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A Literary Expatriate: Hamlin Garland, Edith Wharton, and the Politics of a Literary Reputation

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On July 27, 1924, a year before her famously disastrous meeting with F. Scott Fitzgerald, Edith Wharton invited another American author to tea at Pavillon Colombe: Hamlin Garland (1860-1940). Garland, a pioneering realist best known today for *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891) and *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (1895), was two years older than Wharton, and he had admired her work since reading *The Valley of Decision* and *The House of Mirth*. Garland had grown up on a series of hardscrabble farms in Wisconsin, Iowa, and South Dakota, but by the turn of the century had become man of considerable influence in the world of American letters. Although his gritty prairie realism and his interest in reform movements distinguish his subject matter from Wharton's, both began their literary careers within a few years of each other, both championed realism and were praised by their mutual friend William Dean Howells, and both were well versed in Darwinian theory and other scientific philosophies of the day.

What is significant about the visit is not so much that Wharton invited Garland for tea, although R. W. B. Lewis notes that only "the occasional fellow American writer" was invited to call (Lewis 466). Rather, given the position each writer held in American literature of the day, their meeting represents a symbolic contest between the "genuine aristocrat" and genuine democrat (Newlin and McCullough 313), American writers and "Europeanized critics," and expatriation and literary nationalism. As was his custom, Garland sent a fairly full account of the meeting in a letter to his wife, Zulime, and, when he wrote the four volumes of his memoirs in the early 1930s, he recorded two versions of the meeting, one in *Companions on the Trail* (1931) and one in *Afternoon Neighbors* (1934). Since the meeting is a single incident viewed in memory through the refractive lens of Garland's literary tastes and thus, in part, through the American literary establishment's view of Wharton, Garland's distinct versions of the incident provide a snapshot of the decline in Wharton's reputation and the criticism of her expatriate status during the 1920s and 1930s.

Garland had in a manner of speaking crossed paths with Edith Wharton before their single meeting, for if their social circles were widely divergent, their literary circles nonetheless intersected at many points. Garland knew everybody. As the editors of his collected letters, Keith Newlin and Joseph McCullough note, "Garland was an exceedingly gregarious man" (Newlin and McCullough xiii), and his journals, letters, and memoirs bear out this contention. It was Garland who had given Stephen Crane the $15 to redeem *The Red Badge of Courage* from the typing agency so that it could be published, for example, and he both knew and corresponded with literary figures such as William Dean Howells, James Whitcomb Riley, Walt Whitman, George Washington Cable, Mary Wilkins Freeman, and Henry

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Blake Fuller. Indeed, Wharton would have read about Garland in volume two of Horace Traubel's *With Walt Whitman in Camden* (1906-14), of which she read the first two volumes and wrote to Bernard Berenson in 1917 that she was "thirsting" for the third (Wharton 391). A more personal connection to Wharton also exists: when Garland gave a series of lectures in Boston in 1888, they had been reviewed favorably in print by none other than Morton Fullerton. Thanking Fullerton for his "very just and able article on my work" (Newlin and McCullough 28), Garland, in a letter written on May 2, 1888, praised Fullerton's "first editorial" in the *Boston Daily Advertiser* and asked him to stop by for a visit, an invitation that Fullerton had to decline because he was in London at the time. Thirty years later, Garland recalled Fullerton as "a slender youth with a dainty mustache, a George Meredith enthusiast" who in later life became "an elderly exquisite in appearance, but an able and pleasing talker" (*My Friendly Contemporaries* 35). Garland's politics also provided a connection with Wharton. His experiences on Midwestern farms and on Indian reservations in the west had caused him to direct his energies toward political movements, such as Henry George's single tax and the fight for Indian rights, and it was in this capacity that he met Wharton's friend Theodore Roosevelt. As a proponent of American literature, Garland, during the course of his long life, wrote about literary history of which he had been a part, maintaining an "influential correspondence with such early literary historians and critics as Brander Matthews, Edmund Clarence Stedman, Fred Lewis Pattee, Stuart Pratt Sherman, and Van Wyck Brooks" who helped to shape "the study of American literature and culture today" (Newlin and McCullough xiii). Garland thus had a direct means of shaping this narrative of American literature, one that was strengthened when, in 1918, he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Wharton's abilities as a writer had already won Garland's respect before their meeting. In *Companions on the Trail*, Garland mentions that, on his way to visit Roosevelt at the White House in 1905, he picked up *The Valley of Decision*, which he, like his good friend Henry Blake Fuller, saw as "a great but by no interpretation a faultless book. It is almost too learned—too rich in historic details. It is very long and at times suggests the old-fashioned novel, but it is a most inclusive and interesting picture of eighteenth-century Italy" (*Companions* 325). Garland was still sufficiently struck by the book to write a letter to Wharton in care of the publisher, receiving in return a letter of "charming sincerity" (325) in which Wharton expressed a desire to meet him. Significantly, Garland also sought more formal recognition for Wharton's work. As chairman of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, he noted that the Institute should "take account of the work of women" (Newlin and McCullough 247) and was instrumental in nominating Wharton as among the first three women proposed for membership. His admiration was based not only on Wharton's fiction, such as *The Valley of Decision*, but also on her poetry. In recalling the death of Theodore Roosevelt, Garland acknowledged in *Back-Trailers from the Middle Border* (1928) that "like hundreds of others who knew and loved him I tried to put my feeling into verse but found the subject too vast for my pen; only Edith Wharton approached the dignity and music which his dirge require" (104), a statement he follows by quoting several stanzas of the poem. In *My Friendly Contemporaries*, Garland was more explicit about what had prompted his praise: "of all the poems which appeared in praise of Roosevelt, the one which most moved me and which came nearest to being his adequate epitaph was written by Edith Wharton, a free flowing yet proportioned utterance, original in quality and emotionally sincere, entitled 'With the Tide'" (*My Friendly Contemporaries* 215).

Perhaps the most important connection between Garland and Wharton before their meeting was Garland's presence on the Pulitzer Prize juries for both fiction and drama in 1921. In reviewing the selections from 1920, Garland wrote to fellow jury member Stuart Sherman that he found most of them "impermanent": "I can't imagine myself re-reading (Floyd Dell's) *Moon-Calf* or (Sinclair Lewis's) *Main Street* a year from now—and as for five years! . . .. They write not as artists . . . . but as hot-shot reporters" (Newlin and McCullough 287). Unimpressed, indeed alarmed, by *Main Street*, Garland mentions as an alternative Zona Gale's *Miss Lulu Bett* (which in its play form won the prize for drama in 1921) but found it "very slight hardly more than a short story" (289). On the other hand, "*The Age of Innocence* has dignity and a fine method but the story is without originality. The book lacks emotion but it is technically high" (Newlin and McCullough 289). Despite his less-than-rousing endorsement, this judgment marked the height of Garland's praise for the novels of 1920, and it was enough. Fritz Oehlschlaeger has argued that Garland's lack of enthusiasm for *Main Street*—he would support it, Garland said, only if there were a danger of the prize not being awarded at all—swung the other judges to support *The Age of Innocence*; in any event, Wharton's novel won the Pulitzer Prize. In 1923, Garland again made himself Wharton's champion, promoting her this time as a recipient of the Gold Medal of the American Academy of Arts and Letters instead of Mrs. Schuyler Van Rensselaer, who ultimately won the medal in 1923. In his diary entry for January 12, 1923, he writes: "The voting for the medal was too 'sudden' to please me. I agreed with Brander (Matthews) that Edith Wharton was the logical recipient, but Sloane, Butler and Johnson were for Mrs. Schuyler whose work I do not know except in magazine articles" (223). Wharton did go on to win the medal in 1924, so Garland's good judgment was vindicated at last.

It is with this background, then, of both critical praise and behind-the-scenes support for Wharton's work that Garland went to visit Wharton at Pavillon Colombe in

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1924. Written the day of the meeting, July 27, 1924, this first account in Garland's letter to his wife is wholly admiring. Wharton makes a good impression at once by meeting him at the train station in person and on foot, since it is Sunday and her chauffeur's day off.; the simplicity with which she greets him has "nothing of the reserve she is credited with" (313). Garland is clearly as struck by her appearance as by her manner:

> She is a handsome figure. She wore an exquisite white gown and a lovely hat. . . .She shows her years but carries herself well and her voice is charming—without any accent—a beautiful voice. Her eyes are brown and clear and friendly, and her expression candid and humorous—It is a long walk up to her door and I fear in my keen interest in our talk I almost walked her off her feet. . . . (Newlin and McCullough 313)

Garland was equally impressed by her house, which he called "Pavillon Colombo," noting especially the "heavy, blank, forbidding portals" that opened onto a "delightful hall" and "glorious garden" where the two had tea, the "pleasant little room" that was her study, and a "curious little open summer house of lattice work" with a desk and writing materials for her "writing guests." When he expressed surprise that her study was "so neat and orderly," Wharton laughed and told him "But I *am* a neat and orderly person" (314), a piece of self-disclosure at odds with the forbidding manner he had been led to expect. The two found points of agreement ranging from their dismay at the "foreign element" in New York and resentment at the presumption "of our Europeanized critics" (313) in judging American literature to conversation about mutual literary friends James, Howells, and Fuller. As if this were not enough, she endeared herself to Garland by praising his *Son of the Middle Border,* which had won the Pulitzer Prize the year after *The Age of Innocence,* and by expressing an interest in his daughter's public reading of Wharton's poem "With the Tide." The two agreed to exchange their most recent books, Garland's *A Daughter of the Middle Border,* which Wharton had not read, and what Wharton called her "box of little New York stories," *Old New York.*

The most surprising discovery for Garland was Wharton's sense of humor, as two of the anecdotes in his letter to Zulime illustrate:

> It interested me to see that all the villagers knew her and regard her as their patron. She had just been giving a number of prizes to the school children. . . . They were all given prizes. As she handsomely said, "Even the ones who were poor in attendance were given prizes because they were in attendance on this occasion. That is sufficiently Bolshevik, isn't it?" she said. She is never funny but has a glowing, quiet humor that is delightful. (314)
>
> She is a wonderful woman. She must be nearly seventy (Wharton was 62 and Garland 64) yet she is alert as a girl in mind and on her feet. She spoke of the change between the period of her girlhood when women were old and retired at forty. She said she had always smoked until a few years ago when the doctor advised against it. For a matter of six months she went without but then the doctor told her to try and see if smoking would affect the heart again. "I found I didn't like the taste of it" she said humorously. "This alarmed me. If all my vices should turn out to be like that I would be devastated. I decided that hereafter I would reform slowly." She said it a great deal subtler than this but it was to this effect. (315)

Garland is careful to distinguish between genuine humor and the attempt to be "funny," which in 1920s parlance would have connoted the vulgar telling of jokes or otherwise striving to please. The anecdote about smoking, too, is obviously designed to put him at ease. She is, Garland concluded, "a genuine aristocrat but being genuine she does not insist upon it" (315), and despite his commitment to democratic expression, the old single-taxer and political activist was obviously charmed by her. On only one point did they disagree: her expatriate status. After praising her house and indicating that he understood "the charm of such a life," Garland nonetheless added "And yet it is a kind of exile, isn't it?" "No," she said. "I know many of the literary folk in Paris, and then my English and American friends can come to see me—Besides, you must remember it is only a few hours to London" (314). In Garland's first account of the visit, the issue of Wharton's literary exile is clearly secondary to the impression Wharton made as a person. He concludes his account of the visit by saying, "I liked her—as hoped to do. I *think* she liked me—I hope she did and that we will meet again" (315). But the two never did meet again, so when Garland began to publish his memoirs seven years later, it was this visit alone that he recalled.

Garland's second account of his visit appeared in *Companions on the Trail* in 1931. During the intervening seven years, Wharton had published works such as *The Mother's Recompense* (1925), *Twilight Sleep* (1927), *The Children* (1928), and *Hudson River Bracketed* (1929), but Garland mentions none of them. Instead, he frames his account of the meeting with his reaction to *The Valley of Decision* many years earlier and his wish to write to her at that point. Emphasizing her inaccessibility, he reports that before he wrote to her, his friends said, "She spends all her time abroad and is rather unapproachable. . . . She is reported to be entirely out of key with modern America" (*Companions on the Trail* 325). Since the year being described is 1905, not 1925, it is clear that Garland is engaging in some creative recollection here, retroactively projecting Wharton's present circumstances onto his past memory of events. His account of the visit still retains the features that impressed him—she meets him at the railroad station wearing "a lovely white gown and hat to match"—but now she makes a "regal figure" as she faces him, not in the flowering garden this time, but in her "drawing room" (325). Although Garland still praises her, it is in different terms: "She is the most

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beautiful and distinguished woman writer of my acquaintance and wholly charming in voice and manner. I found her frank, kindly, and keenly intellectual. She treated me as a fellow craftsman, and professed pleasure in my commendation of her Italian book" (326). The abstract adjectives replace the wealth of description in the earlier account, but on one subject Garland is more voluble than before--Edith Wharton as expatriate:

> She admitted that she was open to the charge of being an expatriate but insisted that she was not. "I find it easier to write here," she said, "and life is more gracious. All my work now, however, is concerned with American subjects. I shall go back occasionally, but I regard France as my home, for the present at least."

What had been a simple matter of assuring Garland that she was not a literary exile (because her friends were in Europe and London was so close) now becomes implicitly a criticism of the land she has left behind: America is her *subject*, but France is her *home*, at least for the present—because life is better there. Garland continues:

> She is writing now mainly of the days when she was a young girl in New York City. Her life like her books resembles that of Henry James. She is an intellectual aristocrat and finds present-day New York disheartening. She admitted that she has been away so long that she could not find the America she knew. She returns to it only in imagination. She illustrates as completely as James the danger of staying too long in Europe—however, she would not admit that such alienation is a source of regret. (326)

The differences from the earlier accounts are striking. She is now an "intellectual" rather than a natural aristocrat, one who prefers to dwell in the New York of her imagination. For the first time in describing this meeting, Garland singles out Henry James as not simply another writer like Howells or Henry Blake Fuller, but as the writer from whom her work and her life is drawn, and a fellow expatriate whose mistakes she repeats. In the earlier letter, both she and Garland expressed a nativist dismay at the "foreign element" in New York; here only Wharton does, and implicitly this is because she has been away too long. She "admits" to being away "so long"—too long—but will not "admit" to having any regrets. In this account, Garland presents himself implicitly as a defender of American literature, interrogating an expatriate who experiences "alienation," something he did not report in the earlier document, but denies the problem.

The third account of Garland's meeting with Wharton appears in *Afternoon Neighbors*, the fourth and final

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Call for Papers: ALA 2009

The Edith Wharton Society will sponsor two panels at the American Literature Association Conference in Boston, MA, on 21-24 May 2009.

1. After Innocence: Late Edith Wharton

In his influential essay, "Justice to Edith Wharton", Edmund Wilson casually wrote off Wharton's writing after The Age of Innocence, concluding that the more "commonplace work of her later years had had the effect of dulling the reputation of her earlier and more serious work." This panel re-examines the final period of Wharton's career, and its place in any assessment of the writer's oeuvre. Possible topics might include: Wharton and her critics; the late short stories; versions of her memoirs; correspondence; the critical writings; public image; the writer's responses to contemporary fiction; Wharton and the Depression; the Vance Weston novels; The Buccaneers; Wharton's legacy. All approaches welcome. Please submit 250 word paper proposals and brief biographical statement by **15 January 2009** to Laura Rattray at: L.Rattray@hull.ac.uk

2. New Perspectives on the Novel of Manners

Since James W. Tuttleton wrote *The Novel of Manners in America* in 1972, scholars have "reclaimed" a massive amount of literature by writers who were marginalized though canon formation. So too have critical perspectives and methodologies broadened the study of literature. Additionally, many contemporary popular texts are now taught in classrooms. This panel seeks to use Edith Wharton, as a comparative point from which to examine other writers, as novelists of manners. Submissions may include modern or popular writers or any new treatments of canonical writers. Please submit 250-300 word proposals and a brief biographical statement by **15 January 2009** to Margaret Murray at murraym@wcsu.edu.

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volume of his memoirs, which appeared in 1934, the same year as *A Backward Glance*. Garland titles his chapter "Edith Wharton's Home," as if to emphasize the place rather than the person. His picture of her contains the same elements, but the emphasis has changed:

> She met me on the platform, beautifully gowned in white. I thought her one of the handsomest women I had ever seen. She showed her years of course, but not in her voice or glance. She carried her slender figure alertly, and her clear brown eyes were keenly observant and at the same time humorous and friendly. Her wide-brimmed hat shaded her face softly and her feet were daintily shod. Altogether she looked the American aristocrat, quite the person I had expected to meet but older than the portraits I had seen . . . . Her accent was that of a cultivated Eastern American, a delightful blend of the Old World and the New. (206)

The cosmopolitan quality of vocal patterns "without any accent" has become the accent of a cultivated Eastern American, which reinscribes and signals class difference; her eyes, but not her words, are humorous; and the issue of her youthful manner is subordinated to the fact that she "showed her years" and looked "older than the portraits I had seen" (205). Whereas in the earliest recollections Garland had stressed Wharton's natural manner (not her reserve) and had mentioned Wharton as an aristocrat only fleetingly, in this version the impression of an "American aristocrat" as Lady Bountiful predominates, especially when Garland calls her a "well-known and beloved figure in the village" and quotes her as saying vaguely that she enjoys "helping in civic affairs" (205). The two speak of literature in general, not of mutual friends like Howells, James, and Fuller or of their own books. With perhaps a touch of envy, Garland reports that Wharton "felt the coming of new gods (in literature) but seemed confident and secure. Her work was still in demand" (207).

CALL FOR ALS WHARTON BIBLIOGRAPHY

Did you publish a book, book chapter, or article on Wharton in 2008?

If so, please send a copy to Carol Singley, who writes the 2008 bibliographic essay on Wharton for *American Literary Scholarship*. She will consider your work.for inclusion.

Please send items to Carol Singley, 312 Maple Ave., Swarthmore, PA 19081 by May 1, 2009. Email questions to singley@camden.rutgers.edu

In addition to the portrait of Wharton as a *grande dame*, the idea of Wharton's expatriate status completely dominates this account. For the third time Garland reproduces his conversation with her on the subject, and for the third time it undergoes a change. In this version he is now not only advocate but emissary for the American literary scene, asking Wharton to donate the manuscript of "With the Tide" to the American Academy. After Wharton has told him that her summer home is in Paris and her winter home in the south of France, Garland questions her more closely:

> " Does that arrangement mean that you are never coming back to America?"
>
> She smiled a little sadly. " I fear it does. I have made several short trips to New York and Philadelphia, but my interests are nearly all here."
>
> To this I replied, " I can understand your decision, but I regret our loss. Your presence in America would be of great service to us." (205-6)

This version grants him not only the last word but a victory that he had not had before: instead of denying that she exists in a "kind of exile," she admits her expatriate status, acknowledging also that France is her permanent home. In this Depression year of 1934, Garland chooses a curious word to appeal to Wharton's literary patriotism: service. Since the two discussed "her War experiences," he may consider her literary work in America a natural extension of the service she provided to her adopted country during the War, although he is comfortably vague as to exactly what "service" her presence would provide. The effect, however, is to suggest to his readers that Wharton is somehow shirking a duty to her homeland, living as she does a secure and untroubled life abroad as an in-demand author while her countrymen are suffering.

Garland solidifies this impression through his description of her home. Although he says somewhat disingenuously that his "notes of this afternoon are few," he calls the house a "typical French villa" adding,

> It was all colorful, secluded, and entirely French. In truth, the house, charming as it was, did not seem to be her home—only her hotel. Her books are American and she remains wholly American, but her surroundings are essentially French. I felt in her something of the same incongruity which troubled me during my visit to Henry James at Rye. She is losing touch with New York. She is loyal to her native land, but she is no longer tolerant of it—except in

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> theory. She still calls herself American, but her tastes are European. (206)

In short, Wharton, in abandoning America, has also abandoned her home, an echo of some critics' perspectives on her late work. The charming Pavillon Colombe of his first account is now not a home, but a "hotel"; the fictional home, a hotel masquerading as a home, parallels the fictional American Edith Wharton, an alienated expatriate who "calls herself American" but has European tastes and surroundings. To cap the impression, Garland adds a final parenthetical note for those who may not have kept track: "So far as I know she has not visited America since this date, July 29 (he meant 27), 1924. Perhaps like Thomas Hardy she finds it 'Too rackety' over here" (207). This aside presents a decidedly negative tone to the whole and, in the eyes of his readers, must have solidified any impressions that they had of Wharton as an out-of-touch expatriate who wants to keep New York as fodder for her literary output but is unwilling to help it in its present plight.

By 1934, six years before his death, Garland no longer had either the audience or the critical clout that he had had in the early years of the century; his habit of seeing modern literature as possessing what he called a "yellow streak" of indecency, his Western romances, and his obsession with psychic phenomena in his later years had eroded his credibility. But during the twenties and thirties he was treated as an elder statesman who had lived during a formative period of American literary history, and he lectured constantly about recollections of the giants of American literature. In short, his opinions of literary figures still mattered, and his portrait of Wharton still counted. Garland does not cite reviews of Wharton's work, but he does not need to. Looking at his glimpses of Wharton, from Wharton the amused and amusing hostess to Wharton as confirmed expatriate, it is clear that the public myths about Wharton during the last decades of her life were powerful enough to override the private impressions she made even on someone like Garland, who, both as a realist novelist and as a man charmed by her presence, should certainly have known better.

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Edith Wharton Collection Research Award

Deadline: March 15, 2009

Each year the Edith Wharton Society offers a Edith Wharton Collection Research Award of $1500 to enable a scholar to conduct research on the Edith Wharton Collection of materials at the Beinecke Library at Yale University. Prospective fellows for the 2009-20010 award are asked to submit a research proposal (maximum length 5 single-spaced pages) and a resume by March 15, 2009 to Hildegard Hoeller at hilhllr@aim.com or at 395 South End Ave., #24L, New York, NY 10280.

The research proposal should detail the overall research project, its particular contribution to Wharton scholarship, the preparation the candidate brings to the project, and the specific relevance that materials at the Beinecke collection have for its completion. The funds need to be used for transportation, lodging, and other expenses related to a stay at the library. Notification of the award will take place by April 15th and the award can be used from May 1, 2009 through May 1, 2010. A final report will be due June 1, 2010.

We are pleased to announce that the winner of the 2008 Edith Wharton Research Award is:

Ferda Asya
for her project
" Transatlantic Anarchism in the Fiction of Edith Wharton."