

EDITH WHARTON IN
NEW YORK

Fall or

Spring
1986-?

THEN



NOW

LITERARY LANDSCAPES: WALKING TOUR OF
WHARTON'S OLD NEW YORK - PAGES 6 and 7

MLA 1987 ANNUAL CONVENTION, NEW YORK
"Edith Wharton and Her Men"
Monday, December 29, 1986 3:30-5:00 Brecht Room

"Lovers and Friends: More from More Letters,"
R.W.B. Lewis, Yale University.

"Is Wharton Just a Minor James?" Judith Saunders,
Marist College.

"Trajectories of Desire: Martin Boyne in *The Children*,"
Deborah Carlin, Harvard University.

Session Leader: Annette Zilversmit, Long Island University,
Brooklyn Campus.

(More details on page 3)

FIRST ALL-WHARTON CONFERENCE
June 7-10, 1987

"The Mount," Lenox, Massachusetts

"Edith Wharton at "The Mount": A Rebirth"

A celebration of Wharton's 125 birthday and a convocation of Wharton scholars. Guest speakers include R.W.B. Lewis, Cynthia Griffin Wolff, Margaret McDowell, Elizabeth Ammons, Judith Fryer and Marilyn French. Other papers invited.

(More details on page 11)

DINNER — BUSINESS MEETING — SEE INSERT

'Feminized Men' in Wharton's *Old New York*

by Mary Margaret Richards

In *Edith Wharton's New York Quartet*, the only book-length study of Wharton's *Old New York*, Catherine M. Rae speculates that in *False Dawn*, the first novella, the male protagonist is based on Wharton herself. Lewis Raycie, says Rae, "is in some ways reminiscent of the young Edith Wharton" as his father is like Wharton's mother.¹ Rae may indeed be right; certainly in *False Dawn* and *The Spark* the male protagonists are "feminized," suffering under the same sorts of narrow expectations and rules as Wharton's women. The plot lines of these two novellas, dealing with freedom to travel and service in the military, demand male characters, and they allow Wharton to point out that New York society can stunt and ostracize its men as well as its women.

Lewis Raycie, the protagonist of *False Dawn*, is feminized in three ways. First, his father seeks to remake Lewis in his own image. Susan Gubar has pointed out the potency of the Pygmalion myth as man seeking to remake "female life as he would like it to be."² In Wharton's version, the elder Mr. Raycie seeks to form not only his wife's and daughters' lives, but also his son's: "To Lewis... Mr. Raycie had meted the same measure as to the females of the household."³ One of the Raycie acquaintances speculates that "you wouldn't have supposed young Lewis was exactly the kind of craft Halston would have turned out if he'd had the designing of his son and heir" (5). Mr. Raycie is proud of Lewis's learning, but "could (Lewis) have combined with this tendency a manlier frame, and an interest in the few forms of sport then popular among gentlemen, Mr. Raycie's satisfaction would have been complete" (23). Ironically, Mr. Raycie wishes that Lewis were more "manly" at the same time that he manipulates his son into silence and confusion.

Mr. Raycie hasn't given up on shaping his son, who he thinks is "young and malleable" (23); Lewis knows that his Grand Tour is "intended by Mr. Raycie to lead up to a marriage and an establishment after Mr. Raycie's own heart, but in which Lewis's was not to have even a consulting voice" (24). That is, Lewis is to be no freer



Alan Maley, Conacher Galleries, S.F.

in his choices than his sisters, his mother, or any other women in New York society. According to Mr. Raycie, Lewis's Grand Tour is to be a "formative" experience (24) which will give Lewis exactly the same tastes and desires as his father. Mr. Raycie assumes that Lewis will admire only what he himself had, and, when Lewis returns with a collection of unknown paintings, complains, "I supplied you with the names of all the advisers you needed, and all the painters, too; I all but made the collection for you myself, before you started" (51). This, of course, is the problem: in every action, in his physical build, his drinking habits, his tastes, his loves, Lewis has been anticipated by his father's wishes for him and is ostracized and disinherited when he goes against them.

The second way in which Lewis is feminized is that his father's attempt to remake him renders Lewis inarticulate, unable to speak his mind in his father's presence; he is not in control of the language his father speaks, the masculine language of power. When trying to talk to his father he "stammers" (pp. 6, 26, 50), "simper(s)" (p. 44), and produces a "faint but respectful gurgle" (p. 45). His one attempt at "faint irony" (p. 44) is met with a stare and a flat correction which again reduce Lewis to silence.

Third, Lewis is made to feel "other" by his contact with an artist. John Ruskin helps him to see beyond the boundaries of narrow New York society; this vision, shared by no one in New York, sets him apart. His father disinherits him, and society ostracizes him; even though his artistic judgement is accepted by a later generation of New Yorkers, Lewis himself is outcast, unable to find a place within the society. In the preface to her book *The Resisting Reader* Judith Fetterley describes the position of women in a patriarchal culture: "bereft, disinherited, cast out, woman is the Other, the Outsider."⁴ This description fits many of Edith Wharton's heroines; it describes Lewis Raycie as well.

Unlike Lewis Raycie, who is effectively removed from New York social circles, Hayley Delane, the protagonist of *The Spark*, remains a part of the society. However, the narrator of Delane's story thinks that Delane has been stunted, that he is capable of much greater ac-

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R.W.B. Lewis Speaks On "Edith Wharton and Her Men"

The Special Session "Edith Wharton and Her Men" sponsored by the Edith Wharton Society at the 1986 Annual MLA Convention in New York is scheduled for Monday, December 29, in the Brecht Room at 3:30-5 P.M. The leading speaker is R.W.B. Lewis of Yale University who has recently completed edited (with Nancy Lewis) the long awaited *The Letters of Edith Wharton* (Scribner's). In "Lovers and Friends: More from More Letters," Professor Lewis will reveal from her large cor-

complishments than he has been allowed. While we see Lewis Raycie as a young man, still forming his character, Delane has long since become "an accomplished fact" (p. 178). We can only guess with the narrator at the forces which have turned Delane into an idle New Yorker, a "card-playing, ball-going, race-frequenting elderly gentleman" (p. 221). The narrator decides that "his mind had been receptive up to a certain age, and had then snapped shut on what it possessed, like a replete crustacean never reached by another high tide" (p. 199). This snapping shut, he postulates, had happened when Delane left the army at the end of the Civil War and returned to "the common-place existence" of Old New York, "from which he had never since deviated" (p. 200). At a dinner to which several Civil War veterans have been invited, the narrator thinks that even if Delane's mind had "snapped shut" at age nineteen, he was still more mature than the other veterans; however, "it was only morally that he had gone on growing. Intellectually they were all on a par" (p. 203). The narrator says Delane is "something still not wholly accounted for" (p. 179). who keeps "reminding (him), in his lazy torpid way, of times and scenes and people greater than he could know" (p. 184). Delane has within him something fine, "other faculties, now dormant, perhaps

respondence the rich and complex relationships Wharton had with male friends and artists. Professor Judith Saunders of Marist College in "Is Wharton Just a Minor James?" will seek to rescue Wharton from the shadows and comparisons, most limiting, she suffers in this famous literary coupling. She will posit that in complexity of plot and characterizations, in cogent feminist criticism, Wharton is perhaps superior to the older James. And in "Trajectories of Desire: Martin Boyne in *The Children*," Deborah Carlin of Harvard University, will trace the sympathetic and psychoanalytic exploration of character Wharton afforded her male protagonists as well as her heroines.

Following the session will be a cocktail party paid for by Edith Wharton Society to which all members and attendees at the session are invited. Directly after will be an individually paid for dinner at a nearby French bistro (wine and gratuities courtesy of The Society) and business meeting for interested members to honor Professor Lewis and Professor Margaret McDowell of Iowa University for their pioneering work in establishing the significance of this eminent American writer. (Details of dinner and reservations will be found on enclosure.)

MORE MLA CONVENTION NEWS: Two other papers on Wharton will be given in the Special Session "The Supernatural in American Literature," on December 28, 10:15-11:30, in the Brecht Room: "The Failure of Domesticity in the Ghost Stories of American Women Writers" by Lynette Carpenter and Wendy Kolmar and "Persephone and the Other Woman in Wharton's 'Pomegranate Seed'." by Annette Zilversmit.

even atrophied" (p. 178). Delane seems to belong "elsewhere, not so much in another society as in another age" (p. 177); in fact, Delane on a polo pony reminds the narrator of "the figure of Guidoriccio da Foligno, the famous mercenary, riding at a slow powerful pace across the fortified fresco of the Town Hall in Siena" (p. 184). The narrator explains Delane's seriousness in his athletic accomplishments as being "mysteriously...the shadow of more substantial achievements, dreamed of, or accomplished, in some previous life" (p. 186). Yet "there was no doubt that the society he lived in suited him well enough" (p. 177).

The narrator's fancies of what Delane could have accomplished contrast to the narrow life Delane actually lives. Like Lewis Raycie, Delane is frustrated in his attempts to use language. Although he has once been a reader (199) and does have a grasp of language, he is insecure about his abilities, afraid of some vague inadequacy in himself that would reveal his lack of knowledge. While "He knew what he wanted to say; his sense of the proper use of words was clear and prompt" (197), for Delane "there was a gulf fixed between speaking and writing the language" (198). Delane, then, has more control of spoken language than Lewis Raycie does, but both

BOOK REVIEWS

Judith Fryer, *Felicitous Space: The Imaginative Structures of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather*. University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1986, pp. xvii + 403.

Judith Fryer's powerfully evocative "woman-centered inquiry" into the fictions of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather seeks to understand the inter-connectedness between space and the female imagination" (xiv). The subject is broad, and Fryer's wide-ranging use of the arts, humanities and social sciences gives the project even greater scope. Following the book's "own logic" (xiii) — to most readers a highly unstructured one—Fryer weaves and interweaves biography, critical commentary, and her own insights into a work that is at once a critical study — an attempt to redefine the cultural structures in which Wharton and Cather wrote — and Fryer's own experiment in "women's language."

Fryer sets her separate studies of Wharton and Cather against an introductory analysis of turn-of-the-century architecture and culture. Given the American belief in the shaping influences of environment and national character, with the traditional relegation of women to private, domestic, and static spaces and men to public, open, and active spaces, what then, asks Fryer, *are* the conditions for space and the female imagination? A woman, she suggests, must have — at least within her imagination — freedom of "movement between private spaces and open spaces"; she must also be able to center one's self in space, to have a starting point from which this outward movement can occur" (50). From this rather loose framework, Fryer begins her investigations.

Expectedly, Fryer reads the novels more in terms of setting or situation than plot. The design of *The House of Mirth* is a "skewing" (75) of the ordered, balanced, classical proportions that Wharton valued in human and spatial relationships and achieved at her Lenox home, the Mount. *The Custom of the Country*, Fryer brilliantly argues, is an "urban pastoral" — a song of loss about the destruction of "structures that encourage communication" (115). If Lily is a Wolffian Art Nouveau ornament, "diverted from her (moral) axis, then Undine Spragg is a "more crude and powerful version of Lily...with an imagination warped and limited by the culture that has produced it" (103). Citing Archer's preference for "sincere" Eastlake furniture, Fryer demonstrates how taste rules over principle in *The Age of Innocence*. In Archer's fragmented world, order is achievable only by elevating the woman's private sphere of power to that of deity. It is regrettable that, woman-bonding in this novel notwithstanding, Fryer focuses only on May, failing to explore the rich imaginative spaces of Ellen Olenska. With her immersion in beauty, art, music and conversation, Ellen poses as alternative — perhaps even a felicitous

(continued on page 10)

Alfred Bendixen, ed., *Haunted Women: The Best Supernatural Tales by American Women Writers*. Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, New York, 1985. 276 pp.

In *Haunted Women*, Alfred Bendixen brings together several female members of the American canon: Harriet Beecher Stowe, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Kate Chopin, Sarah Orne Jewett, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, and Edith Wharton, along with writers who deserve reassessment: Harriet Prescott Spofford, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Grace King, Madelene Yale Wynne and Gertrude Atherton. His purpose is to resurrect the ghost story and consider its power to express the concerns of late nineteenth-century women, such as sexuality, love, marriage and motherhood. The supernatural tale, he argues, freed women writers from the conventions of realism by offering other-worldly metaphors for repressed anxieties and desires.

He treats the ghost story as not merely "popular," but "serious" literature, as writers from Poe to James treated it. His provocative introduction interprets each story, offering subtle shades of difference among the several ghosts. In each case, he finds the supernatural element calls into question some long-held belief in woman's nature or her place, giving the story an overt or often covert feminist theme.

In Stowe's "The Ghost in the Cap'n Brown's House," for example, the local gossips debate whether the Captain's woman is a mistress or a ghost. The more important question, Bendixen points out, is the connection between the two; to be a mistress is to be a ghost, at least socially speaking. Freeman also challenges traditional ways of viewing the female in "Luella Miller." The ideal of the helpless, passive heroine falls before the frightening figure of a vampire-like woman who attracts protectors and then drains the life out of them.

Clearly autobiographical stories support Bendixen's thesis. In the feminist classic "The Yellow Wallpaper," for example, Gilman fictionalizes her own experience with the "rest cure," practiced by her doctor S. Weir Mitchell, for the female nervous disorder "hysteria." Mitchell separated the patient from her family, placed her in bed, massaged her in lieu of exercise, and forced her to eat large amounts of food. His treatment frustrated many intelligent, educated, ambitious women (among them Jane Addams, Alice James and Edith Wharton) because it urged their acceptance of traditionally sanctioned, leisure-class female inactivity. "I went home," Gilman wrote after her cure, "followed those directions rigidly for months, and came perilously near to losing my mind." Her tale of progressive madness gives fictional form to her own frightening experience.

(continued on page 10)

Recent Wharton Studies: A Bibliographic Essay

by Alfred Bendixen

Edith Wharton's literary reputation grew dramatically during the ten years covered in "A Guide to Wharton Criticism, 1974-1983," which appeared in this newsletter last fall. Instead of looking at Wharton as simply a talented follower of Henry James, critics began to recognize her as a major writer whose artistic techniques, psychological insights, and social criticism merited serious attention. Wharton scholarship was stimulated by both the appearance of R.W.B. Lewis' widely praised biography and the rise of feminist literary criticism, which found new sources of power and subtlety in Wharton's fiction. The work done in 1984 and 1985 indicates that Wharton continues to attract a wide range of perceptive commentary from first-rate critics. Bibliographic essays frequently lament the quality of literary scholarship, but it is my pleasure to state that Wharton seems to be inspiring some of the most intelligent, most original, and most illuminating criticism in American literature.

Several scholars have added to our knowledge of Wharton's life and literary career. In "Walter Berry and the Novelists: Proust, James, and Edith Wharton" (*Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, March 1984, 38: 514-528), Leon Edel moves from a genial account of his earlier researches into Berry's life to a meditation on the relationship between Wharton and Berry. Scholars will be interested in Edel's account of his own meeting with Wharton in the 1930's and his suggestion that Berry was "an authoritative man" who gave Wharton "'sanction' to be an artist, to be free of herself." The first issue of the *Edith Wharton Newsletter* contained an essay by Katherine Joslin-Jeske, "What Lubbock Didn't Say" (Spring 1984, 2-4), detailing some of the ways in which Percy Lubbock's selective editing of his *Portrait of Edith Wharton* misrepresented Wharton. Joslin-Jeske's claim that Wharton's letters reveal a warmer and more complex personality has recently been supported by several other scholars, most notably Alan Gribben, whose superbly edited selection of Wharton's love letters to Morton Fullerton appeared in *The Library Chronicle of the University of Texas* (1985, 31: 7-71). In addition to Gribben's introduction, which not only provides essential background information but also discusses Wharton's devotion to men who "withheld themselves from her in critical, heartbreaking ways," the issue also contains Clare Colquitt's "Unpacking Her Treasures: Edith Wharton's 'Mysterious Correspondence' with Morton Fullerton" (73-107), an examination of the ways Wharton's affair with Fullerton shaped her literary career with valuable excerpts from other letters. It is now clear that Wharton scholars will have much to rejoice over in 1987 when Scribners publishes *The Letters of Edith Wharton*, edited by R.W.B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis.

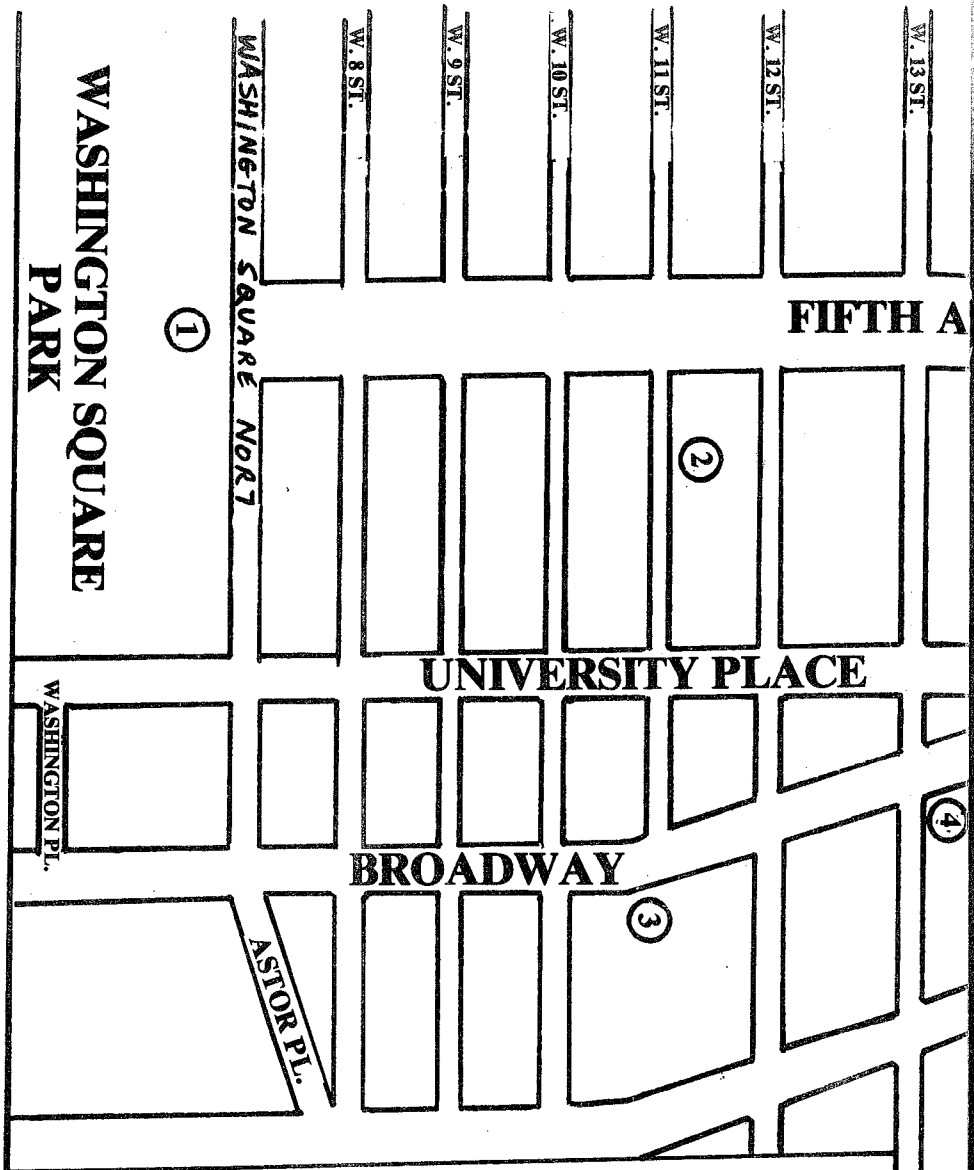
Other scholars have also made good use of unpublish-

ed correspondence. Alan Price's "The Making of Edith Wharton's *The Book of the Homeless*" (*Princeton University Library Chronicle*, Autumn 1985, 47: 5-21) shows how Wharton persuaded distinguished writers and artists to contribute to "what is arguably the most artistically varied and beautifully made book to come out of World War I." Price's article establishes that the making of this gift book to benefit war refugees was much more difficult than Wharton suggested in her autobiography. In "Wharton, Lewis and the Nobel Prize Address" (*American Literature*, 56: 262-270), Ellen Phillips Dupree uses unpublished letters to explore the literary friendship of Wharton and Sinclair Lewis. Dupree's article includes an important letter from Wharton to Lewis (in which Wharton criticizes Lewis' famous attack on Howells and the genteel tradition in his Nobel Prize speech), and discusses Wharton's need to make Lewis see that his own fiction is the culmination of a realistic tradition that can be traced back to her *The Custom of the Country*, Robert Grant's *Unleavened Bread*, and Howell's *A Modern Instance*.

Wharton's belief that she was a central part of America's literary tradition is being confirmed by other scholars, who are finally beginning to examine the ways in which she influenced over writers. Robert L. Coard's "Edith Wharton's Influence on Sinclair Lewis" (*Modern Fiction Studies*, Autumn 1985, 31: 511-527) clearly establishes that Wharton's *Ethan Frome*, *Summer*, and several of her comic stories did much to shape Lewis' satiric treatment of life in the American small town. Adeline R. Tintner's "Wharton's Forgotten Preface to Vivienne de Watteville's *Speak to the Earth: A Link with Hemingway's 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro'*" (*Notes on Modern American Literature*, Autumn 1984, 8: item 10) argues that Wharton's "perceptive and brilliant preface" may have had an indirect influence on one of Hemingway's best stories. The subject of Wharton's influence on other writers, male and female, merits additional attention; for instance, her extraordinary influence on F. Scott Fitzgerald has not yet been sufficiently explored.

Those scholars who are returning to the old subject of Henry James's influence on Wharton are now increasingly likely to explore the complex ways in which Wharton reacted to James. In "'Xingu': Edith Wharton's Velvet Gauntlet" (*Studies in American Fiction*, Autumn 1984, 12: 227-234), Judith E. Funston notes that both writers used their fiction as "an outlet for expressing ... reservations and criticism" about each other's work, suggests that the Osric Dane of "Xingu" is a thinly veiled portrait of James, and moves on to an insightful discussion of the ways in which Wharton's critical principles constitute a rejection of James' theories of the novel.

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- 7 Gramercy Park — Setting for *The Old Maid*, early home of George Frederic and Lucretia Jones.
- 8 Calvary Church — E. W.'s childhood Church.
- 9 Scribners Hqts. — E. W. Publisher
- 10 E. W. born here Jan. 24, 1862.
- 11 Site of the Fifth Avenue hotel — Settings for *New Year's Day* and *The Buccaneers*
- 12 Madison Square Park — Setting for *The Fruit of the Tree*.
- 13 E. W.'s first memories — Opening of *A Backward Glance*.
- 14 Site of Lucretia Jones home (E. W.'s wedding reception here).
- 15 Trinity Chapel — E. W. and Teddy married here April 29, 1885.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE WALKING TOUR OF THE
**‘LITERARY LANDSCAPES OF
 EDITH WHARTON’**

(EDITH WHARTON'S OLD NEW YORK)

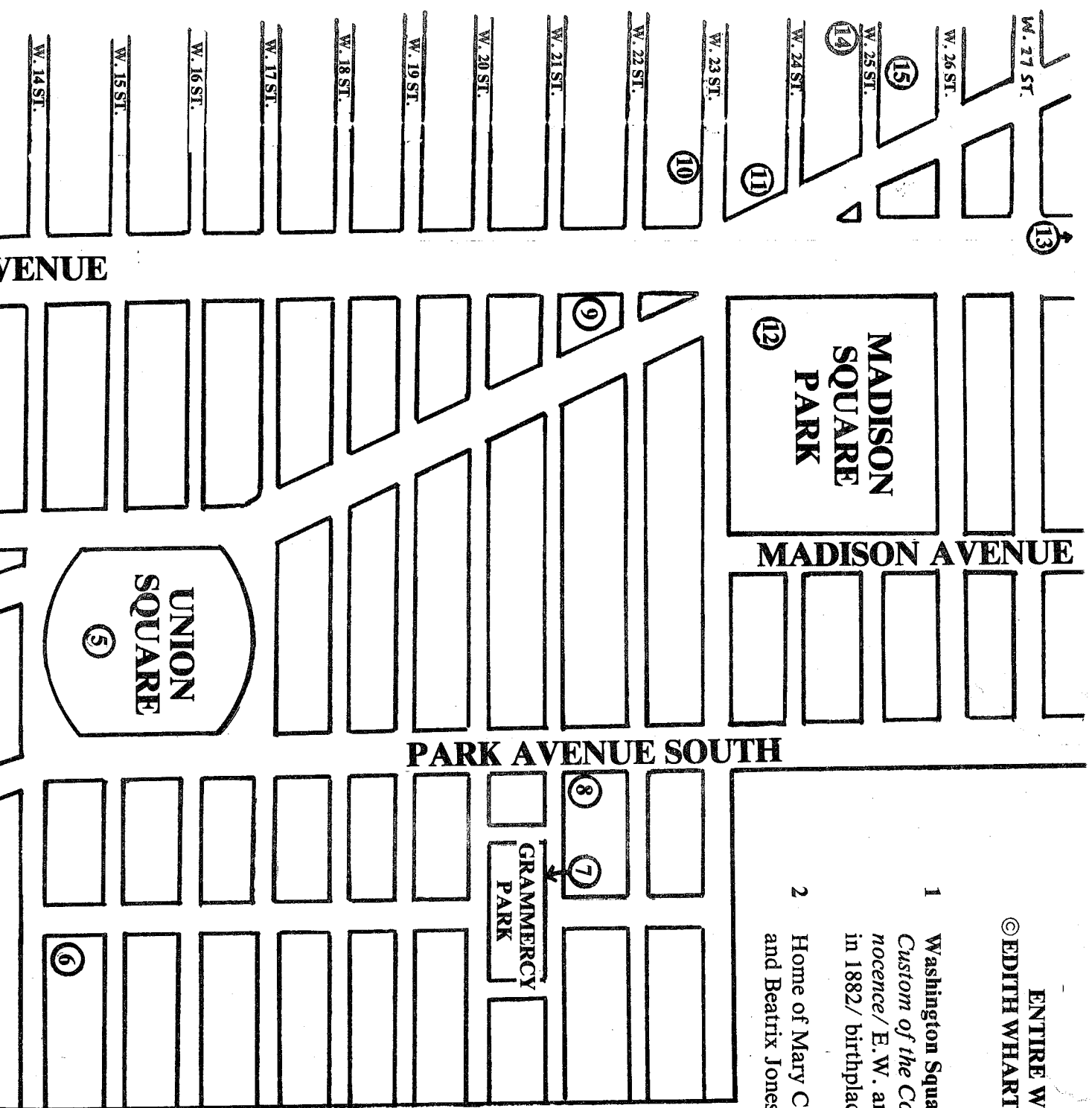
Co-Sponsored by Edith Wharton Restoration and the
 Edith Wharton Society

*The tour will be given again in Spring 1987 to benefit the Mount. Tour researched and written by Scott Marshall

**ENTIRE WALKING TOUR IS
© EDITH WHARTON RESTORATION, 1986**

- 1 Washington Square Park — Settings for *The Custom of the Country*, *The Age of Innocence* / E. W. and her mother resided here in 1882 / birthplace of Henry James.
- 2 Home of Mary Cadwalder Jones (Minnie) and Beatrice Jones (Farrand)

- 3 Grace Church — E. W. baptised here 1862 / Newland and May married here in *Age of Innocence*.
- 4 Site of Wallack's Theatre — A setting in *The Age of Innocence* / E. W. attended plays here as a young girl.
- 5 Union Square — Settings for *The Old Maid*, *Bunner Sisters*, *The Age of Innocence*, *Hudson River Bracketed*.
- 6 Site of the Academy of Music — Opening of *The Age of Innocence* / E. W. attended opera here.



Recent Criticism, continued from page 5

Carolyn L. Karcher's "Male Vision and Female Revision in James's *Wings of the Dove* and Wharton's *The House of Mirth*" (*Women's Studies*, 1984: 10, 227-244) argues that Wharton's novel is a feminist response to James' "patriarchal myth." Some critics may be uncomfortable with Karcher's reliance on feminist theory and terminology (especially the work of Gilbert and Gubar), and others may protest that her article is unfair to Henry James, but this provocative essay raises a number of vital questions.

It seems likely that much of the most original work on Wharton over the next few years will be devoted to examining her relationship to other women writers. The benefits of this approach may be seen in Barbara A. White's "Edith Wharton's *Summer* and 'Woman's Fiction'" (*Essays in Literature*, Fall 1984, 11: 223-235) and the chapter, "On The Threshold: Edith Wharton's *Summer*" in White's book *Growing Up Female: Adolescent Girlhood in American Fiction* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985). By placing *Summer* in the contexts of sentimental fiction and the seduction novel, White establishes Wharton's place in a female literary tradition. *Summer* is also singled out for attention in Sandra M. Gilbert's "Life Empty Pack: Notes toward a Literary Daughteronomy" (*Critical Inquiry*, March 1985, 11: 355-384), which draws intriguing comparisons between Wharton's novel and George Eliot's *Silas Marner*. Psychoanalytical critics will be fascinated by Gilbert's discussion of the way women writers in a patriarchal culture cope with the theme of incest. Feminist critics will also be interested in Carol Wershoven's "The Divided Conflict of Edith Wharton's *Summer*" (*Colby Library Quarterly*, March 1985, 21: 5-10.) which emphasizes Lawyer Royall.

Elaine Showalter's "The Death of the Lady (Novelist): Wharton's *House of Mirth*" (*Representations*, Winter 1985, 9: 133-149) offers a valuable reassessment of Wharton's place in our literary tradition, arguing that Lily's death represents the rejection of "the infantile aspects of her own self" and the assertion of "her creative power as a woman artist."

The value of feminist approaches to Wharton's work is also exemplified by Judith Fryer's "Purity and Power in *The Age of Innocence*" (*American Literary Realism*, 1985, 17:153-168) and "Women and Space: The Flowering of Desire" (*Prospects*, 1984, 9: 187-230), both of which are incorporated into Fryer's *Felicitous Space: The Imaginative Structures of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1986). Literary critics have always recognized Wharton's careful attention to setting and physical space, but Fryer's exploration of "the interconnectedness between space and the female imagination" raises a number of important new issues. Future work on both Wharton and American women writers will have to take Fryer's in-

sights into account.

Another notable contribution to Wharton criticism is Wendy Gimbel's *Edith Wharton: Orphanhood and Survival* (New York: Praeger, 1984). Gimbel's unifying themes are orphanhood and alienation, the symbolic roles of houses, and the search for selfhood; some readers may object to the close parallels Gimbel draws between characters and Wharton's life, but most will admire and benefit from her close readings of *The House of Mirth*, *Ethan Frome*, *Summer* and *The Age of Innocence*. Alexandra Collins' "The Noyade of Marriage in Edith Wharton's *The Custom of the Country* (*English Studies in Canada*, June 1983, 9: 197-212) provides an illuminating discussion of how Wharton's novel moves from a critique of American marriage customs to a wider indictment of modern life.

Two studies added significantly to our appreciation of *The House of Mirth*. Wai-chee Dimock's "Debasing Exchange: Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*" (*PMLA*, October 1985, 100: 783-792) provides the fullest and most sophisticated examination thus far of the novel's economic metaphors and their moral dimensions. Bruce Michaelson's "Edith Wharton's House Divided" (*Studies in American Fiction*, Autumn 1984, 12: 199-215) moves from an exploration of Wharton's deep fascination with drama and its underlying aesthetic and moral principles to a persuasive account of the ways that stage devices shape structure and theme. He concludes that *The House of Mirth* "is in a basic way about drama, about play-acting, about life lived on an unbounded and perpetual stage-set, and about the problem of understanding...where the stage-world and the posturings of daily existence end and where the real world and real self begin."

Lawrence Jay Dessner's "Edith Wharton and the Problem of Form" (*Ball State University Forum*, 1983, 24: 54-63) raises important questions, but the essay is marred by Dessner's failure to consider any of the critical insights of the past twenty years. Relying on the view of Wharton presented in Percy Lubbock's *Portrait*, Dessner complains about contrived endings, the use of retrospective ironies, and Wharton's moral solipsism. Fortunately, an awareness of recent scholarship and of Wharton's cultural and intellectual background is reflected in Mary Ellis Gibson's "Edith Wharton and the Ethnography of Old New York" (*Studies in American Fiction*, Spring 1985, 13: 57-69), which uses anthropological theory to comment on social symbolism in *The Custom of the Country* and *The Age of Innocence*.

Other critics have added to our understanding of Wharton's intellectual heritage. In "Edith Wharton's Use of France" (*The Yearbook of English Studies*, 1985, 15: 109-124), Alan W. Bellringer provides new information on Wharton's fascination with France, objects to the "satirical brittleness" of *The Custom of the Country*, and lavishes praise and attention on several unjustly neglected works including "The Recovery," "The Last Asset," *Madame de Treymes*, and *The Reef*. Wharton's use of Italy is the subject of Alberta Fabris Grube's "Edith Wharton's Italian Background" (*Rivista di*

Studi Anglo-Amer, 1985, 3: 133-144).

Surprisingly, *The Age of Innocence* appears to be receiving less critical attention than any of Wharton's other major novels. The only essay devoted solely to this novel in 1984 and 1985 was John Kekes' "The Great Guide to Human Life" (*Philosophy and Literature*, October 1984, 8: 236-249), which uses *The Age of Innocence* as the basis for a philosophical meditation on the value of "identity-conferring decency." There are signs, however, that scholars are finally beginning to examine some of Wharton's unjustly neglected works. Catherine M. Rae's *Edith Wharton's New York Quartet* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1984) is a useful study of the four short novels that comprise *Old New York*. Rae sometimes lapses into plot summary, (perhaps because she felt that readers were unlikely to be familiar with this book), but she offers some new insights and new information (especially on Wharton's interest in Whitman). Other perceptive comments on *Old New York* can be found in R.W.B. Lewis' preface to Rae's book; in Rae's "Edith Wharton's Avenging Angel in the House" (*Denver Quarterly*, Spring 1984, 18: 119-125), which focuses on *The Old Maid's* "exposition of woman's inhumanity to woman"; and in Adeline R. Tintner's "False Dawn and the Irony of Taste-Changes in Art" (*Edith Wharton Newsletter*, Fall 1984, 1: 1, 3, 8). The recent republication of *Old New York* in paperback should stimulate further critical inquiry into these four short novels, especially *The Old Maid* and *New Year's Day*, which deserve to be ranked with Wharton's finest achievements.

The three chapters devoted to Wharton in Allen F. Stein's *After the Vows Were Spoken: Marriage in American Literary Realism* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984) not only address a vital issue, but also provide a useful guide to stories and novels that almost everyone neglects. The chapter titles provide a reliable guide to Stein's approach: "The Marriage of Entrapment," "Marriage in an Imperfect Society," and "Moral Growth and Marriage." Wharton's achievement in the short story form has not yet received adequate attention. One suspects that a new paperback selection of her short fiction would do much to stimulate interest in this aspect of her career. The current selection, *Roman Fever and Other Stories*, now published by Berkley, fails to show the range of techniques and themes that Wharton employed in her short stories. In *The American Short Story, 1900-1945: A Critical History* (ed. by Philip Stevick, Boston: Twayne, 1984, pp. 41-51), Ellen Kimbel focuses on "The Eyes," "Souls Belated," "The Other Two," and "Autre Temps" as representative works.

Wharton's lifelong fascination with the supernatural tale also received new attention. In an entry for an en-

cyclopedia edited by E.F. Bleiler, *Supernatural Fiction Writers* (New York: Scribners, 1985 Vol II, pp. 783-788), Douglas Robillard offers a brief overview of Wharton's career, provides summaries of all of her ghost stories, and admires Wharton's stylistic restraint and craftsmanship. Alfred Bendixen's collection of supernatural tales by American women writers, *Haunted Women* (New York: Ungar, 1985) includes "The Fullness of Life" and "Pomegranate Seed" and suggests that Wharton's use of the ghostly tale to raise troubling questions about love and marriage represents the culmination of an unjustly neglected feminist tradition.

Several notes shed light on various aspects of Wharton's work. Nancy Morrow's "Games and Conflict in Edith Wharton's *The Custom of the Country* (*American Literary Realism*, Spring 1984, 17:32-39) focuses on the moral significance of the game metaphors. In "The Sledging Accident in *Ethan Frome*" (*Studies in Short Fiction*, Spring 1984, 21: 145-146), Jean Frantz Blackall challenges Cynthia Wolff's suggestion that Ethan Frome regresses into infantile behavior by arguing that Frome's decision to sit in the front of the sled represents a protective gesture. An issue of the *Edith Wharton Newsletter* (Spring 1985, 2) contained three notes: Susan Koprince explored Wharton's allusions in "The Meaning of Belmont in *The House of Mirth*"; William J. Scheick commented on Wharton's anthropological interests in "Cupid without Bow and Arrow: *The Age of Innocence* and *The Golden Bough*"; and Peter L. Hays noted a minor error in *Ethan Frome* in "Wharton's Splintered Realism."

The high quality of the work done in 1984 and 1985 suggests that Wharton is now firmly established as a major writer whose work can be subject to the most sophisticated scrutiny. The most written about novel is now *The House of Mirth*, but scholars are showing increasing interest in *Summer* and *The Custom of the Country*. Both *Ethan Frome* and *The Age of Innocence* are receiving less attention than in the past. More work certainly needs to be done on *The Reef*, *Old New York*, and the short stories. We also need more studies of Wharton's experiments with fictional form; her relationship to intellectual, aesthetic, and cultural movements; her place in American literary traditions; her interest in the supernatural; her concepts of art and the artist; and her psychological insights into both women and men. I hope that this survey of recent Wharton studies and the previous "Guide to Wharton Criticism, 1974-1983" will be of service to scholars as they continue to explore Wharton's achievements, and I would appreciate information on any material that was inadvertently omitted.

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(*Felicitious Spaces* cont. from p. 4)

one? — to May's speechless reign. Chapters on *Ethan Frome* and *Summer* are largely derivative: Charity is "trapped" without speech "in a world of words" (199). (Fryer does not explain how, in *The Age of Innocence*, speechlessness connotes power, here victimization); the narrator in *Ethan Frome* creates then escapes with the joy and "relief of the dreamer awakened" (195) from the stripped-down human and physical structures of Starkfield.

Regarding Wharton's creative processes, Fryer draws the not-new conclusion that Wharton suffered ambivalence between disclosure and retreat, and that, ultimately, we are denied access to her "secret garden" of creativity (156). What is new, however, is Fryer's application of the gothic metaphor to Wharton's creative process: "Writing, for Wharton, seems like being haunted" because it requires surrender to *disorderly* processes that meant dangerous penetration into hidden, taboo recesses (159-60). Fryer is hard on Wharton, dubbing her a traditionalist, a "persona." That she could write both the veiled, conventional *A Backward Glance* and the disruptive, passionate "Beatrice Palmato" shows "how well she could also shroud her creative processes and jam the message of its importance with counter signals...Wharton attempts to reconcile her two lives by tacking back and forth between the private space and the public space, lingering in the ghostly reveries of the one, participating in the 'ceremony' of the other" (161-65). One has to wonder whether Wharton ever achieves "felicitous space" and whether she serves as a foil for Fryer's main interest in Cather; Fryer never uses the term in her discussion of Wharton.

Fryer argues that Cather's fiction offers "another way of telling" (ch. 7). Replacing the Jamesian-Wharton notion of invention as fabrication with discovery, Cather begins as "reporter," but ends as "originator," re-creating as well re-visioning (208). Cather's starting point is the land—as reality, idea, and source of regeneration. Like Proust's "little phrase," time and artifact are both fixed and timeless, poetic and universal — like memory. Perhaps the essential difference between Cather and Wharton — although Fryer does not engage in comparative analysis — is the experience of memory: for Cather it is a recapturing of something vital, nurturing, and whole; for Wharton it is a painful reliving of loss and fragmentation. "Felicitous space," then, is both physical and spiritual; experienced by Thea Kronberg, Father Latour, Tom Outland, and especially Jeanne Le Ber, it frees the imagination and permits one to find one's center and give it form (295). Fryer attempts to explore the psychological, even mythical, connection between body, memory, and form, but her treatment, admirably discontinuous in a Catherian sense, lacks clarity and methodology. And her analysis of Cather's narrative technique is too selective and disregarding of work in narratology to offer more than a peek into Cather's method. Fryer offers an exciting feminist reading of *Shadows on the Rock*, arguing a racial re-working of

male traditions in Cather's portrayal of Jeanne Le Ber's reclusive *jouissance*. One should not ignore, however, as Fryer very nearly does, Cather's interest in social progress as well as solitude: Alexandra envisions a developing and populated countryside. Cecile Auclair marries Pierre Charron, linking the Old World to the New, and St. Peter yearns for the social as well as spiritual harmony of the Hopi mesa village.

In trying to write a book in women's language and experience, Fryer is caught in a dilemma that faces feminists: namely, how to produce a woman's text in a culture where language itself is inscribed in patriarchy. There is often a clash of styles here, as Fryer attempts both to assert her points and to evolve them by subtler routes. Some of her chapters offer perceptive analysis, others impressions, repetitions, and lists that make reading for the point difficult. Nevertheless, this book — in Blanche Gelfant's words, "criticism that is open-ended, capable of surprise, and subversive of traditional standards and forms"¹ — is a mine from which explorers will extract many valuable gems.

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¹*Women Writing in America: Voices in Collage* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1984), p. 7.

(*Haunted Women*, cont. from p. 4)

Edith Wharton's stories also bear the mark of her struggles with convention, especially her marriage to Teddy Wharton. The obviously autobiographical "Fullness of Life" and the more fictionalized "Pomegranate Seed" explore the oath "until death do us part." In the first a woman, after her own death, finds her true soul mate on the other side; and in the second, a man, after his wife's death, finds a more suitable second wife here. The protagonists, unhappy with the first union yet trapped by convention, cannot break away from the initial marriage even after death. Whether the ghost is haunted by the living mate or the living mate haunted by the ghost, marriage closes off, for eternity, the possibility of a second, healthier bond.

In Bendixen's context, the ghost story emerges as an historically and socially, as well as psychologically, significant genre. The stories startle the reader into a recognition of the anxieties over the female role inherent in late nineteenth century American society. But in order to enjoy the ghost stories, readers must be willing to meet the authors in what Wharton called the "primeval shadows," where they feel if not see ghosts and share, to some extent, the fears of the characters. Perhaps the most frightening element in these ghost stories is that their feminist conflicts continue to haunt us.

Katherine H. Joslin
Iowa State University



Members Meet At "The Mount" To Plan First All Wharton Conference

On a clear warm spring day, June 14, 1986, twelve members of The Edith Wharton Society met at Edith Wharton's summer estate, "The Mount" in Lenox Massachusetts to begin planning the first all Wharton Conference for June 1987. Present were Diane Cox, Eleanor Dwight, Kathy Fedorko, Irene Goldman, Karin Jackson, Katherine Joslin, Alan Price, Carol Schoen, Carol Singley, and Annette Zilversmit (pictured above.) Thomas Hayes the Executive Director of "The Mount" and Scott Marshall, associate curator, also attended.

After a morning tour and lecture by Mr. Marshall of this chateau-like mansion Wharton herself designed with the help of Ogden Codman, an architect, the members had lunch on the majestic stone balcony overlooking the formal gardens and grounds. They then proceeded to business in the upstairs quest bedroom which once briefly housed Henry James. Agreed immediately was that the conference would take place in this beautiful New England house, "The Mount," where Wharton wrote *The House of Mirth* and found inspiration for her New England tales between June 7-10 1987. The conference would also celebrate the 125th anniversary of Wharton's birth. Its title would be "Edith Wharton at 'The Mount': A Rebirth." Guest speakers would be the leading Wharton scholars: R.W.B. Lewis, Elizabeth Ammons, Marilyn French, Judith Fryer, Margaret McDowell, and Cynthia Griffin Wolff. Amelia Peck, a curator of American Decorative Arts of The New York

Metropolitan Museum of Art, would speak on the original furnishings of "The Mount." A tour and lecture of the entire estate, films of Wharton works, and open discussion groups would be other unique highlights.

The Edith Wharton Restoration, a private group who are presently the official caretakers of "The Mount," now a Massachusetts historical landmark, would underwrite the conference as part of the series of fundraising events they plan to continue commemorating Wharton's 125 birthday during 1987. (A fuller and guided walking tour based on enclosed map will be given in Spring 1987. For more information write: "The Mount," Lenox, MA. 01240.)

Accommodations for the three days and nights will be at the adjacent lovely Seven Hills Inn, formerly another sumptuous country home of other wealthy New Englanders at the turn of the century.

Small papers (5-8 pages) on any aspect of Wharton are requested for seminar sessions. 1-2 page proposals should be sent to March 1 to: Annette Zilversmit, Dept. of English, Long Island University, Brooklyn, New York. Brochures with full details will be sent soon. Immediate inquiry should be directed to: Professor Katherine Joslin, Co-Director, Iowa State University, English Department, 203 Ross Hall, Ames, Iowa 50011.

Call For Papers

(*Old New York*), cont. from p. 3)

of them, like many women, feel their abilities to be inadequate.

In spite of his lack of intellectual growth, Delane has achieved a moral stature greater than that of his fellow New Yorkers, a morality based on a meeting with Walt Whitman as Lewis Raycie's aesthetic tastes are founded on his meeting with Ruskin. It is this morality that makes him "other" in New York society. Faced with a decision that goes against the opinions of those around him, he tells the narrator about the "big backwoodsman," "that queer fellow in Washington" (207), who has guided Delane through the moral crisis of his life: "I had to settle something with myself, and, by George, there he was, telling me the right and wrong of it! Queer — he comes like that, at long intervals; turning points, I suppose," and when he does, "I can't see things in any way but his" (213). Delane has been taught "Christian charity" by "an old heathen" (212), and he ignores New York society's ideas of how he should treat his rebrother-in-law even when his actions cause his wife to leave him and society to ostracize him.

The main difference between Delane and Lewis Raycie is in their attitudes toward the society they live in. Lewis feels himself a prophet, compelled to try to change society's views, while Delane simply doesn't care what others think. Delane does not see the need to explain his actions because he is not concerned with the opinions of those around him. After a time, the society which has ostracized him changes its mind and takes him back into the fold; his unconcern is the key to his return to favor. The narrator ventures an explanation of Delane's constant good nature: "the only people who are never put out are the people who don't care; and not caring is about the saddest occupation there is" (180). But what Delane doesn't care about is the frivolous rules and regulations of the New York society he lives in. He sees no need for attention to form; rather, he is concerned with what is right. His moral differences from those around him are clear in his insistence that doing something good is more important than who does it:

To everyone else, my father included, what mattered in everything from Diocesan Meetings to Patriarchs' Balls, was just what Delane seemed so heedless of: the standing of the people who make up the committee or headed the movement. To Delane, only the movement itself counted; if the thing was worth doing, he pronounced in his slow lazy way, get it done somehow, even if its backers were Methodists or Congregationalists, or people who dined in the middle of the day. (204)

Delane's limitations are that he must live an idle life, that he cannot exercise those impulses that might have

made him a different man. But within the confines of the New York society in which he lives, he does demand of himself a moral stature that even he does not understand. He cannot appreciate Whitman's poetry; his mind, intellectually and aesthetically, is shut tight. The loss of Delane's moral possibilities is greater than that of Lewis Raycie's aesthetics. While Lewis Raycie could have been an artist, critic or teacher, Hayley Delane could have been a moral force for change. At least some members of later generations are able to appreciate the stunted gifts and possibilities of both these men; the narrators of both stories look back with understanding at the more circumscribed lives of earlier New Yorkers.

The destruction of those who do not fit the mold of New York society is here, as in many of Wharton's other works, the seminal exposure. These protagonists — feminized, dictated to, unable to use language effectively — have been affected by meetings with artists who have shown them a broader picture of what their lives could be, and left them to struggle with that vision. Once aware, these protagonists become "other" in their society. While the usual role for women is to be "other," for the men it is an unaccustomed one. The result is that in the two novellas with male protagonists, like the two with heroines (*The Old Maid* and *New Year's Day*), we see the way that New York society destroys anyone, man or woman, who has standards it does not recognize, who judges or acts from morals it does not understand, who is recognized by the society as "other." Male or female, anyone who wants more or sees more is a danger to the comfort of the familiar.

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¹Catherine M. Rae, *Edith Wharton's New York Quartet* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1984), p. 15. Rae also mentions R.W.B. Lewis's comment that in *Ethan Frome* Wharton seems to have used her own marital situation, reversing the sexes of those involved. See Lewis, *Edith Wharton: A Biography* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 309.

²Susan Gubar, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity," in *The New Feminist Criticism*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), p. 292.

³Edith Wharton, *Old New York* (New York: Scribners, 1924, 1952), pp. 22-23. References to this edition will be made in the text by page number.

⁴Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. ix.