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NOTICES

ALA TO MEET MAY 24-26

The third annual American Literature Association (ALA) Conference will be held at The Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C., May 24-26, 1991. The Edith Wharton Society was one of the founding members and this year's program has again attracted some of the most exciting scholars in American literature. The Wharton Society will have two sessions. On the "*The House of Mirth Revisited*" panel will be Kristen O. Lauer, "Edith Wharton's Warning To Women: The Neurotic Defense Strategies of Lily Bart"; Carol J. Singley, "Missing the Word: Wharton's Skeptical Portrait of Lily Bart"; Susan Goodman, "Howard Sturgis's Influence on *The House of Mirth*"; and Jacqueline Levering Sullivan, "A Quickened Intelligence of the Heart: A Reappraisal of Gerty Farish." Annette Zilversmit is the moderator. The second panel will be the first joint session of two major American women writers: Blanche Gelfant will moderate "Willa Cather/Edith Wharton" with John J. Murphy's "Niel Herbert and Newland Archer: Male Filters of Historical Ambivalence" and Annette Zilversmit's "The Lesbian Sub-text: Wharton's 'All Souls' and Cather's 'The Old Beauty.'"

Members and their colleagues are urged to attend. The rates at this Mayflower Hotel are \$60 a night, single or double and \$75 at the nearby Hilton. The conference fee is \$30. Write to Alfred Bendixen, English Department, California State University, L.A., 5151 State University Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90032-8110. (Or call 213-343-4291)

WHARTON SESSIONS AT NEMLA

Edith Wharton sections are now found in many regional conventions. At the Recent Northeast Modern Language Association (NEMLA) held in Hartford, Connecticut, April 5-7th, Carol B. Sabora, Villa Julie College, organized and moderated "Wharton and the World: Responses and Revisions." The papers were "Into The Looking Glass: Gender, Space, and Power in the *Custom of the Country*," Annette L. Bennert, Allentown College; "War As Editor: Edith Wharton 1914-1915," Alan Price, Penn State, Hazleton; "The Arrival of Motherhood in Wharton's Fiction," Patricia LaRose Pallis, University of Connecticut; and "Wharton's Madonna: Fulfillment Or Concession?" Carol J. Singley, American University.

Wharton papers in other NEMLA panels included "The House of Mirrors: Carrie, Lily and the Reflected Self," Caren J. Town, Georgia Southern College; and "Palimpsests of Meaning: Wharton's Manuscripts and *The House of Mirth*," Annette Zilversmit, Long Island University, Brooklyn.

CALL FOR PAPERS — Next year's NEMLA conference will be held in Buffalo April 3-5 and Monika Elbert will chair the Wharton session. The topic is "Men in Wharton's Life and Literature." Papers or proposals may discuss the influence of Wharton's male friends and companions on fiction, the influence of male writers on her work, or Wharton's depiction of men in her fiction, as for, example, friendship between or among men, constructs of the masculine, or the relationship of men's identity and their social and economic status. Material should be sent to Monika Elbert, English Department, Montclair State College, Upper Montclair, NJ 07043.

HELP NEEDED

Richard M. Dunn is writing a biography of Geoffrey Scott and would appreciate any unpublished material or information Wharton scholars and readers may have come across in their research. He is also looking for Georgette Lubbock's address. She may have Percy Lubbock's diary which could be of interest. Write to Richard M. Dunn, 7 East 14 Street, New York, NY 10003.

CORRECTION NOTED

Shari Benstock, University of Miami, offers this correction to *The Letters of Edith Wharton*, edited by R.W.B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis.

The correct date of Edith Wharton's letter to Elisina Tyler (pp. 447-48) is September 21, 1926, not 1921 as given in the Lewis text. Royall Tyler was posted to Budapest (see fn. 3) in 1924 (see Edith Wharton to Elisina Tyler, 16 April 1924). Both letters are in the Edith Wharton Manuscript Collection at the Lilly Library, Indiana University (Box 3, folder 3), where they are correctly catalogued by date.

Neglected Areas: Wharton's Short Stories and Incest

by Barbara A. White

*(The following article is a unique departure for the Edith Wharton Review. It is part one of a whole chapter excerpt from the book Edith Wharton: A Study of the Short Fiction, to be published shortly. * The concluding part and perhaps the most provocative will appear in the fall issue. In some correspondence about the manuscript, Barbara A. White writes, 'When I contracted to do the book, I had no theory about Wharton, but after a consecutive reading of the short stories I became convinced that Wharton probably was an incest victim (being in Women's Studies I've come to know students who are incest survivors and have learned from them the basic signs), but still I had to write a book on the short stories in general, and not on Wharton and incest. . . . I think I just scratched the surface in terms of evidence that would support my basic theory (in fact, I'd done most of the research and some of the writing about her stories before I came to the incest theory). I think people will find a whole lot that I missed. Maybe this accounts for the very strong feeling or intuition, as opposed to intellectual conviction, I have that I'm right about the incest (i.e. that I've unconsciously absorbed much supporting evidence — you see, I do accept the existence of an unconscious!)"*

The influential Edmund Wilson established the traditional periodization of Wharton's work soon after her death. He thought the significant years in her career were 1905 to 1920, the span between the great novels *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*. He found her fiction after 1920 "commonplace," if not downright bad, and dismissed her earliest work as preoccupied with "artificial moral problems" in the manner of her friends Henry James and French novelist Paul Bourget.¹ Although Wilson's evaluation must be questioned, at least as it applies to the short stories, the stories do tend to form three distinct groups. The dates differ a bit from Wilson's because the shorter works anticipate the novels. The short stories that followed the publication in 1901 of Wharton's second collection, *Crucial Instances*, have much in common with *The House of Mirth*, particularly the familiar emphasis on the aristocracy and economic and social institutions. I say "familiar" because readers have learned to associate these features, along with male narrators and the marriage/divorce theme, with Edith Wharton. Yet the twenty-four stories published before 1902 reveal a different Wharton.

In the early stories there are almost as many female narrators and reflectors as male (and in the stories published before 1900 there are actually more female reflectors). Important female characters greatly outnumber the male characters. The upper crust is scarcely more visible than the working and middle classes. Only gradually, in the progression from the uncollected stories to *Crucial Instances*, do aristocratic backgrounds, like male reflectors, begin to dominate. The major themes of the early stories include the responsibilities of the artist, the nature of art and perception, courage versus cowardice, past versus present, and female experience, especially its claustrophobic tendencies. Although these themes would engage Wharton throughout her career, the emphasis changes; for example, in the period Wilson considers the zenith of her career she would stress the institutions that limit women, whereas in the earlier period she focuses on the felt personal experience of restriction. One might also characterize the early stories by what is *not* there — no economics of marriage, no decline of old New York, no obvious ghosts.

*Excerpted from *Edith Wharton: A Study of the Short Fiction* by Barbara A. White, forthcoming in November 1991 from Twayne Publishers, Boston. Printed by permission of the publisher: all rights reserved.

Despite the absence of many features for which Wharton has been appreciated, her early stories cannot really be considered apprentice work. As a writer Wharton sprang full grown, as it were, from the head of Zeus. Shock is the dominant tone of the reviews that greeted her first collection, *The Greater Inclination* (1899); the reviewers could hardly conceive of a writer this accomplished being previously unknown to them.² Few first books have received such glowing notices. Wharton herself tended to downplay the suddenness of her emergence as an author, pointing out her childhood obsession with "making up" and gradual attraction to writing in adulthood. She notes that *The Greater Inclination* "contained none of my earliest tales, all of which I had rejected as not worth reprinting." The implication is that the first stories had no value except as the means by which she "groped my way through to my vocation" (BG, 119).

Wharton's common practice throughout her career, however, was to choose stories to collect on a basis other than quality. She picked her most recently published stories, seldom excluding one unless it had been specifically criticized by someone she respected or unless it related too obviously to her personal life. Thus, she omitted "The Line of Least Resistance" (1900) from *Crucial Instances*, even though she had originally planned to make it the title story, because James found fault with it (Lewis, 125). She rejected "The Fullness of Life" (1893) and some other tales for too openly portraying dissatisfied wives. They were "excesses of youth" not worth reprinting because written at the top of her voice; she describes "The Fullness" as "one long shriek."³ Although Wharton may have truly considered her initial stories inferior, it is evident she liked the idea of having some youthful excesses to repudiate. At any rate, modern readers have disagreed with her. Her first published story, "Mrs. Manstey's View" (1891), has found favor, along with "The Lamp of Psyche" and "Friends" (1900).⁴ These stories eclipse several she chose to collect in *The Greater Inclination*. Wharton's early period must be considered one of significant accomplishment, from the first stories through the two collections. It includes two of her best stories, "Souls Belated" (1899) and "The Angel at the Grave" (1901), and impresses in quantity as well as quality, the stories constituting between a quarter and a third of her output during her lifetime.

At the same time, Wharton's sophistication as a short-story writer in the 1890's did not preclude development. The confident pronouncements of *The*

Writing of Fiction resulted from experience; and however distinguished Wharton's early stories may be, they are probably, taken as a whole, slightly less accomplished than those of her later periods. Although she could occasionally write brilliant stories like the two mentioned above, she sometimes fell short from failure of technique (rather than failure of concentration, as in her later years). A very promising story, "A Cup of Cold Water" (1899), comes to grief because she cannot overcome the same type of logistical difficulties she later solved in "The Other Two" with the cognac and the tea. Wharton was also experimenting with narrative point of view in her early years and moving toward what would become her standard practice. Perhaps most important, she had to come to terms in this period with her new profession — with literary tradition and the influence of other authors, with her publishers and readers, with the reflections of her own past and personal life in her writing. All these issues, which I discuss in the remainder of this chapter, would be complicated by her being female and would in turn affect her writing, sometimes leading to significant change.

In "Telling a Short Story" Wharton mentions numerous practitioners of the form who presumably influenced her own work in a general way. There are the British: Scott, Hardy, Kipling, Stevenson, Quiller-Couch, and Conrad; the Russians: Tolstoy and Turgenev; the French: Balzac, Flaubert, and Maupassant; and the Americans: Poe, Hawthorne, and James. Wharton critics have considered most of these writers as models, even drawing some specific parallels between stories in the case of the most obvious influences, the French and the Americans.⁵ Several names have been added to the list, including George Meredith, William Dean Howells, and Henry Blake Fuller, a Chicago writer whom Lewis sees as Wharton's "sanction for combining realistic detail with a melodramatic plot" (85-86). Interestingly, all these writers are male; the only woman Wharton mentions in "Telling a Short Story" is Jane Austen, although she pays tribute elsewhere in *The Writing of Fiction* to her favorite female novelists, Eliot and Sand.

Wharton's failure to name a female short-story writer would be less remarkable were her earliest stories not so clearly in a female tradition and did they not resemble works by the New England local colorists Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary Wilkins Freeman.⁶ "Mrs. Manstey's View" could have been written by Jewett or Freeman. Although the title character inhabits a New York boardinghouse and

once had a husband, she is at heart a New England nun. She lives a solitary existence, her only friends the animals and plants she can see from her window (there are as many types of flowers named in the story as herbs in Jewett). Mrs. Manstey's neighbors may think her "crazy" (1: 3, 9) but like many a Jewett or Freeman spinster, she stays in tune with an idealized green world. That world is threatened when a neighbor starts to build an extension blocking Mrs. Manstey's view. Wharton's metaphorical description of the threat connects her with a broad range of women's writing, reaching back to the domestic sentimentalists and Emily Dickinson, as well as the local colorists. Not only has Mrs. Manstey's landlady, representing the mass of unobservant humanity, failed to notice the stunning magnolia in the next yard, but the tree is doomed: "One of the [work]men, a coarse fellow with a bloated face, picked a magnolia blossom, and, after smelling it, threw it to the ground; the next man, carrying a load of bricks, trod on the flower in passing" (1: 9).

"Those horrible boots!" as the protagonist of Wharton's next story, "The Fullness of Life," exclaims of the object she associates with her husband (1: 12). Lest these passages be considered "excesses of youth" of the sort Wharton later enjoyed repudiating, it should be pointed out that she uses the same image in her distinguished novel *Summer*, when the heroine's communion with nature is interrupted by a man's muddy boot trampling some frail white flowers. One is reminded of the sylvan child protecting her green world against the hunter in Jewett's "A White Heron" (1886) and the New England nun in Freeman's story sweeping away the tracks of her cloddish fiancé: "She had visions, so startling that she half repudiated them as indelicate, of coarse masculine belongings strewn about in endless litter; of dust and disorder arising necessarily from a coarse masculine presence in the midst of all this delicate harmony."⁷

The theme of the intrusion of the "coarse masculine" into an idyllic female world appears again in Wharton's "Friends," an early story even more reminiscent of Jewett and Freeman than "Mrs. Manstey's view." Penelope Bent quits her teaching job of many years and leaves her New England friends to marry. When she is jilted and returns home, she discovers that her best friend, Vexilla Thurber, has been hired in her place. The friendship survives, as Penelope overcomes her resentment and refuses Vexilla's offer to give up the job — Vexilla needs the money to support her poverty-stricken

family. In the end harmony is restored because Penelope has reestablished "her connection with the general scheme of things," becoming "in touch once more with the common troubles of her kind" (1: 214).

Perhaps Wharton thought she was clearly departing from her models; there is even a touch of satire in the names Penelope Bent, Vexilla Thurber, and Euphemia Staples (another teacher), although the hint is not carried through. She emphasizes the seediness of the New England setting (the story begins emphatically, "Sailport is an ugly town"), employing the same technique she would later use in *Ethan Frome* and *Summer*; the description of Vexilla's hovel and shabby dependents — senile grandmother, paralyzed brother, and slatternly sister — anticipated the two novels. In her autobiography Wharton claims she wanted to "draw life as it really was" in New England, "utterly unlike that seen through the rose-coloured spectacles of my predecessors, Mary Wilkins and Sarah Orne Jewett" (*BG*, 293). This contrast is deceptive in that Wharton seems to have the mistaken impression that her predecessors avoided describing poverty; there is actually nothing in "Friends" the local colorists could not have written.

Wharton's failure in "Telling a Short Story" to acknowledge Jewett and Freeman, even if she were ultimately to reject them as too rosy, might be explained by her general disinclination to admit influence, particularly the American variety; she quickly dismisses Poe and Hawthorne, two important models, as outside the "classic tradition" of the short story.⁸ There are many possible reasons for Wharton's strong "anxiety of influence," not the least being the diminution of her literary reputation that resulted from false categorization as James's imitator.⁹ In addition, Amy Kaplan suggests in *The Social Construction of American Realism* (1988) that each generation of female writers "might have to struggle as much against female as male forms of influence."¹⁰ To shape a role for herself, Wharton had to confront "the volubility and commercial success of the domestic tradition of American women novelists" (72). Kaplan goes on to argue that Wharton tried to establish herself as a professional author by disassociating herself from the domestic or sentimental writers.

Two stories about female artists, "The Pelican" (1898) and "April Showers" (1900), are noisy rejections of the sentimentalists. In "The Pelican" Mrs. Amyot takes up lecturing for the same reason many early nineteenth-century women began writing — to

support her child after her husband's death. Although she has no particular knowledge or ability, she succeeds, at first because of the "personal accent" she brings to her talks. To her, "art was simply an extension of coquetry: she flirted with her audience" (1: 92). Finally the public grows tired of her silly lectures on Plato and continues to patronize her only out of sympathy. At the end of the story Mrs. Amyot's bearded, self-supporting son is embarrassed to learn that she still gives his education as an excuse for continuing her career.

"April Showers" concerns a budding novelist. The seventeen-year-old Theodora Dace submits a novel to *Home Circle* and somehow or other (the plot is absurd) receives an acceptance meant for the popular author she has imitated, Kathleen Kyd. The pen names (Theodora adopts "Gladys Glyn") suggest the alliterative pseudonyms of nineteenth-century writers like Grace Greenwood and Fanny Fern; Kathleen Kyd's real name is, not surprisingly, Frances G. Wollup. Theodora bears her ultimate rejection with the help of her sympathetic father, who confesses that he once tried a novel. The only parts of this slight story that seem at all real are Wharton's opinion of the novel and her description of Theodora's initial joy at being accepted. The latter is presented in terms of an ecstatic oneness with the green world as Theodora embraces the spring earth and feels that "in her own heart hundreds of germinating hopes had burst into sudden leaf" (1: 193). As for the sentimental novel, Wharton goes to the opposite extreme — it is simply garbage. Theodora's uncle suggests she write a romance about sanitation rather than "the sentimental trash most women wrote" (1: 194). He says, "I don't believe in feeding youngsters on sentimental trash; it's like sewer gas — doesn't smell bad, and infects the system without your knowing it" (1: 190).

Although Wharton thus announces her difference from Grace Greenwood, her rejection of Jewett and Freeman is not thereby explained unless all female writers are being collapsed into a single category. This is the conclusion of Josephine Donovan, who sees Wharton as separating herself from all female writers, not just sentimentalists. Donovan refers to Wharton's "self-identification as masculine" and need to "distance herself from 'authoresses' in order to establish herself as an 'author' (45, 48). One may not agree that Wharton reveals "contempt for her own sex" (46) or identifies as masculine, and Susan Goodman's recent book supplies another view. Certainly much of the traditional evidence for Wharton's misogyny, such as her use of male reflectors

and the comments of male friends that "she liked to be talked to as a man," is capable of alternative interpretation; for instance, no one explains *why* the saying that she was a self-made man pleased Wharton.¹¹ Was it because she really wanted to be a man, because she wanted to be taken seriously, or because she appreciated the irony? This intelligent woman probably knew that whatever she accomplished, some excuse would be unearthed to lump her with Grace Greenwood; the ultimate irony is that the reason would be her supposed imitation of a man (that is, Henry James).

Whatever one decides about Wharton's possible male identification or misogyny, Donovan is clearly right when she says Wharton saw herself as inhabiting an entirely different world from the one Jewett and Freeman lived in. It *was* a different world, as young women were leaving the women's culture celebrated by the local colorists and such "friends" as Penelope and Vexilla and "entering the world of public, patriarchal discourse" (11); unfortunately, as Donovan shows, that discourse was at the same time becoming increasingly social Darwinist and male supremacist. Wharton's Mrs. Manstey might be considered a stand-in for Jewett and Freeman at a loss in the new world. She is an "artist" and even possesses the equivalent of rose-colored spectacles — an "optimistic eye" and "the happy faculty of dwelling on the pleasanter side of the prospect before her" (1:4). But the loss of her view, when her attempt to burn down the extension fails, kills her. Wharton differs most from her predecessors in her endings: Mrs. Manstey dies; the wife in "The Fullness of Life" cannot escape her husband even in the next world; Penelope must leave Vexilla and move to New York.

In the world of public, patriarchal discourse a woman is an interloper and must tread carefully. If we read "Mrs. Manstey's View" as the story of a female artist, it reveals Wharton's sense of the difficulty, even impossibility, of the role. Mrs. Manstey must have her view, in order to project patterns of the landscape and make up stories about the people, just as Wharton herself needed to "make up" ever since she was a little girl. But to preserve her view Mrs. Manstey has to commit a criminal act — burn down the extension. "Making up" is thus necessary to life but illegal. Although Wharton's trespass eventually succeeded where Mrs. Manstey's failed, it cost her a great struggle and a number of breakdowns, as Cynthia Griffin Wolff details. Wharton even tells us directly in her very reserved autobiography that when her first collection of

stories finally appeared, she read the reviews with "mingled guilt and self-satisfaction."

Her transgression was partly against class because aristocrats did not become professional writers, but she also gives some of her own traits to female artist protagonists of the lower classes, who are just as guilty. Mrs. Amyot of "The Pelican," a woman preternaturally shy like Wharton, needs an excuse to pursue a career and hence embarrasses her son. Theodora of "April Showers," whose novel resembles Wharton's own adolescent novella, actually neglects her domestic duties in order to write, forgetting to sew on her brother's buttons. One looks in vain for satire of this early nineteenth-century rationale for excluding women from authorship; the story clearly implies that women should stop writing and go back to their needlework. Even the artist characters' names—Mrs. Manstey, Mrs. Amyot (toy man?), Theodora—make them lesser versions of men. That Wharton goes to such extremes in dredging up stereotypes of the authoress and then condemning her indicates anxiety over being thought a producer of sewer gas, rather than a reasoned judgment that women shouldn't write. These early stories have the quality of exorcisms, much like Wharton's adolescent reviews; Lewis tells us the teenaged Wharton accompanied her creations with mock reviews harshly condemning them.¹² Imagining the worst might ward it off.

Wharton was extremely sensitive to criticism, as I have already suggested, and she knew the audience that counted was male. Women might read the magazines, but men occupied the critics' and publishers' chairs. Wharton's sense of her audience as male is revealed very directly in the early stories themselves; in the last chapter we saw an example in "The Lamp of Psyche," where the narrator interrupts to reassure the reader about "a heroine whom he would not like his wife to meet." Wharton's eagerness to please shows up in her early letters to her editor, Edward L. Burlingame of *Scribner's Magazine*. She finds his criticisms of the stories he rejected tremendously helpful and fears only that her "cry for help & counsel" might be misinterpreted as (of course) "the wail of the rejected authoress." The unsureness in the early stories and letters and the courting of the male audience are highlighted by contrast with the later Wharton. In *The Writing of Fiction* the established professional makes the following statement about audience:

No writer—especially at the beginning of his [sic] career—can help being

influenced by the quality of the audience that awaits him; and the young novelist may ask of what use are experience and meditation, when his readers are so incapable of giving him either. The answer is that he will never do his best till he ceases altogether to think of his readers (and his editor and his publisher). (*WF*, 21)

Although this passage can be read as sound, if rather conventional, advice to the young writer, it also comments on Wharton's own beginnings. *She* could not help being influenced, especially at the start of her career, by an audience that turned out to be "incapable"; she had to stop thinking of her readers, including editor and publisher, though the extreme word choice in the phrase "cease altogether" makes one question the possibility. Right after this passage Wharton notes that even for the author least concerned with popularity, "it is difficult, at first, to defend his [sic] personality" (*WF*, 21). She seems to have felt that she did not sufficiently defend hers (the "counsel" she begs from Burlingame becomes in *The Writing of Fiction* a "peril," as "counsellors intervene with contradictory advice"). Wharton indeed claimed that before her first volume of short stories appeared she had no real personality of her own. The counsel Burlingame and other male readers gave must have confirmed her fears as expressed in the female artist stories. The early stories *Scribner's* rejected (and Wharton eventually rewrote) were the female artist stories, such as "April Showers" and "Copy" (1900), or to be more precise the stories told from a female point of view and dominated by female characters, such as "Friends" and "The Twilight of the God" (1898).¹³ Interestingly, the rejected stories also included those about the lower classes. For instance, Burlingame found the early version of "Friends" too "squalid." Around the same time, he refused to publish the brilliant novella *Bunner Sisters*, which resembles "Friends" in its frank description of poverty; although he gave its length as the main reason, he seems to have found the story "dreary" (Lewis, 66). *Bunner Sisters* only saw print in 1916, after Wharton's reputation had long been established. On the other hand, Burlingame loved "The Pelican" (Lewis, 81), and the fortunes of this story well illustrate the pressures of Wharton's entrance into the world of public discourse.

Reviewers of Wharton's first collection liked "The Pelican" too, one even singling it out as the best in the volume (over a great story like "Souls Belated").¹⁴

In an early assessment of Wharton's work (1903), "The Pelican" is called "one of the best short stories ever written."¹⁵ While no one since has reached that height of enthusiasm, the story has generally been esteemed; it received a big boost from inclusion as one of the five short stories in Louis Auchincloss's *The Edith Wharton Reader* (1965). "The Pelican" thus has greater stature and commands more recognition than other Wharton products of the 1899-1900 period such as "Friends," "A Cup of Cold Water," "The Muse's Tragedy," and "The Line of Least Resistance." The problem is that "The Pelican" is really a middling story about on a level with the works just mentioned. More Jamesian than most Wharton tales, it violates many of the principles of short-story writing she came to consider essential, such as the need for compactness and vividness and the preservation of unity of time. Flaws in the point of view, as I explain in the next section, keep the reader unsure about the narrator, and even the minor characters prove difficult. One of Wharton's most perceptive early readers, Frederic Taber Cooper, complains of Mrs. Amyot's son: "His whole manner is in bad taste—perhaps Mrs. Wharton meant him to be precisely that kind of man, but one doubts it."¹⁶

All this is not to reduce "The Pelican" to the level of inept stories like "April Showers" or "The Confessional," but to suggest that the story's popularity owes less to its quality than its theme. Auchincloss even explains his choice by observing that the story "inaugurated a lifetime series of satires of ladies."¹⁷ If women controlled the literary establishment, "Friends" might occupy the same position as "The Pelican." As it is, one can understand Wharton's move from working-class women like Penelope and Vexilla to the suave male aristocrat who narrates "The Pelican." In her stories about art, woman increasingly becomes object rather than subject; instead of artist she is muse, as in "The Muse's Tragedy" (1899) or the grisly "The Duchess at Prayer" (1900), in which the Duke poisons his wife and turns her into a statue.

But making the artists male did not improve the quality of the stories. Probably the most solid generalization that can be made about Wharton's short stories is that the artist stories are her least successful.¹⁸ Like Hawthorne and James, she was fascinated by the theme; fully half the early stories concern art in a fairly direct manner (this fact in itself accounts for the slight inferiority of the stories in her first period). Yet unlike her predecessors, Wharton never accomplished much in this subgenre

("Xingu," 1911, is her only real triumph), and she gradually wrote fewer artist stories. The failure of her artist novels, *Hudson River Bracketed* (1929) and *The Gods Arrive* (1932), can no doubt be attributed to the theme rather than diminished talent in old age. Cynthia Griffin Wolff's diagnosis of the novels—"Being unwilling or unable to write a novel that exhibited the *real* connections between an artist's life and work, Wharton filled up her two *Kunstlerromane* with a host of subsidiary 'subjects'"—applies perfectly to the stories.¹⁹

One finds a good deal of arty conversation, especially about the world of painting, but the real interest lies somewhere else. For instance, the muse's tragedy in the story of that title is the failure of her personal relationship with a deceased poet. Although the world considered her his mistress, he wanted intellectual companionship only; like the young man in "The Valley of Childish Things" (1896), he loved young girls whom he preferred not talk. In "The Moving Finger" (1901) an artist paints a portrait of his friend's wife and after her death has to confront the friend's insistence that he keep aging the woman in the portrait. Richard Lawson aptly calls this story an "inchoate ghost story" and notes that "the artist situation is the background, perhaps even the catalyst for a personal...interaction" ("Edith Wharton," 312).

When art provides more than a backdrop, the main issue in the story is usually good art versus bad art. In a continuation of the "sewer gas" theme from "April Showers," an artist must resist the temptation to produce inferior work for money or increased popular reputation. An aspiring poet in "That Good May Come" (1894), a slight early effort, compromises himself to buy a confirmation dress for his sister. The painter in "The Recovery" (1901) becomes complacent when he is lionized in America. After Keniston travels to Europe and views the works of "the masters," he realizes his inferiority. This story has a happy ending, as Keniston's recognition inspires him to start over, thus setting him on the road to recovery.²⁰ In a later story with the same theme, "The Verdict" (1908), a fashionable painter has to quit in his heyday because he is just no good and it's too late to learn. He considers his one claim to greatness that in spite of his popular success he knew enough to stop painting (1: 622).

Wharton would ring changes on this theme throughout her career. An artist might think he could safely break the rules, as does the painter in "The Potboiler" (1904) who asks, "Why can't a man do two kinds of work — one to please himself and the

other to boil the pot?" (1: 671). The man may be a scientist instead of an artist, as in "The Descent of Man" (1904), where a professor gets sidetracked from his serious experiments when he writes a popular book of pseudoscience. Whatever the situation, the creator who does less than his best gets punished. The problem with these stories is that if one does not accept Wharton's view of good art versus bad art, that the difference is obvious and anyone with a brain can instantly detect it, they are much too simple. Even if one does share her view, the stories remain didactic, and where is the salamander in the fire? Wharton usually avoids didacticism, as we saw in Chapter 1, but she often has a message when it comes to art. Although many of the artist stories, such as "Copy" and "Expiation" (1903), are supposed to be comedies, an occasional earnestness of tone about the quality of art keeps them from being consistently funny.

A more promising theme that appears in some of the artist stories concerns the blurring of the lines between the artist's personal and public lives. The protagonist of "That Good May Come" worries about damaging other people by using them as characters. In "The Portrait" (1899) a distinguished painter who declines to "wear the portrait painter's conventional blinders" and reveals people as they really are (1: 173) produces one notable failure. He paints an "expurgated" portrait of a notable villain because he cannot bear to disillusion the man's worshipful daughter. Interestingly, in this one instance Wharton seems to approve of an artist deliberately creating a lesser work.

"Copy" treats the other side of the coin: in place of the artist's potential to harm others, the possible invasion of the artist's own personal life. Helen Dale and Paul Ventnor, former lovers who have become successful writers, recall the days when they lived instead of writing about life, "when our emotions weren't worth ten cents a word, and a signature wasn't an autograph" (1: 285). Helen claims, "I died years ago. What you see before you is a figment of the reporter's brain — a monster manufactured out of newspaper paragraphs, with ink in its veins" (1: 278). The two are now "public property" (1: 278), and indeed they meet because they both secretly want their old love letters back to use in their memoirs. The threat of becoming public property and other issues in the relationship between the artist's personal and public lives are explored at greater length in Wharton's first novella, *The Touchstone* (1900). She was obviously preoccupied with this kind of question as her work became better known, her first col-

lection of stories having been published in 1899.

As we have seen, Wharton omitted some of her earliest published stories, like "The Fullness of Life," from the collection because she feared they reflected her own experience too closely. But other stories of her first period are more curious, their strangeness suggesting unresolved personal content. "The Portrait," which Lewis gently calls "somewhat confused" (84), begins with a cogent discussion of realism in art but in the second half takes on a surreal quality. The arty talk gives way to the portrait painter's evocation of his subject's daughter, Miss Vard, who possesses the "guilty secret" of idolizing her father (1: 178-79). If the circumstance of the painter compromising his art to preserve the daughter's illusions seems a bit forced, it really strains credibility to have the daughter die when she finally discovers the truth about her father's corrupt business practices. The situation of a woman becoming disillusioned with a man she has previously admired is prevalent in Wharton's early stories, such as "The Lamp of Psyche," "The Valley of Childish Things," and "The Twilight of the God," but the woman's enlightenment does not cause her death. In the case of "The Portrait" we are expected not only to find it logical that the discovery kills Miss Vard but also to approve: the story ends as the painter tells the narrator, "She died last year, thank God" (1: 185).

The characters in "The Portrait" resemble those of "The House of the Dead Hand," a story written in 1898, around the same time as "The Portrait," but not published until 1904. This story, which Lewis frankly labels "inept" (81), is an Italian melodrama filled with Gothic trappings. It makes little sense on the surface, though Wharton does succeed in establishing a creepy atmosphere. Wyant, the reflector, has been asked by an art professor friend to view a painting belonging to Dr. Lombard, an Englishman living in Siena. Dr. Lombard refuses to let anyone photograph, or reproduce in any way, his lost Leonardo, which he bought after its discovery in a farmhouse (Wharton herself had in 1894 discovered lost Giovanni della Robbia terracottas in an Italian monastery—see Lewis, 72-73). Wyant duly visits Lombard's home, "the House of the Dead Hand." The ominous name comes from the marble hand above the door, "a dead drooping hand, which hung there convulsed and helpless, as though it had been thrust forth in denunciation of some evil mystery within the house, and had sunk struggling into death" (1: 509).

Inside the house, which is described in terms of cold and decay, Wyant finds an odd trio: Dr. Lom-

bard, an old man who looks and acts like "some art-loving despot of the Renaissance"; his silly, conventional wife, who is too stupid to understand her husband's constant insults; and their "sullen" daughter, Sybilla (1: 509-10). Dr. Lombard seems a kind of vampire, as Wyant contemplates "the contrast between the fierce vitality of the doctor's age and the inanimateness of his daughter's youth" (1: 510). The robotlike daughter actually owns the painting, having purchased it with a legacy from her grandmother. The ritual Sybilla and her father go through to show Wyant the painting is nothing short of bizarre. She has to take a key from a "secret drawer," draw aside a hanging tapestry, and fit the key into a concealed door. After the party traverses a narrow passage they come to another door, which is barred with iron and fitted with a "complicated patent lock." This door is opened with another key and leads to a small dark room wherein a picture is "concealed by a curtain of faded velvet." Lombard instructs Sybilla in a ritualistic reading of verse, whereupon she draws the cord and parts the velvet folds (1:512). The painting turns out to be a mass of symbols, replete with a crucified Christ, a veiled woman in a red robe, and a human skull holding wine.

Sybilla strikes Wyant as caring little for the painting, and indeed she and her lover, whom Lombard has forbidden her to see, want Wyant to pass letters and help Sybilla run away. The lover claims she lives in horrible fear of her father—"the father is terrible; she is in his power; it is my belief that he would kill her if she resisted him" (1: 521). Wyant, however, one of Wharton's earliest detached men, refuses to help; he reasons that she can simply leave the house and sell the picture: "She isn't walled in; she can get out if she wants to" (1: 526). Several years later Wyant makes a return visit and finds that, in spite of Lombard's death, everything has remained the same. Sybilla has tried many times to sell the painting, which she passionately hates, but her father has prevented her. She claims, "[H]e was always in the room with me....I can't lock him out; I can never lock him out now" (1: 529). In other words, "The House of the Dead Hand" is Wharton's first ghost story.

The situation bears a strong resemblance to that of a much better known ghost tale, "Mr. Jones" (1928). In this story, originally titled "The Parasite,"²¹ a female writer much like Wharton herself inherits an old manor house in England. Her attempts to learn about her forebears are thwarted by the "invisible guardian" of the house, Mr. Jones (2: 179). When alive, he had been the jailor of his

employer's deaf and dumb wife; as a ghost, he protects the "secret past" (2: 181). Had the invisible guardian been "Mr. Smith," we might not have recognized the father-daughter connection, but Edith Jones Wharton chose to give this ghost her father's name. One does not have to be an analyst to wonder about these daughters with guilty secrets being preyed upon by parasitic fathers who can never be locked out. Nor can one miss the sexual connotations of the keys, lock, secret doors, and velvet folds in "The House of the Dead Hand" (significantly, there is also a long, complicated business with keys and locksmiths in "Mr. Jones").

Wharton's interest in incest as a literary theme has been noted ever since her biographers discovered the pornographic "Beatrice Palmato" fragment among her papers. This piece, which she marked "unpublishable," consists of an outline for a short story and a brief fragment (now published in Lewis, pp. 544-48, and Wolff, pp. 301-305). The fragment is an explicit description of oral sex between the recently married Beatrice and her father, "a rich half-Levantine, half-Portuguese banker living in London." Although Beatrice finds the sex more pleasurable than the "rough advances" of her husband, Wharton indicates that it began in childhood and has made Beatrice "depressed." According to the outline, her older sister mysteriously committed suicide at seventeen and her mother died in an insane asylum after having tried to kill Palmato. Beatrice eventually has children and her father dies. When her daughter reaches the age of five or six, Beatrice becomes disturbed at her husband's innocent displays of affection for the girl. She forbids a simple kiss, and the husband suddenly understands "many mysterious things in their married life — the sense of some hidden power controlling her, and perpetually coming between them." Her secret revealed, Beatrice kills herself.

In some of Wharton's novels the father-daughter incest theme is obvious, if not so explicitly drawn. Charity Royall of *Summer* ends up marrying her foster father; fifteen-year-old Judith Wheater of *The Children* (1928) receives a marriage proposal from her father figure, a middle-aged bachelor friend. The theme has also been traced in other novels, works as various as *Ethan Frome* and *The Mother's Recompense*.²² Certainly the odd father-daughter stories we have been considering would make more sense if the terrible secret the characters were bent on hiding were incest. In "The House of the Dead Hand" Lombard might be assumed to have symbolically killed Sybilla, accounting, in the traditional

Gothic connection between house and female body, for the cold and decay of the house. The painting probably stands for the incest itself, bought with Sybilla's female legacy, kept secret and protected with keys, locks, and hidden doors; Dr. Lombard, guardian of the secret, understandably refuses to let the picture be photographed and makes Sybilla guardian after his death. The dead hand over the door of the house, in this reading of the story, could be the hand of the mother (or grandmother), too weak to protect the daughter. Or it might be the "third hand" of the Beatrice Palmato fragment, wherein Mr. Palmato and his daughter call his penis his third hand. Cynthia Griffin Wolff makes a convincing association between the third hand and the hand of Wharton's father, which forms a major part of her earliest recollection as recounted in *A Backward Glance*.²³ If the dead hand is the third hand, it practically announces, "This is the house of incest."

Though Wharton's biographers and critics have noted her preoccupation with the incest theme, no one has satisfactorily explained it. The implication seems to be that an attraction to the father or "struggle for the father" between mother and daughter is "natural," especially in a woman who liked men and disliked women (a view of Wharton we have already found too simplistic).²⁴ Wolff's psychoanalytic explanation is that at age four or five Wharton "conceived an intense and possessive love for her genial, affectionate father" (207). This love somehow got "invaded by the persistent remnants of an earlier, more infantile yearning—a voracious need for comfort and a ravenous, insatiable quality of desire." Confronted "not merely by the crisis of childhood sexuality, but also by the unresolved elements of that earlier crisis of infancy," the child reacted by becoming overdependent on her mother and never resolving her childhood attraction to her father (252).

Of course, we are left to wonder where all those voracious, ravenous desires came from in the first place. In a very revealing note, Wolff compares Wharton to one of her heroines, Charity Royall of *Summer*: "Both manage the threatening sexual passions of their own natures by interposing an older woman between themselves and the proximate male who is the most immediate object of these feelings. Charity demands a 'hired woman'; Edith Wharton developed a morbid dependency upon her own mother" (433). Interestingly, the psychoanalyst has misremembered *Summer*. In the novel, Charity demands a hired woman only after her foster father has entered her bedroom and tried to seduce her. I am reminded of Sigmund Freud's initial belief in

his patients when they confided their childhood sexual abuse by fathers and other men. But because he felt "it was hardly credible that perverted acts against children were so general," especially by prosperous, respectable men, he dismissed his patients' reports as fantasies.²⁵ In other words, he managed to project the "threatening sexual passions" away from the fathers on to the children's "own natures."

I think Wharton was probably an incest victim in early childhood. Of course, this contention cannot be proved, any more than the psychoanalytic interpretation, but it is certainly suggested by her writings and explains some still unanswered questions about her life.

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Part Two (Conclusion) will appear in Fall Issue.

NOTES

¹ Wilson, "Justice to Edith Wharton," 19. Wilson also complained that the early stories "take place either in a social void or against a background of Italy or France." Only with *The House of Mirth* did Wharton emerge "as an historian of the American society of her time." Here again is the attitude I discussed in my preface; actually, fewer than a third of the early stories take place outside the United States.

² See Springer, 2-5.

³ Edith Wharton to Edward L. Burlingame, 10 July 1898, in *The Letters of Edith Wharton*, ed. R.W.B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988), 36.

⁴ See, for instance, Goodman, 7-8; Lawson, "Edith Wharton," 309-10; Walton, 78.

⁵ For a comparison of Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado," Balzac's "La Grande Breteche," and Wharton's "The Duchess at Prayer," see June E. Downey, *Creative Imagination: Studies in the Psychology of Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1929), 202-208. Eleanor Dwight compares "The Cask of Amontillado" and "The Duchess at Prayer" in "Edith Wharton and 'The Cask of Amontillado,'" in *Poe and Our Times: Influences and Affinities*, ed. Benjamin Franklin IV (Baltimore: Edgar Allan Poe Society, 1986), 49-57. Wharton's "The Dilettante" and James's "The Two Faces" are discussed as "related stories" in Stanley J. Kozikowski, "Unreliable Narration in Henry James's 'The Two Faces' and Edith Wharton's 'The Dilettante,'" *Arizona Quarterly* 35 (Winter 1979): 357-72. For further echoes of James in Wharton and vice versa, consult works by Bell and Tintner listed in the bibliography. The possible influence of Washington Irving on Wharton's short stories could be explored. Wharton was certainly familiar with Irving's work, having used *The Alhambra* (1832), a collection of tales about Moorish Spain, for her childhood "making up." Wharton

resembles him in her fondness for exotic settings, penchant for melodrama, and pictorial and satirical bents.

⁶ In addition, one could argue that Wharton's comments on the short story versus the novel in her letter to Robert Grant (see Part 2) imply that the short-story tradition is basically female.

⁷ Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, *The Revolt of Mother and Other Stories* (New York: Feminist Press, 1974), 89. For a general discussion of the "green-world archetype" in women's fiction, see Annis Pratt and Barbara A. White, "The Novel of Development," chap. 2 in Pratt, *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 16-24. For treatment of this theme in Emily Dickinson and other writers, see Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 642-50. Muddy boots are a prominent part of the description of the hero in Augusta Evans Wilson's best-selling *St. Elmo* (1867). For Wharton's use of conventions of the sentimentalists, see my "Edith Wharton's *Summer* and 'Woman's Fiction,'" *Essays in Literature* 11 (Fall 1984): 223-35.

⁸ Wharton gently mocks Poe in her early story "That Good May Come" (1894). His "The Raven," which borrows from Dickens' "Barnaby Rudge," is burlesqued in awful stanzas from "Boulterby Ridge." If Wharton declined to follow the example of writers like Willa Cather and Kate Chopin and directly acknowledge Jewett's influence, she did make the required pilgrimage to the Jewett home; in July of 1905, just before the publication of *The House of Mirth* and four years before Jewett's death, she took a car trip to South Berwick, Maine (Lewis, 150). For Jewett's influence on other writers, see Josephine Donovan, *Sarah Orne Jewett* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1980), 135-40. The dangers of being associated with Jewett, even in 1990, are made clear by the recent outcry over Susan Gubar's calling Wharton a "regionalist" (*New York Times Book Review*, 5 November 1989) and Brian Lee's pairing her with Jewett in *American Fiction 1865-1940* (1987). See *Edith Wharton Newsletter* 6 (Fall 1989): 3, and *Edith Wharton Review* 7 (Spring 1990): 12.

⁹ For refutations of the idea that Wharton was a disciple or imitator of James, see Lewis, 131, and Howe, 6-7. Howe states, "The claim that Henry James exerted a major influence upon Mrs. Wharton's fiction, repeated with maddening regularity by literary historians, testifies to the laziness of the human mind" (6). As early as 1923, Fred Pattee pointed out major differences between Wharton and James as short-story writers. He says, "She is not so psychologically analytical as Henry James nor yet so scientific of method: where he worked notebook in hand she works with intuition, and often with more glow and passion. In rapidity, too, she greatly surpasses him, as she does in simplicity and naturalness of style." See *The Development of the American Short Story* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1923), 375. I think "rapidity" is the key; Wharton preferred "compactness" and "vividness" to the slow analysis of James. Margaret B. McDowell contrasts Wharton and James as writers of ghost stories in "Edith Wharton's Ghost Stories," *Criticism* 12 (Spring 1970): 134-38.

Wharton's view of her indebtedness to James is perhaps expressed in her preachy story "The Debt" (1909). A scientist who refutes his mentor's theory claims that his debt requires solely that he "carry on the light. Do you suppose he'd have wanted me to snuff it out because it happened to light up a fact he didn't fancy? I'm using his oil to feed my torch with: yes, but it isn't really his torch or mine, or his oil or mine: they belong to each of us till we drop and hand them on" (2: 71).

¹⁰ Amy Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 71; hereafter cited in the text.

¹¹ Louis Auchincloss, Introduction to *A Backward Glance* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), vii. Percy Lubbock

recalls that "she liked to be talked to as a man" in *Portrait of Edith Wharton* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1947), 62.

¹² Lewis, 31. Wharton's adolescent novella, entitled *Fast and Loose*, was published in 1977.

¹³ See Lewis, 71, 76-7.

¹⁴ Review of *The Greater Inclination*, *Academy* 57 (8 July 1899): 40.

¹⁵ See Anna McClure Sholl, "The Work of Edith Wharton," *Gunton's Magazine* 25 (November 1903): 426-32. This article is quoted in Tuttleton, 171.

¹⁶ Frederic Taber Cooper, *Some American Story Tellers* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1911), 178.

¹⁷ Louis Auchincloss, "Prefatory Note to 'The Pelican' and 'The Rembrandt,'" in *The Edith Wharton Reader*, ed. Louis Auchincloss (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), 8.

¹⁸ Nevius made this point early on; for his discussion of the artist stories, see pp. 16-21.

¹⁹ Cynthia Griffin Wolff, *A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 395; hereafter cited in the text.

²⁰ Plante criticizes this story at length, noting justly that it lacks depth and "does not really deal with any of the perennially important matters concerning the nature of man or the nature of art" (364).

²¹ Box 16, Edith Wharton Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

²² Substantial discussion of the incest theme in Wharton can be found in the following works: Elizabeth Ammons, *Edith Wharton's Argument with America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 133-43, 182; Louise K. Barnett, "American Novelists and the 'Portrait of Beatrice Cenci,'" *New England Quarterly* 53 (June 1980): 168-83; Sandra M. Gilbert, "Life's Empty Pack: Notes toward a Literary Daughteronomy," *Critical Inquiry* 11 (March 1985): 355-84; Lewis, 524-26; Adeline R. Tintner, "Mothers, Daughters, and Incest in the Late Novels of Edith Wharton," in *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson and E.M. Broner (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1980), 147-56; Adeline R. Tintner, "Mothers vs. Daughters in the Fiction of Edith Wharton and Henry James," *AB Bookman's Weekly*, 6 June 1983, 4324-28; and Wolff, 379-80, 412-15.

²³ Wolff, 307; Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, 2. Donovan suggests, 57, that the dead hand is the hand of the mother. It is entirely appropriate that Dr. Lombard recalls "some art-loving despot of the Renaissance" because the Italian Renaissance was notorious for open defiance of incest prohibitions and literature in which incest is taken lightly. See Donald Webster Cory and R. E. L. Masters, *Violation of Taboo: Incest in the Great Literature of the Past and Present* (New York: Julian Press, 1963), 5-6. See Barnett for discussion of references to Beatrice Cenci, a sixteenth-century incest victim, in the fiction of Hawthorne, Melville, and Wharton; Barnett concludes that "all found it a means of evoking the theme of incest, which contemporary canons of decorum kept from open discussion" (169).

²⁴ Tintner uses the phrase "struggle for the father" in both her articles (p. 155 and p. 4328, respectively).

²⁵ Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1897, quoted in Judith Lewis Herman, *Father-Daughter Incest* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 10. For the explaining away of childhood sexual abuse, see especially Alice Miller, *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal of the Child*, trans. Hildegarde and Hunter Hannum (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1984). See also Florence Rush, *The Best Kept Secret: Sexual Abuse of Children* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1980) and Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, *The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1984).

BOOK REVIEWS

Linda Wagner-Martin, *The House of Mirth: A Novel of Admonition*. Twayne's Masterwork Studies. Boston: Hall, 1990. 103 pp. Cloth, \$18.95.

In *The Writing of Fiction* (1925) Edith Wharton counsels that an author "will never do his best till he ceases . . . to think of his readers (and his editor and his publisher) and begins to write, not for himself, but for that *other self* with whom the creative artist is always in mysterious correspondence, and who happily has an objective existence somewhere, and will some day receive the message sent to him, though the sender may never know it." Wharton's love letters to Morton Fullerton reveal that in her personal life Wharton also sought "mysterious correspondence" with an imagined other. Faith in the "objective existence" of an idealized reader/lover constitutes a credo that Wharton's characters share. No work more poignantly testifies to her characters' belief in the necessary fictions of romance than *The House of Mirth*, where Lily Bart is continually misread by the only man to whom she wishes to send a message of love. Yet as Linda Wagner-Martin's recent study shows, if Lily is ever to find a sympathetic reader, she must first perceive what her story is. For Wagner-Martin, Lily's tragedy is that hers is a "non-story" (22): Lily never achieves the self-knowledge or autonomy necessary to author her life, to become an agent rather than a pawn in the plots of others more authorial than she. Instead, Lily remains the perpetual victim, a powerless "would-be actor" (23).

Questions concerning writing and reading, authorship and reception, self and other, lie at the heart of Wagner-Martin's fine introduction to *The House of Mirth*. Intended for a general readership but of interest to Wharton scholars as well, this work follows the standard organization of the Twayne's Masterwork Studies, with the introductory chapters providing a literary-historical overview and the remaining text, entitled "a reading," offering an extended interpretation of *The House of Mirth*. Titles from the eight chapters composing that reading point to Wagner-Martin's concerns: "Story as Subtext," "The Mother-Daughter Paradigm," "Daisy Miller and *The House of Mirth*."

Wagner-Martin finds in Wharton as exemplary practitioner of authorial subterfuge, of "fiction as disguise." Linking Wharton to other women writers of the period who "explor[ed] significant women's themes in a covert manner," Wagner-Martin postulates that Wharton wrote for two audiences: the innocent and the initiated (7). Wagner-Martin's thesis rests upon the claim that Wharton recognized the majority of her contemporaries would judge her novel according to the traditional marriage-plot. Hence Wharton's task as author of "condemnatory fiction" was to conceal her rebellious designs beneath an apparently conventional surface plot (4). In this way, Wharton could both satisfy herself and also appease the expectations of a predominately naive readership, who would see in Lily's descending trajectory "a moral warning that the dictates of society must be obeyed" (52). Of Wharton's original readership, few would discern the author's subversive intent. Put otherwise, while Wharton wrote *to* an often hostile contemporary audience, who "could not bear too much reality" — and who punished writers such as Kate Chopin and Theodore Dreiser whose novels too plainly spoke of woman's real needs (6) — Wharton wrote *for* a more tolerant future readership, who would comprehend her tale as social criticism excoriating the limitations of women's choices. For Wharton's "*other self*," the reader who perceives the radical message hidden within this fictional palimpsest,

The House of Mirth is a dark, almost vengeful novel, one of admonition rather than of manners. Its complex message is . . . *Play by all the rules, regardless of who has made them, or you will end up dead. And, women's lives are meant to be empty and decorative, tapestries of chicanery and adultery and dishonesty; either live them in that mode, or give up any right to be a woman.* (51)

As author, Wharton also had to play by the rules, but as Wagner-Martin makes clear, unlike the negative heroine of her novel, Wharton used those rules to her advantage. Concerning Wharton's narrative voice, for instance, Wagner-Martin explains that though "Wharton's elegant, mannered, and somewhat ironic voice" was "in some ways the most traditional decision she made in writing *The House of Mirth*," that stratagem enabled Wharton to speak to two audiences at once (15). According to Wagner-

Martin, most readers in 1905 would have regarded this third-person voice as omniscient; only the perceptive few would have understood that this voice represents a "highly selected view" (16). Wagner-Martin is particularly astute when she analyzes Wharton's narrative frame, which privileges Selden's perspective and thereby causes the reader accustomed to "relying on a male narrator" to accept Selden's skewed viewpoint as authoritative (31). Much like Lily Bart, the naive reader is male-dependent.

Wagner-Martin's discussion of narrative voice raises a number of questions worthy of further exploration. Does Selden actually narrate the opening chapter, as Wagner-Martin suggests, or does another stereotypically male voice speak in addition to his? Is the first half of this novel told chiefly through Selden's perspective, or are a number of narrators heard throughout, most important of whom is Lily? Finally, whoever the narrator(s) may be, how are we to interpret the racist, sexist, (upper) class-bound narrative lens through which Lily's non-story is filtered?

To survey early reviews of *The House of Mirth* is to realize that similar questions have, in fact, been posed ever since this novel appeared; that is, even Wharton's original readers were less than univocal. This leads to the only shortcoming in what is otherwise an admirable study, for Wagner-Martin tends at times toward categorical criticism. Most revealing is her interpretation of Lily as sacrificial lamb, a view that largely ignores Lily's willing participation in her murky transactions with Gus Trenor, "the husband of her dearest friend," and with her "nasty," "dangerous" rival, Bertha Dorset.

This criticism notwithstanding, Wagner-Martin's interpretation of *The House of Mirth* as "unexpectedly political" in theme and surprisingly modernist in technique is incisive, stimulating, and refreshingly lucid (76). Indeed, Wagner-Martin's study may be of most benefit to Wharton scholars in passages foregrounding the novelist's modernist ties. Wagner-Martin observes, for example, that "Wharton's essentially modernist technique of juxtaposing scenes without heavy explanation enabled readers to find their own meanings" (51). Acute, too, is Wagner-Martin's analysis of the open-ended manner in which Wharton concludes *The House of Mirth*: "By composing a novel that left . . . important questions unanswered, Wharton foreshadowed the very kind of 'open' text the modernists would pride themselves on creating . . ." (7). Even more compelling is Wagner-Martin's commentary on the ways in which Wharton's fiction speaks to readers today:

In the closing years of the twentieth century, when readers have been besieged by existential texts that avoid all pretense of "answer," Lily Bart's dilemma — finding enough meaning in her life to continue her struggle for it — is all too real, and all too involving. That Wharton has presented one of the earliest depictions of women's struggle in this vacuum of firmly established meaning — the chaotic twentieth century so marked by war, political turmoil, and personal debilitation — has won for her a readership that will continue not only to read, but to access, her work. (87)

If *The House of Mirth* stands as one of Wharton's many letters to the world, Wagner-Martin's reading of that letter nicely illumines how each generation enters into the mysteriously open-ended process of creating meaning — and making it new.

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Janet Goodwyn, *Edith Wharton: Traveller in the Land of Letters*. London: Macmillan, 1990. 179 pages. \$35.

Edith Wharton remarks in *A Backward Glance* that after the publication of *The Valley of Decision*, I felt like some homeless waif who, after trying for years to take out naturalization papers, and being rejected by every country, had finally acquired a nationality. The Land of Letters was henceforth to be my country and I gloried in my new citizenship.

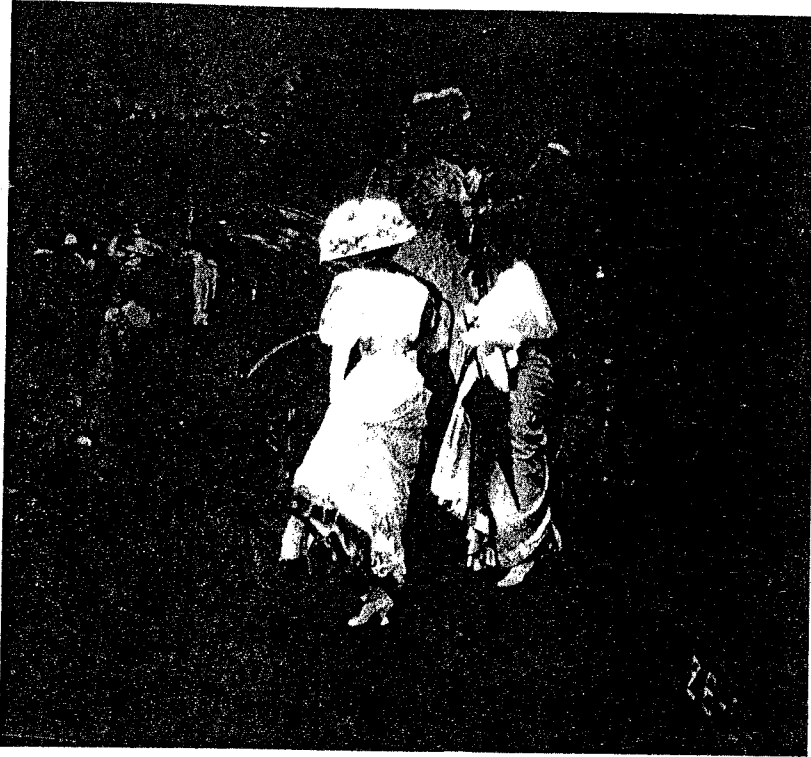
In *Edith Wharton: Traveller in the Land of Letters*, Janet Goodwyn applies the analogy to examine how Edith Wharton's sense of the possibilities of literary landscape creates and shapes a vision that "offers each reader a place from which to judge the possible." She posits topography as a structural, even generic, principle of Edith Wharton's work. Goodwyn discusses the novels, autobiography, and travel literature using actual, fictional, and metaphorical geography as reference points.

The cultural significance of the Euro-American landscape is that it illuminates how Wharton's thought bridges not only two continents, but the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At the core of

Continued on page 32

EDITH WHARTON IN PARIS

A Special Supplement



After the Races, Paris 1905

Edward J. Steichen

A "portentous visit" is recorded by Shari Benstock in her groundbreaking book, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940*.

To trace the roots of the expatriate woman's experience in Paris, we must . . . begin with . . . Edith Wharton On a bleak December afternoon in 1893, Wharton stood at the door of a house on the Rue Barbet de Jouy, a street intersecting the fashionable rue de Varenne, in the heart of the Faubourg St. German on the Paris Left Bank [A]ttended by her husband, [Wharton was] waiting to be welcomed into the French society by the well-known novelist Paul Bourget. A member of the French Academy, Bourget had important acquaintances in literary and intellectual circles; although not a member of the French aristocracy (he was the son of a provincial scholar who had become a professor at the Lycée Louis Le Grand in Paris). Bourget could provide Edith Wharton an introduction to academicians and aristocrats alike. (37-38)

Edith Wharton returned again in 1906 to the Bourget home, this time to find her own apartment and life in France and to stay for the next thirty one years of her life. June 28 - July 1, 1991, the Edith Wharton Society will return to Paris to hold its First International Edith Wharton Conference. To inaugurate these proceedings, this Special Supplement considers the relationship of this fortuitous meeting for both the French writer and the upperclass New York woman who was soon to become one of America's most distinguished authors. In a series of articles and original translations, Adeline Tintner presents difficult to find and rarely known mutual commentary.

Edith Wharton and Paul Bourget

by Adeline Tintner

These remarks on Edith Wharton and Paul Bourget are based on serendipitous findings. While I was reading Bourget's fiction for other reasons, I was struck by signs of Edith Wharton appearing in one way or another, even though I was looking for something else. A good introduction to the personal relationship between Edith Wharton and Paul Bourget can best be found in her article *Souvenirs de Bourget d'Outremer* in 1936 after Bourget's death in 1935, which has never been reprinted or commented upon as far as I know. She remembers how excited she was when Bourget arrived at Newport in 1893 with his bride Minnie with an introduction for the Whartons from Teddy Wharton's relation, Henry Ridgway. Bourget was the first distinguished writer whom she had ever met, who, two years later, would become one of the youngest members of the French Academy. *Outremer*, the book Bourget wrote in 1895, after his trip, records, as we all know, his impression of Edith Wharton, although unnamed, the "intellectual tomboy" who "ordered her intellect somewhere as we would order a piece of furniture, to measure, with as many compartments as there are branches of human knowledge...may she make a blunder! in vain. A mind may be mistaken, a mind may be ignorant, but never a thinking machine!" This rather tough estimate changed when, in 1899 and 1900, the Whartons visited the Bourgets in Italy.

In her essay of 1936, Edith Wharton speaks about the technical ideas of Bourget. "They were completely opposed to mine. Having discovered that our theories did not agree, we made the wise resolution never to speak of our respective works but in revenge we never tired of relating to each other the subjects of our future books. The irony and sadness of a human life we both envisaged in the same manner. Each incident furnished for us, for him as well as for me, a new *donnée*, and we passed hours telling each other about them."

We see the result of these hours swapping *données* or ideas, for there seems to be a kind of mutually penetrating interplay of texts during 1900 to 1908, the period of their most intense friendship. Edith Wharton published a playlet called "Copy" in *Scribner's* in June of 1900 before Bourget wrote a story called "Le Dernier Poésie" in November of 1900. He always dated his work so we know when it was written and he seemed to have read all the American periodicals. There is a curious similarity between both. Her story is about a man and a woman, he a great poet and she a great novelist. The man comes to the woman to get back the love letters he sent to her years ago so he can use them for his memoirs, as she plans to do with his letters to her. At the end, they both decide that the whole idea to capitalize on their love affair was a mistake. It is done from the woman's point of view. Bourget handles the story differently in "Le Dernier Poésie," but the plot is basically the same. His famous writer goes back to visit a young woman to whom he wrote love poems many years ago for he needs them for his memoirs. But finding her an overworked, little bourgeois housewife with children, his heart is touched and he gives up the idea. It clearly has the same plot as "Copy" but done in the context of French life, and by a repentant male chauvinist pig, as some might call him today.

During this time, Edith Wharton, Bourget and Henry James were writing stories based on similar themes, as if they were all taking a writing course and a teacher told them to write a story on a specific theme, each one doing it differently.

In 1901, Bourget dedicated, in a collection of short stories call *Monique*, the title tale to Edith Wharton and one can see when one reads "Monique" why he did so. Edith had published her *Decoration of Houses*, with Codman, in 1897, and Bourget saw her at this time as an expert on fine furniture. In "Monique," he invents a character, Hippolyte Franquetot, who repaired fine pieces of 18th century furniture with a true artist's genius. And then Bourget gives an essay on all the great furniture makers of that period — Riessner, Boulle and Cressent — to show Mrs. Wharton that he too was knowledgeable. This was part of his character, which James called his "omnivorism," and Monique is the name of a little girl whom Hippolyte trained to carry on his artistic expertise in the tale.

This article was first presented at the Wharton Society Dinner, Washington, D.C., December 1989.

In 1903, Bourget writes a story called "Le Portrait," clearly based on Edith's "The Moving Finger," published in *Crucial Instances* (1901). In Mrs. Wharton's tale, the painter Claydon, in love with Mrs. Grancy, is forced by her husband after her death to paint her as aging, just the way the husband is. In revenge, the painter paints in her eyes the message that her husband is dying and, getting the message, her husband does die. But the painter disavows any responsibility for this. "She had a message for him," he said, "and she made *me* deliver it." Bourget's tale, "The Portrait," concerns a painter who has been having an affair (and the concealed attachment is Bourget's specialty) with a married woman who, because her lover has thrown her over to become engaged to a rich American woman, then commits suicide by taking an overdose of chloral. His fiancée, Mrs. Alice Gray, sees the portrait and then breaks off her engagement to the painter. Why? Because she read the message in the dead woman's eyes that she had killed herself for love of the painter. "You have put your remorse" for her death, she tells him, "in her eyes." Clearly the message in Mrs. Grancy's eyes appears once more.

But to reinforce his indebtedness to Mrs. Wharton for her idea, if not for her treatment, it seems he put into the figure of the rich American fiancée certain recognizable features of Mrs. Wharton herself. Mrs. Alice Gray is American, rich, drives around in an automobile, wears marvelous clothes and has a taste for 18th century furniture. She is clever and independent in mind. Surely this is Edith. Then, in 1905, Mrs. Wharton does a little dipping into Bourget. She shows that in *The House of Mirth*, her first novel, she has availed herself of fictional structures from two of Bourget's novels. One is from *L'Idylle Tragique*, 1896, the presentation copy of which one finds in Maggs's list. This cosmopolitan novel is about a *femme du monde*, Ely de Carlsberg, married to a cruel archduke but having affairs serially with two best friends. But what I want to call attention to is that the main setting is on a yacht owned by Dickie Marsh, a financier and entrepreneur from Marionville, Ohio. He and his niece Florence, or Flossie, Marsh, are the only Americans on board where there is a pair of lovers, Andreana Bonnacorsia and the Vicomte de Corancez. But since Andreana's brother is against their marriage, they are supposed to be living in sin. However, they have been married secretly in the chapel of the Fregozo place, although word has gone round that Flossie was an accomplice in a rendezvous between illicit lovers. Therefore, her fiancé, Verdier, begs off his engagement to her. Then Ely becomes a heroine since she tells the archduke and Verdier, armed with a letter as a document and with herself as a witness, that Andreana was respectably married. Flossie's fiancé is consoled and it all ends happily for them.

What Edith Wharton does is to make a yachting party also the central crisis for *The House of Mirth* from which point Lily Bart's luck changes for the worse. In her yachting society, in her case made up of Americans, there is also a Bertha (a "Berthe" had appeared in the Bourget novel) who becomes the villainess of the tale, Bertha Dorset. Mrs. Wharton, though, has developed her plot further from the point which Bourget makes. In his novel, a young woman has her reputation tarnished for marriage if she is a guest on a yacht which shelters an affair. Mrs. Wharton's point enriches the plot. In her novel, the really guilty Bertha Dorset turns the tables on Lily and implies by a very clever maneuver that Lily was the lover of Bertha's husband.

Selden, whose warning Lily had not taken to get off the yacht, is himself a character based on another novel by Bourget, the very widely-read *Cosmopolis* of 1893. Not only is he like the passive Julien Dorsenne, the hero of that novel, but Selden's relation to Lily is very much like Dorsenne's relation to Alba Steno, the young girl who wants him to marry her to take her away from her mother's immoral cosmopolitan circle. He resists her appeal and she commits suicide. Like Lily's suicide, hers is also equivocal. She exposes herself to marsh fever and doesn't die until a protracted illness from the exposure kills her. However, Mrs. Wharton gives Selden dimensions and depth of feeling we do not meet in Bourget's hero who is a pedantic writer, a "restless analyst." And Mrs. Wharton is not guilty of one of Bourget's besetting sins, as she explains well in her memorial essay. "Bourget used to complain often to me that in my books I did not explain the characters enough and I answered that he underestimated the intelligence of his readers in supposing that he had to dissect in advance the motive power of every act, almost of each word, instead of allowing it to reveal itself by the words and actions of the characters."

Mrs. Wharton arrives in 1905 in Paris as a huge success after *The House of Mirth's* phenomenal sales. Bourget then launches her in his exalted social circle of the Faubourg St. Germain. Just around this time, Bourget wrote a story called "L'Indicatrice" or "The Informer" or "The Finger-Woman" in which the main character, a Mrs. Edith Risley, a rich American woman staying in a hotel in Paris, is the prey of a young thief. His mistress, her temporary maid, is supposed to rob her employer of her jewels in coordination with her lover, but she is so impressed by the goodness of Mrs. Risley that she reveals to her the plan and they both avert the disaster. As the story proceeds, it seems very clear that the American woman is a portrait of Edith Wharton, for there are lots of telling details. (See *Edith Wharton Review*, VII, 1, Spring, 1990.) For instance, she transformed her suite into a kind of home where "all the things around her carry the imprint of a gracious personality." She was "one of these Americans who seem to carry over to the area of refinement that strong will which the men of their country carry over into the area of money-making." She spread antique material over pieces of furniture and her books were "in English and German, Italian and French."

"L'Indicatrice" appeared in 1908 in a collection of short stories by Bourget called *Les Détours du Coeur* and it was published in book form just when Charles Du Bos's translation of *The House of Mirth* called *Chez les heureux du monde* appeared with a preface by Bourget. His critical piece for Wharton's book is first rate. He explains that *The House of Mirth* is a study of high life in the United States which Mrs. Wharton, born and living among these self-appointed aristocrats, is an expert on. The book had already become a bestseller in the United States and the chief reason for this lies in the fact that in "this strange civilization" there are two seemingly irreconcilable characteristics. The first is that everything here breathes a spirit of equality; the second is that the differences between the classes are more definitely marked than in any European country. If you take a walk in Central Park, you are struck by the appearance of the strollers whose clothing seems to indicate a minimum of differences in the manner of get-up. If you go on a train and it isn't a Pullman, you'd swear there was only one class and all travelers belong to it, from the millionaire to the lowest employee. But, no prince of the Italian Renaissance has indulged his fantasies as the oil magnate does in his ball in New York hotels and his wife has a bigger budget than a princess royal. This is where the almighty Dollar (and those words are in English) rules. One must understand the secret logic of the surprising paradox if one wants to understand the worldly life in the United States of America and *The House of Mirth* is "the best key to this enigma," which explains the success of the novel. This aristocracy is open to all who have money and, in that, it is democratic, but you are not allowed to lose your money in this society. If you do, you are ruined, and ruined people must be ejected, for money rules.

Mrs. Wharton's memorial essay in 1936 takes off, in a sense, from where Bourget left it in his Preface to the translation of her first novel. She explains the structure of her aristocratic American background to the French reader and goes from that to Bourget, who is terribly fixed on worldly life, and has tremendous respect for the cosmopolitan titled world to which he devoted his fictional canvas. She reviews her 40-year friendship with him. She describes his growing rigidity of ideas and loss of an earlier wit and expertise at "talk" as he ages. It is a fine estimate of what was admirable in his character and personality. We see from the essay what a brilliant and engaging figure he was and why she continued to be his friend, even after his nationalistic and proto-fascist attitudes made him insupportable to others, among them Henry James. She tells us that his anti-Dreyfusard position was due, not to anti-Semitism, but to a disbelief that the French army could do any wrong. The essay was a fine coda to a friendship of 40 years, a relationship which is reflected in the work of both Bourget and Wharton. Whether or not Mrs. Wharton made a portrait of Paul Bourget in Paul Ventnor, the great poet of "Copy," a tale which reflects their fondness for each other yet their independent points of view, we see in Bourget inarguable signs that Edith Wharton lent her personality to one, if not two, characters in his stories and her plots to at least two of his tales. I don't claim to have done anything but touch the tip of the iceberg. Someone more saturated in Wharton's work than I am should look into the whole friendship and see how it affected their work, their fictional output, which, up to now, has been ignored by Wharton scholarship.

New York City

Preface to *The House of Mirth*

(*La Préface pour Chez les heureux du monde* (1908)
translated by Charles Du Bos)

by Paul Bourget

Mrs. Edith Wharton's book which Mr. Charles du Bos has translated under the title, *Chez les heureux du monde*, is called in English *The House of Mirth*, literally *La Maison de Liesse*. It is a study of the high social life in the United States. When this book appeared three years ago in New York, it produced a huge sensation from one end of the American continent to the other. For the first time, these aristocrats of the cheque book, whose excessive elegance is a supreme and disconcerting culmination of this working class democracy, had met a realistic portrait painter, as irrefutable as she is vigorous. Mrs. Wharton was born and has lived among them; the authority of her documentation is therefore absolute. She is a very remarkable literary artist. The collection of short stories and novels she has published over ten years attest to an always growing mastery. The contours of its composition adding to the exactness of its material, *The House of Mirth* becomes a living mirror of this transatlantic society in which it shudders as it recognizes itself and passes judgment on itself. There the book has had a prodigious success, which amounted to the sale of hundreds of thousands of copies, a fact humiliating for us other French writers who have much smaller editions and who don't even suspect the magnitude of the extent of the Anglo-Saxon book trade. *The House of Mirth* has been discussed with frenzy, which is the test of all truly strong novels. They are "placed as signs of contradiction," to borrow an admirable expression from a sacred text which sums up so well the impression produced by Truth on the human spirit. Whether it is in the realm of Science or Art, Politics or Morality, there exist large considerations of an illusory optimism that the great thinker, the great artist, the great statesman must, as their first mission, get rid of. These disillusionments do not take place without clamors and conflict, but once the tumult of the first hour has passed, truth imposes itself, scientific discovery becomes a point of departure of innumerable works, the political principle is applied everywhere, moral doctrine regenerates those who once denied it most passionately, and the book takes its place in all the libraries. This is already the fate of *The House of Mirth* and I present here a primary reason for it.

Travelling in the United States, one distinguishes almost immediately, in this strange civilization, two seemingly irreconcilable characteristics. The first is that everyone breathes *the spirit of equality*; the second is that the differences in the social distinctions there are more implacably demarcated than in any European country, from oligarchical England to autocratic Russia. You take a walk in *Central Park*; you are astonished by the appearance of the strollers whose get-up seems to show a *minimum* of differences in the way they clothe themselves. You board a railroad train. If there is no *Pullmann car*, you would swear there was only one class and that all the passengers must belong to it, from the millionaire to the lowest employee. You say: Here is really a democracy. The manner of these people corroborates this first impression. It indeed appears that here each individual is anxious to assert firmly the republican dogma that one man is not worth more than another. Yet, at the same time, in no place is the *fact of inequality* more evident. No feudal lord of ancient times had as much complete freedom to expand his personality, or to submit to less constraint, than a similar American millionaire settled on the deck of his *yacht* has today. No Italian prince of the Renaissance could more freely display all the caprices of his fantasy than a similar oil or gasoline magnate when he puts on in a New York hotel one of those balls which the following day will arouse the admiring or indig-

nant stupor of all the Snobs or all the Prudhommes of one or the other world. The wife of someone who began life by putting down railway ties with his own hands will have a clothes allowance superior to that of a princess royal. Seen from that angle and putting aside New England, that corner so distinct, so rare, so admirable in its inherited and perfected culture, America appears, with all its grievances, as the country where the Dollar is King. It's their motto: *the almighty dollar*. The self-declared egalitarian democracy thus creates an improvised patriciate which constitutes in its habits the most separated and the most isolated castes at the top of the nation. It is a surprising antithesis whose secret logic one must grasp if one wants to give an exact accounting of that which high social life represents for the people of the United States. *The House of Mirth* is the best key one has to solve this enigma.

This alone would suffice to explain the success of this novel, even if the talent displayed in it were not of such a rare quality. It is the story of a young girl, Lily Bart, whose father was a rich businessman. She is a great beauty and her mother has raised her in *Society* and for *Society* alone. She has created from her a luxurious flower, a living orchid, and for a luxurious flower one must have the atmosphere of a hothouse, a sheltered existence, precious and useless, costly and protected, which money alone can procure. The portrait of this mother is a retrospective one. Mrs. Bart is dead when the story begins; but sketched in a few strokes, her portrait is significant in the highest degree. Her whole conception of things is summed up in these words of a singularly expressive brutality: "Mrs. Bart's worst reproach to her husband was to ask him if he expected her to 'live like a pig'; and his replying in the negative was always regarded as a justification for cabling to Paris for an extra dress or two, and telephoning to the jeweler that he might, after all, send home the turquoise bracelet which Mrs. Bart had looked at the morning."

Here is summed up in ten lines the whole principle of the tragedy which constitutes the matter of this novel; here also is defined one of the essential characteristics of the worldly life in America. It is the willed work of people who have followed a program and who expect to complete it, cost what it may. In all old civilizations, this worldly life has a tradition so completely elaborated through the centuries that a historian of customs can, for example, follow its evolution in France, from the social "rounds" contemporary with Louis XIII up to the garden-parties of today, passing through the court of Versailles, the salons of the eighteenth century, those of the Restoration, those of the July Monarchy, those of the second Empire. In this new civilization across the ocean high social life has been created and continues to be by an energetic blow which made it seem like a conquest. And it truly is one, that of self-made aristocrats who have made themselves aristocrats in spite of the surrounding democracy. From that situation arises this hardness scarcely concealed under fantasy and display, this implacability which requires that ruined people should be cast out of this world of frantic idlers. The association of these two violently contradictory worlds is made necessary by the intimate contradiction of such a state of mind. The social life so practiced ceases, indeed, to be a relaxation and a rest. It requires an effort, a competition of another order. It is open to all, for those who practice it are involved in it, because they desire it, and all those whose fortune allows them to desire it, can desire it equally. In that respect, it's an egalitarian situation. But, since nothing in the world is more unequal than desires without money to back them, this inequality from the very outset has for its necessary counterpart the most prodigiously unequal results. Women of Mrs. Bart's type would without doubt be astonished to see their vanities and frivolities so interpreted. The alert and agile artist that Mrs. Wharton is does not make the mistake, often attributed to authors of novels of high life, of expatiating on the turquoises and toilettes of Lily's mother and her contemporaries. She is satisfied in showing how the education given to Lily Bart developed in this girl a new sense: that of the social pageant. Lily is intelligent, beautiful, loyal and sensitive. She possesses all the qualities that a man of integrity could find in looking for a companion. She has only to appear and everyone's sympathies move toward her. And yet she will lead a miserable life, at once envied and betrayed, worshipped and slandered. She will meet a man of integrity whose wife she ought to be. She will be loved by him, and she will love him, only they won't declare this love to each other. She will finally die either because of carelessness or by suicide in a manner as equivocal as her life. Her disappearance will remain a mystery for this *Society* for whom she will have been the heroine and the victim. Why? Because her father, the businessman, was ruined, and, brought up as she has been, it's almost physically

impossible for her to give up that decoration of the social life to which she belongs, — she, her beauty, her wardrobe, her tastes, her smile, the desire she provokes, the suspicion she arouses, in sum, all that she is.

The novel is simply a long and minute analysis of this drama: the struggle of this enchanting child to try, once her mother is dead, to maintain herself, with a small fortune that soon grows smaller, on this strange Olympus of millionaires where her delicate sensibility receives no real nourishment and yet she can breathe in no other environment. It is a slow tragedy almost without events, where each chapter is a picture. At the end of it, we understand the tragic underside of this unbridled frivolity, and Lily Bart appears as the symbol of countless destinies, bruised and crushed by the idol which has been monstrously raised above the palaces of Fifth Avenue and cottages of Newport. All the small concessions of conscience by which she descends to a semi-parasitism so costly that it accomplished her ruin, all her hesitations before the good marriage necessary for her which always escapes her and before the polite venality which horrifies her, the melancholy of the useless triumphs of her beauty and the kind of unconscious ferocity with which Society eliminates one of its weakest members, — all these are the pathetic themes that the writer captures and recaptures; and each time her superior art draws on an occasion to establish a characteristic of the customs of these *happy ones of the world*. She does this so well that the adventure of this unfortunate professional beauty ends by becoming a pretext for the creation of the most complete picture of the whole corner of this civilization. American high-life is exposed in its entirety and types treated in the manner of those Italian portraits at once so representative and yet so individual — the Van Osburgs, the Percy Gryces, the George Dorsets, the Trenors, the Wetheralls, Mrs. Norma Hatch, Lawrence Selden, Rosedale, these names which I cite at random from my memory, evoke, after one has closed the book, characters profoundly individualized and all of whom group themselves in the same human series. It is the very definition of what the novel of manners ought to be, at once collective by its impressions of an ensemble, and particular by its impressions of details. From a technical point of view Mrs. Wharton's book is a masterpiece of the genre.

It is superior also because of another quality of the author's art. Mrs. Wharton is connected with another great Anglo-Saxon novelist, Mr. Henry James, by a continuous investigation of the subtlety of observation and by a kind of hidden irony, whose taste is a singularly sharp one. One discovers in it the secret vibration of an almost sickly nervousness that a superior coolness of intelligence controls and represses. The entire novel is written thus in a reserved and biting tone which makes one smile at the same time that it makes one shudder. Here there is light observation, thrown out in passing, and whose quick glimmer lights up the abysses of nothingness; for instance, when we see the Wetheralls going to church: "They belonged to that vast group of human automata who go through life without neglecting to perform a single one of the gestures made by the surrounding puppets. It is true that the Bellomont puppets did not go to church; but others equally important did — *and Mr. and Mrs. Wetherall's circle is so large that God was included in their visiting list*. They appeared, therefore, punctual and resigned, with the air of people bound for a dull 'at-home.'" In addition, there are phrases of familiar dialogue, almost insignificant, and the banality of the words pronounced produce a sinister impression in contrast to the sad uneasiness of the situation. I'll quote from the last meeting of Lily Bart and Rosedale. This person is a Jew who pushes himself in society. During the period when Lily was in fashion, he wanted to marry her; she refused him. When she began to fall from grace, she wanted to marry him: he refused her. She failed even more. In her final energetic move, *the orchid* wished to become a pot-herb. Lily imagined she could enter a hat designer shop as an apprentice. Rosedale, who knew nothing of her final failure, met her on the stairway of the Metropolitan and begged her to take a cup of tea with him. He said to her:

"I haven't seen you for an age, Miss Lily."

"You wouldn't be likely to hear anyone talk about me. I have joined the working classes."

At first not believing, then astonished, he exclaimed: "Well, that's admirable!" to which Lily, gathering the ends of her feathered scarf, answered:

"Oh, no — it's merely a bore."

He accompanies her and, arriving in front of the poor dwelling place where the ruined girl has taken refuge, he looked at it with unconcealed disgust, and asked — "This isn't the place, is it? Someone told me you were living with Miss Farish."

"No, I am boarding here. I have lived too long at the expense of my friends."

He continued to look at the darkened and blistered facade, the windows with their curtains of wretched lace, and the Pompeian decoration of the muddy vestibule. Then he looked at her again and said with a visible effort: "You'll let me come and see you, one of these days?" She smiled, recognizing the heroism of the offer to the point of being truly touched by it.

"Thank you — I shall be very glad. *And it was the first sincere word she had ever spoken to him...*"

They are nothing, these five or six answers, it is nothing, this reflection which comments on them, yet when one reads this page in its place, one's heart is oppressed, so sensitive has this dry and detached manner made one to the loneliness of the shipwreck on which Lily Bart has floundered. It is worthy of the end of *Pere Goriot* where Balzac, after having made Rastignac pronounce in front of Paris, "To the two of us, now!" adds with an indefinable irony, "For his first act of defiance to Society, Rastignac went to dine with Mme de Nucingen." Is not the fact that such a name and such a memory can be evoked in connection with Mrs. Wharton and *The House of Mirth* the highest tribute that can be paid to this penetrating, bitter, pathetic work?

I will add only a word on the excellence of the translation. Mrs. Wharton's style is so like her thought, so ductile and so precise in its nuance, that it was very difficult to equal its supple complexities. Mr. Charles du Bos has succeeded in doing so. This copy of such an original bestows the greatest honor on a young writer, already known in the field of art criticism and one who promises to take, in the literary world as well, a distinguished place because of it.

Paul Bourget

June, 1908

Translated by Adeline Tintner
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Memories of Bourget From Across The Sea

(*Souvenirs de Bourget Outremer*)

by Edith Wharton

While reading the obituaries devoted to Paul Bourget in all the big French daily papers, as well as in the journals, I was struck by the uniformity of these "portraits" of the master. Whatever the judgments of these writers on his literary work and his political convictions, all, without exception, represented the man seen too often in his works: the intransigent moralist, the teacher who never smiles. Now, I have known many men of letters in whom one immediately would see a fundamental link between the man and the writer; but for those who knew Bourget intimately, it was truly difficult to discover this link in him; for the real, the living Bourget, the man I knew, went way beyond the contours of the narrow person his young admirers constructed after this death with elements taken from his work.

In the first place, I was surprised by the uniformity of all these portraits of "the great man"; then I realized that among the intimate friends of his youth and his brilliant maturity, many had disappeared, and the writers who today speak of him can only offer to their readers the rigid effigy of the old Bourget burdened with honors and prejudices, he who, little by little, was substituted for the brilliant and unconstrained friend of my youth. Actually, I knew Bourget intimately ever since his visit to the United States the year after his marriage; and nothing resembled less my dear friend of long ago, so full of activity and gaiety, like an "older brother" who played for so many years such a great role in my life, than this pompous and severe person who was in the process of becoming the Bourget of the future.

II.

It was in 1893.

The year before, Bourget had married the exquisite and sweet Minnie David, and with her made a honeymoon trip to Greece — a trip during which both were intoxicated by the beauty of this country which resembles no other, and by the splendor of the works of art with which man has decorated it. Like all who make this trip, he dreamed only of doing it again, when the following summer, Gordon Bennett, proprietor of the *New York Herald* and an old friend of Bourget, proposed that the latter make, at the expense of the great daily paper, a journalist's assignment to the United States.

In this far off period, the French scarcely traveled. The idea of going to America would have made an even bolder explorer than Bourget hesitate, and I am not really sure what made him decide to make this great leap into the unknown with his young wife. But he did accept the *Herald's* offer, and as soon as his Parisian friends knew his decision had been taken, they insisted on giving him letters of introduction for New York, Boston, Washington, etc.

During the period when Bourget had his apprenticeship in Paris, he had been connected with the Ridgway family, originally from Philadelphia, but settled for a long time in Paris. Now he discovered the old Mme. Ridgway, whose children had married in France, was the first cousin of my father-in-law and my husband, as a result, was the relation of the enchanting Henry Ridgway who was the model of the elegant "clubman" of the first novels of Bourget. It is thus that when the latter left to discover the New World, young Mme. Henry Ridgway, daughter of the Parisian banker Munroe, had the idea of giving him a letter of introduction for her Wharton cousins.

At that time my husband and I left to spend time at Newport, the most "fashionable" (as Bourget always said) resort of the New World. Bourget very much wanted to see close at hand the social life

of this overseas Deauville, and as soon as he arrived he left with us the letter of introduction that our Cousin Ridgway had given him.

What a thrill for a young woman passionately interested in literature, but who never dreamed of making herself part of the illustrious fraternity of writers! I had naturally read all of Bourget's books, and although at this time I didn't like his novels too much, I had, on the other hand, the strongest admiration for his *Essais de Psychologie contemporaine*, the first volume of which had appeared. At the time of our meeting, I knew almost no man of letters. I had always led a purely social life, and the idea of entertaining in my house a great French writer frightened me at least as much as it flattered me. Not sharing my husband's taste for the frivolous and monotonous life of Newport, I didn't realize how the kind of life which appeared to me so desperately banal could have a documentary attraction for a foreigner as curious for novelty as Bourget was. I did not know whom to invite to meet this well-known writer, and I was too timid to be able to imagine that perhaps he preferred to take a family meal rather than to be part of a formal dinner. But it was something I had to do, and, somewhat reluctantly, I invited them to lunch with six or seven guests. "At least," I thought, "they can enjoy the incomparable view of the sea (for we lived on the top of a cliff overhanging the Atlantic) for want of engaging in interesting conversations."

I had forgotten that everything interests travelers and, above all, those like Bourget. I don't know whether, that first day, his myopic eyesight reached as far as the dazzling sea spread out at his feet; but I know that our house and our table companions interested him enormously. My guests had been carefully chosen, for it wasn't very easy to find at Newport guests likely to have an interest in intellectual life, but what Bourget wanted was to see representatives of the social life as one understood it then in my country; and from that point of view he surely made interesting relationships in my home.

However, he has told me since then, that that which had surprised and interested him above all was to find a house filled with books in this ultra-frivolous milieu, and he returned as often as possible, enchanted by the contrast between the quiet library of *Land's End*, with its great bay windows opening up on the immensity of the Atlantic, and the life of the Casino and of sports, yachting, bridge — sumptuous dinners and elegant dances which make up Newport's season. At this time when the cottages lining up along the cliffs were almost all occupied by old New York families — the Astors, Van Alens, Goelets, Winthrops, Chanlers, Cushings, etc., this season of the seaside resort still had a superior kind of elegance; but the pleasant people constituting this little society were, with few exceptions, hermetically closed to the intellectual and artistic movement which, in Paris and London, had reached even the most frivolous milieux. At Newport it wasn't yet necessary to appear to be interested in ideas.

I shall always remember my first encounter with the celebrated writer and his young wife. Bourget's beautiful head, with its grave and tormented characteristics, its gay smile, its look always on the alert, resembled one of those living and vigorous Roman senators one sees in the Capitoline Museum. As for his wife, she had the somewhat old-fashioned grace of a portrait by Winterhalter, and her huge sweet eyes seemed to be lost in a mysterious distant land where one felt she led her real, her profound life. One could even say that from a certain point of view she lived completely in depth, and he completely in multiple and insatiable but completely exterior curiosities. She was very timid, or rather, I think, little inclined to form a connection easily, or to let herself go in casual friendships, while Bourget, indefatigable observer of the human soul, could have taken for his motto the *Homo sum* of the poet.

In sum, both of them felt immediately on familiar territory in *Land's End* where the Italian furniture of the eighteenth century, which my husband and I had brought back from our many trips, reminded Bourget of his own sojourns in Tuscany and Umbria. It is perhaps thanks to my library and my Venetian consoles that we were instantly at ease with one another, and that with these two people I don't recall having to get beyond that very boring first stage which often precedes harmony. It seems to me that already from the first day we understood and loved each other.

I have often noticed that these friendships that take place like a thunderbolt generally are a prelude to a durable attachment, having neither clouds nor unpleasantnesses and without diminutions. It was so in our case. Beginning with our first meeting, I knew I had two new friends on whom I could

always count and who probably were going to play a great part in my life. There were so many questions about which we held the same opinions, so many tastes which we shared together, so many subjects which we could discuss as far as the eye could see!

III

The Bourgets who arrived at Newport for a few days stayed there a full month. In flicking through the first pages of *Outre Mer* (which I haven't reread since 1894), I notice how the smallest details of this life of lazy ladies and gentlemen interested him. But I also realized that he did not escape the error common to almost all the sociologists who have come over from old Europe to study American customs. For Bourget, as for all the other Europeans, North America was above all, before everything else, the country of dollars. Now, this conception, which since then has become alas only too true, was not true forty years ago for the old cities in the Eastern states. In New York, above all, the rich families were most often people of mediocre intelligence but of pleasant habits who lived for many generations on their rents. The enormous increase of the value of these real estate properties in New York had created a small rich society, lazy and closed, into which recently certain rare representatives of the new classes from the West, those of more than modest origins, have insinuated themselves, but who have gained in mines and railroads the millions which must soon eclipse the fortunes of old New Yorkers. In the circle in which I lived (and which formed in my youth the "society" of the little New York of that time) one never heard Wall Street spoken of, and the majority of the men devoted their leisure time to sports and the hunt. In my circle — father, brother, uncles, cousins — no one was "in business," except one of my mother's brothers, who, wanting to be able to afford the requirements of a large family, had accepted the presidency of one of the new railroads of the West which was beginning to attract American investments.

It was after he left Newport that Bourget undertook, with the ménage of John Gardner of Boston, a long trip to the Western States. Probably he already knew Mrs. Gardner who owned a palace in Venice, and every year made extended sojourns in Paris and London. Closely connected with John Sargent and other painters of the period, and with the great collectors of Paris and London, Mrs. Gardner was one of the celebrities of Boston, and she was to bequeath to that city her beautiful collection of Italian pictures and art objects. To shelter these treasures she constructed a mansion in the style of a Venetian palace with a courtyard warm as toast, where in the depths of winter camelias and bougainvilleas flowered and where hundreds of uncaged birds sang, while the snow piled up in the streets of Boston, swept by an icy north wind coming from Canada.

This mansion, filled with precious paintings and beautiful pieces of furniture from the Italian Renaissance, became, on the death of the woman who had created it, the Isabella Gardner Museum, but I believe that when Bourget went to Boston it had not yet been constructed and the Gardners lived in the winter in a private house and in the summer in their country estate in a suburb of the city. The Bourgets soon became friends with the couple, but when I saw Bourget again, I realized, not without surprise, that for him the person in the family truly interesting was not the brilliant and capricious Mrs. Gardner, but her calm and silent husband. John Gardner, in truth, from old Boston stock, offered to the avid collector that Bourget was, the finished example of the "gentleman" businessman. At this time, the type was still rare among us, and completely unknown in France. In my youth the descendants of the old "colonial" families occupied themselves very little with business, and if some of them were very rich, it was above all because the land they inherited, in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, had risen in value in a fabulous fashion.

But with the construction of the great railways of the West, the men of this old milieu, especially the bankers and important lawyers, were attracted by the new Eldorado which was soon to offer more marvelous occasions for getting rich than those of the gold mines of California. These railroads of the West, which have overthrown our small New York society, introduced into it not only the violent desire for gain and an immense increase of wealth, but also the new element of businessmen with many irons in the fire who up to now have been aloof from the old society. It is starting from this time that New York social life, while displaying an unusual luxury, was lowered little by little to the

social and intellectual level of the newcomers.

But I must get back to Bourget and his trip across the United States. He returned again after several months, having seen and noted much. But that which struck us above all, in rereading his book, was to see him bewildered and overcome by the rapidity and uproar of a trip which would appear to us today like a slow journey across a peaceful and sleepy Arcadia!

IV

I don't believe I saw the Bourgets before they left America, but it was probably the next year that I found them again in Paris. It seems to me that at this time they were still living in a small bachelor flat in the rue Vaneau where Bourget had lived before his marriage, but somewhat later they moved to the rue Barbet-de-Jouy in the pleasant apartment they were never to leave. In any event, my husband and I never passed a year without visiting them, whether in Paris or at the dear Plantier of Costebelle which they bought, I believe, a few years after they went to the apartment in the rue Barbet-de-Jouy.

We were accustomed to spend each year at the end of winter and the spring in France and Italy; and soon we got into the pleasant habit of making a trip every year with the friends to whom we were bound by a truly fraternal affection. Sometimes we met in Milan to take a turn through the little towns of the north of Italy; sometimes we met our friends in one of the many watering places which Bourget, constantly preoccupied with therapeutic questions, judged indispensable to his own health and that of his submissive wife. I recall several sojourns at Pougues, fifteen days at Ragatz (while the Dreyfus case was full-blown!) and other watering places, one of which was at Royat which he became very fond of since the advent of the auto allowed him to discover the alpine beauties of Auvergne. It is somewhat because of us that Bourget, always cautious and hesitant when it was the question of the least modification of his habits, became so quickly a *dévo*té of the road. But our first travels in Italy date from before the advent of the auto. We generally settled ourselves say in Milan, Turin or Venice; then we would hire a large carriage to make excursions in the neighborhood. My husband, on a bicycle, went ahead of us to look around, procure rooms at the inn, and order meals, while we followed, in the slow trot of our tired horses, across the ravishing bergamesque landscapes or the alpine valleys of Piedmont.

But what a joy, when the auto, in allowing us to extend these exploratory trips, made it possible for us to discover little forgotten corners, such as the fairy-like town of Sabbioneta, Lake Iseo, Madonna di Tirano. The Bourgets were perfect traveling companions. Dear Minnie, whose exquisite visual sensibility made her the precious collaborator of *Sensations d'Italie* enjoyed above all what one would call the hidden beauties of our travels: the beautiful Renaissance villa lost in a distant valley, splendid altar-screens sleeping in the silence and dampness of the great abandoned church. For her as for me, the catalogued wealth of museums and galleries possessed less charm than those beautiful things forgotten in the unknown corners of a country too rich to count its treasures.

V

And in the evening, back at the inn, after a joyful day of healthy fatigue, what did we talk about, settled in front of spaghetti and chianti? About everything, it seemed to me, the spirit of Bourget was intensely open, his culture vast, his memory completely filled with recollections of his literary and social beginnings. Unlike most of his French contemporaries, he had traveled much not only in the United States but in Italy, England, Ireland (where he often went to visit an old French friend of high culture, who had inherited a beautiful estate in this country). It is thanks to Henry James, the great novelist, that he made so many interesting contacts in England, in literary, university and social circles, some of which developed into permanent friendships. In the Bourget of this period, there was none of this intense "nationalism" of spirit and culture which characterized certain French men of letters and which always reminded me of the famous line of Kipling: *How can they know*

England who only England know?

Indeed, it is only by having seen other countries, studied their customs, read their books, gotten to know their inhabitants, that one can place one's own country in the history of civilization; and in spite of Bourget's more and more sedentary way of life these many travels left him not only precious memories of art and the friendship of the elite but also, above all, a freedom of spirit, an objectivity in his judgment about men and things which would surely surprise some of these people who have known only the aged Bourget of his last years.

I have often remarked that the friendly relations between two persons of different countries, who have the same intellectual and artistic tastes, have an exceptional quality by the very fact that they are not bothered by any of the personal sympathies or antipathies which exist between members of the same milieu. What good is it to gossip about a neighbor to someone who doesn't know him, and who is ignorant about his whole circle? One is obliged inevitably to take refuge in general ideas, or in questions about art and literature. Instead of taking delight in the latest twaddle of circles and salons, one speaks rather of Tolstoy or Proust, of Wagner or Debussy; and on problems of general interest each person directs the searchlights of a curiosity free from all attachments.

To justify this point of view I have only to recall my frequent, interminable discussions with Bourget on the subject of the Dreyfus affair, and especially on the trial at Rennes. We found ourselves near the Bourgets at Ragatz at that very moment and naturally he and I spoke of it from morning to night. I say "he and I" for he had asked me not to make the slightest allusion to it before his wife, who felt that one could not approach this burning question in a manner purely objective. Bourget, on the contrary, understood it very well, and whenever we were alone we resumed our arguments. Like the majority of my countrymen, I shared in no way his point of view or that of his circle, for he always told me that personally he had no closed opinion on the guilt of Dreyfus. For him, that which counted first was the political obligation to defend the army, by no matter what means. I was far from being of his opinion, but he never got angry while listening to my arguments; and I can say that nothing gave me as high an idea of his intellectual independence as did this sojourn near him at a moment when many Frenchmen, and the most intelligent, submitted to the pressures of an atmosphere overheated by political hatreds.

But the "Affair" was not our only subject of conversation during our stay at Ragatz. I remember that the day we arrived Bourget came to meet us, completely happy because of a discovery he had just made. The son of the Duchess of Langeais was staying at our hotel!

That evening in the restaurant Bourget motioned to me: there was a little old man, very pale, very shriveled, seated at a table in a distant corner of the dining room, paying no attention to the bathers around him . . . The son of the Duchess of Langeais! To understand the emotions stirred up by this discovery, one has to have known Bourget's passionate adoration of Balzac — for the entire *oeuvre* of Balzac, an adoration shared by most of his contemporaries for him whom James had called *the father of us all*.

The grim tale of the Duchess of Langeais was based (everyone knew it) on a love affair of the Duchess of X . . . and the old man seated opposite us was the son of the woman who had played such an important role in the scandalous history of the Restoration salons.

I had rarely seen Bourget so moved, so enraptured by the idea of talking to the son of a woman whom Balzac had immortalized! He had already written to a friend in the Faubourg St. Germain to ask for a letter of introduction to the old Comte de . . . ; and he awaited its arrival with a fevered impatience.

The next day he received it. His correspondent warned him that the Count of . . . was an "old solitary person," who had firmly decided to make no new relationships; but she had immediately begged him to make an exception for the great French novelist, and Bourget, then at the peak of his glory, was persuaded that such a request would be favorably received.

The same day, he left the letter with his card for the Count. "You'll see," he said to me, as we went down to dinner, "he'll come over to have a word with me . . . I'll present you to him."

Alas, the son of the Duchess of Langeais didn't bother to greet us. He did not even glance in the direction of our table. He was satisfied, the next day, to leave a card for Bourget with the hotel's concierge; and during the entire length of his stay at Ragatz, he continued to stare with an icy eye

at the poor novelist who had dreamed of long passionate conversations with the son of Mme. de Langeais.

I have to say that Bourget was the first to laugh at his disaster. At this time he laughed easily. Every aspect of the human comedy attracted his insatiable curiosity, arousing in him his sense of humor or his sense of irony; but all the same he remained a little vexed at this completely unexpected snub.

VI

When traveling, Bourget related very easily to the people he happened to find in his path. These chance meetings amused him a great deal and furnished him with an inexhaustible supply of pleasing anecdotes. But he also put himself into rapport with people who could facilitate his historical and archeological researches, or who simply interested him, as well, being examples selected from a foreign society. Thanks to him I made very agreeable acquaintances in the countries we visited together. It was he who led us to the old Prince Trevulzio in his Milanese palace, where I had the pleasure of examining at my leisure the incomparable treasures that filled this magnificent private house, one of the most perfect examples of the living quarters of a great Italian lord whose ancestors for three hundred years had devoted their wealth to the acquisition of a collection of masterpieces.

In the church at Milan where the princes of Trivulzio are buried, I recall that Bourget mentioned that the tombs of the princely family were situated in alcoves covered with marble on the first floor, that is, above the arcade on which the central dome of the church rested. "Even dead, the Trivulzios have to be lodged on the *piano nobile*," he said with a smile.

It is also thanks to him that I made the acquaintance of the great composer Boito, this charming and agreeable man of the world, who made me feel very secure when I wrote a book on Italian villas. But I cannot mention here all the relationships I formed in Italy thanks to Bourget. I recall above all that a letter from him put me in contact with Miss Violet Paget (the famous writer, "Vernon Lee") whose books on Italy, *Euphorion*, *Belcaro*, etc. — created the pleasures of the generation which had been introduced by Ruskin and Walter Pater to the beauties of the great Italian primitives. Miss Paget, who long outlived the great art critics of our youth, always received in her little villa of "Palmerino" distinguished foreigners who came to Florence, and for many years was intimately linked with the Bourgets. As the readers of Anatole France know, she appeared in *The Red Lily* under the name of Miss Bell and she was one of the last representatives of this pre-war world, when she met with friends to talk about beautiful pictures or beautiful music, without suspecting under what mortal blows this pleasant society would soon collapse.

VII

But it was above all in Paris and at Costebelle that I spent long days with the Bourgets. As he aged, he became more sedentary and less inclined to displacements. I often tried to tear him away by auto to Spain, or the north of Italy, but he was immobilized by the slow tyranny of routine, and his wife, who had the traveler's soul, didn't dare to cross him in his ways. For many years the household made the trip between Paris and Costebelle by auto, and I who twice a year went over the same route always tried to get Bourget to change his itinerary, by describing to him the countless wonders which marked out the different routes leading from Paris to the Mediterranean. Bourget listened with real interest to my descriptions of Albi, Moissac, Souillac and Tournus to mention only a few of the towns he could visit without going too much out of his way; but every year he regularly stopped again at the same stages: Sens, Moulins, Lyon, Avignon and I don't even think that he ever saw the exquisite chapel of Saint-Gabriel, near Tarascon, nor the Merovingian baptistry of Vénasque, because he refused to make only a little detour to get there.

He was the first to make fun of this impossibility of modifying his itinerary. But the fact persisted, and like all manias, this one became more tyrannical with old age. The more trips to Italy, Germany, England: the more unforeseen displacements; always arranged in advance, and it was necessary above all to make only the *already made*.

After the war, having sold my country house in the United States, I settled finally in France. For summer I had bought a little estate near Montmorency, and for winter I installed myself in an old house on a rocky height which dominates the "old town" of Hyères. These two projects annoyed Bourget, for reasons my readers will hardly be able to figure out. It is he who had shown me my future house at Hyères, an old abandoned dwelling. We climbed to it by foot from the old town, and I was immediately enchanted by the splendid view from the terrace, which commanded the whole sea, from Cape Bénat to the open roadstead of Toulon. But when I told Bourget I wanted to buy this house he was appalled because no one had lived there for fifty years, and he was sure none of the tradesmen would climb up to the house (it was five minutes from the market and from the main street)! He begged me not to commit such a folly and when I took no notice of this and occupied the restored and modernized house, the Bourgets, for at least two years, always left their auto at the entrance of the estate and climbed the long walk which led to the house. As to my little house in the Northern suburb, they stayed for two years without seeing it because Bourget had never ventured into the suburbs of Paris by auto! It is perhaps because of a habit he formed in finally coming to Saint-Brice that he later decided to settle in Chantilly, a decision he surely would never have dared to make in the first years after the war!

At Hyères he knew only three auto routes, that which led by the valley of the Gapeau to the old Charterhouse of Montrieux, that of the Fort of Bréganson and that of Toulon. Once he had made a lovely auto tour, he talked about it for a long time and only asked to do it again: the great difficulty was for him to risk a first trial. When he moved to Le Plantier the household had (hard to believe!) two saddle horses and Bourget and his wife took a ride each morning — but without ever turning aside from the trail that the old Comte de Beauregard had made for his race horses, between La Capte and the peninsula of Gien.

When he formed the habit of taking a yearly cure at Royat, he ventured, with a thousand precautions, on the beautiful mountainous paths of Auvergne, and since I had traveled over this region in every sense of the word, we would often speak of it. One day Bourget made an allusion to La Chaise-Dieu, and I told him my regret at not having visited it.

With a certain amount of grace, he understated his surprise: "How is it, my dear friend, that you who live on highways, you who are always running after new discoveries, do not know this marvel of marvels? One of the most beautiful monuments of France, and one which is so close to my house? (He was always boasting of being a native of Auvergne!)"

Completely confused by my omission, I did not fail, the following summer, to make the pilgrimage to La Chaise-Dieu. When I saw Bourget after this visit, I was obliged to confess my disappointment. In spite of all the archeological interest of this famous abbey church, it seemed to me less important than its glorious rivals of Puy, Clermont-Ferrand, and even Issoire and Brioude.

— Is it because you have made me descriptions of it that have been too eloquent? I don't know...but... Bourget interrupted me.

— Ah! what luck! he said with his malicious smile. Since you have been disappointed, I won't have to go see it!

And he laughed like a child, delighted at having made me believe that he had studied on the spot all the archeological details of the abbey.

I have wished in these notes to speak not of the writer but of the friend. I respect the fact that the opinion of a foreigner on work as well known as that of Bourget can have but little interest for his fellow countrymen: but I realize that it is impossible to delay any longer the painful confession that I have never liked his novels very much. It is particularly painful for me to confess it, for he did me the great honor of writing a very beautiful preface for the French translation of my first novel, *The House of Mirth*. It is even thanks to him that my friend Charles Du Bos (whom I didn't know

at the time), made his literary debut by translating my novel; and I will always be grateful to Bourget for having rendered this friendly service.

My admiration for his essays of literary criticism has always been very great; but why must those qualities which made the conversationalist so seductive — the gaiety, the irony, the light and lively way of telling an anecdote or of mimicking a conversation — why must all that made his talk so brilliant and full of savor disappear each time the novelist took up his pen?

We often spoke of the art of the novel, for the technique of our profession excited both of us: soon I realized that Bourget's ideas were completely the opposite of mine. From the moment Bourget began a novel, he mounted the pulpit. He had to make each person a pawn in a game cleverly contrived in advance, and from which the disconcerting unexpected in life was totally banished. Having discovered that our theories would never be in agreement, we took the wise resolution not to speak again about our respective works; but, in return, we never tired of telling each other the themes of our future books. We saw the irony and sadness of the human lot in the same way; each incident furnished us, him as well as me, with a new idea and we passed hours in telling them to each other. Bourget used to complain to me that in my books I did not explain the characters sufficiently and I answered that he underestimated the intelligence of his readers in supposing that he had to dissect in advance in a drawn-out way the motive power of every act, almost of every word, instead of allowing it to reveal itself by the word and action of the characters.

Useless to add that these discussions never left the least rancour in the spirit of the speakers. Nothing altered Bourget's affectionate good nature toward his friends. One could tease him, make fun of him, even scold him a bit, without his getting angry. During the long years of a quasi-fraternal friendship, I never saw in him the least shade of impatience or of resentment.

Besides, Bourget was the most dependable and the most indulgent friend one could imagine. I realized this after the war, when I discovered, not without surprise, what treasures of forbearance he preserved with old German and Italian friends. Among these last, above all before the entrance of Italy into the war, there were some, in spite of the excellent welcome one always gave them in Paris, in the literary and worldly salons, who did not hesitate to proclaim their hatred for France and the French. Bourget knew about this: but what I could never get myself to forget, he was quick to forgive. "Poor M. . .," he would say, "One cannot be angry at her for that, for she has to earn her living . . ." (The person in question was a journalist) Or again — "Ah! La Comtesse N. . . has undoubtedly been poorly informed and, well, she has German relations . . ."

The bottom of his heart was filled with benevolence, and many are the young writers who owe him wise advice and general encouragement. Even when he didn't share their opinions, he was always ready to be of service to them, and a number among them are those who, without admiring the writer, honored the literary integrity of the man.

One day I received a very moving proof of this literary integrity. It was just when Tolstoy died. For a long time the great Russian novelist had become the object of Bourget's scorn and hatred. Always very personal in his judgments and strongly influenced, as he grew older, by the opinions of his circle, he came to deny the literary genius of the writer because he undervalued, with good reason, his vague social theories. I had often remarked to him that the novelist's genius remained intact in spite of the intellectual poverty of the man. Bourget always answered — "But no, my dear, you are wrong: This Tolstoy was never a great novelist. What are *Anna Karenina*, *War and Peace*, *Resurrection*? A jumble of incoherent theories, disconnected themes, without beginning and without end . . ."

The day Tolstoy died, we resumed this discussion and never have I heard Bourget express himself with more injustice and violence. But the same day a great daily newspaper asked him for an article on Tolstoy. In order to write it, he had to look at the novels which he surely had not re-read for many years; and having done so, Bourget wrote on the Russian novelist, whom he had in reality never ceased to admire, one of the most beautiful and generous articles that an artist has ever devoted to the memory of a colleague.

All of Bourget is in this anecdote: his fundamental generous nature, his sudden veering in his opinions, and above all his magnificent professional integrity.

It is this Bourget, the great honest man who always admired, often in spite of himself, all that was great in art and in thought, whom his friends will always remember; it is this Bourget whom they will not cease to mourn.

Translated by Adeline Tintner

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APPENDIX

*The preface Paul Bourget wrote in 1908 to the French translation by Charles Du Bos of *The House of Mirth* is here presented in its original form and in a literal translation.¹ It is one of the first critical essays on Edith Wharton's first novel, which still stands up today as a brilliant and yet a measured assessment of that novel, both as a work of art and as a work of social comment. Bourget's critical essays stand ahead of his novels, except perhaps *Cosmopolis* and most of his short stories. They were appreciated by both Edith Wharton and Henry James and we can see why in this example of his ability to put his finger directly on a major theme of a given work of art or thought and the clarity of his language in doing so. I have left unchanged his frequent misspelling of Mrs. Wharton's name, a habit he manifested even when he referred to her in his letters to Henry James. Seeing the mutilated name gives the reader an impression of Bourget's lack of concern for such pedantries and his intense concentration on ideas, a tendency which ended by ruining many of his most ambitious novels, but which made his critical pieces, such as this one, memorable. This preface is but one of fifty he wrote for other writers, for he had a talent for generalizing his impressions.*

*The memorial essay Mrs. Wharton wrote on Paul Bourget a few months after he died and published in a French journal for French readers is important for all interested in her and her work for three reasons.² The first is that here she amplifies and somewhat corrects the analysis Bourget had made in his preface to *Chez les heureux du monde*, written almost 30 years before, of the American society she sprang from and which she writes about in *The House of Mirth*. Her review of the changes in the small group that ruled New York society during her girlhood are nowhere else explained so clearly. The second reason is that she separates the earlier Bourget from the later Bourget whom Henry James could no longer know because of Bourget's nationalist, even totalitarian ideas and because of the changes in his personality — really not so much changes as intensifications of earlier manifestations. In Wharton's account, the Bourget she knew, who was the friend of the family and her travelling companion of the early years of the century, is here vividly sketched. The third reason shows itself quite clearly in the impatience Mrs. Wharton displayed in recounting certain anecdotes in which her own habits of travelling and sightseeing are interfered with by a person of equally stubborn and difficult temperament. Edith Wharton was acknowledged to be, as her friend Henry James had written to a young friend, "difficult" and here her difficulty comes through in her description of Bourget's resistance to some of her travel suggestions for him. Brilliant and stimulating as she was, one can see from her report of Bourget's failure to follow her travel advice that one would not be able to keep up with her. She also seems to have had the same kinds of difficulties with Berenson when travelling with him. James was a more passive kind of personality and more inclined to give in, although at one time in making the rounds with Mrs. Wharton at her rapid pace, he did suffer a mild heart attack.*

In connection with the current interest in Mrs. Wharton's alleged anti-Semitism, her comments on the Dreyfus case and her personal identification with the Dreyfusards is here clearly expressed, although her attempt to soften the well-known anti-Dreyfusard position Bourget took seems somewhat belabored.

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1. Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, p. 1.

2. Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*, p. 1.

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Wharton's work, especially the novels, is a constantly changing America, fragmenting then restructuring, a progressive process that particularly informs the largely neglected novels of the 1920's. In seven chapters, Goodwyn explores Wharton's landscapes of Italy, pre and post war France, New York, New England, and of novels like *The Glimpses of the Moon* that contain several geographical settings. A typical approach expands the analogy into the attitude and behavior of the characters, as in this excerpt from her reading of *The Mother's Recompense*:

Kate Clephane has simply attempted to exercise her right to the old American way of escape, absconding from personal responsibility into a wilderness, which is, in this case, social and moral rather than of the physical environment.

Among the special pleasures of Goodwyn's book are her insights into *The Valley of Decision* and *A Backward Glance*. Writing *The Valley of Decision*, according to Goodwyn's analysis, reflected Wharton's "desire to act as a cross-cultural mediator," and empowered her "to formulate a coherent idea of her own situation as an artist, and particularly as a woman artist, in turn-of-the-century America." Using landscape, she was "grafting herself onto what she saw as a literary 'genealogical tree of the arts.'"

At the same time, Wharton's refuge in extensive reading and research provided a scholarly defense against artistic criticism. As R.W.B. Lewis records in his biography, "Edith did a prodigious amount of authentic scholarly research [for *The Valley of Decision*]. She made lists of books to consult — histories, reminiscences, dictionaries, travel writing; she made notes . . ." Ironically, that protective effort failed to refrain Henry James from his famous advice that Wharton tether herself to her New York backyard. Specific details of those histories, reminiscences, of her research with Vernon Lee for *Italian Villas and their Gardens*, and of her explorations into the backgrounds of Italian art history with Bernard Berenson have so far not been studied.

It should also be mentioned that Wharton's investigations did not stop with her Italian writings, but can be traced through most of her work. Her detailed research into the history of old New York for the *Age of Innocence* is a case in point, yet surely by 1921 her confidence in her literary and geographical identity, in her "place" in the land of

letters, had increased sufficiently that her need for scholarly protection against criticism must have been considerably diminished.

Therefore, an especially interesting aspect of the geographical metaphor ultimately becomes the "landscape of identity" — a particularly American topic. Wharton's psychological landscape of autobiography, "the terrain of the artist," is a topic addressed in a different way by Penelope Vita-Finzi in *Edith Wharton and the Art of Fiction*, London: Pinter, 1990 (reviewed by Susan Goodman in the *Edith Wharton Review*, Winter, 1990). Both Vita-Finzi and Goodwyn detail inexplicable omissions and inconsistencies of fact in *A Backward Glance*, "the sanitized, official version of her life," in which Wharton records her difficulty in attaining citizenship in this "land of letters." Why, for instance, did she claim that "until 1918 I never kept even the briefest of diaries," when she had not only begun "Life and I," and autobiographical fiction, but kept diaries for 1905, 1906, 1908, not to mention the "Love Diary"? Did she discontinue her usual research, relying on a memory that proved faulty? Was it embarrassment about her divorce alone that caused her to omit virtually any mention of Teddy Wharton, or were there other factors? These questions and many like them deserve further investigation, especially because if some details of *A Backward Glance* are untrustworthy, so also might be some of Wharton's purported attitude about becoming a citizen in the land of letters. That would not negate the metaphor at the basis of Goodwyn's work, but it could alter it.

Janet Goodwyn's analogy is large, and one which Edith Wharton's authorship deserves. Yet the requirements of publishing undoubtedly restricted the length and impeded the depth with which Goodwyn could examine Wharton's Land of Letters to say nothing of her "landscape of identity." However, she has provided a creative map for other scholars who might well wish to consider Goodwyn's concept as a new "place from which to judge the possible." For them, works of related interest, besides those listed in Goodwyn's bibliography, may include Mary Suzanne Schriber's "Edith Wharton and Travel Writing as Self-Discovery" *American Literature* 59.2 (May 1987): 257-267; Ruth Maria Whaley's *Landscape in the Writing of Edith Wharton*, Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard, 1982; and Judith Fryer's *Felicitous Space*, Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P, 1986.

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