

**“I Don’t Speak Your Language”:  
An Analysis of Cinematic Language in Martin Scorsese’s  
*The Age of Innocence* in Comparison with the Novel**

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Martin Scorsese’s *The Age of Innocence* (1993) was a long awaited adaptation of Edith Wharton’s novel of the same name published in 1920. When the film was released, it got mixed reactions from critics and audience alike because of its differences compared from the other Scorsese films and its way of adapting Wharton’s novel. It was accepted as a departure for Scorsese because he was more famous for gangster films such as *Mean Streets* (1973) and *Goodfellas* (1990). This was the first so-called costume drama for Scorsese and it doesn’t include any violent scenes. In the past, he was good at depicting masculine and violent characters. So this shift disappointed and confused the audience to some extent.

Linda Constanza Cahir criticized the film for having transformed the subtle and complicated novel into a Hollywood romantic paradigm. (12) Like Cahir, many critics and audience had an impression that this film fails to do justice to the original text. This is probably because Wharton’s novel had already established its status as a masterpiece. After all, it is almost impossible for film adaptations of literary masterpieces to get the same status as the original works.

My first point in writing this thesis lies exactly here. Scorsese’s *The Age of Innocence* is too underestimated in comparison with its original text. Thus, in this thesis, through focusing on the differences between cinematic and literal languages, I intend to

challenge the popular beliefs that films are inferior to literature. Then I will analyze Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence* in a way to uncover how he interpreted and translated the Wharton's literary languages into a unique, cinematic one.

## **1. Cinema and Literature—Their Relationship and Their Differences**

### **1-1. The Difference of the Codes Between Cinema and Literature**

The misconception that films are inferior to novels began at an early stage of the cinematic history. Virginia Woolf declared in her essay, "The Cinema" (published in 1926), that cinema is a vulgar thing. She described the audience watching a movie as follows. "The eye licks it all up instantaneously, and the brain, agreeably titillated, settles down to watch things happening without bestirring itself to think" (1). This signifies a typical notion about films that is still dominant today—that watching films is easier than reading books because it requires less imagination. It is considered that watching films is more of a passive action while reading is more of an active action.<sup>1</sup>

Woolf, however, also pointed out the possibility of cinematic representation claiming that although not yet aware of what it can do, cinema can reconstruct the world of novels using different symbolic signs. She points out that *mise-en-scène* and sounds

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<sup>1</sup> McFarlane mentions in his "Reading film and literature" about this issue as follows, "The second misconception, and at this stage more important one, is that films makes fewer demand on the imagination than a book does. This kind of thinking is based—erroneously, in my view—on the belief that coming to terms with a continuous narrative involving a set of characters operating in a given time and place enjoins a greater effort on the part of the reader than it does on that of the viewer" (16).

are uniquely cinematic expressions, which are independent from other forms of art. (2)

Still today, people take cinema as popular culture while taking novels, which they think are naturally more difficult to understand, as high culture.

Brian McFarlane wrote an episode in his essay called “It Wasn’t Like That in the Book,” which suggests how films are automatically more underestimated than literature. After watching Scorsese’s *The Age of Innocence*, McFarlane’s colleague said to him, “Of course it’s not nearly as complex or subtle as book,” which McFarlane himself disagreed (3). Many critics claim that it is almost inevitable for films to be more superficial than literature because it always takes much less time to watch a movie compared to reading novels. And they go on to claim that filmmakers cut off all the good and subtle elements out of the novel.

At this point, it is interesting to note that a distinguished novelist cannot always be a promising scriptwriter. Vladimir Nabokov once tried to write a movie script for his own *Lolita*. However, his scenario was unusable. Both William Faulkner and Scott Fitzgerald are distinguished representatives of American literature. However, it is known only to a few people today that they also worked for Hollywood as scriptwriters. They were both unsuccessful as scriptwriters. Great novelists do not always make great script writers because films has different standards, different criteria and different codes. Films should be judged as films. Then, what is the difference between the two?

According to McFarlane in his “Reading film and literature”,

...the intricate interaction of mise-en-scène (what is visibly there in the frame

at any given moment), the editing (how one shot of a film is joined-to/separated-from the next) and sound (diegetic or non-diegetic, musical or otherwise)... Each of these three categories of film's narrational arsenal has numerous subdivisions, and a full response to the film asks the viewer at various levels of conscious, to take them all into account, sometimes separately, most often in concert (16).

Cinema and literature have different codes, and to watch and interpret a film is as difficult as reading a book. In fact, the cinematic languages, which are *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, editing, and sound effects are more difficult to recognize because all of those elements happen at the same time. It is impossible to recognize all the details of one shot in one sitting. What should be remembered is that it is quite nonsense to compare literature with cinema in order to decide which is "better" than the other when they have completely different standards.

## **1-2. Fidelity Issue and Intertextuality**

It is true that the history of the production of films has greatly depended on novels. A lot of films are based on novels or playwritings whereas written pieces of works are rarely based on films. This does not make films less of an art than novels but this fact has something to do with the notion that films should be faithful to their original texts.

The fidelity issue concerns people's tendency to evaluate films based on how

“faithful” the film is to the original texts. What is really problematic about the fidelity issue is that the criterion is based on a deep-seated belief that novels or original texts are better than their adaptations. Critics like McFarlane, Smith, and Persson claim that people place too much emphasis on fidelity issue when it comes to evaluating films.<sup>2</sup> Scorsese’s *The Age of Innocence* is largely discussed only in terms of its fidelity to the original text. We tend to overlook the intertextuality of Scorsese’s *The Age of Innocence* with his other films because we are obsessed with the intertextuality between Wharton’s novel and Scorsese’s adaptation.

First of all, fidelity is a very vague criterion. When reading books, each person imagines fictional characters in different ways. So, it is not possible for a film to meet every reader’s expectation. Moreover, the “original” text never exists. According to Persson :

We need to acknowledge more fully the idea that all texts and cultural products are responses to and have been generated by other texts and cultural products... Thus the adaptation is most fruitfully read as being part of a web of readings, interpretations and discourses at various levels” (42).

Bordwell also agrees with this: “Artworks are human creations, and the artist lives in

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<sup>2</sup> McFarlane mentions this issue as follows. “... it shouldn’t be necessary after several decades of serious research into the process and challenges of adaptation to insist that ‘fidelity’ to the original text (however distinguished) is a wholly inappropriate and unhelpful criterion for either understanding and judgement” (15).

history and society. As a result, the artwork will relate in some way, to other works and to aspects of the world” (56). The original text itself is the result of the intertextual relationships to other texts. So it is meaningless to claim that original text is better or has more of credibility than the adaptation.

## **2. Wharton’s *Ellen* and Scorsese’s *Newland*—The Comparison of the Novel and the Cinema Version of *The Age of Innocence***

### **2-1. Scorsese and Wharton’s Common Ground**

Due to their interest in fidelity issue, a lot of critics and audience have overlooked this film’s relationships with other Scorsese films. *The Age of Innocence* surprised the audience for its non-violence and its difference from the other Scorsese films when it first came out. However, this film is deeply related to his other films and his recurring theme in filmmaking.

Edith Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence*, published in 1920, is set in the 19th century New York’s high society. The story’s plot revolves around the platonic love affair between Newland Archer, who comes from one of the best families in New York and Ellen Olenska, who happens to be the cousin of Newland’s fiancé/wife May Welland. Ellen had failed in her marriage to a Polish Count and has come back to New York as an outsider with some scandalous rumors that she had an affair with her husband’s secretary. Newland Archer is caught between feelings for his perfect fiancé, May, who conforms to the society where they belong, and his forbidden yearning for Ellen, who is an outcast of the society. It is not a mere love triangle story. Wharton

keeps pursuing the theme of the difficulty of living a life as you like in the 19th century America. There are many unspoken rules and conventions that one has to follow and scandals are fatal in the small high society community.

Wharton herself was born into a good family in the 19th century New York high society. Having been a black sheep of the family, she experienced a divorce and escaped to Paris later in her life. Ellen Olenska is, to some extent, her alter ego. The struggle Wharton herself had experienced in the society is the very core of this novel.

The 19th century is, as Wharton called it, “the age of innocence” where people pretended to be unaware of all the “unpleasant things,” which are scandals and free ways of living in defiance of the conventions. While pretending that nothing is happening, people in the high society exclude those who defy the conventions. As Wharton puts it, “The New York ritual was precise and inflexible” (22). Wharton explains the reasons why the 19th century was the age of “innocence” in the following manner:

He [Newland] remembered what she had told him of Mrs. Welland’ request to be spared whatever was “unpleasant” in her history, and winced at the thought that it was perhaps this attitude of mind which kept the New York air so pure (81).

Having become an outcast of that society despite her legitimate upbringings, Wharton wrote many stories, which pursue the same theme as *The Age of Innocence*. She knew,

from her own experience, how people of elegance and supposed generosity in New York society have expelled in a brutal way someone who did not conform to the mostly unspoken laws in a society.

What is important is that this theme is familiar to Martin Scorsese, too. In terms of his upbringing, Martin Scorsese has somewhat similar experience as Wharton. Although he was brought up in Little Italy instead of the 19th century New York high society, the two seemingly different communities have something in common. That is, they both have strict rules and conventions that demand absolute obedience. Scorsese said: “Very rarely did Sicilian live on Mulberry Streets—that was for Neapolitans. So what they did was import the village mentality and the village social structure to Elizabeth Street” (Behar, 186). Scorsese grew up in a world still dominated by the feudal system, where being loyal to the community rules paid off but being disloyal was fatal. Back in those days, Little Italy was largely ruled by mafias and it had its own unique rules and conventions.

Scorsese is famous for his skills in cinematic representations of the underworld with organized crime, violence, betrayal and gang conflicts. The common theme throughout his career of filmmaking is “the typical Scorsese tension between the individual and the social setting” (Persson, 46).

The mafia/gangster stories in *Mean Streets*, *Goodfellas*, *Gangs of New York* (2002) and *Taxi Driver* (1976) are related to the theme of *The Age of Innocence*. Leitch points out: “. . . his heroes and heroines are free spirits struggling for survival in a world determined to crush them into conformity” (297). In fact, Scorsese admits in one of his

interviews that Travis in *Taxi Driver* has something in common with Newland Archer.<sup>3</sup>

In the end, what Wharton wanted to express in the novel has deep down, something in common with Scorsese's own problem. That is why it is dangerous to judge the film only from its relation to the original texts. We have to place this film in the light of Scorsese's other works if we really wish to understand its heroine. Scorsese has his own reasons to make this film. Scorsese changed Newland Archer into somebody who is much closer to other heroes in his films.

## **2-2. Cinematic Mise-en-scène of the *The Age of Innocence***

In thinking about the changes Scorsese has made about Newland's character, first I would like to discuss the Scorsesean mise-en-scène as seen in *The Age of Innocence*. In this film, we can see the full exploitation of his forte, violence. What Wharton calls "the old New York way of taking life "without effusion of blood""(282) becomes, in the hands of Scorsese, cutting the meat or cutting cigars. In order to express the bloodless violence, as Persson puts it, Scorsese uses flesh and knives as he often does in other films. While in the novel, Wharton did not mention cutting meat except in one scene, in which she explains how hard the meat served in Newland's house is and how difficult it is to cut it. In the film, there are at least three scenes where people are shown cutting meat with knives while gossiping about someone. The sound of cutting is clearly emphasized. Moreover, Scorsese adds scenes where male members of the

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<sup>3</sup> Helmetag comments as follows: "Scorsese has stated that Newland Archer shares the same unfulfilled yearnings for Countess Ellen Olenska that Travis Bickle had for Betsy in *Taxi Driver*" (164).

society cut their cigars even though there are no corresponding descriptions in the novel. Here, again, the cutting sound is so harsh and clear. Scorsese goes so far as to add a scene where the Mrs. Mingott chooses the proper knives for a dinner party from the catalog of knives. These descriptions are uniquely Scorsesean and shows that, even without blood, one can still feel the violence in his films.

### **2-3. Point of View of the Narration**

The other crucial change from the novel concerns the point of view of the narration. Voice-over narration is the key point of discussion when evaluating this film. The film has been criticized for depending too much on the narration borrowed from the novel. For instance, Cahir commented in her essay: “Essentially, Wharton’s writings ends up doing much of the movie’s work, and the actors, mute and muted, are reduced to pantomimesque performance” (12). On the other hand, some critics have supported the use of voiceover narration in the following manner: “The voice-over comments on and clarifies the visual images and thus becomes an authority in the film” (Persson, 53).

Both sides of the critics missed the fact that Scorsese slightly changed the point of view of the narrator. The voiceover narration in the film is performed by Joanne Woodward, whose voice is so calm, feminine and elegant. The narration objectively explains the codes and rules of the high society from God’s perspective. Since those are, as Cahir claims, mostly citations from the novel, and are performed by a female voice, audience tends to assume that the voice represents Wharton herself. However, in Wharton’s novel, while the narrative is written from a third person

perspective, most of it represents Newland's inner feelings.<sup>4</sup> Wharton is sometimes harsh on Newland and the narrative sometimes exposes Newland's tendencies to be indecisive and self-protective. This makes it a little difficult for the readers to sympathize with him; we are not quite sure if he is brave enough to confront the society with Ellen. Eby explains Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* as follows:

Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* (1920), a novel poised between the Victorian and modern eras which provocatively examines the potential for women's freedom through a male center of consciousness, encourages a reading of its many silences. (93)

Scorsese could have used voiceover narration performed by Newland's voice.<sup>5</sup> He did not, however, and intentionally kept the audience from seeing Newland's own feelings too precisely, thus making Newland as more of a heroic and mysterious character than the Wharton's Newland. Scorsese's Newland is more like a loner, fighting with the social conventions just like the corresponding characters in his other films. It is quite ironical that in order to enhance the character's personality and encourage the audience to identify themselves with Newland, Scorsese chose to take away the Newland's point of view from the narration.

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<sup>4</sup> For example, while in the novel, the narrative goes as "...but he [Newland] said to himself, with considerable admiration, that if a lover had what she [Mrs. Mingott, May's grandmother] wanted, the intrepid woman would have had him, too." (24), the movie narration goes as "But if she [Mrs. Mingott] wanted a lover, the intrepid woman would have had him, too."

<sup>5</sup> The classical use of voice-over narration in Hollywood films is explained in detail in Mikirou Kato's *Eiga Gyanru Ron Hollywood-teki Kairaku no Style*.

Scorsese is more sympathetic with Newland than Wharton. As Pam Cook points out, Scorsese's film alters the perspective of Wharton's novel, changing it from a story about women into a story about men. (46) Wharton probably identified herself with Ellen Olenska and regarded Newland as someone who has failed to follow Ellen's path to release himself and ends up giving up the love of his life to conform to the society. While in Wharton's novel, the heroic figure is Ellen Olenska, in Scorsese's film, Newland is the hero. Wharton questioned Newland's strength to endure the consequences of rebelling against the society and described him as someone who, just like other people in the high society, likes to gossip about people and does not realize the true meaning of being independent. In Wharton's novel, Ellen is the only one who rebels against the society and takes responsibility for her own choice.

Scorsese, on the other hand, is clearly making Newland as someone who comes to share the same value with Ellen and becomes a rebel himself. The crucial point in understanding this difference involves their respective way of describing the specific language used in the society and the language used between the lovers.

#### **2-4. Language Issues of *The Age of Innocence***

What is the language issue in *The Age of Innocence*? In both the novel and the film, Ellen Olenska says to Newland Archer, "I don't speak your language." In the novel, Wharton repeatedly emphasizes that Ellen has a foreign accent: "she [Ellen] said with her trailing, slightly foreign accent" (15). However, it is clear that Ellen is not talking about the language in its literal sense since almost all of her conversations take

place in English and basically both Newland and Ellen are native speakers of English. In the film, this sounds a little more strange because Michelle Pfeiffer, who is playing Ellen's part, speaks perfect English. Obviously, here she is referring to the cultural difference between the two. People in the New York high society take Ellen almost as a foreigner, making it an explanation for her unconventional behavior. Here she is referring to the rules and conventions that really disturb her as it exclude her from New York's high society. Ellen Olenska, having broken up with her husband and becoming the target of gossip about her affairs outside the marriage, is a complete scandal in America. She was raised in Europe, taking "expensive but inconsistent education." Her loneliness and independence are described in detail both in the novel and in the film.

On the other hand, Newland Archer is someone who speaks the specific language of the 19th century American high society. He grew up with the unspoken customs and rules and takes them for granted. Only after meeting Ellen does he realize how everyone around him uses that unspoken language to communicate with each other to the exclusion of any newcomer.

Language always has two sides to it. It brings together those who have learned to use it but excludes those who do not know how to use it. The language in the 19th century New York's high society consists of the delivery of flowers, formal invitations, and etiquettes for certain occasions. As the narration from the film goes:

They all lived in a kind of hieroglyphic world. The real thing was never said or done or even thought but only represented by a set of arbitrary signs.

Archer knew those signs. They were not subtle and were not meant to be. They were more than a simple snubbing. They were an eradication. (00:24:25-)

Gossip is an important language in the world of *The Age of Innocence*, too. The people in the society would be constantly observing other people, always looking for a target of their gossip. This could be seen as a tacit language as well. Those people who do not share the same values with them would be completely excluded from the gossip talk. May started to gossip about Ellen and then Newland disagreed with her opinion about Ellen. Then, she and her entire family stopped talking about Ellen in front of Newland, which kept him from getting important information about Ellen. Those who do not share the same values, those who do not speak the same language, are gradually excluded from the society and eventually, like Ellen Olenska, are expelled from it for good.

The essence of their language is that it is exclusive. It is an implicit language. It is obviously the tool of communication but it is also something that excludes people who are ignorant of it. That is what Wharton and Scorsese experienced in their own lives and that is what Wharton and Scorsese wanted to convey through *The Age of Innocence*. The 19th century American high society has so many code of conducts and customs that are difficult to acquire. The problem with Ellen Oleska is that she does not observe those rules because she was raised in Europe. Moreover, she believed in her own way of living and refused to learn the customs. In fact, that is what drew Newland

to her—her freedom and her ignorance of the rules that society imposes on them.

Apart from the language of the 19th century New York high society, there are two other languages described in *The Age of Innocence*. One is the language that is spoken by the next generation. Newland's eldest son always overtakes a conversation. He cannot keep secrets; he says everything out loud. Newland's son, Dallas (in the movie, he is called Ted), has an eloquent speech about the manners of his parents:

You [Newland and May] 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!

(300)

The age of innocence has finally come to an end and for the younger generation, the language became more open-hearted, explicit and less exclusive. There are much less unspoken rules and conventions; the language in its literal sense plays the more important role. All those implicit languages like flowers, gossips do not really make sense to Dallas. He marries an illegitimate daughter of someone who was expelled from the New York high society in the past and he does not really care about it. He opens up to his father about how May explained Newland and Ellen's relationship to him, which really makes a deep impact on Newland.

Newland and Ellen, on the other hand, do not belong to the new age. What they did was to make the best of an aspect of language that they knew: its exclusiveness.

Newland and Ellen, who are excluded from the society with its predominance of secret, implicit language, develop their own, secret language to pursue their platonic love and fight for their way out of the 19th century New York's high society.

There are two crucial scenes in both the novel and the film that describe the specific language used by Ellen and Newland. They are the scene of the lighthouse and the last scene. In the scene of the lighthouse, Newland, who is already married to May, visits her grandmother to discover that Ellen is staying with her. This step grandmother of Newland's tells him to go and look for Ellen who went to the beach. Newland finds Ellen, looking at the lighthouse standing with her back against him. Newland makes a secret wish that if she turns around before a ship passes the lighthouse, he would go and talk to her. She never turns around and Newland leaves without speaking to her. Later, he discovers that Ellen, knowing that he is there, intentionally refused to turn around. There is an unspoken communication between the two. Ellen's refusal somehow communicated itself to Newland. The refusal is their sign of love; after all, Ellen says to Newland, "I can't love you unless I give you up" (145).

This sign of refusal exchanged between Ellen and Newland repeats itself in the last scene. After May's death, Newland visits Ellen's place in Paris with his son. Newland is still wondering if he should visit and see her after almost 30 years of silence. Letting Dallas, his son, go earlier, Newland sits down on the bench beside her apartment and looks up at her window. Wharton concludes the novel as follows:

He sat for a long time on the bench in the thickening dusk, his eyes never

turning from the balcony. At length a light shone through the windows, and a moment later a manservant came out on the balcony, drew up the awnings, and closed the shutters.

At that, as if it had been a signal he waited for, Newland Archer got up slowly and walked back alone to his hotel. (305)

Wharton only slightly suggests the connection of the two scenes: in the former scene, Newland receives her message of refusal through her choice of not turning back; in the latter, through the closed shutters. However, they are only suggestions and in the last scene, there remains a good possibility that Newland is misunderstanding her message. Actually, there are several scenes in this novel where Newland completely misunderstands her signals. So the secret love language between Newland and Ellen is not working all the time. The unstable nature of the language between the two suggests that, from the very beginning, Newland and Ellen have different values. Newland, having grown up in a good family, was, after all, never be able to outgrow his old beliefs acquired from the exclusive society. He eventually stays married with May while Ellen fell victim to the society and leaves for Europe. Newland is bound to custom and conventions, and even though his love for Ellen broadens his insight, Newland remains an insider throughout the novel. After all, it was always Ellen who fights against conventions while Newland's pursuit of freedom always remains half-hearted. That is why Wharton left it to the reader to decide whether or not their language is functioning. In the final scene of the novel, they choose to have different

ways of living so we can never be quite sure that they achieved a full understanding with each other.<sup>6</sup>

Scorsese was deeply aware of the connection between the scene of the lighthouse and the last scene, and he emphasized the connection of the two scenes by adding to the last sequence a flashback from the lighthouse scene where Ellen is standing on the shore with her back against him. In the flashback, she turns around and smiles at him as if to reassure him that she still cares about him. By showing her smiling face and associating the last sequence with the lighthouse scene, Scorsese made it very clear that while Newland chooses to give in to the society, he still has with him that secret and rebellious language he had once used with Ellen. This could be counted as another attempt for Scorsese to change Newland into a more heroic character than in a novel. Probably Scorsese identifies himself more with Newland Archer because he is a male character in the first place. Or, as a director of the modern society, Scorsese tried to develop an idea that people indeed are able to outgrow where they came from. In fact, it is even more romantic to assume that Newland could have kept his defiance to his society even though he decided to stay there for the rest of his life.

## **2-5. Physical Expression and Fireplace**

In the novel, there are many descriptions about the physical expression of the characters, especially Newland Archer's. Whenever he is becoming emotional or becoming conscious that he is in love, he "reddens," "colors," or his heart gives a leap.

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<sup>6</sup> Eby argues about "Newland's retreat to New York silence evasion" (101) in her essay.

This shows how naïve he is and how inexperienced he is in terms of romantic relationships or other life experiences. Newland Archer is quite an immature person in the novel. Even at the end of the novel, thirty years after their affair, when his son brings up the subject of Ellen Olenska, “Archer felt his colour rise under his son’s unabashed gaze” (299). Other characters like Ellen Olenska or May Welland also blushes from time to time but not as often as Newland. “She [Ellen] blushed seldom and painfully, as if it hurt her like a burn” (140). His immaturity is emphasized in the novel: Wharton once even described Newland as “a self-conscious school-boy” (67).

On the other hand, Daniel Day-Lewis, who plays the part of Newland in the film, looks so calm and mature throughout the film. He speaks in a gentle and quiet voice and acts in a very reserved way. The audience cannot really see him blush in the film nor can they see if his heart is beating fast or not. Since Scorsese changes Newland’s character into more calm and heroic one, he does not emphasize his physical expressions in the same way that Wharton did. Instead, he used light from the fireplace to add some tones to his facial expression. In fact, another distinguishable motif in the novel is the description of fire in the room. Wharton mentions the fireplace more than 35 times in her novel and uses it in order to bring out the comfort and intimacy between the characters. Throughout the novel, the motif of fire is used in many different ways.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> When Newland visits Ellen’s place for the first time, he wonders: “What would she [May] think if she found him sitting there with the air of intimacy implied by waiting alone in the dusk at a lady’s fireside?” (59) Newland also thinks that “His hour alone with her by the firelight had drawn them into a momentary intimacy...” (79). Here and in several other scenes, being alone with someone at the fireside means that they are having an intimate conversation.

Ellen Olenska's beauty is often connected to fire<sup>8</sup> and her beauty as compared to fire makes a great contrast to May's coolness. The motif of the fire is also used to describe Newland's anger and his physical expressions. His flushed face reminds readers of the fire.

Regarding the fireplace motif, Scorsese used Wharton's idea. He even emphasizes it. Fireplace and fire achieve quite a powerful effect in terms of the *mise-en-scène* in the film and the sound of fire burning adds a certain element to the film. Instead of making actors blush or redden, the fire flame both lights up the character's faces and shadows them at the same time, expressing the passion and tension of the affair between Newland and Ellen. The red in the fireplace and the reflection of the flame on Newland's face expresses the passionate nature of Newland Archer. In the film, again, Scorsese transformed Newland's inexperience and immaturity into something that could be described as more positive. The fire reveals his instability, but is given more positive meanings. The flickering light from the fire emphasizes the character's liveliness and beauty.

The fire brings out the passionate feelings between the two but also the sound of the fire burning or the collapse of a burning log is used to describe the moment of anti-catharsis, indicating that Newland and Ellen are doomed to be separated. The fire adds a lot of movement to the serene scenes. Whether it brings tension or comfort, whether it represents anger, passion or disappointment, the burning fire always

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<sup>8</sup> For example, the passage . . . . "A flame darted from the logs and she bent over the fire, stretching her thin hands so close to it that a faint halo shone above the oval nails. The light touched to russet the rings of dark hair escaping from her braids and made her pale face paler" (64).

represents young characters' shaky and sensitive minds and their energy to live. Basically, the essence of cinema lies in moving images so this flickering light from the fireplace really fits the uniquely cinematic representation. And it comes down to the classical way of making movies where the motion always represents the emotion. Mikiro Kato argues in his *Yume no Wakemae* as follows: "Basically, by its very definition, motion pictures should describe motion and that motion should correspond to a protagonist's emotion" (213).<sup>9</sup> The shimmering light adds beauty and youth to the screen. Wharton also connected fire to blood and youth but the corresponding passages in her novel could not have as much impact as the film adaptation since the film directly and constantly shows the color or movement to the audience.

At the end of the novel when Newland becomes 57 years old, there is another description of the fireplace. He still keeps his distinctive physical expressions. When his son brings up the subject of Ellen, "Archer felt his colour rise under his son's unabashed gaze" (299). He still has feelings for Ellen Olenska even though he has chosen to live a life conforming to the society.

On the other hand, in the film, Scorsese inserted a scene where fire is shown to fade away gradually just before the appearance of elderly Newland Archer. The novel shows Archer, who, unchanged after 30 years, still acts like an immature, self-protective insider, but Scorsese has changed it. The fire which represents the youth and liveliness was gone. Newland Archer is now a mature person who understands that his life is

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<sup>9</sup> The classical way of film's describing and visualizing emotion with motion is explained in Mikiro Kato's *Ressha Eigashi Tokubetsu Kogi* as well.

almost coming to an end. There is a sense of closure in the film.

## **2-6. The Use of Cutbacks**

Another unique point about the film is the use of cutbacks. Usually, in a scene of two people having a conversation, the cutbacks are done by the exchange of the point of view shots. Those shots are supposed to be medium close-ups. However, it is not the case with the Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence*. The shots are two-shot-cutbacks, where two people are in the same frame or more traditional one-shot-cutbacks.

The two-shot-cutbacks signify two things. First, the two people having a conversation are sitting close together, which is why they are in the same frame. Second, the two people are observed by the third person. The camera, instead of being the eye substitute of the two people, represents the eyes of someone else who is watching the two of them. Scorsese is clearly aware of this effect and used it to show how close Newland and Ellen are and how they are constantly observed and judged by people around them. Actually, the two-shot-cutbacks of Ellen and Newland amount to approximately 210, while the one-shot-cutbacks of them amount only to 80 or so. In the case of Newland and May, the two-shot-cutbacks are used in relatively earlier points of the film, where the two of them are still close to each other and when people paid much more attention to them as New York's finest couple. The two-shot-cutbacks of Newland and May amount to about 75 and one-shot-cutbacks amount to about 95. Most of the one-shot-cutbacks are used in the latter part of the film, where Newland finds her unsatisfactory and wishes to get a divorce from her. It is true that May and Newland

have much less two-shot-cutbacks than Ellen and Newland, but still, the couple are always close to each other both psychologically and emotionally, and are always exposed to the eyes of the society. It is interesting to note that in showing Newland having a conversation with less significant characters (mostly male), the two-shot-cutbacks are used only about 30 times while one-shot-cutbacks are used about 80 times.

As one can see, the number of two-shot-cutbacks between Newland and Ellen far surpasses that of the two-shot-cutbacks of Newland and others. Scorsese emphasizes the fact that they are observed in a very cinematic and visual way. There are scenes where people in the high society watch an opera show in the film. Actually, what they are looking at through their opera glass is not the play on the stage. It is the audience that they are looking at. Newland and Ellen are the very target of their gaze. Scorsese used a certain framework that looks like opera glass window to show Ellen and Newland together at the opera house.

These are unique cinematic portrayals independent from the novel. In the novel, the two-shot-cutbacks might correspond to the words like “they,” “the two of them” or “Newland and Ellen” whereas the one-shot-cutbacks might correspond to simply “he,” “she,” “Newland” or “Ellen”. However, Wharton found it difficult and unnatural to use the term “they” when she wrote the scenes where two people are having a conversation.

### 3. Conclusion

Overall, Scorsese succeeded in transforming Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* into a powerful film, wholly reconstructing its world in cinematic terms. *The Age of Innocence* is as much Scorsese's work as it is Wharton's. If Ellen Olenska is the alter ego of Wharton in the novel, Scorsese identified himself a lot with Newland Archer in the film and changed him into his own character. As Helmetag mentioned, "*The Age of Innocence* costed over 30 million dollars to produce, roughly 25 percent more than Scorsese's average budget" (162). He cared about all the details of dishes, clothes, interiors and flowers because he understood that those are the very languages used to communicate in the 19th century New York's high society. The audience might simply be overwhelmed by all the elaborate reconstructions of 19th century New York in the movie. But it is essential that we should be fully aware of their meanings, connotative as well as denotative, in the 19th century New York high society. How Scorsese spent a lot of money to all those details in the film shows that he sympathized with the theme of this story from the heart and was really passionate about making this film.

It is absolutely wrong to assume that films are easier to understand than the novels. If we do not understand the cinematic languages, we would be excluded from the cinematic world just as Ellen Olenska has been excluded and expelled from the society. The language has always had an exclusive nature so we should be fully aware of the differences between cinematic language and literary language.

Hopefully, through our comparative analysis of the two versions of *The Age of Innocence*, which are novel and film, it has been proven that cinema has languages

and standards which are quite different from those of literature. I have compared the novel and the film in a way that deny the superiority of the original text, since Scorsese did a great job interpreting it in the cinematic language. Its exquisite combinations of mise-en-scène, sound and editing create huge possibilities for the cinematic expression which is waiting to be uncovered as a form of art.

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