

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

In The Age of Innocence, Edith Wharton has pictured the small circle of fashionable New York society during 1870's as a close society of which the strong old-fashioned norms and traditions are still applied so strictly in controlling the life of its members, although they may longer be reasonable. In such close society everything has been settled in details so that it is impossible for people to see other possibilities than the old conventions which have been applied for generations, if they don't want to be judged improper. In this kind of society, different always means improper.

Besides, the society still applies a strong kinship system, so that an individual is not judged individually, but the family will be also included in every affairs. If one member of a family is judged to be improper, it will ruin the name of the whole family. The society will punish its member who is judged to be improper by expelling not only him/her from the social relations, but also his/her family as well. Besides, in such close society rumors can widely spread so fast that it can be known by the whole society very soon, and then people would not dare to make

any relations with the "improper" person if they do not want to be judged improper and expelled from the society too.

Hypocrisy seems to be the strongest characteristic of the society. Although from the surface it looks peaceful, but actually many secret scandals happen. For instance, most people judge Ellen Olenska to be improper because of her desire to get a divorce from her husband. Actually, if there are not many divorce cases happen in the society, it is not because of their intention to maintain the dignity of marriage, but rather it is just because they want to maintain their status to be a "decent" member of the society. Moreover, although Ellen is regarded to be improper, but in fact there are many men who are secretly interested in and pay attention to her.

The society is described to be men's world, and the ladies are only "the product of the system." Women are only viewed as objects, who have to passively obey what the men told them to do, and accept what the men do to them. This can be seen from their rejection upon divorce. No matter what happens, they will blame the wife. With the reason to preserve the dignity of marriage, they prefer to see her suffer from her broken marriage than to let her get a divorce and try to gain happiness as a free person.

Newland Archer's conflicts are caused by his

difference from the society. He is different because he has more knowledge and experience than any other man; and his knowledge and experience enable him to see the provincialism of the society. His conflicts are caused by his dissatisfaction about facts he finds in the society regarding its old-fashioned conventions and traditions, and his confusion whether to defend his desire based on taste and experience or to be a "decent" member of the society by following the "taste" of the society.

The social conflict experienced by Newland Archer is presented through the value conflict, which is caused by Newland Archer's different values from those of the society. The society seems to apply materialism which is contrasted with Newland Archer's intellectualism. The society appreciates people from their social status and possessions, but Newland he gives more appreciation for clever conversations and experiences.

What makes Newland different from other people in the society is that he realizes about the provincialism of the society, and because he has his own values which he gets from his knowledge and experiences which are different with the society's values. Other people in that society may not suffer from its condition, because they do not have knowledge and experience about the world outside their society which can be made as the comparison. They

can accept society's old conventions completely, even without questioning the importance of those conventions, because they can see no other possibilities other than what has been settled for generations. Moreover, because the society always regards different to be improper, it needs a real strong character to be able to change its condition. Unfortunately, Newland is not that strong, on the contrary he is the one who has to change his personality because of his losing "fight" against the society.

