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The Metaphorical Use of Flowers in *The Age of Innocence*

Chou You

1. Introduction

The Age of Innocence by Edith Wharton (1920) tells the story about the upper classes of old New York in the 1870s. Newland Archer, who is from one of the big families of New York, is engaged to marry May Welland, who also comes from one of the most prominent families in old New York. Before the engagement, May's cousin Ellen returns to New York from Europe after a scandal: she would get divorced from her Polish count husband because of his infidelity. Newland used to have a crush on Ellen, and this time he becomes even crazier about Ellen. The choice between the conventional and “innocent” girl May and the unconventional and “mature” lady Ellen creates the ups and downs of this novel.

Descriptions of flowers play an important role in the novel. They are not just as the ornaments in the ritzy environment and glitzy life, but also have the potential and metaphorical meanings. And the flowers always show up with the characteristic female characters—Ellen and May in particular. In this paper, I will analyze the metaphorical use of flowers in this novel, centering on these two completely different female characters—Ellen and May.

2. The different aspects of Ellen and May

In order to study the metaphorical use of flowers in the novel and what is the connection between the flowers and the female characters, I will begin with a simple introduction of the common sides and different sides of Ellen and May.

2.1 The social backgrounds of Ellen and May

Both Ellen and May come from the Mingotts family, which is one of the strongest branches of New York's family tree. Ellen's parents are continental wanderers, but Ellen was taken care by her aunt, Medora Manson, after Ellen's parents' deaths when she was still a child. Her aunt was a wanderer and “repeatedly widowed” (p.56). So the life with Aunt Medora was turbulent and roaming, too. Differing from Ellen, May grows up in a conventional family, being educated to be polite and follow the rules. The different growth backgrounds and the education they received make them have the different personalities.

2.2 The debuts of Ellen and May in the novel

The debut of one character may have a crucial influence on the first impression on one character, especially the readers of a novel or the audiences of a movie. So how about the debuts of Ellen and May? The book begins the story in a theater, and that is where Ellen and May show up.

The debut of May Welland is described as follows:

On this occasion, the front of the box was filled by her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Lovell Mingott, and her daughter, Mrs. Welland; and slightly withdrawn behind these brocaded matrons sat a young girl in white with eyes ecstatically fixed on the stage-lovers. As Madame Nilsson's “M'ama!” thrilled out above the silent house (the boxes always stopped talking during the Daisy Song) a warm pink mounted to the girl's cheek, mantled her brow to the roots of her fair braids, and suffused the young slope of her breast to the line where it met a modest tulle tucker fastened with a single gardenia. She dropped her eyes to the immense bouquet of lilies-of-the-valley on her knee, and Newland Archer saw her white-gloved finger-tips touch the flowers softly. (pp. 3-4)

With the eyes of Newland, we notice that May wears white, and the pink make-up makes her look adorable and cute. The colors connected with May are bright and warm; she held the “lilies-of-the-valley” and her tucker was fastened with “a single gardenia”. The bright colors and the white flowers symbolize what May is in Newland's eyes—pure and innocent. As a result, the first impression of May from the readers tends to

be connected with the color white which is the symbol of PURITY and INNOCENCE.

The following is the description of the debut of Ellen:

Newland Archer, following Lefferts's glance, saw with surprise that his exclamation had been occasioned by the entry of a new figure into old Mrs. Mingott's box. It was that of a slim young woman, a little less tall than May Welland, with brown hair growing in close curls about her temples and held in place by a narrow band of diamonds. The suggestion of this headdress, which gave her what was then called a "Josephine look," was carried out in the cut of the dark blue velvet gown rather theatrically caught up under her bosom by a girdle with a large old-fashioned clasp. (p. 7)

Note how this differs from May. Ellen's coloring is much darker. As for the style, Ellen is unusual and theatrical in Newland's and maybe other attendant people's eyes. In a word, it would be the "Josephine look" as mentioned. The "Josephine look" is named after the first French Empire's wife, Josephine, empress of France, who presents with "a short waist, decolleté bodice, flowing skirt, and short, puffed sleeves". In other words, it is the style which is a little theatrical and exaggerated. From that, we know that Ellen, who came back to New York from Europe, is out of bounds in the eyes of New Yorkers at that time. Comparing the innocence and purity of May, Ellen is mature and mysterious.

The common feature of the two women's debuts is that they both from the view of Newland, the central male character in the novel. The reader tends to share the same perspective of Newland in the way he observes the two ladies. We can only see what Newland sees, and what Newland does not notice, we do not know, neither. And of course, the thoughts that Newland held for the two ladies affect the way we think of them to a degree. So, as the results of these first impressions, we easily tend to consider that May is innocent and pure like the white lilies-of-the-valley because Newland does, while on the other hand, we guess that Ellen is mysterious and exotic because Newland does.

2.3 Ellen and May at the end of the novel

At the end of the novel, May got married with Newland and gave birth to two babies with him. After a long and peaceful whole life, she died of the infectious pneumonia. On the other hand, Ellen never got married again and lived in Europe alone.

3. Analyses

3.1 Correspondences between female characters and the flowers

Table 1 and 2 show the relationships between flowers and the female characters. Attributes in standard typeface are the author's common understanding as one who is not especially florally literate in Western culture; attributes in italics are according to *A Victorian Flower Dictionary: The Language of Flowers Companion* (2011). Depending on the time and place, there may be other implicit messages about how the flowers connect with the images of the characters. But by the times that flowers show up together with characters, it can be expected that some connections have been made between the flowers and the characters in the mind of the reader. The relationships between the female characters and the male characters also become clearer.

Table 1. Correspondences between Ellen and flowers

The kind of the flowers Ellen got	The color of the flowers	The language of the flowers	The number of times mentioned	The sender of the flowers
yellow roses	yellow, sun-golden	friendship, betrayal, <i>decrease of love jealousy</i>	5	Newland
orchids	not mentioned	love, beauty	2	Mr.Beaufort
carnations	not mentioned	love, fascination	1	Henry van der Luyden
azaleas	not mentioned	temperance	1	Mr.Beaufort
crimson roses	crimson, deep red	love, honor, faith, <i>bashful shame</i>	4	Count Olenski

Table 2. Correspondences between May and flowers

The kind of the flowers May got	The color of the flowers	The language of the flowers	The number of times mentioned	The sender of the flowers
lilies-of-the-valley	white	humility, sweetness, purity, <i>the return of happiness</i>	8	Newland
lilies	white	humility, sweetness, purity	3	Newland

3.1.1 Analysis of the kinds of flowers

From the tables, we can see that Ellen received five kinds of flowers which are speaking five different flower languages, while May received the flowers just from her fiancé Newland and even lilies-of-the-valley and lilies are different kinds of flowers, but in the context, the lilies is the simply way to express “lilies-of-the-valley”, they are the same thing in the novel.

3.1.2 Analysis of the senders of flowers

As mentioned before, there are main four senders of the flowers to Ellen: Newland, the fiancé of May, niece of Ellen; Mr. Beaufort, a controversial business man; Henry van der Luyden, the most powerful person in New York City at that time; and Count Olenski, the husband of Ellen, who has cheated on Ellen.

3.1.3 Analysis of the colors of flowers

After talking about the kinds and the senders of the flowers, the colors of the flowers are also interesting to study about. The kinds and the colors are the messages that the senders to send out, presenting the different images that the receiver presents to them. The flowers that Ellen received are colorful, which suggests that the senders are seeing her in different ways. On the other side, the flowers that May received are only white (from Newland), which suggests that she means to Newland is chasteness and purity.

Here are my preliminary analyses of the relationship between the flowers and the female characters from the tables. Section 3.2 will list the scenes where the flowers show up, and I will try to make a deeper analysis of the flowers and their metaphorical meanings.

3.2 The specific analyses of the flowers and their metaphorical meanings

3.2.1 The scenes of Ellen and her flowers

All of the specific examples about Ellen and her flowers are given in five main groups according to the different scenes in the novel.

A. Newland visited Ellen for the first time

(1) *As he wrote a word on his card and waited for an envelope he glanced about the embowered shop, and his eye lit on a cluster of yellow roses. He had never seen any as sun-golden before, and his first impulse was to send them to May instead of the lilies. But they did not look like her—there was something too rich, too strong, in their fiery beauty.* (p. 77)

It is the first time that yellow roses came into Newland's and the readers' views just after the first private talk between Newland and Ellen. As mentioned in the context, Newland "had never seen any as sun-golden before", which just implies that Newland had never seen any one like Ellen before. The first moment, Newland wanted to send the yellow roses to May because they are beautiful and the roses are always connected with love, but "they did not look like her". What is suited to May has to be the white and delicate lilies-of-the-valley from Newland's gaze. Who is suited to the "too rich, too strong" and "fiery beauty"? Who is shining as sun-golden? It is Ellen. From the yellow roses, we gather what Ellen looks like in the eyes of Newland.

B. Newland went to see May after he visited Ellen for first time

(2) *He looked sideways at her fruit-like cheek and felt rich and secure enough to add: "When I sent your lilies yesterday afternoon I saw some rather gorgeous yellow roses and packed them off to Madame Olenska. Was that right?"* (p. 80)

(3) *"How dear of you! Anything of that kind delights her. It's odd she didn't mention it: she lunched with us today, and spoke of Mr. Beaufort's having sent her wonderful orchids, and cousin Henry van der Luyden a whole hamper of carnations from Skuytercliff. She seems so surprised to receive flowers. Don't people send them in Europe? She thinks it such a pretty custom."* (p. 80)

Newland confessed to May that he had sent the yellow roses to Ellen when he sent the lilies-of-the-valley to May after some hesitation. And from the discourse of May, we get the information that not just Newland but also Mr. Beaufort and Henry van der Luyden sent the flowers to Ellen. Through the flowers that Ellen got from different men, we can sense how each of the senders of flowers views Ellen. It would seem that the flowers are not just gifts and wishes, but also the messages of the words that the senders could not say directly.

C. Newland visited Ellen for the second time

(4) *As Archer entered he was smiling and looking down on his hostess, who sat on a sofa placed at right angles to the chimney. A table banked with flowers formed a screen behind it, and against the orchids and azaleas which the young man recognised as tributes from the Beaufort hot-houses, Madame Olenska sat half-reclined, her head propped on a hand and her wide sleeve leaving the arm bare to the elbow.* (p. 103)

Newland thought the flowers of orchids and azaleas were sent from Mr. Beaufort subconsciously. Maybe he got the information from May that Ellen received the orchids once before, so it seems like a reasonable speculation that the sender of the orchids is Mr. Beaufort. This scene shows us that Newland did really care about the life of Ellen, even the little trivial thing such as the flowers on the table. From this time, we can sense that the jealousy of other men who might have special feelings for Ellen came into Newland's mind.

D. Three consecutive days between the yellow roses and Newland

(5) *"Do you think," she asked, glancing toward the stage, "he will send her a bunch of yellow roses tomorrow morning?"*

Archer reddened, and his heart gave a leap of surprise. He had called only twice on Madame Olenska, and each time he had sent her a box of yellow roses, and each time without a card. She had never before made

any allusion to the flowers, and he supposed she had never thought of him as the sender. (p. 116)

The flowers sent by Newland to Ellen were anonymous, but Ellen found out the sender without a card could be Newland. And as a code, she would receive the yellow roses each time when Newland visited Ellen. As a result, the yellow roses became an indication, the indication that Newland would visit Ellen's house and create a private meeting between them. So when Ellen asked Newland if the woman on the stage would get "a bunch of yellow roses tomorrow morning", is more like an invitation to Newland in secret.

(6) *The next morning Archer scoured the town in vain for more yellow roses. In consequence of this search he arrived late at the office, perceived that his doing so made no difference whatever to any one, and was filled with sudden exasperation at the elaborate futility of his life.* (p. 124)

(7) *From the office he sent a note by messenger to Madame Olenska, asking if he might call that afternoon, and begging her to let him find a reply at his club; but at the club he found nothing, nor did he receive any letter the following day. This unexpected silence mortified him beyond reason, and though the next morning he saw a glorious cluster of yellow roses behind a florist's window-pane, he left it there.* (p. 125-126)

After getting the indication from Ellen of the "yellow roses date", Newland was searching the chance to visit Ellen's house, but he did not get the reply from Ellen as he had expected. Not receiving the reply from Ellen was seen as a humiliation to Newland. So the next day, when Newland saw the yellow roses, the indication of their private meeting, reminding him of the broken arrangement between them, he just ignored them and went away angrily and disappointedly.

E. A talk between Newland and Ellen's aunt Medora at Ellen's house

(8) *These three persons stood together on the hearth-rug, their eyes fixed on an extraordinarily large bouquet of crimson roses, with a knot of purple pansies at their base, that lay on the sofa where Madame Olenska usually sat.*

"What they must have cost at this season—though of course it's the sentiment one cares about!" the lady was saying in a sighing staccato as Archer came in. (p.157)

The roses are not yellow, or white, but crimson—the color of passion and the blazing love. The sender of the flowers has to have the strong feelings and emotions to the receiver. And the people in Ellen's house commented the action as "it's the sentiment one cares about". This is a good warm-up to reveal the sender as follows.

(9) *"Ah, yes, " the Marchioness acquiesced. "So she describes it—my sensitive child! But on the material side, Mr.Archer; if one may stoop to consider such things; do you know what she is giving up? Those roses there on the sofa—acres like them, under glass and in the open, in his matchless terraced gardens at Nice! Jewels—historic pearls: the Sobieski emeralds—sables—but she cares nothing for all these! Art and beauty, those she does care for, she lives for, as I always have; and those also surrounded her. Pictures, priceless furniture, music, brilliant conversation—ah, that, my dear young man, if you'll excuse me, is what you've no conception of here! And she had it all; and the homage of the greatest. She tells me she is not thought handsome in New York—good heavens! Her portrait has been painted nine times; the greatest artists in Europe have begged for the privilege. Are these things nothing? And the remorse of an adoring husband?"* (p. 160-161)

It is a long but very important part of all the discourses. The speaker is Ellen's aunt —Medora Manson, who raised Ellen up after Ellen's parents' death. This time Aunt Medora was asked by Count Olenski to persuade Ellen to go back to Europe. And the roses could be inferred to have been sent by Ellen's husband to make her happy. She told Newland the things what Ellen owns in Europe—acres of glorious roses, historic jewels, priceless sables, brilliant conversations and high reputation and great compliments. But "she cares nothing for about all of these". At this moment, the "roses" sum up the other material things – -sables, jewel, her portrait and so on—in parallel, which means nothing to Ellen; but to most of the people, the rich material life and high reputation of society could be a huge temptation, and some people are even chasing them for a whole life. No matter what is inside, no matter what the real feeling is, just for the

glossy appearance and “stable” life in the old-fashion society are what seem to matter to many in New York, but Ellen seems to care nothing about it.

(10) “Here she comes, ” she said in a rapid whisper; and then, pointing to the bouquet on the sofa: “Am I to understand that you prefer that, Mr.Archer? After all, marriage is marriage... and my niece is still a wife...” (p. 162)

As they had talked before, the bouquet of roses symbolize the rich material life, high reputation and “stable” life in appearance. When Aunt Medora pointed to the flowers on sofa and asked if Newland preferred them, she was still trying to convince Newland to persuade Ellen to go back to her husband—“After all, marriage is marriage...”, the marriage in New York was not just because of love and faith between the couple, but also containing other factors. Considering all of the things, the best choice for Ellen was to go back and to continue the life with valuable material possessions and a good reputation instead of leading such a free but controversial life. “... and my niece is still a wife...”, Aunt Medora held the old-fashioned thought that as a wife, it is not good to be yourself too much, Ellen needs to go back and keep the marriage going on, even if Ellen’s husband was cheating on her, because after all, Ellen “is still a wife...”

(11) “We were saying, my dear, that here was something beautiful to surprise you with,” Mrs.Manson rejoined, rising to her feet and pointing archly to the flowers. Madame Olenska stopped short and looked at the bouquet. Her colour did not change, but a sort of white radiance of anger ran over her like summer lightning. “Ah,” she exclaimed, in a shrill voice that the young man had never heard, “who is ridiculous enough to send me a bouquet? Why a bouquet? And why tonight of all nights? I am not going to a ball; I am not a girl engaged to be married. But some people are always ridiculous.” (p. 163)

As Ellen joined Newland and Mrs. Manson, she noticed the bouquet of flowers and realized that they were from her husband. She pretended to be cool with it, but “she exclaimed, in a shrill voice that the young man had never heard”. And from what follows this part, Ellen asked her maid Nastasia to give the flowers away. Ellen did receive the flowers from people and even got the yellow roses from Newland, but she had never behaved so angrily and gave the flowers away. However, because of the sender of the flowers and the reason why the flowers were sent, she commented this was ridiculous. We know the firm standing of Ellen to the broken marriage and her unfaithful husband. She wanted to throw the beautiful roses away, just like that she wanted to throw the rich but empty life away. Ellen kind of made a decision; however, Newland was confused about the choice.

3.2.2 The scenes of May and her flowers

As for May’s part, although the kinds and the senders of the flowers are not as varied as Ellen’s, the scenes are also organized into five groups.

A. The debut of May in the theater and the party after the opera

(1) On this occasion, the front of the box was filled by her daughter-in-law, Mrs.Lovell Mingott, and her daughter, Mrs.Welland; and slightly withdrawn behind these brocaded matrons sat a young girl in white with eyes ecstatically fixed on the stage-lovers. As Madame Nilsson’s “M’ama!” thrilled out above the silent house (the boxes always stopped talking during the Daisy Song) a warm pink mounted to the girl’s cheek, mantled her brow to the roots of her fair braids, and suffused the young slope of her breast to the line where it met a modest tulle tucker fastened with a single gardenia. She dropped her eyes to the immense bouquet of lilies-of-the-valley on her knee, and Newland Archer saw her white-gloved finger-tips touch the flowers softly. (pp. 3-4)

(2) “The darling!” thought Newland Archer, his glance flitting back to the young girl with the lilies-of-the-valley. “She doesn’t even guess what it’s all about.” And he contemplated her absorbed young face with a thrill of possessorship in which pride in his own masculine initiation was mingled with a tender reverence for her abysmal purity. (pp. 4-5)

It is the first appearance of May Welland (Archer) in the novel. She was in white and also wore white gloves. We all know that the color white always represents the purity and virginity, especially in connection with young ladies. So the bouquet of white lilies-of-the-valley held by May could be seen in coordination with the white dress and white gloves. As a result, the first impression of May from readers tends to be connected with the color white which is the symbol of PURITY and INNOCENCE.

When there came the scene that Newland Archer thought that “She doesn’t even guess what it’s all about”, the lilies-of-the-valley showed up again. If the first scene didn’t tell us what the view dose Newland holds of May directly, now we know—Newland believes that “her abysmal purity” means she “doesn’t even guess what it’s all about.”

(3) *Miss Welland, evidently about to join the dancers, hung on the threshold, her lilies-of-the-valley in her hand (she carried no other bouquet), her face a little pale, her eyes burning with a candid excitement. A group of young men and girls were gathered about her, and there was much hand-clasping, laughing and pleasantry on which Mrs. Welland, standing slightly apart, shed the beam of a qualified approval.* (p. 20)

May with her lilies-of-the-valley showed up in the ball after the opera, and was joined by a group of young men and girls. She is the center of the group, and the impression she gives to other people is of a lady who is pure and non-aggressive just like the white lilies-of-the-valley in her hands. From the sentences (1) to (3), we know that both Newland and May use the lilies-of-the-valley as the representation of May. Newland sees May as pure and innocent as the white lilies-of-the-valley, while May also prefers to be represented as the white lilies-of-the-valley.

(4) *As he spoke he took a swift glance about the conservatory, assured himself of their momentary privacy and catching her to him laid a fugitive pressure on her lips. To counteract the audacity of this proceeding he led her to a bamboo sofa in a less secluded part of the conservatory, and sitting down beside her broke a lily-of-the-valley from her bouquet. She sat silent, and the world lay like a sunlit valley at their feet.* (p. 22)

The action of breaking the flower takes on a particular meaning. To look at this in another way, we need to know the verb “to deflower”, which is a euphemism for having sex with a lady who has not had sex before. There are some statements about the flower in Chinese, too. “采花大盜” could be translated into “the flower-picking robber”, which refers to a man who forces young girls to have sex with him, while the young virgin young girls are often called “黄花闺女” (floral girls). So, in this part, the flower has the symbolic meaning of female sexuality and the chastity/virginity of May.

B. The day that Newland visited Ellen for the first time

(5) *As he went out into the wintry night, New York again became vast and imminent, and May Welland the loveliest woman in it. He turned into his florist’s to send her the daily box of lilies-of-the-valley which, to his confusion, he found he had forgotten that morning.* (p. 77)

Here comes the source of the lilies-of-the-valley that May has—She receives the lilies-of-the-valley from her finance Newland everyday. But, the day Newland went to Ellen to talk, he forgot to send the daily lilies-of-the-valley to the “loveliest woman” in New York on time, which implies that Ellen distracted the attention of Newland from May.

(6) *As he wrote a word on his card and waited for an envelope he glanced about the embowered shop, and his eye lit on a cluster of yellow roses. He had never seen any as sun-golden before, and his first impulse was to send them to May instead of the lilies. But they did not look like her—there was something too rich, too strong, in their fiery beauty.* (p. 77)

Here is the occasion where lilies-of-the-valley and yellow roses showed up together for the first time. As it is the first time that yellow roses came into Newland’s and readers’ views, more details and descriptions are put on the yellow roses in this part. Lilies-of-the-valley plays a role as a comparison to the yellow roses. And from the contrast between lilies-of-the-valley and yellow roses, we can read the different understandings from Newland of May and Ellen. Because he sent the lilies-of-the-valley to May as usual,

while sending the yellow roses to Ellen after a consideration. At this time, the flowers stand the understandings and the ideals that Newland hold to the ladies.

C. Newland went to see May after he visited Ellen for first time

(7) *"It's so delicious—waking every morning to smell lilies-of-the-valley in one's room !"* she said. (p. 79)

(8) *He looked sideways at her fruit-like cheek and felt rich and secure enough to add: " When I sent your lilies yesterday afternoon I saw some rather gorgeous yellow roses and packed them off to Madame Olenska. Was that right?"* (pp. 79-80)

This scene happened after the day that Newland talked to Ellen and sent the yellow roses to Ellen when he sent the lilies-of-the-valley to May as usual. The lilies-of-the-valley from Newland everyday could be seen as the love and longing from fiancé to fiancée. May said she likes to wake to smell lilies-of-the-valley every morning, which I think can also be explained as meaning she likes to wake to feel the love and longing from Newland. And what is more, leading the topic to lilies-of-the-valley also reminded Newland of the accident when he was late to send the lilies-of-the-valley as usual. May pretends to be cool with that, but maybe she still cares about the late flowers and the reason behind it. The lily is a different kind of flowers from the lily-of-the-valley, but according to the context, we all know the lilies Newland mentioned here refer to the lilies-of-the-valley that Newland sends to May everyday.

D. The day Newland and May got married

(9) *The bridesmaids' eight bouquets of white lilac and lilies-of-the-valley had been sent in due time, as well as the gold and sapphire sleeve-links of the eight ushers and the best man's cat's-eye scarf-pin; ...* (p.180)

As the representative flower of the bride May, lilies-of-the-valley and the rare white lilac form the bouquets of the bridesmaids. Of course, the color white is always regarded as the theme of a wedding ceremony, but in this situation, they are especially chosen for the pure and innocent May. The lilies-of-the-valley also means "the return of happiness", which is the reason why it is often used as decorations in weddings. From the perspective of May, Newland is her happiness, and Newland returns to her side finally. But, now it is an ironical symbol of the return of Newland who is torn between May and Ellen.

(10) *Archer opened his eyes (but could they really have been shut, as he imagined?), and felt his heart beginning to resume its usual task. The music, the scent of the lilies on the altar, the vision of the cloud of tulle and orange-blossoms floating nearer and nearer, the sight of Mrs.Archer's face suddenly convulsed with happy sobs, the low benedictory murmur of the Rector's voice, the ordered evolutions of the eight pink bridesmaids and the eight black ushers: all these sights, sounds and sensations, so familiar in themselves, so unutterably strange and meaningless in his new relation to them, were confusedly mingled in his brain.* (p. 185)

When the wedding of Newland and May became real, Newland confused himself by "the music", "the scent of the lilies", and "all these sights, sounds and sensations". I believe "the scent of lilies" or the lilies are the metaphor of the days and memories between Newland and May, or more straightforwardly, is the objectification of his fiancée May. This time, the days and the memories with May and the person May got Newland confused and lost. As for what he is confused about, maybe the choice of getting married with May or the future of them, or the life of himself, or all of them. This is an indication that Archer becomes more and more aware of his depressive imprisonment for a whole life. One day, "To Archer, May becomes the symbol of all that he wishes to escape." (Wershoven, 1982:86)

E. Newland recalled the memories after they had been married for two years

(11) *Though May's outline was slightly heavier, as her goddess-like build had foretold, her athletic erectness of carriage, and the girlish transparency of her expression, remained unchanged: but for the slight languor that Archer had lately noticed in her she would have been the exact image of the girl playing with the bouquet of lilies-of-the-valley on her betrothal evening. He face seemed an additional appeal to his*

pity: such innocence was as moving as the trustful clasp of a child. (p. 324)

The mention of lilies-of-the-valley for the last time was the day when Newland and May got married. And after that, when Newland saw May in her bridal satin two years later after their wedding, he fell into the old memory of May. He recalled the girl with lilies-of-the-valley. He recalled the girl who he thought was lovely and thoughtful. He recalled all the goods of May after the two-year marriage, and then “an uncontrollable longing seized him to tell her the truth, to throw himself to her generosity, and ask for the freedom he had once refused. (p.324) ” May is still the kind and innocent lady in his eyes like the lilies-of-the-valley as before, but what he wants is to get rid of all the life he has now, and leave her with the excuse of her generosity. And this is the last time that lilies-of-the-valley are mentioned in the novel. Even though he had made the right kind of marriage, May and the marriage only made him want to escape. Meanwhile, Ellen “had become the composite vision of all that he had missed.” (p. 350)

4. Conclusion

From the specific examples of the scenes where the flowers are connected with the female characters, I would like to divide the metaphors of the flowers into groups as follows.

Firstly, the table shows Ellen’s flowers’ metaphorical category.

Table 3. Ellen’s flowers

The metaphor of the flower(s)	The example(s)
A. The personality/characteristics of the character	(1)
B. The media as wishes/miss/ love	(2)(3)
C. A overtone of a secret date/arrangement	(5)(6)(7)
D. The objectification of the rich material life	(8)(9)(10)(11)

Then, here is May’s table.

Table 4. May’s flowers

The metaphor of the flower(s)	The example(s)
A. The personality/characteristics of the character	(1)(2)(3)(9)(11)
B. The symbol of virginity/chastity	(4)
C. The media as wishes/miss/ love	(5)(6)(7)(8)
D. The objectification of the character	(10)

From these tables, we could find that using the flowers as the media to express the wishes or other emotions and to present the characteristics of people are in common. Since different flowers carrying on the different meanings as the languages, using flowers as the media of wishes, longing, or love is still commonplace nowadays. The senders will use the languages of flowers as the indirect messages to express their feelings and thoughts that they prefer not to say directly. And what’s also prevalent in present-day society is that people believe in the connections between flowers and the personalities or characteristics of the senders or receivers. In other words, the flowers have the specific images in senders’ minds and they will send the flowers to the appropriate receivers who are fit to the images.

And the connection between flowers and sexuality or intimacy has a very long history. “In 1982 a professional survey of the uses of flowers in England contained the following comment; ‘ in the words of the psychologist who led our group discussion, “If a man gives a girl roses, she thinks tonight’s the night. ”...’ ” (Goody, p.293). This point has been verified in this study, too. The yellow roses play a part as an overtone of the secret arrangements between Newland and Ellen (quotes (5) (6) (7) of 3.2.1), which show the intimacy or the potential sexual relationship of them. And as for May and Newland, the action of breaking the flowers after their kiss is an obvious sexual overtone as mentioned before.

The crimson rose that Ellen got from her husband is a metaphor for her rich material life in the past, which

is parallel to the other luxurious things. And what's different from other metaphors in May's part is the objectification of the flowers. Newland fell into the memories of May after they'd married for two years, and as the representative of May, the images of lilies-of-valley came into Newland's mind. This time, in a sense, we could consider the flowers as May.

As a conclusion, it is very common to use flowers as the carrier of wishes and other emotions. And they are also sent to deliver the messages from sender to receiver. But, what we need to pay more attention is that the flowers could be used to make a connection with the specific meaning and specific character, especially the relationship between flowers and female sexuality.

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