The Mafia in the Drawing Room: Martin Scorsese's Film Adaptation of Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*

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Introduction

When Martin Scorsese adapted Edith Wharton's novel *The Age of Innocenc*e into film (1993), many critics were surprised. The film is generally viewed as a strange departure from many of his other films, so much so that scant attention is paid to it in discussions of his work. On the surface, of course it may seem highly surprising that a filmmaker known and admired for dealing with the roughness of New York street life, as in *Taxi Driver* (1976), and with the violent codes and behaviour of the American-Italian Mafia, as in *Mean Streets* (1973) and *GoodFellas* (1990), turned his attention to what many critics simply perceive as a conventional costume drama in the vein of the British Merchant/Ivory productions. Vincent LoBrutto, for instance, places it in the genre of "costume epics" (2008: 335), suggesting that it shares several features and qualities of many other costume dramas. However, Scorsese himself has stated that his adaptation of Wharton's novel is his most violent film to that date (e.g., Stanley 1992). In my article, I argue that Scorsese's film does not constitute a strange departure, as LoBrutto and others seem to suggest. Instead, I examine the ways in which the film treats strict moral codes, rigid family structures and set loyalties which, often tacitly, govern people's lives and which are, indeed, similar to those governing Mafia conduct, which has been highlighted in several of the director's films; those who do not conform to the rules are punished. Wharton's novel was published in 1920 and focuses on the closed New York upper-class in the 1870s. The novel thus conducts a dialogue between 1920 and the past. Scorsese tunes into that dialogue and brings it into the 1990s, but as importantly his film also creates an interesting intertextual, or intercinematic relationship to many of his other films. It is that relationship that is in focus in the present article.

On Film Adaptations of Literary Texts

Until relatively recently, discussions of film adaptations of literary texts have focused on what is usually referred to as 'the fidelity issue.' In other words, comments on adaptations have almost exclusively dealt with how far the adaptation is 'true' to the original source or if it strays from it, and if it departs from it, whether it can still be said to be 'true' to 'the spirit' of the literary text (e.g., Persson 2003: 133). Since the majority of the analyses were conducted by critics steeped in the norms and traditions of criticism of English Literature, and particularly the critical position of New Criticism which saw the literary text as a self-contained unit, it may not be surprising that the literary original was deemed superior to the paler, simpler and more one-dimensional adaptation (e.g., Whelehan 1999: 17; Aragay 2005: 11). "Such assumptions," Mireia Aragay contends, "depended, in their turn, on an as yet unchallenged faith in the sovereign Author as source and centre of the reified text […] The words on the page," she goes on, "were sacrosanct" (2005: 11). Thomas Leitch holds that in studies of adaptation, literature is privileged in two ways: "By organizing themselves around canonical authors, they establish a presumptive criterion for each new adaptation. And by arranging adaptations as spokes around the hub of such a strong authorial figure, they establish literature as a proximate cause of adaptation that makes fidelity to the source text central to the field" (2007: 3).

According to traditional critics of English Literature commenting on adaptations, then, the film could never properly capture the depth and multi-layered concerns and techniques of the original. As Robert Stam and Linda Hutcheon point out, the hostility to adaptation—or "clichés," as Hutcheon calls the negative attitudes to the phenomenon (2006: 52-71)—has several causes (Stam 2005: 3-8), but broadly speaking it has to do with the idea that a literary text can do things that a film cannot; to many, the differences between the two media are so great that they cannot be bridged. For example, literature is often said to be more intimate than film, which means that a literary text can enter a character's mind and reveal intimate workings of a psyche, whereas film can only show a character thinking (e.g., Bluestone 1979: 407-08). Also, a literary text, it has often been claimed, is able to work with three tenses—the past, the present and the future—while film can only work in the present tense, a notion that is being challenged (e.g., Griffith 1997:

45-46). Furthermore, and what is probably considered the most convincing argument, only literary texts can make 'proper' use of elements such as ambiguity, irony, symbols and metaphors; these elements are, consequently, impossible to 'translate' into the film mode. Therefore, the film adaptation would always be a distortion, or mutilation, of the literary text. As Stam argues:

> The conventional language of adaptation criticism has often been profoundly moralistic, rich in terms that imply that the cinema has somehow done a disservice to literature. Terms like 'infidelity,' betrayal,' deformation,' 'violation,' 'bastardization,' 'vulgarization,' and 'desecration' proliferate in adaptation discourse, each word carrying its specific charge of opprobrium. 'Infidelity' carries overtones of Victorian prudishness; 'betrayal' evokes ethical perfidy; 'bastardization' connotes illegitimacy; 'deformation' implies aesthetic disgust and monstrosity; 'violation' calls to mind sexual violence; 'vulgarization' conjures up class degradation; and 'desecration' intimates religious sacrilege and blasphemy.
>
> (2005: 3)

Hence, the adaptation is inferior and hence the almost fixed assessment that 'the film is not as good as the book.' Indeed, even if there have been attempts at moving away from this issue of fidelity, it would seem that it is a position that dies hard. Thus, in the book *Thomas Hardy on Screen*, for instance, several critics and scholars seem to reiterate the idea that "the book is 'better,' or at least more complex" than many of the adaptations of Hardy's novels (Wright 2005: 1). This is so, the editor claims, because several of the adaptations of Hardy's texts tend to reinforce "a somewhat outmoded version of Hardy: the 'good, little Thomas Hardy,' producer of pastoral tragedies beloved and patronised by his contemporaries," while ignoring, for example, "his refusal to accept the moral and political conventions of his day" (Wright 2005: 2).

Nevertheless, because, as Dudley Andrew puts it, the notion of fidelity is felt to be the "most tiresome discussion of adaptation" (2000: 31), since the mid-1970's, critics and scholars more sympathetic to cinema and its creative possibilities have called for other approaches and other ways of assessing and exploring the relationship between the two media. Possibly leaning on Geoffrey Wagner's three categories put forward in his *The Novel and the Cinema*—"transposition," "commentary" and "analogy" (1975: 222-27)—Andrew himself offers three categories or types of adaptation which would presumably help to open up a more flexible approach to the field, namely "borrowing,

intersection, and fidelity of transformation" (2000: 29), categories which indicate how closely the adaptation in question follows the source text. In his *Novel to Film*, Brian McFarlane, too, seeks a new approach by, in short, identifying those elements that can simply be transferred from one medium to another and those that cannot. His argument is that those features that defy a transfer must be adapted to fit another medium (1996: 13-14).

However, arguably one of the most fruitful and potentially productive approaches to film adaptations of literary texts is the one proposed by Robert Stam. In order to liberate adaptation studies from the issue of fidelity and from the notion that literature is superior to film, he convincingly advocates what could be termed 'intertextual dialogism,' arguing that "[w]e need […] a new language and a new set of tropes for speaking about adaptation" (2005: 24). 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: "Notions of 'dialogism' and 'intertextuality,' then, help us transcend the aporias of 'fidelity' and of a dyadic source/adaptation model which excludes not only supplementary texts but also the dialogical response of the reader/spectator. Every text, and every adaptation, 'points' in many directions, back, forward, and sideways" (Stam 2005: 27). "Film adaptations," he argues elsewhere, "are caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation and transmutation, with no clear point of origin" (2000: 66). One important consequence of an intertextual approach is, according to Aragay, that it would "debunk […] the original/copy binary pair which lay at the basis of traditional adaptation studies" (2005: 25). What could be focused on, Aragay holds, is "the 'original' text's own intertextuality" (2005: 25); or, she goes on, "it may be done by placing the source text in the intertextual network of its adaptations" (2005: 25). Thus, the adaptation is most fruitfully read as being part of a web of readings, interpretations and discourses at various levels.

Surprisingly, though, even if Aragay seems to see an adaptation as being in dialogue with other adaptations of the source text in question (for example, the multiple adaptations of *Hamlet*), she seems largely to ignore the intertextual dialogue between a particular adaptation and the filmmaker's other films, be they adaptations or not. However, in her *A*

Theory of Adaptation, Linda Hutcheon highlights the interesting dimension of what she refers to as "[g]enre and media 'literacy'" (2006: 126) among "knowing and unknowing audiences" (2006: 121). If the audience experiences the film as an adaptation, it "inevitably fill[s] in any gaps in the adaptation with information from the adapted text" (2006: 121). Importantly, and which is central to my argument on Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence* in this article, this ability is also true in regards to other films. Or as Hutcheon puts it: "If the audience knows that a certain director or actor has made other films of a particular kind, that intertextual knowledge too might well impinge on their interpretation of the adaptation they are watching" (2006: 126). Scorsese's treatment of Wharton's novel can, I suggest, be placed intertextually in relation to his other films, especially those dealing with violence and the Mafia.

Both Stam and Hutcheon propose a dialogic approach to adaptation, where intertextuality plays a major part in interpretation and the construction of meaning. As Hutcheon interestingly suggests, this dialogue can be viewed in terms of "palimpsestic intertextuality" (2006: 21), where the various interpretations and layers of meaning that exist for a text or film (or for a director or an actor, for that matter) enter the interpretation of a particular adaptation. Viewed thus, an adaptation is a cultural product that is most fruitfully read contextually, "as [n]either the product nor the process of adaptation exists in a vacuum: they all have a context—a time and a place, a society and a culture" (Hutcheon 2006: xvi). In other words, the context takes on a greater significance, as a palimpsestic intertextuality would move away from more or less superficial discussions of what is kept or not from the source text and instead seek to explore more dynamic and multi-layered relationships involved in an adaptation. As Stam argues:

> By adopting an intertextual as opposed to a judgemental approach rooted in assumptions about a putative superiority of literature […] our discussion will be less moralistic, less implicated in unacknowledged hierarchies. We can still speak of successful or unsuccessful adaptations, but this time oriented not by inchoate notions of 'fidelity' but rather by attention to 'transfers of creative energy,' or to specific dialogic responses, to 'readings' and 'critiques' and 'interpretations' and 'rewritings' of source novels, in analyses which always take into account the gaps between very different media and materials of expression. (2005: 46)

As the extended discussion above suggests, increasingly commentators on adaptation seem to agree that traditional adaptation discourse, leaning on comparative case studies of specific adaptations, "has tended to privilege or at least give priority (and therefore, implicitly, value) to what is always called the 'source' text or the 'original'" (Hutcheon 2006: xiii). Therefore, rather than having Wharton's novel as a starting-point for my exploration of Scorsese's adaptation, it seems constructive first to examine the director's overall achievement, particularly the main themes, conflicts and concerns represented in his work in order to come closer to an understanding of his adaptation.

Martin Scorsese's Cinematic Underworld

It would be fair to state that most critics saw, and perhaps still see, Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence* as a strange departure from his other films. Thomas Leitch calls it a "nineteenth century costume drama" (2007: 297), and Richard Lippe arguably sums up the attitude towards the film when he states that *The Age of Innocence* "was given a predominantly polite but cool reception because it wasn't the kind of project, a period piece and a melodrama, associated with Scorsese the director of *Mean Streets*, *Taxi Driver*, *Raging Bull* and *GoodFellas* […]" (2005: 221). To that list could of course be added later films such as *Casino* (1995), *Gangs of New York* (2002) and *The Departed* (2006). Indeed, when *The Departed* appeared, critics seemed to sigh with relief that Scorsese had returned to the kind of film he does best, that is, cinematic representations of the underworld, with ingredients such as organised crime, violence, betrayal and gang conflicts; for example, Peter Bradshaw states that "Scorsese has hit his stride again, and he has produced something with as much as gusto as his best films of 20 or 30 years back; it grips and shocks and entertains […] Scorsese, that American movie giant, has never been asleep exactly, but now he is very much awake" (2006). A clear indication of this position was the fact that he finally won an Oscar for Best Director after being denied it several times, despite frequent nominations.

It would seem, then, that Martin Scorsese is first and foremost connected to and appreciated for his explorations of the criminal and violent world of America, in general, and New York, in particular.

Although his filming career began in the 1960's, his first critically acclaimed films were *Mean Streets* and *Taxi Driver*. As most commentators point out, *Mean Streets* is regarded as his breakthrough, signalling several of Scorsese's concerns in later films. Set in Little Italy, the area in New York where the director grew up and a neighbourhood to which Sicilians often immigrated, the film zooms in on the close-knit community whose members rarely if ever leave the area, and on the main character Charlie's (Harvey Keitel) attempts at surviving in it. Scorsese seemingly wishes to show the closed, or claustrophobic, world of those who live there. The centre is Tony's Bar and everything outside this neighbourhood hardly exists. Importantly, it is a community governed by strict codes and by people's loyalty to the leading head, "the august personage of Giovanni [Cesare Danova], the neighbourhood's Godfather" (Quart and Rabinow 2005: 43). In one sense, as David Denby argues, "*Mean Streets* shows what *The Godfather* left out—the neighbourhood chisellers, loan sharks and screw-ups who prey on their own community […] but the Mafia provides the system of values they live by and even a certain legitimacy, should they want it" (2005: 35).

In other words, their lives are held together by the strict authority of the Mafia, on the one hand, and by that of the Church, on the other. As Quart and Rabinow suggest: "The film's texture is less involved with the internal processes of 'the boys' than with the cultural symbols that bind the community together. There is a code and Uncle Giovanni is an enforcer of one part of it, just as the Church serves the function for higher realms" (2005: 43). If one follows the codes, as Charlie tries to do, all is well; but if one breaks the codes, he or she has to be dealt with, perhaps even excised. This is the fate awaiting Johnny Boy (Robert De Niro), who "compulsively betrays the code of obligation and respect that the community of petty thieves and well-dressed punks live by" (Quart and Rabinow 2005: 45). By flaunting his debts and by openly insulting Giovanni, he challenges the rigid order and has to take the consequences, which can be seen as a ritualistic killing off so that order is restored.

According to Richard A. Blake, in *Mean Streets* one can detect what would preoccupy the director in his later work, particularly the problem of "personal identity within an enclosed subculture that is constrained, not necessarily by geography or ethnicity […] but by other threats from outside forces. *Mean Streets* set the pattern. Subsequent films would situate that pattern within different contexts" (2005: 176). Blake suggests

that *Taxi Driver*, too, offers a variation on this theme in that what we witness is "the typical Scorsese tension between the individual and the social setting" (2005: 194). Hailed as "one of the authentic American masterpieces from the 1970s" (Nyce 2004: 37), the film focuses on Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) who feels like an outsider in "a diseased world" (Nyce 2004: 37). The New York that emerges is hellish, and Travis is confronted with the seediness of violence, crime and prostitution. If strict codes govern the neighbourhood in *Mean Streets*, no such codes exist in the world of *Taxi Driver*. In fact, the viewer gets the feeling that violence is arbitrary and that killings are done without any reason. Put in another way, it could be argued that the codelessness is the new dominant code. It is a system of crime which governs the life of New York's citizens and which permeates their existence. As Marie Katheryn Connelly argues, "[c]rime is a preoccupation not only with Travis, Betsy, and the cabbies, but it is also a large part of the political rhetoric espoused by the presidential candidate, Palantine [Leonard Harris]" (1993: 46).

This system of crime generates alienation, anxiety and despair. Initially, Travis is very much "a quiet observer of his city" (Connelly 1993: 40), an outsider unable to interact with it. Gradually, however, the system of crime, moral degradation and codelessness that seems to dominate his life, gets to him: "He feels assaulted by the forces in his life—the criminals on the street, children who pelt his cab as he drives by, scummy passengers who disgust him" (Connelly 1993: 40). Thus, the film explores the effect of destructive forces on a psyche, and the response to those forces. There is a conflict, then, between the collective system of crime and corruption, on the one hand, and the individual, on the other. The result is pent-up anger and frustration, emphasised by his infatuation with Betsy (Cybill Shepherd), "who somehow seems above it all" (*FilmFacts* 2005: 70), and by his wish to save 12-year-old prostitute Iris (Jodie Foster) from her sordid and dangerous existence, personified by her pimp (Harvey Keitel). Travis' "moral outrage and his nausea" (Horsley 2005: 79) make him into "a modern-day crusader" (Horsley 2005: 80). Travis' solution to his situation is to break free, which he does through extremely violent means, by killing, among others, Iris' pimp and a robber, creating a bloodbath.

If the characters in both *Mean Streets* and *Taxi Driver* are locked into violent systems that control their lives, the same could, at least to

some extent, be said about *Raging Bull* (1980). Even if, as Michael Bliss suggests, for the first time "Scorsese has chosen as his central character an individual who is predominantly unsympathetic" (1995: 67), the boxer Jake La Motta (Robert De Niro) is pressed to obey the rules laid down by the mob. Again, there is a Scorsesean conflict as there is a "disjunction […] between Jake's desires and the social forces that prescribe acceptable behaviour" (Bliss 1995: 67). Much can be said about La Motta's unpleasant and violent behaviour in the world of boxing, but what interests me here is his relationship with the Mafia. It is the Mafia that controls La Motta's and other boxers' careers by deciding for the sake of maximising profits, who must win and who must lose the fights. While trying to refuse "to bow to the dictates of the Mob-dominated boxing fraternity" (Nicholls 2004: 47), he "is also part of a distinct subculture. […] Much of the early action takes place […] in the social clubs where neighbourhood Mafia bosses conduct business […]" (Blake 2005: 196). In order to get a title fight, he agrees to the terms of the Mafia and its local boss, Tommy Como (Nicholas Colasanto). Significantly, according to Nicholls, the film's central conflict is that "between Jake's defiant individualism and the encompassing arms of the Mob […]" (2004: 46).

It was not until *GoodFellas* (1990) that Scorsese returned to portray the world of the Mafia, even if particularly *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988) again sets up the clash between the protagonist and the dominant rules of the community. As Blake suggests: "Dying as an executed criminal, the Jesus figure fits into the pattern of Scorsese's trapped and self-destructive heroes" (2005: 209). In discussions about *GoodFellas*, it is frequently pointed out that the film is a conscious response to *The Godfather* saga in that it "can be regarded as Scorsese's reply to the high style, grand opera treatment of Coppola in *The Godfather* […]" (Nyce 2004: 115). Scorsese himself states in an interview that it was the ordinariness that he wished to capture as opposed to the grand life: "What fascinated me most were the details of everyday life. […] What they […] eat, how they dress, the nightclubs they go to, what their houses look like, and how, around that, life organises itself, day by day, minute by minute. Their wives, their kids" (Behar 2005: 185). Elsewhere he states that "the food, and the ritual of eating, were very important" (qtd. in Keyser 1992: 201).

As in *Mean Streets*, the film zooms in on a tight and closed world, influenced by Scorsese's own childhood area of Little Italy, which was characterised by Italian village life. Scorsese states: "Very rarely did a Sicilian live on Mulberry Street—that was for the Neapolitans. So what they did was import the village mentality and the village social structure to Elizabeth Street" (Behar 2005: 186). As Behar argues, this kind of structure created "its own highly complex geo-socio-politics" (2005: 186). Importantly, it could be termed a "feudal structure" (Behar 2005: 186), and if there were conflicts, "it was normally none other than the Don who settled any problems" (Behar 2005: 186).

Although Scorsese points out that *GoodFellas* does not, in fact, deal with the Mafia, the group around Jimmy Conway (Robert De Niro) has a similar set-up and a similar "honour-among-thieves" code (Smith 2005: 195) as found in organised crime, most notably the Mafia. In other words, it heavily relies on the loyalty to one's own close group, or tribe. Consequently, if one is loyal, rewards are handed out; if one is disloyal, one gets punished, often brutally so. Indeed, it would be fair to argue that the whole film revolves around conventions laid down by the leaders of the tribe, particularly in relation to masculine behaviour. Several key scenes emphasise a raw macho language which, as Keyser suggests, serves "to link the Italians as bloodbrothers in a criminal tribe and to capture the fiercely primitive masculine ambience" (1992: 202). Characterising many exchanges is that there is "some testing, some trial-by-ordeal" (Keyser 1992: 202).

The most explicit illustration of the strict codes underlying this organisation is the treatment of Tommy (Joe Pesci) following the murder of Billy Batts (Frank Vincent), an established member of the Gambino family. There are certain taboos in the Mafia, and one is that such a member as Batts cannot be killed without the go-ahead of the leadership. When the bosses invite Tommy, he and the audience are led to believe that he will be initiated as a member; instead, he is ritualistically executed, and it is made clear that he is killed because he has violated the code and jeopardised the order. As Keyser contends: "Tommy pays in blood for Batts's death so the order of the crew can be preserved" (1992: 204).

Another example of the rigid attitudes towards the breaking of the code is of course Henry's (Ray Liotta) betrayal of the group; here, he makes himself guilty of breaking what could be termed "a Mafia code of

silence" (Keyser 1992: 207). The consequence of this act is that he becomes exiled from the group, forced to enter the federal Witness Protection Program in order to survive. In short, significantly the film's main concern seems to be the tribal system we call the mob: "The Mob is a family that embraces and contains all its members; like a feudal fiefdom, it endures by absolute allegiance. Its rewards are wealth and a sense of belonging; its penalties are exile and death" (Keyser 1992: 211).

Importantly, *The Age of Innocence* succeeds *GoodFellas* (and the box-office hit *Cape Fear*, 1991) and precedes *Casino* (1995), in which Scorsese revisits the world of the Mafia, so much so that Nyce even argues that "[f]or the first time in his career, Scorsese repeats himself, even down to specific shots and sequences" (2004: 139). Nyce particularly sees strong similarities between the two main male characters in *Mean Streets* and in *GoodFellas* (Charlie and Johnny Boy, and Jimmie and Tommy respectively) and those in *Casino* (Sam "Ace" Rothstein [De Niro] and Nicky [Joe Pesci]), but also in narrative technique. Thematically, too, *Casino* to a large extent zooms in on the Mob, and the film is often seen as "the final instalment of Scorsese's gangster trilogy" (Casillo 2006: 341), the other two being *Mean Streets* and *GoodFellas*. Like these, Casillo goes on to argue, "*Casino* depicts a closed society that, with its own obsessive rituals, ceremonies, symbols, codes, taboos, and punishments, must defend itself against the hostile mainstream" (2006: 341). Similar to the former two films, Sam is loyal to the Mafia codes, while Nicky cannot conform to them and is killed because of it.

As my discussion above demonstrates, there is little doubt that many of Scorsese's films implicitly and explicitly echo one another, thereby creating interesting intertextual/-cinematic links. In other words, they are part of what Stam calls "dialogism" (2005: 27) and what Hutcheon refers to as "palimpsestic intertextuality" (2006: 21). The more the viewer is familiar with Scorsese's films, the more s/he is able to see the connections between them. These connections are predominantly found at the thematic level, where the intertextuality concerns the individual trapped by the dominant society's norms and strictures; Leitch points to "Scorsese's thematic consistency" in that "[h]is heroes and heroines are free spirits struggling for survival in a world determined to crush them into conformity" (2007: 297). Moreover, although this aspect is not in focus in the present discussion, the intertextual link arguably occurs at

the level of actors chosen for the films, particularly Scorsese's use of Robert De Niro, Harvey Keitel and Joe Pesci, but also to some extent of Daniel Day-Lewis and, more recently, Leonardo DiCaprio. At a more specific level, and particularly relevant to my discussion, the intertextuality manifests itself in the fact that his films often deal with the Mafia and the tensions between its rigid codes and the individual's urge to go against them, as well as the consequences of such disobedience.

Here, it seems to me, it would be valuable to pause in order briefly to outline the dominant features and strategies of the Mafia, not only because they sum up several of the main issues in Scorsese's films focused on in my discussion above, but also because they are central to my examination of *The Age of Innocence* below. As Henner Hess writes in his comprehensive *Mafia & Mafiosi: Origin, Power and Myth*, to groupings in the Sicilian Mafia, the main model for Scorsese, "natural kinship" (Hess 1998: 85), that is, family, constitutes the most important bond, followed by "ritual kinship," "friendship," "instrumental friendship," and "clientele relationship" (Hess 1998: 115), all of which aim to secure close ties. Furthermore, for the close relationships to function satisfactorily, certain norms, or what could also be called "codified rules" (Hess 1998: 107) apply to the members. According to Hess, these would include, for instance, "[t]he duty of those associated to help one another to revenge in blood any affront suffered" (1998: 107), as well as "[t]he duty to keep a secret" (1998: 107), elsewhere referred to as "[t]he rule of silence" (1998: 110). These and other codes are, Hess goes on, "contained within a conventional system of norms valid for, and felt to be binding within, the entire subculture—the system known as *omertà*" (1998: 109). The term *omertà* includes the notion of respect and honour, which means that a man's property and family must be protected, and disputes and conflicts have to be solved "through his own efforts" (Hess 1998: 109).

As Hess argues, it follows from this system that these groups primarily operate outside the rules of mainstream society. It also follows that the members are expected to be loyal to the codes implicitly or explicitly agreed upon. This loyalty is, as suggested, mainly maintained through kinship and close relationships, such as marriage and godparent relationships, which operate as a regulating force and help to "screen […] off all uninvited intervention" (Hess 1998: 110), that is, threats to the group in question. However, if members of the group show signs of

disloyalty, or if the Mafia is threatened by external forces, or if it meets resistance from individuals who do not wish to agree to their terms, coercive strategies are frequently used. Hess holds that there are several steps in such coercion, for instance "more or less explicit verbal threats," "symbolic warnings," "actions resulting in considerable material damage," or indeed cattle being killed (1998: 113-14). If the person fails to comply, more serious actions are resorted to, for example, beatings and various forms of mutilation. A killing, according to Hess, is used as a final solution, and it has "often been compared to the execution of a death sentence without previous trial" (1998: 114). Significantly, this act "is needed to lend validity to the norms whose observance is not supervised by an enforcement staff" (Hess 1998: 114). Moreover, while the initial threats are covertly expressed, killings are more public in nature; in other words, "unless they were known in circles beyond those directly affected they would represent an ineffective weapon. It is not as an individual punishment or as an act of revenge but as a symbolical demonstration of what might happen that the terror act acquires its importance" (Hess 1998: 115). Killings, then, are mostly used to set an example.

If the Mafia relies on close bonds and a loyalty to certain norms and codes of conduct, as well as coercive strategies to get what they want, the status of the leader, most often the head of the family, is very much a part of its structure and power. Needless to say, perhaps, his main aim is to increase material wealth for himself and those associated with him. Hess points out, though, that the leader's "position and power enable the *mafioso* to act the part of patron, of protector, of the noble, chivalrous cavalier who unselfishly helps the weak" (1998: 133). As such, his position is arguably sanctioned by those surrounding him and "any citizen can turn to the *mafioso* with a request for help" (1998: 133). Another important aspect of his function is that of mediator in conflicts, which shows the "prestige and respect" (1998: 134) he holds. Still, while seemingly acting benevolently, the *mafioso* often uses his position to protect and further his own and the group's interests.

As will emerge in the discussion that follows, several dominant features of the Mafia outlined above as well as Scorsese's treatment of them in many of his films, are of the utmost significance in my argument on Scorsese's adaptation of Wharton's novel, as I hold that the world of

the Mafia and that of polite society in 1870's New York, both as represented by the filmmaker, share a great many traits.

The Tribal World of The Age of Innocence*: Conformity and Conflict*

For a viewer not tuned into the 'Scorsesean palimpsest' suggested above and not familiar with Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, Scorsese's turning to this novel may come as a surprise. However, I would argue that the filmmaker's interest in the novel is not a coincidence, as it arguably deals with the type of Scorsesean conflict as previously discussed. Still, as Helen Killoran shows, the novel *The Age of Innocence* "has drawn a smorgasbord of critical comment on a number of topics" (2001: 93). Early criticism focuses on Wharton's abilities as a writer, particularly "craftsmanship and structure" (Killoran 2001: 93). Reviews also try to locate the novel in a novelistic tradition, seeing similarities to the works of Henry James and Jane Austen, also known for their taut literary style of irony and restraint. Particularly the novel's intertextual relationship to the work of Henry James has been commented on; indeed, as Adeleine R. Tintner points out, *The Age of Innocence* is often viewed as "the most Jamesian of Edith Wharton's novels" (1999: 58). If James and Austen were praised for their literary style, they also explored the tensions between a restrictive environment and the individual's desires. Even if, according to Killoran, modern critics of the past few decades "have raised a potpourri of topics" in discussions of the novel, for example issues of "Puritanism and morality," as well as feminist discussions of matriarchy and patriarchy, the majority have in various ways examined "the frustration and futility of Archer Newland's empty life caused by the weight of social inhibitions" (2001: 94).

Published in 1920, and set in 1870's New York, it is a historical novel characterised by "its almost surgical accuracy" and described as "an elegy for a lost world that is both a tribute to and a cutting analysis of the realm of her childhood" (Waid 2003: xiii). In this, then, the novel is not all that different from several of Scorsese's films, which also try to capture the director's childhood, growing up in New York, more specifically Little Italy, while simultaneously problematising the behaviour in that world. Writing from the perspective of what America had become in the aftermath of the First World War, or what Waid terms

"the unsettling modernity of a post-war world" (2003: xiv), in relation to what it was when she grew up, Wharton depicts a society ruled by what was usually referred to as the "New York four hundred," that is, the "exclusive group, defined by the limits of Mrs. Astor's ballroom and the closest thing to an aristocracy that America had ever known" (Waid 2003: xvi). This world was in effect closed to the 'ordinary' middle-class, constituting "an inaccessible realm of mysteries and manners" (Waid 2003: xvi).

What emerges in the novel, then, is a world which is "rigidly ritualized" (Waid 2003: xvii) at all levels, which relies on inclusion and exclusion, and which does not take kindly to those who do not conform to the established codes. In fact, it seems fruitful to read the novel as an examination of an intricate tribal system; as Nancy Bentley argues, and summarised by Waid, there are collective forces at work which reveal an obsession "with the threat of contamination and the fierce (if bloodless) violence of being excluded from what is called the 'tribe'" (Waid 2003: xvii). As Bentley puts it, "in Wharton's world of customs and manners it is the subtlest shades of decorum that can contain the 'gleam of a knife'" (1995: 63). These concerns represented in the novel and highlighted by Bentley seem to speak to Scorsese's sensibilities; indeed, in her review of the film, Amy Taubin holds that "Scorsese and his collaborator Jay Cocks are almost religiously respectful of Wharton's novel." In addition to the main plot and the main conflicts, this respect, according to the reviewer, can also be found in the details: "Like an archeologist, Scorsese goes to every length in re-creating the 1870s […] There's an awesome collection of period paraphernalia here" (2007: 9). I would suggest that it is also in order to capture the tone of the novel and to create an intimate relationship between novel and film that a narrator voice-over (Joanne Woodward) is exploited throughout the film. The voice-over comments on and clarifies the visual images and thus becomes an authority in the film.

From the very beginning, both the novel and the film establish the notion that the upper circles of society are controlled and governed by covert, often unspoken laws. They open by a night at the opera, an annual social event. Just as opera is arguably stylised life, controlled by strong form, so the behaviour of the upper-class spectators in the audience adheres to old rigid form. Everything at the opera, from dress to seating, is carefully formalised. Even the times of arrival and departure,

as well as means of transport, are regulated. To Newland Archer (Daniel Day-Lewis), we are told in the novel, such regulated behaviour seems "as natural to [him] as all the other conventions on which his life was moulded: such as the duty of using two silver-backed brushes with his monogram in blue enamel to part his hair, and of never appearing in society without a flower (preferably a gardenia) in his buttonhole" (2003: 4). The film script's directions emphasise that "[w]hat we see of him first is the perfect GARDENIA attached to the lapel of his jacket" (Scorsese and Cocks 1995: 1).

It is not a coincidence that a reference is made to a flower as an important marker of taste and social convention. Throughout the novel, the reader is made aware of the code of flowers at social events. The film picks up on this: an understanding of the language of flowers seems to be crucial to a correct interpretation of tacit signals and messages sent through floral arrangements as well as the species of flower used. Thus, for example, at the final dinner for Ellen (Michelle Pfeiffer), the hostess has placed a "lavish centerpiece of Jacqueminot roses and maidenhair" (Scorsese and Cocks 1995: 109) on the long dining room table. According to the lists provided by John H. Young and Kate Greenaway, published in the 1880's and offering guides to the etiquette of flowers, the roses arranged thus would signal "[r]eward of virtue" (Greenaway 2003: 371) and the maidenhair "discretion" (Young 2003: 354). In other words, it seems to constitute praise for Ellen's decision to remain married to her husband, to accept the norms of New York society and leave it, a message that would be understood by the guests.

Thus, there was an intricate system of meaning attached to flowers. Young enthusiastically states: "There is a sentiment attached to flowers, and this sentiment has been expressed in language by giving names to various flowers, shrubs and plants. These names constitute a language, which may be made the medium of pleasant and amusing interchange between men and women" (2003: 350). Therefore, Newland's falling for the temptation to send Ellen a bunch of yellow roses, while sending Lilies-of-the-Valley to his fiancée, May Welland (Winona Ryder), becomes a daring act, indicating passion in a rigidly controlled world. The latter flower would neutrally and somewhat blandly mean "[r]eturn of happiness" (Young 2003: 354), while "the meaning ascribed to yellow roses varies unusually widely [...] Yellow roses are associated variously with jealousy, infidelity, love that will not last, and friendship" (Waid

2003: 51). It is quite clear from Newland's act that he is fascinated and infatuated by Ellen and that he is willing to break social decorum to tell her so, even if he instinctively knows that it is potentially self-destructive and that he may be punished for it by polite society if found out.

If it is a closed world with rigid codes and fixed rituals, it is so because, similar to the Mafia, various walls have been raised to secure that life can go on inside without any major disruptions. Yet, it is also a most vulnerable world, as it is at times suggested by the narrator voice-over; on one occasion, for instance, we hear: "{This was a world balanced so precariously that its harmony could be shattered forever"};[1] later it is stated that "[t]hey 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" (Scorsese and Cocks 1995: 17). It could be speculated that it is because they feel so vulnerable and threatened that walls have been erected. The most important of these, I suggest, are family and family ties, while another wall consists of knowing the codes and barriers, that is, etiquette and accepted behaviour, also referred to as "form" (Scorsese and Cocks 1995: 7), accessible only to a chosen few. Both of these—the reliance on family ties and adherence to form and strictly regulated behaviour and codes—are, as has been highlighted above, central features of the Mafia which have been explored by Scorsese in other films. Early on, the novel establishes the importance of family and kinship, particularly through the "authority on 'family'" (Wharton 2003: 17), Mr. Sillerton Jackson; his knowledge in these matters is vast, we come to understand, as the novel offers a long list of his expertise at family connections (Wharton 2003: 7). In the film, the narrator voice-over states regarding Mr. Jackson (Alec McGowen):

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[1] Although entitled *The Shooting Script*, there are some minor discrepancies between the film and the printed script. What is expressed within brackets— {...}—incorporates what is actually said in the film, that is, what the audience actually hears. If the dialogue in the film and the script is identical, only the script is cited and referred to in my text. Of course, when it comes to textual directions other than the dialogue, only the script can be cited, while some visual images can only be discussed by references to the film itself, as they do not appear in the script.

> Old Mr. Sillerton Jackson was as great an authority on 'family' as Lawrence Lefferts was on 'form.' {The mean and melancholy history of Countess Olenska's European marriage was a buried treasure he hastened to excavate; he carried like a calling-card an entire} register of the scandals and mysteries that he had smoldered under the unruffled surface of society for the last fifty years. (Scorsese and Cocks 1995: 8)

There seems to be a carefully constructed web of connections and ties, and matters that concern family are often decided, we learn, through extensive covert discussions, in the novel variously termed "tribunal" (Wharton 2003: 12) or "family council" (Wharton 2003: 19). Significantly, this suggests a clan-like structure, referred to in the film script as "tribe" (Scorsese and Cocks 1995: 110), not dissimilar to that of the Mafia, where the individual member is expected to be subordinate to the group.

If 'family' constitutes the principal protection against external forces, their lifestyle and norms are also firmly held together by 'form.' As has been shown, this concept comes into play at the opera in the beginning, as well as in the language of flowers. As importantly, it governs the ways in which social interaction is conducted: what text invitation cards should include; what visits could be made when; what dress should be worn when; what drinks should be served with what dish; what dances were appropriate for what occasions. As Bentley convincingly argues in her discussion of the novel, etiquette is crucial in upholding status: "It is these minute aspects of manner, rooted in details of speech, clothing, carriage, and taste, that constitute an invisible force keeping 'different social strata from mixing'" (2003: 449). Leaning on, among others, the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, Bentley holds that etiquette, form and taste are central to what she terms "tribal discipline" (2003: 453), that is, a system by which members of a tribe are controlled and kept in line. In such a system, it becomes important to conform to the rules, but it also becomes important to know how everybody else is adhering to the unspoken laws. The more one knows about the lives and short-comings of others, the stronger one's own position is. As Bentley contends, the novel "shows that the very boundaries that determine cultural identity and meaning are silently—and in times of crisis, actively—policed" (2003: 457). In the film, these boundaries are visually and cinematically shown, among other things, at the first dinner at the Archers, where their rigid and closed world is represented by the candle holders framing, or

indeed boxing in, the characters at the table, while they are discussing Ellen's situation and personality in derogatory terms.

While Mr. Sillerton Jackson is the authority on 'family,' Mr. Lawrence Lefferts (Richard E. Grant), as was mentioned above, is the arbiter of form and taste or, as the narrator voice-over states: "{Lawrence Lefferts […] was New York's foremost authority on form, and his opinion on pumps versus patent-leather Oxfords had never been disputed; on matters of surreptitious romance, his skill went unquestioned}." He seems to have the right to pronounce verdicts on people's behaviour, verdicts that decide the attitudes towards the person in question. In the film, Lefferts' character is toned down somewhat compared to the novel's treatment of him, but towards the end of the film, Mr. Julius Beaufort's (Stuart Wilson) scandals and affairs are commented on in a highly condescending manner. In an after-dinner conversation involving several prominent gentlemen, we hear:

> LEFFERTS
> Beaufort may not receive invitations anymore, but it's clear he still maintains a certain position.
> PHILIP
> Horizontal, from all I've heard.
> […]
> LEFFERTS (indignant)
> If things go on like this, we'll be seeing our children fighting for invitations to swindlers' houses and marrying Beaufort's bastards.
>
> (Scorsese and Cocks 1995: 112)

The control, or policing, of people's behaviour, then, is carried out at all levels and in most areas of private and public life, and figures like Mr. Sillerton Jackson and Mr. Lawrence Lefferts offer assistance to the tribe. However, if there are even greater issues at stake, that is, if the tensions are such that easy verdicts are not sufficient to resolve a problem another, higher, authority is necessary; it is to this higher authority that the members of the tribe turn to get support or help. In *The Age of Innocence*, this position is held by the van der Luydens (Michael Gough and Alexis Smith), as stated in the novel: "They were the arbiters of fashion, the Court of Last Appeal, and they knew it, and bowed to their fate" (2003: 36). Therefore, when New York society has unanimously snubbed the Lovell Mingotts by turning down invitations to a dinner that would introduce Ellen to this world, Mrs. Archer (Sián Phillips) and

Newland appeal to the powerful, godfather-, or don-like Mr. van der Luyden and his wife; indeed, in the novel Mr. van der Luyden is referred to as "a reigning sovereign" (2003: 35). It is noteworthy that in the film script he is referred to as "the patrician" (Scorsese and Cocks 1995: 21), a patrician being of the "upper class in early [ancient] Rome which controlled the government after the expulsion of the kings" (Starr 1971: 254). Thus, not only does Scorsese link Mr. van der Luyden to an extremely powerful position; he also links him to a glorious Roman/Italian past, which in turn implicitly links him to the director's other American-Italian films. To emphasise his position of superiority, the narrator voice-over also says that "[t]he van der Luydens stood above all the city's families" (Scorsese and Cocks 1995: 23). Significantly, the "eradication" of Ellen, as it is called by the narrator voice-over on this occasion (Scorsese and Cocks 1995: 20)—signalling a symbolic death as the film cuts to Ellen while these words are pronounced—is criticised by these supreme judges, who resolve the problem by arranging their own dinner featuring Ellen, thereby offering support to the victims while simultaneously sternly correcting the behaviour of the other members of their society; or as the narrator voice-over stresses: "When the van der Luydens chose, they knew how to give a lesson" (Scorsese and Cocks 1995: 24).

The walls of 'family' and 'form' offer protection to the tribe, shutting out unwelcome intrusions, and the borders are controlled and policed by chosen or self-appointed authorities, such as Mr. Jackson, Mr. Lefferts and Mr. van der Luyden, but also Mr. Letterblair (Norman Lloyd), the legal expert, who keep the members in line and who become tools through which order is upheld. It is my argument that the structures represented in the novel closely resemble those found in organised crime, especially Mafia-like structures dealt with in Scorsese's films. Loyalty and solidarity to the tribe are rewarded through status and a feeling of belonging, while those that do not conform are punished, often through exclusion.

It is in this closed world that Ellen makes her entry. She is immediately felt to be an uncomfortable presence to the insiders, in that her dress and hairstyle at the opera do not follow the code for such occasions. The film script's directions closely follow the descriptions of her in the novel: "We see the back of the COUNTESS's head, her curly brown hair held in place around her temples by a narrow band of

diamonds. […] She wears a distinctive blue velvet gown" (Scorsese and Cocks 1995: 3). In the novel, we are told that this fashion "was then called a 'Josephine look'" (2003: 7). As is pointed out by Waid, this appearance, named after Josephine, the empress of Napoleon Bonaparte, was provocative and "contrasted sharply with the plunging, lace-covered necklines and accentuated bodices" (Wharton 2003: 7n) of the dresses at the time. Thus, Ellen draws attention to herself in unbecoming and inappropriate ways and indirectly embarrasses the family. That Ellen is insensitive in other people's eyes to their etiquette is further illustrated by her behaviour at the van der Luyden dinner. While toning down her dress, being out-dressed by the other women, she breaks the code for social interaction when she leaves her seat to talk to Newland, as the narrator voice-over comments: "It was not the custom in New York drawing rooms for a lady to get up and walk away from one gentleman in order to seek the company of another. […] But the Countess did not observe this rule" (Scorsese and Cocks 1995: 24-25).

Even if Ellen's behaviour at social events may be annoying, it does not really constitute a major threat. However, as she regularly chooses to socialise with figures viewed with suspicion, especially Mr. Beaufort, whose mysterious background and extra-marital affairs make him a figure to be avoided and possibly feared, but also members that could be defined as "bohemian" (Bauer 2003: 478), that is, journalists, writers and artists, she moves from being excentric to being a threat to the established order. Moreover, discussing the novel, Elizabeth Ammons convincingly suggests that Ellen is "orientalized" and therefore constitutes a sexual threat, "with her dark hair, sumptuous low-cut gowns, and seductively close, dim, draped rooms"; according to Ammons, Ellen is finally ejected because "she is *dark*, female, artistic, and sexy" (1995: 83; Ammons' emphasis). The ultimate threat posed by Ellen, though, is her wish to divorce her husband, as such an act would seriously undermine, or even destroy, the stability that this community relies on. What is at stake, then, is the very survival of the tribe, its customs and its privileges. Therefore, she has to be made aware that her plans are neither encouraged nor tolerated. Mr. Letterblair, being the legal spokesperson of the tribe, makes sure that the social interests go hand in hand with the legal ones. As he states to Newland: "Oh their [the family's] position is clear. They are entirely, and rightly, against a

divorce. […] the wisest thing really is to do as the family says. Just let well enough alone" (Scorsese and Cocks 1995: 36-37).

It is not a coincidence that Newland—showing some signs of frustration with the social inhibitions, but being firmly steeped in and shaped by them—is sent to put the case to Ellen. In other words, the lawyer Newland is sent as the messenger to defend the customs of the tribe and point out the consequences if Ellen does not comply. As Pamela Knights argues in her examination of the novel, Newland is cast as "the official voice, the spokesman for Firm and Family, who has to represent the word of all the tribal fathers in the containment of the woman who threatens them" (1995: 23). Arguably, this resembles the pressures resorted to by the Mafia, to put it bluntly, to get what they want through coercion. Consequently, when Newland visits Ellen, we are made aware that the social pressures are such that they simultaneously are above the law and constituting the law: "Our legislation favors divorce. Our social customs don't" (Scorsese and Cocks 1995: 42), Newland tells Ellen. He goes on to point out how unpleasant a divorce suit would be to her. Most importantly, he expresses a badly disguised threat, namely that she would be excised from social interaction if she were to go through with it. Put differently, he makes her an offer she can't refuse: "It's my business to help you see these things just the way the people who are fondest of you see them, all your friends and relations. If I didn't show you honestly how they judge such {matters}, it wouldn't be fair of me, would it?" (Scorsese and Cocks 1995: 43). The film stresses the importance of this threat, when we see that in the fire "[a] log breaks in two and sends up a shower of sparks" (Scorsese and Cocks 1995: 43), suggesting that Ellen's fate is sealed: despite strong emotions, she is in effect stifled, or broken, by the family's powers.

Thus, the tribe's hostile and unsympathetic attitude to Ellen's predicament, voiced by Newland, is a clear indication of how the tribe deals with potentially subversive elements, or those who think they can set their own rules. One strategy is to express covert or overt threats; another is to use malicious gossip that does irreparable damage to their reputation. Frequently, this is done behind their backs at social gatherings. As mentioned above, Mr. Beaufort becomes a victim of such gossip, when his personality and life-style are talked about in condescending ways. Towards the end of the film, it dawns on Newland that, because of his closeness to Ellen, he has himself been a target of the

family's gossip; through the narrator voice-over, we get access to his thoughts:

> Archer saw all the harmless-looking people at the table as a band of quiet conspirators, with himself, and Ellen, the center of their conspiracy. […] He guessed himself to have been, for months, the center of countless silently observing eyes and patiently listening ears. He understood that, somehow, the separation between himself and the partner of his guilt had been achieved. And he knew that now the whole tribe had rallied around his wife. (Scorsese and Cocks 1995: 110)

Newland is ultimately manipulated by May to remain loyal to the family and to honour his marriage to her, when she tells him that she is pregnant. Crucially, the novel implies that Newland's insight that he has been the subject of close observation and gossip is a kind of death; as it "closed in on him like the doors of the family vault" (2003: 201), he feels buried alive. As Knights puts it: "Archer is reintegrated into a stable, if frozen, identity" (1995: 39). In Scorsesean fashion, however, the director chooses to emphasise that this act is one of violence, where those who do not conform run the risk of being punished. Again, the viewer hears Newland's thoughts through the narrator voice-over: "He was a prisoner in the center of an armed camp" (Scorsese and Cocks 1995: 110).

The relative compassion shown to Newland is not shown to Ellen, though, as the threat voiced earlier is mercilessly acted upon. Throughout, the film shows us that Ellen's life in New York will not be tolerated and several scenes symbolically anticipate her fate; on one occasion early on, for example, Newland and Mr. Sillerton Jackson discuss Ellen's plans, and while Mr. Sillerton Jackson speaks arrogantly about her, he snips his cigar, an act signalling punishment. This violent act is repeated when Newland and Mr. Letterblair discuss Ellen's wish to get a divorce; while Mr. Letterblair dismisses her ideas, he, too, snips his cigar in a fashion similar to that of Mr. Sillerton Jackson. When we see Newland and Mr. Letterblair dine together in the next scene, the latter continues firmly to oppose Ellen's plans, and while we hear his harsh words on her, the meat is cut, as if Ellen is symbolically sliced up, or killed, reminiscent of killings in Scorsese's Mafia films.

Due to her reluctance to accept life as it is lived in the fashionable New York circles, Ellen is gradually isolated, until she is finally excised, under the disguise of a friendly farewell dinner. Significantly, it is carefully implied that this act is in fact a symbolic killing off of Ellen,

and the novel refers to it as "the old New York way of taking life 'without effusion of blood'" (2003: 201), clearly signalling the underlying "ritualized" violence (Bentley 1995: 60) in that act. The film, however, more subtly indicates this violent act in the narrator voice-over's referring to the tribe's ruthless behaviour as follows: "The silent organization which held this small world together was determined to put itself on record" (Scorsese and Cocks 1995: 114); on this occasion, no cracks are visible in the wall of conformity, or as it is termed, "the seamless performance of this ritual" (Scorsese and Cocks 1995: 114). These words accompanying the visual images representing a compact and unanimous insistence on removing Ellen from this society leave the viewer in no doubt that what he/she witnesses is a kind of execution, Mafia-style. As importantly, that this act should indeed be seen as an execution is strongly suggested by Scorsese's own perception of it, in that in the script's directions he explicitly links it to this particularly brutal element of warfare: "CAMERA pans with all this social choreography. ARCHER watches the ritual as if it were an elaborate rehearsal for *a firing squad*" (Scorsese and Cocks 1995: 114; my italics). Their symbolic execution is successful, as Ellen is excised, leaving for Europe. Thus, order is restored.

Conclusion

It should be clear from my discussion that to a large extent Scorsese's adaptation of Wharton's novel represents conflicts that closely resemble those that many of the director's other films explore, particularly those dealing with organised crime. Admittedly, occasionally one meets similar ideas, but they are largely undeveloped; for example, in his recent *Gangster Priest: The Italian American Cinema of Martin Scorsese* (2006), Robert Casillo points to these similarities, but leaves the link unexplored and in fact seems surprised by his own findings:

> Strange as it may seem, the codes and rituals of the Italian American underworld, which specify the limits this subculture places upon violence as well as its rules of inclusion and exclusion, find their upper-class analogue in the late-nineteenth-century Manhattan society depicted in *The Age of Innocence*, in which the malicious strategies of social acceptance, conformity, containment, and ostracism take not an overtly violent form, as with the mob, but lie concealed beneath the courtesies and benignities of social ritual. (2006: 395-96)

If one agrees that violence, coercion and punishment are central to many of Scorsese's films, as I have discussed, then Lawrence S. Friedman's assessment that "[i]t is primarily [the] theme of sexual frustration that links the apparently anomalous *The Age of Innocence* to Scorsese's other films" (1997: 179) is oddly incongruous with what actually seems to be going on in much of his work. Reviews, too, mainly focused on the frustrated relationship between Newland and Ellen, rather than on the underlying violence. When trying to assess the film, Georgia Brown, for example, calls it "a male weepie" (2007: 9), and sees in "passion's silences" (2007: 9) the film's main strength. In a similar vein, Amy Taubin singles out the theme of being in love as the central one, contending that "[t]here's only an endless yearning, a lifetime of unfilled desire" (2007: 12). And even if Mark Nicholls emphasises "the dictates of the tribal organisation surrounding [Newland]" (2004: 29), he principally sees the film as "a representation of the male melancholic imagination *par excellence*" (2004: 16); the film's main focus, then, according to Nicholls, is Newland's obsessive "search for a state of melancholia that will satisfy his desire" (2004: 17), that is, a desire that he wants "unsatisfied" (2004: 16).

It is also interesting to note that in a penetrating exploration of Scorsese's adaptation, Brigitte Peucker devotes some time to the film's intertextual relationship to other media, particularly art and film. For example, she deals with the ways in which the film makes extensive use of painting; Scorsese, she argues, "frames Wharton's characters in painterly effects" (2003: 508). What she refers to as "Scorsese's painterly aesthetic" (2003: 508) finds artistic expression in, among other things, camera movement which "suggests the sweep of the artist's paintbrush" (2003: 508). Furthermore, she convincingly suggests considerable cinematic intertextuality between this film and other films. She particularly points to the French New Wave director Eric Rohmer's *Marquise of O...* (1976), which Scorsese had seen before making *The Age of Innocence* and which is "notable for the manner in which it approaches a literary text suffused with references to the visual arts" (2003: 510), and to the work of the German director Rainer Werner Fassbinder, who is "also very much concerned with the conjunction of literature, painting, and theatre" (2003: 511). Pecker sees, then, several layers of intertextuality, or intermediality in Scorsese's film. It is

somewhat surprising, therefore, that in what is in many respects a convincing discussion, she makes no references whatsoever to Scorsese's own films, thereby failing to see, I would argue, other important intertextual dimensions present in his adaptation. However, in my reading of the film, Ellen's crime against and punishment by the tribe is the film's main concern, echoing Scorsese's gangster films and creating an intertextual dialogue with them as well as with Wharton's novel; indeed, through Scorsese's adaptation new readings of the novel open up.

If one accepts Hutcheon's notion of "palimpsestic intertextuality" (2006: 21) and applies it to Scorsese's *oeuvre*, then one also has to accept that Scorsese's adaptation of this novel is not an anomaly, as seems to be the dominant view among critics, but very much congruous with several of his films that I have commented on above. The difference is, of course, that rather than focusing on the subculture of organised crime, *The Age of Innocence* deals with life in the polished drawing rooms of the upper-class. Still, the two worlds ultimately share structures and behaviour in significant and uncomfortable ways. The violence seen in Scorsese's version of *The Age of Innocence* is not physical and it does not result in beatings, killings and blood-baths committed by the Mafia to maintain control of their organisation, as in, for example, *Mean Streets*, *GoodFellas* and *Casino*. Nevertheless, even if the violence is not tangible, Scorsese's treatment of the novel shows us in no uncertain terms that similar mechanisms of inclusion, exclusion, coercion and punishment are at work among the 1870's New York social élite.

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