attention. Immediately after her story we are told, “Monimia had no will but his” (483). It might be said that Smith handicaps

Monimia so that Orlando's story can prevail. She ends up working to support Orlando and herself, which is hardly noticed by her husband (486-7), she becomes ill (496), and finally, she bears him a son and heir (522).

Monimia and Selina work tirelessly to uphold Orlando's romantic fantasies, and to believably fill the roles he has set for them. They are physically exhausted by trying to play the parts he has assigned them in his fantasy. He wants Selina and Monimia to meet every week to read his letters together:

'I shall then be present with you,' said he, mournfully, 'at least in imagination – yes, however distant my person may be, my soul will be here! I shall, in fancy at least, enjoy the delight of seeing together the two beings whom I most fondly love, and of knowing they are occupied with the thoughts of their poor Orlando! There is a story in one of the popular periodical publications, I believe in the Spectator, of two lovers, who agreed at a certain hour to retire, each from their respective engagements, to look at the moon; the romantic satisfaction they enjoyed in knowing that the eyes of the person beloved were, at the moment they were gazing on I, fixed on the same planet, will be this means be doubled to me; for I shall know that at such an hour on such a morning my Monimia and my Selina will be just in this place; I shall see them – I shall see the eagerness with which Monimia will ask for news of me – the pleasure with which Selina will give it.- Every object round this spot will be present to me; and wherever I may be,

however occupied in my duty, my would will at that moment be particularly here.’ (292)

While both girls are anxious to “gratify him in this romantic fancy,” Monimia sighed and reflected “that if all this was necessary to soften a separation of only three weeks (for Orlando had again assured her it would not be more), a longer would be quite insupportable to them both” (292). When she refers to “them both,” the reader wonders if she is not referring to herself and Selina, rather than herself and Orlando. What is insupportable is not the distance or loss of Orlando, but Orlando’s elaborate plans for their time. At a later meeting, he requests that she keep a journal while he is gone. She promises to obey, though she says it will be little more than a journal of sufferings and sorrow. He replies, “But when that sorrow, those sufferings are over, my Monimia,” cried Orlando, trying to speak cheerfully, “with what transport shall we look back on this journal, and compare our past anxieties with our actual happiness!” (348). The past is not compared to the present, but to the “actual.” The journal is valued primarily as a narrative for their *reading* pleasure, not a recording of her actual experience.

Both Selina and Monimia revise their narratives in order to avoid or minimize Orlando’s excessive reactions, connecting their attempts to narrate with the author’s own. At the same time, Selina and Monimia must silence or subdue Orlando in order to get their own stories told. He constantly interrupts their narratives with expressions of anxiety, jealousy, and extreme emotion (Selina 426-434, Monimia 465-482). Both women are concerned with the effects their stories have on him, and

often modify their narratives in order to spare him or spare themselves the trouble of dealing with him. Bartolomeo notes “virtually all of the reported action is rendered by women” (Monimia, Selina, and Mrs. Roker, principally) which places “women firmly in control of important components of the narrative, in the same way that a woman, Mrs. Rayland, holds sway over Orlando’s fortunes” (655).

In contrast to Orlando, Monimia is a patient and considerate auditor. “Monimia turned pale, but only clasped her hands together as she sat by him, and did not interrupt him. He went on” (93). Monimia’s moments of dishonesty are marked by careful, conscious consideration of the act and its effects, and are most often efforts to calm and reassure Orlando. She often puts on a happy face for Orlando, convincing him of “the hope she affected to feel” (152). Toward the end of the narrative, the contrast between her inner state and outer behavior is particularly strong. We are told that Monimia is ill, “she made light of it however, and endeavoured to restore to him that cheerfulness, of which, she observed with great uneasiness, he had been some time deprived; but it is difficult to communicate to others sensations we do not feel ourselves [. . .] She smiled, but tears were in her eyes – She assured him she suffered nothing [. . . and] wished Orlando to believe that with him every place was to her a heaven” (496).

In The Age of Innocence, May “answers” with looks which Newland then transcribes into words. “As he entered the box his eyes met Miss Welland’s, and he saw that she had instantly understood his motive, though that family dignity which both considered so high a virtue would not permit her to tell him so . . . the fact that

he and she understood each other without a word seemed to the young man to bring them nearer than any explanation would have done. Her eyes said: 'You see why Mamma brought me,' and his answered: 'I would not for the world have had you stay away' (11-12). Her silence is accounted for, and even preferred. "It was evident that Miss Welland was in the act of announcing her engagement . . . Archer paused a moment. It was at his express wish that the announcement had been made, and yet it was not thus that he would have wished to have his happiness known. To proclaim it in the heat and noise of a crowded ballroom was to rob it of the fine bloom of privacy which should belong to things nearest the heart. His joy was so deep that this blurring of the surface left its essence untouched; but he would have liked to keep the surface pure too" (16). He is comforted by the fact that "May Welland shared this feeling. Her eyes fled to his beseechingly, and their look said: 'Remember, we're doing this because it's right'" (16). Again, Newland is particularly concerned with the setting of certain performances – he believes that the setting reflects the validity of the interior moment. May's silence is perceived as not only acceptance, but agreement. "Evidently she was always going to understand; she was always going to say the right thing. The discovery made the cup of his bliss overflow . . . She sat silent, and the world lay like a sunlit valley at their feet" (17).

While Archer's society does communicate in secret code to some extent, Newland seems too sure of his interpretation and begins to prefer the ambiguous silence to actual words (29). Udden observes: "The fictions of interpretation force the reader to perform certain reading acts in order not to become the victim of the text's

ironies. The reader has to reject the misinterpretations of the fictive readers and construct her own reading somewhere in between them [. . .] Through those characters, and the explicit metafictional comments, the reader becomes conscious of the ‘absurdities’ of fiction” (154). It is generally our heroes, and other characters who are most like them, who misinterpret the words and behaviors of others. May’s silence allows Newland to maintain his fantasies. In contrast to May’s silences, Ellen “gives voice” to Old New York’s underlying fears. When she refers to the van der Ludens’ home as “gloomy,” he is struck by her rebelliousness. “Those privileged to enter it shivered there, and spoke of it as ‘handsome.’ But suddenly he was glad that she had given voice to the general shiver” (47). It is interesting that Ellen gives voice to actual inner thoughts, while Newland merely gives voice, in his own mind, to his own projections of others’ thoughts. He compresses the complications and passions of a lifetime down to one direct, declarative statement. Dallas tells his father, “You never did ask each other anything, did you? And you never told each other anything. You just sat and watched each other, and guessed at what was going on underneath. A deaf-and-dumb asylum, in fact. Well, I back your generation for knowing more about each other’s private thoughts than we ever have time to find out about our own” (214). Dallas here draws an important distinction between knowing one’s own thoughts and knowing someone else’s. In fact, in sharing May’s last words with his father, Dallas undercuts with powerful finality Newland’s claims to any real understanding of May’s thoughts.

Gary Lindberg notes that Newland's readings of May and Ellen inform our reading of him. "Archer's psychic state, then, is projected in his images of himself and others, and since the novel center on his consciousness, the shifting qualities attributed to Ellen and May actually serve to characterize Archer himself. It is tempting to regard Ellen as the projection of his inner possibilities and May as the agent of the outward conventions he is examining" (130). As Lindberg suggests, this simplification and schematization represents Archer's point of view and constitutes his tendency to mis-read others. A more useful approach is offered by Kathy Miller Hadley, who highlights the reader's recovery of Ellen and May's untold stories. Hadley argues that the reader's conventional expectations of a focus on Newland's story are undermined by their attention to the untold stories of Ellen and May. Hadley writes that Wharton "ironically invites the reader to speculate about Ellen's story by focusing on Newland's obsessive curiosity about it – a curiosity that is fed by Ellen's own willingness to leave her story untold. In this way, Newland's quest becomes largely a search for information about *Ellen's*" (266). While Newland obsesses over Ellen's story, he shows no interest in May's. In the end, his lack of attention to May's story allows her to undermine his intended "escape" from their marriage.

When Newland proposes that they marry ahead of schedule, May "smiled dreamily upon the possibility; but he perceived that to dream of it sufficed her. It was like hearing him read aloud out of his poetry books the beautiful things that could not possibly happen in real life. 'Oh, do go on, Newland; I do love your descriptions'"

(92). When she argues against his plans to elope, she must flatter him. “He stood silent, beating his stick nervously against his boot-top; and feeling that she had indeed found the right way of closing the discussion, she went on lightheartedly: ‘Oh, did I tell you that I showed Ellen my ring? She thinks it the most beautiful setting she ever saw. There’s nothing like it in the rue de la Paix, she said. I do love you, Newland, for being so artistic!’” (53). His artistic nature is aligned with his feelings for Ellen; May knows enough to employ both. Newland may be artistic, but May is artful. The narrator points out that May has calculated the effect of mentioning Ellen, and is determined to present the reference “lightheartedly.” She again flatters him when she asks him to “be kind to Ellen” while she and her family are out of town. She suggests that only Newland can truly understand and entertain Ellen. “I think she’s been used to lots of things we haven’t got; wonderful music, and picture shows, and celebrities – artists and authors and all the clever people you admire. . . I can see that you’re almost the only person in New York who can talk to her about what she really cares for” (76). She is highly aware of Newland’s feelings for Ellen, and repeatedly arranges for them to be in contact so that he is doing it at her bidding rather than behind her back. Each time, it bolsters Newland’s adoration for May and undercuts his intentions with Ellen. As Linda Wagner-Martin observes, “May knows only triumph” (43). My own reading is less confident of this; May can control Newland’s outer life, but not his inner one.

Wharton, as author, controls the worldview at the close of the novel. In Smith’s novel, the Romance conventions win out, with a happy ending secured for

Orlando and his family. By allowing Orlando's view to control the plot, his fantasy is written into the text of the work as a whole. At the same time, Smith makes the reader aware of a gap between Orlando's fantasy and the reality of life for Monimia through the hollowness of her representation of the characters at the close of the novel, as noted by Joan Forbes and Joseph Bartolomeo. The final chapter is presented completely as description, there is no dialogue. By framing the close of the novel as inadequate or unsatisfactory to the reader, Smith calls into question the value of the romance as a whole. What some critics have dismissed as Smith's "failure" and evidence of her rush in completing the novel, seems instead to be a calculated and highly effective way of demonstrating the gap between Orlando's romance and the larger world of the novel.

III. The Romantic Hero as Reader and Writer

The hero's reading habits, and how he reacts to fictional texts and realist texts, reveal important information about his value in the worldview of the novel. For both heroes, reading and writing often collapse into one activity. Adela Pinch, author of Strange Fits of Passion, explains that "feeling itself is thus revealed as that which constructs and mediates between the categories of literary 'convention' and personal 'experience'" (8). Roberson writes of the hero's "need to transform given reality into a living myth – to structure a new romance of modern heroism with himself cast in the lead role. He thus imposes a reading upon his own life even as he lives it. In this way he suffers the displacement Schlegel describes for the Romantic poet: drawn

both into the age of heroism past and into the age of heroism possible, the reality that is the present moment remains insignificant and undesirable” (35-6).

With Orlando, the romantic hero’s insistence on presence in the scene of reading, the scene of his writing’s projected reception, often means his absence in the scene of writing, the time and space where he actually is. The space of the actual represents the social norm or “reality,” while the space of reading is his own fantasy. Orlando’s reading and writing often collapse and converge, but we rarely see Newland writing. This suggests an important difference between Orlando and Newland. Orlando’s public expression of emotion, through writing, becomes, for Newland, a private reflection, contained within his own mind, coloring his interpretations, but not his actions. Newland’s romanticism is more theatrical and performative, as it exists only in his own visions. Orlando produces fictions, while Newland merely consumes them. Over the course of the novel, Orlando’s reading goes from mainly poetry to primarily legal documents. Orlando moves from the inner world out into the public world, while Newland seems to turn inward. Newland wants his reading to be a private pleasure, while Orlando enjoys reading aloud with Monimia

- The Hero as Reader

Orlando reads the English literary classics. We know that he has read Clarendon’s History of the Rebellion, Lady Wardlaw’s Ballad of Hardyknute, Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales, Thomson’s The Seasons, Gray’s The Bard, and Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure. The narrator tells us that “the sort of reading he

had lately pursued” contributes to the “romantic enthusiasm of his character” (56). Much of his reading comes back to him through memory; current events in his actual life often call to mind a similar episode in literature. In his mind, the scene of his actual life often resembles “one of those so often met with in old romances and fairy tales” (518). The only works we actually see Orlando reading are poetry at the Hall (188, 317), the newspaper in London (447), and “a practical discourse on faith in opposition to good works,” read aloud for Rayland (60). His own reading, and that which he suggests for Monimia, shows that he believes reading can provide guidance for living. He often refers to the examples established in literature. When he considers Isabella and General Tracy’s potential marriage, he reflects “but one cannot help thinking of January and May!” (294). Like Newland, he often confuses his reading with his interpretation of real-life events. Orlando’s reading is much like that of Miss Cassado, the young Jewess he meets at his uncle’s house in London. The narrator tells us that she had just come from boarding-school, “her head full of accomplishments and romance” (302-3). She is immediately drawn to Orlando since “she had her imagination filled with heroes of novels, and the figure and face of Orlando exactly corresponded with the idea of perfection she had gathered from them” (303). Naturally, Orlando considers her the only reasonable person at the evening’s dinner. Comparing him to the young schoolgirl, Smith continues to undercut Orlando’s status for the reader.

Newland’s reading is international, and shows a particular affection for French writers. This helps further align Newland with Wharton, herself, who lived

most of her life in France. He reads Goethe's Faust, Feuillet's Monsieur de Camors, George Eliot's Middlemarch, Dante, Petrarch, Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Maupassant, Michelet, Thackeray, Browning, and William Morris. We are told that Merimee's Lettres a une Inconnue "was one of his inseparables" (65). He also recommends books for May's reading, such as Tennyson, and notes that "she had advanced far enough to join him in ridiculing the 'Idyls of the King' but not to feel the beauty of 'Ulysses' and the 'Lotus Eaters'" (29). Like Orlando, Newland relies upon his reading to guide his behavior and understanding of his world. His reading both challenges his traditional notions, and suggests new possibilities. Newland is bored and bothered by the engagement visits he and May must make to all the family; "He supposed that his readings in anthropology caused him to take such a course view of what was after all a simple and natural demonstration of family feeling" (43). He hopes to open May's eyes to the world, and understands that as a woman of society she has been trained to ignorance. "It would presently be his task to take the bandage from this young woman's eyes, and bid her look forth on the world [. . .] He shivered a little, remembering some of the new ideas in his scientific books, and the much-cited instance of the Kentucky cave-fish, which had ceased to develop eyes because they had no use for them" (52-3). The realism of his science books causes him to look with new eyes on age-old customs; Newland is frightened by the potential disconnect between science facts and social facts/fictions. In addition to the books he reads alone, he also attends theater. We know that he attends Gounod's Faust and Boucicault's The Shaughraun in New York, and Labiche's Voyage de M. Perrichon

in Paris. Theater provides a social outlet, of sorts, for the rich passions Newland enjoys in his private reading.

Wharton again and again stresses that Newland is reading “the latest,” suggesting that his reading is as modern and current as possible. This apparent interior liberalism contrasts with his very conventional, traditional lifestyle. Lindberg writes, “He has seen enough plays and read enough poetry and fiction to have literary sanctions for feelings not cultivated in New York. But these feelings are themselves warped by his social habits, for New York makes such a cleavage between literature and life that it seems impossible to experience for oneself the feelings one reads about” (133). While Orlando’s reading preferences are compared to a young girl’s by Smith’s narrator, Newland’s reading habits and selections are praised by Wharton’s narrator. In fact, Newland’s “favorites” are often praised so strongly that it seems they must be Wharton’s favorites, too. Emily J. Orlando notes that the few female authors in Newland’s library are not American, and they use male pseudonyms (George Eliot, Vernon Lee), and that the women artists embraced by the world of Wharton’s novel are not American (Christine Nilsson, Ada Dyas, Adelaide Neilson, Mrs. Scott-Siddons), suggesting that America is averse to the woman artist, and the American woman artist in particular (74, 73). This further suggests Wharton’s complicated relationship to American woman writers, and a need to distance herself from their tradition and its “merely popular” connotations.

Both authors have a bit of fun with their heroes as readers, often linking them to traditional stereotypes of “woman readers” and the dangers of female literary

tastes. Orlando's father is concerned about the effects romance is having on his son's looks. He initially mistakes Orlando's anguished appearance for proof that Philip has committed suicide. Orlando reassures him that Philip is fine, but Mr. Somerive demands to know the cause for Orlando's "haggard looks" and "disordered manner." He questions what mysteries Orlando is involved in that keep him out so late. "Let me not see tomorrow that wild and unsettled look, that pale countenance, and so many symptoms of suffering" (273). Mr. Somerive suggests that Orlando's romance with Monimia will result in the ruin of the family.

In The Age of Innocence, Newland's sister comments on the effects of his reading after Newland spends a night reading Rossetti. "Mercy, how pale you look, Newland!' Janey commented over the coffee cups at breakfast; and his mother added: 'Newland, dear, I've noticed lately that you've been coughing; I do hope you're not letting yourself be overworked?' For it was the conviction of both ladies that, under the iron despotism of his senior partners, the young man's life was spent in the most exhausting professional labors – and he had never thought it necessary to deceive them" (87). Both Orlando and Newland are tired by reading, not the "real" labors of work and life, but they are happy to let their families think otherwise.

When Letterblair asks him to handle the Olenska divorce case, Newland claims he wants no part of it. He has heard enough, through gossip, to know that it is a messy affair. After reading the "unwelcome documents," however, he has a change of heart (59). He agrees to handle the case. He admits that the papers "did not tell him much in fact, but they plunged him into an atmosphere in which he choked and

splattered” and he decides “he must see Madame Olenska himself rather than let her secrets be bared to other eyes [. . .] she stood before him as an exposed and pitiful figure to be saved at all costs from farther wounding herself in her mad plunges against fate” (60). The facts of the case are distinct from the impression they make on Newland as a reader. After seeing her case in writing, he envisions her as a figure in a romance. Her containment in the narrative of the documents makes her “safe” for Newland to think about. Wolff notes, “It is typical of Newland’s thinking that he should construe Ellen as a ‘case’; and this is of a piece with all those other habits of mind that push aside the ordinary complexities of actual human life for the grander sweep of the romantic imagination” (423). When Letterblair suggests that Ellen should not seek the divorce, even he becomes a figure in the romance. “Archer had gone to the house an hour earlier in full agreement with Mr. Letterblair’s view; but put into words by this selfish, well-fed and supremely indifferent old man it suddenly became the Pharisaic voice of a society wholly absorbed in barricading itself against the unpleasant” (62). Old New York is now Newland’s rival in this romance; *it* represents a danger to Ellen, the damsel in distress. While Archer may fancy himself her hero and defender, he is not so bold with her in person. In discussing the divorce with Ellen, he admits to being uncomfortable with the “hard facts” and thinks, “How little practice he had had in dealing with unusual situations! Their very vocabulary was unfamiliar to him, and seemed to belong to fiction and the stage” (69). At one point in the conversation, they both fell silent, “and Archer felt the specter of Count Olenska’s letter grimacing hideously between them” (70). The letter takes on a body,

and a threatening one at that. What concerns him, he claims, is not knowing “how much truth was behind it?” It’s not the infidelity itself that bothers him, but his inability to know whether the letter’s account of infidelity reflects reality or not. Similarly, in his own lying to May about his trip to Washington, he reflects, “It did not hurt him half as much to tell May an untruth as to see her trying to pretend that she had not detected it” (170). As he attempts to answer May’s questions about not going to Washington, which makes him available to see Ellen, he curses “the unnecessary explanations that he had given when he had announced his intentions of going to Washington, and wondering where he had read that clever liars give details, but that the cleverest do not” (170). His current experience seems to “prove” the truth of this writing.

Whenever Newland receives a note from Ellen, he comments on the stationary, her penmanship, and the letter-writing conventions she ignores. He receives a note from her, written at Skuytercliff, which begins abruptly with “I ran away,” and immediately Newland attempts to translate it according to romance conventions. As usual, his interpretation reveals far more about him than about her or her note:

The tone of the note surprised the young man. What was Madame Olenska running away from, and why did she feel the need to be safe? His first thought was of some dark menace from abroad; then he reflected that he did not know her epistolary style, and that it might run to picturesque exaggeration. Women always exaggerated; and

moreover she was not wholly at her ease in English, which she often spoke as if she were translating from the French. ‘Je me suis evadee-‘ put in that way, the opening sentence immediately suggested that she might merely have wanted to escape from a boring round of engagements; which was very likely true, for he judged her to be capricious, and easily wearied of the pleasure of the moment. (80)

Newland attempts to translate her words, “which she always spoke as if she were translating in French,” back into French, failing to see his own faulty translation. Newland fails to read what is written. He seems to picture her as French, a romanticized European, rather than the American-born and raised native English speaker we know her to be. It is interesting that he fears she may “run to picturesque exaggeration” since it is not her exaggeration that concerns us, but his. Whatever the cause for her departure, Newland imagines the van der Luydens have rescued Ellen, which reminds him of a play he saw in Paris by Labiche, Le Voyage de M. Perrichon. “He remembered M. Perrichon’s dogged and undiscouraged attachment to the young man whom he had pulled out of the glacier. The van der Luydens had rescued Madame Olenska from a doom almost as icy; and though there were many other reasons for being attracted to her, Archer knew that beneath them all lay the gentle and obstinate determination to go on rescuing her” (81). Like Orlando, Newland takes her words too literally. Her “running away” and “rescue” are figures of speech, not realistic descriptions of events.

Newland receives a shipment of books from London which includes new works by Herbert Spencer and Alphonse Daudet, and George Eliot's Middlemarch. The narrator takes care to tell us why he chose each piece. He chose Spencer and Daudet because he was familiar with their other works, and Eliot's novel because he had read interesting reviews. "He had declined three dinner invitations in favor of this feast; but though he turned the pages with the sensuous joy of the book-lover, he did not know what he was reading, and one book after another dropped from his hand" (87). A collection of love sonnets by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, The House of Life, which he had ordered because the name attracted him, was the only book to bring him pleasure. His reasons for choosing the first three books are contrasted with the simple impression made on him by the title of Rossetti's book. "He took it up and found himself plunged in an atmosphere unlike any he had ever breathed in books; so warm, so rich, and yet so ineffably tender, that it gave a new and haunting beauty to the most elementary of human passions. All through the night he pursued through those enchanted pages the vision of a woman who had the face of Ellen Olenska . . ." (87). He is clearly pursuing a vision, not a woman.

Wharton makes clear the absurdity of NY society's reading habits with her description of Mr. van der Luyden's reading of The New York Times – reading the news is something that must be done, but is often done in such a way that it serves no real purpose. Mrs. Van der Luyden is quite concerned about interrupting her husband's daily reading of the paper to announce Archer and Mrs. Newland's arrival. Her gravity is contrasted with the narrator's description of Mr. van der Luyden's and

Mrs. Archer's discussion of the best time to read the paper. Mr. van der Luyden explains, "In town my mornings are so much occupied that I find it more convenient to read the newspapers after luncheon." Adeline responds, "I think my Uncle Egmont used to say he found it less agitating not to read the morning papers till after dinner." Van der Luyden responds that he understands the desire to avoid hurry "but now we live in a constant rush" (35). The paper "must" be read, but it should be done so as to avoid agitation and scheduled for convenience. The fact is that these landed families, which read the paper primarily for social and financial gossip, rather than relying on it for important information, busy themselves with the "work" of reading the paper when the news is already too "old" to count. The scene also contrasts the two forms of breaking news - the investigative journalism of the newspaper and the family news, "Newland's story," transmitted by Mrs. Archer. The most important news still travels by word of mouth, as the presentation of the information is often more important than the information itself. It also reminds the reader of Mrs. Archer's earlier comment dismissing "all this modern newspaper rubbish" (32). The realism of the newspaper is contrasted with the romance of the novel. It is noted, however, that Newland "usually tossed off half a dozen papers with his morning coffee" (36).

In The Old Manor House, when Carr leaves his office to go to work on Philip's case, he invites Orlando to amuse himself with reading a newspaper, since he has no books but law books. "Orlando assured him that his mind was not in a state to receive amusement from any of the usual resources" (446). Carr's clerk brings in candles and the newspaper, but "he was too much occupied by his private distresses

to be able to attend to public occurrences, interesting as they were at that period to every Englishman, and particularly to one who had seen what Orlando had seen, of the war then raging with new violence in America. He read, however . . .” (447). He reads that the American soldiers, fighting in defense of their liberties, had “marked their route with the blood which flowed from their naked feet in walking over frozen ground” (447). This may be interpreted as their own kind of writing, perhaps the ultimate “realist” writing. Such physical, substantial writing contrasts sharply with the delicate, dreamy kind of writing Orlando does.

In reading letters, both heroes imagine all the figures as characters in romance. In Wharton, we do not see the letters that Newland reads. In Smith, we do, and therefore can gauge the (in)appropriateness of his response. In America, Orlando reads the letter from Monimia, describing Belgrave’s advances and Jacob’s actions on his behalf. “Orlando, during perusal of this letter, was so entirely occupied by it, that he forgot where he was. The Hall and all its inhabitants were present to him; and he started up to demand instant satisfaction of Sir John Belgrave, and to chastise the mercenary and insolent servant, when he found himself, by the distance of many thousand miles, deprived of all the power of protecting his Monimia, under marching orders to remove he knew not whither, and cut off from all communication with her” (378). He believes that distance deprives him of his power to protect Monimia, but she would not be in danger if he had not revealed the secret of the turret staircase to Jacob. It’s not Orlando’s distance that proves dangerous to Monimia, but his nearness. As he awaits another letter from home, he dreams that Monimia is being

pursued by Belgrave, and she is calling out for his help against “the inhuman persecutor of her innocence” (383-4). “At other times fancy, more favourable, represented her as she used to appear in the early days of their attachment – cheerful, because unconscious of having erred – and tenderly trusting to him, even when she discovered that their clandestine meetings were contrary to the strict line of duty and propriety [. . .] Dreary was the contrast between his real situation and these soothing visions; and he often preferred such as gave him sleeping torment, to such as by flattering with happiness tendered more insupportable the despair which consumed him” (384). He is awakened from a dream “of Monimia given to him by the united consent of Mrs. Rayland and his father” by the cry of a night hawk and “Orlando, once roused to a comparison between his visionary and his real situation, was alive to the keenest sensations of sorrow [. . .] Orlando endeavoured to shake off the uncomfortable sensations, which, in despite of his reason, hung about him ; but he rather indulged that check them, in throwing upon paper the following” (387). The Sonnet he composes is an indulgence of emotion, and one which later appears in Smith’s Elegiac Sonnets.

- The Hero as Writer

Orlando signs his name on the bench in the woods, merging himself with the “rustics” and hoping Monimia will see it. He recalls being in the spot with Monimia when they were children.

The letters carved by the rustics, whose Sunday’s walk in summer sometimes led them to this bench, remained; he remembered them

well; and, for the first time in his life, felt disposed to take his share of this species of fame; and, with his knife, he engraved on that part of this covered seat which had suffered least from

- "The sylvan pen

Of rural lovers,"

The words – "Orlando, 9th December 1776" – flattering himself that this rude memorial might be seen by Monimia, and draw from her soft bosom one sigh more of tender recollection, in his absence. (284)

When he says "he remembered them well," it is unclear if he is confusing the rustics' walks with his own, or whether he claims to remember the rustics' writings, or the rustics, themselves. As ever, he confuses the scene of his writing with the scenes of other writings. He anticipates his own absence in his writing, imagining his writing will have the same impact on others that his reading has had on him.

In America, recovering from his injuries, Orlando writes several incoherent letters to his father, apologizing for his behavior in regard to Isabella's elopement, and recommending Monimia to his protection. Lieutenant Fleming had the good sense not to mail the letters. "Orlando had now strength of body and of mind enough to look them over; but, circumstanced as he was about Isabella, he now hardly knew better than he did then, what to say that should not aggravate all the pain he lamented: something, however, it was necessary to write . . ." He decides to leave out any reference to Isabella, and focuses instead on the story of his voyage and first landing. "But such was the agitation of his spirits while he was writing, from the lively idea he

had of the sensations his letters would give to those to whom they were addressed, that it brought on an access of fever, and he was confined for a few days” (360).

Every time he writes, he imagines being read. In many ways, he is right about being physically present with them – but this only serves to make him ineffectual wherever he *really* is. His writing is about presence in the scene of reading, and necessarily involves his absence from the scene of writing. Writing to his father, who he now fears is dead, Orlando is saddened by writing letters “which he could hardly expect would ever be read [. . .] it was too probable the eye for which it was intended was closed for ever” (383). He continues to write the letters, however, and takes pleasure in the pain it causes him.

The only practical work Orlando does is collect evidence for his case to prove himself rightful heir to Rayland’s property. The reading and writing he does for legal reasons contrasts sharply with the reading and writing he does personally, revealing the absurdity and ineffectiveness of the latter. In gathering evidence for the case, he records notes from meetings, “Orlando made minutes of what Mr. Walterson said” (451); secures reliable witnesses, like Mrs. Roker, “he had at all events assured himself by the letter he was now in possession of, that she was not mad” (460), and the cook, asking Monimia where she might be found, as “her evidence may be of great importance to us” (470); and, most importantly, gather Mrs. Roker’s “strange confession,” which reveals the location of the will (515). Still, the adventure is forefront in Orlando’s mind. When he is searching for the hidden will at Rayland Hall, “Orlando could not, amid the anxiety of such a moment, help fancying, that the

scene resembled one of those so often met with in old romances and fairy tales, where the hero is by some supernatural means directed to a golden key, which opens an invisible drawer, where a hand or a head is found swimming in blood, which it is his business to restore to the enchanted owner” (517-8).

- Visions and Realities, The Hero’s Imagination

“Imagination” is an important word in both novels. Both heroes are repeatedly described as possessing it. Wharton shows the positive aspects of imagination. Wharton’s narrator describes Newland as “too imaginative not to feel that . . .” as if imagination has something to do with the capacity to feel (28). In fact, imagination is more closely allied to creation or production than with impression. Newland wonders at how in May “such depths of feeling could coexist with such absence of imagination” (115). He describes May’s “most tranquil unawareness” and “inexpressive girliness” – one internal, the other outward. He distinguishes between “dealing with” reality and “anticipating” it - he believes she will “go through life dealing to the best of her ability with each experience as it came, but never anticipating any by so much as a stolen glance” (115). He contrasts her “transparency” with his “thick mediation” (115). Newland also contrasts “his real life” with “his actual life” when he ponders his time away from Ellen.

He had built up within himself a kind of sanctuary in which she throned among *his secret thoughts and longings*. Little by little it became the *scene of his real life*, of his only rational activities; thither he brought the books he read, the ideas and feelings which nourished

him, his judgments and his visions. Outside it, in the *scene of his actual life*, he moved with a growing sense of unreality and insufficiency, blundering against familiar prejudices and traditional points of view as an absent-minded man goes on bumping into the furniture of his own room. Absent – that was what he was: so *absent from everything most densely real and near to those about him* that it sometimes startled him to find they still imagined he was there. (159 emphasis added)

He distinguishes between what is real to him – books, ideas, visions - and what is real to those around him, the scene of his actual life. It is significant that what is “real” to Newland involves his reading and his visions, things most un-real to those around him.

Smith’s narrator highlights the negative aspects of imagination. Orlando often loses himself, quite literally at times, in his visions. In London, walking to his uncle Woodford’s house, he imagines his family at home and Monimia in the Hall. It is significant that both of these visions involve watching the figures read. He imagines his father, “trying to dissipate with a book the various anxieties that assailed him for his children” and Selina, “attentive to her father’s reading, often asking questions and soliciting information” (300). Isabella, Emma, and Mrs. Somerive are there as well, but absorbed in their domestic duties. He imagines Monimia “stepping cautiously into the library whenever she could find it open, to take or replace some book which they had read together – she shed tears as she read over the well-known

passages he had particularly pointed out to her – she dwelt on the pages where he had with a pencil marked some peculiar beauty in the poetry” (300). Typically, his vision of her reading involves evidence of his past writing. It is also significant that his vision reads like a descriptive narrative, showing careful detail and specificity. Finding himself lost on the streets of London, he is “recalled then from the indulgence of his visionary happiness to the realities around him” (300). The idealized domestic vision of women and books is replaced by the unwelcome company of his uncle, who “appeared particularly disgusting to Orlando, who had lately been accustomed to associate only with women” (301). At dinner later that evening, he again “disengaged his mind from the scene around him, and was picturing in his imagination the turret of Monimia. He saw her sleeping; and her innocent dreams were of him! Every piece of furniture in the room, the books, and the work that lay scattered about it, were present to him. It was the image only of Orlando that sat at the table of Mr. Woodford; the soul that animated that image was at Rayland Hall” (304).

Newland’s stifling social life forces his attention inward. Newland “often *pictured to himself* what it would have been to live in the intimacy of drawing rooms dominated by the talk of Merimee (whose Lettres a une Inconnue was one of his inseparables), of Thackeray, Browning or William Morris. But such things were inconceivable in New York, and *unsettling to think of*“(65). For Newland, *picturing* is how he describes his fantasy, while *thinking* is how he describes the unpleasant reality; or reality *made* unpleasant by its contrast with the fantasy. Escaping into the

love poems, Newland imagines himself pursuing Ellen “but when he woke the next morning, and looked out at the brownstone houses cross the street, and thought of his desk in Mr. Letterblair’s office, and the family pew in Grace Church, his hour in the park at Skuytercliff became as far outside the probability as the visions of the night” (87).

Gary Lindberg suggests that Newland’s preoccupation with atmosphere mirrors Wharton’s concern with “situation” over individuals or action. “Wharton seems more concerned with the relations of ideas, people, actions, or objects to their surroundings than with the attributes of things in themselves. Her sentences immerse us in a well-defined social world: things are in their places; actions have an accorded time; individuals fit into a larger pattern” (152). In this way, it is sometimes difficult for the reader to distinguish between Newland’s personal judgments and the judgments of Old New York. This difficulty, in fact, is key to the novel’s movement and meaning, and indicative of Wharton’s complex narrative style. In the end, Newland believes that while Ellen’s atmosphere in Paris is “rich,” it is ultimately “too dense” and “too stimulating for his lungs” (215). Such an atmosphere may suit his inner passions, but not his outer life. He literally can not live in it, his lungs can’t process the air; he can only dream in it. He is both sustained and smothered by the air of Old New York. Newland muses, “If one had habitually breathed the New York air there were times when anything less crystalline seemed stifling” (60). Eventually, Newland himself becomes a museum piece. Others will view him, read about his strange customs, and consider him with a mixture of mild interest and dismissal.

Given the opportunity (and he is given the opportunity by May and Ellen), Newland would not act like people in novels, but the vision continues to color his inner life and desires. Throughout the novel, the order of custom is contrasted with the disorder of emotion, without any clear victor. Emotion must be safely contained within order, in the pages of a book; it is not to be lived. Wharton's respect for Newland depends upon his refusal to actually "behave like people in novels," meaning act on their emotions rather than custom or conventions. But to some extent, Wharton also suggests the value of an inner life like Newland's, recovering the values of romanticism as something worthwhile, if not actually possible. Greenwald writes, "In modern novels, romance is evoked as an absence, not a presence [. . .] romance is precisely constituted as a sense of the absence of reality, of the world as stark and bare, which produces a kind of enchantment in reverse" (6-7).

IV. The Reader – Libraries and Inner Lives

In *A Backward Glance*, Wharton shares memories of her first experiences as a reader and writer. She writes of "the great voices that spoke to me from books" (69). Like Newland, her reading and writing is associated with sound. It is also very much located in place – place as both a room and a refuge; a site hidden from sight. It is a very private pleasure. She describes her "secret ecstasy of communion" with books in her father's library. "There was in me a secret retreat where I wished no one to intrude, or at least no one whom I had yet encountered. Words and cadences haunted it like song-birds in a magic wood, and I wanted to be able to steal away and listen when they called" (70). Private contemplation is like a room, a room which provides

both containment and isolation. In their novels, both Smith and Wharton describe the library as a private, masculine sanctuary, apart from the busy, domestic areas of the house. Women trespass on this space and ultimately claim possession of the heroes' inner lives. Newland is contained by May, and Orlando is contained by Rayland. The libraries represent self-possession, or freedom, while the domestic spaces represent repression and containment

We are given precise details about the decoration and arrangement of Newland's study, a "Gothic library with glazed black-walnut bookcases and finial-topped chairs which was the only room in the house where Mrs. Archer allowed smoking" (4). It is Newland's masculine sanctuary, a sanctuary which is clearly carved out within the otherwise oppressively feminine space. Newland imagines that Ellen will decorate their house just like Mrs. Welland's, and "his only comfort was to reflect that she would probably let him arrange his library as he pleased – which would be, of course, with 'sincere' Eastlake furniture, and the plain new bookcases without glass doors" (46). In contrast to the tuftings and gilt vitrines of the feminine spaces, Newland imagines his library will be more modestly done. He is disturbed in his private space, and his private musings, by both Janey and May. Newland's sister, Janey, interrupts him in his library at his mother's house. "He raised his head irritably when his sister Janey entered, and then quickly bent over his book (Swinburne's Chastelard – just out) as if he had not seen her. She glanced at the writing-table heaped with books, opened a volume of the Contes Drolatiques, made a wry face over the archaic French, and sighed, 'What learned things you read!'" (54).

It is interesting to note that he was not in fact reading, but imagining the scene at the Club. Newland is also interrupted by May, when she insists on his reading aloud to her from his poetry books. He learns to read history, instead, in order to avoid her interruption of the finer pleasures of poetry. Newland's narrator tells us, "He had taken to history in the evenings since May had shown a tendency to ask him to read aloud whenever she saw him with a volume of poetry: not that he disliked the sound of his own voice, but because he could always foresee her comments on what he read. In the days of their engagement she had simply (as he now perceived) echoed what he told her; but since he had ceased to provide her with opinions she had begun to hazard her own, with results destructive to his enjoyment of the works commented on" (177).

In Wharton, the women continually trespass on the men's spaces and interiority. Miller notes, "Conversation is both a distraction and a necessity to Wharton's narrators as well as her characters who possess artistic imaginative sensibilities" (19). In Wharton, there is also a sense that the women try to possess men's inner lives. May claims possession of Newland's feelings and equates them with her own in order to convince Ellen to leave New York. She tells Newland that she has "talked things over" with Ellen; "I wanted her to know that you and I were the same – in all our feelings." She hesitated, as if waiting for him to speak, and then added slowly: "She understood my wishing to tell her this. I think she understands everything" (195). By telling Newland that Ellen "understands," she is suggesting that she and May are in perfect agreement.

Orlando's attachment to his library is less territorial than Newland's, but equally revealing of his character. The library is a refuge from those who do not understand his romantic pursuits. Orlando begins sleeping at the Hall to avoid his brother's jealousy at home and to be closer to the objects of his affection – the books, Mrs. Rayland, and Monimia. Like Newland's, Orlando's library is established as a masculine space distinct from the surrounding feminine, domestic space. The narrator explains, "he had been allowed to sleep in a little tapestry room, next to the old library, at the end of the north wing – a division of the house so remote from that inhabited by the female part (or indeed by any part) that it could give no ideas of indecorum even to the iron prudery of Mrs. Rayland herself" (42). Orlando describes his "asylum" in the library: "The quiet asylum he had obtained at the Hall, in a room adjoining to that where a great collection of books were never disturbed in their long slumber by any human being but himself, endeared to him the gloomy abode of the Sybil, and reconciled him to the penance he was still obliged to undergo; for he was now become passionately fond of reading, and thought the use of such a library cheaply earned by acting as a sort of chaplain, reading the psalms and lessons every day, and the service in very bad weather; with a sermon on Sunday evening" (42-3). Here the tone is clearly Orlando's – quiet asylum, books never disturbed in their long slumber, the gloomy abode of the Sybil, the penance he was obliged to undergo. He imagines himself tormented by Mrs. Rayland's demands and his family's resulting jealousy; he is a victim of cruel fate, but determined to see it through. The following description employs the narrator's point of view, gently mocking romantic

conventions. “Orlando was a young man as uncommonly grave, as he was tall and handsome. There was something more than gravity, there was a dejection in his manner; but it served only to make him more interesting. He now slept oftener than before at the Hall, but he was seen there less; and passed whole days in his own room, or rather in the library; where, as his quiet and studious temper recommended him more than ever to Mrs. Rayland she allowed him to have a fire, to the great comfort and benefit of the books, which had been without that advantage for many years” (55-6). The books seem physically sensitive to Orlando’s presence – first they were disturbed from their long slumber by his nearness, now warmed and comforted by his fire. If not for Orlando, what would become of the Library? The books are almost like people who depend on Orlando for their salvation. The books are like Monimia. The cold, quiet of the books is echoed in the narrator’s many descriptions of Monimia, waiting for Orlando to come. When he arrives she tells him “I am half frozen,” and he complains that she is not happy to see him because she is preoccupied by the mere physical sensation of cold (71). Just as he brings her form to life through his teachings, he brings the stories to life through his imaginings. Monimia repeatedly assures Orlando that his teachings and the books he has directed her to read have provided her with invaluable support and sustenance.

The reading experience is something like voyeurism, like a violation of a private and sacred space. The reader experiences this both from the outside, as the one looking in, and as the character, looking out. Iser writes, “Participation means that the reader is not simply called upon to ‘internalize’ the positions given in the text

but he is induced to make them act upon and so transform each other, as a result of which the aesthetic object begins to emerge. The structure of the blank organizes this participation, revealing simultaneously the intimate connection between this structure and the reading subject” (1681).

CONCLUSION

Charlotte Smith and Edith Wharton defy simple categorization as writers of romance, sentimental novels, or novels of manners. Their contributions to the novel form are numerous, but often unacknowledged or underappreciated. Smith’s early and sophisticated use of free indirect discourse, her use of incorporated genres, employing dialect for characters such as Betty and Jonas, reveals her to be much more modern than commonly thought. Her novel is not a romance using realism to contrast and highlight the differences, but closer to a realist novel making use of romance as a trope. Wharton’s suggested recovery of romance and sentimental values, her sophisticated use of performative narrative techniques, and her bold social critique of a “realist world” gone mad, aligns her more closely with the romance tradition than even she might be comfortable acknowledging. Her recognition of the value, even the necessity, of interiority, privacy, emotional and intellectual freedom, does not move her backward in the novel tradition, but forward, toward the cultural critique of later twentieth century critics and theorists.

As Jacqueline Labbe writes in her introduction to The Old Manor House, Smith’s writings “anticipate the ‘meta,’ the style of writing aware of its own status as text, as genre. Her fictionalized self and the fictionalization of culture create a

thematics of artifice that work to underscore the constructedness of human experience” (28). Starr writes that “Smith, writing at a crux of the novel’s generic solidification, was one of the most significant experimenters in the novel at the close of the century” (149). Carol Fry estimates that “perhaps more than any writer of her time, Charlotte Smith expanded the horizons of the novel” (138). Similarly, Wharton’s work anticipates much later work in cultural studies by thinkers like Jean Baudrillard and Guy Debord. Both Smith and Wharton draw attention to the performative aspects of the Romance hero: Smith to the individual performing for other individuals in order to secure their affections or favor, Wharton to the individual performing even for himself – actually staging his own narrative. Carol Singley comments that Wharton’s “outlook is bleaker than most realists’ . . . indeed, her pervasive, sometimes comic, sense of irony suggests modernism as much as realism” (239). Linda Wagner-Martin agrees, claiming that “Wharton’s novel seems genuinely part of the modernist movement” (53). Greenwald, too, asserts romance’s spot in early modernism. “Romance was not repudiated by the end of the nineteenth century, but formed the very basis for modernism. Though romance fantasy might seem opposed to modernist skepticism, in fact romance dramatizes the processes of desire and the difficulty of satisfaction which are central themes of modernist literature” (158).

Charlotte Smith and Edith Wharton created heroes whose reading and writing enact the complexities of narration, representation, and knowledge that the writers, themselves, faced. Their attention to the reader, and understanding of the

negotiations between reading about fictional lives and living life, signals an important issue in the development of the novel. Coming to terms with the conventions of romance and the innovations of realism, both authors demonstrate a keen understanding of how reader, writer, and written are implicated in each other's fictions and realities.

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