



# EDITH WHARTON REVIEW

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### "Usually the Reward of Tosh": Edith Wharton's Business Education

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 University of Nevada, Reno, Nevada

Two recent discussions of the turn-of-the-twentieth-century revolution in American publishing place Edith Wharton, as might be expected, with the conservatives, who chose literary and social elitism over the business ethic of the new, "progressive" publishers. The progressives, who succeeded in establishing a national market for magazines and books, broke with tradition by bidding for authors and vigorously promoting books, often far in advance of publication. They assumed the necessity to be both "innovative and anticipatory," and they encouraged writers to think of

themselves not as artists but professionals, writing rapidly and on a regular schedule to produce books that contained what Frank Doubleday called "selling stuff" (Wilson 77). It was the progressives who instituted the "star system," under which editors furiously competed for the few writers capable of producing a best-seller. Wilson observes that Wharton "did not take up the new activist style. Notably [she] instead stayed for some twenty years with the publishing house of Scribner's" (143). Susan Coultrap-McQuin, in her study of American women writers' business careers, similarly notes that "while some women adapted to the professional expectations of the new era, others like Willa Cather and Edith Wharton

## THE EDITH WHARTON SOCIETY BUSINESS MEETING AND DINNER

### New Orleans MLA

Saturday, December 29, 2001

**Business Meeting: 12:00-1:15 p.m., Pontchartrain Ballroom E, Sheraton.**

**Dinner: 6 p.m., Galatoire's Restaurant  
 201 Bourbon St., New Orleans, LA**

**For menu choices, cost and reservations, click on [www.gonzaga.edu/wharton/](http://www.gonzaga.edu/wharton/)  
 Send check or money made payable to The Edith Wharton Society for \$39 (US funds) with menu choices to Julie Olin-Ammentorp, 4491 Swissvale Dr., Manlius, NY 13104 to be received by December 22.**

## BOOK REVIEW

*Mysteries of Paris: The Quest for Morton Fullerton.* By Marion Mainwaring. Foreword by Richard Howard. Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2001. \$30.00 cloth. Foreword and Acknowledgments pp. ix-xii (327 pp.)

This is a book with a mixed agenda. Primarily an account of "The Quest for Morton Fullerton," as its subtitle indicates, *Mysteries of Paris* is at once a detective thriller, an exhaustive scholarly endeavor, and an on-going attack on R.W.B. Lewis.

Mainwaring faults Lewis for his careless assimilation of factual materials that she provided for his biography of Edith Wharton (1975). She acted as a professional researcher for Lewis in Paris, and her grievances were originally set forth in the *Times Literary Supplement* (16 Dec. 1988) after the Lewises' edition of Edith Wharton's *Letters* (1988) recapitulated some of the errors that Mainwaring had found in the biography. Her criticisms have to do with dating of the letters and with what she regards as factual errors and false inferences. Mainly this attack is carried on in exhaustive, thoroughly documented footnotes, many of them drawing heavily upon the approximately 300 letters that Edith Wharton wrote to Morton Fullerton. (See, e.g., 302-03, n. 175, and 305-06, n. 240.) These letters, many of them still unpublished, are now housed in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas/Austin. Altogether, Mainwaring's meticulous documentation and arguments are persuasive and deserve consideration. There is a wealth of information in the notes, including a helpful résumé of the provenance, contents and dating of the collections of Wharton/Fullerton papers at Yale and at Texas. (See 298-99, n. 77.)

On the other hand, the "Texas papers" did not come to light until after the Lewis biography was published, although he and his co-editor Nancy Lewis draw on them in their edition of the letters. And while Mainwaring enters into debate with the Lewises, she does not frame her own findings and judgments with reference to those of Shari Benstock, who in *No Gifts from Chance* (1994) was the first Wharton biographer to have had access to the Wharton correspondence concerning Fullerton. Neither does she "place" her portraits of Fullerton and Wharton within the context of earlier biographers other than Lewis. How does her "strangely hollow man" (66) affirm or depart from the figure created by Cynthia Griffin Wolff, Eleanor Dwight, and Shari Benstock? Here he comes over as

decadent, ruthless, scheming, evasive, corrupt as a man, but also inept and in economic straits as a journalist. "Even if loveless, he was vulnerable in his vanity, and his parents' expectations were always there" (252). His charm remains a given, undemonstrable (6), although his intelligence is manifest.

In this version of Edith Wharton's relationship with Fullerton, is she a more abject, reckless, and naïve figure than heretofore? "He had put a plan to a self-despising woman who believed it might ruin her reputation but knew she would accede to any course that might satisfy her desire. 'I'm not so stupid as you think' is startling in Edith Wharton: surly, even vulgar" (169). "Her requests were usually demands for attention—he had only to reply and she would apologize—and almost pitifully transparent" (196). Can we trust the reminiscent Parisian gossip about Edith that Mainwaring has interwoven? — e.g., "both abnormally rigid and abnormally fussy" (227) or "...Francesca (who told Katharine, who told Will that she didn't like Mrs. Wharton: 'looks worn out and nervous and wants too much 'homage'" (196-97). What of the relationship between Walter Berry and Fullerton? "Edith loved two men who were sophisticated and intelligent: one asexual, the other a satyr, both loveless, both selfish, who got on well together" (228). One would like some indication, if only in the notes, of where Mainwaring is striking out in new directions.

Marion Mainwaring is also a creative writer, author of *Murder in Pastiche* and *Murder at Mid-years*. Wharton scholars will recall that she wrote an ending for *The Buccaneers* (1993), working from Wharton's own notes. As a detective story concerned with the biographer's pursuit of an elusive con man, *Mysteries of Paris* is compelling reading. False starts, discoveries, frustrations, breaks-through, reassessments, corrections of earlier inferences abound. Mainwaring's account is personal, intimate, colloquial, breathless, at times humorous: "If James thought ... Morton lied to him." "Well, hell, Morton did lie" (111). "No time to think. Photocopy now. Use brain later" (126).

As for William Morton Fullerton, his ultimate interest for Wharton scholars would depend on his effect on Edith Wharton as creative writer. In her opening chapter Mainwaring sets up this topic: "Edith Wharton's relations with him can be traced in what may be the most various written record of a

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preferred to publish with Alfred A. Knopf and Charles Scribner's Sons that resisted the modern style" (48). Both critics see the progressives to have masculinized the writing profession, which in the nineteenth century had been hospitable to women: Wilson concludes that as a result women writers typically confronted new obstacles, while Coultrap-McQuin finds that those women with traditional values had "to struggle to adapt to the more modern professional ethos" (199).

In *The Social Construction of American Realism* (1988), Amy Kaplan, too, considers Wharton's relationship to the literary marketplace. Like Coultrap-McQuin and Wilson, she concludes that Wharton resisted pressure to write for the mass market during the first half of her career. Kaplan, however, sees her as more acceptive of progressive publishing than they do, arguing that she used its ideal of the professional to distinguish herself from both the upper-class woman of leisure and the nineteenth-century woman domestic novelist, whose sentimentality had appealed to a wide range of readers. Focusing on Wharton's early writings, she argues that "the ethos of professionalism serve[d] a double purpose [for Wharton]: it posit[ed] a creative realm outside of and antagonistic to the domestic domain, and it imagine [d] a way of entering a cluttered literary marketplace while transcending its vagaries and dependence upon popular taste" (74).

Wharton's large correspondences with Scribners and Appleton along with letters written to her by her friend Walter Berry around the turn of the century tell a story markedly different from either of these. Far from being satisfied with the very conservative Scribners, at an early point she resisted their determination to act as, in Coultrap-McQuin's words, the nineteenth-century "Gentleman Publisher," whose relationship to his writers replicated that of the Victorian father to his children. Encouraged by Berry, she strove to make her relationship with her Scribners editors more businesslike, making clear her approval of the new publishing and her expectation that they play by its rules. Her adoption of a version of the masculine, progressive style at times resulted in serious conflicts with her male editors; at the same time she usually felt very comfortable in Scribners' atmosphere of cultural elitism. She would remain with the firm for more than twenty years not because she approved of their business practices but because she continued to hope that the competition for best-selling writers would force them to grant her a privileged status among their writers, providing her high earnings and greater control of the publishing process without sacrificing her respect or the tasteful production of her

books by a firm associated with her own class. In addition, while the correspondences confirm Kaplan's view that Wharton was attracted to the new ideal of the professional, they also make clear that neither Scribners nor, later, Appleton was willing to grant her a professional status independent of her books' commercial value. As Wilson observes, for the writer, like the entertainer, "professionalism might be bound, almost inevitably, to the principle of exchange....their credentials would be established only in practice, and not before it; and...their status as expert or professional would rely rather heavily on the often-elusive plebescite of mass popularity" (16). As a result, Wharton was forced to become much more the businesswoman than Kaplan suggests; far from separating herself from the "vagaries" of the market, she became an astute reader of them, writing realist fiction calculated to attract a broad spectrum of readers and conducting her career on business principles.<sup>1</sup>

In 1888, when Wharton first submitted her writing to Scribners, the firm exemplified the model of the Gentleman Publisher, and they would change little and then only reluctantly over the twenty years of her association with them. In his history of the house, Roger Burlingame observes that "the Scribners were conservative publishers" (80), who saw no reason to reject the nineteenth-century methods by which they had risen to prestige and prosperity. Wharton's editors, Edward Livermore Burlingame and William Crary Brownell, both more than ten years older than she, were among the most powerful figures in American publishing. At first, as a writer of poems and stories intended for *Scribner's Magazine*, she worked exclusively with Burlingame, a discerning reader with a Ph.D. from the University of Heidelberg, who had edited the magazine from its inception in 1886. When she progressed to writing books, the dignified and reticent Brownell, a prominent critic of art and literature, became her "literary adviser" and editor. Occasionally, usually on matters involving a contract, she communicated with Charles Scribner, Jr., the firm's head. Although she preferred the personable Burlingame, she had similar working relationships with all three men: they assumed that an upper-class woman would (and should) have little interest in or understanding of business, and would therefore defer to their expertise. In the beginning, they also seem to have expected that she, like the few other society women who published with them, would produce a relatively small number of works, whose audience would be drawn largely from her friends.

The contents of *Scribner's Magazine*, in which many Scribners writers published, further reveal the operation of nineteenth-century assumptions about

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gender. In the 1880s and 90s, few women published in the magazine, and most of these contributed a single poem to any one issue. During Wharton's more than twenty-year-long association with the house, the proportion of women contributors increased to about one third of the total. The twelve issues for 1889, when Wharton first appeared, contain 123 works by male authors and only 26 by women. The imbalance is even greater when prose works alone are considered: 97 are by men and only 4 by women. In 1905, when *The House of Mirth* ran in several issues, the number of works by women had increased to 54, while 105 were written by men; 36 of the prose selections are by women and 78 are by men. And in 1913, when Scribner's ran *The Custom of the Country* (Wharton's last novel to be serialized in the magazine), the proportions remained about the same: 45 works, of which 30 are prose, are by women and 114, of which 77 are prose, are by men. In addition, subjects tended to be gender-linked, with men contributing, for example, adventure fiction, analyses of current events and politics, explanations of scientific and technological advances, and accounts of geographical exploration, and women contributing romantic poetry, society or regionalist fiction, and journalistic articles on feminine subjects (nursing, education for girls, the wives of prominent men). Thus, while Scribner's had responded to pressure at the turn of the century to publish more women, probably a result of the Woman's Movement, it nevertheless continued to be predominantly a man's magazine. Wharton's editors would likely have considered it a privilege for a woman to appear in Scribner's, and most women who had succeeded in doing so probably would have agreed.

In addition, although Scribners resisted the star system, by the late nineties they had identified a small group of top-selling male writers to whom they paid the highest royalties and gave the most frequent advertising. These writers, who appeared frequently in Scribner's included such well-known figures as Richard Harding Davis, John Fox, Ernest Seton Thompson, Henry Van Dyke, Thomas Nelson Page, James Cable, Robert Grant, Theodore Roosevelt, James M. Barrie, and Robert Lewis Stevenson. Unlike the progressive publishers, Scribners rarely paid royalties of more than 15%, announced books far in advance of publication, or gave writers individual ads. But other Scribners writers would have been very aware of this group's status. At an early stage, Wharton appears to have determined to be included in the group, but except for the period between *The House of Mirth's* tremendous success

and the appearance of *The Fruit of the Tree* (1907), she did not receive its privileges.

As Scribners began regularly accepting Wharton's work, she increasingly expressed her growing confidence by voicing her opinions about publishing matters. For the most part, Burlingame and Brownell discouraged such intervention: letters written between 1897 and 1905 refer to their having rejected her suggestion that Berkeley Updike, owner of the small Merrymount Press, print her first book, *The Decoration of Houses* (1897) (Wharton, letter to Brownell, 15 July 1897), and failed to consult her about the size of the illustrations or the cover design (Wharton, letter to Brownell, 31 October 1897); denied her request that *The Greater Inclination* (1899), her first collection of stories, be brought out on schedule (Brownell, letter to Wharton, 16 September 1898); rejected a friend's design for the cover of her novella *The Touchstone* (1900) (Wharton, letter to Brownell, 3 March 1900); changed the makeup she had approved for her first novel, *The Valley of Decision* (1902) without informing her (Wharton, letter to Brownell, 4 January 1902); declined to publish her friend Howard Sturgis's novel *Belchamber* (Wharton, letter to Brownell, 28 February 1904)<sup>2</sup>; and denied her request that the Merrymount Press print the travel book *Italian Backgrounds* (1905) (Wharton, letter to Brownell, 26 March 1905). In addition, she began what would be a long series of protests that her books were insufficiently advertised. Her editors did agree to include additional photographs in *The Decoration of Houses* (Lewis, *Biography* 78), to use the title Wharton preferred for *The Greater Inclination* (Brownell to Wharton, 7 Feb. 1899), to bind some copies of *The Greater Inclination* in white and gold to attract Christmas shoppers (Wharton, letter to Brownell, 6 December 1899), and not to change *The Touchstone's* title after it had been used for the magazine version (Wharton, letter to Brownell, 26 February 1900).

The question is perhaps less why Wharton's prominent editors paid little attention to the proposals of a society woman whose work was only beginning to be noticed than why she expected they would. Her letters suggest that from an early point she was aware of her abilities and determined to use them to escape the limitations of the society woman's role. During this period, her editors were encouraging her to produce the highest quality work at a leisurely pace without considering sales, which meant that she had a great deal of artistic freedom but little ability to negotiate with them. Initially, she seems to have assumed that her influence with them would increase as she received strong reviews, but Brownell and Burlingame held that reviewers were rarely qualified judges of literary quality. She then began to point to her respectable sales record, assuming the firm would reward a writer whose books

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had become profitable investments. However, they quickly discouraged her concern with commercial success. Remembering this period in her autobiography (written when her fiction was appearing constantly in mass magazines), Wharton recalls Burlingame's response to her submitting several stories within a fairly short period: "If I were you I wouldn't be in such a hurry. You mustn't risk becoming a magazine bore" (*Backward Glance* 146).<sup>3</sup> She recounts, too, both men's surprise at the respectable sales of *The Decoration of Houses* as they had presumed it "was more likely to succeed as a gift book among my personal friends than as a practical manual" (*Backward Glance* 110). To be sure, Scribners would not have encouraged their male authors to write with the goal of achieving high sales, but as most of these had professional or business careers they were far better positioned than were women to direct their careers as writers. Upper-middle and upper-class women, unless they were supporting a family, risked the degradation experienced by Mrs. Amyot of Wharton's story "The Pelican" if they revealed they enjoyed being paid well.

Wharton's first serious dispute with her editors grew out of her growing suspicion that Scribners had failed to promote her books energetically because they believed she would never achieve more than modest sales. It erupted in the fall of 1898, when Burlingame informed her that Scribner's coverage of the Spanish-American War would delay publication of her stories from *The Greater Inclination*. Because he insisted that several stories appear in the magazine before the book came out, publication would be too late to take advantage of the Christmas trade. On September 9, Wharton urged Brownell, as "the court of last resort," to intercede in "a friendly controversy [with Burlingame] as to the date of publication of my stories." She avoided any mention of sales, saying only that "I am obliged to go abroad in January for an indefinite length of time, & I am so anxious to have the book brought out before my departure" (9 September 1898). An obviously irritated Brownell denied her request, reminding her that the "interests of author and publisher are identical" and therefore "your book will be just the kind of literature that I am most interested in seeing added to the list of the house and therefore interested in seeing successful from a commercial point of view" (16 September 1898). Shortly afterward, she was apologizing to Burlingame, explaining that illness had caused her to forget "that the matter had been so definitely settled" (18 Sept. 1898). Her response to Brownell, however, implied her mounting resentment. After somewhat curtly thanking him for "taking the

trouble to state so explicitly the reasons which make it necessary that the publication of my little book should be postponed," she asked that he reconsider his decision not to employ Berkeley Updike, the printer she had requested. She also took the opportunity to complain about *The Decoration of Houses's* small pages and marble-paper cover, observing that "no particulars as to the size or price of the book were ever given me" (18 Sept. 1898). The following February, writing to accept Scribner's terms for *The Greater Inclination*, she angrily accused the firm of advertising her house-decoration book minimally. Charles Scribner replied that "Your acceptance of our terms of publication for the volume of stories is accompanied with such criticism that we must not allow your letter to go unanswered." He insisted that *The Greater Inclination* was receiving sufficient advertisement, and he attributed the initially slow sales of *The Decoration of Houses* to her own late delivery of the manuscript at the beginning of December 1897, which had meant it could "not be advertised to advantage" (13 February 1899).

In October of 1898, Wharton traveled to Philadelphia, where she underwent medical treatment for an unspecified illness. R. W. B. Lewis and Cynthia Griffin Wolff assume she suffered a nervous breakdown, and they attribute her quarrels with Scribners during this period to her poor mental health. But although a few of her letters show signs of stress, I do not find her requests of her editors at this time to have been unreasonable, and like Shari Benstock, I doubt she was psychically disturbed. Authors often arrange to have their books brought out to attract Christmas shoppers, and Wharton can hardly be blamed for not wanting her book to appear during the slowest retail period of the year. (In fact, Charles Scribner had told her that *The Decoration of Houses*, brought out on Dec. 3 of the previous year, was "entirely too late for a successful sale" (letter to Wharton, 13 February 1899). Nor is it likely that publishing the stories in the magazine would have financially compensated her for the book's appearing after Christmas.

Brownell had evidently revealed that he expected *The Greater Inclination* to have a small sale in any case for on April 3, 1899, Wharton asked that copies be sent to England because "I so thoroughly agree with you that my stories are not of the kind that catch the general attention readily, that I want to make the most of my trans-Atlantic opportunities." Three weeks later, she was complaining bitterly about the book's advertising and hinting she was thinking of giving her work to another publisher:

If a book is unnoticed or unfavourably received, it is natural that the publisher should not take

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much trouble about advertising it; but to pursue the same course towards a volume that has been generally commended seems to me essentially unjust. Certainly in these days of energetic & emphatic advertising, Mr. Scribner's methods do not tempt one to offer him one's wares a second time.

(letter to Brownell, 25 April 1899)

As passage of the International Copyright Law had substantially reduced the threat of pirating, the progressive publishers now routinely announced new books with a long drum roll of advertising (Wilson 80). As a result, the traditionals, too, were pressured to increase their advertising budgets. Significantly, the publishers Wharton praises—McMillan, Dodd and Mead, McClure, and Harper—were progressives, signaling to Brownell that the firm was ignoring the current realities of the book business, and that she could expect to be treated better by this new group. If Scribner's had indeed given *The Greater Inclination* little advance advertising, they would have been going against the trend.<sup>4</sup> The book in fact had a strong initial sale, and Wharton pointedly informed Brownell that its "popular success" had prompted several inquiries from other publishers (26 September 1899). He chose not to respond to her letter's implication, probably concurring with publisher Walter Hines Page that "this method of an author shocks me. If he does not openly hawk his book and reputation, he at least tempts one publisher to bid against another, and this invites the publisher to regard it as a mere commodity" (4).

While Wharton wholeheartedly approved progressive publishing's rewarding of the commercially successful writer, she frequently found its methods, even Scribner's restrained adaptations, vulgar and potentially degrading. Because she was determined that her fame and power should not require the sacrifice of her dignity, she often sent her editors mixed signals. For example, her persistent reluctance to have her books illustrated implied her indifference to reaching the largest possible audience. Several of her letters specifically state that she found publicity painful, as when she remarked that a publicity photograph "looked like a combination of a South Dakota divorcee and a magnetic healer and to encounter this apparition again would drive me from the field of letters." She ended by promising to have another taken but asked that it be used "as little as possible" (letter to Brownell, 27 February 1901). And as late as 1908, she implied to Charles Scribner, in a letter about the recent appearance of her collection *The Hermit and the Wild*

*Woman* (1908) her willingness to leave advertising decisions to the firm: "It has struck me that, for these shrieking days, the book was being very faintly advertised; but I always feel that such things may be left to your judgment" (2 October 1908). Her objection to many forms of publicity undoubtedly encouraged her publishers to continue to see her as a typical society woman, for whom the opinions of her friends had more significance than sales figures.

An extraordinary series of letters, largely unpublished, written during this period to Wharton by Walter Berry reveals she confided to him her hopes for her work and her frustrations with Scribner's. In them, he assumed the role of adviser, urging her to be more assertive in dealing with her editors and using humor to demystify them for her. Significantly, although he was a lawyer, he urged her to develop business skills, rather than those associated with professionals. He understood the new publishing thoroughly, and he saw no reason why writers should not take full advantage of the financial opportunities it presented. By contrast with Burlingame's warning not to become a "magazine bore," Berry praised Wharton's numerous acceptances from periodicals: "What a vogue you are setting: From Youth's Companion to Pat Collier! Do you know C.? Great fun he is, and knowing your front row in the 400, he'll pay high" (9 November 1898). In a letter dated November 6, 1899, he expressed his unhappiness with Scribner's, caustically suggesting a strategy for negotiating a new contract: "As you used to get \$175 before [for stories published in Scribner's], why not begin cheerfully by asking if it is customary that the publication of a successful book lowers the value of future productions; follow this up by stating the price paid for the G Inc [*The Greater Inclination*], and the offers made for 'anything from yr. pen'; and wind up by regretting that you can't write at 'scab' rates, as you belong to the Author's Union."<sup>5</sup> He ended pointedly, "I don't quite appreciate your *eugonement* for Scribner—unless as a sort of *sorhoflurs* Gamp to your first literary offspring!" A year later, having learned the terms of Wharton's contract for *The Valley of Decision*, he chided her for her lack of assertiveness: "Let me say right here that your backbone had no cartilage whatever when you agreed to give Scrib. The Valley for only \$2000 'advance royalties.' It should be \$2,000 cash, and royalties beginning with the first volume sold" (24 October 1900). At one point, he enclosed an article about Edward Bok, associated with progressive methods in his positions as vice president of Curtis Publishing and editor of the *Ladies' Home Journal*. Berry heavily underlined "a few years ago [Bok] was a stenographer for Charles Scribner's Sons" and appended a moral: "To succeed: Leave Scribs" (27 January 1902).

The previous September Wharton had informed

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Brownell about her numerous letters from publishers and her inclination to sell *The Touchstone* to one who had offered her royalties of 15% (28 Sept. 1899); Scribner's agreed to match the rival offer. The significance of the 15% figure was that it was the royalty commanded by those writers Scribners considered successful, or in some cases, potentially successful. For example, after Harold Frederic's first novel received attention-getting reviews and sold quite well, he received royalties of 15% on his next novel, *In the Valley* (1891) (Myers 76); Robert Louis Stevenson, a Scribners star, received 15% for *The Wrecker* (1891), (McKay, 32); Robert Grant received 15% for his bestseller *Unleavened Bread* (1900) and asked (and was refused) 20% for his next novel (Grant to Charles Scribner, 12 March 1902). On October 13, 1900, Berry regrets that "I couldn't break away for the N. Y. spree-no such luck-though I should have loved it, especially the going with you to bait Burlingame."<sup>6</sup> He expressed surprise that *The Touchstone* had sold fewer than 5,000 copies, suggesting "We'll have to demand a glimpse, or, legally 'crave oyer' of their books!" (Two weeks later, Wharton would write to Brownell to express her concern about the low sales: "I did not expect a selling success for it, but what perplexes me is that it should apparently have given *The Greater Inclination* such a boom and yet not have done better itself [27 October 1900]). In fact, the 5,000 copies of the novella sold by the end of 1900 put it on at least one best-seller list.

Probably influenced by Berry, Wharton began about this time to seize control of her career by writing books that would both satisfy her artistic standards and "catch the general attention readily." For her first novel, *The Valley of Decision*, she significantly chose the historical novel, a genre experiencing a surge of popularity. (On seeing the completed manuscript, Berry would joke, "If you wanted to write a heart interest-historical-When-Valley-Was-In-Flower-book, you thank God didn't do it" [27 February 1902]). Not only did it receive excellent reviews, but sales were impressive for a work by a relatively unknown writer, particularly one not serialized. Her next book, *Sanctuary*, (1903), a novella criticizing the modern inclination to succeed by dishonest means, fared less well. However, she clearly hoped at least to equal *The Valley's* sales with her realist stories, collected in *The Descent of Man* (1904). The decision to turn from romanticism to realism was probably influenced by her new friend Robert Grant, author of the best-selling problem novel *Unleavened Bread* (1900). She had been drawn to realism and naturalism as early as the

90s; in 1892 Burlingame had rejected her novella *Bunner Sisters*, whose title characters struggle to support themselves by maintaining a tiny shop, as too pessimistic for Scribner's readers. She would also have been aware that realists during the Progressive Era aimed their fiction at a broad audience in order to effect social change, making it possible to achieve large sales while writing serious fiction. *The Descent of Man's* timely, controversial subjects seemed likely to attract notice: the woman question, yellow journalism, adoption, the "new" marriage. She was therefore puzzled and deeply disappointed when several reviewers complained that her "Jamesian" characters were incomprehensible to the average American. About this time she wrote in despair to Brownell, "I write about what I see, what I happen to be nearest to, which is surely better than doing cow-boys de chic" (25 June 1904).

Brownell's unpublished reply, preserved in his "letter book" in the Scribners Archives at Princeton, is important, revealing that he overtly discouraged Wharton's desire for commercial success because he felt she was being influenced by the values of classes beneath their own. His objections probably affected Wharton strongly because they echoed her own fears that her participation in the marketplace could result in degradation.

But I repeat I don't understand your feeling of "discouragement." Do you suppose there is a single one of the persons who wrote those notices whose opinions expressed privately you would care a straw for? As for "popularity" of the grossest kind, such as attends on "cow-boys done de chic," you don't seriously mean you want that—and if you do, how unreasonable to expect it without lifting a finger to secure it. And how can characters seem "real" to people who never "moved" in the circles to which they belong. Moreover you take Madame Cardinal's advice not to "dormer dans la sentiment" and il n'y a que ca chez nous! How unphilosophic and inconsistent to indulge fastidiousness even to the point of making an art of it and still complain that one is not all gummed up and begrimed by what one elbows off and pushes aside. The only way to get the huzzas of the hoi—at a respectful distance—is to impose the thing on them by making it so important that they can't neglect it, but must join the chorus to show they can appreciate. Ce que vous avez fait en "The Valley", par exemple! That is what you have cut

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out for yourself, since the *universal* thing—like sentiment—is not highly differentiated enough for you. I am trying, you see, to be mischievous as a guarantee of my candor. (6 July 1904)

In equating Wharton's desire for financial success with bodily defilement, Brownell was alluding to a standard of feminine conduct that demanded her work be pursued for altruistic rather than monetary purposes. His choice of this trope warned of the risk involved in ignoring class and gender barriers, of reducing the "respectful distance," both by "writing down" to less discriminating readers and adopting the commercial ambitions of middle class males. Having fulfilled his responsibility in pointing out this danger, he then reassures her by strenuously denying that she had, in fact, ever attempted to appeal to ordinary readers; although she may have yielded to the temptation to wish for large sales, her good breeding had prevented her from overtly pursuing them. In stating that her writing "indulge[s] fastidiousness even to the point of making an art of it" (a view that could hardly have pleased Wharton), he emphasized that her writing was inseparable from her upper-class identity. In a tone distinctly paternal, he admonished her to adopt an attitude of passivity in regard to commercial success, maintaining high artistic standards and ignoring the reviews despite their ability to influence sales.

Wharton, however, was not persuaded to change course. Two years later, she completed *The House of Mirth* (1905), an exquisitely crafted novel of manners that was also an expose of America's upper class. That she was aware of its potential to sell exceedingly well in the midst of the Progressive Era is evident in her negotiations for the contract for her next novel, which would be *The Fruit of the Tree* (1907): "As to terms, it seems to me that the incipient popularity of *The House of Mirth* might permit me to name \$8000 instead of \$7500 [for the serial]; and perhaps you would think it reasonable, if the sale of the volume exceeded 10,000, to raise the royalties to 20% on the rest of the sale" (to C. Scribner, 19 May 1905). Throughout this period, Brownell persisted in seeing her as incapable of appealing to a mass audience, although Burlingame was somewhat more optimistic. When, six weeks after the novel's appearance, the sales broke 100,000, she wrote rather smugly to Burlingame, "I have not heard from Mr. Brownell since he wrote, about a month ago, a very kind letter to break to me, with all gentleness, the fact that the H. of M. would probably not go above 40,000" (23 November 1905). On November 11, she had written Charles Scribner that "it is a very beautiful thought that

80,000 people should want to read 'The House of Mirth,' and if the number should ascend to 100,000 I fear my pleasure would exceed the bounds of decency." When, the following spring, he informed her that the Curtis Publishing Company had placed an order for 10,000 copies of the cheap edition to use as subscription premiums, she exulted, "the crowning touch has now been put to Lily's success." Demonstrating her willingness to linked with a popular writer, she mentioned to Brownell that she suspected Gertrude Atherton's recent denunciation of *The House of Mirth* was prompted by jealousy about the Curtis "deal" (to Brownell, 14 June 1906).

Just a few months earlier, she had become exceedingly apprehensive while awaiting public response to the novel. The jacket Scribner's had prepared for the first edition contained a blurb that Wharton paraphrased to Brownell, "For the first time, the veil has been lifted from New York society by one who &c. &c." She demanded that he "do all you can to stop the spread of that pestilent paragraph, and to efface it from the paper cover of future printings. I am sick at the recollection of it!" (14 October 1905). It seemed possible that Scribner's was presenting her as a kind of muckraker, and her reaction was to assert defensively her class's standards of propriety—ironically precisely those Brownell had earlier invoked in criticizing her commercial aspirations. Although he protested that the offending sentence actually read, "the curtain has been raised by an authoritative dramatist" (16 October 1905), he found her reaction to be appropriate, and he immediately ordered that the remaining jackets be destroyed.

In the aftermath of the news that Scribner's had "never published any book the sale of which has been so rapid" (C. Scribner to Wharton, 10 November 1905), Wharton was paid \$10,000 for the serial rights to *The Fruit of the Tree*. Remarks in a letter to Robert Grant reveal that Scribner's appeared to understand the meaning of her achievement: "Mr. Scribner sent for me, and said the success of the H. of M. had been greater than they expected, and had consequently increased the value of the next-born; and that they proposed to pay me \$10,000 *instead* of \$8,000; and thereupon he handed me the cheque!" She thought the act so generous that it "ought to be proclaimed aloud" (4 Jan 1907). In addition, for the first time her royalties rose to the coveted 20%. With the unimpressive sales of *The Fruit of the Tree*, however, her relationship with her editors quickly resumed its old pattern, despite the prevalent view that the economic recession was affecting book sales. When Burlingame refused to promise her prompt serialization of the novel that would be *The Custom of the Country* (1913), she went above him to Charles

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Scribner. Recognizing that her satire of wealthy Westerners in New York had tremendous selling potential, Scribner assured her that he "could not let it go elsewhere—even for the magazine" (9 August 1907).<sup>7</sup>

Events beyond Wharton's control, the illness of her husband, Teddy, and subsequent deterioration of her marriage, meant she did not complete *The Custom of the Country* on schedule. She missed Burlingame's deadline for the serial, and when she took the nearly completed manuscript to him, more than two years later, she discovered that he "did not feel prepared to make room for it in the magazine till next year" (Wharton to C. Scribner, 20 October 1911).<sup>8</sup> She angrily informed Charles Scribner that as a result of the decision she had put aside *The Custom of the Country* in order to begin another novel. Scribners had paid her a \$5,000 advance, half what she had received for *The Fruit of the Tree*, implying they considered *The House of Mirth* to be an anomaly. About this time, she also received the report that sales of *Ethan Frome*, published in September of 1911 to enthusiastic reviews, were sluggish. When she accused Scribner of advertising the novella scantily, he vigorously defended the firm's handling of it, insisting that whereas "the more discriminating readers have bought it eagerly... we have not secured for it the interest of the large public which supports the best sellers" (10 April 1912).<sup>9</sup> His comments reiterated the old assumption that she was a writer solely for an educated elite, but he seemed unaware of his increasingly precarious relationship with her. He was therefore stunned when she responded with her decision to give her next novel, *The Reef* (1912), to D. Appleton and Company, who had paid her an advance of \$15,000. Despite Burlingame's warning that other publishers were approaching her, Scribner seems to have trusted that her aristocratic sense of propriety would ensure she would remain with the house. In a letter to her lover, Morton Fullerton, in June of 1912, Wharton jokingly linked their affair with her decision at least temporarily to "leave Scribs": "Mr. Scribner is mortally hurt by my infidelity" (Benstock 250). For a while, she apparently hoped to publish with Scribners again, that her dramatic gesture would compel them to realize they must compete for her writing. In 1913, Scribners in fact reluctantly agreed to meet another publisher's offer of \$12,500 for the serial of novel tentatively titled *Literature*. When she decided that the war in France was making it impossible to do sustained work on the long novel, she proposed giving them a "much slighter" work. *The Glimpses of the Moon* (1922) (Wharton to Scribner, 30 March 1916). Incredibly, Scribner refused

her offer, saying he would prefer to wait for the longer novel. Willing to publish the book, he would give her a 20% royalty, but only if sales reached \$15,000 (19 May 1916). After she sent him her novella *Summer* (1917), he similarly informed her that the magazine had no room for it.

Wharton's twenty-year-long correspondence with Appleton, little of which has been published, suggests she made the change not simply because she wanted more money, but because she had concluded she deserved a publisher who would act as her agent, producing her books how and when she wanted them, and giving them extensive promotion. As Scribner's financial health declined after 1910, she must have worried that their continuing resistance to compete for her work might endanger her career. Not only would she not earn all she might from her books, but her ability to publish would remain in their control. Although they had long implied to her their willingness to publish her books while expecting no more than moderate sales, a time might come when they could no longer "carry" less profitable authors. Appleton, on the other hand, willingly offered to give her books the attention and promotion she desired, and to find places for her stories and serials in the high-paying popular magazines known as the "slicks." In the beginning, Wharton assumed that competition for her work would ensure her control over her own publishing. She had not foreseen, however, that those who accepted her work as a valuable commodity and willingly paid highly competitive fees also expected their money's worth. While she had finally gained control of her publishing, she would frequently find herself struggling to retain her artistic freedom.

Appleton was an old, family-owned firm; in 1900, however, it had entered receivership, resulting in a complete reorganization on the progressive model, newly committed to "aggressive marketing and internal office efficiency" (Wilson 75). Wharton would have found particularly attractive Appleton's willingness to act as her literary agent in negotiating with the magazines; in addition, in 1912 Morton Fullerton was Appleton's representative in Paris, and he apparently gave the firm a strong recommendation. Her first editor at Appleton was Joseph Sears, a friend of Fullerton, with whom she enjoyed an extremely good relationship. When illness forced Sears to resign in 1919, though, Rutger Jewett, an editor with a strongly progressive style, took his place. Jewett found Wharton both intellectually and socially imposing, while she felt dismayed by his informality and unconventional marketing strategies. For example, she was embarrassed when he attempted simultaneously to defend her and draw attention to

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one of her novels by taking out an ad for the purpose of attacking writers of unfavorable reviews, and she pointedly ignored his suggestions of subjects for her future novels. Her evident disapproval caused him to write her dejectedly, "I know you consider my ideas, hopes and ambitions for the books as quaint and provincial etc." (5 August 1925).

Wharton's mistaken assumption that Appleton would consider it a privilege to publish her work is evident early in her relationship with them. In 1918, she signed a contract specifically for "a story of the type of 'The House of Mirth'" (Sears, letter to Wharton, 31 October 1918), again receiving a \$15,000 advance. She, however, appears to have been unaware that she was confronting what Wilson calls "the encroachment of publisher prerogative onto the very notion of invention" (88), to have assumed she would be the one to decide what constituted such a novel. She therefore began work on *A Son at the Front* (1923), based on her experiences in Paris during the war. In the weeks after the Armistice, Appleton attempted to find a buyer for the serial; however, they encountered a resistance to war fiction from publishers predicting that the public was ready to move on to new, uplifting subjects. Wharton, stunned when she learned editors asked to see a finished manuscript, observed: "it would be the first time I have been asked to show a manuscript for many years" (letter to Sears, 29 November 1918). In the end, *The Pictorial Review* purchased the serial, but when the "war book scare" persisted, they attempted to break the contract. She had never previously faced such a situation. Although early in her career Scribners had rejected her work on the basis of quality or suitability for Scribner's, they had never attempted to influence her choice of subject and certainly had never asked her to stop work on a novel in progress. Seemingly unaware of the seriousness of the situation, she offered to forgo serialization in order to publish the novel quickly, while the war was still a major topic of discussion. When Appleton rejected this proposal, Jewett dramatically cabling "Cannot Make Up Loss Of Serial By Early Book Publication. War Books Dead In America. Advise Accepting Pictorial Plan" (19 July 1919), she offered to change the title to *Paris or Their Son*. Throughout, she had difficulty comprehending that Appleton took the scare seriously. She reassured a frustrated Jewett, "I think this is simply a nervous reaction, and I venture to suggest that by next year my novel may find a much warmer welcome than you think at present" (25 July 1919).

Gradually she came to understand that whereas Scribners had been committed to guiding

popular taste, Appleton and the slicks were determined to follow it, and that they would never accept her war novel. In September, Jewett informed her that a house committee had decided she should replace *A Son at the Front* with the New York novel she was scheduled to write next (19 September 1919). Despite the time lost, *The Pictorial* expected her to deliver the manuscript on schedule, which left her only six months in which to produce an entirely new novel. Incredibly, *The Age of Innocence* (1920) was completed seven months later, a feat Wharton would describe as "really a superhuman piece of work." A major reason for her leaving Scribners had been her desire for prompt serialization, but she had not foreseen that the magazine editors would expect what she called "prose-by-the-yard" (letter to Jewett, 5 January 1920). In addition, she felt stunned and hurt when *Pictorial* editor Arthur Vance complained that the critically acclaimed novel was "somewhat above the head of his subscribers" and insisted she tailor her future work more closely to the magazine's requirements (Jewett, letter to Wharton, 14 October 1920). His tone abruptly changed, however, after the novel achieved best-seller status.

After this difficult initiation into the new publishing, Wharton seems to have revised her expectations, with the result that her next six years with Appleton proved relatively tranquil. Although she felt pressured to write more quickly than she would have liked, she was receiving top prices and as much advertising for her books as she could possibly desire. Too, she and Jewett had reached the understanding that she valued his advice about business but not about literature. She was, in fact, very pleased with the results of his negotiations on her behalf, and their relationship warmed. In 1924, he praised her, "You are the only author in the magazine field who is writing literature and at the same time being paid the high figure which is usually the reward of tosh" (31 October 1924). Although she had earlier written to Brownell, "I never can get used to any other origin, and always sit down and weep under the willow tree when I remember Jerusalem" (20 Aug. 1917), she clearly preferred working with an editor who was committed to fulfilling her wishes.

In the fall of 1926, however, Wharton became involved in a venture that illustrates both her self-assurance at this point in her career and the risk of exploitation that dealing with the slicks involved. On October 7, 1926, she mentioned to Jewett that she had been approached by a representative of the newly revived *Delineator*, which wanted to bid against *The Pictorial* for a serial, Jewett confirmed that the *Delineator* was "buying big names" and wanted a serial by her if they could have the entire manuscript by the summer of 1928. Although she had already contracted with *The Pictorial*

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for a serial scheduled to begin in the spring of 1928, he urged her to sign with the *Delineator* as "the financial rewards will be high" (9 December 1926). The *Delineator* ultimately offered her the colossal price of \$42,000. With Wharton's approval, Jewett arranged for her to give *The Children* (1928), on which she was already at work, to the *Delineator*. He was confident that Arthur Vance, editor of *The Pictorial*, would wait, as *Twilight Sleep* (1927) was currently running in the magazine. However, when Vance learned of the "Delineator deal," he interpreted Wharton's contract with *The Pictorial* as meaning that her next novel would go to him; in addition, he offered to raise the payment for the serial from \$35,000 to \$40,000 (Jewett to Wharton, 7 June 1927). After intense negotiations, Loren Palmer of the *Delineator* agreed to waive his right to *The Children* on the condition that Wharton provide him a substitute serial by June of 1928. It was formally agreed that she would deliver *The Children* to Vance by November of 1927; she would then give 30,000 to 40,000 words of a new novel to the *Delineator* by the following June, to be followed by installments of 20-30,000 words until completion. Her comment on this occasion, in retrospect sounding painfully naive, was: "But if Mr. Vance really wants another novel before I give one to the *Delineator*, I can only say that I will do my best to satisfy both editors, and to notify them as long as possible in advance if the time limit proves too short for me" (letter to Jewett, 21 December 1926).

One might ask why Wharton would enter into such an arrangement given her troubles over *A Son at the Front*. She had recently taken out a large loan in order to purchase several properties adjacent to St. Claire, the old convent at Hyeres she had made her country home, creating an immediate need for additional funds. Several letters about this time mention her request that her advances be paid ahead of schedule. On July 6, 1928, she thanked Jewett for the firm's "special arrangements," explaining she had undertaken several building projects just as her income had been temporarily reduced as a result of ongoing transactions with the City of New York. Too, at age sixty-four, she feared she would soon have to slow down. She mentioned to Jewett that she preferred to write *Hudson River Bracketed* before *The Children* because "at my age, I feel that I ought to deal with the biggest subject first" (23 September 1927). The *Delineator* offer represented an excellent financial opportunity as it promised to produce a bidding competition between the *Delineator* and *The Pictorial* for future serials. A similar competition between *The Pictorial* and *McCall's* for the serial of *The Mother's*

*Recompense* (1925) had ended with Vance's paying her \$2,000 more than the \$25,000 stipulated in the original contract (Jewett, letter to Wharton, 14 September 1922). Finally, she seems to have continued to equate money with power, to have assumed, not unreasonably, that an author paid \$42,000 for a serial would be the one to determine when it could be ready.

*The Children* was completed only slightly behind schedule at the conclusion of one of Wharton's most difficult years: Walter Berry, her closest friend for forty years, died on October 9, 1927, the result of complications following an appendectomy. After a short rest, Wharton began work on *Hudson River Bracketed* (1929), and she met the first deadline. In September, however, she was horrified to discover that the *Delineator*, without consulting her, had already run the first chapter of the unfinished novel. They had committed her to their own, exceedingly tight, schedule, leaving her no way to refuse without damaging her reputation. Even Jewett, who customarily supported the magazine editors, felt that Oscar Graeve had gone too far. At another time, Wharton might have chuckled at his comparison of her to "a golfer, faced with a pond in the middle of the course;" "this pressure has developed into a mental and moral hazard," he warned (15 March 1929). She was, in fact, driving herself to write for long, exhausting stretches every day. Before the novel was completed, she had suffered recurring bouts of flu and a mild heart attack. Although she met all the magazine's deadlines, Graeve let it be known that he found much of the novel to be "unsatisfactory" (E. Carroll to Jewett, 28 June 1929), leaving Wharton to vow, "I will never again willingly give a line of mine to the *Delineator*" (to Jewett, 15 July 1929). But she had signed a contract with them for another serial.

During the Depression, Wharton's income declined as a result of the lower prices paid for fiction as well as the magazines' desire for cheerful works. "The fact is," she confided to Jewett, "I am afraid that I cannot write down to the present standard of the American picture magazines" (26 October 1933). She also privately wondered if another publisher might make a difference; by 1934, she had reached the point, once again, of seriously considering a change. But about this time, Jewett became seriously ill, and he would die a few months later. Wharton would, after all, remain with Appleton until her death in 1937.

Contrary to Wilson's and Colquitt-McQuin's assumption that the masculinization of publishing under the progressives worked against women writers, Wharton's career, along with those of Gertrude Atherton, Ellen Glasgow, and Willa Cather,<sup>10</sup> demonstrates that some women prospered under the progressive system. Becoming a competent businesswoman involved gaining a "masculine" expertise that then enabled the

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woman writer to participate in what Wharton saw as a gender-neutral market (rather in the way the Internet is sometimes seen today). Because the new publishing equally valued the "selling successes" of males and females, Wharton used these to reject the oppressive femininity she perceived in the woman writer's construction within a traditional publishing house. By learning to write both for herself and a market, she moved beyond the restricted career Scribners had clearly first envisioned for her to become America's most critically acclaimed and best-paid woman writer.

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### Notes

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Unless otherwise noted under Works Cited, the documents quoted in this essay are housed in the following archives: Wharton's correspondences with William Crary Brownell, Edward Livermore Burlingame, and Charles Scribner are in the Scribner Archives, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Her correspondence with Rutger Bleeker Jewett of Appleton is in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Letters to Wharton from Walter Berry are also in the Wharton Papers in Beinecke.

<sup>1</sup> Millicent Bell in "From Lady into Author: Edith Wharton and the House of Scribner" and, more recently, Shari Benstock in her biography of Wharton, *No Gifts From Chance*, observe that Wharton became increasingly assertive in her dealings with Scribners. Neither, however, connects Wharton's development of business skills to unhappiness with her Scribners editors or to the influence of progressive publishing.

<sup>2</sup> *Belchamber* would be published by G. P. Putnam's in 1906.

<sup>3</sup> Millicent Bell concludes about this incident that Burlingame intended not only to advise Wharton to "school herself to a harder standard than publishability" but to discourage her from producing more work than could appear in *Scribner's* (308-09). But his choice of the word "bore," from the language of manners, suggests he was equally concerned with pointing out the inappropriateness of demonstrating her talent too frequently; to appear too often in print, he implies, is comparable to dominating the conversation.

<sup>4</sup> In *Of Making Many Books*, Roger Burlingame, son of Edward Livermore Burlingame, emphasizes that the amount spent on advertising a book invariably reflects the publisher's expectation of sales (119).

<sup>5</sup> Here, Berry is referring to one of several authors' societies formed between 1891 and 1899 for the purpose of supporting writers in negotiating financially with publishers. See Wilson 83.

<sup>6</sup> Wharton ultimately asked Berry to assist her in her negotiations with Scribners: Lewis mentions that he "studied and witnessed" the contract for *The House of Mirth* (151).

<sup>7</sup> According to Wilson, under the progressive system authors commonly negotiated by bringing early chapters of a novel to a publisher (82).

<sup>8</sup> When *The Custom of the Country* was finally serialized, beginning in January of 1913, Burlingame

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announced it dramatically on the cover, possibly as a means of conciliating Wharton: "Beginning in this number/The Custom of the Country/A New Novel By Edith Wharton, Author of 'The House of Mirth' etc./Published Monthly With Illustrations."

<sup>9</sup> Advertisements appearing in the *New York Times Book Review*, likely to be read by Wharton enthusiasts, suggest she had grounds for her unhappiness. On 29 October 1911, *Ethan Frome* was announced with ten other novels in a large ad listing all Scribner's fall publications. It was not mentioned again until December 3, when it appeared together with the quotation from the *New York Sun*, "The best thing Edith Wharton ever did," as one of thirty-two "holiday books." Wharton's portion of the ad is set in small type, large type being reserved for J. M. Barrie, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Henry Van Dyke. And the novel was not one of six "Christmas books" prominently advertised on 10 December.

<sup>10</sup> Gertrude Atherton switched publishers a number of times in order to receive the best possible terms, Cather left Houghton-Mifflin for Knopf when "she believed her publisher was making no effort to take advantage of her growing visibility" (Woodress 307), and Glasgow used her books' commercial success to insist that all her future work be heavily advertised (Goodman 178).

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**"The absorbed observation of her own symptoms":  
*Ethan Frome* and Anne Sexton's "The Break"**

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Anne Sexton's poem "The Break" draws on Wharton's tale of Ethan Frome's "smash-up" (4) in order to present the story other own. Sexton's understanding of the catastrophe at the heart of *Ethan Frome* informs every level other text: from its opening images of fracture and silent resentment, to its sustained themes of desire, betrayal and punishment, and its final contemplation of the relationship between physical and emotional suffering. The importance of Wharton's novel to Sexton's poem is confirmed, and reaches its climax, in stanza 9 with the speaker's ambiguous but nevertheless deeply telling declaration: "I'm Ethan Frome's wife" -- an identification to which I shall return. It is apparent that *Ethan Frome* is also significant to Sexton on a structural level. Its complex narrative formation and its foregrounding of the discursiveness

of truth exemplify the process outlined by Wharton's narrator in his framing preface, and offer Sexton a crucial framework: "I had the story, bit by bit, from various people, and, as generally happens in such cases, each time it was a different story" (3). The concern of this article is to examine the uses to which Sexton puts Wharton's fiction; to explore the ways in which she unravels its multiple voices and shifting perspectives on traumatic experience, and then weaves them anew for her own confessional purposes.

Although there is no copy of *Ethan Frome* catalogued as part of Sexton's library at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas, it is apparent from "The Break" and other poems that Sexton knew the book well. Indeed, in her memoir of her mother, *Searching for Mercy Street: My Journey Back to My Mother, Anne Sexton*, Linda Gray Sexton recalls that Sexton read *Ethan Frome* and *The Age of Innocence* and recommended both to her daughter (114).

Before tracing the impact of *Ethan Frome* on "The Break", we need to look at the putative origins of Sexton's poem, asking what it is that the novel offered to Sexton at this particular time. According to the editors of Sexton's letters, "The Break" records an actual incident in her life. In 1966, eager to recreate the previous year's -- unusually happy -- birthday (when a power failure throughout the region had forced the cancellation of a restaurant dinner, and inspired, instead, candle-lit celebrations at home), Sexton had switched off the lights and again lit candles. This time, a candle went out and, "in the dark, [Sexton] caught her heel and fell a full flight of stairs," breaking her hip-bone (Sexton and Ames 304). Sexton's biographer reads rather more into the incident. She suggests that "The Break" originates in the break-up of Sexton's disastrous love affair with her psychiatrist (after his wife discovered evidence of their relationship) and implies that the fall was not entirely accidental: "On her birthday -- often a day she chose to punish herself -- she tumbled down the stairs at home and broke her hip" (Middlebrook 266). Sexton herself indicated support for such a reading, for example; in correspondence with her English publisher, albeit with reference to a different poem: "On November 9\*, my birthday (see poem 'Menstruation at Forty' and its death drive) I fell down the stairs and broke my hip, shattered it in fact" (letter to Jon Stallworthy, 14 December 1966).<sup>1</sup> On similar lines, Sexton's daughter, Linda Gray Sexton, confirms that "her fall, while looking like a mere accident, seemed to her fraught with Freudian meaning." Quoting the opening line of "The

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Break" ("It was also my violent heart that broke") she asks rhetorically: "Why a broken heart? Because shortly before she pitched forward into darkness and fell headlong down the carpeted risers, her lover had rejected her and told her he was returning to his wife" (L. Sexton 136). As these complex accounts of passion, betrayal, guilt, violence, punishment and masochism suggest, *Ethan Frome* — with its account of the doomed affair of Ethan and Mattie Silver — provided Sexton with a story to parallel, and on which to model, her own.

Wharton's fictional account of destruction and despair is, then, the necessary foundation on which Sexton constructs her confession; the catalyst for her own lament. Her judicious use of twenty rhyming quatrains gives her story a narrative structure and impetus to rival Wharton's "The Break", like *Ethan Frome* dramatizes a succession of events, as much as it reveals a state of mind and, in this respect, may be regarded as atypical of Sexton's work, and of confessional poetry in general.

The profound influence of *Ethan Frome* on "The Break" is apparent from the outset. Sexton's title alone is significant; "The Break" being synonymous with the "smash-up" (4) which forms the dramatic core of Wharton's novel. Sexton's title both foregrounds this event and, by means of its own polysemy, indicates that there may be many kinds and degrees of "break." The first line of Sexton's poem ("It was also my violent heart that broke" [my emphasis]) which begins *in media res* and suggests previous catastrophes, exploits this ambiguity, confirming that the heart is not the only thing to have been broken. In stanza 10, Sexton elaborates: "The fracture was twice. The fracture was double" and, in a lecture on the poem, explains: "we have two breaks, a broken hip and a broken heart" (Crawshaw Lectures [4, p. 2]). This clarification, however, may be regarded as a little disingenuous. As Wharton's and Sexton's texts make clear, there are many more than "two breaks" at issue in each: the broken marriage, broken trust and fractured relationships (romantic and therapeutic) which are the concern of Sexton's text, and the broken marriage, shattered dreams and broken home (Ethan's literally broken home, lacking a heart, or central 'L' section: "the centre, the actual hearth stone" [16]) at stake in Wharton's.

In addition, it is clear that "smash-up" and "break" are both euphemisms for psychological trauma, or mental breakdown. *Ethan Frome* (text and protagonist) is dominated by his fear, and family history, of mental breakdown: "Fust his father got a kick, out haying, and went soft in the brain, [. . .] then his mother got queer" (10). And it is with "chill [...] forebodings" (54)

that Ethan anticipates a similar fate befalling Zeena. "The Break" opens from the perspective of one already experiencing psychological breakdown. Implicit in Sexton's confession that "it was also my violent heart that broke" is the understanding that the mind too is broken. The hip which, in line 5 of the poem, is depicted as "splintering up" is a metonym for the self which has cracked up.

In Sexton's opening stanzas, as in Wharton's narrator's framing preface to *Ethan Frome*, we are introduced to many of the key concerns of the rest of the text. Wharton's comment "My last page is always latent in my first" (*Backward Glance* 208), stands also for Sexton's first lines which read:

It was also my violent heart that broke,  
Falling down the front hall stairs.  
It was also a message I never spoke,  
Calling, riser after riser, who cares

about you, who cares, splintering up

the hip that was merely made of crystal. (1-6)

These contradictory images for falling and rising ("falling down [...] calling, riser after riser"), paralleled in line 5 by a reference to her "splintering up" as she falls down, and later (in stanzas 3 and 5) to coming "undone" and being tied "up," mimic the literal action of *Ethan Frome*: as Mattie and Ethan start their final descent down the icy hillside: "there was a sudden drop, then a rise [...]. As they took wing for this it seemed to him that they were flying" (124). It also anticipates the figurative sequence of reversed fortunes, or twists of fate, which dominate the novel. Hence Sexton's speaker's fall and rise, "calling" as she goes, mimics Zeena Frome's initial abjection and subsequent dominance, even to the extent of echoing Wharton's words: "she seemed to be raised right up just when the call came to her" (131) [my emphasis]. Sexton's diminution of Wharton's frozen mountain setting (here transposed to a domestic staircase) exposes the speaker's powerlessness and emotional immaturity (after all, it is usually children who are unable safely to negotiate stairs) and anticipates the turn of fortune in *Ethan Frome* whereby Mattie Silver's vivacity and blossoming sensuality wither to a child-like dependency. Sexton reiterates this point in stanza 15: "And now I spend all day taking care / of my body, that baby," a metaphor which recalls Ethan's mother's regression from matriarch to infant: "his mother got queer and dragged along for years as weak as a baby" (10).

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The site of Sexton's fall is, in fact, heavy with significance. That the break in Sexton's poem is caused by her "falling down the front hall stairs" reminds us of Ethan's various crises in the hall, on the stairs, or at the threshold of his own home. We recall Ethan's "hated vision," prior to Mattie's departure, of "the stairs he would have to go up every night" (122). Most importantly, we remember that Wharton's narrator reaches his true insight, his "vision" of Ethan's story by way of Ethan's "low unlit passage, at the back of which a ladder-like staircase rose into obscurity" (19, 18). So too, the stairs in Sexton's poem, are the site of (here self-) revelation.

That the fall, in Sexton's poem, "was also a message I never spoke" suggests that here, as in *Ethan Frome*, the truth may never be 'told,' and instead may emerge through textual aporias. As Wharton's narrator acknowledges: "I had the sense that the deeper meaning of the story was in the gaps" (6). By paradoxically articulating the unarticulated (that is, by granting a hearing to the never spoken, by attending to its 'call') Sexton draws attention to one of the aporias in her own text (the unspoken message). In addition, she indicates that there are modes of signification quite apart from language. *Ethan Frome* and "The Break" dramatize the fateful ways in which action may speak more loudly than words. In both texts, transgression, confession and punishment are as much enacted or performed as they are spoken.

The chiasmic inversion of Sexton's line "calling, riser after riser, who cares" — insistently carried over to the first line of the second stanza — "about you, who cares" [italics Sexton's], with its shift of emphasis from the uncared for (who cares about you?) to the carer (you who care) foregrounds questions of duty and neglect which are central to both texts. One subtext of this is the confused dialogue in *Ethan Frome* between Harmon and the narrator, where the problematic question of distinguishing between the carers, and the cared for, is raised. Harmon explains that "Somebody had to stay and care for the folks. There warn't ever anybody but Ethan." The narrator infers from this that after Ethan's accident his "folks" would, in turn, have cared for him, but is corrected by Harmon: "it's always Ethan done the caring" (6). This conclusion clearly runs contrary to Zeena's martyr-like sense of her own duty and importance and, later, comes as a surprise to Ethan himself, who is so bowed down with cares, that he has lost any sense of justice or perspective. He is startled, even paralyzed, by Mrs Hale's sympathetic acknowledgement of his care for Zeena: "I don't know what she'd 'a' done if she hadn't 'a' had you to look after her" (104). It is the need to care, and the longing

to be cared for, which motivates Mattie and Ethan's relationship, and which reaches its bitter nadir in their final, enforced dependence. Moreover, implicit in *Ethan Frome* and "The Break," is the understanding that, just as there are different kinds of 'break,' so too, there are different kinds of care — a spectrum which ranges from the familial, and burdensome, to the practical and clinical, and the willing and emotional.

In the fourth stanza of "The Break," the breakdown (or fall) is figured as an attempt to escape, and its failure as just retribution for ever having tried: "What a feat sailing queerly like Icarus / until the tempest undid me and I broke" (13-14). That Icarus was seeking to escape from the Labyrinth (incidentally, like the farm which is the millstone round Ethan's neck, of his own father's making) makes this simile particularly appropriate. Ethan, like Icarus, is trapped: "The inexorable facts closed in on him like prison-warders handcuffing a convict. There was no way out — none. He was a prisoner for life, and now his one ray of light was to be extinguished" (99). Sexton's image encapsulates the tragic resonance of his and Mattie's doomed flight: "As they took wing for this it seemed to him that they were flying indeed, flying far up into the cloudy night. [. . .] Then the big elm shot up ahead" (124).

Sexton's metaphor of the tempest ("the tempest undid me and I broke") is similarly apt, for it is the "long winter evenings" and the "stormy nights" (51) which are the backdrop to the mental breakdowns of Ethan's experience. In Sexton's text, as in Wharton's, the dread weight of winter is the catalyst of disaster. The fact that Ethan has "been in Starkfield too many winters" is, we are told, the "nucleus" of his story (6). And it is the power of the tempest (figuratively, the emotional trauma which surfaces every November, and literally, although here I am speculating, the winter storm which may have caused the power failure on the previous year's birthday, and thus the fall on this) which is at the root of Sexton's mental and physical collapse. As we know, *Ethan Frome* was written in winter (*Backward Glance* 296), was referred to by Wharton as her "winter's work" (qtd. in Lewis 297), and was entitled *Hiver* when first published in a French translation (Lewis 309). Winter causes the first of Ethan's many 'undoings' (he admits that his marriage to Zeena "would not have happened if his mother had died in spring instead of winter [. . .] " [52]) and, on a figurative level, his last. For it is one particular tempest (the winter storm which forces Ethan to shelter the narrator in his home) which leads to the laying bare of this story; to the narrator's discovery of the "clue to Ethan Frome" (19).

The winter landscape operates as a pathetic

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fallacy for the participants of both texts' numb, inactive frozenness and as a background for their respective disasters. Of Ethan, we are told that "he seemed a part of the mute melancholy landscape, an incarnation of its frozen woe" (11) and we witness his final downfall taking place on a "glassy slide" (123) which is "as slippery as thunder" (33) (again suggestive of the malevolent "tempest"). In "The Break," the icy, wintry setting is instrumental in establishing the speaker's fragility and vulnerability. In stanza 2, her fall is described in images of glassy, jagged, sharpness:

splintering up  
the hip that was merely made of crystal,  
the post of it and also the cup.  
I exploded in the hallway like a pistol. (5-8)<sup>2</sup>

We should note the metaphors of "splintering" and "crystal" which anticipate the broken glass dish at the dramatic heart of Wharton's novel, as too does the fact that Sexton's subject's fracture is not a clean one — its jagged, exposed edges leave a lingering threat, which will not easily be concealed or repaired.

It is the violence of these multiple fractures which dominates Sexton's text. From the emphatic opening line, "The Break" foregrounds the sudden horror of the fall and the vicious pain of its aftermath; features which Sexton emphasizes in a lecture which she gave on the poem. Twice she recites a list of violent images from her text ("exploded, firecrackers, hung, scraped, pared, screwed, kill, sandbag, stammered, acrobat, punisher, abandoned, motor, fractured, grave, burst, violent") then comments, gnominically, "You can tell a lot about a poem by the words used in it" (Crawshaw Lectures [4, p. 2]). Again, there are parallels in the narrator's preface to *Ethan Frome* where the scene is set in a succession of violent and wintry images which anticipate Sexton's: "blazing," "torrents," "glitter," "storms," "pitched," "cavalry," "siege," "garrison capitulating," "resistance," "enemy," "beleaguered" (7). In both cases, the metaphors not only alert us that there is violence to come, but establish the nature of that violence as a sustained process of attrition.

Foremost among these traumatic breaks, and latent in Sexton's title, is the destruction of Zeena's precious red glass pickle dish which, in the intense central scene in *Ethan Frome* is illicitly used, uncannily broken (by the spectral cat, here acting as Zeena's familiar) and then guiltily hidden away — a scene which is invested with deep desire and fraught with anxiety. The whole episode is profoundly symbolic. Zeena sees in the broken dish the evidence of her own broken and infertile marriage: it is referred to as "the ruin

of her treasure," "the one thing I cared for most of all" and "the thing I set most store by" (94). In addition, the breaking of the dish dramatically represents the immediate shattering of Mattie and Ethan's intimacy ("It seemed to him as if the shattered fragments of their evening lay there" [63]) and anticipates the larger catastrophic break at the end of the novel.

The place of the pickle dish is taken, in Sexton's text, by a bouquet of desiccated roses. And here Sexton foregrounds the connection (implicit in Wharton's novel) between the destroyed object (broken dish or dried-up, blood-red roses) and the broken heart:

My one dozen roses are dead.

They have ceased to menstruate. They hang  
there like little dried up blood clots.  
And the heart too, that cripple, how it sang  
Once [...] (44 - 48)

Sexton's barren, menopausal roses make explicit the loss of fertility and dashed hopes for the future latent in Zeena's reaction to the breaking other dish: sobbing and "gathering up the bits of broken glass she went out of the room as if she carried a dead body ..." (94). This despite the fact that the pickle dish, like the roses, represents misplaced desire: just as Zeena's dish was a gift from a Great Aunt, rather than a love token. Sexton's roses were sent by her lecture agency ("The Break." Drafts, HRHRC) rather than by her lover. In Sexton's image of the drooping dead flowers may be deciphered the "starved apple-trees," the "black wraith of a deciduous creeper" and the "dead cucumber vine [...] like the crape streamer tied to the door for a death" (39) of *Ethan Frome*. Most importantly, her roses fulfil the same symbolic function as Zeena's fading geraniums which "pine away when they ain't cared for" (102). In "The Break," the speaker's heart (metaphorically the roses), like Zeena's (metaphorically the geraniums) has not been "cared for," has gone into decline and is now mourned: "And the heart too, that cripple, how it sang / once." Beneath this memory of joyful singing, lie traces of Zeena's original, but now lost, "volubility" which, when she first came to care for Ethan and his mother "was music in his ears" (53).

In addition to their symbolic impact, Sexton's roses / heart share the same dramatic function as Zeena's pickle dish. Roses / heart and pickle dish are red, signifying danger or offering a warning (Sexton's heart is "like a fire alarm"). Not coincidentally, red is Mattie's colour; her costume is a "cherry coloured fascinator" (23) and on the fateful evening of the breaking of the dish, she "had run a streak of crimson ribbon through her hair" (60). Heart and pickle dish alike are usually kept

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hidden: they are fragile, precious, private, treated with care and only exposed or brought out, on special occasions. That they both become damaged is incontrovertible evidence that they — or metonymically their owners — have been abused.

As has already been suggested, it was the discovery of signs, or evidence, of Sexton's relationship with her lover, which acted as the catalyst for this particular 'break' (the fall down the stairs). Diane Wood Middlebrook records that Sexton's lover's wife "discovered their love poems" — perhaps written from the heart? — "among his private papers and bec[a]me very angry" (265). Similarly, in *Ethan Frome*, it is not the transgression, but the discovery of transgression, which prompts the disaster. Notwithstanding Mattie and Ethan's desperate and deluded attempts to hide or efface the signs of their relationship (Ethan tries to reassemble the broken pieces of glass to ensure the "impossibility of detecting from below that the dish was broken" and then foolishly declares himself "satisfied [...] that there was no risk of immediate discovery" [64]), the evidence will not be concealed.

In Sexton's description of the broken heart awaiting discovery, stirring up trouble, brooding on its own discontents, may be found a palimpsest of the red pickle dish. Although superficially reassembled on the shelf, Wharton's glass dish, rather like Henry James's "golden bowl" and F. Scott Fitzgerald's "cut-glass bowl" (from the titles of the same names), nurses its own flaw in malevolent anticipation of its vengeful moment of revelation:

Yet like a fire alarm it waits to be known.  
It is wired. In it many colours are stored.  
While my body's in prison, heart cells alone  
have multiplied [. . .] (65-68)

The line "in it many colours are stored," I read as an allusion to the multiple, prismatic colours of Zeena's shattered dish and, in turn, to the "hundreds of prisms and cubes and splinters of glass [. . .] gleams of blue, and black edged with yellow, and yellow, and crimson edged with black" of Fitzgerald's fragmented glass bowl (295). Of course, it also takes us back to Sexton's original break: "splintering up / the hip that was merely made of crystal" (5-6). That the heart is metaphorically chained ("It is wired") — because passionate and dangerous — records the repressive imprisonment of Ethan Frome: "It seemed to Ethan that his heart was bound with cords which an unseen hand was tightening with every flick of the

clock" (108). The images, in both cases, portray a bomb primed to detonate at any time. We are made aware that in "The Break," as in *Ethan Frome*, truth will out.

In Sexton's poem, it is the repressive and punitive dimension of Ethan's experience that is emphasized. The first and last lines of Sexton's eighth stanza: "That takes brute strength like pushing a cow up hill" and "The body is a damn hard thing to kill" offer a deeply insightful and sympathetic reading of Ethan's hellish fate. The rock-like burdens which it is his duty to shoulder: first Zeena, whom we know already to be his purgation (in the pickle dish scene, she is likened to a rock: "She broke off in a short spasm of sobs that passed and left her more than ever like a shape of stone" (94), and then Mattie (who becomes Ethan's literal and figurative additional burden as a consequence of the accident: "he struggled to raise himself, and could not because a rock, or some huge mass seemed to be lying on him" [125]) resonate in Sexton's allusion to Sisyphus.<sup>3</sup> But the mythological potential of the simile and its grandeur are deflated by the transformation, in "The Break," of rock into cow. That Sexton reads Ethan's perpetual burden and punishment as being the task of pushing a cow up a hill, indicates (as indeed does the requirement for "brute strength") her understanding that Ethan is reduced to an animal-like existence. This insight is exemplified in the aftermath of Ethan's accident, by the nature of the immediate demands on him: "far off, up the hill, he heard the sorrel whinny, and thought: 'I ought to be getting him his feed....'" (126).

As Ethan has found, to his and Mattie's terrible cost: "The body is a damn hard thing to kill." All of the desperation, frustration and anger attendant on his plight are encapsulated in this terse, knowing line of "The Break" (32).<sup>4</sup> That this chilling truism is informed by Sexton's reading of *Ethan Frome* is apparent from the opening lines of the next stanza, stanza 9, which mark Sexton's first explicit acknowledgement of her debt to Wharton's novel: "But please don't touch or jiggle my bed. / I'm Ethan Frome's wife. I'll move when I'm able" (33-34). It is clear from Sexton's drafts of "The Break" that stanzas 8 and 9 (which include the allusion to Sisyphus and the acknowledgement of the body's tenacity) are late additions to the poem.<sup>5</sup> The reference to "Ethan Frome's wife" appears only in the last stanza to be inserted in the poem's final draft, and plays a crucial part in its satisfactory closure. Thus it may be argued that Sexton's reference (ostensibly) to Zeena Frome (Ethan's nominal wife: remember his careful distinction, when he introduces them to the narrator, between "my wife, Miss Frome" and "Miss Mattie Silver" (128), like the character of Zeena in Wharton's fiction, is responsible for holding everything together.

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Sexton's line "I'm Ethan Frome's wife. I'll move when I'm able" (34) exemplifies, in its own ambiguity, the contradictions, reversals and indeterminacy which lie at the heart both of *Ethan Frome* and of "The Break". Although on a first reading, as I have suggested, we may read Sexton's speaker's affinity as being with Zeena Frome (Ethan's nominal "wife"), the evidence of the rest of "The Break" and specifically, the persistence in it of other voices, indicates a far more complex and mutable series of identifications. Sexton herself problematizes the affiliation in a question which she poses in a lecture on the poem. She cites the line "I'm Ethan Frome's wife" and asks: "What do I mean by Ethan Frome's wife?" (Crawshaw Lecture [4, p. 3]). It is not clear whom this label signifies: the woman Ethan loves, the woman he is married to, or the woman / women for whom he is responsible? The ambiguous identification may be read as simultaneously meaningless (it is not certain who is the referent) and profoundly meaningful (in that it reveals and confirms the identification, even interchangeability, between the two women). By foregrounding this undecidability, Sexton highlights the crises of sympathy, identity, and relationships, which are crucial to both texts.

The uncertainty of Sexton's affiliation, her inability to choose or declare her sympathies, brings to the fore the latent, or potential, identity between Mattie and Zeena in Wharton's novel — the fact that each has a claim (one legally, one emotionally) to be considered as "Ethan Frome's wife." The essential similitude of the two women is encapsulated in Sexton's initial prohibition ("But please don't touch or jiggle my bed") which reminds us that both Mattie and Zeena repel touch. We see this in Zeena and her husband's physical separation (in chapter 3, after the dance, Zeena had "lain down with her face turned away" and "Ethan undressed hurriedly and blew out the light so that he could not see her when he took his place at her side"[42]) and in the lack of contact between Mattie and Ethan during their stolen evening of intimacy: "when the door other room had closed on her he remembered that he had not even touched her hand" (72). The similarity between Zeena and Mattie is also apparent in Wharton's novel in the symmetrical scenes where each stands guard at the threshold of the house (chapters 2 and 4). It may be perceived too, in the gradual mutation whereby the once vivacious, red-cheeked Mattie, takes on Zeena's look: "She looked so small and pinched, in her poor dress, with the red scarf wound about her, and the cold light turning her paleness sallow" (100). Moreover, we are aware that Zeena once had more in common with Mattie than is now apparent (Zeena, too, was once talkative and companionable [chapter 4]). We sense that, before long, Mattie will succumb to Ethan's taciturnity and to the bleakness of life on a farm. As Shari Benstock argues, it is "the isolation of the Frome household that destroys its

inhabitants and renders Mattie a younger version of Zeena" (248). These latent similarities culminate and are realised in Wharton's text in the uncanny transposition of the two faces during Zeena's absence: "Zeena's empty rocking chair stood facing him. Mattie rose obediently and seated herself in it. [...] It was almost as if the other face, the face of the superseded woman, had obliterated that of the intruder" (65-66).

The structure of *Ethan Frome* may be said to sustain and exploit the same ambiguity about the characters and similarities of the two women, as is subsequently foregrounded by Sexton. In the opening scene of the novel proper, we are uncertain about the identity of the woman at the dance who is the subject of Ethan's keen interest. Our expectations are roused until finally and briefly Ethan's wife is mentioned, but only to be immediately placed under erasure by the naming of Ethan's true focus of interest: "his wife's cousin, Mattie Silver" (24). Similarly, the narrator's early reference in his preface, to an obscured "woman's voice droning querulously" (18), creates the crucial suspense which motivates the reader's interest throughout. Of course, we read the novel under the delusion that this must be the voice of Zeena; the suspense is sustained even to the last chapter where, although "the querulous droning ceased," we are left no clearer about whose voice it is. Finally, and shockingly, all is revealed with the dread revelation that the complaining, "high thin voice" is that of Mattie Silver (128). This horrifying scene, which depicts both Mattie and Zeena living as Ethan's dependants, confirms that each is, in a lasting and punitive sense, "Ethan Frome's wife."

Sexton's speaker, by appropriating the label "wife" in order to obtain a hearing, subtly asserts the rights and the value of the — usually effaced — 'other woman.' And it is here that we see one of the main significances of Sexton's revision of *Ethan Frome*. Her speaker's at least partial and tentative claim to the voice of Mattie Silver for the first tune, gives the persistently silent Mattie — whose feelings in Wharton's text are only ever betrayed through looks, or blushes, and whose experience is related at two removes (by the male narrator's "vision" of Ethan Frome's "story") — a voice of her own.

Mattie's is the perspective from which Sexton opens her poem: the falling / fallen woman gesturing because her own voice cannot be heard ("falling down the front hall stairs. / It was also a message I never spoke"). She is the 'femme fatale' whose only permissible language is that of the body. We see her, as a result of the fall, stripped of her femininity,

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dispossessed and powerless: "At the E.W. they cut off my dress" (20). In "The Break", we find an echo of the violent and repressive punishment meted out to Mattie for yielding to her passions, here claimed by Sexton's speaker as her own: "But now they've wrapped me in like a nun. / Burst like firecrackers! Held like stones!" (11-12). We should note the symbolism of the (red) firecrackers and the allusion to paralysis (repeated in stanza 10 "A bird full of bones, now I'm held by a sand bag"). We see that both Sexton's speaker and Mattie are vulnerable, powerless, victims of (male) abuse of power. Mattie is "indentured" to Zeena and Ethan by practical "misfortune" (43), just as Sexton's speaker is indentured to her lover by psychiatric misfortune. Ethan is aware that "he had no right to show his feelings" (35) — a double prohibition on the grounds of his status as employer and as married man. The same holds true of the lover in "The Break" who is both married, and professionally involved. In both cases, the man charged with the 'care' of the woman (*'who cares I about you, who cares'* (4-5)) is, in fact, responsible for a failure of care — for the emotional and physical catastrophes of both texts.

In the narrator's framing conclusion to *Ethan Frome*, we are tantalizingly close to hearing Mattie's version of the story (about to be reported by Mrs Hale) but again, and finally, her voice is elided: "They gave her things to quiet her, and she didn't know much till to'rd morning, and then all of a sudden she woke up just like herself, and looked straight at me out of her big eyes, and said . . . Oh, I don't know why I'm telling you all this,' Mrs Hale broke off, crying" (130-31). Wharton's narrator is in search of the "missing facts of Ethan Frome's story, or rather such a key to his character as should coordinate the facts I knew" (8). The key fact that eludes him - the 'break' in his narrative - is Mattie's untold story. This breach is finally filled by Sexton's adoption of Mattie's missing voice.

I suggest, in my introduction, that *Ethan Frome* is significant to Sexton on a structural level and nowhere is this clearer than in this appropriation and synthesis of these different, contradictory, yet sometimes simultaneous perspectives. Sexton's poem with its blend of disparate voices and subject positions exemplifies the process at the heart of *Ethan Frome* by which the situation is "seen through eyes as different as those of Harmon Gow and Mrs. Ned Hale" (viii). If, as I have suggested, the voice of Mattie is discernible; so too are the voices of Ethan and Zeena. Although the primary reading of Sexton's first stanza may lead us to conclude that this is Mattie's voice, Ethan's voice whispers beneath it. It is certainly "also" his "violent heart that broke" (the emphasis on violence brings to mind the argument between Ethan and Zeena after her return

from Bettsbridge: "For a moment such a flame of hate rose in him that it ran down his arm and clenched his fist against her" (88)). And it is Ethan who is persistently and culpably silent: on Mattie's banishment from the house "Words of resistance rushed to Ethan's lips and died there," "Twice he opened his lips to speak to Mattie and found no breath" (108). Zeena's presence too may be detected. Sexton's speaker's fascination with her own symptoms, and fetishism of medical paraphernalia ("an odd device, / a buck's extension and a Balkan overhead frame" (23-24)) both describes Mattie's paralysed condition and evokes Zeena's hypochondria. Sexton's line even reifies the name of Zeena's "Doctor Buck". On occasion, all three voices are detectable, as for example, in stanza 13 of "The Break" which implies that inarticulate desire, or the failure to communicate, are central to both falls:

Understand what happened the day that I fell.  
My heart had stammered and hungered at  
a marriage feast until the angel of hell  
turned me into the punisher, the acrobat. (49-52)

In this stanza may be traced the voices of the scorned and vengeful 'other' woman (Mattie, or Sexton's speaker) witnessing but not participating in a marriage, of Zeena (nervous, desiring, excited at the beginning of her own marriage, and rendered sullen and powerless by her own husband's visible love for another woman), and of Ethan (tongue-tied, dissatisfied: we are reminded in particular of his faltering, inappropriate attempts to discuss with Mattie, Ruth and Ned's kiss).

Indeed, the story of "The Break", like the story of *Ethan Frome*, is a product of the piecing together of "hints" and "different stories" (9, 3). Sexton's speaker is only able to present the full picture by exercising the different subject positions from which it is drawn. Wharton's narrator's prefatory explanation: "I had the story, bit by bit, from various people, and, as generally happens in such cases, each time it was a different story" (3), as I have suggested, offered exciting narrative possibilities to Sexton. Her poem may be read as a paradigm of the writing process championed by Wharton in her introduction to this novel: "Each of my chroniclers contributes to the narrative just so much as he or she is capable of understanding of what, to them, is a complicated and mysterious case; and only the narrator of the tale has scope enough to see it all, to resolve it back into simplicity, and to put it in its rightful place among his larger categories." [Wharton's emphasis] (viii) Thus Sexton's first-person narrator (her 'I') shifts perspective and voice repeatedly throughout the

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text in order to synthesise this "vision" other story.

Finally, the addenda to Sexton's speaker's identification with "Ethan Frome's wife": "I'll move when I'm able" (34) gets to the nub of the questions of responsibility and motivation that are central to Wharton's text and to her own. As the latent doubt about whose is the querulous voice, the uncertainty about "who cares," and the ambiguity about who may claim to be Ethan's wife indicate, profound and unsettling questions about capability and culpability, passivity and power need to be asked of both texts.

If, as Cynthia Griffin Wolff has persuasively argued, *Ethan Frome* is "about its narrator" (164), then "The Break" is about its telling. For, in the admission "I'll move when I'm able," Sexton demonstrates her control over her experience, her ability to dominate it by writing about it (Spacks 41). The verb "move" records both her ability to "move" subject positions, exercising different voices in him, and, more figuratively, her ability to "move" the reader through the medium of a poem about tragic lost love). The emphatic and deeply self-conscious first-person voice, and the long vowel sounds in this line, express and exemplify the speaker's pleasure at recalling, and aestheticising her experience.<sup>6</sup> This is a purposeful and productive process. Sexton's speaker, like Zeena Frome, relishes her latent power. She is able swiftly to turn trauma to account (as I mentioned. Sexton's poem is based on prose drafts written from the hospital in the immediate aftermath of the accident), to turn passivity into activity (we are reminded of Zeena's rapid recuperation once Mattie's departure has been decided), and to turn tragedy to her own advantage, here by writing about it, or using it productively. This suggests that Sexton's speaker is neither as heart-broken, nor Zeena as sick, as it had previously suited them to present.

Sexton, in textualizing her experience — in reprising, scrutinising, and representing it in writing; in rising or responding to the call of the muse — may be said to have demonstrated a remarkable recovery of selfhood. Mrs Hale's comment about Zeena's recovery stands for both women: "It was a miracle, considering how sick she was — but she seemed to be raised right up just when the call came to her" (131). For Sexton's speaker, as for Zeena, it is "the absorbed observation of her own symptoms" (53) which is the key to her escaping them.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The "death drive" which, arguably, surfaces in both of these texts is worthy of scrutiny - although, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Maxine Kumin, a long-term friend of Sexton's, and a fellow poet writes in her poem "How It Goes On" - a

poem, incidentally, inspired by Sexton's suicide [*To Make A Prairie* 191] - of "nights so cold / the pond ice cracks like target practice" (*Selected Poems* 163-4), thus offering an interpretation of Sexton's image of the hip cracking like a pistol.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, rocks and stones are part of the landscape of *Ethan Frome*. In her introduction, Wharton describes the characters other novel as "granite outcroppings" - typical of the region, but usually "overlooked."

<sup>4</sup> Linda Gray Sexton comments, of one of Sexton's later suicide attempts: "It appeared it was harder to kill herself than she had anticipated because she had developed such a tolerance to all kinds of medication" (162).

<sup>5</sup> Unusually for Sexton, "The Break" originated in hospital notes made in the immediate aftermath of her accident. More typically of her technique, the poem manuscript then went through numerous revisions.

<sup>6</sup> An early draft of the poem emphasizes this connection between experience, and the process of writing about it. The falling / writing self is objectified as a typewriter: 'I throw the typewriter onto the floor / I broke its hip, I gave it the sack' ("The Break". Drafts, HRHRC).

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#### **Re-Inventing Colonialism: Race and Gender in Edith Wharton's *In Morocco***

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Recently, interest in Edith Wharton's travel writing has led to discussion of *In Morocco* (1920), her account of her 1917 trip to the French Protectorate. Three important points have been made. First, Wharton's book is in many ways typical of the genre of "Orientalist" writing outlined by Edward Said (Funston). Second, *In Morocco's* descriptions of Moroccan harems constitute part of her "argument" about the role of women in American society (Ammons). Third, the book enthusiastically supports French colonialism by praising the work of Resident General Louis-Hubert Lyautey and his wife Inés, ignoring the harsher realities of French rule (Rich).

This article will argue that despite Wharton's support of Lyautey, *In Morocco* did not merely reproduce a pre-packaged colonial discourse. Rather,

it brought together disparate influences: Lyautey and his theory of colonization; the influence of pre-Protectorate Orientalist discourse, particularly through the work of Pierre Loti; and Euro-American discourses on racial purity and miscegenation. Into this complex of influences Wharton injected her views on the role of women in Euro-American society and on the relationship between France and America. These views of Wharton were in turn inflected by her encounter with Morocco. The result was a new cultural product, a new discourse of colonialism. Wharton created a vision of Morocco which was uniquely hers.

By discussing the French colonial project in Morocco, Wharton took part in the larger process by which travel writers have encouraged metropolitan readers to take a positive interest in colonial projects which might not benefit them directly or materially. This broader issue has been addressed by Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, and the questions Pratt poses make *In Morocco* an important book for historians of colonialism as well as for Wharton scholars:

How has travel and exploration produced "the rest of the world" for European readerships at particular points in Europe's expansionist trajectory? How has it produced Europe's differentiated conceptions of itself in relation to something it became possible to call "the rest of the world"? How do such signifying practices encode and legitimate the aspirations of economic expansion and empire? How do they betray them? (4-5)

Wharton's energetic praise of Lyautey clearly contributed to the legitimization of French aspirations of expansion and empire. She described him as "the Great Administrator" who opened Morocco to foreign travel (15-16) and who prevented the relics of Moroccan culture from falling into ruin (33-34). He who had rescued Morocco from the "rebellious tribes" then rescued France from the Germans by maintaining control of Morocco's economic productivity-- the "Miracle of Morocco" that rivaled Foch's "Miracle of the Marne." All of this was achieved without the destruction typical of French colonial endeavors in Algeria and Tunisia. Lyautey successfully incorporated native rulers into the Protectorate government, educating them for their new tasks (161-69); meanwhile, he prevented the destruction of native arts and ways of life. Wharton quoted Lyautey as saying, "It was easy to do because I loved the people" (170-71).

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However, we should not infer from this glowing portrait of Lyautey that Wharton's book was a mere vehicle for the agenda of the Protectorate's colonial leadership. It did legitimize French expansion and empire, but it presented images of Moroccans and of French colonialism that were incompatible with prevailing French ideas. This was the result of the way Wharton used concepts of gender and race to imagine Morocco, America, and France. Wharton's book rejected French depictions of Arab women as libidinous sexual objects and the harem as an eroticized space in order to use her descriptions of harems to protest the oppression of women in American society (instead casting only "black" women as libidinous sexual objects). Her book also contradicted the French myth of the *mission civilisatrice*. Her attitude toward the French role in Morocco was predicated upon a strong aversion to racial and cultural mixing. As she saw it, the role of the colonizer was not to Westernize but rather to prevent miscegenation. The issue of miscegenation was portrayed in gendered terms: she described a feminized Arab culture that had to be protected from the rapine masculinity of Europeans and "blacks." French colonial authority, embodied in Lyautey's masculine person, was the force that would protect Arab culture from such predations. Gone was Lyautey's claim that colonialism was "that which creates, which develops, which humanizes." Wharton replaced the *mission civilisatrice* with a *mission preservatrice*.

The dominant French view of Morocco was based on Lyautey's famous philosophy of colonization. His ideal of colonial policy was based on the principle of "association," in contrast to the older policy of "assimilation" pursued in Algeria and elsewhere. In Lyautey's words, the French were to "maintain as much as possible in their entirety native governmental machinery, institutions, and customs; to use the traditional leaders, to let them control the police, the administration—even justice—and the collection of taxes, under the control of a single agent residing close to the chief" (qtd in Betts 118). This was seen as a practical policy, intended to minimize the amount of coercive force necessary for French rule. It involved a certain amount of cultural separatism, but it was grounded primarily on a conservative respect for traditional institutions. As Raymond Betts has pointed out, this associationalist ideal did not abandon the traditional French notion of the *mission civilisatrice*. The French still saw their role as promoting the economic, cultural, and moral advancement of the colonized peoples; they merely sought to promote such advancement through means that were more

compatible with native ways of life, ways that, it was hoped, the colonized would find less obnoxious (123). While this was racist, or culturalist, in the sense that it assumed a hierarchy of societies in which the Moroccan was inferior to the French, it clearly expressed faith in the ability of Moroccan society to evolve into a higher form. "We must not treat the indigenous people as the vanquished, as an inferior race," declared Lyautey, "but rather elevate them to our level." Furthermore, while Lyautey's policy called for maintaining separate French and Moroccan governments, schools, and neighborhoods, it was by no means a policy of strict racial separatism. In fact, Lyautist urban planners defined their methods in contrast to what they saw as the British pattern of racial separation (Hoisington 109). In Lyautey's words, the success of the colonial endeavor depended upon an "agreeable and candid association of the two races.... In a word we have placed our hand in theirs" (qtd in Betts 118-19). This view of the colonial relationship was in many ways a fantasy. It was not a fantasy that Wharton shared.

Wharton either did not understand or did not accept the notion that association with the French would promote the development of Moroccan society. As a result, her depiction of French Morocco was a subversion of the Lyautist vision, despite her ardent praise of Lyautey himself. Her overall vision of Morocco was that of a crumbling ancient civilization which was threatened by both internal decay and European corruption. Her praise of Lyautey is based upon her perception that his goal was to preserve this "rich and stagnant civilization" intact (76). Lyautey had ended the colonial "profanation" of Moroccan towns caused by colonization, forbidding European construction within the city walls. He had even required administrative buildings to be placed "so far beyond the walls that the modern colony grouped around them remains entirely distinct from the old town, instead of growing out of it like an ugly excrescence." Meanwhile, he undertook the task of preserving Moroccan art and architecture with "skill and discretion" (35, 33; cf. also 37, 166, 170).

While Lyautey did indeed work to preserve Moroccan art, Wharton's view of his overall mission was a distortion. The French administration did not seek to freeze Moroccan cities in their 'natural' state; rather, they actively sought to transform urban life. The Lyautist philosophy demanded that this be done under a "native façade" and with "the greatest prudence," but nevertheless the aim was to develop Moroccan cities, as part of the *mission civilisatrice*. At the Rabat

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exposition, Lyautey declared that the colonial mission was to "stimulate the cities and the harvests, to open regions heretofore struck with inertia to all the possibilities of the future." Wharton, however, seemed to think that Lyautey aimed to seal off Moroccan society from Western influence.

This divergence from the Lyautist view of Morocco was the result of Wharton's ideas about race, ideas which differed from the prevailing French colonial discourses. These ideas led her to construct racial types differently than the French did, and to see the French as the guardians of racial purity in the Protectorate. Wharton seems to have been more influenced by the discourse of scientific racism than by the Protectorate leadership.

French ideas about race in Morocco during this period were dominated by what has become known as "the Berber Myth." This myth was based on a racist or culturally essentialist notion of a fundamental dichotomy between Arabs and Berbers in Morocco. According to Edmund Burke III, the Berber Myth gained popularity after 1904 as the French struggled to find a basis for policy-making in Morocco; by 1912, it had become hegemonic, and influenced French views of politics, religion, and race in the new Protectorate. By 1919 the Protectorate administration had decided to promote the gradual assimilation of Berbers to French language and civilization. The Berbers were noble savages nearly free from the burden of Islam and were ripe for the *mission civilisatrice* -- provided that respect was shown for their particular political and cultural needs, according to the Lyautist method (Burke 181, 197; Slavin 188).

This Arab-Berber distinction did not play a prominent role in Wharton's discourse. When she mentioned Berbers, the image was not noble savagery but merely savagery. Her discussion of Marrakech's history of invasion by "the wild clansmen" seems to associate the Berbers with "the fierce black world beyond the Atlas" (107, 111). Wharton was much more concerned with the distinctions between blacks, Arabs, and Jews than she was with the "Berber question." Wharton used *In Morocco* to advance her own racial views, not those of the Protectorate leadership.

On the other hand, Wharton's view of Islam did resemble the French colonial view. Like her French hosts, Wharton envisioned an Islam which was characterized by fanaticism and which was at the root of the alleged stagnation of Moroccan society. Islam, as she saw it, combined unpredictable violence with moral lassitude and a stultifying

resistance to change (38, 49). However, since she did not racialize her description of Islam in terms of an Arab-Berber dichotomy, it is difficult to say to what degree Wharton's discourse on Islam was influenced by her stay in Morocco, and to what degree she drew upon an older shared heritage of ideas about Islamic lands. There is much to suggest that Wharton was influenced less by her encounter with the French colonialists in Morocco than she was by the books she read about Morocco; many of these books predated the consolidation of the Berber Myth and constitute older discourses of orientalism and colonialism.

The strongest influence upon Wharton's *In Morocco* seems to have been Pierre Loti's *Au Maroc*; the similarities in form and content are striking. But a comparison of Wharton and Loti demonstrates that despite these similarities, Wharton did not simply reproduce Loti's discourse any more than she reproduced Lyautey's. She used many of Loti's insights and devices, but she used them to illustrate her own perspective.

"Pierre Loti" was the pseudonym of Louis Marie Julien Viaud, a French naval officer and novelist who traveled to Fes in 1889 with a French diplomatic expedition. Travelling by donkey, he devoted a great deal more attention in his book to the logistics of the voyage than Wharton would, but in many other respects she imitated his narrative. The opening descriptions of the boat passage and the interminable delays before embarking are very much like Loti's. And when she marvels at the "firm French roads"(22) in a country that had been utterly roadless ten years earlier, she seems to be comparing her journey to his.

Wharton also follows Loti in celebrating Morocco's untouristed pristineness. Like him, she depicts Morocco as a land frozen in time, cut off from the modern West by "the old shroud of Islam" (Loti 2). Like him, she compares herself to the medieval crusaders in the Holy Land, and comments upon the medieval character of the Kairouan university. Like Loti, she focuses on the predicament of a young female slave as the embodiment of the defects of the Moroccan social system. She also echoes Loti's statements about the paradoxical combination of Arab energy and lassitude. Like Loti, Wharton described the men of the Moroccan cities as soft and indolent. Yet both writers saw Moroccans as a source of danger. Wharton's discussion of the hazards of Islamic fanaticism contrasts the security of Lyautey's Morocco to the Morocco of Loti's day - but the difference lay in the French presence: Islam's dangerous inclinations remained unchanged.

In these respects, Wharton and Loti seem to be participating in the same Orientalist discourse. However, there are also scenes in Wharton's book that demonstrate her use of Loti's motifs to promote her own perspective, one that diverges from his. In particular, Wharton placed a greater importance on racial typology. This can be seen

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in her description of the Marrakech souks, which closely parallels Loti's account of the bazaar in Fes. Both described the diversity of people at these markets, but Wharton's "types" are identified more exclusively by race. For example, Loti listed, alongside Berbers and Jews, "fair-skinned Arabs," "Mussulmans [sic] without conviction," "unrelenting fanatics," and "the saint" as separate elements, defined not only by race but by religious inclination, an independent variable (217-18). Wharton, on the other hand, saw race as constituting character type: "fierce tribesmen" [Berbers], "mad negroes," "consumptive Jews with pathos and cunning in their large eyes and smiling lips," "lusty slave-girls," etc. (112).

Wharton's greater emphasis on racial distinctions is most evident in her references to "blacks" or "negroes." Wharton's blacks are clearly separated from the Arabs, and possessed of distinct racial characteristics that naturalize their position in society. Loti also distinguished between Arabs and blacks, but he did not make as absolute a distinction between their social roles, nor did he naturalize this distinction to the extent that Wharton did. While most of Loti's blacks are found in servile positions, he seems to recognize that this is not their natural state (the Sultan's infantrymen were "poor wretches...recruited goodness knows how"-- and only some these soldier-slaves were black) (119-20). Loti also described a black *caïd* (local governor), albeit in racially stereotyped terms, and the Sultan himself is described as "brown-faced" (120, 150-52). Moreover, the domestic servants at Loti's residence in Fes do not seem to have been black, although his description of the women who crowded the city's rooftop terraces does claim that the "negresses" were the servants of the Arab women (162, 175).

Wharton's blacks, on the other hand, have clearly defined social roles and racial characteristics. In the countryside she claims to have encountered an entire village populated only by blacks, described as "big friendly creatures," who apparently did not mix with their Arab neighbors (47). In the cities, all the blacks are servants or slaves, and all the slaves are black. Wharton did condemn the institution of slavery (in keeping with the fashionable view of Oriental despotism), but her blacks do not seem ill suited to servility in general; indeed, the cheerful energy of negro servants stands in sharp contrast to the vapid languor of their Arab masters. There is a dangerous side to this energy, however, as evinced by the "mad negroes" in the Marrakech souks. The black population of Marrakech originates in that "fierce black world beyond the Atlas" with all its "heat and savagery" (107, 111). Even in Fes, the nighttime stillness of the Arab city is disturbed by "the savage

thrum-thrum of a negro orgy" (102). This vision of blacks as both stupidly amiable and potentially dangerous represents the imposition of her own racial ideology onto Loti's discourse about Morocco.

The racial absolutism evident in Wharton's descriptions of Arabs and blacks made her resistant to the idea of the *mission civilisatrice*, and accounts for her rejection of Lyautey's colonial vision. Believing that people's character traits and lifestyles are determined by their race, she expressed no hope that French endeavors might transform Moroccan society. This absolutism was informed by the scientific racialism popular at the time. Wharton was familiar with the work of Vernon Kellogg and with "Gobinisme", a eugenics movement based on the work of Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau. Wharton's aversion to racial and cultural mixing in Morocco reflected these ideas. She warned against European influences on Moroccan society, and scorned attempts by Moroccans to assimilate to European culture. She also described racial mixing among Moroccans as a root cause of Moroccan backwardness (128). Her book as a whole emphasized Lyautey's role in preventing the disruption of Moroccan culture by "European bad taste." Her 1919 preface to the book expressed doubt that the pristine land she had visited would remain preserved after the war. European tourism would ruin the character of the country, subjecting it to the "banalities and promiscuities of modern travel." No longer would Morocco be insulated from modernity: "the strange survival of medieval life...will gradually disappear, till at last even the mysterious autochthones of the Atlas will have folded their tents and silently stolen away" (10-11). Wharton's preface to the 1927 edition expressed pleasant surprise, however: despite heavy tourist travel, Morocco had, thanks to Lyautey, "kept nearly all the magic and mystery of forbidden days... all the conveniences and facilities introduced have not been allowed to mar the ancient wonder" (15-16). Whereas Gobineau had gloomily claimed that the stronger (more masculine) races would inevitably impose themselves upon the weaker (feminine) races, thereby producing the corruption and degeneration of civilization (Young 107-08), Wharton found in Lyautey an antidote to Gobineau's pessimism. Lyautey was the father figure who protected the virtue of his immature feminine charge from the masculinity of her suitors.

Wharton's vision of Morocco as a pristine land which ought not to be corrupted by European

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visitors has much in common with Loti's discourse. Both authors found modernization distasteful in the metropole, and hoped that Morocco would not be affected by it. But Wharton's disapproval of Western "corruption" of Morocco is more deeply rooted in her general disdain for cultural and racial mixing. One senses this disapproval in her description of Tangiers, which "swarms with people in European clothing." Her ambiguous wording is revealing: are these people Europeans? They are not Arabs: Wharton is referring to people from across the Strait, but her phrase suggests that they are not really European anymore, despite their dress (they swarm, like insects). Unlike Loti, she did not favor the influence that colonial life might have upon a European. She hastened to leave Tangier and to reach unadulterated Morocco, the "world of mystery" (23-24).

Wharton's descriptions of Moroccans also make it clear that she viewed racial and cultural separation as the desirable norm and mixing as a dangerous aberration. She saw the Moroccan population as composed of distinct racial types, most notably Arabs and blacks, but also, with less distinction, Jews and Berbers. In Wharton's account, it is best when these groups keep to themselves. The village of blacks is a pleasant picture: the men are "friendly," the women "handsome," and the children "jolly" (although their "spindle legs and globular stomachs" indicated malnutrition, Wharton appears to have found this endearing) (47). This description of amiable separation contrasts with her description of Marrakech's mixed population. The waves of invaders who conquered that city were unsuccessful at adapting to urban life: they became "infected with luxury and mad with power" but never lost their old tribal habits. The varied peoples of Marrakech preserve their distinct characteristics, but the souks where they mingle are "dark, fierce, and fanatical" (106-07; 111).

Wharton also makes clear her disapproval of the mixing of European elements into Moroccan society. In addition to her condemnation of pre-Lyautey colonialism and her fear of the influence that tourism might have, Wharton's opposition to "hybridity" is apparent when she describes situations involving European influences upon Moroccans. One of these situations involves actual "miscegenation". In the Rabat home of a Moroccan "dignitary," Wharton met a woman who was to act as an interpreter for the harem. This woman was half-Algerian, with a French mother. She had been educated in the French schools of Algeria, but neither this schooling nor her French blood had benefited her, according to Wharton. Although she looked European, she could barely speak French,

and "her soul was the soul of Islam." Her Algerian identity makes the point clear: trying to assimilate Arabs was a mistake. In Algeria, the French had tried to make Arabs French; the result, according to Wharton, was a failure. Gobineau, too, had used the Algerian example as an illustration of the degenerate results of hybridization (Young 106).

Wharton was implicitly contrasting the failed Algerian policy of assimilation to Lyautey's Morocco. But her desire for racial separation went far beyond Lyautey's associationalism, with its proclaimed respect for native customs and institutions. In contrast to the Lyautist ideology, Wharton's narrative allowed no possibility of 'elevating' the Moroccan to the level of European civilization. One example of this is Wharton's description of the Caid of Marrakech. The Caid tried to adopt European tastes in art, but "like all Orientals" he was incapable of understanding European ideas of beauty; the result was that his "exquisite" Moroccan decorations were sullied by "the tawdriest bric-à-brac" of Europe. Curiously, Wharton contradicted this assessment only a page later, claiming that the Caid "seems, unlike many Orientals, to have selected the best in assimilating European influences." But Wharton allowed this image of fruitful assimilation to surface only so that she could denounce its possibility on grounds more serious than mere poor taste. Superficial affectations of European ways, whether tasteful or not, were insignificant in the face of "the abyss that slavery and the seraglio put between the most Europeanized Mohammedan and the Western conception of life" (156-57). This abyss was absolute; as a result, Wharton had no concept of a *mission civilisatrice*. She praised Lyautey for preserving Moroccan society, not for improving it. Despite her putative horror at the institution of slavery and the confinement of women in harems, she never suggested that European influence might alter or abolish these practices. Like the malnutrition of the rural black children, she saw slavery and the seraglio as immutable aspects of Oriental civilization. Cultures should not mix; races do not change. The only hope for improvement in Morocco, as Wharton saw it, was time, time to evolve-- but this hope depended upon the ability of the French presence to prevent cultural and racial intermixing, protecting Morocco both from European influence and from the "barbarism" of the black Sahara (128).

Another element of Wharton's racialism was her sexualization of "black" women and desexualization of "Arab" women, a theme which differed from popular French attitudes and which was tied to her assertions about gender roles in France and America. Her innovative portrayal of Moroccan women supported her agenda concerning women's roles in

America; it also reinforced her notion of a racial hierarchy.

There was certainly much French colonial cultural production devoted to the description of North African women as erotic objects, and to fantasies about the harem as a place of sexual pleasure. This image was propagated most publicly through photographic postcards, which often displayed North African women in a state of semi-undress. Similar ideas about North African women and the harem are evident in colonial travel narratives. This is true of Loti's book: his sexual attraction to Moroccan women is a significant theme in his narrative. Wharton, too, described Moroccan women in sexualized terms.

The difference between Wharton and Loti lay in which bodies were sexualized. The women Loti described in sexual terms were sometimes "dusky" but never identified as negro or black. Likewise, the models photographed for colonial postcards generally represented "Moors" and "Kabiles," not "blacks". In contrast, Wharton did not eroticize Arab or Berber women, but the black women in her narrative were "lusty" with "swaying hips," "handsome blue-bronze creatures, bare to the waist, with...firmly sculptured legs and ankles." In one scene reminiscent of the postcards, a dust storm in Marrakech produced a sudden gust of wind, "stripping to the hips the black slave-girls scudding home from the souks"(112, 47, 119).

Wharton's Arab women, by contrast, were portrayed as non-sexual. She explicitly denounced the traditional Western view of the Arab harem as a place of brimming sexuality. As a woman, Wharton was given the opportunity to meet with several groups of "harem" women in great Moroccan palaces, an experience forbidden to Loti (much to his regret, no doubt). The Sultan's wives are described as having a vivacity that might be interpreted as sexual, "laughing, babbling, taking us [Wharton and Mme. Lyautey] by the hand, and putting shy questions while they looked at us with caressing eyes." But their relationship with the Sultan does not seem sexual (when he enters, they are merely "respectful," and one wanders off to play with his little boy). In any case, vivacity was exceptional in a harem, according to Wharton; a Moroccan palace was a "dignified official household" where the women typically wore "looks of somewhat melancholy respectability." She contrasted this explicitly to the Western fantasy of "sensual seduction" in the harem.

This non-sexual portrayal of harem women seems to be related to Wharton's belief in upper-class women's "respectability" (a problematic category for her). This contrasts sharply and probably deliberately with Loti. Loti describes at length, and in mildly erotic

terms, the women who congregate on the rooftops neighboring his residence in Fes. Some of these women seem actively interested in Loti, even flirtatious. While some of them may be slaves, others may be of high class (they "belong" to his neighbors, but whether as slaves or wives is uncertain). None of them are explicitly identified by race. One of them has recently been beaten, and Loti expresses pity for her, although he shamefully confesses that this pity is motivated by his attraction to her. (203-08)

Wharton, too, described the congregation of women on rooftops. Her treatment of the subject seems to be a rebuttal to Loti's. Like Loti, she depicted the balconies and rooftops as a space inhabited solely by women, describing the crowd which turned out to watch the festival of the Hamadchas. For this biannual event, "the feminine population seizes the opportunity to burst into flower on the housetops," dressed in their best finery. But Wharton was quick to point out that such a display of feminine beauty was a rare occurrence; normally the only women seen in public in Morocco were those "of the humblest classes, household slaves, servants, peasants from the country, or small tradesmen's wives...." Moreover, in contrast to the brightly-dressed prostitutes and dancing girls of Algeria and Tunisia, the low-class women of Morocco went about "wrapped in the prevailing grave-clothes." This contrasts sharply with Loti's description of a country teeming with alluring women of various classes. Wharton was even uncomfortable with her implication that upper-class women might appear amongst humbler folk on special occasions, for she immediately contradicted this idea. "Even then," she asserts, "it is probable that the throng is mostly composed of slaves, household servants, and women of the lower *bourgeoise* [...]" (53).

Wharton's discussions of harems and rooftops suggest that she sought to make it clear that Western ideas about the libido and sexual availability of Oriental women did not apply to the wives of the Moroccan elite. (According to her, all such women were Arabs, although one suspects that this may be a case of Wharton misclassifying some women as slaves based on their appearance.) As a result, whereas Loti had sexualized Arab/Berber women but not blacks, Wharton sexualized black women but rejected his portrayal of Arab women. This was because Wharton used her descriptions of the harem women to provide insight into the roles of women in France and America. The eroticized image of the Arab woman was incompatible with the point she wanted to make about gender back home.

During the war, Wharton also wrote and published a book about the French entitled *French Ways and their Meaning*. This book was addressed to Americans,

and encouraged Americans to understand and learn from the French. Wharton wrote that the Americans and the French were "two intelligent races," but as she saw it, the French were "grown-up," while the American "race" was a mere adolescent and therefore had much to learn. Most importantly, Americans needed to learn from the role played by women in French society. Wharton felt that French women lived more public lives than (upper-class) American women, interacting more freely with men. As a result, according to Wharton, French women were intellectually more developed and psychologically more mature. For Wharton, the role of women was the key factor determining the maturity of a people as a whole: "No nation can have grown-up ideas till it has a ruling caste of grown-up men and women; and it is possible to have a ruling caste of grown-up men and women only in a civilisation where the power of each sex is balanced by that of the other" (113).

As Elizabeth Ammons has recognized, Wharton used her descriptions of Moroccan harems to illustrate the stultifying effect that gender segregation, seclusion, and restriction had upon women and upon society as a whole. The women of the harems are "listless" and conniving, "imprisoned in a conception of sexual and domestic life based on slave-service and incessant espionage." Their imprisonment renders them helpless; they can't cook, sew, clean, or even care for their sick children. They are utterly dependent on "one fat and tyrannical man... almost as inert and sedentary as his women" (*In Morocco* 149, 152). Wharton drew a parallel between these households and upper-class Anglo-American households: "I was never more vividly reminded of the fact that human nature, from one pole to the other, falls naturally into certain categories, and that Respectability wears the same face in an Oriental harem as in England or America" (146). The harem was the epitome of the household where women are sequestered from public life, rendering them dull and lifeless. The only exception to this was the Sultan's household. The Sultan's harem occasionally allowed outside visitors; as a result, the Sultan's young wives were happier and more vivacious, albeit still vapid. Moreover, the vapidness of these idle wives was contrasted with the "majesty" of the Empress Mother. This woman, who exercised authority in the palace and seemed involved in the public affairs of the Sultanate, was strong and wise (141-43). The message is clear: women's intellectual, social, and moral development is proportional to their access to public life.

Thus Wharton used the harem as a parable to illustrate the deleterious effects of the exclusion of women from public life in America and England. This required her to emphasize the similarities between the harem women and the bored and stuffy women of

upper-class Anglo-American households. As a result, she rejected the image of the harem as a place of erotic energy, portraying "Arab" women in non-erotic terms, reserving her erotic voyeurism for Morocco's "black" women.

Wharton's interest in the similarities between harem women and the women of the West contradicted her belief in absolute racial difference. On the whole, however, her racialism was dominant. Her fear of miscegenation led her to reject any possibility that French influence might improve the condition of Moroccan women in the way that she hoped it would improve American society. Furthermore, her discussion of harems reinforced her notion of a racial hierarchy, with women's social position as the criterion of racial maturity: France was the most "grown-up", and Morocco the most immature.

Wharton's racialized discussion of Morocco was also influenced by the socio-political transformations brought about by World War I. The formation of new (though perhaps temporary) ideas of identity based on wartime alliances required clear lines to be drawn against the "Other." Both *French Ways* and *In Morocco* were part of this project. *French Ways* was an explicit response to the wartime realization that America had entered into a new and intimate relationship with the French. According to Wharton the war had revealed that America had much in common with France, a commonality that had gone unnoticed in peacetime. "The world since 1914 has been like a house on fire," she wrote. "All the lodgers are on the stairs, in dishabille [sic]. Their doors are swinging wide, and one gets glimpses[...] that a life-time of ordinary intercourse would not offer." In this atmosphere of disruption and revelation, she claimed, illusory visions of similarity and difference were dispelled, and new, more profound affinities were discovered. "It is of these fundamental substances that the new link between America and France is made," Wharton declared. The wartime alliance was a human creation, to be sure, but it was based on a pre-existing and natural commonality which was evident "in the suddenly bared depths of the French heart" (*French Ways* v-vi). In short, Wharton was arguing for a French-American 'We.' The 'They' in this case were the Central powers, particularly the Germans. The war had disrupted the boundaries of the Euro-American identity imagined by upper-class Eastern Americans like Wharton, and a new boundary had to be drawn. Although *French Ways* focused on the differences between the French and American races, the effort throughout was to make peculiarities of the French seem either insignificant or admirable, to be emulated by Americans. French-American communion would help bring the Americans to maturity, while rejuvenating the French (96-97). Thus, Wharton's French-

American 'We' was based upon a natural racial affinity and a common destiny.

This reading of *French Ways* adds to our understanding of *In Morocco*. In the Morocco book, the commonality of French and American identity is no longer argued; it is assumed. Here, Wharton made no mention of French peculiarities, nor of differences between the French and Americans. Never once does she mention the fact that her hosts are French rather than American have any significance; never once are the two nations compared. Because she spoke fluent French, there was no mention of linguistic differences between herself and the French. In contrast, she dealt explicitly with the linguistic chasm separating herself and her hosts from the Moroccans (28). But language was not the primary locus of difference. Wharton's focus remained race, opposing the French-American to the Arab and the black. This opposition involved contrasting "Western" civilization with "Oriental" society. The wartime desire to imagine a unity between Americans and the French encouraged Wharton to frame the Orientalist dichotomy in the most absolute terms.

Wharton's affinity for the French indubitably encouraged her support for the colonial project in the Protectorate, as did the influence of Hubert and Inés Lyautey. This did not lead her to accept French colonialism on its own terms, however. Rather, she recast the French image of colonizer and colonized in accord with her own ideas about Morocco and Moroccans, based on her notions of race and gender. Her fear of racial and cultural miscegenation led her to reject the French idea of a *mission civilisatrice*, while her attitude toward gender roles led her to reject the eroticization of Arab women in order to portray the harem as an archetype of women's oppression. *In Morocco* represents the intersection of multiple strands of cultural and political discourse in Wharton's creative mind, at once promoting, transforming, and subverting the projects of the colonizers.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> [...] "avant tout une oeuvre de pacification, celle qui crée, qui développe, celle qui humanise, qui fait aimer le drapeau sous les plis duquel elle s'accomplit." Lyautey, Letter to M. Guestier, Feb. 1913, in *Paroles D'Action*, 89.

<sup>2</sup> The contrast between Wharton's racialism and more progressive elements in her thinking was not confined to the Moroccan context. As Dale Bauer has noted, "Wharton's refusal to recognize Harlem culture reveals how much she wants to maintain a cultural authority maintained by her race and class and, simultaneously, to oppose paternal authority and domination" (62).

<sup>3</sup> "...qu'il ne fallait pas traiter les indigènes en vaincus,

en race inférieur, mais les élever à nous...." Lyautey, speech to L'École Des Sciences Politiques, Dec. 21, 1912, in *Paroles D'Action*, 76.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Normand, Rabat's first "municipal service director," qtd in Hoisington 113. As Charlotte Rich has noted (11), Hoisington treats in considerable detail the gap between the colonial doctrine of association and the reality of direct colonial rule, but even the official doctrine was far more interventionist than Wharton imagined.

<sup>5</sup> "...elle la [terre] féconde, y suscite les cités et les récoltes, ouvre à toutes les possibilités d'avenir des régions jusque-là frappées d'inertie." Lyautey, opening speech at the Rabat exposition, September 16, 1917, in *Paroles d'Action*, 239. It is uncertain whether Wharton was present at this speech or not.

<sup>6</sup> At the end of her book there is a catalogue of "The Work of the French Protectorate in Morocco, 1912-18", with statistics on commerce, roads, and port construction. This section does mention the establishment of schools to educate Moroccans for commercial and administrative tasks ("without interfering with their native customs or beliefs") as well as the provision of medical care (174). However, this survey of French activities stands apart from her travel narrative, appended along with a section on Moroccan history. As a result, it conflicts with her overall portrayal of Morocco as a civilization untouched by the European presence since Lyautey's arrival. Moreover, even the "Work of the French Protectorate" section minimizes the effects of colonial development upon Moroccans.

<sup>7</sup> Several, including Charles de Foucauld, Edmond Doutté, Augustin Bernard, and the Marquis de Segonzac, are among those noted by Edmund Burke III as exemplifying a nuanced and undogmatic approach to the Berber issue, an approach at odds with the Berber Myth after 1912 (Burke 175-77).

<sup>8</sup> Compare to Loti 14.

<sup>9</sup> Compare Wharton, *In Morocco* 32, 51-52, 80, 88, 150, 157 to Loti 2, 63, 95, 100, 104, 154, 168, 182-83, 216-18.

<sup>10</sup> Dale Bauer indicates that Wharton may have supported the eugenics movement before the war, although she argues that Wharton opposed it after the war. Bauer also points out that Wharton's post-war belief in the non-genetic origins of human character was limited to whites, and that she feared the attempts of blacks and Jews to assimilate to white culture (30-31, 51-2).

<sup>11</sup> For examples, see Alloua.

<sup>12</sup> Wharton, *In Morocco* 137, 143, 151. Wharton's description of the harem women of Fes actually has much in common with Loti's portrayal of the rich young men of that city. Cf. Loti 168.

<sup>13</sup> Berber women seem to fall somewhere in-between

for Wharton. While she does not describe Berbers in the erotic way that she describes blacks, "unveiled Berber women" seem to lack the conservativeness of Arab women. But again, the Arab-Berber distinction received little attention from Wharton.

<sup>14</sup> Wharton, *French Ways* 9, 95-96. Wharton's call for a new intimacy and mutual acculturation of races in *French Ways* may seem at odds with the opposition to racial and cultural mixing in Morocco. This apparent contradiction, however, is consistent with "scientific" theories about hybridity prevalent from 1850 to 1930, theories which held that that the intermingling of closely related species or races is fortifying and fruitful, even though the mixing of more distant species or races produces degenerate offspring (Young 18).

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## MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION MEETING

### December 27-30, 2001 New Orleans Edith Wharton Society Sessions

Session 105: Thursday, 27 December, 8:45-10:00 p.m.  
Grand Couteau, Sheraton

**Edith Wharton Goes Goth.** Chair: Augusta Rohrbach, Harvard University Rohrbach@harvard.edu

#### Papers and Panelists:

1. The Beauty of Edith Wharton's Gothic Tales: "The Eyes" and Afterward, Caroline Levander, Department of English, Rice University, Clevade@rice.edu

2. Edith Wharton and Gothic Landscapes, Janet Beer (Manchester Metropolitan University) and Avril Horner (University of Salford) jbeer@cwcom.net

3. Dis-figurement and Dis-coverey: The Tableau of Lily Bart, Thomas Loebel, Department of English, University of Calgary, loebel@ucalgary.ca

Respondent: Teresa Goddu, Vanderbilt University, Teresa.a.goddu@vanderbilt.edu

**Business Meeting:** Saturday, 29 December  
12:00-1:15 p.m., Pontchartrain Ballroom E, Sheraton

Session 553: Saturday, 29 December, 1:45-3:00 p.m. Salon 828, Sheraton

**War Writing by Wharton and Other Writers.** Chair: Harriet Gold, Univ. de Montreal

#### Papers and Panelists:

1. "In Their Time: Edith Wharton and Ernest Hemingway," Susan Goodman, Univ. of Delaware, Newark

2. "Home Front, War Front, History: Four Texts of the First World War." Janet Sharistanian, Univ. of Kansas

3. "What's Place Got to Do with It? Wharton and Faulkner on War." Deborah L. Clarke, Penn State Univ., University Park

4. "Edith Wharton and Rebecca West: Women Write the War." Julie A. Olin-Ammentorp, Le Moyne College

(Continued from page 2)

lover left by any woman, ranging as it does from business letters to love letters to poems to highly wrought pornography to novels—for Fullerton is recognizable as a character not only in James's *Wings of the Dove* but in two Wharton books, *The Buccaneers* and *The Reef*" (4). However, for the most part, that is not the book Mainwaring has undertaken to write. An exception is the fascinating brief section on "The Writing of *The Reef*," in which she reads the characters of Sophy and Anna as a split between Edith Wharton's earlier and later selves in her relationship with Fullerton. Sophy represents an idealizing love, and Anna is "the more experienced Edith" in her various stages of ecstasy, disillusionment, and jealousy. "Darrow's pleasant ironic presence and facile mendacity are Morton's..." (204). Mainwaring goes on to speculate on the advisory roles played by both Fullerton and Walter Berry during the writing of this novel. (Cf. 170-71 on Fullerton's being a "co-creator of her poetry," specifically, of "Ogrin.")

As scholarly books go, this one is a good read, its breathless subtitles drawing us on: "Henry James: Advice on Blackmail," "The Valise of Mme Pouget," "Camille: The Concierge's Tale," "London: A Mistress," "Paris: A Siren." But one may feel that the flamboyant style and the detective genre are at odds with the scholarly objectives. At times the personal agenda vis-à-vis Lewis and the fictive impulse predominate. And Marion Mainwaring's primary subject is her own obsessive quest, "the story of the research into his life" (6).

Jean Frantz Blackall, Cornell University

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