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This issue highlights the winning essay of the fifth annual Edith Wharton Essay Contest. The judges were: Co-Editors, Carole M. Shaffer-Koros and Linda Costanzo Cahir; and Associate Editor, Margaret Murray. The winner received an award of \$250. There were 14 entries.

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Competing Visions: Edith Wharton and A. B. Wenzell in *The House of Mirth*

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In a letter she wrote to William Brownell on August 5th, 1905, Edith Wharton indicates her distaste for popular illustrator A. B. Wenzell's pictorial additions to *The House of Mirth*. Brownell, a literary consultant for Charles Scribner's Sons, had written to Wharton asking her to approve the choice of frontispiece for the novel version that was to come out later that year. Wharton had seen Wenzell's illustrations in *Scribner's Magazine's* serial edition of *The House of Mirth* beginning in January of 1905, but was not very impressed. While she ultimately signed off on Brownell's choice of frontispiece (in a terse postscript at the end of the letter), it is clear from the body of the letter that Wharton would rather not have included the illustrations at all. After admitting that she regretted having "[sunk] to the depth of letting the illustrations be put in the book" in the first place, Wharton adds, "oh, I wish I hadn't now!" (*Letters* 94).

Wharton's vehement reaction to Wenzell's illustrations for *The House of Mirth* was noted by George Ramsden, who catalogued the portion of Wharton's library that was passed on to her godson, Colin Clark. Ramsden notes that in her personal copy of the novel, Wharton crossed out the notice on the title page announcing A. B. Wenzell's illustrations. She also removed the table of illustrations and carefully cut out each of the corresponding pages that included his artwork (137). Interestingly, Ramsden records no such alterations to Wharton's copy of *Madame de Treymes* (the 1907 version illustrated by Wenzell); *The Fruit of the Tree*, illustrated by Alonzo Kimball; or *Sanctuary*, illustrated by Walter Appleton Clark.

It appears from her expression of regret for having permitted the inclusion of illustrations in the first place, and from her determination to

excise the illustrations from her copy of the novel after its publication (but not from the others), that Wharton didn't object so much to illustrations in general or to Wenzell's illustrations in particular, as she did to having any illustrations at all in *The House of Mirth*. A closer examination of Wharton's text and Wenzell's illustrations reveals that Wenzell's illustrations work against one of the main thrusts of the text. In order for the reader to feel the full measure of Wharton's critique of New York society, it is important that Lily's attempt to achieve a stable self-hood be frustrated. By rendering her abstract beauty in specific terms, Wenzell "crystallizes" Lily, undermining her final disintegration and denying the destructive nature of the society that oversees her downfall.

Although Wharton had already published eleven books and a series of articles by 1905, the publication of *The House of Mirth* marked her first widespread critical and popular success as a novelist (Colquitt). According to Helen Killoran, in *The Critical Reception of Edith Wharton*, the novel sold 140,000 copies in its first year of publication (27). According to Sheri Benstock, the novel sold 80,000 copies in the first two weeks alone (34). Immediately, Wharton's portrayal of Lily Bart and the New York society in which she circulated sparked a diverse range of opinions about the novel's literary and moral value. Not surprisingly, much of the debate centered around the character of Lily Bart, whom some reviewers saw as "capable," "well poised," and "morally sane," and other reviewers saw as "coldly corrupt [...] spoiled, and selfish" ("Contemporary Reviews" 307, 313). If nothing else, the literati's vastly disparate opinions of Lily Bart illustrate that she does not submit easily to a single reading, a quality that many reviewers were quick to point out. Writing for the *Atlantic Monthly*, Mary Moss called Lily a "complete study" who is both "aggressor" and "victim," "utterly sordid" but also "fastidious" (309-310). *The Saturday Evening Review* called Lily "a masterly study of the modern American

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woman," precisely because she is a "thorough woman of the world, spoilt and selfish and yet withal intensely loveable" (313).

Despite these multi-faceted portrayals of Lily Bart, A. B. Wenzell seemed to notice only what he was prepared to see: the Art Nouveau siren that he and other illustrators like Charles Dana Gibson made their living portraying. From his first depiction of Lily descending Selden's staircase to his final image of Lily kissing Selden goodbye, Wenzell's heroine is a cookie cutter cutout of stereotypical womanhood: either vampish or virtuous, but little else. Wharton's complicated and nuanced vision of Lily contrasts sharply with Wenzell's flat, superficially rendered rendition. Despite Wharton's multi-faceted portrayal of a complex, conflicted heroine, A. B. Wenzell's illustrations present a single, superficial vision of Lily Bart that reinforces conventional stereotypes rather than questioning them.

By 1905, Wenzell was easily one of the most widely reproduced illustrators in the country. In the years surrounding the turn of the last century, Wenzell produced hundreds of illustrations for publications like *Collier's and Scribner's Magazine*. He reproduced those, in turn, in collections of prints with titles like *Vanity Fair* and *The Passing Show* (Reed 46). Wenzell's prints repeat virtually identical scenes of fashionable society, showing well-dressed men and women lounging around in their drawing rooms. Even today, a search on Google.com for "A. B. Wenzell Passing Show" yields hundreds of hits of auction houses selling Wenzell's prints for just a few dollars each.

Wenzell's illustrations, then, became synonymous in the public's mind with "fashionable society and drawing room subjects" (Reed 46). In addition to producing the same kind of scenes over and over again, Wenzell uniformly reproduced the same kind of New Art woman that had become popular in turn-of-the-century illustrations: flat, unnatural, and superficially decorative. While critics like Cynthia Wolff and Reginald Abott have noticed the influence of the Art Nouveau movement on A. B. Wenzell's illustrations, neither of them address how Wenzell's superimposition of flat, unnatural, and superficially decorative drawings on Wharton's text conflict with a more nuanced reading of the novel's gender politics. Wolff, for instance, relegates her observation about Wenzell's illustrations to a footnote and doesn't address them again (325). Abott treats Wenzell's drawings more directly, but only to establish that they do, in fact, constitute a kind of American Art Nouveau (75). In reality, Wenzell's illustrations perform a much more complicated function in the text. By rendering Lily Bart superficially, Wenzell reinforces a superficial reading of the heroine. Furthermore, by constantly directing the viewer's gaze to the visual spectacle of Lily's body, Wenzell forces the reader into the position that Lawrence Selden occupies at the beginning of the novel: a spectator who can claim that "there is nothing new about Lily Bart" (5).

Granted, Wharton does open the novel by dwelling on the spectacle of Lily's body, but she does so from Selden's viewpoint. In the very first sentence, his eyes are "refreshed by the sight of Lily Bart" (5). While the reader's first exposure to Lily is conspicuously visual, the narrator is also careful to point out that Selden is the one doing the looking. His impressions of her are of a spectator looking at a painting in an art gallery. He is struck by her "vivid head," "girlish smoothness," "purity of tint," the "modelling of her little ear," and the "crisp upward wave of her hair" (which he suspects has been "brightened by art"). While he is vaguely dissatisfied with the analogy, he thinks of

Lily in entirely superficial terms: "as if a fine glaze of beauty and fastidiousness had been applied to vulgar clay" (7). Selden continues to think of Lily in superficial terms throughout the rest of the novel. When he meets her again in France, for example, he is struck by her "impenetrable surface" that suggested "a process of crystallization which had fused her whole being into one hard brilliant substance" (149). For Selden, the "real Lily Bart" is the one who literally turns herself into a painting at the *tableau vivant* (106).

Wenzell was not the only turn-of-the-century illustrator to reinforce a view of women as the objects of male gaze, of course. At that time, professional illustration was more or less a man's game. Howard Pyle's influential painting school admitted only twelve young men at a time, no young women. The Society of Illustrators (Wenzell was one of its founding members and, when *The House of Mirth* was published, its second president) did not admit female artists until 1920. Due largely to Pyle's influence, American illustrators tended to be staunchly conservative when it came to gender politics. N. C. Wyeth, for example, felt that women were supposed to be like his Swiss mother, obsessed with "*Kirche, Küche, Kinder*—church, kitchen, children" (Michaelis 209). The business of illustration, then, often functioned like Edwardian drama and other turn-of-the-century art forms: their main purpose was to "please and placate the male audience" (Wolff, "Lily Bart and the Drama of Femininity" 73).

Scribner's decision to publish Wenzell's illustrations alongside Wharton's text was undoubtedly financially motivated. Wharton, a comparatively unknown author at the time, could not be expected to sell nearly as many magazines as could Wenzell. The January 1905 edition of *Scribner's Magazine* opens with a full-color reproduction of Wenzell's illustration of Lily Bart descending Selden's staircase—many pages before Wharton's text appears. Scribner's determination to push the illustrator to the forefront instead of the author ensures that the reader's first vision of Lily Bart is Wenzell's. Granted, Wharton also ensures that the reader's first vision of Lily is from a male's point of view, but she spends much of the rest of the novel complicating and questioning that view. Wenzell's final vision of Lily, as we shall see, is identical to his first.

A century after the initial publication of *The House of Mirth*, A. B. Wenzell's illustrations continue to affect how readers view the text. In a review of the 2000 cinematic version for MSNBC, Sarah Bunting's principle objection to the lead actress is the color of her hair. "How dare director Terence Davies use Gillian Anderson for the lead role?" Bunting asks. "She looks *nothing* like Lily Bart. Lily Bart is *blonde*" (italics included). Of course, nowhere in the text does Wharton indicate that Lily's hair is blonde. She does point out, however, that Mr. Rosedale, Percy Gryce, Mrs. Trenor, and Miss Sneddon are all blondes. The charwoman outside Selden's building has "straw-coloured hair," and Lily's mother's hair is yellow (13). Lily, however, is most likely meant to be dark-headed. She has black eyelashes, after all (7, 20) and is said to be the spitting image of Joshua Reynold's Mrs. Lloyd, another dark-headed lady. In fact, the similarity between the two women is evidently so striking that Mrs. Lloyd has a type "so like her own that [Lily] could embody the person represented without ceasing to be herself" (106). Despite her insistence that Davies did not stay true to the novel when he cast a red-headed actress to play Lily, Bunting's vision of Lily Bart undoubtedly comes from A. B. Wenzell's rendition of the heroine—not Wharton's. (Continued on page 3)

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Bunting is not the only critic to see Lily as A. B. Wenzell drew her. In "Lily Bart and the Beautiful Death," Cynthia Wolff identifies Lily as an "Art Nouveau woman" (323). Noting that the Art Nouveau movement tended to portray women in "flowing, sentimentalized, visual renderings," Wolff makes the case that *The House of Mirth* presents Lily in just that way. Lilies were the flowers of choice in the Art Nouveau decorative style, after all, and for Wolff, Lily proves again and again that her primary function is to be decorative. Stating that Lily has "nothing more to offer than a superb capacity to render [herself] agreeable," Wolff claims that Lily has no capacity to "make choices, draw difficult distinctions, or bear hardship" (324, 326). The novel, however, takes pains to demonstrate that Lily has capacity to do all three. She makes the choice to burn Selden's letters even though she knows they can allow her to reenter society (241); she clearly understands the differences between Rosedale's business proposition and a love-based marriage

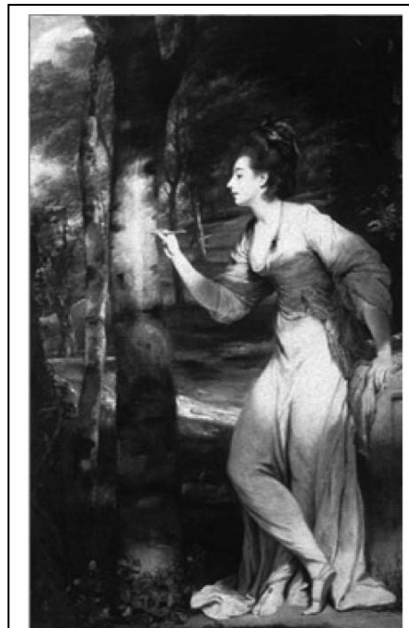


Fig. 1. Mrs. Lloyd

Reynolds. Her choice demonstrates that she is more than simply an object to be looked at and admired, rather she is herself an artist and a creator. Reynold's portrait, after all, is of a woman

(233); and she suffers social ignominy and eventually death because she refuses adopt the corrupt morality of the upper class. It is possible that, like Lawrence Selden and A. B. Wenzell, Wolff misses Lily's interiority because she is so intent on seeing her as a New Art woman.

When Lily has the chance to actually render herself as an artistic creation, however, she does not pick an Art Nouveau-influenced artist like John Singer Sargent or A. B. Wenzell to emulate. Instead, she chooses the more classical portrait artist Joshua

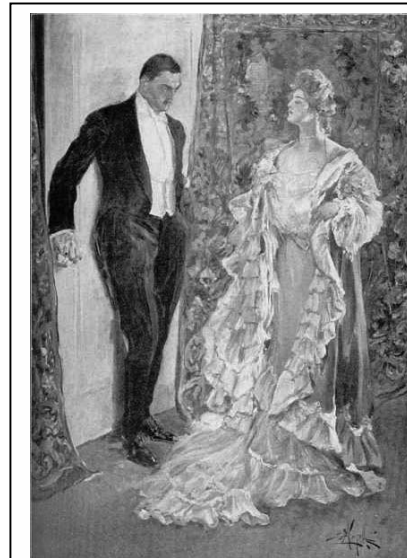


Fig. 2. I Mean to Make You

they are difficult to make out in reprinted versions, the 1905 edition clearly displays the Oriental buildings and designs in the tapestry, turning Lily into an object to be conquered. The scene as



Fig. 3. The Passing Show

doing something: "Mrs. Lloyd Carving Her Husband's Name on the Trunk of a Tree." The title of the painting indicates an active rather than a static subject. Furthermore, her choice of action makes it clear that she wishes others to see her not just as an object, but as a writer.

Wenzell's illustrations, on the other hand, emphasize Lily's passivity. In his illustration of Lily's confrontation with Gus Trenor, Wenzell allows Lily to fade into the tapestry behind her. Although they are difficult to make out in reprinted versions, the 1905 edition clearly displays the Oriental buildings and designs in the tapestry, turning Lily into an object to be conquered. The scene as Wenzell portrays it is startlingly similar to scenes he had painted for other publications. In *The Passing Show*, Wenzell includes an almost identical scene of a man confronting a woman against a tapestry. In it, the male figure occupies the same pose that will be later adopted by Trenor. His head is inclined, one foot juts out in front of the other, and his hands rest in a similar manner against his body and the furniture. The female figure is also quite similar to how Wenzell will portray Lily. She has

backed up against a floral tapestry, her dress splays out along the floor, and her hair is done up in an identical style. In this case, Wenzell has simply repeated his standard Art Nouveau woman.

Sometimes, however, Wenzell's version of Lily complements the picture Wharton has drawn of her. In "The Woman Continued to Stare," which was used as the frontispiece in the serialized version and makes up the cover of Norton's 1990 critical edition, Wenzell's Lily is descending a stair case after visiting Selden's apartment (14). Lily's pictorial descent in the picture prefigures her social descent that will take place gradually in the text. By juxtaposing the image of Lily with that of the char woman, Wenzell hints at the possibility that Lily might even become the charwoman. Indeed, Wharton will have her do just that as she takes possession of Selden's letters and then considers

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(Continued from page 3) selling them to Mrs. Dorset when she becomes financially desperate enough to do so (236). In order to climb down the stairs, Lily has had to walk through the charwoman's muddy water. She becomes, in effect, the dingy woman she had always abhorred. Wenzell is careful to show the stain from the mud creeping up the lower right-hand corner of Lily's white dress in order to mirror the taint of having been in Selden's apartment.

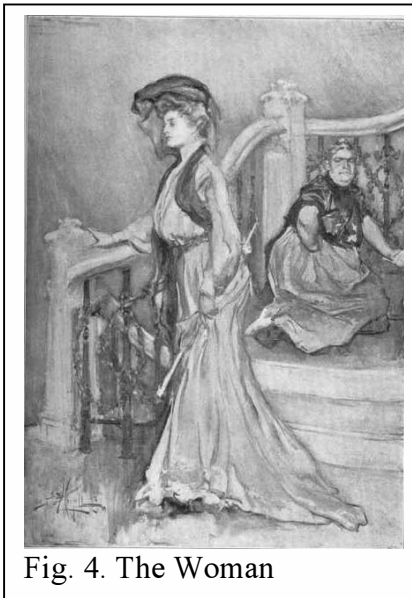


Fig. 4. The Woman

Wenzell continues to utilize stair imagery in his other illustrations of the novel, just as Wharton returns repeatedly to visions of stairs to indicate the upward and downward social mobility of her characters. In "She Lingered," Lily stands on a landing looking down upon the party at Bellomont. Here

Wenzell has flipped the earlier significance of stairs. Descending from Selden's apartment, Lily encounters two representatives of the lower social strata: the charwoman and Mr. Rosedale. At the bottom of the stairs at Bellomont, however, the moral lowground is represented by members of the upper class: Percy Gryce and Miss Van Osburgh, feeling only the dulled sensations of their set (40). From her perch on the terrace, Lily feels above the crowded selfish world of pleasure," and



Fig. 5. She Lingered

decides not to descend into it yet (41).

Despite these few images of Lily that complement or complicate the text, more often than not, Wenzell's vision of Lily is a simplified one in which she is reduced to being the object of male gaze. In his opening illustration of Lily descending Selden's steps, in fact, Wenzell places the reader in Rosedale's position, viewing Lily from the landlord's point of view. Like Selden, Rosedale sees Lily as an object of art. Unlike Selden, Rosedale converts his aesthetic response to Lily's beauty into social capital, much like the millionaire who buys a picture-gallery of old masters in order to secure dinner invitations with New York society (96). According to Maureen Montgomery, this was a common response. In *Displaying Women: Spectacles of*

Leisure in Edith Wharton's New York, Montgomery explains that women's bodies reflected class and social respectability, which in turn reflected the wealth of the men who viewed them. Because the display was "concentrated on the sexualized body of the woman, spectatorship was a predominately male activity" (117). Wenzell's version of Lily's body has become an ornament for men to look at. As such it is decorated with flowers, ruffles, and textured material. As Abott points out, one of the major elements in Art Nouveau design was the "S-curve," particularly in women's bodies (79). From bust to bustle, Lily's figure in Wenzell's opening illustration is a perfect representation of an S-curve, which was meant to be both sensual and decorative, like the curved stem of a flower.

Wenzell continues to portray Lily as a decorative object to be admired by men in the rest of his illustrations. In "She Lingered," for example, Lily's figure is again presented as an S-curve, with exaggerated bust and hips (2). That Lily is part of scenery is evident from the way the flowers on her dress blend in with the flowers on the balustrades. A vine hanging from the column is repeated in the strands hanging from Lily's shawl. Wenzell, who was known for his "preoccupation with the rendering of the sheen of a silk dress," frequently blends portions of Lily's clothing into the floral background of the picture (Reed 46). In "I Mean to Make You," for example, the floral pattern of Lily's dress matches the decorative pattern of the tapestry hanging behind her (115). Similarly, in "Goodbye," the flowers on Lily's dress and hat match the floral pattern on the tapestry in Selden's rooms. By blending Lily's body with the decorative objects that surround her, Wenzell reinforces the illusion that she is a decorative object to be looked at and admired by men.

Selden, it seems, is only too happy to look at and admire Lily. For him, She is a "wonderful spectacle" (53), something to be "watched [...] with lazy amusement" (54). Despite her rather nuanced critique of his "republic of the spirit," Selden continues to see Lily's role as someone to provide "aesthetic amusement" and his to provide "admiring spectatorship" (55). Even after he convinces himself that he has seen a new side of Lily, Selden continues to think of her as an object to be looked at. Her face is "pale and altered," her beauty diminished, and his keenest insight (the one marked by italics and an exclamation point) has to do with what she looks like when she is alone.



Fig. 6. She Turned

If Wharton wishes to emphasize Lily's inner complexity by juxtaposing it with Selden's shallowness, Wenzell misses the point entirely. Instead, he encourages the reader to misread Lily just as Selden had done by placing the viewer squarely in the latter's shoes. In "She Turned," Wenzell insists that the reader see Lily as an object of art to be gazed at and admired by men. He utilizes a

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triangular composition that forces the reader's eye to travel up the folds of her dress and rest upon her face. The reader mirrors Selden's insistent gaze, then, encouraged by the lines of the picture to look at Lily's face. Wenzell makes use of this triangular composition to similar effect in other illustrations as well. In "You Don't Seem to Remember," the lines of Lily's dress, the slope of the other woman's shoulder, and the direction of Trenor's



Fig. 7. You Don't Seem

gaze all point to Lily's face (96). Because readers tend to view objects from left to right, the slope of Lily's dress cause the viewer's gaze to move up Lily's body, from her feet to her face, just as it will in "Oh, Gerty, the Furies" (130).

In pictures such as "She Turned," Wenzell places the reader in the position that Selden occupies in the opening scene of the novel: "As a spectator, enjoying Lily Bart" (6). The reader, like the men in Wenzell's picture, gazes upon Lily's body as a

piece of art. Wenzell ensures that we see Lily as a decorative object, either as a jewel in Rosedale's theater box in "You Don't Seem" or as an ornament on Selden's arm in "Dear Mr. Selden" (171). In the latter picture, Lily is again the object of male gaze as all the men in the picture (with the exception of Selden) stare at her. Of course, the other woman in the picture stares at Lily as well, but this does not detract from her status as an object of masculine desire. As Maureen Montgomery points out, women in Wharton's New York most often gazed at other women in order to establish a sort of pecking order—to judge the degree to which other women were also being gazed upon by men. (117). In other words, the woman staring at Lily Bart in "Dear Mr. Selden" only reinforces the gazes of the males around her.

For Wenzell, Lily only ceases to be looked upon as an object of male desire after she begins her fall from society's graces. In "Look at Those Spangles," there are no men in the picture to look at Lily. Furthermore, none of the women look at her either. Instead, they either stare at the hat in Lily's hand, or in two cases, attempt to catch the viewer's gaze by staring directly out of the painting (220). Unlike many of his other portraits of Lily, Wenzell does not employ a triangular composition here in order to draw the viewer's eyes up Lily's body. Instead, the heads in the painting form more a less a straight line placed horizontally across the upper half of the picture frame, making it difficult for the viewer to settle long upon one or the other. Although Lily's hair is lighter than the rest, the viewer is distracted from that distinguishing characteristic by the two other faces that gaze so pointedly back (the only figures among all of Wenzell's illustrations for the novel to do so). Lily completes her fade into obscurity by wearing a plain, black dress instead of a light-colored dress filled with frills and flowers. In this picture Lily no longer

acts as a decorative object. Instead, she creates decorative objects for other women to wear.

"I Am Ready" also pictures Lily after her fall. While the viewer is clearly meant to compare this picture of Rosedale and Lily under a tree to the earlier outdoor scene of Selden and Lily at Bellomont, Wenzell no longer forces the viewer to dwell on Lily's body. Instead of using a triangular composition that draws the eye across



Fig. 9. Look

Lily's body to her face, however, Wenzell places Rosedale and Lily on opposite sides of the painting. As he did in "Look at Those Spangles," Wenzell places his subjects' faces in a horizontal line, ensuring that Rosedale's head competes with Lily's for attention. Rosedale's clothing also competes for attention, since it is nearly as decorative as Lily's. He wears a brightly colored vest with a floral pattern, jewelry on his fingers, spats, and light-colored hat. Compared with the dark-suited men in Wenzell's other pictures, Rosedale is a feminized dandy.

Wenzell is not alone in his depiction of the feminized Jew. As Bryan Cheyette points out, portraying Jewish men as

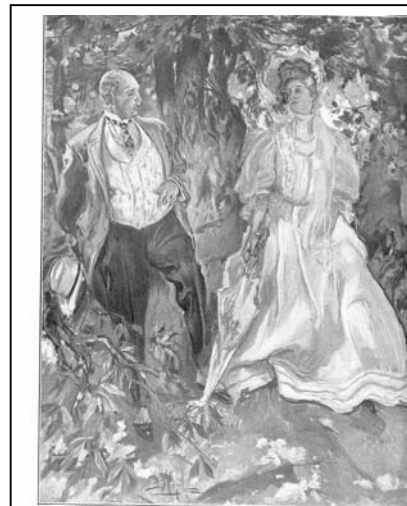


Fig. 10. I Am Ready

feminine was commonplace for both artists and writers in the nineteenth and the twentieth-centuries (5). Wenzell does not employ the stereotype in order to comment on it, however. Instead, he emphasizes Rosedale's femininity in order to draw attention away from Lily. Unlike Selden at Bellomont, Rosedale's body is not firmly outlined. Instead, the folds of his jacket turn into the bark on the tree trunk behind him, just as the frills on

Lily's hat blends with the leaves above her. Because he is placed on the left-hand side of the picture, the viewer's gaze falls first upon Rosedale, and is then forced to linger in order to absorb the decorative detail. Because Lily has lost her social capital, Wenzell seems to say, and is no longer capable of reflecting the wealth of the men around her, she is no longer an object to be gazed upon by men.

In many ways, Wharton's strategy for portraying Lily is (Continued on page 6)

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similar to Wenzell's. Like Wenzell, Wharton makes a spectacle of Lily, but she does so in order to expose the destructive nature of the patriarchal society that prizes women solely as decoration. She also makes it clear that rather than passively submit to the controlling gazes of others, Lily takes charge of her own presentation. In the tableau vivant scene and elsewhere, Lily uses the appearance of her body as a tool to gain power and influence the world around her. From an early age, Lily "liked to think of her beauty as a power for good, as giving her the opportunity to attain a position where she should make her influence felt in the vague diffusion of refinement and good taste" (30). Lily is not the only one to recognize the benevolent potential of Lily's beauty. Gerty, for example, tells Selden how Lily used her beauty to benefit the members of the Girl's Club. Unlike Mrs. Bry, who gave five hundred dollars and Mr. Rosedale, who gave one thousand, Lily's principle contribution was to allow the young working women to gaze upon her. "[Y]ou should have seen their eyes," Gerty exclaims as she and Selden prepare to witness the tableau vivant. "[I]t was as good in a day in the country just to look at her" (105).

It is clear from Gerty's comments that simply giving money isn't enough. Although Rosedale had donated more money than Lily and Mrs. Bry combined, Gerty is not entirely pleased with his gift, wishing that Lily were not so nice to him. What the girls really need, according to Gerty, is not Rosedale's "Jew" money or Mrs. Bry's new money, but the refining influence of Lily's upper-class beauty. Gerty was not alone in her faith in the uplifting power of leisure-class women. Mary Cadwalader Jones, Edith Wharton's sister-in-law, published an essay on working girl's clubs in 1894. According to Jones, the best that a "society belle" can do for young working-class women is not to donate money to keep their social clubs afloat (club dues should do that), but to be "looked upon as examples" (282). Jones makes the case that allowing oneself to be "looked up to and followed [...] by a clubful of hard-working girls" is more than enough to ensure the "development of higher and nobler aims" (283, 278). Unlike her sister-in-law, Wharton does not seem to be so uncritically accepting of the notion that young society ladies can improve the lives of working women simply by allowing themselves to be gazed upon. When Lily meets up with one of Gerty's former club girls in the final chapters of the novel, Nettie expresses her gratitude for the uplifting influence Lily has had on her life. However, it wasn't Lily's beauty or social graces that helped Nettie begin a new life with a baby and a husband, but the money that Lily gave her to recover in a sanatorium—money that she received from Gus Trenor (243). While Jones claims that it is impossible to do effective club work while "lead[ing] a life outside the club that is willfully inconsistent" with the high moral standards that the club is trying to instill, Wharton clarifies that the only reason that Lily can be any help to Nettie at all is because she allowed herself to take money from Trenor under questionable circumstances (282).

Wharton further dismantles the idea that gazing upon the aesthetic beauty of Lily's body is somehow enough to inspire "higher and nobler aims" by having Selden express just that sentiment. As he gazes upon the opening tableau, Selden thinks about his own capacity for an "adjustment of mental vision" and "responsive fancy" that will allow him to see more deeply and truly than Lily's other viewers (105). When he finally sees Lily's reenactment of Mrs. Lloyd, Selden is primed for a sublime experience. To Selden, the "flesh and blood loveliness of Lily Bart"

expresses nothing so much as "nobility," "grace," "poetry," and "eternal harmony" (106). Indeed, Selden thinks that he gazes for the first time on the "real Lily Bart" and is sure that now that her beauty has been "detached from all that cheapened and vulgarized it," it can now lead him into the Republic of the Spirit that he discussed with her at Bellomont (107). Of course, Lily's beauty does no such thing. Ned Van Alstyne's first reaction to the sight of Lily's figure is to exclaim that "there isn't a break in the lines anywhere" (106). For Ned, the point of the evening was not to reach a higher state of being, but to realize "what an outline Lily has" (109). George Dorset and Gus Trenor react similarly. In fact, the most practical consequence of Lily's appearance in the tableau vivant is to convince Gus Trenor that he should demand the sexual favors she implicitly promised by taking his ten thousand dollars.

The audience's various reactions to Lily's appearance among the tableaux vivants do not just expose the crassness of Gus Trenor's and Ned Van Alstyne's "unfurnished minds" (105). They also demonstrate the limitations of Selden's ability to "read" Lily and of Lily's ability to control the manner of her consumption. In "Aesthetic Obtuseness and Aesthetic Perception in *The House of Mirth*," Travis Foster invokes Walter Pater to argue that Selden's responses to Lily's self-formation as an art object reveal his own inadequacies as an art critic. Walter Pater was a nineteenth-century English essayist and art critic whose views on art seem to have informed Selden's. That Wharton was familiar with Pater's work is evident from the inclusion of his volume on Renaissance art in her library (Ramsden) and references to him in her autobiography (141). One of Pater's principle tenets was that engaging with a work of art should heighten one's self-perception. The way to perceive critically, according to Pater, is to observe oneself while experience new sensations, or "see oneself seeing," as Travis puts it (3). While Selden does seem to be very aware of his reactions to Lily's appearance, those reactions rarely lead to any special insight. Selden is never able to see "anything new" in Lily Bart: not in the train station, at the tableau vivant, or at the end of the novel looking at her corpse. For Selden, Lily's purpose is always to confirm his previously-held notions about himself. Indeed, Selden seems most willing to marry Lily when he thinks she will leave those notions unchallenged. As Selden thought about Lily the night after she appeared as Mrs. Lloyd, he lost himself in a "state of impassioned self absorption" and craved "the companionship of one whose point of view should justify his own, who should confirm, by deliberate observation, the truth to which his intuitions had leaped" (121). Judged by Pater's standards, Selden is not the sophisticated aesthete he claims to be. Instead he is a "chronic and stubbornly bad reader, one whose inability to perceive critically either Lily or art indicate an equal inability to think critically about himself" (Foster 3).

It is unsurprising then, that Selden vastly misunderstands Lily's purpose for appearing in the tableau vivant. For Selden, the "real Lily Bart" he sees there is otherworldly, "divested from the trivialities" of the society that surrounds her (106). For Lily, however, her appearance as Mrs. Lloyd is precisely to cement herself in the center of that society. Like the Wellington Brys who put on the show, Lily decides to "attack society collectively" by displaying herself to as many people as possible (103). She is not at all concerned with providing a sublime experience to the discriminating mind. Instead, she simply wishes to be admired. After the show, Lily finds herself at the center of a throng of audience members,

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caring “less for the quality of the admiration received than for its quantity” (108). In fact, she gives Ned Van Alstyne and George Dorset the exact look that Selden hopes to receive for having supposedly read her correctly.

Unfortunately, while the Wellington Brys manage to profit socially by Lily’s appearance, Lily does not. Judith Fryer, Cynthia Griffin Wolff, Emily Orlando, and others have examined Lily’s authorship in the tableau vivant, of the fact that her beauty becomes a source of power rather than a means of objectification. While this is undoubtedly the case, it is also true that Lily proves completely incapable of controlling the reactions of her audience members, or of using those reactions to gain a more secure position in society. If anything, Lily’s turn as Mrs. Lloyd places her in an even more precarious position. Jack Stepney, for example, who has only just gained a place among the inner circle of New York society himself, uses the occasion to censor her (124). Both Selden and Rosedale, neither of whom Lily considers to be viable husbands, are sufficiently inspired by her beauty to try to ask her to marry them (110, 140). Most damaging, perhaps, is Gus Trenor’s resolve to make her his mistress and the perception by her friends that he must have done so. While Lily may have entered the tableau vivant hoping that her “crystalline” beauty could gain her a secure place and identity, in practical terms it only serves to destabilize her further.

It is likely, in fact, that Wharton specifically chose *Mrs. Lloyd* as Lily’s subject because the portrait is far too over-determined to offer her any hope of securing a stable self-hood. Although Judith Fryer claims that Edith Wharton’s knowledge of painting “was not substantial,” there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Wharton was familiar with fine art in general and with Reynolds’ work specifically (34). Fryer herself notes Wharton’s familiarity with Italian renaissance painting, and Wharton’s autobiography is full of references to art and artists. She mentions having met the modern American painters Edward Boit and Ralph Curtis, for example (171-72), as well as devouring books on renaissance painting by Walter Pater and John Symonds “with zest” (141). Wharton’s art library was substantial. Of the four thousand or so volumes of books owned by Edith Wharton at the time of her death, sixteen hundred of them were dedicated to art, archeology, and history. Unfortunately, this portion of Wharton’s library was destroyed during Germany’s bombing of London in 1940, so it is difficult to know with certainty how many of her books dealt specifically with painting (Ramsden xv). In the afterward to his catalogue of her remaining books, however, George Ramsden writes that the reason Wharton separated her library into two parts in her will was that her godson’s family already owned a substantial collection of art books. It is likely, then, that the much of the destroyed portion of Wharton’s library did have to do with art and that she was interested enough in those volumes to make sure that they went to a family that could use them.

Not all of Wharton’s art books made it into the selection that was destroyed in the London blitz, however. Among the books on art criticism and painting that Wharton willed to the Clarks were Sir Joshua Reynolds’ *Fifteen Discourses* that he delivered to the students of London’s Royal Academy (Ramsden 102). That she read the discourses is indicated in a letter to William Fullerton in which she wrote that she found Reynolds’ pronouncements on art “such a mixture of drivel and insight” (*Letters* 238). She also referred to the Reynolds’ speeches in her

fiction, particularly to the “noble draperies [of] Sir Joshua’s Discourses on Art” (*False Dawn* 76). Although interest in Reynolds had fallen off somewhat during the mid-1800s, by the turn-of-the-century his work again commanded a great deal of popular interest. His discourses to the Royal Academy were reprinted in 1891, and a number of treatments of his biography and paintings were widely available in the years when Wharton was working on *The House of Mirth: Sir Joshua Reynolds*, by Claude Phillips in 1894; *Sir Joshua Reynolds*, by Walter Armstrong in 1900; *Reynolds*, by Estelle M. Hurl in 1900; and *Sir Joshua Reynolds*, by Alfred Lys Baldry in 1903. Although Judith Fryer writes that “Wharton might well have consulted any number of programs for tableaux vivants,” it is more probable that she chose Reynolds’ *Mrs. Lloyd* as carefully as Lily did (42).

In late nineteenth-century newspaper accounts of fashionable tableaux vivants, Sir Joshua Reynolds’ paintings feature heavily. In 1897, a society columnist for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* notes that “Mrs. Frederic Edey made a striking picture of a Sir Joshua Reynolds beauty in deep wine-coloured velour” (4). In “At the Queen’s Court, Two American Ladies Create a Sensation in Buckingham Palace,” another columnist remarks on the sumptuousness of another Reynolds’ gown: “The dress worn by Mrs. Hein was copied from a picture by Sir Joshua Reynolds. The petticoat and corsage were of rose-colored brocade embroidered with silver, and the full court train, also of rose velvet, fell from the shoulders and was edged with silver” (1). The overall effect of these and other public recreations of Reynolds’ paintings seems to be one of opulence and wealth. When Lord Wolseley issued invitations to a fancy dress ball and demanded that the ladies dress up to resemble paintings by Reynolds, Romney, or Gainsborough, he does so because such a show of conspicuous consumption will display and solidify power (11). It is possible that Lily has a very similar goal in mind, such as when she tells Selden that in order to be successful, women are expected to be “pretty and well-dressed till [they] drop” (12), or when she explains to Gerty that wearing costly dresses is simply part of the price of living with the rich (207). It is also possible that Lily’s choice of dress is meant to convey innocence.

In contemporary newspaper accounts of society women dressing up to match Joshua Reynolds’ paintings, two broad purposes emerge: the first is to display power and wealth, such as at the Bradley-Martin party in Philadelphia or at Lord Wolseley’s ball in Dublin; the second is to display purity and simplicity. Furthermore, there seems to be definite rules about who gets to dress up as what. When Reynolds is invoked to denote extravagance and wealth, the women dressed up to look like his paintings are invariably married. When Reynolds’ is used as a metaphor for purity, the women matching those paintings are invariably unmarried. For example, in “Simplicity in Dress: Opportunities for Pretty Effects Which Young Ladies Ignore,” the author of an 1881 *Harper’s Bazar* article urges girls under twenty-one to rely on the natural beauty of their bodies rather than elaborate dresses and jewelry to appeal to the opposite sex. “It is the soft rounded forms, the dewy bloom of the cheeks, the clear young eyes, the soft tender lips, that we want to see,” the author writes. Instead of “heavy velvets and loaded trimmings,” women should look to the “old portraits by Sir Joshua Reynolds” for examples of “grace and elegance” (3). In 1884, a columnist using the name “Lady Manners” praises young women who choose to dress themselves after Reynolds portraits. “Young
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unmarried girls were formerly dressed with the utmost simplicity," Lady Manners writes. "[W]hite draperies, like those Sir Joshua Reynolds used to paint, were considered in every respect most suitable for them" (4).

On one hand, Lily's choice of "pale draperies" instead of a fancy dress may have very well meant to convey the "soaring grace" that Selden allows himself to see (106). On the other hand, the fact that she didn't "cover up her figure" with "fal-bals," as Ned Van Alstyne gleefully points out, leaves her open to all sorts of vulgar comments and ribald speculation (109). Lily's inability to command a uniform reaction is no doubt due to the liminal state in which she finds herself. It is true that she is unmarried, but she is also twenty-nine—far older than the age that the *Harper's Bazar* article stipulates for wearing Reynolds draperies. Lily's display of her full-bodied figure, then, is more akin to a married woman's efforts to display the property of her husband than it is an unmarried girl's demonstration of innocence and youth. Van Alstyne voices this sentiment when he tells the crowd gathered at Carrie Fisher's that a girl as good-looking as Lily had better get married. "In our imperfectly organized society," he says, "there is no provision as yet for the young woman who claims the privileges of marriage without assuming its obligations" (124). Rather than stabilizing her position, Lily's choice to appear as Mrs. Lloyd makes her in-between status even more evident.

Wharton's selection of *Mrs. Lloyd* is especially destabilizing because while it allows Lily to "oversee her objectification" as Emily Orlando puts it (84), it also undermines Lily's ability to control her own image by making her just one more artist in long line of artists. Judith Fryer points out that while Lily has clearly authored the scene by selecting the type, there is also irony in the fact that she represents a figure, Mrs. Lloyd, who is not herself autonomous but represents another figure: Mr. Lloyd (47). The authorship of the scene becomes even more muddled when we consider that Reynolds did not select the pose, but borrowed it from a Raphael drawing of *Adam Tempted*. The image he used had been etched in reverse by Pierre Crozat for his *Recueil d'Estampes* in 1763 (Mannings 1137). We might say that Wharton poses Lily posing as Mrs. Lloyd posed by Reynolds after a pose by Crozat copied from Raphael. Although there is no way to know whether or not Wharton knew of Mrs. Lloyd's complicated provenance, it does seem clear that Lily's appearance in the tableau vivant does not easily allow her to claim ownership of her own image.

In fact, as the novel progresses Lily finds it more and more difficult to manipulate the "vivid plastic sense" of her physical body (103). When Selden first sees Lily at Grand Central Station, he thinks of her beauty as "fine glaze" over vulgar clay (7). When he meets her again in Monte Carlo, her beauty had undergone a "process of crystallization" that resulted in an "impenetrable surface" (149). While Selden thinks that the evident crystallizing of Lily's features represents a kind of permanent beauty, it is clear to the reader that Lily desperately fears losing her good looks. She complains to Gerty that she is getting lines in her skin, and worries that her face is becoming pale and leaden (207). Lily's physical deterioration is an important marker of her social descent; as Lily's opportunities diminish, so does her beauty. By the end of the novel, she repeats the image of the charwoman, clutching the packet of Bertha Dorset's letters to sell as she walks down Madison Avenue in front of Selden's apart-



Fig. 11. Adam Tempted

ment building (236).

Wharton's final descriptions of Lily's body make it clear that the social world she tried so hard to enter has left her scooped out and hollow—little more than a shell of the woman she was before. In fact, Wharton uses the word "hollow" twice to describe Lily in the final few chapters, once when Selden notices her "delicately-hollowed face" (238) and again when she hollows out her arm to

make room for Nettie Struther's phantom child as she lays dying (251). Selden's final glimpse of Lily as she says goodbye to him in his apartment is of a virtual skeleton. Her hands are thin, her figure has "shrunk to angularity," and there are dark circles underneath her eyes (241). She seems the polar opposite of the woman who had appeared as one of Reynolds's paintings just a few months before. To make sure that we notice the difference, Wharton brings back several elements of the tableau vivant for Lily's final death scene (Fryer 52). At the Wellington Bry's, Lily "expanded like a flower in sunlight" (108). Now she is "a flower from which every bud had been nipped" (247). Before taking the laudanum that will kill her, Lily lays out the Reynolds dress on her bed to remind her of her previous triumph. Finally, when Selden sees her corpse, he can't reconcile the "real self" on the bed with the "real Lily Bart" he saw modeling as Mrs. Lloyd (252).

By drawing such a sharp contrast between Lily's tableau vivant and her tableau mordant, Wharton reminds her audience that unless they are willing to conform to the norms and expectations of society, women will find it next to impossible to create stable selves. Any attempt to live independently threatens to leave them hollowed out and wasted away, just like Lily's corpse. In "Lily Bart and the Drama of Femininity," Cynthia Wolff discusses the difficulty that women of Wharton's culture had constructing independent selves in the face of "various narratives of the world to which women had, of necessity, accommodated themselves" (219). Wolff argues that one of the narratives that Lily struggles against is the expectations of Edwardian melodrama, in which a good woman is tempted by the extravagance of society, and then either dies as a result of her fall or is redeemed by her refusal to succumb. Wharton purposely frustrates these expectations. Lily demonstrates her refusal to succumb to society's temptations by burning Bertha Dorset's letters, but is not subsequently redeemed. She also refuses the alternate narrative, which is the redemption-through-marriage plot as exemplified by Nettie Struthers.

A. B. Wenzell's illustration of Lily's final meeting with Selden, however, restores the redemptive narrative that Wharton has purposely frustrated. For one thing, Lily is pictured not as a skeletal shell but as a full-bodied woman. Rather than being "shrunk to

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Fig. 12. Goodbye

(Continued from page 8) angularity," Lily retains the S-curves she displayed descending the staircase at the beginning of the novel. If anything, the curves of her body are even more exaggerated than in earlier illustrations. As it did in "I Mean to Make You," the floral pattern of Lily's dress matches up with the floral pattern in Selden's tapestry. For another, Wenzell's Lily seems to have achieved the redemption that Wharton denied her.

No longer an object to be desired and conquered, she is a figure to be worshipped. Lily's white dress contrasts sharply with the black dress she wore in the previous illustration. Selden's head is bowed, as if before an angel, while Lily kisses him chastely on the forehead. Pictured just after she selflessly burns Selden's letters, Wenzell's Lily has become angelic. For Wenzell, Lily's death is triumphant rather than tragic. Rather than being destroyed by a society that denies women the possibility of constructing stable selves, Wenzell's Lily is instead exalted by it.

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**Metaphors of Deception: Incomplete Speech Acts
in Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence***

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This art of dissimulation reaches its peak in man. Deception, flattering, lying, deluding, talking behind the back, putting up a false front, living in borrowed splendor, wearing a mask, hiding behind convention, playing a role for others and for oneself—in short, a continuous fluttering around the *solitary* flame of vanity—is so much the rule and law among men that there is almost nothing which is less comprehensible than how an honest and pure drive for truth could have arisen among them. (Nietzsche 1172)

Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense"

In *The Age of Innocence*, Edith Wharton displays the society of 1870s New York as one that is ruled by "deception, flattering, lying [and] deluding" (Nietzsche 1172) by a world that is driven by the language of social performance, as defined here by Nietzsche. The characters do not honestly or directly communicate with one another; instead they try to read each others' behaviors as Nietzsche explains most men do: by assuming that all other men can read their every "action and thought" (Nietzsche 1172) like actors on a stage. In his essay "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," Nietzsche returns to the central questions of man's existence: "What does man actually know about himself?" "Is language the adequate expression of all realities?" and "What then is truth?" (Nietzsche 1172, 1173, and 1174). Nietzsche then argues that "'truth' is a mode of illusion and 'the schemes our intellects impose upon things by means of language, while practically useful, are fundamentally deceptive'" (Magnus 29). This same deception is clear in Wharton's novel. Wharton displays man's ability to deceive himself and the resulting inability to redefine his world since he is confined by a purely symbolic language that is constructed by his society.

In "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," Nietzsche argues that language is the means by which the human intellect attempts to "[establish] the first laws of truth" (1172). Man attempts to communicate "a uniformly valid and binding designation...for things," (Nietzsche 1172-73), but only is able to communicate through a series of arbitrary metaphors that are, in

essence, deceptive and misleading. The individual can be nothing better than a liar "who uses the valid designations, the words, in order to make something which is unreal appear to be real" (Nietzsche 1173). Such a "misuse" of words means that individuals are in a constant state of deception, lying to themselves and other individuals. In fact, it is just this need "to exist socially and with the herd" (Nietzsche 1172) that individuals are compelled to communicate at all. Nietzsche also explains that "the intellect unfolds its principle powers in dissimulation, which is the means by which weaker, less robust individuals preserve themselves—since they have been denied the chance to wage the battle for existence with horns or with the sharp teeth or beasts of prey" (Nietzsche 1172). Yet, man knows nothing about himself and instead "permits himself to be deceived" (Nietzsche 1172). In *The Age of Innocence*, Wharton displays old New York society as such a "herd," where each member plays a key role in the "battle for existence," but where the metaphorical language is so far removed from any sense of reality or truth, that honest communication is nearly impossible. The characters dance around one another as though they are an audience trying to decipher symbolic gestures from performers on a stage, even though they are one and the same. The communication may be effective to the degree that most characters, excluding Archer of course, function well with the symbolic language and can decode them effectively; yet Wharton still highlights the inherent dishonesty of their communication. She places Archer at the center of a social stage, one that serves as a metaphor for this social performance. The characters ultimately live in a state of unreality, creating a language for themselves that is ineffective and that only deceives.

The extended metaphor of the stage displays the characters' deceptive relationship with language, and even more importantly, reflects Wharton's own fondness for Nietzsche's particular philosophy of rhetoric. In his biography of Edith Wharton, R.W.B. Lewis notes that Wharton was a fervent admirer of Nietzsche, reading many of his writings, repeatedly including him "in her inventory of favorites" in her commonplace books (Lewis 230). Also, by specifically framing her novel with the operatic production of *Faust*, Wharton offers a direct nod back to Goethe, who, as Lewis explains, stood even above Nietzsche as her most prominent figure of influence and whose *Faust* consistently "led the list of her favorite works" (Lewis 230). Moreover, Lewis explains how Wharton "felt that Goethe contained most of Nietzsche" (Lewis 230). In fact, many of the same philosophical leanings about the nature of language and truth are reflected in the work of Nietzsche, Goethe, and Wharton.

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Although his essay, "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," was written when Nietzsche was still early in his career, its "stock...has risen in the eyes of many scholars over the past few decades, primarily because it analyzes truth in terms of metaphor" (Magnus 30). They now "interpret Nietzsche as defending a view of 'truth' that treats it as an illusion foisted upon us by language" (Magnus 30). As such, Nietzsche's postulations are couched firmly within a rhetorical debate about speech acts that spans from the ancients to more recent contemporary philosophers. As Douglas Robinson explains, "at issue in the debate over speech acts is whether language is to be conceived as essentially a system of structures and meanings or as a set of acts and practices" (Robinson). The central questions are first, as Nietzsche writes, "Is language the adequate expression of all realities?" (1173) or alternatively, as Austin asks, "can saying make it so?" (Austin 7). Robinson refers to Harold Bloom's characterization of the debate as even stemming from the "clash between the Greek *logos* ('word'), with its associations of static visual structure, and the Hebrew *davhar* ('word'), with its associations of dynamic human action" (Robinson, "Speech Acts"). Robinson also refers to "Goethe's retranslation in *Faust* of the opening line to John's Gospel, from 'In the beginning was the word' (*das Wort*) to 'In the beginning was the deed' (*die Tat*)" as an "attempt...to recover language not in inert transcendental structure but in creative human actions" (Robinson). In the more recent studies, J.L. Austin identifies "performatives," which are "utterances" that indicate "the performing of an action...not...just saying something" (6-7). Austin also defines a complete "performative utterance" that is "felicitous," or that is "appropriate," "correct," and "complete" (13-14). In other words, Austin's theory explains that language primarily constitutes reality; by saying a thing, we are making it so. Austin presents another interpretation of Nietzsche's approach to language as inherently metaphorical showing its inherently performative aspects as well.

This same conclusion is clearly reflected in *The Age of Innocence*, except that Wharton proves the speech act theory by showing its reverse: what happens when "the thing" is not said at all. Since most of the characters do not express themselves through clear performatives, they trap themselves in a state of inaction. Through much of the inaction, they become caught in what Nietzsche refers to as a linguistic "mode of illusion" that is "fundamentally deceptive" (Magnus 29) or as Austin similarly refers to as "infelicitous," which either are "not implemented" or can "arise out of 'misunderstanding,'" intentional or not (Austin 16, 22). Either way, the characters, especially Archer and May, do not communicate their thoughts honestly but as Nietzsche explains most men do, through a language that is "always metaphoric [ruled] by conceptual schemes of one's own construction [that are] permanent fixtures" (Magnus 29). In particular, the characters in Wharton's novel are ruled by a metaphorical conceptual scheme that is ruled by the stage. From the first lines, Wharton focuses attention on the actual stage, on Christine Nilsson's singing *Faust* at the Academy of Music, and the same performance returns again at the end of the novel, when two years later Archer finds himself married to May but still longing for Countess Olenska.

Wharton positions them at a performance of Charles Gounod's *Faust*, which is a romanticized, diluted interpretation of the legend. In fact, as Robert Lawrence explains, even at the height of its popularity in America, Gounod's version was criti-

cized for "its lack of bite," "especially in the diabolical sequences" (ix). Thus, Wharton purposely separates her characters from an authentic version of *Faust*, which again echoes back to Nietzschean concerns for authenticity of truth. In "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," Nietzsche considers the reality of a "thing" and the "arbitrary assignments" of those things by language, which separates "the thing itself" through multiple layers of metaphor (1173). Likewise, the true version of Goethe's *Faust* is watered down for old New York society. Wharton writes, Nilsson

"sang, of course, 'M'ama!' and not 'he loves me,' since an unalterable and unquestioned law of the musical world required that the German text of French operas sung by Swedish artists should be translated into Italian for the clearer understanding of English-speaking audiences" (4)

Wharton plays with notions of language on multiple levels, highlighting the intense disconnection between the authentic text of Goethe's *Faust* and the nearly unrecognizable version performed for American audiences. The performance itself mirrors the layers of metaphor that rule this society, the performance being so far removed from the original text just as the metaphors misrepresent and deceive.

Moreover, by opening her novel with the Daisy scene, Wharton also explores Nietzsche's view that language is metaphoric, arbitrary, and, unless actually communicated, can be deceptive, and she does this in her own particularly symbolic way. In the opening pages, Archer looks on as Marguerite, sung by Nilsson, performs a decidedly symbolic act in order to profess her love for Faust, and to express a desire for a return of his affections. Wharton writes, "she was singing 'He loves me—he loves me not—he loves me!—' and sprinkling the falling daisy petals with notes as clear as dew" (4) Marguerite performs such a "deed," thus making her silent thoughts a reality to herself. Consequently, Wharton reflects a primary concern of the speech act theory, particularly that of Austin, who specifically explores the performative utterance of "I do" "as uttered in the course of a marriage ceremony" (12-13). Austin argues, "in saying these words we are doing something" (13). However, unlike Marguerite, Archer never does speak his words, and he therefore becomes trapped within his own deceptive world.

Of course, the other, more obvious reason for choosing Gounod's version is that it is historically appropriate. For Wharton's old New York society, a visit to the opera is a basic communal rite, the performances having become "routine and perfunctory," with Faust serving as the "staple of New York seasons" (Dizikes 215, 175). However, old New York society still does not focus its attention on the performance presented by the actors on stage, but rather on the one offered by their fellow audience members. They watch one another arrive in "private broughams, in the spacious family landau, or in the humbler but more convenient 'Brown coupé,'" and even the newspapers are more concerned with the quality of the "exceptionally brilliant audience" than with the star performer, Christine Nilsson (Wharton 3). This same audience talks through most of the performance, led by the two most important authorities, Lawrence Lefferts, the expert on "form" and Sillerton Jackson, the expert on "family" (Wharton 8). Although many appreciate the Academy of Music for "its excellent acoustics" and the performance for the fact that "no expense had been spared on the setting," of primary concern is the audience, especially since its

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small size allows them to keep out “‘new people’ whom New York was beginning to dread” (Wharton 3, 5). A visit to the opera is itself a deception, as the actual purpose in attending the show is simply to see and to be seen.

As such, New York society performs brilliantly for itself, providing all the melodramatic conflict and suspenseful episodes that the stage cannot. Since attendance at *Faust* is an annual tradition, the audience members do not enjoy the performance, nor do they even need to. They watch it without suspense, knowing the entire story, knowing exactly what to expect. For this audience, the language of the stage is fixed and understandable, without pretense or trickery. As a result, they instead enjoy the performance of their own audience, where the language of deception, conflict, and suspense rules. Nietzsche argues, “insofar as the individual wants to maintain himself against other individuals, he will under natural circumstances employ the intellect for dissimulation” (1172). Likewise, the audience of New York thrives in such a language by creating a new language that is deeply rooted in arbitrary metaphors.

Archer is, of course, the perfect victim of such deceptive language. At first, Archer develops his own secret language, performing according to a script that he alone possesses. Archer reads actions symbolically, without concern for reality. He believes he knows the reality of the situation; yet, he only deceives himself. Consequently, the public sphere of 1870s New York society is sacred for Archer, at first. He enjoys the duplicitous aspect of the opera as socially performative, taking pleasure as both an actor and a spectator. Archer arrives late since it is “the thing,” considers his own reasons for “delay,” turns “his eyes from the stage and [scans] the opposite side of the house” to vainly consider his fiancée, all before he even focuses any attention on the actual opera on stage (Wharton 4-5). Although everyone else in the audience “stopped talking during the Daisy Song,” Archer believes that he alone understands its significance (Wharton 5). May’s gaze is fixated on Nilsson’s performance, and yet he thinks to himself “The darling!...She doesn’t even guess what it’s all about” (Wharton 6). Archer then projects that in their future marriage “his enlightening companionship” will provide her with a knowledge of the world that she does not presently possess (Wharton 6). He considers himself “in matters intellectual and artistic...distinctly superior of these chosen specimens of old New York gentility; he had probably read more, thought more, and even seen a good deal more of the world, than any other man of the number” (Wharton 7). Archer is ruled by the kind of pride that Nietzsche designates as ruling over every individual who has attempted to achieve any understanding of truth:

“The pride connected with knowing and sensing lies like a blinding fog over the eyes and senses of men, thus deceiving them concerning the value of existence. For this pride contains within itself the most flattering estimation of the value of knowing. Deception is the most general effect of such pride...” (Nietzsche 1172)

Of course, Archer is most the most deceived member of the herd. His ego tells him that he exists consciously beyond the constraints of his society and he actually believes that he “accept[s] their doctrine on all the issues called moral” out of choice (Wharton 7). Archer starts out believing that “it would be troublesome—and also rather bad form—to strike out for himself,” as though he would be able to speak a different language if

he so decided. Yet Archer has been trained to communicate like an actor on a stage, with the routines programmed and arranged in order to mislead society’s watching eyes.

When Ellen is brought to the Opera by the Mingotts, Archer thinks to himself “to receive Countess Olenska in the family circle was a different thing from producing her in public, at the Opera of all places” (Wharton 10). Archer is fully constrained by the language of his society, or as Nietzsche designates, “the legislation of language” (1172). According to Archer’s rules, which are in fact defined by his community, only certain behavior can be allowed in public, and the flagrant display of such a woman is not acceptable. Nevertheless, instead of correcting the situation honestly, discussing their expectations openly with May and Ellen, he decides to perform according to the dictates of “Taste” and “Form” (Wharton 12). He does not communicate or relate his real thoughts and feelings; rather, he acts passively according to the established societal rules of public performance. Archer moves into the Mingott’s box to mollify the situation, yet as Wharton explains, “he saw that [May] had instantly understood his motive, though the family dignity...would not permit her to tell him so” (14). Wharton continues, “The persons of their world lived in an atmosphere of faint implications and pale delicacies, and the fact that he and she understood each other without a word seemed to the young man to bring them nearer than any explanation would have done” (14). They believe that by not speaking, they can still communicate with one another.

At first, Archer believes that May is able to fully understand his language. He tries to read her reception of his signals in her eyes. Even though announcing their engagement “in the heat and noise of a crowded-ballroom was to rob it of the finest bloom of privacy which should belong to things nearest the heart,” Archer understands when May’s eyes “said, ‘Remember, we’re doing this because it’s right’” (Wharton 20). Like the van der Luydens whose “pale eyes” are able to “[cling] together in prolonged and serious consultation,” May and Archer need not even speak their thoughts to one another (Wharton 46). Archer thinks to himself, “Evidently she was always going to understand; she was always going to say the right thing” (Wharton 20). Even in silence, one believes they know what the other is thinking, like mimes in unison. Of course, Archer is inherently satisfied by such forms of inactive communication, even if what he believes he understands does not truly reflect May’s real thoughts. Yet, as Nietzsche writes that “it is this way with all of us concerning language: we believe that we know something about things themselves...; and yet we possess nothing but metaphors for things” (1174). Archer wants to believe in the truth of his relationship with May, and so he initially misreads her signs as representative of truth.

Yet Archer also does want to rebel against the unstated script of their relationship, and of the conforming language of his society. With the addition of Countess Olenska and the reaction that her presence stirs within New York society, Archer begins to realize that an inescapably pathetic irony exists in that they do not communicate honestly. At another level of consciousness, Archer does realize that “in reality they all lived in a kind of hieroglyphic world, where the real thing was never said or done or even thought, but only represented by a set of arbitrary signs” (Wharton 36). The signs do not represent reality. They are illusory and unreliable, leading the actors into unproductive, false

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situations. Archer becomes moved by “a spirit of perversity” to defend Ellen’s absence at the ball as well as her “conspicuous” behavior that does not align with the well-defined language of New York propriety (Wharton 32-33). In his own defense, Archer argues against Sillerton Jackson, “I didn’t have to wait for their cue, if that’s what you mean, sir” (Wharton 33). Archer again prides himself in his ability to think for himself and to speak his own language. Archer believes that he is “free” (as he argues women “ought to be”) particularly to understand his world, and even to break away from it (Wharton 34). This is really the first, and nearly the only instance where Archer is able to say “the thing” honestly (as Austin declares language is meant to do and Nietzsche reminds us is nearly impossible to do). Yet, when Archer does express this honest, independent thought, he “[makes] a discovery of which he was too irritated to measure the consequences” (Wharton 34). He cannot help but feel uncomfortable speaking an honest performative utterance, partly because his society will not allow it.

Still Archer fears that his impending marriage is doomed to become “a dull association of material and social interests held together by ignorance on the one side and hypocrisy on the other,” believing that he might end up like Lawrence Lefferts, caught in scandalous love affairs while his wife stands by exuding nothing more than a “smiling unconsciousness” (Wharton 36). In May’s hollow gaze, Archer sees a future complete with specious promises and cunning deceit. Archer even starts to worry that May’s “frankness and innocence were only an artificial product” for “untrained human nature was not frank and innocent; it was full of twists and defences of an instinctive guile” (Wharton 37). Archer instead desires a level of honesty in a relationship that he believes May cannot give him;

yet he cannot decide whether it is because she is truly vacuous or simply deceitful.

Thus he is attracted to Ellen, who enters their world looking for “big honest labels on everything” (Wharton 62). Ellen, unlike May, speaks the truth directly, which shocks and enthralls Archer. Ellen represents the opposite of Nietzsche’s doomed, deluded man, and the quintessence of Austin’s man who speaks “feliculously,” without irony or deceit. In their first complete conversation, Ellen speaks “candidly,” and Archer finds it “undeniably exciting to meet a lady who found the van der Luyden’s Duke dull, and dared to utter the opinion” (Wharton 52). Wharton continues, “He longed to question her, to hear more about the life of which her careless words had given him so illuminating a glimpse” (52). Ellen’s new language represents the type of honesty that Archer believes he desires. He admires her because her language does not conform to the metaphoric rules of his society.

Yet Archer does not realize that they could never truly communicate properly because Ellen has not been given the script of New York Society. To Archer, Ellen seems fiercely independent, since she does not care for what is “fashionable” in America. He is drawn to this, believing that he has found someone whose consciousness matches his own. Nietzsche writes that each individual attempts to “perceive himself completely,” and Archer believes that he can (Nietzsche 1172). Of course, Ellen’s presence only serves to deceive him even more, pushing him further into the center stage of New York society’s ever-watchful eyes. Archer believes that with Ellen he can move beyond their set language and form a new one that no one else will be able to understand.

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Edith Wharton Collection Research Award Deadline: March 15, 2011

Each year the Edith Wharton Society offers a Edith Wharton Collection Research Award of \$1500 to enable a scholar to conduct research on the Edith Wharton Collection of materials at the Beinecke Library at Yale University. Prospective fellows for the 2011-2012 award are asked to submit a research proposal (maximum length 5 single-spaced pages) and a resume by March 15, 2011 to Margaret Murray, (murraym@wcsu.edu) Western Connecticut State University.

The research proposal should detail the overall research project, its particular contribution to Wharton scholarship, the preparation the candidate brings to the project, and the specific relevance that materials at the Beinecke collection have for its completion. The funds need to be used for transportation, lodging, and other expenses related to a stay at the library. Notification of the award will take place by April 15th and the award can be used from May 1, 2011 through May 1, 2012. A final report will be due June 1, 2012.

We are pleased to announce that the winner of the 2010 Edith Wharton Research Award is:

Dr. Irene Goldman-Price
for her project:

Tonni and Herz: Forty Years of Correspondence from Edith Wharton to
Anna Catherine Bahlmann

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Archer is particularly struck by the power of this notion when he attends the performance of "The Shaughraun." In this environment, at a play that he has seen many times before, the introduction of Ellen's presence in his world transforms his view of New York's metaphoric rules. Suddenly, Archer sees mirrored on stage their prescribed, stale, and deceptive world. As their attraction grows, their shared and seemingly personal understanding of the world appears to pull them away from that set societal script. Like the last time Archer saw Ellen, when "he bent and laid his lips on her hands, which were cold and lifeless," the "wooer" on stage "stole back, lifted one of the ends of velvet ribbon, kissed it, and left the room without her hearing him or changing her attitude" (Wharton 92, 93). Although such fetishized moments carry an aesthetic quality in that they are beautiful in their unassuming stillness, they also serve as a replacement for living life completely. Archer feels that by being constrained by the societal script, he has not been living authentically, but rather he has been feigning tranquility and pleasure. This moment at the theater temporarily awakens Archer, and he suddenly realizes that Ellen possesses a "mysterious faculty of suggesting tragic and moving possibilities outside the daily run of experience" (Wharton 94). Ellen represents the possibilities of what he believes real life entails, beyond the theater door.

Archer believes that since Ellen refuses to act falsely, he can join her in a world that is completely foreign to his own, one that where language is rooted firmly in honesty and truth. Ellen acknowledges the difference between her language and that of Archer's world, exclaiming, "the real loneliness is living among all these kinds of people who only ask one to pretend" (Wharton 63). Ellen cares nothing for public opinion and refuses to act according to New York society's dissimulation. She is not constricted by their rules of public performance, as is reflected in her artistic tastes. Archer appreciates the artistic world, but only that which is conventional and predictable. As Nietzsche asserts, when man exists "socially and with the herd," he also must subject himself to "boredom and necessity" (1172). Thus, Archer is used to seeing Faust every year, "where, in the familiar setting of giant roses and pen-wiper pansies, the same large blonde victim was succumbing to the same small brown seducer" (Wharton 264). In contrast, Ellen loves "dramatic artists, singers, actors, musicians" and, above all, "*imprevu*," or improvisational performance art (Wharton 86). Her very idea of artistic performance is based on authentic responses to ever-changing moments. Ellen believes that such "*imprevu*" adds to one's enjoyment. It's perhaps a mistake to see the same people every day" (Wharton 86). This mirrors the spirit of the European, "bohemian" society where she feels comfortable, where the language continuously changes because the participants continuously change.

This differs entirely from that of New York society where the emphasis is on duty and stasis for the sake of public decorum. Yet Ellen refuses to give up her community of artists, just as she rejects the idea of returning to her husband. She will not yield to a false performance by succumbing to the pressure of her family's opinion regarding proper public responsibility. Ellen actually comes to embody the most "felicitous" representation of Austin and Nietzsche's understand of a world without metaphor. Nietzsche writes, "only by forgetting this primitive world of metaphor...only by forgetting that he himself is an *artistically creating* subject, does man live with any repose, secu-

arity, and consistency" (Nietzsche 1176). In some ways, this idea even resonates with Nietzsche's later theories about the *Übermensch* and the importance of the "will to power." As Magnus explains, "will is more fundamental to human beings than knowledge" particularly to "enhance power" (41). Once more, the power to *do* something is more important than simply *knowing* something, and in rhetorical terms, one must speak in order to do, which Ellen does. She is an "artistically creating subject," both in life and in speech, and this entirely excites Archer. He is enticed by the possibility of entering her world, or more accurately, of breaking free from his.

However, Archer will never be able to do this. He has been trained as an actor, and inherent in this role is a sense of duty and responsibility. He can never even complete a felicitous performative action as Austin would have him do, but instead his communication is ruled by a series of lame attempts at honesty. When meeting alone to discuss the divorce, Archer wants to know the "truth" of Count Olenski's charges, but he never completely says what is in his mind, nor can he speak his thoughts directly (Wharton 89). He tries to remind Ellen of the vital fact that her husband is very well capable of ruining her reputation, but he can only muster incomplete fragments of thoughts: "He can say things—things that might be unpleas—might be disagreeable to you: say them publicly, so that they would get about, and harm you even if—" (Wharton 89). Ellen then directly questions "what harm could such accusations, even if he made them publicly, do me here?" (Wharton 89). Yet, even in this most intimate of settings, where true communication is necessary, Archer cannot speak the truth. He keeps his thoughts to himself: "It was on his lips to exclaim: 'My poor child—far more harm than anywhere else!'" (Wharton 89). But he puts on a different, infelicitous persona, answering "in a voice that sounded in his ears like Mr. Letterblair's," and focuses their attention back on the expectations of New York society, which he notes "is a very small world compared with the one you've lived in," and "is ruled, in spite of appearances, by a few people with—well, rather old fashioned ideas" (Wharton 89-90). Archer cannot free himself from his role as a member of his society, reverting his concerns back to the language of his own "world" that prevail over even his own desires and love for Ellen.

Even when sending the yellow roses to Ellen, which is itself a gesture of communicating his associations of her "fiery beauty," he does "not put a card" with them, nor does he tell May that he had even visited her cousin (Wharton 67). When Ellen does acknowledge the roses later at "The Shaughraun," asking Archer, "Do you think...he [referring to the heart-broken lover on stage] will send her a bunch of yellow roses tomorrow morning?" (Wharton 96). Yet Archer does not respond concretely, but continues to speak metaphorically, removing himself from having to speak any direct truths. He "reddened" and then replies, "I was thinking of that too—I was going to leave the theatre in order to take the picture away with me" (Wharton 96). Once again, Archer feels safe in the language of metaphor, and the metaphor of the stage seems to provide a most comforting solace for him.

Before the wedding date is finalized, Archer does at least reveal his love for Ellen, yet his language is still stilted and metaphoric, even up until the last, desperate moment before he is committed to May forever. Even in this most essential moment of "truth," the most honest, direct expressions of love that Archer can muster are still couched in abstract and passive terms. At

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first, he tells her, "May guessed the truth....There is another woman—but not the one she thinks" (Wharton 137). Then, after he realizes that Ellen followed his directives about the divorce in order to protect May and her family (soon his family), he speaks of his love for her in the past tense, unable to profess that he still is overwhelmed by his passion, stating, "At least I loved you—" (Wharton 138, 139). Archer cannot see, nor can he express the truth of his present and future situation, and therefore, a future relationship with Ellen can never be realized. Again, since he cannot say "the thing" (his love for Ellen), he will never realize it as a truth. Even as he is convinced that "nothing can't be undone" and that he is "still free," Archer has no grasp of reality; he is seeped in the fantastical drama of his own life, of the false front under which he has lived for so long (Wharton 139). Yet Ellen has a clear perspective of his society's expectations. She reminds him that it in his world, obligation and duty are in fact an essential part of their public world. She explains that she did not divorce because he taught her it was the correct decision, "to spare one's family the publicity, the scandal" (Wharton 138). He even attempts to escape from his engagement by saying that since May refused to accelerate the wedding date, "that gives me the right" to break it off completely (Wharton 141). Yet again, Ellen reminds him that it was Archer who "taught [her] what an ugly word [right] is" (Wharton 141). Archer does not realize that he is bound to the rules of public performance and by the metaphors of his society; the only "right" he has is to continue playing the role that he long before accepted. He has no choice, otherwise.

After the marriage, Archer becomes firmly trapped in the deceptive trap of his own mind and society. He continues to believe that May does not have "the dimmest notion that she was not free" (Wharton 160). Archer is still charmed by those who are free, particularly those who are able to speak honestly, like that of the Carfry nephew's tutor, M. Riviere, who argues that his poverty is:

worth everything... to keep one's intellectual liberty, not to enslave one's powers of appreciation, one's critical independence....And when one hears good talk one can join in it without compromising any opinions but one's own; or one can listen, and answer it inwardly. Ah, good conversation—there's nothing like it, is there? (Wharton 164).

However, Archer cannot help but perform through theatrical metaphors. At the August meeting of the Shaugraun Archery Club, Archer is sent to fetch Ellen, but instead, he reverts to "the art of dissimulation," using Nietzsche's words (1172). Archer thinks of "The Shaugraun" again, and he silently performs the scene where "Montague [lifts] Ada Dyas's ribbon to his lips without her knowing that he was in the room" (Wharton 177). So Archer, instead of completing his task, stands in silent musing and promises to himself, "If she doesn't turn before that sail crosses the Lime Rock I'll go back" (Wharton 177). Archer's silent theatrics are futile because they are never actually expressed.

Even during his last chance to realize his relationship with Ellen when he picks her up in Jersey City, Archer cannot speak what is in his mind. On the way to train station, Archer imagines a dramatic romantic scene in the carriage where they would sit arm in arm, and he too imagines "the number of things he had to say to her" and "the eloquent order they were forming themselves on his lips" (Wharton 234). But of course, he does not realize his fantasy; upon receiving her, he kisses her palm "as

if he had kissed a relic" and forgets "everything that he had meant to say to her" (Wharton 235, 236). Even when Ellen tries to make their shared fantasy a reality by "[flinging] her arms about him and [pressing] her lips to his," Archer cannot respond, he cannot act honestly (Wharton 237). He reverts to empty words and gestures, noting that in response to the action of her kiss, he is "not even trying to touch the sleeve of [her] jacket" (Wharton 237). He even admits that he is caught by the "other vision in [his] mind," and yet he does not even define this vision (Wharton 238). Ellen, with the directness to which Archer is still unaccustomed, demands that "we'll look, not at visions, but at realities," even though she stated "reality" of the only possibility that exists, for Ellen to "live with [Archer] as [his] mistress" (Wharton 238). Once more Archer is shocked by her honesty, by the "crudeness of the question," and after Ellen explains that she can only live in a world where the Gorgon "fastens...eyelids open" Archer leaves the brougham, crying (Wharton 238, 239). Archer still lives in his imagination, which is ruled by deluded melodrama and conventional inhibitions; therefore, he will never be able to live the life he desires. Even when others speak truths for him, he recoils dismally, always compelled back to the comfort of his empty metaphors.

Thus Archer, having been trained in a language of deception, is also deceived by the same language, for he cannot see beyond what he believes to be true. He is consumed by his own pride that, as Nietzsche writes, allows such a man "to be deceived" (1178). Of course, Archer cannot see that throughout the years, as he was simultaneously attempting to woo Ellen and deceive May, he did not realize that he was in fact the true victim of deceit. Ironically for Archer, May has complete control of the dissimulation throughout the novel and is fully aware of the metaphorical language that rules their lives. Like an actor in a theater, she can play either playing the pure, innocent role of a woman who needs to have a "bandage" taken from her eyes, or that of a warrior characterized with "Diana-like aloofness," as she did when she won the archery contest and had all eyes focused on her (Wharton 67, 173). May is a very observant spectator, noting changes in Archer, as she does when she asks if there is another woman who he might love more than her. Archer notes her "quiet lucidity," and May herself says, "you mustn't think that a girl knows as little as her parents imagine. One hears and one notices" (Wharton 121). Although she is continuously perceived by Archer as ignorant and naïve, in fact May is extremely aware of the inner workings of her relationships and their society. By the end of the book, she even learns to move beyond the roles of mere actor or spectator into the commanding role of director.

Yet in this process, May retains complete public decorum, never airing any dirty laundry (even "her torn and muddy wedding-dress") (Wharton 269). She is discreet in her moves. She is not like Ellen as *Übermensch* because she does not express her will felicitously. She does not ever confront Archer and Ellen. In contrast, Archer is so saturated in the deception of his marriage that he loses any and all powers of observation. He is unable to read the reality that May is entirely aware of his relationship with Ellen. Nor is Archer able to see how May has been carefully manipulating both Ellen and him so that their marriage would remain intact. When Archer attempts to purge his soul after their visit to the opera, May interrupts him and brings him bad news regarding Ellen's future return to Europe. May even tells Ellen that she is pregnant two weeks before she tells Archer,

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and before she herself was sure about it. Yet, he does not realize how aware May is until their first dinner party, when the performative aspect of the love triangle reaches an emotional climax. Archer finally realizes that he has been the one on stage with everyone, including May, observing his indiscretions with Ellen. Wharton writes, “and then it came over him, in a vast flash made up of many broken gleams, that to all of them he and Madame Olenska were lovers....He guessed himself to have been, for months, the centre of countless silently observing eyes and patiently listening ears” (276). Although clues are given to the reader that May is aware all along, to Archer, the transformation of May’s character is both silent and seamless. May’s true power emerges when she explains to Archer that she “was right” about being pregnant, with “her blue eyes wet with victory” (Wharton 283). While May has silently controlled the deception all along, Archer is revealed as the ignorant one, the one whose silence has only served to deceive one person: himself.

When Wharton ends the novel twenty-six years later, she presents a study in contrasts with Archer representing a generation that never spoke its thoughts and the opposing “new order,” epitomized by his children and their generation that “were emancipating themselves,” both in speech and in action (Wharton 288, 285). Archer thinks of the moment when May “had broken to him, with a blushing circumlocution that would have caused the young women of the new generation to smile, the news that she was to have a child” (Wharton 284). While Archer is still portrayed as “contemplative” and caught in his own quiet thoughts about an unspoken life that “he had missed,” his son, Dallas, speaks openly and directly in a quick, staccato rhythm that seems to nearly express his every inner thought (“Think it over? No, sir; not a minute. You’ve got to say yes now. Why not, I’d like to know. If you can allege a single reason—No, I knew it”) (Wharton 286, 288). All the while, Archer thinks of May, who he still considers to be always “so lacking in imagination, so incapable of growth,” not connecting the fact that he has always really been the same way (Wharton 287).

So when Archer decides to go to Paris with Dallas, Wharton seems to hint at an optimistic vision for what an individual can become, that perhaps Archer will finally meet with Ellen and profess the thoughts that have overwhelmed him for more than a quarter of a century. Yet even as Dallas speaks the truth to Archer, that Ellen was “your Fanny,” was “the woman you’d have chucked everything for: only you didn’t,” Archer is still flabbergasted and stunned, unable to speak his thoughts (Wharton 293). After his son finally communicates a truth from May, one that the married couple was never able to communicate directly to one another, that “when she asked you to, you’d given up the thing you most wanted,” Archer receives Dallas’s “strange communication in silence,” unable to fully respond to this new generation’s felicitous honesty, but instead quietly muttering, “She never asked me” (Wharton 294). So Dallas mocks the language that plagued his father’s generation:

You never did ask each other anything, did you? And you never told each other anything. You just sat and watched each other, and guessed at what was going on underneath. A deaf-and-dumb asylum, in fact! Well, I back your generation for knowing more about each other’s private thoughts than we ever have time to find out about our own. (Wharton 294)

And so the reader hopes that Dallas’s spoken reality will initiate

Archer to do “the thing” he has thought about for so long.

But it is still too late for Archer to live the truth that he always desired. As he sits waiting for the final theatrical “signal,” for the awnings and shutters to be closed by some anonymous man-servant, he speaks, finally, a truth aloud to himself. He announces, “It’s more real to me here than if I went up” (Wharton 298). This is the only reality that Archer will ever understand and the only one of which he can actually speak. He lives in a language of deception. He has been caught and will be caught forever in the language of metaphor, in his deluded fantasy where he makes nothing happen, where instead, things happen to him. He will never “artistically create” anything; therefore, he will never live with “repose” or “security” (Nietzsche 1176).

Nietzsche asks “how an honest and pure drive for truth could have arisen among” men who are eternally caught in a world ruled by dissimulation and deception (1172). Wharton’s novel ends with the same pessimism of Nietzsche, at least for Archer’s generation. Even though Archer continually yearns for “the flower of life,” Ellen Olenska remains “as a thing so unattainable and improbable” even in a new age where the rules are different and the language is changed. Yet perhaps, in Dallas, Wharton also offers a more confident view of what humans can achieve in speech and in deed. She writes, “Dallas belonged body and soul to the new generation,” and even as “it had never been possible [for Archer] to inculcate in his even the rudiments of reserve,” Dallas is living a life that is fulfilling and complete (Wharton 293). He says what he thinks, does what he wants, and defines his world without guise or pretense. Wharton’s exploration of the effectiveness of speech acts seems more complete in Dallas.

Yet even this new generation of the early 1900s is still a “future” that exists in the past for Wharton, who is writing twenty years later in 1920. The final twist, ending with Dallas marrying Fanny Beaufort and thereby breaking all the rules, is still not contemporary to the moment in which Wharton is writing and still does not represent a complete fulfillment of what an honest and felicitous form of communication could offer. Archer still thinks that the people of his son’s generation “were too busy—busy with reforms and ‘movements,’ with fads and fetishes and frivolities—to bother much about their neighbors” (Wharton 291). Even as one generation is caught in metaphors of deception and deceit, the new one moves too quickly without any rules or guidelines. Even as honest and straightforward as Dallas is, he rushes through his conversations, impedes truly felicitous communication. Even after confronting Archer about the ridiculous nature of his generation’s interactions, he curtails the conversation and “[breaks] off” by saying, “I say, Dad...you’re not angry with me? If you are, let’s make it up and go and lunch at Henri’s. I’ve got to rush out of Versailles afterward” (Wharton 294). Although they may be more effective and satisfying than the performative rules that Archer’s society abided by, the new rules may still be problematic for effective communication.

Straight through to the end of the novel, Nietzsche’s “honest and pure drive for truth” drives Wharton’s characters and her questions about human decision. While Ellen may represent the closest possibility to authentic communication, it is Archer whose complete inability to read his society’s signs is with whom Wharton is primarily concerned. All language is ruled by performance; even Ellen cannot escape this fact. Furthermore, for Wharton, the notion of the performative rules of language is also reflexive for the characters in the novel and for the reading

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audience, allowing for emotional outlet and social criticism. Just as Nietzsche presents a pessimistic view of man's inability to communicate honestly, none of Wharton's characters, not even those of the "future" generations, display a complete sense of what such honest and felicitous communication could be.

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Demeter Forgiven: Wharton's Use of the Persephone Myth in her Short Stories

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Whilst much critical attention has been given to Wharton's "lifelong obsession with Persephone and her sojourn in the Underworld" (Lewis 495), Donovan, Waid and Singley and Sweeney noting the association between her use of this mythological figure with that of the woman writer, to my knowledge no scholar to date has acknowledged the radical shift in her appropriation of this myth over the course of her writing career. Her depiction of Demeter, Persephone's mother, in particular, is drawn with a progressive sympathy until she comes to represent one of the few instances of female solidarity in Wharton's fiction, in the form of Mrs Ashby senior in "Pomegranate Seed" (1931). Marginalized or significantly absent in her early tales, Wharton's Demeter figures become increasingly central characters in her Persephone stories, reflecting a pattern noted by various critics of a distinct shift in narrative perspective from that of the daughter to the mother in Wharton's later fiction (Tintner 155; Donovan 83; Waid 190). This progressive rewriting of Demeter is closely tied to Wharton's vision of female caretaking which in her early stories, when shouldered by Persephone, is depicted as a (sometimes unwilling) sacrifice; however in her later tales, when Demeter assumes this role, the inherent power and importance of such a responsibility is reconsidered, both in terms of human relations and the legacy to be left behind amongst the living. Wharton's presentation of the realm of Hades also undergoes significant transformation over the thirty-three years in which the writer incorporates the myth into her short fiction. Initially presented as a cold, decaying prison in her story

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Announcement

The Edith Wharton Essay Prize

Instituted in the fall of 2005, the Edith Wharton Essay Prize has been awarded annually for the best unpublished essay on Edith Wharton by a beginning scholar. Graduate students, independent scholars, and faculty members who have not held a tenure-track or full-time appointment for more than four years are eligible to submit their work. The winning essay will be published in the *Edith Wharton Review*, a peer-reviewed journal, and the writer will receive an award of \$250.

All entries will be considered for publication in the *Edith Wharton Review* as well as for the Edith Wharton Essay Prize. Submissions should be 15-25 pages in length and must follow the new 7th edition MLA style, using endnotes, not footnotes. Applicants should not identify themselves on the manuscript, but should provide a separate cover page that includes their names, academic status, e-mail address, postal address, and the notation "The Edith Wharton Essay Prize."

To submit an essay for the prize, send three copies by October 1, 2010, to the co-editor of the *Edith Wharton Review*: Dr. Carole M. Shaffer-Koros, English Department, CAS 3rd Floor, Kean University, 1000 Morris Avenue, Union, NJ 07083.

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"The House of the Dead Hand" written in 1898 (Wright 114), Hades becomes an increasingly tempting territory which Paulina in "The Angel at the Grave" (1901) is able to resist, but Kenneth Ashby exactly thirty years later in "Pomegranate Seed," much to his second wife's chagrin, cannot.

As Wharton takes Persephone and Demeter into the twentieth century, the narrative context into which they are written becomes increasingly modern. Wyant's descent to view Lombard's Leonardo in "The House of the Dead Hand," which echoes Aeneas' journey to the underworld, is paralleled by his visit to the historic city of Siena, steeped in Renaissance art and mouldering chapels (CS1 520). In this, her first Persephone story, Wharton's narrator equates the age and oppressive character of the House of the Dead Hand itself with the drama it contains. She writes:

Might not the accumulated influences of such a house modify the lives within it in a manner unguessed by the inmates of a suburban villa with sanitary plumbing and a telephone? (CS1 538).

But by 1928, the Underworld realm Wharton portrays in Bells country house is not simply visited, but taken on by the independent travel writer, Lady Jane Lynke, who decides to "warm [the house] into new life" (CS2 507) by inviting guests, and perhaps even installing a new one-pipe heater in the unbearably cold blue parlour (508). By the time Wharton writes her final Persephone story in 1931, the goddess figures are placed in a world of "sky-scrapers, advertisements, telephones, wireless, aeroplanes, movies, motors, and all the rest of the twentieth century" (CS2 683) proving, as Wharton writes six years later in "All Souls," that it is nonsense to think that the supernatural disappeared with the introduction of electric light (CS2 798).

Wharton's Persephone stories all deal with material inheritance, and, here too, the daughter's legacy becomes an increasingly modern one. In "The House of the Dead Hand," this legacy is in the form of a Leonardo painting, four years later in "The Angel at the Grave" it is a collection of papers, and in "Pomegranate Seed" (1931) it is a first wife's fashionably decorated town house. In each case, the woman's material gain is inextricably tied to her loss, mirroring the paradox of Persephone, present in her absence, both dead and alive, both lost and found (Singley and Sweeney 177). The hand motif, one of Wharton's most consistently employed literary devices, takes on its legal, deadened meaning in the Persephone stories, in the form of "mortmain," in which inherited property remains in control of the deceased, echoing Longfellow's lines:

We have no title-deeds to house or lands;
Owners and occupants of earlier dates
From graves forgotten stretch their dusty hands,
And hold in mortmain still their old estates.
"Haunted Houses" (1858)

Whilst the oppressive control of the past over the present is explicitly referenced in her first Persephone story "The House of the Dead Hand" by the title and Dr. Lombard's use of his daughter's dowry to buy the Leonardo, the manner in which this cursed legacy manifests itself becomes increasingly complex and subtle in her later stories. By 1931 in "Pomegranate Seed" this tyrannical past is no longer a patriarchal one, nor a haunting presence, but rather the stifling *absence* of Elsie Ashby, which taints Charlotte's new home so much so that "even the bare walls cry it out" (CS2 708).

The Persephone myth was attractive to Wharton for various reasons; it offered both a classical allusion with which to write about mothers and daughters, and a narrative context in which to create increasingly contemporary Underworlds. But perhaps the myth's most enduring attraction was the possibility that incest could be represented as a temptation, and the uncomfortable question of female complicity posed by such a depiction. In her reworking of this incestuous narrative (Hades is Demeter's brother and Persephone's uncle), Wharton's later Persephones sometimes actively choose this union, as in her 1912 poem "Pomegranate Seed" and her 1931 story of the same name. Wharton's literary consideration of incest, and female complicity therewith, noted by various critics in her later writing (Wolff; Tintner; White; Bauer) has been given further prominence by the discovery of the Beatrice Palmato fragment, which Wolff dates her as having written in 1919 (291). This fragment, which White notes bears a striking similarity to "The House of the Dead Hand" (40-42), not only explicitly details Beatrice's physical pleasure, but also contains three different portrayals of a mother's role in such a relationship, which all result in female sacrifice. Wolff astutely notes that whilst Wharton punishes the women, she chooses to let the father, "who is the ultimate source of evil and perversion" (300), die a relatively peaceful death in his old age. Both Beatrice and her elder sister commit suicide, their mother having died in an asylum after trying to kill Palmato (Wolff 293-95).

Whereas in her early Persephone stories the mental or physical absence of Wharton's Demeter figures make them somehow complicit in the situation the daughter finds herself, her later appropriations of the myth rewrite Demeter's role from that of accessory to one of victim as the mother goddess is drawn with increasing sympathy. Indeed even Mrs Clemm, the housekeeper at Bells who appears to be an extension of Mr Jones' patriarchal oppression in her 1928 story, is initially described with sacrificial allusions as having "a small round face rest[ing] on [her] collar like a red apple on a white plate" (CS2 503), evoking images of St John the Baptist's end. Such a comparison foreshadows the heavy payment that will be demanded for her failure to follow her ghostly superior's orders; in the final paragraphs of the story she is found strangled in her bedroom, presumably by Mr. Jones.

Wharton's "addiction to classical literature and Greek myths" (Tintner 150), was typical of the time in which she started to write. Indeed Sherman notes that as early as 1869, an *Atlantic Monthly* piece entitled "The Greek Goddesses" began with an apology for the repeated subject matter, stating that "their genealogies have been ransacked, as if they lived in Boston or Philadelphia" (16). Louis credits this nineteenth century interest in the chthonic deities, including Persephone, to a Victorian disdain for the Olympian gods, who seemed heartless by comparison in their instigation and enjoyment of the suffering of others (Louis "Proserpine" 343). Demeter, in particular, appealed to the compassion of the spirit of the age that abolished slavery, in her symbolic value of the pain and sacrifice inherent to motherhood, and in her iconicity as a goddess of fertility in a time when concerns moved towards a "reviving reverence for the material world and its seasonal cycles" (Louis "Proserpine" 329). Evidence of this can be found in the enormous popularity of Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, first published in 1890, the quasi scientific focus of which on ancient myth and ritual offended many by its inclusion of Christian religion alongside the fertility cult of Demeter.

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However the mother goddess was already a celebrity well before Frazer's study; indeed such was her appeal that by 1869 the Madonna was being described as "a disguised Demeter" (Sherman 21).

At the time Wharton began writing, Persephone and Demeter had already made frequent appearances in nineteenth-century art and literature. A plethora of poetry was written around the myth, including Shelley's "Song of Proserpine" (1820); Swinburne's "Hymn to Proserpine" and "The Garden of Proserpine" both published in 1866; Tennyson's "Demeter and Persephone" (1887); Meredith's "The Appeasement of Demeter" (1887) and "The Day of the Daughter of Hades" (1883), as well as Walter Pater's prose essay "The Myth of Demeter and Persephone", which was first published in 1876. D.G. Rossetti compulsively painted and repainted Proserpine through the 1870s, as well as Walter Crane in 1878, Arthur Hacker in 1889, and Frederic Leighton in 1891 (Louis "Proserpine" 351).

As the age edged into the next century the goddesses are given new symbolic values, Persephone becomes progressively eroticized in her pictorial representations, as are the classical figures of Aphrodite, Undine and Andromeda which Wharton incorporates into her fiction (Honey 430). And it is in this era that Donovan notes the Persephone myth evolving from a celebration of maternal instinct into a rejection of the mother (83). Persephone's descent into the Underworld becomes an allegory of the New Woman's rejection of the essentially domestic women's sphere of their mothers for what had previously been the exclusively male realm of education and employment. Central to this transition is the problematic relationship between daughter and mother, in which the maternal realm "represents a horrifying stasis" (Donovan 47). Wharton evokes this conflict of vision between mother and daughter in her 1912 poem "Pomegranate Seed", in which Demeter and Persephone are unable to communicate after the latter's return from the Underworld, their speech a fragmentary series of freestanding utterances, no longer dialogic as the two are now apparently unable to understand or respond to each other (Louis 1991: 343). Rather than creating an innovative rereading of the myth, however, Wharton's poem echoes the earliest known written version of the narrative, Homer's *Hymn to Demeter*, in its focus on the gap between the mother's understanding and the daughter's actual experience in Hades.¹

Narrated from Demeter's perspective, Homer's *Hymn to Demeter* includes two different versions of the extent to which her daughter Persephone was complicit in eating the pomegranate seeds which were to oblige her to return to the Underworld every year. In the *Hymn* Persephone is in a meadow picking flowers when she is abducted by her uncle, Hades, and taken down to the Underworld to become his wife. In her despair, Demeter neglects her duties as a goddess of fertility and agriculture, and the world above is plunged into famine as the crops fail, only beginning to grow again when Persephone finally returns to her mother.ⁱⁱ However, as a consequence of eating some pomegranate seeds in the Underworld, Persephone must return for a few months every year as its queen. In this way the Eleusinian myth of Demeter and Persephone accounts for the seasons: the barren months of the year Demeter's daughter is in the Underworld with Hades, and her return is marked by a return of fertility to the earth. Persephone therefore belongs to both worlds, a daughter in

Demeter's land of the living and a wife in Hades' kingdom of the dead.

The central motif of this paradox is the pomegranate, which Wharton references more frequently than Persephone herself.ⁱⁱⁱ Foley notes the fruit's double association with sexuality and death - deriving from its blood-red colour and its multiple seeds, and suggests that the fruit may signify a consummation of Persephone's marriage to Hades (56). Foley's reference to the ancient Greek ritual of a bride eating food in her husband's house to signify her transition into her new life under his authority suggests that the eating of the seeds also signals Persephone's new allegiance to her husband; no longer a maiden daughter she is now a wife and queen.^{iv} If the pomegranate is the fruit of knowledge, which Donovan analogizes as the forbidden fruit in the Judeo-Christian myth of the Fall (43); it is "the forbidden fruit of sexuality" (Zilvermit 299).

The eating of the pomegranate seeds is narrated twice in the *Hymn to Demeter*. Although Persephone is first seen in the Underworld as a "shy spouse, strongly reluctant" (line 345) on her husband's bed, the first account contains no suggestion of her being *forced* to eat the fruit. The impersonal narration contains no allusion to violence, the word "stealthily" may suggest trickery, but the word "gave" can also be read as implying acceptance. Homer writes:

But he gave her to eat/ a honey-sweet pomegranate seed,
stealthily passing it/ around her, lest she once more stay
forever/ by the side of revered Demeter of the dark robe.
(lines 371-73)

The second account is in the form of Persephone's words to her mother, explaining how she came to eat the pomegranate seed. Here, the far more subjective, first person narration contains a different version of events:

He stealthily/ put in my mouth a food honey-sweet, a
pomegranate seed,/ and compelled me against my will and
by force to taste it. (lines 411-13)

In both accounts the fruit is described as "honey-sweet" and obviously tempting. Persephone's suggestion that she had to eat it under duress is not in the omniscient narration in the first account, which appears a more objective version of events. In her analysis of the *Hymn*, Foley wonders if Persephone protests too much for the benefit of her mother. Or, she asks, does Persephone "lift the veil from Hades' secrecy and expose the violence that she experienced beneath it?" (60). Another unresolved paradox here is the pleasure present in her description of being force fed, with its obvious sexual connotations.

Persephone's experience is narrated via Demeter's vision in the third person, in a manner not dissimilar to the distancing between narrator and object of focalisation so frequently used by Wharton in her short stories. Demeter does not see Persephone being abducted, she does not hear her daughter's cries for help, nor does she witness the eating of the pomegranate seeds, and therefore the mother, like many of Wharton's narrators, is a potentially unreliable narrating consciousness. The two versions of how Persephone comes to eat the pomegranate seeds highlight the differences between the two central figures, "without explicitly questioning the truth of either" (Foley 60). As in many of Wharton's stories, the narrative lacks resolution as to the extent of Persephone's complicity, which is ultimately left to the reader to decide. Such a fragmented nature of the earliest version of the myth makes it a distinctly reader driven text.

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Originally written in 1898, "The House of the Dead Hand" (1904) represents Wharton's earliest use of the Persephone myth in her short fiction. It derives its title from the name of the Sieneese house visited by an American named Wyant, in order to see a painting owned by the Englishman, Dr Lombard. The interior of the house is depicted as a cavernous realm, and Wyant's journey through it, to view the Leonardo, in "an atmosphere of mortal cold", past frescoed figures "'with the filmed melancholy gaze of shades in limbo" (CS1 522), down a narrow stone passage, through various locked doors, is suggestive of a descent into the Underworld. Significantly, he is led to the picture by Lombard's daughter, Sybilla, whose namesake took Aeneas to Hades (Morford and Lenardon 361).

Unlike her namesake, Sybilla is no oracle, and is almost mute in her father's presence. Next to Dr Lombard she either parrots a prepared speech about the painting or recites a verso from Dante's *Paradise*; in both cases the words are not her own. However, when her father is called away she finally speaks for herself and begs Wyant to return, in order to create a distraction during which she would lock her father up and escape. She explains she would then sell the painting, which is legally hers, and marry. But Wyant refuses to help, explaining stiffly that it would be socially unacceptable, given that he is Dr Lombard's guest. The subsequent narrative condemns Wyant's inaction three times, firstly when he himself compares his excuse to that of the Levite and the priest in the parable of The Good Samaritan, secondly by Sybilla, and thirdly by the hand itself, which "reach[es] out like the cry of an imprisoned anguish" (CSI 543) as he leaves the house.

Sybilla's mother also receives little narrative sympathy in this, Wharton's first Persephone story. Ostensibly a vehicle of humour, Mrs Lombard is a stereotype of an Englishwoman abroad who is "inconsciently and ineradicably English that even the silhouette of her cap seemed a protest against Continental laxities" (CS1 523). Carpenter reads her inability to recognise the sarcasm of her husband's remarks as testament to her husband's cruelty, (59) whereas I read Wharton's inherent aesthetic snobbery in her representation of Mrs Lombard as a clear measure of her lack of sympathy for this character. Mrs Lombard's particular fondness for Frith's "Railway Station," one of the most popular, commercialised pictures of the late nineteenth century, which had dramatically fallen out of fashion when Wharton wrote this story, firmly places her within the sphere of the unsophisticated masses. This social categorization is doubly pronounced when one considers the story was published in *Atlantic Monthly*, one of the top magazines of the Gilded Age, produced by editors who took on a "responsibility of cultural custodianship bestowed by 'cultivated' readers" (Mott 2). Whereas the other characters in the story are frequently associated with the art of Renaissance masters, Mrs Lombard brings the common-place, mass-marketed, distinctly unfashionable into the narrative to illustrate the marginality of her character.^v

Mrs Lombard's central function in this story is in conjunction with her daughter, as indicated by the repeated focus in the narrative on the similarity between the two. When first introduced to Sybilla, Wyant remarks that the daughter is "a slim replica of her mother" (CS1 523). Like Demeter, she has prodigiously long blonde hair, and "a full round voice like her mother's" (CS1 526).^{vi} Both Frazer and Harrison stress the remarkable pictorial similarity between Demeter and Persephone, Frazer

writing that the two are "almost indistinguishable" (Carpentier 95). Indeed, in ancient Greece, Demeter and Persephone were considered a dual goddess and were worshipped as one (Goodman 147).

The fusion between mother and daughter is furthered by the girl's name, in Roman mythology "sibyl" was a generic term for a prophetess (Morford and Lenardon 246) who was often stationed in a cave from which she made her pronouncements. The most famous example was perhaps the Cumean Sybil, who communicated with Aeneas before his descent into the Underworld (Virgil, *Aeneid* 6. 42-51). Demeter, too, was known as "the goddess of dark caves" (Pater Greek Studies 110). Both women appear to have the same fate as Ovid's sibyl, who, when asking to live for a thousand years forgets to ask for eternal youth, and proceeds to age and dry up, but never die, as recounted in *Metamorphoses* (Parke 247). When Wyant revisits the House five or six years later the two women are sitting in the same positions by the brazier, there is no change except that both have grown "oddly old ... in a dry, smooth way, as fruits might shrivel on a shelf instead of ripening on a tree" (CS1 545). Sybilla is older, but she has not matured or ripened, her sexual maturity symbolised by the pomegranate bud woven into the carpet in front of the Leonardo.^{vii} A ripe pomegranate, bursting with seeds, not a bud, represents Persephone's knowledge gained in the Underworld. Unlike Persephone, Sybilla never becomes a wife.

Although Lombard died years ago, the two women remain in the house with the painting. White reads Sybilla's lament that even after his death, her father "was always in the room with me ... I can't lock him out; I can never lock him out now" (CSI 547), as indicative of memories of incest that the young woman can never erase, commenting on the sexual imagery of the locking and unlocking of doors, Sybilla's keys and the parting of the velvet curtains which cover the painting (40). Such incestuous undertones are also found by Dyman, who notes Wharton's depiction of Lombard as a vampire (131). Whatever conclusions can be drawn from Wharton's depiction of Dr. Lombard's Underworld ruled by Dr. Lombard, it is clear that much lies beneath the shadowy, hidden surface.

Although Sybilla presents herself as a victim, she is ironically the custodian of the key to the room where the painting is kept when her father is alive, and after his death she defies her mother by refusing to sell up and return to England. The extent of Sybilla's complicity is further blurred by the presence of an unreliable reflector in the shape of Wyant. The bumbling, insensitive tourist manages to mislay his letter of introduction in the opening of the story, to be used unwittingly as a go between by Sybilla and her sweetheart, and to misread the title of the painting he has come to view (CSI 528). Orlando also notes his sexually charged misreading of Sodoma's decidedly pious painting of Saint Catherine receiving stigmata, concluding that his attraction "seems more salacious than spiritual" (134). Wyant is notably Wharton's first male narrator, and "The House of the Dead Hand" is significant in her short story writing career in that it marks the beginning of a lifelong pattern of using an unreliable male narrator to relate someone else's story (as in "The Pelican" (1898), "The Triumph of the Night" (1914), "Miss Mary Pask" (1925), "All Souls" (1937).

The next significant reference to the Persephone myth in Wharton's short fiction is two years later in her story "The
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Touchstone" (1900). This is the story of the posthumous publication of Margaret Aubyn's letters, a writer whose works include a novel entitled *Pomegranate Seed*. Aubyn's love for Stephen Glennard is unrequited, and here we have another example of a Persephone figure who is denied a conclusion or physicality to her amorous desire. "Copy," published in the same year, is a dramatic dialogue between the poet Paul Ventor and the writer Mrs Dale, famous for her novel, *Pomegranate Seed*. Wright makes the connection between this book title and Wharton's short story of the same name, written in 1929, as evidence of a twenty-nine year gestation period (50). I agree, rather, with Lewis that Persephone is a constant theme in Wharton's work (495), in fact the next time she uses it is only a year later, in her 1901 story "The Angel at the Grave."

Nineteen hundred and one marks a turning point in Wharton's use of the Persephone myth in her short fiction, as it is the first time her Persephone figure is presented with a real choice, and the first time that the Underworld is presented as a temptation. In her reading of this story of female caretaking, Benstock suggests that "The Angel at the Grave" is based upon the experience of Wharton's lifelong friend Sara Norton, who devoted her life to editing her father's manuscripts and letters (112). Orlando wonders if the narrative was inspired by the example of Mary Berenson, whose notes formed the basis of Bernard Berenson's book *Venetian Painters* (1894), which established his reputation as a leading authority on Italian painting (151). In "The Angel at the Grave" Paulina Anson gives up her own life to venerate her grandfather's, and when she considers whether to accept a marriage proposal which would entail leaving the Anson house and starting a new life as a wife (and perhaps mother), Wharton asks "Did Persephone, snatched from the warm fields of Enna, peer half consentingly down the abyss that opened at her feet?" (CS1 259). At this turning point in the story Wharton clearly equates the Underworld with a desired sexual maturity associated with marriage.

The oppressive nature of her grandfather's legacy is depicted through the shrine like presentation of his house as a "cold, clean ... family temple", as is Paulina's sibylline role as "interpreter of the oracle" (CS1 257). Rejecting her suitor, Paulina throws herself into writing the "Life" of her grandfather, Orestes Anson. By the time she has finished, Paulina realizes "it was not so much her grandfather's life as her own she had written" (CS1 260). However, it is only after Paulina gives up her suitor that the house possesses her; her prison is sealed by sacrificing her chance of marriage, not the rejection of her manuscript (CS1 259). Before this moment in the narrative, the house was Demeter's realm, and marriage the temptation of Hades. It is Paulina's decision not to marry that turns her life in the house into Persephone's imprisonment in Hades, and *this* Hades loses any association with forbidden pleasures.

"The Angel at the Grave" contains no positive representations of mothering. Paulina's own "unworthy" (CS1 257) mother had married a distant cousin, and had been excluded from the family's fame; Paulina's two aunts are unmarried and do not inherit any of their father's intellectual gifts. These two women, who take on a maternal role in Paulina's life, are dismissed and derided in an ironic manner not dissimilar to the narrative treatment of Mrs Lombard. Wharton writes "But the great man was a philosopher; and to both daughters respiration was difficult on the cloudy heights of metaphysic" (CS1 255). It is also signifi-

cant that Paulina's grandfather's name, Orestes, evokes the only Ancient Greek narrative of matricide, and this, coupled with the Persephone allusion, reinforces the denial of mother inherent to this story.

The third, and final part of "The Angel at the Grave" is the happy ending Lewis finds quite "unpersuasive" (99) and Dyman "pathetic" (138). This is the arrival of the young George Corby, searching for an important discovery of Anson's, written down in a pamphlet Paulina has thoughtfully saved. They agree to start work as soon as possible on making Anson's discovery public, and as Paulina, now in her forties, watches him leave the house, her face looks "as though youth had touched her on the lips" (CS1 270). Wharton's use of "lips" rather than "cheeks" gives a paradoxical quality to the final sentence, in that "youth" suggests innocence, but "lips" imply the potential of sexual maturation with Corby.

Characteristically ambiguous and lacking in closure, Wharton's ending can be read as both liberating and damning. White finds the arrival of Corby uplifting in that Paulina "will be published - and she controls the House of Anson" (55), but both Dyman (137) and Donovan (53) find Paulina's sacrifice fruitless, as it will be Corby's writing, not Paulina's manuscript, that will be published. Paulina's fate is aptly paralleled with Persephone's, who is both damned and imprisoned by her yearly return to the Underworld. In this story female caretaking inspires both pity and even a poignant bitterness in the reader at the very end, when the middle-aged Paulina's hopes are raised by the young George whose only interest is in her deceased grandfather.

The tempting nature of the Underworld is developed further in her 1912 poem "Pomegranate Seed," in which Persephone defies her mother by choosing to return to the realm of Hades. Unable to communicate with or understand each other, Persephone's last words are "I hear the voices of my dead;" Demeter's apparent non sequitur (after a "long silence"), is "I hear the secret whisper of the wheat" (PS 291). The poem breaks from Wharton's previous pattern of a marginalization of Demeter by giving her the last word, and Louis notes that here, Demeter's "powerful and wide-ranging sympathies make her a more touching ... character than her ghostly, bitter daughter" (Louis "Gods" 343). Framed by her daughter's rejection, the poem can be read as Wharton's first sympathetic rendition of Demeter's experience, in which the concluding sibilant softness of Demeter's wheat whisper effectively overrides Persephone's apparent authority. By 1912 Wharton's rejection of the mother is imbued with a distinct empathy for her.

Wharton's next Persephone story appears sixteen years after her poem "Pomegranate Seed" was published, in the form of her short story "Mr Jones" (1928). The three Demeter figures presented in this story illustrate the shifting nature of Wharton's depiction of both mothers and mothering, and the female role of caretaking. Her first, distinctly modern Demeter figure, is Lady Jane Lynke, a writer who bears a striking resemblance to Wharton herself (Wilson-Jordan 64), now in her sixties. On inheriting the country house of Bells, Lady Jane takes on her new role as owner and custodian with gusto, appearing to be someone who can overcome the oppressive legacy of the past, in a story which "turns a new spin on the theme of women's relationship to an old vault-like house" (Orlando 162).

Lady Jane is placed in direct opposition to Wharton's second Demeter figure, the housekeeper, Mrs Clemm, who
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receives her orders from the ghostly Mr Jones, a shadowy manservant “between life and death” (CS2: 506). Mrs Clemm has “eyes like black seeds” and skin “as wrinkled as a piece of old crackly” (CS2 503), recalling Wharton’s earlier evocations of the Sybil in both “The House of the Dead Hand” and “The Angel at the Grave.” Wharton assigns her the sibylline role of acting as a medium for Mr Jones’ messages (Carpenter 73). The third Demeter is Lady Jane’s own mother, a relic of Wharton’s typically absent Demeter figures, who does not come to her daughter’s aid for more than an afternoon, claiming that her busy social schedule prevents her from returning before the next summer.

Bells is an English Hades, whose very shabbiness makes it seem full of “people long dead” (CS2: 502). The Persephone figure in this narrative is the Viscountess Juliana, the deaf and mute wife of the fifteenth Viscount, whose body is now lying alone in her husband’s tomb, with its “tedious enumeration of [his] honours [and] titles” (CS2 498-499) under the scant inscription “also his wife,” in small, cramped characters. Lady Jane’s determination to unearth the facts about Juliana’s life gives the narrative the contemporary frame of a quasi-detective story, and a means by which the narrative genre compliments the modernity of the protagonist. Despite the many obstacles Mrs Clemm puts in Lady Jane’s path, she learns that Juliana’s marriage was one of convenience: her dowry funded her husband’s gambling and womanizing abroad, whilst she remained a prisoner at Bells, forbidden to communicate with anyone other than the servants. The Viscount’s absence and the lack of offspring suggest the marriage was never consummated, unlike Persephone’s. When Lady Jane finally reads Juliana’s unsent letters to her hus-

band, in which the late viscountess begs to be allowed contact with the outside world, Mrs Clemm is found murdered in her bedroom. Suspecting Mr Jones, Lady Jane demands to speak to him, only to be told he died years ago.

The “bud” motif present in “The House of the Dead Hand” is also used in “Mr Jones”, in the description of Lady Jane’s forbears. Wharton writes:

The unchronicled lives of the great-aunts and great-grandmothers buried there so completely that they must hardly have known when they passed from their beds to their graves, piled up like dead leaves ... to preserve something forever budding underneath. (CS2 503)

Her description is reminiscent of the cyclic nature of the seasons, the need for death to sustain new life, as envisioned by Frazer’s and Harrison’s account of the Eleusinian rites, and it seems the old Demeter must be sacrificed for the new one to take control. Mrs Clemm’s death, caused by Lady Jane in her challenge to the housekeeper’s and therefore Mr Jones’ authority, is the necessary price to be paid for the female solidarity between the new owner and the late Juliana, who insists the latter’s story is heard.

Whether incest can be read into Wharton’s Hades-like depiction of Bells is debatable. White suggests that Wharton’s decision to use her father’s name for the eponymous guardian and ruling presence of Bells might allude to her own experience of incest (67,101), but equally persuasive is Orlando’s reading that the name of the manservant is that of the painter Burne Jones whose wife complained bitterly of her mistreatment by her husband (164-65). Although this story was originally entitled “The

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The Edith Wharton Listserv

Wharton-I is your best electronic source for timely information about the Wharton Society and its activities (prizes, grants, conference calls for papers, the EWS dinner at MLA, and so on). It is also a list for questions and discussion of Wharton’s works.

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Parasite”, and there are frequent references to locks and keys, there is none of the submerged physicality of desire in the vampirish description of Dr. Lombard in “The House of the Dead Hand,” and unlike her earlier story, the reader of “Mr Jones” is not left with the pressing question of the nature of the relationship between the young woman and her jailer.^{viii}

At first glance, Wharton's 1931 story “Pomegranate Seed” appears to be a straightforward love triangle, charting the rivalry between the current and former wife of Kenneth Ashby, Charlotte and the deceased Elsie Ashby. Even before the first, faintly written letters arrive, Elsie's dominant presence still pervades in the Ashby house, from the interior design, to her children in the nursery, to the blank space where Elsie's portrait used to hang in the drawing room. Charlotte's confidence that theirs is a happy marriage is shaken by the arrival of a series of mysterious letters sent to her husband. These apparently hand delivered missives, (there is no stamp), are addressed in an androgynous handwriting, which is “visibly feminine” but with “masculine curves” (CS2 679). Desperate to know the identity of their sender, Charlotte spies on Kenneth opening, and kissing, one of the letters. Unable to find out the sender's identity from her husband, Charlotte persuades Kenneth to go away with her on a month's holiday à deux.

The ninth letter arrives the day before the couple are due to sail. When Kenneth does not return from work that evening Charlotte commits the transgressive act of opening the envelope and attempting to read the letter inside. At her side is Kenneth's mother, the third Mrs Ashby, who recognises Elsie's handwriting. The older woman does not say her deceased daughter-in law's name out loud; her eyes, rather, are drawn to the blank wall where Elsie's portrait used to hang and when Charlotte finally reads the enclosed letter, the sheet of paper is almost blank. Charlotte believes she can make out the words “mine” and “come” (CS2 706) which, as Singley and Sweeney note, open an endless range of possibilities, from a command to Kenneth, to a victorious message to Charlotte (189).

Charlotte is read as Persephone by various critics, including Singley and Sweeney who argue that her opening of the letter positions her in Demeter's realm, “[gaining] a mother but [losing] a husband” (177). Waid reads her opening of the last letter as symbolic of eating the forbidden fruit, deciphering the word “come” as Elsie's call for the woman to join her in the Underworld (196). However, I tend to agree with McDowell (140), and Lewis (xvi), that Kenneth is the Persephone figure called to the realm of the dead by his deceased wife. He is lured by the temptation of Elsie into the Underworld. Here the kingdom of the dead reverts to the dark, enticing realm of sexuality presented in Wharton's 1912 poem of the same name, and the letters are “sexually charged, tainted epistles from the other-world, redolent of forbidden things” (Blum, qtd in Singley and Sweeney 191). Hades is no longer a patriarchal force, Elsie, with her “masculine handwriting” and dominant nature, has become the king of the Underworld.

I therefore read Charlotte as a second Demeter, possessing a distinct lack of fertility and sexual desire, typical of Wharton's depictions of this figure. Her motivation for marrying Kenneth is very much connected to the New York townhouse she would acquire, and the story opens with her smug remembrance of the “innocent envy” she had felt when she visited the first Mrs Ashby in a drawing room she would have liked for herself (CS2

678). Having been married for almost a year there is no suggestion that they will ever have children, and Charlotte takes on the role of caretaker of Elsie's house, husband, son and daughter. Zilversmit suggests that Charlotte's frigid nature is the very cause of Kenneth's departure, and concludes that she has “driven [her] husband away” into the arms of a more attractive woman (299). Young sees the daughter-in-law's opening of the letter as the sealing of a “tacit bond” between the two living Mrs Ashbys, and narrated from the perspective of Charlotte's experience, this story is deeply sympathetic to Kenneth's mother, Wharton's principle Demeter figure.

Mrs Ashby senior is portrayed as a maternal, comforting woman, whose “mere bodily presence [gives] reassurance to Charlotte” (CS2 701). When Kenneth does not return, Charlotte's instinct is to contact Mrs Ashby, who she significantly calls “mother”. At her mother-in-law's house she is given toast and sherry, evoking Demeter's role as Goddess of the Wheat, and her traditional depiction with symbols of fruitfulness, such as grapes. This is the first time Wharton associates Demeter with any symbols of fertility; her previous depictions of this figure invariably carry the epithet “dry.” Needed by Charlotte, Mrs Ashby is described with a distinct admiration. Wharton writes:

The light of the lamp fell directly on her old face, and Charlotte reflected what depths of the unknown may lurk in the clearest and most candid lineaments. She had never seen her mother-in-law's features express any but simple and sound emotions – cordiality, amusement, a kindly sympathy; now and again a wholesome flash of anger. (CS2 707)

Elsie, on the other hand, is the Persephone who rejects her. Kenneth's unreasonable objections to leaving the children with his mother, which he tells his new wife not to even try to understand (CS2 695), suggests that it was Elsie who wanted to keep them away from their grandmother. Although this is a story of loss, it is also one of victory. Mrs Ashby now will bring the children up with Charlotte. Her caretaking role as grandmother and mother-in-law is valued, and she symbolises the comfort and wisdom of the maternal. Whereas Charlotte is materialistic and naive, Elsie cold and domineering, and Kenneth weak-willed,

Mrs Ashby is the only character in this story who is presented in a wholly positive manner and one of the very few female figures Wharton spares her ironic detachment. It appears Wharton has finally forgiven Demeter and allowed her to be a mother again.

The female solidarity traditionally associated with the myth of Demeter and her daughter (Hayes 31) can be found in Wharton's last two Persephone stories. Here, whilst acknowledging the loss and sacrifice inherent to the mother, Wharton finally becomes kinder to her, endowing the goddess with increasing power and narrative importance. Although the sexuality inherent in Demeter's role as goddess of fertility is never acknowledged in Wharton's Persephone stories, her role as caretaker is radically revised by the writer over the thirty-three years in which she incorporates the myth into her short fiction. The wheelchair bound, “idiot” (CSI 537) Mrs Lombard evolves into the victorious, “sound” (CS2 707) Mrs Ashby, who will be raising Persephone's children, and will never experience the loneliness of female old age (the subject of both Wharton's first and last story). No longer a figure of ridicule, rejection or pity, Wharton's Demeter is finally vindicated.

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End Notes

- ⁱFoley writes that the single surviving manuscript (dated to the early fifteenth century) was discovered in 1777 (153).
- ⁱⁱHades is both the name of the realm of the Underworld and its king.
- ⁱⁱⁱThe word "Pomegranate" is used in "The House of the Dead Hand" (1904), "The Touchstone" (1900), "Copy" (1900), the poem "Pomegranate Seed" (1912). The word "Persephone", by contrast, is only referenced in "The Angel at the Grave" (1901) and the poem "Pomegranate Seed" (1912).
- ^{iv}This is reinforced by the change in her name; she is only known as Persephone from the time she becomes Hades' wife, before that her name is "Kore", meaning maiden.
- ^vBarriers were put around Frith's paintings when exhibited in order to "keep the crowds at a safe distance". 25 April 2008 <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/picture-of-month/displayPicture.asp?id=350&venue=2>
- ^{vi}Homer's Hymn to Demeter begins with the line "I begin to sing of rich-haired Demeter, ... of her and her trim-ankled daughter" (line 1). As Louis notes, in 1905 Bridge refers to Demeter's rage in terms of her "golden-rippling hair upon her shoulders shaken" in his play Demeter: A Mask (qtd. in Louis "Proserpine" 338).
- ^{vii}Lombard's command that visitors stand on the pomegranate bud before the curtains shrouding the painting are opened bears a striking similarity with the Duke's treatment of his deceased wife's portrait in Browning's "My Last Duchess."
- ^{viii}In "The House of the Dead Hand" Wharton directly asks her reader: "What were the relations between Miss Lombard and her father?" (CS1 532)

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Book Review

Lives of Victorian Literary Figures. Part IV: Henry James, Edith Wharton and Oscar Wilde by their contemporaries.

Series Editor: Ralph Pite.
Volume Editors: Janet Beer,
Sarah Annes Brown, Elizabeth Nolan and
Jane Spirit. London: Pickering and Chatto,
2006. 1200 pp. Cloth, \$460.

By Carole Shaffer-Koros, Kean University

Although Wharton scholars may not view her as a Victorian writer, this triple-volume set juxtaposing Wharton, James and Wilde may be a very suggestive combination. While Henry James and Oscar Wilde came to fame in the 1880s and 90s, Wharton's best fiction was not to appear until later. Nevertheless, all three, as late Victorian and Edwardian writers, share the cultural inheritance of mid-nineteenth century idealism colored by war, Darwinism and the work of Herbert Spencer. Their work also shows the impact of the earlier concept of the self undermined by "a new awareness of historical determinism." These anthologies of facsimiles of contemporary reviews, memoirs and letters about the individual author considered in each volume will save scholarly researchers a great deal of time locating and, in some cases, suffering the eyestrain of reading microfiche resources. Also helpful in each volume is the listing of a chronology and a useful bibliography of primary and limited secondary sources for each author.

Naturally Wharton scholars are well aware of the close friendship and intertextual influences of Wharton and James. Most of the pieces in the James volume are reminiscences or reviews that show both his strengths and, in a few cases, his limitations that narrowed his literary success. Some of these memoirs are by personal friends of Wharton as well, perhaps shedding a bit of light on their interrelationships. Jamesians will enjoy the review of James by Frank Moore Colby deliciously entitled "The Queerness of Henry James."

In the Oscar Wilde volume, contemporaries show that he was part of the Aesthetic movement even from his undergraduate days at Magdalen College, Oxford, in the 1870s. Later memoirs attest to the devastating effect of Wilde's trial and imprisonment. Based on the mixed opinions of the documents, the reader

is left with a picture of a complex figure whose relationship to Wharton deserves to be explored.

Volume 3, the Edith Wharton work, is edited by our own Janet Beer and Elizabeth Nolan. Here the editors have included memoirs from Wharton's childhood friends and letters addressed to her from James and other intimates. These are important documents for scholars interested in the details of Wharton's personal and intellectual life that bear on her writing. For example, the brief memoir of Eunice Maynard counters the popular belief that Wharton did not like children. Facsimiles of contemporary reviews of Wharton's work, including a "critical study" by none other than Katherine Fullerton Gerould, are a wonderful resource for scholars.

Overall, the three volume collection will add a great deal to the study and understanding of these literary giants. While the cost of the volumes may be prohibitive to individual scholars, this set is an important addition to university libraries.

Katherine Joslin. *Edith Wharton and the Making of Fashion*. UP of New England, 2009. 209 pp.

By Meredith Goldsmith, Ursinus College

Few academic readers enjoy the pleasure (sometimes, perhaps, a guilty one) of turning straight to the pictures. Yet readers of Katherine Joslin's new study of fashion in Edith Wharton's fiction will experience exactly that, with the added benefit of knowing that such pleasures are not guilty, but warranted by the study's assertions. In this ably historicized work, Joslin shows us how Wharton's long career spanned important changes in the fashion industry. Through depictions of fashion, the author claims, Wharton comments actively on evolutions in women's fashion and their implications for women's lives, women's work, and women's freedom.

The book begins with a paradigmatic scene of fashion in Wharton's fiction, that of Lily Bart, the night before her death, packing away the Reynolds dress from the *tableau vivant*. This scene serves as a touchstone for the book's project: Joslin notes that readers of realist fiction have been apt to dismiss ephemeral consumer objects like clothing, despite the efforts of many scholars to study Wharton's use of commodity culture. Thus, her readings point to the importance of such ostensible remnants of history. Through analyses of Wharton's autobiographies as well as both candid and publicity photographs, Joslin reminds us that Wharton was a discriminating fashion consumer. She chooses and describes her characters' costume with equal attention and care.

Joslin recasts some of Wharton's best-known novels in light of their sartorial concerns. Although some readings later in the book are unsurprising to readers familiar with Wharton scholarship, Joslin's attention to context allows the texts under study to be read in new ways. For example, although readers of Wharton are familiar with Undine Spragg's compulsive consumption, Joslin reads the novel through one particular technology, that of the pier-glass mirror, which graced not only department stores, but the halls of Versailles. Returning to *The Custom of the Country*, one notes the ubiquity of mirrors—Undine's world becomes a department store, decorated with pier-glass in

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which we watch her watch herself. Joslin's lingering on such details illuminates Wharton's juxtaposition of May Welland Archer and Ellen Olenska in *The Age of Innocence*. Archer's first view of the two heroines, in which he notes May's modest "tucker" and Ellen's "Josephine" gown, dramatically underscores the differences between the two women. Here, as in her reading of *Bunner Sisters*, Joslin calls attention to Wharton's deliberate use of anachronisms—the Empire look, dated in the 1870s, was resuscitated in the 1890s and reclaimed again in the teens (in 1907, Paul Poiret designed a gown for his wife entitled "1811"). Wharton evokes the cyclical nature of fashion, forcing past and present to co-exist in her depiction of Ellen and questioning the notion of historical fidelity. To help us appreciate the nuances of the fashions she describes, Joslin draws upon the costume collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Mint Museum in Charlotte, North Carolina, offering numerous color photographs of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century apparel. As readers' eyes move between text and image, our understanding of Wharton's fashionable women grows.

My critiques of the book are relatively minor: occasionally, Joslin's focus on fashion risks flattening her otherwise subtle analyses of the novels. For example, I was struck by Joslin's claim in her discussion of *The Mother's Recompense* that Kate Clephane accepts middle age upon returning to France at the end of the novel, a claim buttressed by the comparison between Kate Clephane and Wharton herself. *The Mother's Recompense* ends as the heroine comes to grips with a frighteningly empty life, something not even the most elegant or age-appropriate garments can wish away. Here, the integration of Wharton's life and art seems forced: while Wharton apparently embraced singlehood, expatriation, the flexible fashions of modernity, and aging, the closure of *The Mother's Recompense* offers a much less sanguine account of what modernity has to offer middle-aged women.

I also note one omission that, if explored, might deepen Wharton's dialogue with fashion. In her brief discussion of the invention of the brassiere, Joslin argues that modernity informed the development of new undergarments as well as new fashions. While Joslin notes that the patent for the invention of the bra was held in the US by Caresse Crosby, she neglects to state that Wharton knew—and not surprisingly, disliked—Caresse Crosby and her husband Harry, Walter Berry's nephew. The Crosbys were ultimately better known for their establishment of Black Sun Press, an important modernist publishing house, than for Caresse's earlier achievement. I cite this omission not to quibble with Joslin, but to suggest that the interconnections between Wharton, modernism, modernity, and fashion may run even further below the surfaces of clothing than this well-argued study makes clear.

The question of what lies under women's clothing evokes larger questions of fashion's link to the body, sensuality, and sexuality. Joslin reminds us that Wharton almost never calls attention to the sensations involved in wearing clothing. Yet fashion molds the body; the textures, fabrics, and colors one wears evoke sensory as well as affective states. For me, one highlight of this book was Joslin's imaginative flight into the feelings of a woman's body accustomed to the corset; I wish this adventure-some reading were brought back into conversation with Wharton's texts. Arguably, Wharton's pleasure in fashion indicates something of her sensual and sexual being: what do we make of the early photographs that emphasize her hourglass fig-

ure? How do we interpret her penchant for bejeweled "dog-collars," which she kept throughout her life and bequeathed to friends and relatives? I find an eroticism in these objects that is rarely articulated in this study—if fashion was a sign of class, gender, and mobility, surely it functioned, on some level, as a fetish. Katherine Joslin, in her unpacking of fashion from the "mold[y] trunks" (2) of literary history, prompts Wharton critics to continue such pleasurable investigations.

Dianne L. Chambers. *Feminist Readings of Edith Wharton: From Silence to Speech*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 209 pp.

By Annette L. Benert, Independent Scholar

Based on recent feminist theory and Wharton's literary biography, *Feminist Readings of Edith Wharton: From Silence to Speech* uses four "silenced" female protagonists to represent both "the challenges and constraints of female authority and authorship" in the early twentieth century and "the complex narrative strategies Wharton employs to overcome" them (10). Initially silenced herself by strictures of family and class, her prolific publication from *The House of Mirth* on was her own definitive move into speech. Dianne L. Chambers, Professor of English at Elmhurst College, casts "Wharton's struggle to achieve narrative control" as her "own struggle over how to tell her story" (23).

She places Wharton's attempt "to reconcile the double identity of author and woman" in the period's literary "gender war" (26). Refusing her mother's strictures on women's roles, Wharton also voiced "impatience with feminist ideas" (35). She rejected the sentimentalism identified with women writers and embraced the "masculinized" activities of writing and publishing (44). Yet her fiction often employs "competing discourses" of business and romance to both "tell a story and comment" on it (47). Indeed, Chambers' fine sense of Wharton's fruitful use of contradictions gives this book much of its richness.

At its heart are "the complicated narrative strategies" Wharton used to "answer the challenges she faced as a female writer" (11). In *The House of Mirth* (1905) Lily Bart "clings to Lawrence Selden's narratives as evidence of a better and truer self," but his "misreadings" of her make him "a terribly inaccurate chronicler" (50). She aspires to "an aesthetic definition of self," but the "discourse of business and trade" better describes "who she is within . . . the material conditions of her life" (60). She "dies not because she is guilty" but because her "misreading" of Selden has "render[ed] her mute" (64). This useful reading of the novel nonetheless ignores Lily's frequently accurate understanding, even articulation, of her situation and obscures the cold naturalism of Lily's toxic and powerful female companions.

The Reef (1912) demonstrates how "masculine narratives silence women's voices and how women fail to define their own stories" (70). Sophy Viner enacts "the effects of class . . . on female control over story" and Anna Leath "the struggle for female voice" in "an international and cosmopolitan culture." Both "emerge as silenced subjects" able neither "to control the stories told about them" nor "to construct their own narratives" (67). George

(Continued on page 27)

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Darrow's "facile interpretations of Anna's telegram and behavior" anticipates his throwing her letter "unread into the fire" (75). With both women, "Darrow controls the talk" and ends it "with a kiss" (83). Yet this helpful reading of the novel accounts for neither Darrow's preference for inarticulate nature, even silence; nor the brutal truth-telling in Book Four; nor the farcical use of tragedy in Book One and of comedy in Book Five.

Chambers' analysis of *Summer* (1917) is stronger. Charity Royall "loses agency, identity, and voice when she is seduced by the language and story" of others (98), and Wharton's reliance on Charity's point of view shows greater "confidence in her control over the narrative" (99). Further, Charity's underclass status makes her "highly sexualized" (102), "prone to transgressive behavior," and rendered "defenseless" by "her exclusion from [all] that upper class status brings" (103). Lawyer Royall calls her people "'scum,'" her mother not "'half-human,'" and Charity herself a "'damn bare-headed whore'" (108, 116). Lucius Harney calls them "'a little independent kingdom'" (107) and her "'a waif from the Mountain'" (109) ? both alike unhelpful to self-understanding. Wharton "painfully traces Charity's decreasing ability to express her desire, to construct her own story, and to defend herself against" others' narratives (119). Pregnant with Harney's child, Charity marries Royall, the "ultimate failure to script an alternative narrative" (122). Her "child-like behavior" thereafter is "regressive" and her marriage "incestuous in spirit," a "narrative . . . closure so complete that it suffocates" (123). However, like Sophy Viner, Charity often can actually *see* her situation – she just cannot *write* it.

Chambers claims that Wharton's increased confidence makes *The Glimpses of the Moon* (1922) "much more carefully crafted and more deserving of critical attention" than other readers have seen. A new "narrative authority" enables her to "move beyond the struggles of individual characters" to "critique broader cultural narratives about romantic love, female virtue, and motherhood" (126). Foregrounding gender as a socially scripted act, the novel uses "staging and performance" and an omniscient narrator to emphasize its frequent "'staginess'" just as sentimental and epistolary elements generate "parody and conflicting discourses" (127-29). The "romantic pair" talks business; family and friends "rarely share the same physical space"; "mothering is half-heartedly conducted long distance" (132). Writing being unreliable, "the semiotics of gesture, actions, and the body can also tell the story," especially for "a society predicated on show" (139). Though Susy is cast "as romantic heroine, mother, and redeemed 'fallen' woman, . . . calling attention to the staging of these roles" charges them with irony. Nick's watching Susy "foreground[s] the spectator viewing the action, undermines [these] cultural stories," and makes "the idea of motherhood . . . more satisfying than the reality" (143-46). However, the novel's preoccupation with the wandering well-to-do directs its satire toward class at least as much as toward gender.

Finally, though Wharton's letters show anxiety about her writing, *A Backward Glance* focuses on her "literary development" by "carefully construct[ing] an idealized writing self that she can trace back to childhood." Her "longing to become a writer" accompanied "an underlying anxiety about her ability" to do so. These novels "reflect these internal struggles and fears" in the "contexts that shaped Wharton's life and writing" (152). But as Chambers observes of *The Reef*, "if Wharton is struggling to define woman as a speaking subject" she seems "deeply

ambivalent about the potential for success" (90). That may be true, but another issue is linking Wharton's characters as "speaking subjects," whose gender and class alike prevent their fully becoming, to Wharton's own evolving narrative virtuosity.

Feminist Readings of Edith Wharton: From Silence to Speech makes for interesting reading, though the reader often bumps into the same words and ideas. The book needed editing for repetitive language, typographical and factual errors, and unclear structure. Furthermore, linking Wharton's narrative strategies to her personal life seems a leap, neither well developed nor useful. Yet Chambers' central thesis about gender and narrative is powerful and important, offering fine insights into Wharton's evolving confidence and strengths as the novelist whose style, vision, and imagination we all relish.

Corrigendum

Fall 2009 Review by Elsa Nettels of *Reading Edith Wharton Through a Darwinian Lens*

It is fitting that Judith Saunders's well-written and well-researched book be published in the "Year of Darwin," the 200th anniversary of his birth and the 150th anniversary of *The Origin of Species*. Saunders applies the basic concepts of evolutionary biology in chapters on four of the best known of Wharton's works--*The House of Mirth*, *The Age of Innocence*, *The Old Maid*, and "Roman Fever"--and three lesser known novels--*The Reef*, *The Glimpses of the Moon*, and *The Children*. Although she notes Wharton's knowledge of Darwinian ideas and her reading of Huxley and Spencer, she derives her theoretical framework, not from Wharton's writings, but from scores of recent analyses by biologists and other scholars, such as David Buss, Joseph Carroll, and David O. Wilson, who have defined Darwinian concepts in the emerging field of Darwinian literary criticism. Saunders provides a useful glossary of terms: among the most important in her study are fitness, measured by the number of copies of an individual's genes reproduced in the next generation; adaptive behavior, exhibited in response to changes in the environment to ensure survival and increase individual fitness; and nepotism, behavior promoting fitness by support of relatives whose genes are likely to be reproduced in future generations.

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