

Student Essay on The Age of Innocence: Responsibility to Self Vs. Responsibility to Others

**The Age of Innocence: Responsibility to Self Vs.
Responsibility to Others by Edith Wharton**

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Essay

In the novel, all but one character are bound to the status quo and code of society. It seems as though their own personal passions and thoughts are unimportant compared to those of those who judge them superficially. This strict form of living dictates how the character thinks, or so it seems. Formal events appear to be of high importance at this time, such as the Opera and the Beafort's balls. The women of the novel seem to not think for themselves at all, and are immune to forming their own opinions. The duty to the public is full of loopholes, many which are discovered in the book. Larry Lefferts, for example, seemed to be quite hypocritical in the novel as he spoke of morality yet was one of the biggest adulterers in the whole novel.

The one character that stands apart from these harsh decrees is Ellen Olenska. After her husband cheated on her and left her in Europe, she moves back to America hoping to recover and be reiterated into a good society. However, she finds the people of New York to be cold and judgmental, yet completely unaware of their ways. As she finds New York strange, they find her quite strange as well. They are shocked and almost insulted over her abnormal ways and actions and have great trouble accepting her. Newland Archer, however, finds this unorthodoxy very attractive in Ellen, seeing that she is her own person, unlike Newland's fiancée May Welland who seems to have no personal opinions of her own.