

## LEWISES DISCUSS THE LETTERS

R. W. B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis on

*The Letters of Edith Wharton*

Highlights from a Question and Answer Session

*Edited by Alfred Bendixen*

The recent conference on Wharton letters at Long Island University featured a question and answer session with R.W.B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis. In responding to the questions from the audience, the Lewises discussed their editing of the *The Letters* and offered insights on various phases of Wharton's life and works. These selections provide a sampling of that session which ended with an enthusiastic round of applause from the audience. In editing these highlights, I have occasionally compressed both questions and answers and supplied transitions.

**Question: Did your editing of the letters change the view of Wharton established by your biography of her?**

R.W.B. Lewis: Not substantially. The recent discovery of a large group of Wharton's letters to Morton Fullerton was, of course, a major surprise. They suggest that her affair with Fullerton lasted a bit longer than I originally thought. The Fullerton letters provide an intimate, highly revealing, sometimes painful portrait of Wharton's inner life. They give us a more graphic sense of the details of her private life, her emotions and needs, but they don't really change the general picture.

**Question: Which of her correspondents provoked the most interesting letters from Wharton?**

Nancy Lewis: My answer may surprise you here. I would say that her most interesting letters were not those to Fullerton or to Bernard Berenson or to Henry James, but the ones she wrote to her female friends, especially Sally Norton. The letters to her as well as to Mary Cadwalader Jones and Margaret Terry Chanler show the

warm human side of Edith Wharton and completely dispel the view of her coldness. They also demolish the notion that Wharton did not like women or have female friends.

**Question: In deciding which letters to include, did you try to protect Wharton in any way? In other words, did you omit letters that show an unpleasant side to her personality?**

R.W.B. Lewis: We tried to be fair to her, to represent her life fully. Occasionally, she expressed some prejudices that we wish she didn't have. In a few of the letters we rejected, there are some racist or anti-semitic remarks. There was one letter that we originally planned to include that did contain some vilely anti-semitic comments.

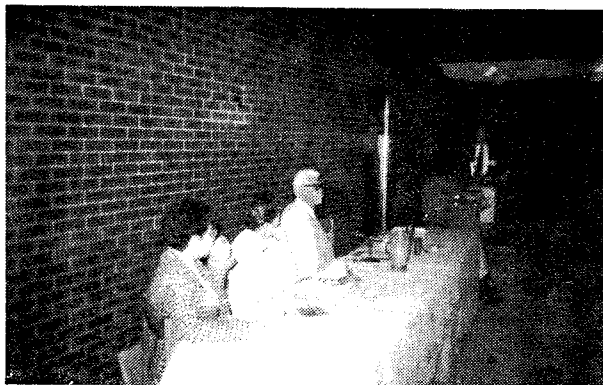
Nancy Lewis: Actually, the publisher persuaded us not to use the letter. Our editor contacted us and said that if we included this letter, it would be the only one to get attention.

R.W.B. Lewis: That's right. The publisher thought that letter would over-shadow all the others in the media, and that it would be wrong to include an atypical letter that could distort the public view of Wharton.

**Question: Wharton's personality does emerge in the letters and it is not always friendly. Some of the remarks seem rather blunt, almost "snippy." Was she like that?**

R.W. Lewis: One of her English friends said that Wharton was wonderful if she liked you, but if she didn't, watch out. For instance, she became more and more scornful of Lady Sybil Cutting, who married three people that Wharton liked. "Snippy" is hardly the word. Wharton was actually mean in her comments on her.

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## Editor's Bulletin Board

### Society Meets in New Orleans

On October 29, 1988, while the MLA Convention went about its other business, deep in the heart of the Garden District of New Orleans, in the elegant Southern mansion hotel of The Columns, rumored to be a bordello and more reminiscent of Tennessee Williams' Victorian ancestors than Edith Wharton's, the sixth annual business/dinner meeting of the Edith Wharton Society took place. Clare Colquitt organized and arranged for the event.

With applications for official status as an allied organization still frozen, the Society decided to forgo formal elections and appoint the Session organizer as the President for each year. Since Alan Price is co-ordinating the Society's 1989 Special Session, "Edith Wharton and Europe," he was accepted as president for 1989.

A new Executive Board was also selected and includes Gloria Erlich, Kate Meyers, Judith Sensibar, Peter Hays, Clare Colquitt, Kathryn Joslin, and Carol Singley.

The problem and politics of finding winning topics for these elusive Special Sessions was next discussed. Single authors, especially American writers, appear to have the hardest time winning these slots and protests are to be lodged. Appeals still have to be made to approaches favored by the current MLA Program Committee. Literary theory seems to predominate in past and recent sessions. Tentatively something in the order of new theoretical readings of Wharton will be heavily considered for the 1990 MLA Special Session.

More to our particular liking, the present members unanimously decided to plan another successful Wharton conference. This one is to be held in Paris, possibly in June of 1990 but most likely in the following year. Hopefully, European scholars will participate. A week of morning sessions and a day at Wharton's home outside Paris, the Pavillon Colombe, are planned. Katherine Joslin will be the director of this conference and if you have suggestions or ideas, write to her at the Department of English, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI 49008.

### MLA Alliance is Still Frozen

We conducted this meeting in New Orleans in anticipation that the applications for formal alliance would be opened in September 1989 and perhaps only one more Special Session would be necessary as official recognition guarantees at least one session. Upon returning to New York, we were informed that the Delegate Assembly did not pass the new requisites of allied organizations and thus no applications are being considered. A long and angry letter was sent by the Society to Phyllis Franklin, the executive director, asking for some interim arrangement. As expected, her polite was a restatement of the impasse and an invitation to apply for a Special Session!!

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### The Edith Wharton Newsletter

Edith Wharton Society

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### Wharton Goes to Washington, D.C.

Whether the MLA Program Committee appreciates it or not, our Special Session for the 1989 Annual MLA Convention in Washington, D.C. looks very exciting. The topic is "Edith Wharton and Europe." Alan Price is organizing the program. Shari Benstock, author of *Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900-1940* (University of Texas Press) and editor of *Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship* (Indiana Press) has agreed enthusiastically to speak of the European influences in Edith Wharton's work. Joining her will be Adeline Tintner, eminent James and Wharton scholar whose latest book is *The Pop World of Henry James: From Fairy Tales to Science Fiction* (UMI). She will speak on the relationship and influence of Paul Bourget and Edith Wharton. The third and perhaps fourth participants have yet to be chosen (as this issue goes to press) from the open call for papers. We shall have to wait until the end of May to hear if we are successful. The announcement thus will be in the next issue of the *Newsletter*. But whether or not the Session holds, the seventh annual business/dinner meeting of the Edith Wharton Society will be held in Washington D.C. between December 26-30. Several members who did go to New Orleans were unaware of our meeting there. So this is the first reminder and perhaps even incentive to plan to come to the MLA and the Wharton Society meeting. The specific date, place and co-ordinator will be announced in the Fall Newsletter.

### Conflicts Brew Over Wharton

Signs that Wharton has arrived are evidenced by recent skirmishes in print over biographical details and major interpretations. Purported errors in R.W.B. Lewis's biography, *Edith Wharton*, were made by Marion Wainwaring in *TLS*, December 16-22 1988. The following week in *TLS*, December Mary Pitlick differed with Lewis about the nature of Wharton's illnesses of the 1890's. Lewis judiciously answered these allegations in *TLS* (February 17-23) . . . More heated is "The Feminist Takeover of Edith Wharton's" by James W. Tuttleton in *The New Criterion*, March 1989. Tuttleton objects to the "sorority of feminists'" claim to having rescued Wharton from neglect "by the male literary establishment" and worse, their appropriation of her life and fiction "to buttress the ideology of . . . feminism. . . ."

### Author Societies Organize

The Edith Wharton Society is participating in the organization of a coalition of American author societies. Plans are underway for the first American Literature conference in San Diego in June 1990.

**Question: Why didn't she talk more about her writing?**

R.W.B. Lewis: She did to friends apparently; I remember Kenneth Clark telling us how they walked up and down the garden talking about a long story, "His Father's Son," and she went into great detail about structure and everything else with him, but in the letters to him she said little about her writing. During the bad times with Teddy Wharton and the feeling of life coming apart, she said to one of her English friends, John Hugh Smith: if only I were a better writer, my work would sustain me, but my kind of pat talent isn't strong enough. That was a moment of depression, but even so, her friends said that she did not have an enormously high sense of herself as a literary artist, and therefore did not talk about it in letters much. There is an interesting contradiction here. On the

one hand, she could express her feeling that she had accomplished something amazing, and at other times, she'd say she only had a half talent.

**Question: What about the use of letters in Wharton's fiction?**

R.W.B. Lewis: In that respect, this conference may force me to modify my opinion. I had thought that Wharton did not use letters in her fiction extensively in the way that, say, James did in *The Aspern Papers*, but the comments on *The Touchstone* in the morning session and the titles of the papers to be presented this afternoon suggest that this is a subject that merits much more attention.

University of California, Los Angeles

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## Afternoon Panel Program-October 8, 1988

### "Why Letters? The Meaning to Wharton's Life and Art"

- I. THE RIDDLE OF MORTON FULLERTON. Moderator / Respondent, Alan Gribben, Univ. of Texas
1. "The Libertine as Liberator: Edith Wharton and Morton Fullerton," Gloria Erlich, Princeton Research Forum.
  2. "Writing between the Lines: Self-Definition in Edith Wharton's Letters to Morton Fullerton." Rhonda Skillern, Univ. of Texas.
  3. "Morton Fullerton: 'Hero' of *Hudson River Bracketed* and *The Gods Arrive*." Abby Werlock, St. Olaf College.
- II. POLITICS AND WHARTON, Moderator, Peter L. Hays, Univ. of Calif. Davis.
1. "The Robert Grant Letters and Wharton's Progressive Era Novels," Ellen DuPree, Univ. of Nevada-Reno.
  2. "Private and Public Voices in Edith Wharton's Letters of World War I," Alan Price, Penn. State. Univ., Hazelton.
  3. "A Brave New Politics: Wharton in The Thirties." Dale Bauer, Miami University (Ohio).
- III. INSCRIPTIONS OF DESIRE, Moderator, Robin Beaty, Manhattan College
1. "Bertha's Letters and Lily: Economies of Desire in *The House of Mirth*," Clare Cokquitt, San Diego State Univ.
  2. "Private Shame/Public Humiliation: Love and Letters in *The Touchstone*." Lev Raphael, Mich. State Univ.
  3. "'The Way in Which the Heart Speaks': Letters in *The Reef*." Elizabeth Keyser, Hollins Coll.
  4. "*Summer* and Its Critics' Discomfort." Kathleen Pfeiffer.
- IV. LETTERS IN THE FICTION, Moderator, Hildreth Kritzer, Long Island Univ., Brooklyn Campus
1. "Before and After the Affair: Letters in the Short Stories," Dale Flynn, Univ. of Calif., Davis.
  2. "The Intrusive Voice: Telegrams in *The House of Mirth* and *Age of Innocence*." Jean Frantz Blackall, Cornell Univ.
  3. "Spring and Touchstone: The Power of Letters in Wharton's Short Fiction." Elsa Nettels, College of William and Mary.
4. "Life Controllers for Women: Letters in *The Children* and 'The Muse's Tragedy'." Sarah Wider, Colgate Univ.
- I. THE DIFFERENCE TO CRITICISM. Moderator, Robert Spector, Long Island Univ., Brooklyn Campus
1. "The Difference to Criticism." Kristin Lauer, Fordham Univ., Lincoln Center
  2. "Clues in the Letters: *The Reef* and *La Princesse de Cleves*," Kate Meyers, Univ. of Tulsa.
  3. "Adventures in Bibliography." Stephen Garrison, Central State Univ. (with Kristin Lauer.)
- II. THE OTHER MEN. Moderator, James Tuttleton, New York Univ.
1. "Wharton, James, and 'The Happy Few': More Gleanings from The Letters," Adeline Tintner.
  2. "Wharton and Berenson," Eleanor Dwight, New School.
- III. WHARTON AND WOMEN. Moderator, Judith Saunders, Marist College
1. "Women Hater (?): Pussy Wharton's Letters to Salley Norton and Daisy Chandler." Katherine Joslin, Western Mich. Univ.
  2. "A Safe Forum: Edith Wharton's Correspondence with Sara Norton." Susan Goodman, Univ. of New Hampshire.
  3. "The Letters of Wharton's Margaret Aubyn." Julie Olin-Ammentorp, LeMoyné Coll.
- IV. GHOSTLY LETTERS. Moderator, Kathy Fedorko, Middlesex County College
1. "Opening the (Fe) mail: Letters in 'Pomgranate Seed'." Carol Singley, Swarthmore Coll. and Beth Sweeney, Coll. of Holy Cross.
  2. "Supernaturalism in Wharton's Fiction." Benjamin F. Fisher, Univ. of Miss.
  3. "Dead Letters in 'The House of the Dead Hand,' or The Postman Always Rings Twice," Lynette Carpenter, Univ. of Cincinnati.

## Book Review

Dale M. Bauer, *FEMINIST DIALOGICS: A THEORY OF FAILED COMMUNITY*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988. xvii, 204 pp. \$34.50, \$10.95.

In recent years, the work of Mikhail Bakhtin has come to be of increasing interest to students of mass culture theory - those literary critics and historians dissatisfied with the limited social and depoliticized scope of deconstruction and structuralism. Bakhtin's materialist theory of consciousness, that it exists both inside and outside the subject and is produced, not just reflected by, language, is especially useful for feminist scholars, anxious to incorporate a critique of cultural determinacy into theories of writing and narrativity. Dale M. Bauer's *Feminist Dialogics* affords an opportune and provocative view of Bakhtin's compelling methodology, theorizing gender as the missing component of the philosopher's discourse. Her first chapter makes clear the personal stake of the critical exchange: that "we acquire 'ourselves' by engaging in our own dialogue with others, and especially with texts that challenge our beliefs" (8). The act of criticism, the very act of reading, is the site of power and individuation, a sorting out of ideologies and possible "selves." To the question of female authority, to the uncertain determinacies of female subjectivity within language, Bauer offers the persuasive rejoinder of Bakhtinian dialogics.

For Bauer, a feminist dialogics incorporates the notion of "difference" into its treatment of gendered voices in the novel. She calls upon Luce Irigaray's suggestion of the feminine in narrative as "disruptive excess": "this excess is a language - we might call it the voice of gender - which moves beyond the atomic self or body into the larger discursive corpus. . ." (6). It is in this contrapuntal play, this "Polylogue," that the female author, character, even reader can enter into patriarchal discourse, engaging and enlarging the range of values, meaning, and consciousness afforded by literary production and culture in general. The radicalism of this resistance lies in interpretation and vociferation, and here also is its central problem - the alienated female voice is a threat to community, to univocal meaning. Bauer's understanding of the conflict is borne out in her choice of literary texts: *The Blithedale Romance*, *The Golden Bowl*, *The House of Mirth*, and *The Awakening*. In each, the central female character fails to read both the text imposed upon her by an anxious and oppressive community, and the text of her own possibilities to realize a language of interpretive resistance. Zenobia, Maggie Verver, Lily Bart, and Edna Pontellier are characters at the intersection of textual production and female identification, fleshing out the presence of Other, yet inevitably unable to translate the discourse of difference.

Bauer's scenario of this "dialogic polemic" is introduced in two examples from Edith Wharton. In the most emblematic, she cites the dramatic dialogue from "Roman Fever," the meeting of two women, two voices, each with her own multiple readings of the relationship between them, and the series of internal dialogues, misreadings, and revelations that occur during the scope of their conversation. Bauer's *mise en scène* provides a textual reference point for her readings of the novels. In each, the female character is at odds with her double-voiced apprehension of reality, like Wharton's two old friends "visualiz[ing] each other, each through the wrong end of her little telescope" (x). The failure of vision is actually a struggle for presence on the part of the character, an unrelenting attempt to make the internal dialogue known in an environment that would silence antithetical meaning. In Bauer's reading, the characters, and authors, argue with varying degrees of success for recognition, thus unmasking the codes and conventions

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## Wharton's "Negative Hero" Revisited

by Julie Olin-Ammentorp

Lawrence Selden, the attractive and seemingly astute lawyer who is drawn to Lily in the opening phases of the narrative, is the one human being who might have supplied such an alternative [life for Lily]. He has a vision. . . of what he calls "the republic of the spirit. . ." But although this betimes was also one of Edith Wharton's ideal images, Selden himself, as she told Sara Norton, was "a negative hero," a sterile and subtly fraudulent figure whose ideals were not much to be trusted.

—R.W.B. Lewis,

*Edith Wharton: A Biography*, P. 155.

. . . we learn that he [Selden] is nothing more than the unthinking, self-satisfied mouthpiece for the worst of society's prejudices. Selden is, as Wharton declared to Sara Norton, "a negative hero."

—Cynthia Griffin Wolff,

*A Feast of Words*, P. 111.

And so he [Selden] remains, to the end, a closet speculation. . . The Republic than a refined replica of the social marketplace, of which Selden is a full participating member.

Selden is a "negative hero," then, as Wharton herself admits. . .

—Wai-Chee Dimock, "Debasing Exchange:

Edith Wharton's "*The House of Mirth*"

(*PMLA* 100), P.787.

While working on another piece on Edith Wharton's relationship to her men characters, I could not help noting the repetition of Wharton's description of Lawrence Selden—her description of him as a "negative hero"—which appeared not only in the landmark works by R.W.B. Lewis and Cynthia Griffin Wolff, but also in the recent *RMLA* article by Wai-Chee Domock. Wharton's use of this phrase seemed to trigger a certain response in all three critics: a sense that it gave them the author's permission to turn the harshest possible criticism on Selden, even, perhaps, to the extent of neglecting passages in *The House of Mirth* which point to a much more sympathetic reading of his character. Curious about the original context of Wharton's remark in her letter to Sara Norton, I wrote to the Beinecke Library for a copy. The following is the paragraph from which the damning phrase is drawn:

I have come back from seeing my play, & now breathe freely. The play was put on in New York *unrehearsed*, with tired actors just off a hard Western tour, & was consequently so badly done—with important lines left out, even!—that it had a "mauvaise press", & seems likely to be a complete failure. —I now doubt if that kind of play, with a "sad ending" and a negative hero, could ever get a hearing from an American audience.\*

In considering Wharton's use of the term "negative hero" in this passage, two aspects come into view. First, Wharton is not actually discussing Lawrence Selden as he appears in her novel, but as he appeared in the dramatization of *The House of Mirth*. Second, she herself does not clearly attach any stigma to the term "negative hero," but rather, by coupling it with "sad ending," suggests that it is more a technical description than a value judgment: Selden is,

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## Brooklyn Hosts 2nd All-Wharton Conference



With less than 60 days notice, more than 100 scholars and readers of Edith Wharton found their way to the thickets of Brooklyn to attend the second all-Wharton conference in less than two years. From over eighteen states and Canada, from as far away as California, Texas and Mississippi, specialists in Poe, Twain, Hemingway, James, Smollett, Austen, Howells, Thoreau and Keats as well as Wharton came to Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus on October 8, 1988 for 'Edith Wharton: Woman of Letters In New York,' Co-directed by Annette Zilversmit, LIU, Brooklyn, and Alfred Bendixen, of California State University, Los Angeles and co-sponsored by the Department of English, The Edith Wharton Society and Charles Scribner's Sons, the day's events celebrated the publication of *The Letters of Edith Wharton* edited by R.W.R. Lewis and Nancy Lewis (Scribner's Sons.)

Three outstanding feminist critics, Elaine Showalter, Princeton University; Wendy Martin, Claremont Graduate School; and Joyce Warren, Queens College-CUNY spoke at the morning's plenary session, "Why Wharton?: The Risings Interest in Edith Wharton." Warren opened by connecting Wharton to the nineteenth century tradition of women writers who featured strong autonomous heroines, especially to Fanny Fern, the journalist, writer, and colleague of Walt Whitman. Martin showed how Wharton linked to the male authors by revisiting and rewriting scenes and plots of writers such as Hawthorne and James. She pointed out that *The House of Mirth* scene where Selden tells Lily of his "Republic of the Spirit" echoes the famous forest encounter of Hester and Dimmesdale in *The Scarlet Letter*. James' *The Portrait of The Lady*,



Martin claimed, is replayed many times by Wharton with subtle twists and turns in her fiction. Showalter stimulated much audience discussion when she pressed that Wharton has not risen sufficiently. This eminent author is not know wide and deep enough, especially by the general public. The powers that control do not believe yet that people are interested in women's lives and art, even one as theatrical, stirring and complex as Wharton who came into her full artistic and sexual self only when past forty. No dramatic plays on Broadway portray these awakenings. No movies or television series are based on her novels, whose contexts are as rich in details as the heroines who dwell in them. Few popular magazines publish excerpts from her startling private papers now opened to the public.

Later in the afternoon eight smaller panels continued to dispel the notion of such neglect in the academic world and found many aspects on "Why Letters?: The Meaning to Wharton's Life and Art." The panel titles were: "the Riddle of Morton Fullerton," "Politics and Wharton," "Inscriptions of Desire," "Letters in the Fiction," "Difference to Criticism," "The Other Men, "Wharton and Women," and "Ghostly Letters." The full program will be found later in this issue.

But one of the highlights of the conference preceded these panels. After lunch, the editors of *The Letters*, R.W.B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis, engaged in a question and answer discussion about their work and book. Fielding gently and informatively often pointed and curious queries, the Lewises provided a deeper look into the scholarship and interest Wharton will continue to evoke for those who have been touched by her genius.



**Question: The letters show that Wharton had remarkable skill as a travel writer. Do you think that her travel writing deserves more attention?**

R.W.B. Lewis: Yes, I think she was a marvelous travel writer. She wrote wonderfully about Italy, France, and Morocco. Incidentally, Candace Waid attempted to persuade a publisher to bring out Wharton's travel writings, but the publisher felt it wasn't of enough interest.

**Question: Having now been quite intimate with Wharton for many years, what do you most admire about her?**

Nancy Lewis: Her human quality. I began by admiring her as a writer and came more and more to like her as a person; she gives of herself; she is a generous soul. The letters show this side of her.

**Question: In editing the letters, did the two of you ever have a difference of interpretation? Were there any aspects of Wharton's life that the two of you disagreed about?**

Nancy Lewis: We really didn't. It sounds crazy, but she had been living with us for so long. . . what do you think?

R.W.B. Lewis: The only thing I can recall would be different judgments about individual letters—sometimes one of us would like a letter and the other would find it boring. That happened a few times, but I can't come up with a common topic about the letters we disagreed about.

**Question: Can you tell us a bit about your methods of selection. For instance, how did your understanding of her works influence your choice of the letters?**

R.W.B. Lewis: We wanted to have as many letters as possible that related to her work or mentioned her work, such as the letters in which Wharton expresses her pleasure at the high sales of *The House of Mirth* or that Brownell had found some architecture in the novel. That sort of thing. We were both pleased when the index was done by our son, Nathaniel, to discover how many of her novels and short stories and other works were mentioned in the letters. One wished there was more about some works, such as *The Custom of the Country*. That novel ranks very high with me, but there are hardly any comments about that novel.

Nancy Lewis: She did ask Fullerton to reread a scene to see if it worked.

R.W.B. Lewis: That's right. The affair was over, but they were still literary comrades. She did a lot of that with him on *The Reef*.

**Question: Did any private individuals offer letters or were they all in collections? Do you think there are more undiscovered Wharton letters out there? Will there be more surprises?**

R.W.B. Lewis: Scott Marshall supplied one very interesting letters, and we tried to track down potential letters to people Wharton had known well. We wonder where the letters to Percy Lubbock are. Perhaps he tore them up in a fit of rage after she cut him in Salzburg. And Geoffrey Scott—she must have written a lot of interesting letters to him. I don't think they would dramatically change anything. Since the publication of *The Letters*, no one has sent us any. We keep opening the mail eagerly, but nothing happens.

**Question: The annotation of these letters is a remarkable achievement. Did you have to omit any letters because you could not provide the notes for them?**

R.W.B. Lewis: No, we did not leave any letters out on that basis. Some of the quotations took hours to track down. There were two cases where we wish our annotations could have been more precise—a clear reference to Walter Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* and one to a remark by Alphonse Daudet.

Nancy Lewis: On her learned comments: she assumed that the person to whom she was writing knew as much as she did, and I wonder if they actually did.

R.W.B. Lewis: The resources of the Yale Library helped a great deal. They had almost every title she mentioned. And I love that kind of detective work.

**Question: Is it possible that there are some letters to Walter Berry somewhere?**

R.W.B. Lewis: I wish there were. After he died, she went over and got her letters to him, sat up all night reading them, and burned them. I wonder if there are any nephews or grand-nephews of Berry that might have some. Letters from him do keep popping up. She kept his letters from the early 1900's on her work. There must have been hundreds of letters from Edith Wharton to Walter Berry, and we would certainly love to have them, but I wouldn't bet on it.



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**Question: We know about Wharton's affair with Fullerton, but her relationship with Berry still raises questions. How would you describe their relationship?**

R.W.B. Lewis: She and Berry had been good friends from the 1890's until his death in 1927. During the Fullerton affair, Berry was in Egypt for most of that time. I think his return to France probably helped bring the Fullerton thing to a close. My sense is that it was a very, very close friendship between a man and a woman, and on Berry's part was probably non-sexual. But he was very dear to her, and Wharton's outbursts at his death seem to me remarkably moving.

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## NEWS AND NOTES OF MEMBERS

- News from our overseas members first-Women Studies are alive and flourishing in Japan according to **Keiko Beppu** who writes from the English Department at a university in Nishinomiya, Japan. "The Iconography of the Madonna in the American Novel" has been the theme for her graduate course for the past two years and she hopes to develop the topic for publication. Her article on Flannery O'Connor appeared in the March 1989 issue of *Women's Studies Forum* published by Kobe Institute for Women's Studies and in that same month at the Annual Meeting of the American Studies Society of Japan whose theme was "Family in American Literature". she contributed to a discussion on family in Nineteenth century American Fiction. Her forthcoming publications are *A Literary History of The United States*, Kyoto: Minerva, which she edited and co-authored, and the Japanese edition of *Women and Language in Literature and Society* ed. Sally McConnell-ginet et al (Praeger. 1980) Tokyo: Yumi Shobo which she is also editing. And last but not least she is preparing the next generation of Japanese Wharton scholars by supervising a graduate student's Master's thesis on Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*. . . ." Closer to Wharton territory **Geneviève Chaleil** of Vernouillet, France is writing her dissertation on "Une Romancière méconne, une certaine image de Europe chez Edith Wharton. . . ." And **Teresa Gómez Reus** of Alicante, Spain is completing her doctoral thesis on "Women and Female Archetypes in Edith Wharton's Fiction." With information from the Edith Wharton Society, Ms. Reus was able to do research at New York and Yale Universities during the summer of 1988.
- **Richard Lawson**, Professor Emeritus of University of North Carolina, is responsible for "Edith Wharton's Short Stories" in *American Short Story Writers*, in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 78. Detroit: Gale Research Co.
- A longer version of a paper delivered at October Wharton conference, "Robert Grant and The Custom of the Country" by **Ellen Dupree** of University of Nevada-Reno will appear in the fall 1989 issue of *American Literary Realism*. (Other selected papers from this conference (covered in this issue) will appear in a Special all Wharton issue of *Women Studies* during 1990, guest edited by Annette Zilversmit, Long Island University, Brooklyn and Alfred Bendixen, California State University, Los Angeles.)
- **Linda Wagner-Martin**, presently of University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, has prepared the (short) volume of *The House of Mirth* for the Twayne Masterworks series. It will be available late in 1989.
- A discussion of a rarely written about Wharton story 'Coming Home' is the subject of the article. "Wharton's War Story" by **Alan Price**, Pennsylvania State University. It will be published in the spring issue of *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*. Professor Price also did a brief review of *The Reef* for the newsletter of the Edith Wharton Restoration.
- A forthcoming issue of *Literature and Psychology* will feature "The Sexual Education of Edith Wharton" by **Gloria Erlich**. Erlich writes that the essay "concerns family themes, the Fullerton affair, *The Touchstone* and *The Reef* in connection with Wharton's efforts to repair the maternal relation." Her book in progress "enlarges] on same theme and implicat[es] others."
- "Edith Wharton's Challenge to Feminist Criticis," by **Julie Olin-Ammentorp** was published in *Studies in American Fiction*, Autumn, 1988. It is based on a paper first delivered at the Wharton conference at the Mount in 1987.
- "Fiction 1900-1930's" chapter by **John J. Murphy**, Brigham Young University for *American Literary Scholarship*, which includes Wharton section is due out in July 1989.
- Other works-in-progress include a book on the short stories of Edith Wharton by **Joseph Griffin** of the University of Ootawa. . . and a bibliography and study of women's ghost stories by **Lynette Carpenter** of The University of Cincinnati. . . **Scott Marshall**, assistant director of Edith Wharton Restoration at the Mount in Lenox, MA, is preparing the historical section of a Historic Report for The Mount. It will include chapters on Edith Wharton and design, the architects Ogden Codmen, Jr. and Francis Hoppin, the design and construction of The Mount, a history of the interiors, the outbuildings, a survey of the gardens and landscaping and a history of subsequent owners and uses. It is scheduled for publication in the summer of 1989. . . . And speaking of Wharton's interest in all aspects of houses, **Janet M. Roberts** of Temple University is adopting Wharton's *The Decoration of Houses* as well as *Italian Gardens and Villas* for an interdisciplinary course being taught to School of Architecture students.
- Recently completed dissertations include "Aestheticism and the Paradox of Progress in the Work of Henry James, Edith Wharton and Henry Adams, 1893-1913" By **Kate Meyers** at The University of Tulsa. Chapters on Wharton discuss "ways in which Wharton used imagery of the Art Nouveau and Decorative Arts Movement to comment on the effects of "progress" on American culture and society. . . ." In Ontario, **Canada**, **Patricia Menon** recently completed "The Shifting Relation: Morality and Sexuality, Experience from *The House of Mirth*."
- More works-in progress-**Carole M. Shaffer-Koris**, Kean College of New Jersey writes, "in addition to a long term project on music and Wharton, I am completing a short term project on Continental influences on *Ethan Frome*." . . **Harriet Gold** has just completed a Master's thesis at Concordia University in Canada called "The Independent Woman in The Work of Edith Wharton". . . *Wharton The Writer*, a book length study of Wharton's travel books, autobiography and critical writing is being undertaken by **Judith Funston**, Michigan State University. (She will not a present be editing a collection of essays on Wharton's nonfiction.)
- TWO SPECIAL REQUEST: **Helen Killoran** writes "I am presently completing bibliographical research on Edith Wharton's reading and would appreciate any obscure or unpublished information on her reading library, books in private ownership, marginalia and the like." Write to 4223 8th NE. Seattle, WA 98105. . . **Flo Gison** has recorded on audio cassette *The Reef*, *Summer*, *Selected Short Stories*, *Xingu and More by Edith Wharton*. *Madame de Treymes* and *The Touchstone*. *Ethan Frome*, narrated by John McDonald, is also available. Tapes may be bought or rented from Classic Books on Cassettes, P.O. Box 40115, Washington, D.C. 20016. Full catalog is available.

that mark appearances in apparently unremarkable ways.

Bakhtin's notion of carnival, of carnivalized language, and the Fool are important indicators for Bauer of female resistance. "The fool is able to assert her defiant voice through carnival, the masquerade, the parody of the "official" lives she leads" (13). This is the same kind of overt and scandalous (in Freud's sense) disrobing of desire that is conveyed in Lily Bart's Tableau vivant, a direct confrontation of seamliness and "appropriate" feminine representation. Zenobia's and Lily's demeanors embody resistant voices and delineate the social framework that contains them. Bauer reads Zenobia's suicide as emblematic of her violent defiance, her resounding no to the law of the father, her dead body grotesquely representational of the failure of Utopia.

Lily Bart's and Edna Pontellier's suicides have slightly different meanings for Bauer, though they nevertheless speak a similar language. For Lily, suicide connotes a failure of Selden's "republic of the spirit" as well as a breakdown of her own inner dialogue, her powers of translation in the speaking positions open to her. Like Maggie Verver, she is silenced by a text of economics that escapes her, though Maggie herself is more inconclusively absorbed into the hierarchies of patriarchal discourse. Lily's dead body is a repudiation of that discourse, an unreadable text. Edna's final swim is also the end result of vocal dissonance, the outcome of her inability to position her desires in a sea of limited and domesticated languages. Bauer takes Edna to task, however, (as she suggests Chopin does) for not perceiving the possibilities of a self written through the text of her own art. Edna's rejection of motherhood ideology could be translated into the "discourse of the creator," realizing presence in her painting (156). But Edna's self-alienation is so complete, her inner voice so discordant to her own ears, that she cannot conceive of a speech but this chosen silence, like Lily giving over to the desire for a pre-oedipal, "pre-linguistic wholeness" and the safe cessation of meaning.

That this self-annihilating articulation of social breakdown is a gendered response informs Bauer's choice of authors as well as texts. For, as she elaborates in her preface, Hawthorne and James, while dramatically diagramming the crush of voices and the dilemma of choices offered their female heroes, attempt to salvage interpretive communities, though their characters' particular environments effectively silence them. Wharton and Chopin, she contends, are less forgiving. They more clearly identify with their characters, there is less narrative distance, more narrative irresolution. And their conclusions indict their characters' communities for the failure of language, of dialogue, of possibilities for the female voice. What occurs among all four of these texts, however, is a dialogue detailing economic and social breakdown, worsening with the increasing alienation of capitalist production. That Zenobia, Lily, Maggie, and Edna are objects of exchange in the social marketplace, with the very limited agency and reduced economic vocabularies, bears testimony to their lack of access to the hierarchies of production and consumption. Bauer details in particular Lily's and Maggie's attempts to manipulate their own relative exchange values in social discourse through what they know, how well they can read other characters' texts and meanings. They are failed attempts largely because of Lily's and Maggie's misreadings, as well as their rejections of power discourses alien to their inner voices. But the critic's analysis of gender economics in the novels suggests a wider-ranging observation about the institutionalization of sexual polarities and the repression of the feminine in culture. The growing

modernist anxiety associated with a post-industrialist world that is so evident in 20th-century American literature becomes even more intensified with reference to gender.

criticism has shown (notably in the work of Janice Doane and Devon Hodges, and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar), gender anxiety itself becomes a strident voice, a strain of narrativity in male-dominated literary modernism. Bauer's Postscript is a suggestive formulation of this argument.

As she promises in Chapter One, Bauer does indeed "determine a viable intersection between feminism. . . and modern/Postmodern criticism" in *Feminist Dialogics* (2). Through her wide-ranging and frequent reference to a variety of literary critics and theorists, she introduces Bakhtin's work to an ongoing debate that suggests new areas for feminist scholars in particular. If there is any critical shortcoming to Bauer's approach, it is that she doesn't open up the dialogue to the reader enough, doesn't allow that reflexivity of language that characterizes the notion of difference in its play of metaphor and self-conscious articulation. This is especially true in the chapter on *House of Mirth*, which is dense with details and repetitions, closing down almost systematically around Lily's characterization. In comparison, Bauer's reading of *The Awakening* more suggestively explores Edna's textuality in its many open implications of sexuality and gender play. This inconsistency in perspective reveals a tendency on Bauer's part to overconstruct her argument, making it workmanlike when it should be allusive, thus distancing the reader from a necessary participation in that exchange of textual meanings. But this critical insistence should by no means dissuade the reader looking for new insights into the way we think about the novel. As Bauer herself claims, we need ways out of the monolith of critical interpretation, and ways into the open venues of textual exchange, to escape the sealed hermeticism of meaning for the pleasures of reading openly, multiply. For the feminist critic, this is a personal as well as political necessity. In its commitment to that end, *Feminist Dialogics* offers a way to participate more fully in that dialogue between author, character, and reader that marks our understanding of cultural "truths," and the capacity of literature to produce them.

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("Negative Hero" Continued from P. 6)

quite possibly, what critics have come to call an anti-hero, a hero who does not act, who does not succeed as the novel's audience wishes him to succeed.

Prof. Lewis himself, in fact, implies a similar conclusion when he returns to the phrase somewhat later in his biography:

Looking back a few later [after the presentation of the play], Edith suspected there had been a chance for it from the start: "I now doubt if that kind of a play, with a sad ending and a negative hero, could ever get a hearing from an American audience." This may have been her own reformulation of the lalidary phrase" she would attribute to William Dean Howells as they left the theater together: "What the American public always wants is a tragedy with a happy ending." (Lewis, 172)

The genre itself and the complexities of Lily's social situation demand a "negative hero"; but Wharton's term does not necessarily constitute, in itself, a negative moral judgment on Selden. Surely Wharton has reservations about him; she quite decidedly creates a character who has his share of moral cowardice and hisitancy; yet it is perhaps not quite so easy to write him off as a purely negative character when one examines her term in the context of her letter.

\* This passage quoted with permission from the Beinecke Library, Yale University.