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1996 ALA CONFERENCE IS PLANNED

The American Literature Society will meet May 30 - June 7, 1996 in San Diego at the Bahia Beach Resort on Mission Beach (619-488-0551). Rates are \$77 single and \$82 double. The Edith Wharton Society will present two sessions: "Tropes of Illness in Wharton's Fiction" moderated by Sandra Hayes and "Images of Older Women in Wharton" organized by Margaret Murray. (Panelists have been selected.)

Reservations (by phone to hotel) are suggested. For further information write Alfred Bendixen, Department of English, California State University, Los Angeles, CA. 90032

CALL FOR PAPERS FOR MLA

The 102nd Annual Convention of the MLA will take place in Washington, D.C. December 27-30, 1996. The Edith Wharton Society will hold two sessions and a call for papers is issued below.

"Edith Wharton and Taboo"

Submit brief bio plus detailed 3-page abstract or 10-page paper by March 1st. Include SASE for response. Send to: Dr. Barbara Comins, 20 West 84th Street, Apt. #7B, New York, NY 10024-4792.

"Edith Wharton and Race"

Send 2-3 page proposals or abstracts by March 1st to: Professor Augusta Rohrbach, 29 North Pleasant Street, Apt. #2, Oberlin, OH 44074.

French Theory and Wharton's Ghosts through Italian Eyes

I fantasmi de Edith Wharton

by Gianfrance Balestra
158 pp. + appendix, Rome
Bulzoni, 1993

by Carole M. Shaffer-Koros

Edith Wharton aficionados who are lucky enough to read Italian will discover a rich critical treasure in this untranslated book. Gianfranca Balestra, professor at the Catholic University of Milan and author of *I fantasmi di Edith Wharton (The Ghosts of Edith Wharton)*, has produced a well-researched volume extending her interest in nineteenth-century literature of the fantastic. In her introduction, Balestra briefly reviews critical works focusing on Wharton's ghost stories and aligns her with other realist authors working with the fantastic such as James, Howells and Twain, pointing out the intimate relationship of the fantastic with realism.

As Balestra notes, the large number of short stories produced by Edith Wharton and the brevity of the form enable the critic to study at close hand her careful and constant attention to technique and stylistics, particularly in the ghost stories. In her chapter "*Il discorso fantastico*," Balestra draws on both American and European literary criticism, indicating the contrast between the older school which privileges the elements of the supernatural, terror and the ghost, whole more recent Anglophone criticism, influenced by French structuralism and post-structuralism, highlights "rhetoric, the impossible, the unreal, the fantastic and *fantasy*" (19).

Balestra calls attention to the importance of Sigmund Freud's *The Uncanny* as a "theoretical introduction to a psychoanalytical reading of the fantastic," and, viewing the ghost story as a potentially subversive and liminal area between the real and the unreal, purposes to examine the discourse of Edith Wharton's ghost stories from a structural and semantic point of view. The approach is a sound one, for the liminal is suggested by Wharton's own proffered titles for her collection (later named *Ghosts*) as *On the Verge* and *Over the Brink*.

Readers are reminded that according to Wharton's autobiographical writings, from childhood she attributed magical qualities to the written word and insisted on their connection with the supernatural. Balestra bases her critical analysis partly on Wharton's own preface to *Ghosts* and the essay "Telling a Short Story," included in the 1925 volume *The Writing of Fiction*. Wharton observes that the reception of ghost stories by the modern reader was diminished by the radio and the cinema (and for

today's reader she would have added TV and the computer); two necessary conditions -- difficult to find in today's hectic world -- for the ghost to appear are "silence and continuity." As for the writer, Balestra directs our attention to Wharton's unsystematic but important esthetic principles for writing a good ghost story: "Improbability, in itself, then, is never a danger, but the appearance of improbability is" and "Once the preliminary horror posted, it is the harping on the same string--the same nerve--that does the trick" (Wharton 39). Furthermore, Wharton echoes Poe's concern with situation as the main aspect of the short story. In addition, the "thermometric" or visceral effect on the reader is an important quality for the ghost story to succeed.

In examining the "ghostly" canon of Wharton's works, Balestra points out the problematic classification of the stories by theme as proposed by Lewis. Her own definition greatly enlarges the category by including texts in which "erupt the supernatural, the mysterious, the inexplicable, the unforeseen in the midst of the routine" (45).

Wharton's early stories, "The Duchess at Prayer," "The Moving Finger" and "The House of the Dead" are examined together in "The Gothic Revisited." The authors notes that these stories are not only chronologically related as early stories, but they are qualified by Wharton's "personal and modern voice" in their dealing with the mysterious relationships between art, life and death. Balestra sees these stories as semantically unified in their references to repressed sexuality. Emphasizing Wharton's originality, she shows in detail the derivation of each of the stories from notable models, e.g., "The Duchess at Prayer" draws from the gothic aspects of Balzac's *La Grande Breteche*, Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado," and Browning's "My Last Duchess." In the early works Wharton establishes models for central tensions that appear in her later writings: the relationships between man/woman and speech/silence. Balestra's discussion on "The House of the Dead Hand" draws clear parallels between the rhetoric of the unspeakable in the discourse of the father (Lombard) on the impossibility of the deciphering of the work of art and his incestuous relationship with his daughter Sybilla.

The reader is surprised to find ghosts characterized as "economic" in a majority of ghost stories composed between 1902 and 1914, while in "*Il fantasma Narciso*" Balestra skillfully examines the moral implications and the nature of the homoerotic double in "The Eyes" and the terror of the aging protagonist of the lesser known "The Looking Glass."

"*Il fantasma donna*" examines women ghosts in Wharton's late literary production in which the woman seems to "gain speech only after death, in form of a

ghost/vampire/witch" and may be called an "erotic ghost" (115). Among others, "Miss Mary Pask" and "Bewitched" are semantically analyzed as expressions of liberated desire.

The final critical chapter, "Il silenzio e la morte," notes that "the fantastic renders visible that which is culturally invisible, introducing absence at various levels and in various forms" (135). As the aging Edith Wharton appreciated, that final and supreme absence is death itself. Balestra discusses the fantastic "A Bottle of Perrier" and the allegorical "death in life existence" of the old characters of "After Holbein." The greatest attention in this chapter is rightly devoted to "All Souls," whose linguistic construction is dominated by "loss and indecision," and whose first paragraph "underlies the difficulty of verbalizing an inconceivable experience, "queer and inexplicable" (145). As suggested by

Zilversmit, the lonely aging widow finds herself alone on the night on which the dead are remembered and bravely engages the threatening foreign, male voice [that of Hitler?] that she discovers to be merely coming from a radio. "The sexual threat is transformed into a horror of absence" (148); Balestra notes that this final short story written by Wharton is pervaded by solitude and death.

The Appendix consists of an inedited ghost story by Edith Wharton, "Exorcism," discussed briefly in the chapter of "The Gothic Revisited."

Wharton scholars are grateful to Gianfranca Balestra for her careful research, her brilliant analysis of a number of ghostly stories and her intelligent grouping by esthetic principles that extend the category of "ghost stories." We look forward to her further contributions to Wharton studies.

Kean College



Wharton *Engagée*: Bold New Premises

Edith Wharton's Brave New Politics

by Dale Bauer

Madison, Wisconsin

University of Wisconsin Press, 1995, \$17.95 (Paperback)

by Meredith Goldsmith

Recent biographers of Edith Wharton have deemed her late politics anything but "brave" or "new." Similarly, Wharton's late fictions have frequently been charged with antimodernism, racism, and an unawareness of contemporary American life. In *Edith Wharton's Brave New Politics*, Dale M. Bauer breaks with the dominant reading of Wharton's late works. Judging Wharton's late output in the same terms as her early work, as her book implicitly argues, is to ignore the imbrication of any author with her culture. Even more importantly, Bauer's decision to read Wharton's late fictions with minimal reference to her earlier ones subtly dismantles a form of prejudice that is rarely discussed in literary studies: ageism. Rarely do we question our association of Wharton's supposed apolitical stance in the 1920s and after with her advancing age. Critics of Wharton's late work have compounded the problem by reading late novels as mere recyclings of her early ones. As the late careers of not only Wharton and Virginia Woolf, but also of such contemporary writers as May Sarton and Diana Trilling make clear, ageist bias is particularly pernicious for women. As Carolyn Heilbrun has suggested, women writers' careers often do not flourish until the demands of family and non-literary work

are past. Women writers often require what Heilbrun calls "the colder determination of middle age" (118) to become the writers they are capable of being.

Edith Wharton's Brave New Politics amply reflects the scope of what Heilbrun might see as the "cold determination" of Wharton's later years. Bauer argues that Wharton's late fictions represent a sustained engagement with the radical cultural developments of her day: Taylorism and Fordism, eugenics, Freudian psychoanalysis, mass consumption, advertising, and Fascism, among them. For Bauer, Wharton's late work forms the site of an acute, yet broad social critique, whose difficulty lies in the sheer quantity of material it takes on at once. Bauer demonstrates Wharton's absorption with the critique of post-war American and European culture through a combination of theory and close textual analysis. She brings to bear on the texts what she calls "cultural dialogics," reading the contemporary references Wharton uses to texture her late work against the actual historical events they reflect; in so doing, Bauer calls upon Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the novel (also a topic of her first book, *Feminist Dialogics* [1988]) as a conversation with its contemporary social reality. Bauer argues that the wildly varying cultural contexts of Wharton's later texts do not reflect a loss of control and an inability to adjust to the pressures of modernity. Rather, they exhibit an understanding of both the contemporary world and the novel form as radical heteroglossias encompassing a multitude of diverse voices.

The book takes on the majority of Wharton's late novels (with the exception of the war novels *A Son at the Front* [1919] and *The Marne* [1923]) from *Summer* (1917)

to *The Buccaneers* (1938). Given what Bauer describes as the ambivalence of the late novels and the broad assortment of cultural material that each text engages, she has chosen to focus each chapter on one or two novels. Chapters One and Two take up *Summer* and *The Mother's Recompense* (1925), respectively; both chapters deal with Wharton's sensitivity to the interpenetration of racial purity and motherhood in early twentieth-century America, exemplified in eugenics policies. Chapter Three explores Wharton's explicit theorization of modern motherhood in *The Children* (1928) and *Twilight Sleep* (1927). The Vance Weston novels, read against contemporary contexts of advertising, evangelism, and the companionate marriage debates, form the subject of Chapter Four, while a reading of "Roman Fever," which recapitulates Bauer's reading of Wharton's articulation of race purity, motherhood, and origins occupies Chapter Five. The final chapter documents Wharton's ambivalence toward racial and cultural amalgamation in *The Age of Innocence* (1921) and *The Buccaneers*.

Bauer's analysis of Wharton's shifting attitudes toward the racist and racial discourses of her era constitutes one of the book's major strengths. Bauer reads *Summer* as evidence of Wharton's understanding of the political ramifications of the regulation of sexuality: the mountain community from which Charity Royall originates "by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century standards, would have been considered dysgenic" (29). Bauer does not neglect the fact that the novel's sole character of color, "the bushy-headed mulatto girl" working in the doctor's office, associates racial difference and foreignness with sexual transgression. Bauer's analysis brings eugenics to the center stage in both *Twilight Sleep* (1927) and *The Children* (1928). *Twilight Sleep* emerges as a critique of the mechanization of childbirth: encouraging women to avoid pain by taking "twilight sleep" drugs turns having babies into a form of mass production. As eugenicists and nativists claimed that fear of pain caused elite women to eschew childbirth, anesthetized reproduction aided in "positive eugenics." Throughout this section, Bauer grounds her analysis in feminist histories of childbirth and Wharton's unpublished letters commenting on eugenicist speakers and theories. While Bauer freely admits that *Twilight Sleep* is a difficult text because of the sheer amount of "cultural work" it does (96), this chapter should refocus critical attention on that novel. Bauer's argument makes this an ideal time to campaign for a new printing of *Twilight Sleep*.

Although Bauer theorizes Wharton's use of racial discourse, she does not apologize for her virulent racism and anti-Semitism. However, she emphasizes the existence of a "racial unconscious" in Wharton's work that militates against the bigoted attitudes she personally expressed. In her reading of *The Mother's Recompense*, for example, Bauer notes that Wharton does not realize the racial implications of making Phemia, an African-American maid, the only character who realizes the incestuous

implications of Kate and Anne Clephane's romance with the same man. Wharton displays a similar, perhaps forced, disregard for making the "nigger minstrel" the figure cultural amalgamation for the American girls who "invade" English society in *The Buccaneers*. Such references are usually regarded as either evidence of Wharton's racism or as throwaway lines -- as Kenneth Warren argues of racial metaphors in James in his *Black and White Strangers: Race and American Literary Realism* (1993), such images work as signifiers of the Americanness of the American novel. Bauer reads them as evidence of Wharton's awareness of the instability of racial or social hierarchies, reminding us again of the historical context of Wharton's late work: for example, as she watched Italian Fascists endeavor to fabricate a society based on racial and genealogical purity, Wharton creates in "Roman Fever" a character whose very existence transforms such purities into fictions.

Bauer also reframes Wharton as a popular author of the mid-1920s by positioning her work against middle-brow writers of the period, Carl Van Vechten, Gertrude Atherton, and Anita Loos, among them. Reading Wharton in this context is a useful move, for analyzing Wharton against the "make it new" bias of high modernism inevitably finds her work failing. Wharton's social criticism becomes more apparent when read against writers consciously appealing to, and constructing, a mass audience. As Bauer argues, for example, despite Wharton's hatred of Van Vechten and of the infamous *Nigger Heaven* (1926) in particular, the two authors shared similar desires to reconcile propagandistic and aesthetic demands, with similarly flawed results. By bringing these authors together, Bauer makes clear that each author protests too much in his or her professed hatred of the other; it becomes obvious what Van Vechten owes to Wharton, despite his negative reviews and the self-conscious disavowal of her work he pens in *Nigger Heaven*. Even more importantly, Bauer allows us to consider what Wharton owes Van Vechten and other writers of his caliber, both in her ambivalent relation to propaganda and in her unconscious appropriation of Van Vechten's essentialism.

A clear writing style enhances the wealth of historical information Bauer offers; her writing echoes Wharton's admirably in its wit and accessibility. Any academic book with a Cole Porter epigraph promises the reader a good time, and Bauer does not disappoint; more surprising, however, is Bauer's effort to incorporate the epigraph in the book's closure. The Cole Porter quote is an excerpt from "Love Me, Love My Pekinese"; Bauer closes the book with a wholly original reading of Wharton's bond with her Pekinese, Linky. Bauer argues that Wharton's lifelong fictional negotiation of self-other boundaries is exemplified in her loving relationship with Linky. As pets play liminal roles in family arrangements -- a little more than kin and less than kind, perhaps -- they allow their owners to experiment with the incest taboo, the same taboo

Wharton explored so fruitfully in her fiction. Bauer's reading of Wharton's exploration of human-canine boundaries typifies the sense of daring that characterizes this book, yet it is still grounded in theory and a thorough understanding of Wharton's work.

While Bauer is highly theoretically informed, the text uses relatively little jargon; it should not deter readers from other fields or advanced undergraduates. Finally, Bauer's belief in dialogism permeates her own writing; on my first reading, what seemed an excessive use of quotation surprised me. I then realized that my own assumptions about what constitutes authorial voice had come into question, for Bauer maintains the course of her own argument while allowing other voices to have their say. She enacts a critical dialogue within the boundaries of her own text. Dale Bauer's work represents an important new direction in Wharton scholarship, although those readers with an unwavering belief in the aesthetic failings of the late Wharton may remain unconvinced. To write a book about ambivalence, and yet maintain a coherent narrative, is a daunting prospect; to resist the temptation to overnarrativize the work of a single author is another. Dale Bauer has accomplished both. *Edith Wharton's Brave New Politics* should have a significant impact on Wharton

studies for many years to come.

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Columbia University

An Interview with Dale Bauer

by Meredith Goldsmith

MG: *Could you tell me why you decided to focus on the late Wharton?*

DB: Sure. I had written a chapter on *The House of Mirth* in my first book, *Feminist Dialogics*, and I really didn't think the politics of what Wharton was doing had been covered in other works, even in my own. So I was really interested in Wharton's political views, and wrote a grant to the Beinecke to read through her papers. In the Beinecke letters, I found many, many references to political events that were not published or part of the biographies that I had read, so she had a lot of political views that seemed to be glossed over. They seemed to come up in her later letters, certainly after her work during World War I. And so I just started pursuing some of those references. At the time, I didn't know much about eugenics and was intrigued by her references to the eugenics movement and found papers and letters people had written to her asking her to endorse eugenics. I think the first letter I found was an anti-eugenics letter in which she likened it to the Inquisition. And that led me to believe that she was positioned differently, that people assumed she was much more reactionary than she actually was. The private letters often showed a much more sympathetic side than I had seen before. And so I went about pursuing more of those political comments, questions, and tried to read the novels in those lights.

MG: *Since the criticism of the late Wharton is so negative, were you trying to defend or reclaim? Did you have those kind of impulses?*

DB: Oh, definitely. Whether they were legitimate or not, I certainly did feel as though there were ways in which a whole period of her life had been dismissed; for me, given the new impulse in American Studies toward the popular, toward the noncanonical, I also wanted to see how much her novels resonated with other popular novels of the time, which has led me to my recent project, to contextualize Wharton in a

group of other writers. And, so yes, I did feel that she had been unfairly dismissed, and that some of her later novels were definitely my favorites. They were popular novels. After *Summer*, after *The Age of Innocence*, *Twilight Sleep* is really a wonderful and funny book, and ironic, and I really wanted to resuscitate critical interest in it. And I really think it's partially because she's engaging with more popular issues, and dated ones as well that makes her more contemporary, but also, quite engaged with the public debates of the time. And I was really much interested in the public debates she engaged in than I was in the kind of sentimental versus realist earlier novels that she wrote, like *The House of Mirth*.

MG: *You don't raise the question of aesthetics, and I think that you use the question of identification as a way around that. Were aesthetics an issue for you as you came to write this book, the way that Wharton's late novels have been characterized as so disorganized, out of control?*

DB: "Chaotic," "melodramatic," what other terms were used? Oh, "sappy!" I guess I didn't feel as though I needed to defend her aesthetically, that in one sense I was less interested in the question of her aesthetics and, after Jane Tompkins, "Is it any good?," and more interested in trying to think of what she was trying to do with those novels. So for me the aesthetic question kind of dropped out for the more ideological question -- I think she had a different purpose at the time. And rather than saying that she lost control over her mastery of aesthetics, that discourse of mastery belongs to a late nineteenth-century Jamesian notion, and she started to adopt, well, what I call a "cultural dialogics," a sense in which her novels were engaged with the time, and not with the Master. I see this as a move into the twentieth century that actually preoccupied her more than it preoccupied me. Her sense of aesthetic changes as well in the Twenties and Thirties. What she saw as aesthetically pleasing, despite some of her comments about writing, was really an engagement with the issues of her culture. The question of aesthetics, whether I intentionally dodge it or just think it's not so much a question for her as it had been, given her success, wasn't really an issue. You're right -- I hadn't thought about it that way, but I use this idea of identification, psychology, the invention of the notion of depth, what I refer to in the book as the "inner life," as her engagement with the popular of the time. So pop psychology, self-help, movements toward developing the "inner life" become more crucial issues than the realist aesthetics she had inherited from James, among others.

MG: *The first time I read your book I was reading it in tandem with Ross Posnock's book [The Trial of Curiosity: Henry James, William James, and the Challenge of Modernity], and it made me think a lot about lateness, and about ageism, in general. We're taught to think of the late phase as a mature realization of all that's been germinating throughout a career. One of the nice things about your historical focus is that it debunks the idea of a late phase as this kind of fruition.*

DB: Well, I think that's more your brilliance than mine! But I think in some ways that's really true. There's the notion that somebody becomes more conservative with age, and that certainly just weren't true for Edith Wharton. Her ideas changed a great deal. I almost see her earlier work as much more involved in the racism of its day than the later works, in which she has to confront, especially in Europe, Mussolini, Fascism, and the kinds of authoritarian limitations that she finds personally troubling, but also culturally troubling. So in one sense, her later work isn't a culmination of a career, it's in some ways a repudiation of an earlier stance. I do like that sense of debunking the notion of progress, of moving toward an ideal self or an ideal aesthetic or political position that is much more fluid over time. Certainly it was true for me in discovering the trajectory of her career . . . As for Posnock, his book was influential for me when I was thinking about how to talk about . . . the anti-Semitism and her racism that does continue as a deflection of her own cultural anxieties. The work I'm doing now is to revisit *The House of Mirth* and to look at the way in which Wharton is disidentifying with Lily Bart as "the woman who does," the woman who's sexually active, or who seems to be sexually active. And deflecting that onto the avidity of the Jew, the sexual and appetitive gregariousness of the Jew, is her way of dealing with this woman she feels, whom she creates, with whom she's hopelessly ambivalent. So I'm trying to talk about Jewishness in the same way, that it's really just a projection, as it is for Posnock, of James's own ambivalence about race. Ken Warren [in *Black and White Strangers: Race and American Literary Realism*] does this too; I've been reading them in tandem . . .

A forming moment in my work on Wharton was going to the Beinecke and seeing what she had crossed out in the handwritten manuscripts, in *The House of Mirth* especially. I looked at all her comments about Jews and some things about Lily's sexuality, and they changed quite a bit. The first

handwritten version was much more anti-Semitic, and much less ambivalent than the final version. So that kind of textual work was also very valuable in my thinking about how she was trying to change her politics in the course of writing these late novels. Whether that influence was just her own or whether her sister-in-law helped in editing it.

MG: *Can you speak a little bit about your next project?*

DB: I'm working on a project called "Sex Expression and American Women," to talk about how the new social sciences of the time, starting with ethnology in the 1860s and 1870s, the science of what was in the blood and how that was transmitted, gives way to the new discourses of sociology, urban psychology, psychiatry, and that these whole new discourses resonate with the sexologists, particularly in Europe, but also those imported in the US, in the ways in which "sex" was being codified in its relationship to the state and the "healthy citizen." So I've been trying to put Wharton in a greater context of writers like Kathleen Norris and Gertrude Atherton, Gilman, among others, and to sort of chart the move from the Christian reformers of the 1860s and 1870s, people like Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, through Pauline Hopkins's work, and then into the Twenties and Thirties, to show how "sex expression" really revitalized a lot of these women authors. If I were going to do *Brave New Politics* over again, I think I would spend more time on the general 1920s movement for women to speak about sexual gratification. In lots of ways where Wharton's ambivalence in *The House of Mirth* is part and parcel of the time of writing this, by the Twenties, more and more people were writing about "sex expression," and allowing Wharton a greater range of freedom. And so many of her readers, I assume, were surprised by her discussion of sexuality, and wanted a more traditional novelist than she was willing to be at the time.

MG: *What you're talking about now, and throughout the book, are a politics of intimacy, and I think Wharton understood that on a very deep level, even when she puts dogs ahead of people . . .*

DB: I'm glad you picked up on the phrase "the politics of intimacy," because, if nothing else, that's really what I was trying to get at. It's a time in the culture when psychology is becoming a disputed territory: does it belong to the experts, the sexologists, the psychologists, or does it belong in popular culture? The advent of the self-help books. What I was trying to do was to talk about how much the politics of intimacy, of relationship, whatever kind of relationships, were politicized in many ways for the first time, and became a matter of public debate and discussion. So it was really my sense of this crisis of masculinity and of femininity being worked out in all kinds of relationships. I really like that phrase quite a bit.

MG: *I want to ask you about motherhood, since so much of your book is about reproductive rights. Has your experience deciding to have a family inflected your readings of Wharton, or has Wharton affected your feelings about your impending motherhood? [Two days after this interview was conducted, Bauer gave birth to twin boys. -- MG]*

DB: I finished the book, the book came out -- you can say this -- two weeks before I got pregnant with these twins, so I didn't even know! I think the most telling moment came when I was doing the copy editing of the *Summer* chapter. And it was only by the end of having written about it that I realized how much I was defending abortion, and a woman's right to choose, in writing that chapter. I think I was trying to fend off some of the discussion and the opposition between Cynthia Griffin-Wolff and Elizabeth Ammons on the novel, the one arguing for it as a *Bildungsroman*, and the other arguing for it as the sickest of Wharton's novels. I think I was trying to intervene in that discussion, but also trying to intervene in Candace Waid's most recent reading, which was very persuasive, and very exciting, but I didn't realize how much I was injecting my own sense that I wanted Wharton to be presenting that option not just as a failed option, as a tragedy, but as a possibility for a woman. It's probably the chapter that I think about the most often, whether or not I was clear about my own objectives, in wanting that to be an option for Wharton. And also questioning, having taught the book this last semester, whether or not Wharton was secretly advocating abortion, and whether there was more sympathy about it. Certainly in the move from handwritten manuscript to finished there are more sympathetic movements to a woman in Charity's position. On the other hand, I'm just still struggling with that book, quite a bit. So yeah, I guess I've really been thinking about the politics of abortion in terms of Edith Wharton . . .

I certainly was drawn to Wharton because of her struggles with motherhood and reproductive

politics and eugenics and legitimacy in a political context. Has it made me rethink my own situation? Yes, I'm certainly hoping there's something like "twilight sleep" tomorrow.

MG: *I was wondering about that.*

DB: I find myself talking about scopolamine a lot more than I ever thought I would. Morphine is less interesting than the scopolamine, the gutting of pain. So yes, I imagine it does.

MG: *I wanted to ask you about your style, about yourself as a writer . . . Your style seems to have changed between the two books. Has your sense of authority changed in this move from first book to second book?*

DB: I really thought that this book for me was a movement out of theory to a hybrid from theory and history. It was more of a labor of love to do this book. I was trying to engage an American Studies audience, and yet not to lose my great faith in theoretical models. But I don't think I could have written this book without doing *Feminist Dialogics*, and looking at rhetorical theory and Bakhtinian criticism and ideological criticism, and then approach this more historical text. . . . For me, now these two first books have really led me to want to tackle a comprehensive study of the period. I had to throw myself into historical documents, sociological documents, for this book in ways that I didn't do in *Feminist Dialogics*, in which I was mostly working with theory and the texts . . . What I tried to do was remove myself from the language of Bakhtin, and to show it works culturally. My goal was to say, OK, if Wharton's aesthetic position is changing, if her ideological position is changing, what is she orchestrating here? What kind of different cultural voices does she include, in order to show how they're always in battle? . . . She seemed to be taking the clash over gender, over class, not so much over race, and sort of enacting those in her novels.

I couldn't have written this Wharton book and done the kind of historical work without having done the theoretically informed Bakhtinian work first . . . Because of the topic, because the topic struck me as out of the range of Wharton criticism, to get people to try to take the last 20 years of her life much more seriously, that I thought that was the more authoritative move. The second thing to do was to show what she was trying to do by pulling in all these other voices. In the first book I was more concerned with showing my own sense of how I was reading Bakhtin and how I was reading feminist criticism, but the topic and the novels I chose to include were much more canonical. You don't have to worry about whether people will be interested in these particular novels for any reason. I was bringing a sense of my own authority to those, with a new way of reading Bakhtin . . . I think in my next project I'm going to try to do both. To say: "this is a topic that's nobody's looked at, 'Sex Expression,' as not a way that people have looked at sociology and literature together" and then say, "here's also my voice and here's how I'm reading them." That's a great question. It leads me to think about Jameson, and the sense of one's form as always conditioned by one's content. You're right to point that out, that I had to be very aware that these were not novels that most people wanted to look at.

What I've been excited about was this great surge in Wharton criticism. I just got Carol Singley's book and Nancy Bentley's; we're all dealing with very similar issues, how to invest new life in Wharton criticism. I wanted this book to be more suggestive than definitive; I wanted to show the range of cultural references. This is what I like about Nancy Bentley's book -- she's trying to show another context. It's not the only context. There are other ways in which to position Wharton so as not to repeat the critical commonplaces. We all fear our favorite authors are getting pigeonholed . . . [for example] I think there's an interesting book that's yet to be written about women writers and Freud. Anita Loos, Gertrude Atherton, Wharton -- they're all invoking Freud and they're all fairly anti-Freudian. . . . That's another context I'd like to see someone deal with Wharton -- Wharton's relationship to Freud . . .

MG: *Thank you for doing this.*

DB: Thank you! It'll be a great delight for me to see this in print and to read it to the boys. The Hutner boys will be much impressed by their mother's interview the day before they entered the world.

Class, Race, and Theory in Wharton

The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton

edited by Millicent Bell
Cambridge, New York
Cambridge University Press, 1995

by Julie Olin-Ammentorp

The Cambridge Companion to Wharton will greatly interest Wharton scholars and general readers alike. In an excellent introductory essay, Millicent Bell provides a summary and overview of Wharton criticism since Wharton's own day, while also pointing readers in the direction of the future of Wharton criticism. In the introduction Bell writes that "The time seems to have come around to reconsider [Wharton's] writing in whole and in part, restudying problems of intrinsic content and literary form, and to evaluate her artistic success or failure. Biographical interpretation of her fiction may have done its work" (15). Later, she remarks that "Critical study of Wharton seems, at last, to have become more rich" (16). To a large extent, this is a good description of the book Bell has edited: a varied and often rich collection of essays on Wharton's work.

The three strongest pieces in this collection are the first three: Pamela Knights's "The Social Subject in *The Age of Innocence*," Nancy Bentley's "Edith Wharton and the Science of Manners," and Elizabeth Ammons' "Edith Wharton and Race." All three of these essays approach Wharton on a cultural studies model, looking at the issues of class, race, and social change as they appear in both conspicuous and minor ways in Wharton's work. Knights is particularly interesting in challenging the dominant critical view of Newland Archer as the quasi-innocent victim of the society that shapes and ultimately limits him. Rather, she argues, Archer is dependent on these very constraints for his being:

Though acknowledging social formation, [Archer] still assumes that somewhere a "real" self survives. The suggestion of the unfolding narrative is, more radically, that without the shape, the social mold, there may be no self at all. (21).

In fact, Knights argues that when Archer "is confronted with a challenge to his categories he begins to come apart," citing several passages in the work which support this claim convincingly (36). Further, Knights argues Newland's fundamental conservatism persuasively, pointing out that not only is Newland a member of a conservative law firm, but his very reading represents some of the most conservative thought of his day (22). On

this and other matters Knights is a subtle reader of Wharton's text. The result in a rich, complex, and challenging reading of the novel.

Nancy Bentley's essay works along similar lines, arguing that "Wharton's fiction delineates the broadest questions of culture addressed in early anthropology" (48) and suggesting Marcel Mauss's term "science of manners" as a more accurate description of Wharton's work than the usual phrase "novel of manners." In an era in which Wharton's political stances have been much debated, Bentley states a relatively neutral and possibly quite accurate view of Wharton's politics:

Wharton's fiction is neither culturally subversive nor apologist; rather it effects a new representation of the sphere of culture itself in order to articulate, circulate, and finally acculturate the shocks of the modern. (50)

Like Knights, Bentley picks up on important but often-overlooked hints of socio-economic upheaval in the political background of Wharton's novels -- for example, Newland Archer's thoughts of "bosses and immigrants" in New York City (52). While some may feel that Bentley occasionally puts the cart before the horse (she writes, for example, that in *Age Wharton* "uses a love story to generate a drama of cultural consciousness" [55]), Bentley is frequently persuasive in her readings of Wharton as ethnographer.

Elizabeth Ammons' article is bound to generate both discussion and scholarship. Wharton herself drew lines between French and German, Anglo-Saxon and Latin as different races in *French Ways and Their Meaning* -- not to mention the lines she drew between Jewish and Christian, black and white, civilized and barbarian, Oriental and Occidental in other works. Yet these distinctions in Wharton's work have been little discussed, perhaps largely because so many Wharton scholars admire her work so intensely that they feel a certain reluctance to fault Wharton on her view of race -- particularly as our views and understanding of race have changed so much as the twentieth century has unfolded. Nevertheless it is time for this work to be done, as Ammons argues: "we must refuse to continue to approach her work as if race were not an operative category in it" (68).

Ammons first turns to the letters for convincing illustrations of her claim that Wharton "agreed with the standard, white, racist generalizations and stereotypes of her day" (68). Not all of Ammons' argument is equally persuasive -- for instance, it is hard to accept "the exile of a dark, 'exotic' Ellen Olenska . . . [as] a coded racial story about forbidden white male sexual desire during Reconstruction" (71). Nor is she fully convincing that the two African-American cooks Wharton describes in *A*

Backward Glance "disappear into devourable food physically . . . and metaphorically" (76). Nevertheless her following point is valid: that the labor of such women enables the leisure and grace -- the decorative, the kind-voiced, sweatless superiority -- of the text's Anglo-Saxon elite. The black women's presence makes possible Wharton's rosy, white-whiskered gentlemen relaxing around her father's table in the company of their sloping-shouldered, flowerlike, white, female complements. (77)

As Ammons' argument suggests, it is easy in studying or teaching Wharton to get caught up in the Newland Archers and even the Lily Barts, to forget the cohorts of underpaid workers who support their leisure. Yet Wharton herself occasionally draws attention to these characters, in terms of class if not in terms of race. Selden, for instance, observes that "a great many dull and ugly people must, in some mysterious way, have been sacrificed to produce" Lily Bart. Perhaps this will be the greatest challenge for those who follow Ammons' charge to "recogniz[e] race as a subject in Edith Wharton's work" (83): noting the ways in which Wharton *does* make some allowance for the differences of class and race.

Though the first three essays are perhaps the most striking, others in the collection are also fine. Maureen Howard's "*The House of Mirth: The Bachelor and the Baby*" contains several observations which are hardly new (for example: "Selden, believing that he now sees 'the real Lily Bart,' buys the illusion of the tableau vivant" [151]). Nevertheless this essay, coming from the hand of a novelist, expresses freshly a fine appreciation for Wharton's best-known and most-discussed novel: *The House of Mirth*, she writes, "occupied the familiar territory of custom and constraint that amused and angered Wharton" (137). Howard also displays a fine - perhaps Whartonian -- sense of irony, noting that an early Wharton sonnet appeared originally in *Scribner's* along with an article on Working Girls Clubs "where improving talks are given -- 'Should women be allowed to vote?' 'How to tell a real lady'" (149). Most interestingly, Howard takes on *The House of Mirth* at the level of genre, arguing that in this novel Wharton "denies the assumptions of genre twice," playing with and then abandoning both the novel of manners and the naturalistic novel (142).

Serious attention to genre also appears in James Tuttleton's "*The Fruit of the Tree: Justine and the Perils of Abstract Idealism.*" Despite Tuttleton's insistence on attacking feminist readings of this novel (164), this essay is an interesting consideration of this much-neglected novel. Tuttleton in fact has the courage *not* to claim that *Fruit of the Tree* is really a neglected masterpiece. Instead he examines why the novel does, in fact, fail aesthetically: Wharton "fail[ed] to see her subject steadily and see it whole" (161). What begins as a labor novel, he contends, becomes a novel about euthanasia before falling into a plethora of other issues -- perhaps too many issues for one

novel to handle well. For Tuttleton, any unity of vision comes "under a rubric we might call 'the perils of abstract idealism.' A full reading of this theme would of course disclose how abstract idealism permeates several plot elements and is played out in various characters" (162).

Other essayists sound other notes. Rhonda Skillern uses a Lacanian approach to discuss Charity's experiences both inside and outside the "symbolic order" in *Summer*. At points the essay seems to stretch a bit too far: is Charity's "white hat with the cherry-colored lining" really "the vulval equivalent to the phallic red pickle dish" of *Ethan Frome* (124)? Nevertheless the essay provides insights into Charity's character and actions, and argues persuasively at the close that Charity "has preserved a space within herself that neither Lawyer Royall nor the Law of the Father can invade" (134).

Two other essays focus on Wharton's first novel, *The Valley of Decision*. William Vance's "Edith Wharton's Italian Mask" is fascinating. With his thorough knowledge of Italian history and of literature about Italy, Vance has made a substantial contribution to Wharton scholarship. His basic point is simple: Wharton created herself as a writer through the "Italian mask" of her Odo Valsecca:

Through him she was able to speculate about personal commitments and choices behind the mask of a different time, a different place, a different gender. (169)

Like Tuttleton and Howard, Vance considers the question of genre. While the novel uses elements of melodrama and even of Gothic, Vance notes, it was taken at the time as Italian history. But, Vance argues, it is really "an Italian romance" belonging to the tradition of George Eliot's *Romola* (183). Within this genre Wharton sounds what would become her signature note:

The forces that oppose Odo and Fulvia are not wicked; they are an array of selfish and amoral interests, entrenched conventions, on the outside; and in Odo's case, an ambivalence within. (187)

Such a statement could describe the best of Wharton's work, from *The House of Mirth* through *The Age of Innocence*.

The other essay on *The Valley of Decision* is a recently rediscovered contemporary review of that novel by Vernon Lee (Violet Paget). Lee vouches for the probability and historical accuracy of Wharton's novel (200), even while voicing her fear that the book "will find few capable of appreciating it (though those few will appreciate it as only the few can do)" (201). Lee's perspective and rhetoric are Victorian -- of interest now, perhaps, for their reminder that Wharton's career began at the end of the Victorian age.

At least one essay may disappoint readers. Elaine Showalter's "*The Custom of the Country: Spragg and the Art of the Deal*" may appeal to those who are unfamiliar with the body of criticism on that novel, and its comparison of Elmer Moffatt and Donald Trump has a

certain charm. But beyond some unconvincing quibbling over whether or not Undine really has her father's business sense (an assumption of much criticism on *Custom*), this essay has little new to say.

Readers familiar with Gloria Erlich's *The Sexual Education of Edith Wharton* (1992) may also be somewhat disappointed with her essay in this collection, "The Female Conscience in Edith Wharton's Shorter Fiction: Domestic Angel or Inner Demon?" It is, as Erlich acknowledges, "condensed" from her book --thus not a new contribution to Wharton scholarship. At the same time, however, the essay is coherent and well-argued, focusing on a number of Wharton texts: "Afterward," "Bewitched," *The Touchstone*, and *Sanctuary*. Not surprisingly, Erlich finds her thesis in the gaps in the texts. For example, in her reading of "Afterward" the husband disappears not so much because of his own financial misdealings as because of his wife's sexual ignorance:

... the ghost that appears "afterward," or belatedly, can be seen as the return of what

Mary had repressed, some knowledge deemed unsuitable for young ladies. Here, as elsewhere in Wharton's fiction, economic ignorance can serve as metaphor for sexual ignorance. (104)

Some may find this reading entirely convincing; others may find it rather oddly places the blame for Ned Boyne's misdeeds on Mary's shoulders, and translates "economic ignorance" into "sexual ignorance" rather too easily. Nevertheless, Erlich's focus on the tendency of some of Wharton's female characters to become overcommitted to standards of sexual-moral purity is an interesting one -- one that resonates with Tuttleton's discussion of the "perils of abstract idealism."

Indeed, several essays in this collection resonate with others -- a factor that only increases the book's worth. *The Cambridge Companion to Wharton* will be a valuable resource for scholars, teachers, and students of Wharton for many years.

Le Moyne College

(See Interview on page 36)



Tribalism and Its Discontents

The Ethnography of Manners: Hawthorne, James, Wharton

by Nancy Bentley

242 pp. New York

Cambridge University Press, 1995

by Denise Witzig

In a recent collection of essays exploring the borders and bridges between American literary scholarship and the American public, literary critic Michael Bérubé describes a compelling feature of "revisionist" criticism:

...[T]he project of rearticulating American literature to its social and historical contexts, of re-establishing the tie between the field of "American literature" and social life in the United States - this project is simultaneously the result of a politically activist cultural criticism that hopes to intervene in its own social and historical moment, namely ours. (Bérubé 219)

The motive of *intervention* can perhaps be said to represent the aims of any literary critic insofar as desire for articulation and meaning is a correlative to interpretation. But the recent ascent of cultural criticism in English departments and in the popular press across the United States reflects the growing imperative on the part of many critics to use literary discourse as a logistical space

wherein social relations can be investigated and exposed as ideologies in textual combat. Clearly, feminism and multiculturalism, queer theory and new historicism bring to the discursive table a political urgency starkly representative of the realities of academia itself, with shrinking jobs and corporate belt-tightening facing off against both an intellectually conservative backlash and an increasingly diverse student population hungry for representation. In seeking to make literary criticism more inclusive, more mimetic and "meaningful" to contemporary readers, cultural critics also seek greater access to that matrix of discourses - social, historical, philosophical, political - wherein ideas are produced, exchanged and reviewed, creating culture itself. In this discursive realm, which Bérubé calls "a crucial site . . . where political and cultural dissensus and consensus are forged and re-formed" (218), reading and interpretation become activist and participatory, in the process revealing literary texts doing the same.

This is the kind of "interventionist" interpretation Nancy Bentley engages in *The Ethnography of Manners: Hawthorne, James, Wharton*. Historically focused, philosophical, critically investigative, Bentley's project tracks the complex web of anthropological theory and ethnographic practice at work in the novels of three American pantheonic writers. She offers a detailed re-examination of fin de siècle and early modernist cultural impulses and confluences, taking her reader on an architectural dig of seemingly long-buried social credences

But her more subtle and complex critical purpose is revealed in a moment of electrifying political acuity at the end of a chapter entitled, "Hawthorne and the Fetish of Race." From a lucid analysis of how a transgressive primitivism and race fetishism became metaphorical categories for nineteenth-century cultural anxieties, Bentley moves swiftly from *The Marble Faun* to more recent political cadences:

... we can find yet a further reincarnation of the black faun in Virginia, if a more insidious one, in the campaign rhetoric from the 1992 presidential election, when Patrick Buchanan announced that "I think God made all people good, but if we had to take a million immigrants in, say, Zulus next year or Englishmen and put them in Virginia, what group would be easier to assimilate and would cause less problems for the people of Virginia?"

Bentley theorizes,

In this parable of the impossible Zulu American, Buchanan sought to conjure an image of supreme incongruity. What he imagined was a figure for the un-American, a trope with its own varied literary history, by turns a "mute mystery" and a "grotesque absurdity." Call it the continuing American fetish of race. (66-7)

In this acerbic passage, notable for its frank referentiality, Bentley brings home with force the social imperativeness of her work and of cultural criticism itself. For the goal of revisionist criticism, in this case ethnographic discourse, is to lay bare the insistent circularity of culture and its artifacts, the buried ideologies displayed in nonliterary and literary texts. For Bentley, this is a problematic but productive circularity which produces and is produced by the cultural texts; it both enables and reinforces social representation. She is quick to point out that her analysis intends to preserve the "uncertainty and mutability" of fiction's mimetic capabilities.

Literary scholars run the risk of lodging a tautology in our own critical practice when interpretations are determined in advance by an assumption that novels either irresistibly uphold or inherently critique the political force fields of society they depict. This tautological trap is something I want not merely to avoid but to analyze. (5)

In brief, Bentley's success in this erudite work results from the power of her exhaustive research and theoretical speculation to trace rather than transcribe those political and cultural exigencies under which Wharton, James and Hawthorne wrote and under which we read. The result is an interpretive project which moves freely between the critical poles of scrutiny and vision, surveillance and projection. Examining the "literature of manners" as textualized and performed in her subject's novels, Bentley

herself becomes an ethnographer of American literature, an ethnocritic, determined to preserve the ambiguous position of inquisitive spy and committed relativist that is the code of the cultural critic.

Bentley's reading of Wharton demonstrates this critically activist project. In a reconsideration of Wharton's literary affinity for the hypercivilized world of old New York, the critic traces a "metaphorical primitivism" throughout the novels. She claims this motif is both a response to the changing order of manners and class-defined behaviors and an intellectual fascination for the concurrent anthropological discourse mapped by Malinowsky, Veblen, and contemporary cultural scientists and archivists. She sees the tropes of this new discourse in the intersection of social commentary and literary genre: the ritualized social sacrifice of Lily Bart, for example, and the atavistic and consuming appetite of Undine Spragg that propel a violent shift in the realist narrative. Bentley notes:

... the realism in their [Wharton's and James's] works is produced out of a deliberate unmooring of codes of conduct from assumptions about inherent civility, a disjunction that is the paradoxical foundation for a new representation of culture and new institutions of cultural authority. (70)

This new realism and its preoccupation with manners is exquisitely rendered in Wharton's *Custom of the Country*, a literal guidebook to the channels and subcurrents of modern marriage negotiation. In Undine Spragg, the novelist depicts a shrewd enabler and agent of social change, a true capitalist who activates the symbolic and pragmatic circulation of class-currency exchanged in the marriage marketplace. For Bentley, it's Undine's employment of divorce as a job description which produces the character's social mobility and material success. In this sense, divorce and its correspondent, marriage, effectuate cultural change and produce powerful new "feminine" institutions which are themselves based on deeply internalized ethnographic relations (as Freud and Lévi-Strauss have stipulated) - exogamic tribal exchange.

In this sense, a definitive figure in Wharton's ethnography of modern manners is the divorcée, the unmarried married woman who not only directs her own marital exchange but has proven her power to repeat and extend it. Modern marriage, as an institution defined by divorce, is a female industry enjoying the kind of exhilarating but distressing expansion that was enlarging the scope of corporate capitalism. (163)

Bentley's reading of Undine Spragg as the kind of capable commodities broker Lily Bart was not is not a critically new reading of those characters or the novels. But what is striking in this discussion is Bentley's ability to activate numerous cultural discourses at play in the

text(s) which dramatize the intellectual acuity of Wharton's vision in creating a character like Undine who is both "primitive," atavistic in her compulsion for social disruption, and highly "civilized," a modern entrepreneur of sex. As Bentley observes, ". . . she's no virgin, but she's a dynamo" (174). Undine's agency is an effect of her desire, through which she controls and reproduces her own objectification, overturning the specularly of both her culture and the realist novel. This reading also points to the insistent ambiguity of Undine's character and the ambivalence with which a reader, particularly a feminist reader, confronts her. Do we admire or detest this sexual adventurer? To what extent is she essentially feminine, a force of nature, and/or a product of materialist culture, a self-selling commodity? (The quizzical nature of this interpretation is not unlike the popular response to Madonna.)

Bentley's reading evades these troubling critical polarities by intervening on behalf of a modern, ethnographic subjectivity which is in itself Wharton's aesthetic and shrewd representation of her time. Undine's character is both diffuse and confluent, a convergence of ideological disparities. ". . . the significance of Undine's atavistic character," says Bentley, "is precisely that it unsettles the opposition between social fashioning and authentic selfhood" (174). Like the realist novel, the character of Undine problematizes regulated, integrated identity in a culture of exhibitionist, consumerist reproduction. And like the contemporary ethnographies which, through the writing act, both survey and participate in the rituals of foreign culture, Wharton's novel records and immerses itself in the strangeness and alien forces of fin de siècle relativism. Ultimately, argues Bentley, Wharton's writing of this novel and all her others enforces and is enforced by the agency offered by shifting tribal

attitudes and the modern cult of divorce, her own included.

If there is any weakness to Bentley's approach it is that, while she briefly invokes the "other" turn-of-the-century scientific meta-discourse, Freud's psychological realism, in her discussion of fetishism, subjectivity, and sexuality, she doesn't fully differentiate its production of culture from concurrent theories. Although not in common currency till the twentieth century, psychoanalysis and its stories clearly intersect both anthropological writing and narrative experimentalism to historicize and construct premodernist subjectivity and its text, the novel. A sustained look at this discursive matrix would have given Bentley's reader an even wider purview into the shadows and corners of drawing-room rituals and terrors animated and repressed by institutional anxiety and cultural alienation. But if her intent was to avoid the critical traps of psychoanalytic speculation or psychobiography consistently witnessed in conventional readings of Wharton, James, and Hawthorne, she does so, lighting out for territories revived by new histories and new meanings. *The Ethnography of Manners* provides public access to a complex range of reading and writing practices, activated by American impulses and ideologies still circulating through social relations and social texts. In theorizing these intersecting discourses, Nancy Bentley crosses borders many cultural trailblazers didn't even know existed.

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St. Mary's College of California

An Interview with Nancy Bentley

by Denise Witzig

DW: *Your approach to literary criticism uses cultural anthropology to redefine what you call "the social authority of novelists and the fictions of society they bring to life." Why did you group these three writers - Hawthorne, James, Wharton - within the same ethnographic discourse? Do you see a particular kinship here?*

NB: There is a way in which the three writers critique and respond to mass culture from within the sphere of high culture. Hawthorne, for example, recast his later narratives within ethnography to comment on racial identity. The racial discourse is really the first realist model for thinking about otherness. James and Wharton critique high culture itself, from within the limits of realism. In fact, I'd say the kinship among the three can be found in this attention to genre, this marking of the boundaries of realism, its limits. Wharton even moves realism into something else, into a domestic modernity. She critiques high culture within the sphere of women, from the perspective of women in culture.

DW: *So Wharton's writing is particularly feminized?*

NB: I'd say she was one of the first women writing from within high culture to critique it. She had class position and professional recognition, the public knew who she was; she was well-established in high culture. And I think this gave her particular insights into the feminine.

DW: *In your discussion of Wharton and James, you describe their drawing room intrigues as sites of modern sacrifice and substitutional violence, with parallels between tribal rituals and urban sensationalism. In fact, you refer to the "terror" of modern manners on display in the novels. Does this mean we're supposed to see the novel of manners as horror story or primal myth? Or is this narrative drama the result of a "hypercivilized" world in all its modern perversity?*

NB: I'd say that those two things are superimposed, they work together. The ethnograph is a Victorian genre, concerned with primal origins which are then translated into modern stories. It presents itself as being about people, but the ethnographer is creating an inadvertent self-portrait. James and Wharton understood this process in writing itself; they have the same impulses to write about themselves in their culture. In this sense the ethnographic represents modern identity because it encodes its anxieties, its self-consciousness. This is really the anxiety of a high culture about its low-culture origins. Fiction does what ethnographies do. It surveys and participates in the culture it describes.

DW: *If, as you state, the novel is a "realist museum" of American consumer culture at the end of the 19th century, does Wharton model ethnography to critique subjectivity or class or even realism itself? Wouldn't this make her more of a pre-modernist than an anti-modernist?*

NB: People at the turn-of-the-century had this high culture anxiety about modernity - not art, but modern culture itself. Wharton is trying to come to terms with mass culture. Ethnography is relevant because it explores modernity. Aesthetic modernism critiques realism; Undine Spragg is a critique of what realism did to Lily Bart.

DW: *How is this related to consumer culture?*

NB: Consumer culture becomes part of Wharton's way of writing. It shows her wariness of mass culture, but she responds to and participates in it, too. I resist the reading that Wharton engages in a diatribe against consumption. Consumption is what she uses to animate her novels; there's an erotic quality to it, a real pleasure, although Wharton realizes its risks for women. Undine shows consumerism's power but Wharton's ambivalence about it. She's conflicted about it but identified with it and this is part of her technique.

DW: *You address Freud briefly in your chapter on James and *The Spoils of Poynton*, but you don't go to any critical lengths to delineate his cultural influence. Do you see psychoanalysis as having a part in the scientific discourse that informs the novelists' use of Malinowski or Veblen?*

NB: Ethnographic discourse is a kind of hinge between psychoanalysis and cultural theory. These are all evolutionary narratives, recasting a master racial narrative about a primal self which becomes civilized. There's a flexibility among the discourses but they're all really the same story. Freud tells ethnographic stories; his "primal scene" narrative is an example of this. I guess I could have made him more of a major player, but I'm more interested in the lateral connections between literary and non-literary works rather than influences.

DW: *How does a critical practice that includes ethnography inform a reading of nineteenth-century texts in a way that traditional literary criticism does not? To what purpose?*

NB: Given what I described about the mutual borrowing between narrative structures, I really see fiction as a form of cultural practice. Novels and ethnographies and social theories clustered in a way that changed what manners were. I try to look at the implications of this. Novels are active forces in society; they critique and participate in culture. I think we should pay attention to what culture can say about genre and what genre can say about culture.

New Gifts to Wharton Scholarship

No Gifts From Chance: A Biography of Edith Wharton

by Shari Benstock

Illustrated 546 pp. New York
Scribner's Sons, 1994 \$28.00

by Augusta Rohrbach

As any experienced reader of biography knows, there's often a thin line between the fact of an author's life and the fiction created during it. Shari Benstock's *No Gifts From Chance* (Scribners, 1994) explores that line and stolidly maintains the distinction between the life and the work. The questions that this biography answers have more to do with the making of a literary great than with the making of great literature. In other words, Benstock's emphasis is on the process by which Edith Newbold Jones, socialite, became Edith Wharton, novelist and professional writer.

Shari Benstock reads and rereads Wharton's life in order to detect signs of the emerging consciousness that created some of our most enduring literature and in the process lets us in on the struggles that marked Wharton's progress from the start. Torn between the roles society prescribed for her and the inclinations that seemed natural, Wharton "was pulled between conforming to social codes and giving free reign to her powers of expression" (21). This is hardly a new story. Even readers who have only a nodding interest in Wharton are already familiar with the battle between the "lady" and the "artist." What Shari Benstock offers her readers are the skills of a practiced literary historian and the consciousness of a feminist scholar who knows how to look behind dates and facts in order to glimpse the life as lived. About Lucretia Jones' late pregnancy, for instance, Benstock's keen sense of the figures she treats quickly leads her beyond the ideas that the event is a nuisance to the activities of a society matron and interpolates that "the pregnancy also betrayed an active sexuality, a possible embarrassment for a woman who could be priggish about such matters" (3). Through observations like this one, Benstock penetrates deeper into the human aspects of what is often treated by others as an endless procession of privilege. In Benstock's book, even the icy Lucretia melts a bit under this biographer's steady gaze.

What readers won't find in Benstock's biography of Edith Wharton is the class envy and veiled voyeurism that plagues many treatments of Wharton's life and art. We don't get the sense that Benstock is only barely managing to repress envy for the sumptuous surroundings that were designed and maintained by and for Wharton's sense of

comfort. Instead, readers will share Benstock's exhilaration over Wharton's accomplishment as a woman and a writer as she details payments received, contracts signed and renegotiated. To this end, Benstock does a lot to dispel the traditional notions of Wharton as the "lady" novelist, secretly composing her novels in the comfort and luxury of her bedroom. Instead, thanks to Benstock's examination of financial records and other such "mundane" material, we come away with a better understanding of the ways in which Wharton carved a niche for her own personal needs out of the lifestyles that could have just as easily sealed her fate as a non-artist. Benstock shows the same clear-headedness about Wharton's emotional life as she does about her financial circumstances, treating the affair with Morton Fullerton, for instance, as the next logical step in this author's struggle to live her life to the fullest. And the difficulty the writer had in wrestling a real life from the "lady" registers in the many illnesses that Benstock documents.

Nor should the reader expect Benstock to romanticize some of Wharton's less attractive traits. Benstock unflinchingly reports on Wharton's anti-Semitic attitudes and actions -- calling Fitzgerald's Wolfsheim the "perfect Jew" and denying scholarship funds to "jewesses," for instance -- without trying to excuse her as a product of the times. As with much of what Benstock tells us about Wharton's views, readers must come to their own terms with her shortcomings; Benstock will not recast Wharton's life to conform to ideology past or present. We must learn, Benstock seems to be saying, not to let the image of the artist overcome the facts about the woman or vice-a-versa.

In fact, after reading Benstock's biography, there is little left of the "personage" Edith Wharton and much of the person. And we learn from this biography, as we do from all good biography, about identity itself. Wharton wasn't "born whole" out of the mind and imagination of a stifled patriarchal society -- an Athena emerging out of Zeus' brow. No. Wharton's emergence was a slow and not so sure one. She worked daily and hard to become the writer she now is in our minds and in our culture. Benstock provides important details of this process when she documents the nature and cause of illnesses experienced by Wharton, her efforts to make money and to command the highest prices. All of this helps to dispel the image of Wharton comfortably ensconced in the lap of luxury and allows us to see Wharton as a dedicated artist grappling with the facts of her life as she came to them. Through Shari Benstock we encounter the many different aspects of Edith Wharton, a woman who was known to those around her by nicknames as various as her own personality. Benstock's examination of Wharton's nicknames -- which ranged from "Sweet" to "John," "Lily"

and "Puss" -- is just a small example of how Benstock uses details to explore Wharton's personality as a woman and a writer.

Many reviewers have been at pains to compare Shari Benstock's *No Gifts From Chance* to prior works on the life of Edith Wharton such as that of Louis Auchincloss, R. W. B. Lewis and Cynthia Griffin Wolfe. While I believe Benstock's volume has a place in this pantheon, I don't believe this biography is meant to replace any of those works. Nor is Benstock's book on Wharton useful because, as many critics hasten to argue, we needed a

"feminist" biography of this great American woman writer. Rather, *No Gifts From Chance* gives scholars a much-needed research guide to Wharton's life and work: Benstock's meticulous references will help scholars track down sources and further Wharton studies as a result. So the critical question that this biography poses is not whether it is feminist, or feminist enough (as many have wondered), but whether or not we are ready to consider a more socially complex Wharton than we have known before.

Oberlin College

An Interview with Shari Benstock

by Augusta Rohrbach

I asked Shari Benstock what compelled her to take Edith Wharton's life as the subject of her recent book, *No Gifts From Chance*. As she explained it to me, this book grew directly out of her previous work, *Women of the Left Bank*, with a twist: it's a book about a woman who occupied "a different Paris than the other women in that book." From among the group of women writers and intellectuals that include Gertrude Stein, Sylvia Beach, Nancy Cunard, Mina Loy, Djuna Barnes and Hilda Doolittle, Wharton was an exception among exceptional people. And one of the most glaring aspects of Wharton's exceptional status has to do with the way we know (and don't know) Wharton in Benstock's opinion. "Of the twenty-two women I discuss in *Women of the Left Bank*" Benstock observed, "Wharton is exceptional owing to the absence of information and supporting documents about her literary and intellectual Paris life. Yet she lived almost half her life in that city. If we had even a quarter of the materials on her Paris intellectual life that we have on her French war charities," Benstock believes that "we would be able to chart key shaping influences of her mind and art." This kind of research would allow us to scrutinize what has been represented as a conventional lifestyle and understand the ways in which Wharton actually lived.

The contradictions within Wharton's received image as the consummate "Lady" and her success as an artist generated a tension that intrigued Benstock while she was writing *Women of the Left Bank*. As a result, Wharton became a starting point for that book, a kind of contrast figure. Critics later objected to Wharton's inclusion in *Women of the Left Bank* precisely because she was a woman "apart" from the Paris that came to define the modernist movement. This initial criticism of *Women of the Left Bank* yielded further reflection for Benstock. While studying the period when Wharton took up residence in Paris for a portion of each year, Benstock found that the same period in Wharton's life also inaugurated her most prolific period as a creative artist. Yet, "we know far more about the intellectual influences Paris gave other 'women of the Left Bank,'" Benstock noted, "than we know about Wharton" -- a tempting omission for the literary historian and troubling fact for the feminist theorist in Benstock.

Wharton continued "to tug" at her imagination, long after the publication of *Women of the Bank*. Benstock began "to treat" herself to texts by Wharton, a writer whose work friends of hers averred as one of the most pleasurable reading experiences. While she became more and more familiar with the complexity of Wharton's oeuvre, the incipient biographer began to question the prevailing image of Wharton as a woman who wrote only in the morning and therefore wasn't "serious" about her work. Pursuing Wharton's life story with writing as the center of her life and "tracking her as a storyteller, writer, and literary business woman" allowed Benstock "to lay down a better *factual framework* than we have had up to now for *how she worked*." But, at this stage, Benstock was far from beginning a biography on Edith Wharton. Instead, she was simply wrestling with what seemed to her disjunctures between the novelist she met in R. W. B. Lewis' pathbreaking biography and the novelist she was reading for pleasure -- time-out from developing her next project, one that combined autobiography and fiction.

In a meeting with her agent over that project, Benstock described her struggles with the new form she was attempting at the time. Author and agent explored the different challenges Benstock was facing with the new project: they wondered if there might not be a "bridge genre" to facilitate the transition from

critic to creative writer. Biography seemed a likely form, especially since it combined the skills of the scholar and critic Benstock had already established with *Women of the Left Bank* and would introduce the budding fiction-writer to a story with a frame already in place.

But why Wharton? Edith Wharton is among the most written about American writers of the twentieth century. I wondered what special problems of interpretation Benstock encountered as she took on this project. Benstock considered herself an average reader of Wharton -- one who had read the usual selection in college and graduate school. She was not committed to any specific interpretation of Wharton's life. Rather Benstock took up Wharton as the subject for her next project because she wanted to know more about Wharton as a literary "practitioner"; she wanted to examine Wharton's life as a creator of literary texts, not an extension of them. Indeed, at the core of Benstock's biography is also the irony of the project's purpose: "biography did not work as a bridge genre for fiction. My great difficulty -- because I find it a suspect enterprise -- was narrativizing the facts as *though Edith Wharton's life were fiction*. It shows in the results, I think: a 'fact' biography, but not one (I would argue) in which the 'facts' appear uncontextualized." Benstock believed there was need for a biography that sought to critically evaluate what had long been considered a necessary dichotomy between Wharton the woman and Wharton the artist. Benstock was committed to vivifying a life that has been overdetermined by "the myths about Wharton as 'lady novelist' or 'society lady' or daughter unloved by her mother or sexually repressed Victorian or Edith Wharton the writer drawn to (or 'obsessed by') the incest theme." The persistence of these myths and the way in which they consistently seep into interpretations of the life and the work convinced Benstock that, at the very least, such myths "need to be charted within -- or distinguished from -- the events of her life, including her reading and writing life."

It also seemed natural to draw on Benstock's existing knowledge of Paris and to use the research skills she honed while working on *Women of the Left Bank*. And so Benstock's connection to intellectual life in Paris was her first and most formidable link to Wharton. She asked herself why Wharton chose France as her home instead of Italy, for instance, a place she had written about and studied most of her life. For Benstock the answer lies in Wharton's interest in the French and in French women most notably. These women had a reputation for creating elegance for daily living -- the kind of elegance that Wharton strived to make a part of her ordinary existence as well. Clearly she had found the kind of cultural home that she longed for and often described as absent in the lives of her literary characters. Once Benstock began to explore Wharton's relationship to her life in Paris by painstakingly tracking down missing documents deposited in government offices in Paris and private collections of letters, a different Edith Wharton began to emerge.

As Benstock researched further into Wharton's life and work, she noticed the prevailing appreciation of all things sensual in her correspondence and other documents pertaining to her life. Food, fabric, the lushness of plant-life, her care and attention to animals -- all of this belied a nature that was unabashedly sensual. Even if Wharton's life was not overtly sexual, the writing and the life together suggest a more flesh-and-blood Wharton than Benstock felt she had encountered in previous work. "How do you explain, for instance, Wharton's sudden and deep attraction to Morton Fullerton?" Benstock asked during the interview. People tend to use the notion of Wharton as a prudish society lady to explain the Fullerton affair away as an anomaly -- the result of years of repression. Rather, Benstock contends, the Fullerton affair was part of a larger continuing education program that Wharton undertook upon her arrival in Paris. Benstock discovered through her research that Wharton spent afternoons at the Sorbonne listening to lectures given by its faculty as well as by Harvard professors on visiting appointments -- the closest thing she'd ever get to a formal education. The Fullerton affair was a logical step in the growing process for Wharton and a natural one. Removed from the context of the repressed Victorian then, the affair loses its appeal to a more purulent interest and is consistent with the Wharton we know through other acts. Benstock's interpretation of this important chapter in Wharton's life restores and rejuvenates, through greater contextualization, the kind of dignity that Wharton worked for in everything she did -- from gardening to novel writing.

Benstock set out to understand what made Wharton's image so different from other female artists of the period and found some interesting similarities in the kinds of struggles described in the work that were not discussed or represented in biographical texts. Her job as a biographer then, was to establish the contexts for Wharton's life as a serious artist -- work begun in some ways by critics Cynthia Griffin Wolff and Amy Kaplan in the wake of R.W.B. Lewis' pioneer study of Wharton. "What I wanted to do in *No Gifts From Chance*," Benstock explained, "was to emphasize Wharton's ability to construct her own identity and the mammoth task such an undertaking actually was for a woman of her period and class. I decided that I wanted to put her first as an artist, but I didn't want to use the writing as material for a

psycho-biography." Benstock's determination "not to read the writing through the life" turned the mirror between Wharton's life as a woman, literary artist and best-selling author. But there is much more to be done in Benstock's view. "We've only begun the necessary work here, I believe, because we've only recently begun to rethink (and research) the central tenets of Edith Wharton's life story." She calls for definitive textual editors of Wharton's oeuvre and greater availability of her letters and other writings so that the recovery of Wharton and literary practitioner can continue. "I don't apologize," Benstock added, "for the 'factiness' of this biography or its copious notes -- indeed, as a Wharton scholar I applaud them because *Gifts* gives all of us a better means of distinguishing the operating myths that have arisen about Edith Wharton as a writer." Once her image has been stripped of such myths, the phenomena that we call Wharton's art and life becomes far less enigmatic. Indeed, there are ways in which Wharton's life, seen in this light, can offer us more by being *paradigmatic*. After all, our interest in biography corresponds with our search for practical ways to achieve identities to which we aspire, and there is much about Edith Wharton from which we can learn and hope to emulate.



"A Feast of Visual and Verbal Details"

Edith Wharton: An Extraordinary Life

by Eleanor Dwight
Illustrated 296 pp. New York
Henry A. Abrams 1994 \$39.95

by Kathy Fedorko

Edith Wharton: An Extraordinary Life by Eleanor Dwight is an affectionate and richly evocative portrait of Edith Wharton. This beautifully written and produced book provides a feast of visual and verbal detail about a woman whose achievements, courage, energy, and love of life were indeed extraordinary.

Dwight organizes her "illustrated biography" around the key places in Wharton's life - New York City, Newport, Italy, Lenox, Paris, Pavillon Colombe, and Hyères - and a key event in her life, World War I. Using 335 illustrations - including photographs, postcards, garden plans, letters, and drawings, many of which have never been published - and a clear, amiable prose style, Dwight immerses the reader in Wharton's world. Yet because of the book's focus on the importance of "place" in Wharton's response to life, the reader isn't overwhelmed by the material.

The evocative detail about the places Wharton lived in and loved and the sharply reproduced photographs of these places and the people who shared her life in them make *Edith Wharton: An Extraordinary Life* a rich complement to existing biographies about Wharton, such as R.W.B. Lewis's *Edith Wharton: A Biography* and Louis Auchincloss's *Edith Wharton: A Woman in Her Time*. Dwight's background as a writer of articles on gardens, travel and literature makes her particularly suited to

discuss how these essential aspects of Wharton's life interrelate, but she also makes judicious use of Wharton's writing and scholarship on Wharton to supplement her observations.

Dwight's description of Wharton's first trip to Europe with her family captures the four-year old girl's delight with spectacle, such as that in Rome of "cardinals resplendent in red-and-gold robes with heavy coaches rumbling through narrow streets at twilight," a delight that would remain with her as an adult and would serve her well as a writer (14). Just as "She watched, listened, and remembered, her writer's capital accruing," while in New York and Newport society, so abroad she soaked up impressions (25). Her favorite companion through Europe's wonders was her father, George Frederick Jones, who "lived through his eyes, as his daughter would later" (14). The description of his visual memory, his sensitiveness to the atmosphere of places, his love of gardens, art galleries, and spectacles, brings Jones to life as an influence in his daughter's life beyond that of stifled poet and financially-strapped gentleman with a difficult wife.

The detailed descriptions, accompanied by engaging photographs and drawings, of Lenox and the surrounding area, of the building of the Mount, and especially of Wharton's gardens, impress on the reader anew how significant to Wharton her life at the Mount was. Dwight deftly explains the influence of Wharton's travels in Italy on the design of the grounds and, through Wharton's letters, communicates how "besotted" (as Wharton herself put it) she was about gardening (115). *The House of Mirth*, written in Lenox, is clearly influenced by Wharton's immersion in nature while living there. The Mount will be "one of the most interesting places in the world in 1907" she enthuses, apparently without irony, to a friend who is in the process of creating Arcadia National Park in Maine.

As skillfully as Dwight captures a sense of the Mount and Wharton's life there, she shows us, through letters, diary entries, and the reminiscences and letters of friends, the inevitability of Wharton's move to Europe. Her homes and life on the Rue de Varenne in Paris, at Pavillon Colombe, and at Hyères are described with the same kind of evocative detail as the homes and life in New York, Newport and Lenox are, enriched by a wealth of photographs. Dwight includes Wharton's extensive lists of flower types organized by color in her gardens at Pavillon Colombe and Hyères, and the names wash over the reader, conveying the effusion of texture, scent, size, color, and shape in a Whartonian garden: orange calendula, heliopsis, yellow calceolaria, white and yellow snapdragons, anchusas, delphiniums, mauve dwarf aster, heliotrope, violet petunias, violet china asters, bachelor buttons, blue browallia, Cape marigolds, Siberian wall flowers, straw and orange nasturtiums, scabiosas, pensemons, orange California poppies (219). Dwight notes that *Summer, The Children, The Mother's Recompense*, and, most interestingly, the "Beatrice Palmato" fragment, are all informed by "images of light and sea" and blooming that characterized Wharton's life in the south of France (257).

The intensity of Wharton's attachment to places was enhanced by her propensity for leaving them. Dwight tells us that Wharton crossed the Atlantic by ship almost yearly between 1885 and 1914, making between sixty and seventy crossings in her lifetime. On land she adored the automobile, which she praised as "a fantastically efficient way to collect mental pictures" (212). Her several cars were named after the lovers of George Sand, prompting Henry James to ask Wharton to take him with her to Nohant for a second visit, if she has "the proper Vehicle of Passion" (137).

Wharton's predilection for going ways other than those in guidebooks and wanting to see other than what tourists wanted to see led to the discovery of a dell Robbia in Italy, several scrupulously researched and distinctively original travel books, and numerous adventures, such as having her car lowered by ropes from the Monastery of La Verna when it couldn't negotiate the narrow road on the side of the cliff (230). "One of the rarest and most delicate pleasures of the continental tourists," Wharton writes impishly, "is to circumvent the compiler of his guide book . . ." (72).

Nowhere in Wharton's sense of adventure more apparent than in the accounts of her World War I travels into the military zones of France and Belgium. Wharton and Walter Berry, her traveling companion, were allowed to travel unescorted while entering and leaving the zones, as usual Wharton took advantage of one "adventurous shortcut" after another. Accompanied by members of the French High Command, Wharton and Berry were also able to get close to artillery fire at frontline positions and in trenches.

Dwight posits that this unique VIP treatment was

probably based in part on the calculation that Wharton would "produce effective propoganda for the French cause" (201). They were right. With a magnificent array of photographs and detail from Wharton's fiction, letters, and newspapers accounts, as well as the letters and writings of others, *Edith Wharton: An Extraordinary Life* illustrates how Wharton took on the war effort in France with CEO power, dedication, and mastery. As her friend Jacques-Emile Blanche wrote of her, "one could picture her at the head of a convent, of a hospital, of a factory, or bank" (183).

Dwight reminds us that Wharton's impetus for her war work comes in part from her emotional connection to place: "That each person have a home was one of Wharton's most profound concerns; and she had a deep impulse to create good working and pleasant living conditions in other lives" (183). The common theme to her activities was that "if someone was in distress, she would respond" (188). What is also clear, however, from Wharton's reference to "the silly idiot women" who are themselves making shirts for the wounded, rather than creating work opportunities for the destitute women war victims as she had done, was that she could also be haughtily self-righteous about her successful war relief work (183).

Throughout the war experience, as in all those that Dwight recounts in *Edith Wharton: An Extraordinary Life*, are verbal and visual portraits of the people Wharton considered her friends and "soul mates," among them, Egerton Winthrop, Ogden Codman, Henry James, Beatrix Farrand, Walter Berry, Sally Norton, Morton Fullerton, and Mary and Bernard Berenson. Especially interesting are the stories about Wharton's conflicted relationship with Ogden Codman, her friendship with Daisy Chanler, beginning with their experiences as playmates in Rome as children, and her friendship with Ethel Cram. Dwight concentrates on how these many friends complicated but also significantly enriched Wharton's life. This is particularly clear in her inclusion of Wharton's long and moving diary entry that, no matter what the cost of her relationship with Fullerton, Wharton felt triumphant satisfaction that she had "drunk the wine of life at last," had "known the thing best worth knowing," had been "warmed through & through, never to grow quite cold again till the end..." (148).

Supplementing *Edith Wharton: An Extraordinary Life* are notes, a chronology, a selected bibliography, including a list of unpublished material, and the photograph credits, which give a good sense of the research involved in this project and will be useful to scholars. The notes are good reading in themselves, especially for those who can never know enough about Wharton. They tell us, for instance, the amount Wharton earned from each of her publications, the contemporary equivalents of the plant names Wharton used, and gossip about the battle between Royall Tyler and Beatrix Farrand over Wharton's will.

The format of the notes is also one of my few complaints about his stunning book. There are no note numbers on the pages. Rather, note entries are listed by page number at the end of the book. The entries may give the source of the information quoted in the text but they do not include page numbers. Often no source information for quoted material is provided at all. No doubt this documentation method was chosen because the book is intended for the general reader than for scholars. (It is a "Dividend Selection" of the Book-of-the-Month Club and an "Alternate Selection" of the Reader's Subscription Book Service.) However, because one of the strengths of *Edith Wharton: An Extraordinary Life* is that Dwight weaves together Wharton's story from so many disparate sources, including those not previously published, scholars will want to read it. Yet trying to use the information from it could be frustrating.

Another minor demurrer concerns Dwight's references to Wharton's rage. At the beginning of the book she indicates that this is one of the emotions that gave places "personalities far beyond reality" for Wharton (19).

At the end, in her discussion of "Roman Fever," Dwight again refers to Wharton's rage, as "this new kind of Roman fever," and she comments that Italy was the place "she could best associate with the honest feelings of rage she had harbored for so long" (279). Though the initial references are prefaced by mention of Wharton's unexpressed hatred for her mother, which might help explain the rage, the second references go entirely unexplained. One would need to have read other books about Wharton to understand what this rage is about, since Dwight's portrait of Wharton is primarily of her as an "incorrigible lover," of travel, of flowers, of friends, of literature, of culture, of the power and beauty of life.

Wharton writes in *A Backward Glance* that "if one is unafraid of change, insatiable in intellectual curiosity, interested in big things, and happy in small way," one "can remain alive long past the usual date of disintegration." Eleanor Dwight's *Edith Wharton: An Extraordinary Life* shows how triumphantly Wharton followed her own advice.

Middlesex County College

An Interview with Eleanor Dwight

by Kathy Fedorko

KF: *What reflections do you have having done your biography?*

EL: When I first started working on Edith Wharton's writing and life I found myself a voyeur in a fascinating world. In her early fiction, for example, Wharton revealed herself both as a woman who was longing to get away from conventional constraints and someone who had a great capacity for savoring life. She seemed to see the world as a place of rich visual experience, of trans-Atlantic adventures and sumptuous spectacles, but she also saw herself as depressed, conflicted and blocked from wholly taking part in life. In "Mrs. Manstey's View," her first short story, she creates an old woman who has little but her capacity to luxuriate in the view out her window and project her fantasies onto the pleasant scenes there. In her next short story, "The Fulness of Life," she tells of another unhappy woman who has a marvelous vision in the Church of Or San Michele in Florence. And for her first novel she makes the central character an Italian Duke who is enamored of the ideas of the French philosophers and also is a great patron of the arts, surely a character whom again she identified with.

My first impression of Wharton's way of experiencing life drew me into her world of vivid images on the one hand, and yet of personal limitations on the other. After doing my Ph.D. dissertation on her Italian experience in the early 1980s, I got the chance years later to do a biography, and by then I had formulated an interesting thesis. I wanted to show in my book *Edith Wharton: An Extraordinary Life* how Edith Wharton saw the world and how she had a profound sense of place. I had become intimate with Edith Wharton's life and work while writing my dissertation, "The Influence of Italy on Edith Wharton," at NYU. After reading and gaining insights from the current biographies in the late 1970s and reading most of the primary sources myself, I realized more must be made about how she used the "visualizing gift" she felt was so important.

First of all I was drawn to Wharton and her work not only because she was a wonderful writer but also because she was an American woman who seemed to react to the demand made on her in ways that I felt were typical for many women. I had another tie, for she came from the same conventional society as

my grandmother, who had been born in New York City in 1881 - they even shared some cousins. I felt that if I came to understand Edith Wharton, I would understand the women in my family. These women, like Edith Wharton characters, were encased in the armor of social propriety. They were reluctant to express their feelings, tended to hide everything unpleasant, and found manners and appearances important as ways to negotiate the world and hide from it. I identified with Wharton, for I respected social traditions and saw how they preserved values, but I also wanted to explore the way she got beyond the conventional demands made on her, and to understand how she investigated life in all its riches.

Once I had made my initial connection with the author and chose to write about her work on Italy, I saw that Wharton's love of travel, beautiful art and architecture were, among other things, her means of escaping from the prisons of convention the women of those times were trapped in. Travel writing was a common pursuit for intelligent women of this class, and Wharton's love of Italy and all it represented was for her among many things a way out of her dilemma. In my dissertation I explored all her books on Italy, including all the sources for *The Valley of Decision*. While doing my research I followed her Italian trips as she described them in *Italian Backgrounds*, up into the mountains of Lombardy and Piedmont, to peasant shrines at the end of many hairpin turns, and to the towns she wrote about: Parma, Mantua, Milan, Venice and Rome.

I also visited as many of her Italian villas as I could find. I went everywhere in Italy that she had gone except for Sicily. During this time I came to see how she saw the world - the importance to her of these glorious, sumptuous settings, of architecture, and landscapes.

I came to realize that you couldn't understand Wharton as a writer without understanding her visual experience and how she brought this to her writing. Travel satisfied her great capacity for life and for exploration. It healed and nurtured her. Crossing the ocean to take tours of France, Italy, or England, or even driving around the Berkshire landscape, she was able to enter another realm of being, for she left the world as we know it and entered the past, drawing on mixed associations of history and literature. On these trips, Wharton, like many travelers, would be the cosmopolitan, free from herself and disengaged from the humdrum details of everyday life. But she was also intensely connected to places; she could write in a letter "I ran screaming from my darling Hyères" as if she were a child being torn from her mother. I knew that a book needed to be written to show how her visual gift was so important to her--to her experience of life, to her fiction, and of course to her books on gardens, decoration, and travel.

I knew that Wharton's first story, "Mrs. Manstey's View," was autobiographical, that Edith Wharton, like Mrs. Manstey, was nourished by views out of windows and that she mixed her visual experiences with fantasies and associations. She projected strong feelings onto places. They became metaphors--windows became "magic casements," promising more than life actually had to offer. In the early 80s I had read Wharton's letters to Ogden Codman, which were not used in the works of Dick Lewis or Cynthia Wolff, and in them she gushes about discoveries of beautiful places, wonderful vistas, and great Italian art. From the letters I knew she had not been the depressed woman in the 1890s that those biographies make her. Like Wolff, I saw her as hungry, but I knew that in addition to feeding herself with words, she fed herself through her eyes.

While she was enjoying her way of seeing she also had a rational way of understanding and analyzing architecture and its principles, which she could very clearly describe. Hence the success of *Italian Villas and Their Gardens* and *The Decoration of Houses*. I knew that to totally understand her and her work the reader must be more aware of how her experience combined her love for landscape and palatial dwellings with this architectural imagination.

The European experience was all important for Wharton, as it enabled her to luxuriate in her sense of history, her love of tradition, and the rituals of the church and old aristocratic societies. The reader must see, I believed, how (as the reviewer of my book in *The New York Times* put it) Edith Wharton "met the world," because the way one meets the world is so important for the characters in her books. Consider Mrs. Peniston, in *The House of Mirth*, and the way place and the domestic details of her life have so much to say about her way of meeting the world.

As Wharton describes her, the most vivid thing about Mrs. Peniston is the fact that "her grandmother had been a Van Alstyne." Her background defines her and so do her housekeeping and her surroundings: "This connection with the well-fed and industrious stock of early New York revealed itself in the glacial neatness of Mrs. Peniston's drawing-room and in the excellence of her cuisine. She belonged to the class of old New Yorkers who have always lived well, dressed expensively, and done little else." Instead of being truly involved in life, she had always been "a looker-on," and Wharton expresses her relationship to the world in a metaphor of furniture: "her mind resembled one of those little mirrors which her Dutch ancestors were accustomed to affix to their upper windows, so that from the depths of an

impenetrable domesticity they might see what was happening in the street.”

Consider also how Ellen Olenska and May Welland “meet the world” differently. For this reason I thought it important to explain how Wharton created her own world, her houses, her gardens, her travels, her entertainments, and so I went into a detailed analysis of these processes:

Because Henry N. Abrams, publishers of fine art books, wanted to publish my book I was able to use more than 300 illustrations, which helped to show Wharton’s world. I was therefore able to include photographs that one could read as texts themselves -- the formal photo portraits of the shy and self-conscious young woman, the portraits of the Frenchified interiors and gardens. Readers had already seen photos of Wharton in many stages, but now I had the chance to further reveal her places, her friends, even her dogs! My greatest frustration was not being able to find more photographs. I really wanted to find one of Rosa de FitzJames, for instance.

Some of my most satisfying moments were spent talking to children and grandchildren of Edith Wharton’s friends, and children and grandchildren of servants of friends. I also enjoyed going to all the places Wharton had been. In so doing, I felt that I knew her story and that was why I organized my book around the places she lived in and visited -- because of her strong connection to these places. I knew from going to Hyères, for example, that the light and views of the south of France were a great influence on her, and we can see how this southern light pervades her novel *Summer*, and the “Beatrice Palmato” fragment which she probably wrote there.

Continuing to use my interest in Wharton and visual experience and the importance of understanding that aspect of her life and work, I organized an exhibition, “Glancing Backward: Edith Wharton’s New York,” at the National Academy of Design in New York in the summer of 1994, drawing together paintings of her friends, family, professional colleagues, and the interior and exterior scenes she wrote about. Doing this exhibition added another dimension to my understanding of Wharton. Here were portraits of all the people whom she had known -- many portraits she obviously had seen. They acted as a strange link between the present and the past, and the personages of her world -- whom I had never met but with whom I had become intimate over the years -- lived in a different way. Doing the exhibition seemed fitting when one considers how Wharton herself felt that personality flows into the adjacent world: “the bounds of personality are not reproducible by a sharp black line but each of us flows imperceptibly into adjacent people and things” (*The Writing of Fiction*). I am the curator, with Viola Winner, for another exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C.: “Edith Wharton’s World: Portraits of People and Places,” which will run for four months and evoke all the periods of her life. To complement that exhibition I have written a small book, *The Gilded Age: Edith Wharton and Her Contemporaries*, which will be published by Rizzoli/Universe next year.

Having become fascinated with interpreting women’s visual experience and seeing it as an important part, along with words, of making art, I am now going to depart from Wharton’s world and write an illustrated biography of another creative woman who also had a wonderful “visualizing gift” -- Diana Vreeland, fashion editor and head of the Metropolitan Museum’s Costume Institute, who has been called the century’s “high priestess of fashion.”



Feminine Repression and its Representations

Gender and the Gothic In the Fiction of Edith Wharton

by Kathy Fedorko

198 pp. Tuscaloosa, AL

University of Alabama Press, 1994, \$34.95

by Monika Elbert

Gender and the Gothic in the Fiction of Edith Wharton is the first book-length study of the Gothic

elements in Wharton’s fiction, and as such, it is a long-awaited and much-needed piece of criticism. Using recent feminist critics as well as revisionist Jungian notions of gender, Kathy A. Fedorko approaches Wharton’s oeuvre by exposing the secret of her haunted houses -- the repressed maternal or the repressed feminine energy, whether that be creativity or sexuality. The study is vital and significant in its scope and breadth and in the connections made between Wharton’s personal life and her fiction. Using autobiographical pieces which show Wharton’s alienation from her mother as well as her

Victorian sense of repressed sexuality, Fedorko is able to portray, quite vividly, Wharton's own problem with sexual dualism and thus renders her a Gothic heroine. Moreover, Fedorko shows how the Gothic paradigm in Wharton's works shifts from her early to later works, and in so doing, she discusses in chronological order no less than sixteen short stories and six of her novels to "explore the tension between feminine and masculine ways of knowing" (xi). The connections made between the short stories, some well-known, others not, and the novels are truly illuminating in the way they expose Wharton's changing views about gender through her lifetime. It is an optimistic reading which allows Wharton to reconcile the feminine/masculine elements in her characters by the time she reaches her late phase of writing, from 1929 to her death in 1937.

Though the Gothic paradigm initially seems to consist of male as victimizer and female as victim, Fedorko goes beyond such essentialist categories to show both male and female protagonists trying to grapple with repressed feminine and masculine traits within their psyche and ultimately learning about gender integration when they are able to confront the repressed feminine/maternal within. That the oppressor isn't always the male, but sometimes the female who buys into male power structures because she fears her own power, accounts for contradictions in Wharton's work, especially in relationship to Wharton's alternating disdain for weak females (in her life and fiction) and admiration for strong female protagonists, who accept both their masculine and feminine powers. In her first chapter, "The Gothic Text: Life and Art," Fedorko asks the provocative question about Wharton, "And what realm could be more frightening and yet more alluring for this unmothered daughter of the patriarchy than the feminine/maternal darkness, with its overwhelming intimacy and primal power?" (8). This question becomes the driving force behind each Gothic hero's and heroine's quest, as presented in chapters two through five.

In chapter two, "Fearing the Feminine," Fedorko reads Lily Bart's quest in Wharton's early novel, *The House of Mirth*, among the backdrop of four of her early Gothic stories written between 1900 and 1904: "The House of the Dead Hand," "The Duchess at Prayer," "The Angel at the Grave," and "The Lady Maid's Bell." This is a rather depressing phase for Wharton, as she "enters the world of women who, unable to accept or act on their sexuality and autonomy, accede control to their self-hating masculine selves, portrayed by the villainous, controlling men who at worst tyrannize them and at best restrict their lives" (22). Though there is the potential for gender reconciliation between Selden and Lily, the opportunity is lost as they both suffer from the malaise of the Gothic heroine -- from asexuality and passivity. Moreover, even though Selden is the male version of Lily, he is still the male victimizer (and Gothic villain) in his ability to objectify Lily as a work of art.

Chapter three, "Confronting the Limits of Reason," explores some of the Gothic stories and novels written during the period between 1906-1916, namely "The Hermit and the Wildwoman," "The Eyes," "Afterward," "The Triumph of Night," "Kerfol," and *Ethan Brand*. Fedorko attributes the "erotic discovery" which characterizes these works to Wharton's love affair with Morton Fullerton, which "tested her sense of her controlled, intellectual, 'masculine' self" (48). Wharton's protagonists in this phase discover "that an arrogant, exclusive reliance on intellect that denies spiritual, emotional, and intuitive ways of knowing is morally reprehensible" (48). The male narrator in *Ethan Frome* is forced to confront his fears of the dark unknown feminine and the highly rational masculine through his projections of Ethan, Zeena, and Mattie onto a single self. Though the characters' imprisonment in gender roles represents the narrator's worst fear, "His courage in plunging imaginatively into the abyss prepares the way for characters in Wharton's subsequent Gothic fiction to claim their eroticism and their will" (65).

Chapter four "Reclaiming the Feminine," spans the years between 1917-1926 in its analysis of two major novels, *Summer* and *The Age of Innocence*, and the eroticized Gothic stories, "The Young Gentlemen," "Miss Mary Pask," "Dieu d'Amour," "Bewitched," and the "Beatrice Palmato" fragment. All of these works depict women asserting their female eroticism and voice and "confronting the Medusa, the terror and power of their inner feminine/maternal self" (70), and especially in the short stories, the male characters are faced with the shame they feel about their maternal/feminine selves as well as their fear of matriarchal thinking. In *Summer* Charity Royall needs to confront her "mother's distorted, grotesque body" in order to face her own fears about "her primal female body" (70). But in returning to North Dormer as Royall's wife, Charity "remains a trapped Gothic heroine," who cannot escape the patriarchal power represented by Royall (82). Charity's initial quest for freedom has a more favorable outcome in her successor, Ellen Olenska, in *The Age of Innocence*. Like Wharton, who begins to live an expatriate and free life in France, beginning in 1910, Ellen becomes the female self in Wharton's Gothic who is "comfortable with autonomy, with her body, with self-knowledge" (69); both Wharton and Ellen can create their own houses, the embodiment of self. Ellen resists being made into an art object and, by leaving a tyrannical husband, she welcomes the challenge and dangers of feminine self-awareness and encounters two surrogate mothers, her Aunt Medora and her grandmother Catherine Mingott, to help her along the way. Newland Archer shows the promise of a newly evolving male Gothic character for Wharton, but he falls short of the goal of gender mutuality. He abandons his role as the upholder of social traditions and "possessor of art and women" as he becomes "a questioner of those values" (87).

In her final and most compelling chapter,

"Surviving the Abyss and Revising Gender Roles," Fedorko shows the development of Wharton's work and success of her characters in her last Gothic phase, from 1929 to 1937. The Gothic heroine and hero are finally able to find their way out of the abyss by accepting the feminine source of creativity. Fedorko gives an excellent and original analysis of *Hudson River Bracketed* and *The Gods Arrive*, in which she focuses on the growth of the two major characters, Vance Weston and Halo Spear. Both characters have already been involved in false gender unions, Vance with Laura Lou and with Floss Delaney, and Halo with Lewis Tarrant, in which they deny the feminine side of themselves. The early Vance fits the paradigm of the proprietary, bullying Gothic villain, and the early Halo the passive, voiceless Gothic heroine. However, after gaining awareness, by delving into their inmost selves and accepting the world of the mothers, Vance and Halo are able to participate in a mutually satisfying relationship built upon the acceptance of both masculine/feminine principles within each partner.

The bifurcation of male/female, common to Wharton's earlier Gothic works, is eliminated by this late period, and this also holds true for some of the well-known Gothic pieces written by Wharton during this phase, "Mr. Jones," "Pomegranate Seed," and "All Souls." In each of these stories, Wharton explores how the female protagonists overcome their fears of the maternal and empower the feminine self. In an excellent reading of "Pomegranate Seed," Fedorko explains how all three female characters are related: "The three Mrs. Ashbys recall again the Triple Goddess Demeter, embodiment of

women's stages of life -- innocent youth, middle-aged maturity, and old age -- and women's different ways of knowing throughout their life" (129). Fedorko's reading of "All Souls" is more problematic; by celebrating the gender-anonymous narrator's nurturing abilities and hence, her/his triumph over the limited patriarchal realm of intellect, she seems to minimize the very real terror and pain of Sara, who remains in a childlike, incapacitated state, after abandoning her old home, Whitegages.

There is only one omission in this otherwise thorough and exemplary work. Though the first chapter deals extensively with class issues in Wharton's own life, the idea of class as it relates to gender integration does not play an integral part in the analyses of the novels and short stories. Surely, economic limitations exacerbate the quest of both male and female characters setting out to confront the abyss -- the deprived mother/female within. And the servants and workers, who have played such an important role in the Gothic genre (with its attendant class conflicts) since its inception in the eighteenth century, cannot just be wished away or romanticized as guides meant to enlighten the protagonists. For example, regarding *The House of Mirth*, Fedorko asserts, "The ghostly denizens of the 'underworld of toilers' in the hat shop where Lily briefly works represent . . . the untold story of sexuality, of unspoken experience beyond the pale of social acceptability" (43). But perhaps this reflects Wharton's more than Fedorko's oversight: to be a healthily gendered person in Wharton's oeuvre requires money and some leisure time.

Montclair State University

An Interview with Kathy Fedorko

by Monika Elbert

ME: *What initiated you into the thesis of Gender and The Gothic in the Fiction of Edith Wharton?*

KF: My interest in Wharton began with my affirmation for Ellen Olenska in *The Age of Innocence*. I was struck by how her sensuality, self-possession, and individuality differentiated her from other Wharton characters. I was also fascinated by the connection in Wharton's fiction between her female characters' sense of themselves and their houses. Thinking about Ellen's "funny little house" on West 23rd Street that is mysterious, sensuous, and idiosyncratic led me to think about other mysterious houses in Wharton's fiction. In the short stories, especially, women are often held captive in dreary mansions rather than living happily in self-created homes as Ellen does in hers. This led me to realize how many other Gothic elements Wharton employed in her fiction: the brutish man, sexual threat and tension, ghosts, concentric narration, and isolating weather like snowstorms and dense fog. While writing my dissertation, "Edith Wharton's Haunted House: The Gothic in Her Fiction," at Rutgers University, I came to understand that the Gothic in Wharton's fiction served as a wild underside to the realism and restraint that Wharton was most known for.

MG: *How do your arguments challenge or abet present interpretations of Wharton's work?*

KF: The tendency has been to align Wharton with either a feminine or a masculine perspective. I see her as not only exploring how the lives of women and men are in conflict but also are attempting to accommodate the best of feminine and masculine ways of knowing and being in her characters' lives. I believe Wharton uses the Gothic as a psychic theater to dramatize the tension between the masculine and the feminine as well to envision human beings who, by reclaiming the feminine/maternal, are comfortable with both gender selves.

Further, by discussing Wharton's Gothic short stories in relation to her realistic novels, I show how the novels contain palimpsestic Gothic texts. As a result I challenge ideas about the nature of Wharton's realism.

Finally, I see the Gothic as an essential way for Wharton to work on her understanding of gender and women's and men's struggle with the feminine, as well as a way for her to respond to the silencing, constraint, fears, and rage that went unacknowledged in her life.

MG: *What personal or scholarly qualities of your own or Wharton's drew you to Wharton?*

KF: Wharton tackles crucial issues in women's lives that interest me. Women in her fiction silence themselves as well as allow themselves to be silenced by men. They try to find a home and an identity that are self-created rather than what others expect. They explore alternatives to control and repression. Women in Wharton's fiction face the Medusa, the dark side of themselves. In addition, Wharton's writing is so rich that it is constantly rereadable.

MG: *What was your greatest challenge in writing your book, either personally or intellectually?*

KF: My greatest challenge was staying with the book and remembering that my ideas were important to the critical conversation about Wharton. At the time I started my work in the early 1980s, no one was putting Wharton and the Gothic in the same sentence, and I wondered what the response would be to my belief that this consummate realist was also a Gothic writer. Appearing on the first MLA Wharton panel in 1983 was one of the things that helped give me the incentive to continue my work on Wharton.

ME: *What was your greatest frustration or discovery, or your most exciting experience in working on your book?*

KF: My greatest frustration was feeling that I would never be done. I wondered if I would ever be able to say to my satisfaction what I wanted to say, as well as bring into my argument the rich scholarship that was going on around me.

One of my most exciting discoveries was seeing so many parallels between the female and male protagonists in Wharton's novels. I found the Charity and Lucius or Lily and Selden or Halo and Vance were described almost identically and were saying the same words. This made me realize that Wharton was telling the same story through both a woman's body and consciousness and a man's while exploring the consequences of sexual difference in the novels' narratives. Finding these parallels led to many collateral discoveries.

ME: *Where are you going from here in Wharton studies?*

KF: I'm excited about a paper I'm writing on how Wharton uses images from the goddess Athena's stories in her fiction, nonfiction, letters, and notebooks.

ME: *What is your advice for the aspiring academic author?*

KF: Have confidence in your intuitions and ideas. They may need "fine tuning," but the insights should be trusted. Nothing should dissuade you if you think you have something to add to the critical conversation. Also, be sure to join the Edith Wharton Society and go to Wharton functions to get to know other Wharton scholars. The Society is a friendly and supportive group.

The Many Men in Wharton's Life

Edith Wharton's Inner Circle

by Susan Goodman

165 pp. Austin, TX

University of Texas Press, 1994, \$24.95

by Carol J. Singley

Susan Goodman follows her first book, *Edith Wharton's Women: Friends and Rivals* (University Press of New England, 1990), with a perceptive study of Wharton's relationships with men. Wharton was the sole female member of an "inner circle" (her term) that included Bernard Berenson, Walter Berry, Henry James, Gaillard Lapsley, Percy Lubbock, Robert Norton, John Hugh Smith, Howard Sturgis, and, peripherally, Morton Fullerton. These writers, art critics and connoisseurs, and intellectuals formed close personal ties in the first three decades of the twentieth century. In addition to enjoying close friendships, they shared intellectual and aesthetic sensibilities and, especially after World War I, thought of themselves as the last bastion of civilized life. Often meeting in pairs or threes at each other's houses in England, France, or Italy, and visiting or traveling together for extended periods of time, they were united, Goodman explains, by a shared sense of place or -- more precisely -- of lost place. As Americans abroad, they experienced varying degrees of intellectual, sexual, aesthetic, and economic, as well as geographic, exile. Although Wharton remains at the center of this book -- just as she was often at the center of the inner circle -- Goodman tells us much about the general sense of detachment that drove Americans to Europe at the turn of the century. She integrates biographical studies with analyses of fiction, by Wharton and James in particular, creating a detailed portrait of this aspiring "Republic of the Spirit."

Goodman analyzes the pleasures and perils of affiliation, especially for Wharton. Individuality, she observes, is generally at risk wherever group mentality prevails. The members of Wharton's inner circle insisted on preserving their independence and distinctive identities, yet individual boundaries sometimes blurred as friends influenced each other and even served as *données* for their fictions. Goodman's understanding that individuals create their lives in collaboration with others is astute. It is less clear however, whether Wharton gained more than she lost from her affiliation.

Goodman's oscillation -- between descriptions of Wharton's reciprocal relations with the inner circle, and accounts of her inferior roles within it -- reflect Wharton's own ambiguous experience. Arrival in the "Land of

Letters," as Wharton explains in *A Backward Glance* (119), marked an important, new phase in her life and career. Finally she had found likeminded friends -- soulmates she had previously only imagined in stories such as "The Fullness of Life." In this protected space, Goodman explains, Wharton could shape a sense of herself as artist and woman. As the only female in a male group, she had access to the thoughts and feelings of both genders, important to a writer's imagination. In particular, her confreres served as prototypes for some of her male characters -- sensitive male artists, who are portrayed sympathetically; overly civilized connoisseurs, who are treated more harshly. The homosexuality of several men in her circle also gave her freedom from sexual risk and consequence. Goodman suggests as well that the inner circle provided Wharton with multiple father figures, a speculation that a more psychological study might explore in depth.

Although Wharton found companionship in the inner circle, she was not always treated as an equal because some members believed themselves fundamentally superior to women. Gaillard Lapsley, for example, was overtly misogynist, disliking women to attend his lectures at Cambridge and attempting to segregate them on one side of the lecture hall. Goodman explains that "knowing Edith" became a sport that bound the men together (23), and Wharton constantly struggled against being transformed into a female "type" (15). Goodman holds the opposing consequences of affiliation in tension throughout her book, explaining how the inner circle allowed Wharton to see herself as both "author and subject, composer and composition, painter and canvas" (26) -- but at a price. Her role -- as "firebird, lioness, whirlwind -- confined and trivialized her power even as it granted her license and latitude" (74).

Chapter three, on Wharton's relationship with Henry James, is perhaps the book's finest. Goodman describes the friends "dancing their own minuet" and carefully distinguishes their roles. Wharton saw herself and James "communing like Milton's angels in her own 'Republic of the Spirit.' For James, Wharton was the drama" (56). Although critics often emphasize Wharton's need for the great master's advice, Goodman rightly maintains that Wharton valued James's personal companionship more than his literary criticism. She offers tantalizing descriptions of the playful, affectionate, and often sexualized language that Wharton and James used in correspondence. She weaves the Fullerton affair and the James friendship together, suggesting not only that the inner circle's blurred sexualities helped prepare her for the bisexual Fullerton, but that James cast Fullerton "at her feet" as a "substitute for himself" (60) so that he could vicariously enjoy her adventures. Goodman calls James's

“possession” of Wharton’s affair “unsettling” (60); indeed, readers may even find it a bit gothic. This chapter includes astute readings of the Wharton-Fullerton-James triad in James’s “The Jolly Corner” and Wharton’s “The Letters” and “The Pretext.” Less convincing to me, because undeveloped, is Goodman’s claim that “The Hermit and the Wild Woman” is an allegory of Wharton’s life with James.

Goodman devotes two chapters to Howard Sturgis, Percy Lubbock, Bernard Berenson, and Bloomsbury, interesting for their bearing on Wharton. Goodman argues, for example, that Wharton’s *The House of Mirth*, *The Custom of the Country*, and *The Age of Innocence* were influenced by Sturgis’s novels, *All That Was Possible* and *Belchamber*, but Wharton did not acknowledge her debt to him because she was already wrestling with charges that she was an imitator of James. She also suggests that Lubbock disparaged women because their vulnerability reminded him of his own, and that Berenson replaced Charles Eliot Norton as Wharton’s mentor. Especially interesting is Goodman’s analysis of Wharton’s relationship with Virginia Woolf, whose central position in Bloomsbury paralleled Wharton’s in the inner circle. The two novelists shared a need to resist biases of male culture and the influence of James, in particular; however, they eyed each other with suspicion as well as curiosity. Wharton was especially threatened by Woolf’s emphasis on subjectivity in art and felt annoyed that younger writers overlooked her.

The last chapter analyzes Wharton’s fictional heroines in relation to the book’s thesis. In short discussions of the novels -- including *The House of Mirth*,

The Reef, and *The Age of Innocence* -- Goodman argues that Wharton’s heroines struggle, as did their author, with conflict between “the accepting soul” and “the dissecting intellect” (*A Backward Glance* 159). Acceptance may lead to unquestioning affiliation but jeopardize individual identity; critical discernment may lead to estrangement or exile rather than the Land of Letters. Thus Wharton’s novels interweave classic plots that end in the heroine’s marriage or death with new ones that leave them in an undefined spaces. Goodman’s interpretations of journeys which take Wharton’s heroines beyond traditional boundaries of female desire and behavior are provocative; I found myself wanting more.

Edith Wharton’s Inner Circle is written with grace and acuity. Goodman is aware of the roles that memory and imagination play in writing history, especially literary history. Because much of her analysis is based on individual letters and memoirs, she has had to confront that fact that even the most objective events undergo radical transformation when related by different people. Thus, she observes that “when Wharton describes the inner circle, she is remembering something that did and did not exist” (6). Goodman demonstrates the process herself when she uses her research imaginatively to recreate a few specific scenes between Wharton and her friends. Goodman’s book leaves us with a sense of Wharton’s inner circle as both real and idealized. It also reminds us that place and identity are closely related, if not synonymous, and it reaffirms, in new ways, the importance of psychic and physical geographies for this talented writer.

Rutgers University, Camden

An Interview with Susan Goodman

by Carol J. Singley

CS: *How did you arrive at your topic?*

SG: I like to think that all my work on Wharton has been related. *Edith Wharton’s Women* explores the author’s relationships with her mother and women friends, while analyzing their bearing on her fiction; and *Edith Wharton’s Inner Circle* provides a group portrait of the male friends whom Wharton called “the inner circle” or “the happy few.” While I was interested in exploring the myths about Wharton’s misogyny in the first book and her relationships with both men and the traditions they represented in the second, I was also interested in tackling what, for me, seemed a more difficult writing problem: weaving disparate, though related, individual stories within a group narrative. My most recent work, a biographical/critical study of Ellen Glasgow, extends this process yet again and grows from my work on Wharton. *The Inner Circle’s* recreation of a particular community and the larger culture it mirrors has helped me to think about Glasgow’s Richmond, its place in history from the Civil to the Second World War and in her imagination.

CS: *Especially in the introduction, you interweave literary analysis and speculative accounts about*

Wharton or others. Would you like to comment on your experience writing this book or literary criticism generally?

SG: In my introduction, I have used material from letters or lines from one of Wharton's short stories to suggest the intersection of these genres. Although the material may read as a "fictionalized account," the parameters of that account and my interpretation of it are bound by the original material. If we agree that people simultaneously live in multiple worlds, the line between biography and fiction necessarily blurs. How can we write about another's life or work without making that fictional leap, at the very least, into another's mind? The ability to remain inside and outside one's subject seems to me one of Wharton's great abilities. She understood what you call her "doubleness" and as an expatriate learned to live comfortably within shifting borders. I like Mencken's notion that personalities are shy things that peep out, giving us a suggestion of understanding; that by degrees, a slow accumulation of impressions coalesces.

What constitutes speculation seems to me an ethical question. When we speculate, for instance, it becomes, if not a kind of "fact," part of the ongoing argument that has to be addressed as if it were fact. I know that Charlotte Goodman, when writing her biography of Jean Stafford, chose not to include any information she could not corroborate. Other biographers freely interpret. I would agree with Ellen Glasgow that all writing is, in some sense, autobiographical. Biographers tell at least two lives, ostensibly the subject's and covertly their own. The relationship between those two narratives -- at once parallel, diverging, and contending -- makes biography and literary scholarship alive.

CS: *Do you think your book contributes to a revisionist interpretation of Wharton as possessive, demanding, or ungenerous? I'm thinking, for example, of her reaction to Percy Lubbock's marriage to Sybil Cutting.*

SG: Any interpretation is revisionist in some sense. In my first book, I was incensed by Janet Malcolm's characterization of Wharton as misogynist. Malcolm was a *donné* or starting point for that book. What was of more interest in this book was how we construct personalities and how we conceive of ourselves as separate entities but also as part of a collaborative fiction. That is the idea I tried to recreate in this book instead of having ideas about specific incidents in Wharton's life.

CS: *Were there aspects of Wharton's character that emerged as surprises to you?*

I'm more and more struck by what a good writer Wharton was. One can skim through any letter and find a beautiful turn of phrase. Also, I'm struck by how little she strained to be an intellectual. In this way she escaped some of the nineteenth-century feminine constraints. I have admiration for her genius. Whatever flukes and biases she had -- her anti-Semitism, for example -- she had a great heart. In almost all cases she acted with great humanity. She never used money to control people, for example, or succumbed to cravings for power. She also uses an amused, ironic stance toward herself. These insights came to me while working on Ellen Glasgow, who had to work so hard at things that came to Wharton so genuinely and naturally.

CS: *What was most satisfying about writing this book? Most challenging?*

SG: The most difficult problem for me concerned focus, how to present a constellation of friends who had lives apart from but also defined themselves through their relationship to Wharton. I needed to decide what relationships had more weight at what times and for what reasons. I wanted to recreate, if possible, some of the texture of the group's relationships. For this reason, Gaillard Lapsley's correspondence with Percy Lubbock interested me. It hurts to read the letter in which he explains his version of the Wharton-Sybil Cutting feud. These competing histories most intrigued me.

CS: *Where are you going from here with Edith Wharton?*

SG: I'm planning a book on novels and manners in the United States -- manners as a precursor to cultural studies. I examine writers traditionally associated with manners -- Wharton, Howells, James -- as well as writers not in the mainstream tradition.

Wharton as a Modernist Writer

In the Interstices of the Tale: Edith Wharton's Narrative Strategies

by Kathy Miller Hadley
155 pp. New York
Peter Lang, 1993

by Mia Manzuli

Kathy Miller Hadley takes her title from *The Writing of Fiction*, where Edith Wharton wrote that: "the subordinate characters, moving about in the interstices of the tale, and free to go about their business . . . remain real to writers and readers." Wharton's attention to the "untold stories" of several subordinate female characters informs Hadley's argument that Wharton's narrative strategies should guarantee a place for her among Modernists. What Hadley wants is to bring Wharton "out of the Victorian era to which she has been relegated and into the twentieth century, the century in which she published all of her major fictions and the one to which, despite critical stereotypes, she belongs" (4).

Hadley turns to three of Wharton's narrative strategies -- a "pervasive use of irony, her attention to the often 'untold' women's stories, and her concern with her characters' psychological development" (4) -- and five of Wharton's novels to make her point. She devotes a chapter to each of the novels, which include: *The Reef*, *The Custom of the Country*, *The Age of Innocence*, *The Mother's Recompense*, and *The Children*. The rationale for Hadley's choices is the relative neglect by critics of *The Reef*, *The Mother's Recompense*, and *The Children*, and the neglect of women characters "in favor of attention to the male characters, as has happened with *The Custom of the Country* and *The Age of Innocence*" (8).

Hadley also believes that these novels best display Wharton experimenting with form. She offers: "In each of them, Wharton simultaneously obscures and reveals narratives in the interstices of the tale, narratives below the surfaces seen by the centers of consciousness, each of whom has compelling reasons for *not* seeing other people clearly" (4). In fact, Hadley seems most intrigued by moments in which she considers Wharton to be obscuring or undermining her own narrative. Hadley does not, however, take up the crucial questions: *why* might Wharton deliberately undermine her narrative structures? and to what end?

Hadley's approach to the novels of Wharton is, in her own words, "pragmatic." She writes: "Ironically, it is because Wharton's fictions have so frequently been obscured by critics' views that a simple reading of the texts

may prove useful" (8). What follows are quite detailed close readings of the five novels she has chosen. She pays attention to plots and to character development and motivation without getting bogged down in making superfluous connections between the fiction and Wharton's life. Though Hadley makes reference in the later chapters to the novels she has previously discussed, each chapter may be read as a separate entity.

In her chapter on *The Reef*, "Obscuring Passions in *The Reef*," Hadley suggests that the novel undercuts its own insistence on the categorization of Anna and Sophy into "lady" and "other woman" (Hadley's terms) by its exploration of "the two women's attempts to understand and even help each other" (11). Hadley, however, does not examine the relationship between Anna and Sophy in any depth. And she examines Darrow's (not the narrative's) difficulty in maintaining the categorization of the women upon which he originally insisted. Hadley's promising opening argument falls away as the chapter relaxes into a close reading of *The Reef*.

The Custom of the Country receives the same treatment: a careful reading of the novel and its characters. Hadley looks at power, which she says Wharton "undercuts" to the point that "all the characters' control over each other and their own lives is ultimately proven illusory" (36). Her reading of *The Custom of the Country*, like that of *The Reef*, is not contextualized in any way, but left to stand on its own.

In contrast, Hadley attempts to ground her reading of *The Age of Innocence* in an argument made by Rachel Blau Du Plessis. She cites Du Plessis's *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* in which the author argues that twentieth-century women writers are "writing beyond" the traditional endings of the nineteenth century, "breaking the narrative structure which says that women must ultimately sacrifice their questing to marriage, or die (3-4)" (Hadley, 65). Hadley thinks that in *The Age of Innocence* Wharton writes beyond the traditional ending by "undermining the structure of the novel and its focus on Newland Archer . . . and by drawing the reader's attention to the untold stories of Ellen Olenska and May Welland" (65). Du Plessis, of course, would not agree. Hadley herself admits in her Introduction that Du Plessis is one of those critics who places Wharton among the Victorians and "sees Wharton's work as belonging to the nineteenth-century sentimental tradition" (1). Regardless, Hadley's own refusal to commit to a reading of the novel's troubling ending may be read as her own attempt to "write beyond" the traditional ending for a chapter on *The Age of Innocence*. What she ultimately asks is that readers continue "to speculate about [Ellen Olenska's] untold story" (80).

In chapter four, "Repaying the Daughter: *The Mother's Recompense*," Hadley looks at the untold stories of Chris Fenno and Anne Clephane. She relies on Nancy Chodorow's 1978 study, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, to explain the complexities inherent in Kate Clephane's return to Anne and her horror at realizing that her daughter is to marry the man Kate still thinks of as "her lover." Hadley then engages in a detailed explication of the various "stories" presented or obscured in the novel itself.

Hadley moves in her last chapter to *The Children*, a novel which she sees as having direct similarities to *The Reef*, the novel with which she began her book. She compares Martin Boyne to George Darrow: "the parallel is instructive," Hadley writes, "for just as George vacillates between his perceptions of Sophy Viner as the object of his passion and a 'child,' so Martin wavers between his desire to possess Judith sexually and his recognition of her youth" (114). There is no real argument in this chapter;

Hadley seems content once again to look at plot and character development (or lack thereof).

Unexpectedly, the conclusion turns to "*Summer* and other Seasons," in which Hadley gets to Wharton's biography and the similarity of *Summer* to the novels she has been discussing. She finds that: "*Summer* illustrates the way in which Wharton uses untold stories as a narrative strategy to explore issues of sexual freedom and the sexual double standard" (136). For this reason, she thinks it is useful to look at *Summer* when one considers Wharton's other novels. In addition, Hadley's conclusion brings up Wharton's incest motif, the way her male characters view women as works of art, and the repeated inarticulateness of her characters as themes that appear in Wharton's novels. A reader is left with the impression that Hadley has much more to say about the five representative Wharton novels.

New York University

An Interview with Kathy Miller Hadley

by Mia Manzulli

MM: *What attracts you to Edith Wharton as a subject -- personally as well as scholarly?*

KM: Wharton's irony is what initially attracted me to her work. I also find her life story fascinating; here was a daughter of New York's staid upper-crust, and she made a life's work out of the things her family most discredited -- women working, and in the arts, at that -- yet she still managed to retain and even broaden her place in society. I also admire her great love of life, and the compassion she showed during the war years in France.

MM: *What led you to develop the specific thesis of In the Interstices of the Tale?*

KM: I remember reading criticism of *The Age of Innocence* and being surprised that others didn't see what I had taken for granted: that Wharton persistently undermines Newland Archer's point of view by drawing the reader's attention to aspects of Ellen's and May's characters that he can't see. I've come increasingly to see Wharton's work as exemplifying many of the traits and concerns of Modernism; not only in her use of irony, but in the ways she emphasizes her apparently secondary characters throughout her fictions.

MM: *How do you see your arguments challenging or supplementing present interpretations of Wharton?*

KM: Early in this project, I saw my arguments as challenging the view of Wharton as a nineteenth-century author, essentially Victorian and regionalist in terms of her plots and narrative techniques. But in the past few years, an increasing number of Wharton scholars have begun to consider Modernist elements in her work. Such issues matter, not because it's important who "claims" Wharton, but because scholars had traditionally used Wharton's presumed old-fashionedness to treat her work dismissively.

MM: *What might you do differently if given the chance?*

KM: I wish I had been more conversant with Wharton's short fiction earlier in this project; I realized belatedly how extensive a role the same narrative strategies I discuss play in the short stories.

MM: *What are you currently working on or teaching?*

KM: I am currently teaching literature and writing at Albion College, in Albion, Michigan. I am also a visiting assistant professor at Michigan State University, where I teach a film class.



Wharton as a Novelist of Morals

Edith Wharton: Matters of Mind and Spirit

by Carol J. Singley

247 pp. Cambridge <Eng> and New York
Cambridge University Press, 1995, \$49.95

by John J. Murphy

Carol J. Singley makes a case for Wharton as much more than a novelist of manners, or if the latter, a writer who explores what prompts the manners, for good fiction, wrote Wharton, "might be defined as the kind which . . . probes [life] deep enough to get at the relation with the external laws" (6). Because *Edith Wharton: Matters of Mind and Spirit* succeeds in relating some of Wharton's best fiction "with the external laws," it deserves a shelf space next to the Lewis biography and Wolff's critical study. The religious pilgrimage from elite Episcopalianism through Calvinism, Transcendentalism, Platonic idealism and to the vestibule of Roman Catholicism makes the fascinating core, and where Singley stays with it her study is excellent.

However, other concerns not sufficiently subordinated to this core might weaken the conviction that here is an accomplished novelist (a female) who is a world writer. Women's issues and Wharton's love affairs are frequently made the motivation behind Wharton's philosophical and theological searching: for example, Wharton's excitement over Nietzsche's attacks on Christianity are related to the guilt the novelist felt during her liaison with Morton Fullerton (18). (Perhaps this is personal bias; as a Cather scholar I suffer automatic resentment whenever achievement and intellectual inquiry are reduced to biological and psychological proclivities -- a reduction, I fear, applied more readily to female artists than to their male counterparts.) Also, there is for me too much prefatory sociological and cultural contextualizing (some of it enmeshed with feminism) before we are allowed to approach the major fiction, and as usual with overviews, much that misleads: for example, that in the

1870s and 80s religion played an important role in American life, but then discoveries in science (especially evolution) rocked religious faith, and sentimentality made the Atonement a fantasy of the weak, and so on. Following an ample "Introduction," the chapter designated as first delays the major fiction with feminist theorizing I failed to detect as essential in most subsequent discussions: how, for example, Wharton was trespassing on the domain of the male by using her mind and had to overcome the female within her.

Significant topics do surface in this first chapter: the negative reaction Wharton felt toward William James's excessive subjectivity regarding belief, her preference for Henry Coppee and Christian logic; her discovery of William Hamilton's view that the human mind can be complemented by deity, of Blaise Pascal's ideas on convention, and her misgivings about Darwinian determinism and preference for botanist Asa Gray's theories on a divine ordainer as the basis of science. However, the fiction becomes secondary here; Singley's method is to allow a topic to develop into a statement on a related short story, rather than to begin with a story and introduce the topic to reveal that story's importance.

The unquestionably valuable part of this book begins with the discussion of *The House of Mirth* in the second chapter, although contemporary skepticism might restrain Singley from reaching this novel's logical conclusion as a religious text offering us the opportunity to reassert faith in an age of disbelief. After inventively demonstrating how the biblical discourses in the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes compete with Darwin's theories of chance and relativity, Singley attributes Lily's failure as a sacrificial Christ not merely to Selden's missing his opportunity to realize his own failure but to an age when "Christian models no longer work" (85), when "belief [in God] was no longer possible" (87). It could be argued that Selden has been given an opportunity to see and that Lily is the vehicle of that opportunity, a situation anticipating the drama repeated over and over again in Flannery O'Connor, a drama containing as much blindness as sight.

Singley's application of the Christian pilgrimage, particularly the comparison of Wharton's version and Hawthorne's in "The Celestial Railroad," enriches the novel for us, as does her juxtaposing of the sea anemone image of Lily's survival struggle and the lilies in Matthew 6 that leave survival to God.

Ethan Frome emerges here as an important text (although slightly weakened for me by overemphasis of it as proof of Wharton's modernism and as therapy for the guilt of Wharton's love affair) in which a harsh moral antidote is applied to the kind of Episcopalian liberalism that replaced morals with manners and privilege. If the novel gave Wharton, as Singley argues, "an opportunity to transcend" the painful conflict between duty and passion in "a thinly disguised account of [her] struggle with divided loyalties to her husband Teddy and lover Fullerton" (108), more significantly it urged her to explore the pessimistic determinism Calvinism and Darwinism shared, to resist both, and to "reveal her own twentieth-century skepticism." If Lily Bart's story juxtaposes biblical and Darwinian texts, Ethan Frome's articulates the failure of the new technology, represented in the engineer narrator, to fathom the depths of the Calvinist doom Ethan personifies. The comparison to a Hawthorne text is less successful here, however, in that the text, *The Scarlet Letter*, somewhat blurs the failure of Ethan's "affair" to distinguish itself as adultery, a failure to consummate that adds to the mystery of the character and of Wharton's inhibitions, guilt, and interest in Calvinism.

The feminist text woven through Singley's study can be justified in the discussion of *The Reef*. Singley considers this novel Wharton's abandonment of Calvinism, rejection of the "dominant Western view of male superiority," and return to a "pre-patriarchal feminine model" (129). The key to this journey "beyond the Father" is Sophy Viner, who represents Wisdom (although so allegorically here that one wonders how she can be taken in by George Darrow). While the argument to establish Sophy as Sophia might be overdone, it certainly convinces us of her function to generate new relationships among characters and to challenge conventional values. Sophy fails to rescue Darrow from superficiality, however, and in destroying the Victorian fairy-tale at Givre with painful truth ultimately drives Anna Leath back to conventionality, stranding her on the reef of patriarchy. In the final analysis, what Sophy offers relative to spiritual fulfillment, intimacy, trust, and equality between the sexes falters in the novel and gets confused with folly. Singley's reading, especially of Anna's discovery of Laura McTavie-Birch while seeking her sister Sophy (a confrontation with Wisdom's dark double, Folly), is a welcome addition to the dearth of commentary on this novel.

Singley stresses the liberating transcendentalism of Emerson and Whitman in her consideration of *Summer*, even though the body-soul split and the deterministic forces of Calvinism, Darwinism, and the market remain

constants. Her reading of the novel against notes Wharton made for a proposed Whitman essay helps us clarify the natural philosophy of Charity, view Lawyer Royall's role asexually, and accept the animal dimensions of humanity in the Mountain section. However, conventions win out in *Summer* also; Whitman's liberating natural world gives way to Hawthorne's forest, although not before encouraging immediate restraint through assurances of cosmic dimension beyond. (I might add here that Charity's failure to have an abortion is not the result of either social or market forces, as Singley seems to contend [154], but due to viewing it as murderous, a reflection of character that needs exploring.)

The strength of Singley's discussion of *The Age of Innocence* lies in detecting Wharton's structuring of the novel around Platonic dialogues which give universality to the treatment of love, duty, and spiritual values in Old New York. Although Ellen introduces new concepts of these topics (among them, seeing love as self-control) here she remains (like Wharton) too conventional, "seems more Puritan than Platonic" (180) in pressuring Archer toward a love of renunciation, a bodiless ideal. Rather than regarding this as a failure, however, Singley might have recognized in it Wharton's characteristic virtue of restraint, what Ellen wants Archer to appreciate during the brougham scene. But the significant deficiency in this treatment of Wharton's masterpiece is an inadequate handling of revelations about May in the novel's epilog chapter, a deficiency unintentionally supporting Archer's blindness.

The significant task in Singley's final chapter is to explore Wharton's flirtation with Roman Catholicism through two less than first-rate novels, *Hudson River Bracketed* and *The Gods Arrive*. Singley skillfully traces what she labels Wharton's "Roman Fever" from tourism, or fascination with Catholic tradition and culture shared with many American writers before and during her time (Hawthorne, Henry Adams, T.S. Eliot, Cather), to participation, or whatever one calls involvement without conversion. The attempt to make these novels respond to the final phase of Wharton's life and cosmic view as revealed in correspondence can have no conclusive result, however, and Singley's worthy effort to parallel Vance Weston's development to the St. Augustine of *Confessions* and Halo Tarrant to the Heloise of the famous letters is frustrated by Wharton's refusal to allow Weston to transcend Platonism and embrace the "Augustinian doctrine . . . that God's light is superior to humans' inner light" (200) and by Halo's collapse into a Madonna-like woman of obedience and service. We approach an impasse of gender bias: Vance's creative impulses are accommodated by a liberal reading of Augustine, while with Halo "Wharton follows traditional Christian, and specifically Catholic, doctrine by channeling her creative energies into supportive, maternal roles" (207-08). Creativity in this narrative, Singley concludes, "issues from an exclusively male God" (208).

I suspect the elderly Wharton had shed the WASP biases evident in *The Valley of Decision* and "Bunner Sisters," although one still finds them in contemporary discourse on the Roman church. Thus they surface here in truisms of contextualization: that faith exists at the expense of intelligence, that "Catholicism provided much-needed relief from moral burdens" (187), that the church demands "complete surrender to [Catholic] teachings, and practice (189). Each of these germs of truth needs to be qualified with a reading of Thomas Aquinas and an experience of those moral burdens accompanying the benefits of sacramental relief, but in spite of these generalizations Singley has probably detected the reasons why Wharton stayed in the vestibule of the church. Willa Cather confessed that while living among the country folk and nuns during the writing of her Quebec novel, *Shadows on The Rock*, she experienced a "feeling about life that I could not accept, wholly, but which I could not but

admire." To accept "wholly" is to increase the moral burden even beyond the authority burden. What remained for both novelists was a deepened and highly elite Episcopaliamism.

A study like Singley's has to be inconclusive because the aspects of Wharton it examines were neither solved nor are solvable but "only paths to explore" (212). There are pitfalls when one undertakes such a cosmic consideration, and Singley stumbles into some of them. However, the risks define the nature of pilgrimage, which is what Singley has allowed us to take with Wharton. Because it links Wharton with the cosmic, with the sacred, with mystery, *Edith Wharton: Matters of Mind and Spirit* not only deserves shelf space next to the Lewis and Wolff books, it gives us good reasons for reading them and continuing to explore Wharton's fiction.

Brigham Young University

An Interview with Carol J. Singley

by John J. Murphy

JM: *I detected what I refer to in my review as a feminist text in your study of Wharton's "relation with the eternal laws." I feel this text surfaces meaningfully in your discussion of The Reef but at other times it got in my way. Would you respond to this reservation about the book?*

CS: We are approaching the topic from different critical perspectives. I think studies of Wharton's life and fiction need to take her position as an upperclass Victorian woman into account, and I base my book, in part, on studies taking similar approaches. For example, Elizabeth Ammons analyzes Wharton's interest in women's rights in *Edith Wharton's Argument with America*; Cynthia Griffin Wolff describes Wharton's emotional and artistic starvation as the result of an overbearing mother and pressure to live as a socialite in *A Feast of Words*; R.W. B. Lewis, in his biography, notes Wharton's use of marriage themes, of particular importance to women; Mary Suzanne Schriber explores Wharton's gendered artists in *Gender and the Writer's Imagination*; and Elaine Showalter, in a much-quoted essay, describes Lily Bart's demise as the necessary death of "lady novelist" Wharton herself. Feminist theologians, in particular, talk about the centrality of gender to inquiries into religion. Like many others, I see my feminist perspective as adding a dimension -- as helping the reader to see more in a text than he/she might see otherwise.

It seems appropriate to discuss Wharton's love affairs and women's issues in relation to her religion. Female writers historically approach religion through personal contexts; indeed, domestic settings were often the only ones open to them. Anne Bradstreet's poetry is a wonderful example of a woman wrestling with questions of faith through expressions of love for husband and children. Wharton inherits and continues this tradition.

JM: *Another problem I encountered was that the historical overview in the chapters prior to The House of Mirth seemed more important than the fiction in these chapters, and I found many of the generalizations on religion as misleading as informative. Why did you think so much overview necessary before approaching the major fiction?*

CS: Again, we may differ in our critical assumptions. I take a cultural studies and historicist approach,

placing Wharton in the context of religious, philosophical, and intellectual -- as well as literary -- traditions. To date, much Wharton scholarship has been biographical rather than historical; my introduction addresses this gap. In order to consider Wharton as a novelist of morals, I needed a "history of ideas" against which to understand the evolution of her values. Wharton's intellectual development is important to my study because Wharton sought, as she says in *A Backward Glance*, to harmonize "the dissecting intellect with the accepting soul" (159). She did not want to be associated with nineteenth-century sentimentalists, who equated faith with feeling only. I also wrote the introduction to complement feminist studies with psychological or linguistic emphases that minimize cultural context. So I'm surprised if you had trouble, on the one hand, with the book's discussion of gender, and on the other hand, with my efforts to place Wharton in a religious, philosophical and intellectual mainstream.

I hope it is clear that the religious views, or "generalizations," in my book are those of Wharton and her contemporaries. They sometimes correspond precisely to theological doctrine, but more often they demonstrate various interpretations as individuals respond to changing times and circumstances.

JM: *Do you really believe Lily Bart fails because "Christian models no longer work" and "belief [in God] was no longer possible" or merely because Selden is blind? Do you think his blindness reflects such universal issues or merely himself and his society?*

CS: I hope my argument makes clear that Lily fails because "Christian models no longer work" in her world. I happen to believe that they work in life outside of novels, although that's a matter not relevant to the book. For some individuals living in the novel's frivolous upper-class, belief in God was no longer possible or desirable; belief in self, money, or social position supplanted it. I agree with you completely that Selden is blind. Wharton shows that his blindness, as well as that of his self-centered, materialistic society, is rampant. I think of *The House of Mirth* as a lament for lost Christian values, not just a declaration of their loss. Wharton would like to see these values resuscitated but is not sure they can be.

JM: *Do you think that Mattie and Ethan consummated their relationship (other than vicariously, as Cynthia Wolff suggests, in the suicidal ride)? I ask this because you juxtapose their relationship to the literally adulterous one in Scarlet The Letter.*

CS: I treat Mattie and Ethan's relationship as adulterous, in part because of the autobiographical connections I make -- it parallels Wharton and Fullerton's actual affair -- and in part because it is emotionally and erotically adulterous -- the two are in love and plan to spend a night together. I see the connection to *The Scarlet Letter* in terms of Wharton's relation with Hawthorne and the tradition he represents. My point is that Fullerton, Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, and Calvinism all come together for Wharton in complementary ways in this New England novel.

JM: *Do you feel you give May enough attention in discussing The Age of Innocence? What about the revelations about her in the last chapter, their effect on Archer's seeing. Are you unintentionally confirming Archer's blindness about her?*

CS: I deliberately give May less attention than Ellen. Ellen in my mind is so superior to May in integrity, wisdom, grace, and beauty that the two women are doubles only in the sense that they compete for the same man. Your question gives me the chance to make explicit what the book implies -- thank you.

I have difficulty crediting May too much because her possession of Archer is predicated on a lie -- a white lie about a pregnancy not yet confirmed, but a lie nonetheless. When Archer "sees" that May knew all along how much he gave up for her, he is confirmed in the kind of sentimental thinking that Wharton criticizes in this novel. Is a life with May any more noble -- simply because it involves sacrifice -- than a life with Ellen? Is it right to insist on a marriage and family if one partner is pulled in a different direction? Are values to be preserved for their own sake? As you can see, I'm not a champion of May Archer! However, it is worth noting that through May's character, Wharton raises these complex issues and lets her readers make their own interpretations.

Perhaps we disagree about Ellen. I do consider it unfortunate that Ellen cannot find a way to bring together her erotic, artistic, and philosophical impulses. The fault may be Wharton's for not realizing her fully enough.

JM: *The last novels discussed do not adequately reflect the final phase of Wharton's spiritual search,*

which is not your fault. However, what did you discover in your research and in interviews that might illuminate this phase beyond what you have in your book?

CS: Actually, I do think the novels reflect the uncertainty of Wharton's final spiritual phase. When a question about Wharton's ultimate faith arises, I think of her godson, William Royall Tyler, telling me that Wharton was a deeply religious person and that religion was always at the forefront of her consciousness. What seems important in his comment is that Wharton could be spiritual without adhering to a particular creed or doctrine. Elisina Tyler's unpublished diary of the last weeks of Wharton's life indicates Wharton's interest in religion, especially Catholicism, but it does not confirm this faith. Despite her fervent hopes, she didn't find a religious answer. She remained, as I say in the book, a religious seeker.

JM: *Your book is a fine one, as I say in my review, deserves a place beside Lewis's and Wolff's. But I wanted you to respond to my reservations rather than to the plaudits the review contains. My last question is the only one of the editor's suggested ones I have included. Where do you go from here with Edith Wharton?*

CS: I continue to explore questions of moral meaning in Wharton's fiction, for example, her use of the Furies and classical concepts of justice in *The House of Mirth*. I'm also editing a few manuscripts and have begun a book-length study that includes Wharton's novels as well as fiction by other American writers.



An Interview with Millicent Bell

by Julie Olin-Ammentorp

In early September, I was lucky to be able to contact Professor Bell by telephone and discuss her book with her. She was naturally enthusiastic about the collection, expressing her sense that it takes a "new direction," or "look[s] at the horizon of Wharton studies." She reports that Wharton remains a strong interest of hers (after making her impact on Wharton scholarship with *Edith Wharton and Henry James* [1965]). She has published on a number of other authors, including *Meaning in Henry James* (1992), and has also written on non-literary topics, recently publishing an essay on Rodin in *Raritan*. While she has no book-length manuscript under way at the moment, a book on nineteenth and twentieth century women writers -- including, of course, Edith Wharton -- "might be growing."

For Professor Bell, the most challenging part of editing *The Cambridge Companion to Wharton* was writing the introduction. Prof. Bell told me that though she was "tempted," she "chose not to do an individual exercise of analysis because of the real importance of the task of viewing the history of Wharton scholarship." This she has certainly done, along with allowing her readers a glimpse of the "horizon" of Wharton scholarship to come.

Contradictory Possibilities: Wharton Scholarship 1992-1994

A Bibliographic Essay

by Clare Colquitt

In his valedictory essay as bibliographic editor for the *Edith Wharton Review*, Alfred Bendixen reflects on his nearly ten years' experience surveying Wharton studies:

When I began . . . reviewing Wharton scholarship, feminist approaches to Wharton's work were still relatively new and Wharton's position in the canon was -- at least to some critics -- questionable. It is my pleasure to conclude my final bibliographic essay with the statement that Wharton criticism is remarkably healthy and growing stronger. Edith Wharton now seems permanently enshrined in the canon of major American writers, and critics are employing an increasingly wide range of sophisticated methods as they examine both theme and technique. ("New Directions" 24)

Scholars are grateful for Bendixen's labors. His work as bibliographic editor began in 1985 with "A Guide to Wharton Criticism, 1974-1983," a collaborative project involving nearly a dozen scholars. The guide was followed in 1986, 1988, 1990, and 1993 by judicious, informative essays in which Bendixen charted the changing landscape of Wharton studies from the mid-1980s to 1992.

The bibliographic essay starts where Bendixen left off and covers scholarly essays, notes, and book chapters from 1993 and 1994, as well as several items from 1992 published too late for inclusion in the earlier survey. Reviews or review essays of books and films are omitted unless, like the John Updike article mentioned below, they hold special significance for Wharton scholars. I refer only in passing to recent biographies and book-length critical studies that have been reviewed already in this journal or soon will be. My aim has been to present as inclusive a survey of English-language scholarship as possible. I realize, however, that this is the bibliographer's impossible ideal and would appreciate additional citations so that I may atone for my sins of omission in subsequent essays.

I wish, too, to thank those who sent me offprints of their recent work. Such assistance is particularly welcome for publications outside the United States since interlibrary loan occasionally fails. This was the case when I attempted without success to obtain Elfriede Pöder's 1992 essay on Wharton, Stein, and Barnes, included in Gudrun Grabher and Maureen Devine's collection *Women in Search of Literary Space*. Both the 1991 conference in Paris and the

1995 meeting in New Haven, "Edith Wharton at Yale," made clear that important work on Wharton is being done in many other languages besides English. In later essays I hope to draw on the expertise of other scholars so as to better situate Wharton studies in its rightful international context.

Marked by the publication of three new biographies on Edith Wharton--Shari Benstock's *No Gifts from Chance: A Biography of Edith Wharton*, Eleanor Dwight's *Edith Wharton: An Extraordinary Life*, and Susan Goodman's *Edith Wharton's Inner Circle* -- and the newly revised edition of Cynthia Griffin Wolff's *A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton--1994* proved a banner year for Wharton studies. While none of the new biographies will displace R.W.B. Lewis's groundbreaking *Edith Wharton: A Biography* (1975), taken together these life studies enrich our understanding of an extraordinary writer who, to borrow from Dwight, led "an extraordinary life" as well.

As the title of her meticulously researched biography suggests, Benstock portrays Wharton as a "self-made woman" who awaited "no gifts from chance." Benstock provides fresh material on Wharton's friendships with women, her complicated family ties, and her lifelong devotion to and emotional dependence on her servants. Not least, Benstock shows how Wharton learned to deal shrewdly with editors and publishers. As Wharton herself once told Minnie Cadwalader Jones, "Writing is my business as well as my passion" (qtd. in Benstock 355). Dwight's crisply written biography, with over 300 illustrations, appeals in large part to the eye, affording us an enticing vision of Wharton's privileged social and economic milieu. Attending more to Wharton's interior life than to the exquisite settings in which she moved, Goodman presents "an intimate view into the workings of an American expatriate community" comprised of Wharton and her closest male friends, and indicates "how Wharton's vision of the inner circle informs her fiction" (xi, xii).

Like the biographies, the collection arising from the Paris conference, Katherine Joslin and Alan Price's engaging *Wretched Exotic: Essays on Edith Wharton and Europe*, contains works relating the life and art (see

Tuttleton's review). These include essays by Benstock ("Landscapes of Desire") and Goodman ("Edith Wharton's Inner Circle") that serve as prelude to the biographies just described, and additional articles that trace the literary and personal significance of Edith Wharton's expatriation to France (Millicent Bell and Carol Wershoven), American reaction to that move (Kristin Olson Lauer), and Wharton's ties--or lack thereof--to other literary Americans in Paris, notably, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Faulkner, and Stein (Robert A. Martin and Linda Wagner-Martin). Scholars interested in Wharton's charitable work during World War I will want to consult Alan Price's essay on the making of *The Book of the Homeless*. His thesis, though bold, is convincing: "No other artist did so much to alleviate suffering among the refugees from Belgium and the occupied provinces of northern France or was able to enlist such a variety of fellow artists in such a broad range of projects to raise money for the war homeless" (219).

No less deserving of mention are essays from *Wretched Exotic* by Teresa Gómez Reus, Brigitte Bailey, Maureen E. St. Laurent, Shirley Foster, and Mary Suzanne Schriber on Wharton's European travels and travel writing. That few other critics analyze the travel narratives suggests that this genre still suffers from neglect, a situation that Schriber's edition of *A Motor-Flight through France* (1991) and Claudine Lesage's edition of the newly discovered *The Cruise of the Vanadis* (1992), will help to correct.

Interest in biography is reflected in essays appearing elsewhere by Deborah Hecht, Scott Marshall, and Gianfranca Balestra. Glancing backward to the "oddly skewed, possibly malicious" *Portrait of Edith Wharton*, Hecht argues that Lubbock's work continues to cast a shadow on scholarship today (259). Marshall documents real-life sources for the art when he investigates Wharton's friendship with Kate Spencer, who was injured in the 1904 sledding accident in Lenox upon which the doomed suicide run in *Ethan Frome* is presumably based. Balestra contrasts Wharton's "long love affair with the motorcar" with James's predictably ambiguous response to "the proper Vehicle of Passion." Despite their varying enthusiasms, James's tale "The Velvet Glove" (1909) makes clear that he, too, perceived the erotic and literary appeal of the car ("Edith Wharton" 595, 600, 603).

Perhaps the most significant contribution to our knowledge of Wharton as a woman and writer of passion is Kenneth M. Price and Phyllis McBride's well-annotated edition of the 1908 Love Diary. Though Wharton scholars have long known of -- and quoted from -- "The Life Apart. (*L'ame close*)," here, for the first time, the manuscript appears in full. Prefaced by a helpful biographical introduction, the publication of this "document of self-analysis, self-questioning, self-creation" will likely serve as a catalyst for further exploration of Wharton's midlife romance (668).

Another essay by Kenneth M. Price shows how

Wharton's complicated vision of Whitman informs her love correspondence and her fiction. Particularly illuminating is Price's exploration of Whitmanian comradeship in *A Son at the Front*. Judith L. Sensibar's insightful analysis of this novel complements Price's study by attending to Wharton's ambivalent response to the sexual politics of modernist aesthetics. In *A Son at the Front*, Sensibar argues, Wharton crafts "a new kind of war novel" that overturns masculinist literary conventions and patriarchal gender constructs (242).

Sensibar's and Price's essays are the sole works focusing on the war fiction. Indeed, scholars tend to favor only a handful of Wharton's novels, among them, *The Age of Innocence*, *The Custom of the Country*, *The Reef*, and *Ethan Frome*. Not surprisingly, essays on *The House of Mirth* far outnumber critical studies of Wharton's other novels. Bendixen's judgment that *The House of Mirth* is Wharton's "most studied," "most praised" book still holds, as does his assertion that criticism on this work is "remarkably high" ("New Directions" 20, 21). The most visible indication of our enduring fascination with Lily Bart -- and with her critics -- is Benstock's contribution to the St. Martin's Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism series. Teachers wishing to include a critical edition of *House* on their syllabi will now have the (pleasing) problem of choice--to select either the theoretically oriented St. Martin's casebook or the more historically situated Norton critical edition by Elizabeth Ammons.

Most recent criticism on *The House of Mirth* centers on Wharton's representation of the body and the body politic. In separate essays Lois Tyson and Gianfranca Balestra examine Wharton's depiction of the female body as material or aesthetic commodity. Along similar lines, Carol Baker Sabora's analysis of Wharton's "technique of literary doubling" leads her to conclude "that the question in this novel is not merely who is the real Lily Bart -- the 'flesh and blood' woman or the breath-taking work of art she has created -- but who or what is a real woman" (372). Grace Ann Hovet and Theodore R. Hovet's impressive comparative study of *tableaux vivants* in the fiction of Wharton, Alcott, Stowe, and Warner stresses "the implications of the [male] gaze on woman's identity and explores the ways that women can evade or even exploit its pervasive presence through feminine mask, masquerade, and performance" (336).

Cynthia Griffin Wolff addresses the role of masquerade by documenting how Wharton's knowledge of contemporary theatrical conventions, particularly those defining the "well-made play," is mirrored in *The House of Mirth*. Though the leading "actors" in this novel "have their counterparts in turn-of-the-century drama," Wolff explains that Wharton's cast of characters "rises above the two-dimensional predictability of stage stereotypes" (267). Racial -- and possibly racist -- stereotyping is of concern in Christian Riegel's essay on anti-Semitism in *The House of Mirth* and in articles by Meredith Goldsmith and Ludger Brinker, both of whom pair Wharton with writers

decidedly outside her accustomed social sphere. Interrelating *The House of Mirth* and Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*, Goldsmith holds that "Larsen and Wharton's commonality lies in their creation of subjects who are racialized through the experiences of both gender and class" (4). In similar fashion, Brinker contrasts Lily's decline with *The Rise of David Levinsky* to show that Wharton and Abraham Cahan share important themes: "Both authors pass severe moral judgments on what they perceive to be the out-of-control materialism of American culture and society . . ." (3).

Of special note is Janet Gabler-Hover and Kathleen Plate's sophisticated reading of the "rich tradition in psychology, philosophy, and metaphysics" informing Wharton's Nietzschean representation of the "*Beyond!*" (359). Essays by Ellen J. Goldner and Marilyn Maness Mehaffy also reward. Focusing on the "lying woman" as the cause of social anxiety, Goldner demonstrates that through death the "lying" Lily is effectively disembodied. No longer a threat to society, Lily "becomes the locus of transcendent cause and produces the cultural image of the individual spirit as universal and free" (303). Mehaffy explores the ways in which "Wharton's text interrogates the historically-specific . . . gender and sexual representations." For Mehaffy, the "crucial moment" in the novel occurs when Wharton "juxtapos[es] Lily and Gus's encounter with the night Lily and Gerty spend in each other's arms." Identifying the latter image of "female-female desire" as "the most occulted sexual signifier in *The House of Mirth*," Mehaffy maintains that the structural "logic" of this novel "alienates the heterosexual narrative as a 'natural,' transparent Metaphor for . . . 'sexuality'" (47-48).

Its cherished position in the Wharton canon notwithstanding, *The Age of Innocence* was the focus of just three critical essays. John Murphy traces the possible influence of *The Age of Innocence* on Cather's *A Lost Lady*. Clare Virginia Eby analyzes "silence and silencing as old New York's means of social control, particularly for maintaining a constricting definition of 'the feminine'" (94). And in a review essay on the Martin Scorsese movie, Linda Costanza Cahir studies the problems of translating "Wharton's most complex and slippery work" into film (13). According to Cahir, Scorsese's chief failure was one of interpretation: "The film never articulates definite ideas regarding the integral meaning of Wharton's novel" (12). Despite its "moments of haunting poignancy," the film becomes "a Hollywood romantic paradigm" that does justice neither to Wharton nor to Scorsese (14, 13).

Whether the BBC production of *The Buccaneers* is more successful in this regard literally remains to be seen, at least in the United States. (Having already been broadcast in England, *The Buccaneers* will be aired by Masterpiece Theatre this fall.) The film industry's persisting interest in Wharton is sure to generate renewed attention to Wharton and the arts, a focus that Adeline Tintner has long held. Tintner's recent study of Pre-

Raphaelite references in *The Buccaneers* documents Wharton's efforts "to thicken the Pre-Raphaelite mood" of this narrative ("Pre-Raphaelite" 18). Her article on Consuelo Vanderbilt's marriage to the Duke of Malborough as the possible source for the international marriages portrayed in this novel is also persuasive.

Peter L. Hays takes a different tack in what was the single extended treatment of *The Custom of the Country*. The title of his essay neatly conveys his thesis: "Undine Is Us: Wharton's Attack on American Greed." (For comparative treatment of Undine Spragg and Lily Bart, see the conclusion of Balestra's "The Body as Commodity.") A revisionist reading of another of Wharton's "bad heroines" is evident in William R. MacNaughton's discerning analysis of the "limited and potentially unhealthy" options available to Sophy Viner at the ending of *The Reef* ("Edith Wharton's 'Bad Heroine'" 223). In a related essay on this book MacNaughton suggests Wharton's rationale for Jimmie Brance's appearance in the closing chapter. By heightening our awareness of the murky world Sophy Viner reenters, Wharton prevents her readers from "sentimentaliz[ing] Sophy's future" ("Wharton's *The Reef*" 228). In his third article on *The Reef*, MacNaughton challenges a critical commonplace by showing that Wharton's "most Jamesian novel" is in fact "a veiled, tentative act of implied criticism: both of James' own actions and attitudes, and, more importantly, of his implausible depiction of certain male-female relationships . . ." ("Edith Wharton, *The Reef*, and Henry James" 43, 44). Sherrie A. Inness studies the "sexual economics" of *The Reef* to disclose how "Anna's and Sophy's intricate relationship to their spatial environments" depends upon the "unnatural" patriarchal nature/culture opposition (76). Approaching the novel from a mythic slant, Wendell Jones, Jr. looks backward to the classical legend of Psyche as he excavates the allusive layers cloaking Wharton's characterization of Anna.

Mothers and lovers are the central focus of Nancy Walker's comparative study of *The Reef* and *The Mother's Recompense*, and of Julie Olin-Ammentorp's Kristevan treatment of motherhood in *The Gods Arrive*. Exploring similar concerns in *The Mother's Recompense*, Nicole Tonkovich offers an insightful new take on Wharton as a novelist of manners. She maintains that "Wharton's novel foregrounds the close connection of the idea of recompense to the novel of manners, demonstrating that when women refuse to cooperate in the regulated sexual circulation and exchange that perpetuates patriarchal marriage, they must be punished or recompensed" (13).

New publications on *Ethan Frome* indicate the high esteem this work enjoys within and without literary circles. In a brief but penetrating note on "the sexual symbolism of the red pickle dish," Darryl Hattenhauer claims "[t]hat Zeena's ostensible illness, hypochondria, and interest in the disease of others are substitutes for sex . . ." (226). In an essay on the "social construction of the sick role," Mary D. Lagerwey and Gerald E. Markle map the sociological

dimensions and pedagogical relevance of Wharton's "treatment" of the ill. Their interdisciplinary analysis raises central issues pertaining to "the importance of class, gender and community in defining and legitimizing the sick role" (121). Medical nightmares are a topic as well in Marlene K. Springer's excellent study *Ethan Frome: A Nightmare of Need*, the second Wharton book included in Twayne's Masterwork Series. Scholars will also welcome Kristin O. Lauer and Cynthia Griffin Wolff's new Norton critical edition of *Ethan Frome*.

Criticism on the short stories suggests that a gothic revival is under way. The spring 1994 *Edith Wharton Review* on Wharton and the gothic is a case in point. The essays featured here stress that the gothic had special appeal for Wharton. Citing a passage from *A Motor-Flight through France*, Kathy Fedorko identifies a major source of this appeal: the gothic frees the artist "to utter the unutterable" (qtd. in 3). Using "Bewitched" and "The Young Gentlemen" as model gothic tales, Fedorko persuasively argues that in Wharton's short fiction, the heart of gothic darkness is the feminine "abyss." "Unutterable" relations among young men and old are unveiled in Richard A. Kaye's astute analysis of the homoerotic subtext lurking beneath Wharton's tales of "homosexual panic" and "interrupted heterosexual domesticity" (12). Monika Elbert associates Wharton with the modernist gothic tradition of a writer whose poetry she despised: T.S. Eliot. According to Elbert, both Wharton and Eliot "attempt to ward off the modern sense of chaos or fragmentation" by seeking alternative "realities" in the supernatural and in myth (19). Relying upon Karen Horney's theories of neurotic typology, Kristin O. Lauer encourages readers to see the "Beatrice Palmato" fragment anew: as a "terribly sad, terribly hopeless" story "of a miserable woman driven to find one moment of rescue in surrender to an obviously controlling, utterly egotistical man" (28).

Wharton's gothic writings receive substantial commentary elsewhere. In an essay dissecting the horror of the "everyday," Martha Banta analyzes a host of "threshold scenes" from Wharton's fiction. Her claim that *The Decoration of Houses* participates in the "ghostly gothic" especially intrigues. In contrast, Janet Ruth Heller posits that "Afterward" is no more than a study of marital discord in gothic disguise. Adopting a different approach, Helen Killoran solves the mystery of "Kerfol" by tracking Wharton's carefully planted "leads." Killoran proposes that what seems a tale of all too common murderous marital strife actually veils the "historical horror" of seventeenth-century religious conflict.

Clearly, Wharton's gothic tales still haunt us. Indeed, as one reads the variously focused essays on Wharton's stories, it is hard not to feel the anxiety of gothic influence emanating from the very titles Wharton chose: "The House of the Dead Hand," "The Other Two," "The Angel at the Grave," and "Roman Fever."

The anxiety of the historically "real" resonates in

essays on woman's contested social place. Concerning "The Looking Glass" and "Permanent Wave," Sherrie A. Inness cautions against a monolithic reading of Wharton's portrayal of the "beauty system." Women's interaction with this system is myriad, and the system itself "complex, multivalent, and polysemous" (8). In a related essay on female performance in "The Other Two," Mary Beth Inverso contends that Alice Waythorn is no mere "projection of the male gaze" but an actor fully in control of her craft (3). Evelyn E. Fracasso offers a decidedly more ambivalent reading of woman's transcendent power in an illuminating study of images of imprisonment in "Mrs. Manstey's View" and "Duration." The concerns Fracasso discusses here receive fuller treatment in her recent book *Edith Wharton's Prisoners of Consciousness: A Study of Theme and Technique in the Tales*. Toby Widdicombe's exacting research instates "The Angel at the Grave" as both a memorial to and a critique of transcendental thought, while Lawrence I. Berkove interprets "Roman Fever" as "a surprisingly traditional Christian" condemnation of female transgression (60). Scholars will want to compare Berkove's reading with Susan Elizabeth Sweeney's many-layered analysis of "Roman Fever." For Sweeney, this story "poignantly expresses Wharton's complicated feelings about forbidden carnal and literary knowledge" (328).

The power of the dead hand and of the hand that writes is the focus of recent essays by Lynette Carpenter and Elsa Nettels. In Carpenter's study of "The House of the Dead Hand," writing is man's province, not woman's: "by associating men's power over language with their power to control women's lives," this story "raises serious questions about the role of the woman of letters in telling women's stories . . ." (55). Nettels, in contrast, examines "texts within texts" in "The Muse's Tragedy" and *The Touchstone* to assert that letter-writing empowers women as much as men: "Whatever the attitude of recipients, letter writers are not victims but creators of texts of unique power that can reach . . . farther than the power of any other agent in Wharton's fiction" (204). D. Quentin Miller addresses parallel issues in his far-reaching study of the "thematic opposition" "between vision--a word that connotes both sight and imagination--and speech" in several Wharton novels (11). For an impressive study of Wharton's narrative technique, scholars will want to consider Kathy Hadley's *In the Interstices of the Tale: Edith Wharton's Narrative Strategies* as well.

The intricately woven fabric of text and context represents another major area of scholarship. In addition to essays cited earlier (see Kenneth M. Price on Whitman, Brinker on Cahan, Goldsmith on Larsen, Tintner on the Pre-Raphaelites, Elbert on T.S. Eliot, MacNaughton on James, and Murphy on Cather), a number of other scholars are extending our knowledge of Wharton's place in literary history. For Katherine Joslin, Wharton and George Sand become resisting readers. Shared discontent defines both writers' reaction to the dominant literary movements

of their time: modernism in Wharton's case, realism in Sand's. According to Donna M. Campbell, "Mrs. Manstey's View" and the *Bunner Sisters* are case studies in Wharton's exercise of literary dissent: "[I]nterfusing the city landscapes of naturalism with the potent iconography and theme of local color," these tales "provid[e] a chilling commentary upon the limitations of local color fiction in a naturalistic world that encroaches upon and threatens its ideals" (169).

Articles by Susan Goodman on the "Sketch of an Essay on Walt Whitman," and by Tamara S. Evans on Gottfried Keller and Theodor Fontane, attest to Wharton's readerly receptivity. Comparing *Summer* with *Irrungen, Wirrungen*, Evans reconsiders Wharton's response to German poetic realism and suggests that Fontane, more so than Keller, may have been a "possible source of influence" (364). She acknowledges, however, "There is no proof that Edith Wharton had read Fontane" (366). Thanks to Helen Killoran's work in progress on Wharton's reading, which now exceeds two thousand titles, scholars will soon have a clearer idea of what Wharton may have read. In an essay "On the Religious Reading of Edith Wharton," Killoran questions whether "Wharton was on the verge of conversion to Roman Catholicism" at her life's close, as some have said (58). Of particular value is Killoran's bibliographical essay "Edith Wharton's Reading in European Languages and Its Influence on Her Work." (Fontane does not appear among the German titles Killoran catalogues.)

Roger Asselineau, Julie Olin-Ammentorp, and Laurel Fryer-Smith analyze Wharton's reading in and of the French. In "Edith Wharton -- She Thought in French and Wrote in English," Asselineau carefully delineates Wharton's "partiality for French" and "Frenchness" (362). Essays on *French Ways and Their Meaning* by Olin-Ammentorp and Fryer-Smith present a lively exchange on Wharton's "reading" of French and American women. Olin-Ammentorp contends that *French Ways and Their Meaning* subtly betrays "Wharton's unstated belief in the fundamental inferiority of women" (15), a position that Fryer-Smith refutes.

Literary relations between Wharton and her contemporaries are explored in Daniel Bratton's essay on Louis Bromfield and in Morris Dickstein's critical collage on "the city as text." Comparing *Twilight Sleep* with *The Green Bay Tree*, Bratton offers a provocative vision of Wharton as a late-Victorian "agrarian" aristocrat. In *Twilight Sleep*, he argues, Wharton advocates "an incorporation into the exigencies of modern life of the older morality, the genteel ethical code, and the recapture of traditional values through renewed contact with the land" (10). Dickstein views Wharton as city writer from a different angle as he places Wharton in a long line of artists and filmmakers who do New York -- among them, Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, Woody Allen, and Martin Scorsese. He writes: "Old New York and changing New York are not simply the settings

of Wharton's novels; they are essentially the protagonists" (195).

Wharton's literary legacy is appraised by Elsa Nettels, Mia Manzulli, and Adeline Tintner. Manzulli maintains that the "garden as a space for female creativity" is a part of Wharton's and Alice Walker's shared artistic inheritance (9). Tintner scrutinizes Richard Howard's double-edged portrait of Edith Wharton in his dramatic poem "The Lesson of the Master." And in a thoughtful comparison of theme and technique in *Ethan Frome* and Jean Stafford's "A Country Love Story," Nettels makes a persuasive case for Wharton's profound influence on Stafford: "[P]rominent [themes] in Wharton's fiction are developed as powerfully by Jean Stafford as by any other of Wharton's successors" (6).

John Updike discusses recent attempts to develop Wharton's themes in "Reworking Wharton," a review essay that is itself a literary (critical) *tour de force*. Contemplating the virtues and the flaws of Marion Mainwaring's completion of *The Buccaneers*, John Madden's film of *Ethan Frome*, and Martin Scorsese's of *The Age of Innocence*, Updike poses the question: "In reworking Wharton, how tied should the workers be to the cruel overseer within her who denied her characters happiness after bringing them tantalizingly close to it?" His wistful comment on "a momentary ambiguity at the end of Scorsese's film" suggests how Updike himself might be tempted to revise Wharton (211): "It could have gone, our illusion is, the other way. Contradictory possibilities are a sign of life, and Wharton's work is full of them" (212).

To survey Wharton scholarship in the mid-1990s is to realize that Wharton's legacy looms large. As we approach the centennial marking the publication of Wharton's first book, *The Decoration of Houses* (1897), signs of life are everywhere apparent that contradictory critical possibilities abound as scholars continue to rework Wharton in imaginative and illuminating ways.

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