



Volume X, No. 2

Fall 1993

The *Edith Wharton Review* is the official publication of The Edith Wharton Society. It is published at the Department of English, Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus, and partially funded by the Andrew Mellon Fund of Long Island University. Contributors may submit short essays, notes, news items, reviews, announcements and experiences of classroom teaching. Manuscripts should be submitted in triplicate and should follow the new MLA style. Send to Edith Wharton Society, Department of English, Long Island University, Brooklyn, NY 11201.

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MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION CONVENTION TORONTO – DECEMBER 27-30, 1993

Sessions

Edith Wharton and the Gothic

December 28th – 3:30-4:45 p.m. Conference Rooms D & E, Sheraton Centre,
Kathy Fedorko, Middlesex Country College, Moderator

1. "The Ghostly Gothic of Wharton's Everyday World,"
Martha Banta, Univ. of California, LA
2. "The Spiritual Economy of Wharton's Modern(ist) Gothic,"
Monika M. Elbert, Montclair State College
3. "Unearthly Visitants': Edith Wharton's Ghost Tales, Gothic Form,
and the Literature of Homosexual Panic,"
Richard A. Kaye, Princeton Univ.

Edith Wharton and The Visual Arts

December 30, 1:45-3:00 p.m. Essex, Sheraton Centre,
Helen Killoran, Ohio University, Lancaster, Moderator.

1. "The Morality of Portraiture in Wharton's Fiction,"
Elsa Nettels, College of William and Mary
2. "Images of Baroque in Wharton's Italian Travel Writing,"
Sara Bird Wright, College of William and Mary
3. "The 'Duchess Effect' and the Role of Portraiture in the Fiction of
Wharton, Frederick Wegener, St. John's Univ. Jamaica

Business Meeting

December 28 – 5:15-6:30 p.m.
Conference Rooms D and E, Sheraton Centre

Members and prospective members of the Edith Wharton Society are invited. On the agenda will be the report from the Executive Committee and the selection of moderator and organizer of one session for the 1994 MLA Convention in San Diego. Proposals will be taken from the floor. Anyone present may offer topic. Vote will be taken immediately at meeting. So if you wish to organize 1994 session, come prepared with suggested proposal.

Dinner of the Edith Wharton Society

December 28 – 7:30 p.m.

La Bodega (Cuisine Francaise)
30 Baldwin Street
Toronto, Canada
Philip Wharton, onwer and manager

Three-course dinner with choice of chicken, veal or fish is \$36.00. Seating is limited so reservations must be made as soon as possible. Make check out to Carol Shaffer-Koros and send to 58 Normandy Drive, Westfield, NJ 07090. (608) 527-2092.

The Gilded Void: Edith Wharton, Abraham Cahan, and The Turn-of-the Century American Culture

by Ludger Brinker

Although they were born only two years apart, Cahan in 1860 and Wharton in 1862, a gulf of cultural, social, and linguistic allegiances separates the two writers. In fact, most American literary historians place Wharton and Cahan in opposite cultural camps. Despite the comparative studies of immigrant and mainstream literature by Jules Chametzky (most notably in *Our Decentralized Literature*) and David Fine which have laid the groundwork for establishing possible connections between the two authors, most critics have not yet seriously taken up this line of inquiry. The reason for this omission is simple; it is based on the prevailing separation of American literature into minority and mainstream, especially in studies of turn-of-the-century literature. Therefore scholars have not attended to important commonalities linking writers such as Wharton and Cahan.

It is not difficult to see why critics have been slow to detect such connections. After all, the social and cultural differences separating Wharton and Cahan are enormous: Wharton was born into exclusive aristocratic New York society and made her debut only a few years before Cahan, literally penniless and barely able to speak English, arrived in New York City in 1882. While Cahan was part of the advance guard of the large Jewish migration that emanated from Russia after the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881, Wharton was a seventh- or eighth-generation American whose Anglo-Dutch ancestors had first immigrated to the Colonies in the 1630's. Wharton was profoundly alienated from her social class, but was also bound to it by old loyalties and thus retained vestiges of hope in the possibility of a socially responsible aristocratic culture in the United States; Cahan, the social democrat, is generally credited with being one of the first important articulators of the emerging immigrant voice. Although their paths never directly crossed, they shared at least one mutual friend, William Dean Howells, without whose warm support Cahan's career as a novelist writing in English might never have blossomed, and whose friendship with Wharton dated back to the late 1870's when he accepted a poem by the seventeen-year-old Edith Newbold Jones for publication in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Thus the skeptic's question con-

cerning what, apart from living in different quarters in the same city, Wharton and Cahan may conceivably have in common, is, on the surface, at least, justified. Granted, there is no commonality in their respective physical descriptions of the American scene, but the commonality of theme, stemming from their response to currents in American culture and history is startling. Both authors pass severe moral judgments on what they perceive to be the out-of-control materialism of American culture and society, a materialism so pervasive that it is the defining element of their characters' identities and the relationships they engage in.

Both authors turned to writing fiction at roughly the same time, and both wrote novels about the New York social scene at the turn of the century. Moreover, Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) and *The Custom of the Country* (1913), and Cahan's *Yekl, A Tale of the New York Ghetto* (1896) and *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917) share a deeply pessimistic outlook about American culture — even if reflected through two radically different personalities, political outlooks, and literary genres. While both novelists assault the romantic traditions of the social classes they describe — Wharton through the genre of the society novel, with its glittering and alluring heroes and heroines, and Cahan through the tenement tale, with its self-sacrificing, noble, and heroic slum dwellers — they share the conviction that the denizens of both worlds suffer from serious moral deficiencies brought about by a pervasive single-minded consumerism to which old ideals and pieties are readily surrendered.

Wharton's evolving culture pessimism has received such abundant critical attention that it is unnecessary to review it. Cahan, on the other hand, it often still undervalued as a writer of fiction in English. One of the reasons for this critical bias lies in the fact that his achievement as a novelist is often overshadowed by his almost fifty-year-long reign as the autocratic editor of the *Jewish Daily Forward*, the most important Yiddish paper in America. However, Jules Chametzky's recent edition of *The Rise of David Levinsky* for Penguin Classics should put an end to such a neglect.

Cahan's first novel, *Yekl, A Tale of the New York*

Ghetto, published in 1896, was the first significant American Jewish novel and is a small realistic gem in the Howells tradition; it was, in fact, Howells who had suggested both the novel's subject matter and later even its title to Cahan. Despite the novel's brevity, its descriptions of immigrant life and painful rendition of the characters' new and ill-mastered English, fully and authoritatively evoke the flavor of the ghetto and exhibit the impact of America on the life of an ordinary Jewish immigrant, Yekl Podkovnik, or Jake, as he begins to call himself in his first significant gesture of acculturation shortly after his arrival in the New World. And while there is no outward physical resemblance between Yekl/Jake and Simon Rosedale, the German-Jewish plutocrat of *The House of Mirth*, both share one common aspiration: to leave their Jewish origins behind and to be received without discrimination by the gentile world.

This gentile world did not easily open its doors to newcomers. It had not willingly opened its doors to the Irish earlier in the nineteenth century. And because of common prejudices and stereotypes, immigrant Jews, whether German or eastern European, had to work hard to be socially accepted by gentile society. One of Cahan's major aims in writing *Yekl* and *The Rise of David Levinsky* was to serve as cultural mediator between eastern European Jews and American gentiles.¹ This attempt to de-mystify and de-exoticize the world of the ghetto was warmly encouraged by William Dean Howells, who saw such efforts as a confirmation of the dominant culture's hegemonic reign. Neither Howells nor Cahan seriously questioned the cultural norms that proclaimed that having a literary career in the United States meant publishing in English and for a gentile audience. Thus the fact that Cahan stopped writing fiction in English after 1917 to devote the remainder of his long and productive career to help his fellow Jews in their process of acculturation by writing for them in Yiddish speaks volumes about the ultimate value that he may have placed on the writing of fiction in general and its ability to reach — and change — the cultural attitudes of a gentile audience.

Unlike Howells, Wharton was not one of the gentile authors who readily welcomed new voices into American literature. Her anti-Semitism, although not as virulent as that of Henry Adams, is nevertheless evident in *The Custom of the Country* and *The House of Mirth*, among other works. Undine Spragg, the thoroughly destructive heroine of *The Custom of the Country*, in her first months in New York falls prey to an Austrian riding-master who is exposed as a Jewish swindler by the name of Aaronson. And rather than letting Lily Bart, the main character of *The House of Mirth*, finally marry Rosedale and commit an act of social and cultural miscegenation, Wharton has her die, this despite Rosedale's steady and

finally triumphant progress to get even with those who had socially snubbed him before — an attitude that actually appeals even to Lily. Ultimately, though, Rosedale remains a product of his "race"; the reader is never allowed to forget that for Wharton, no matter how much Rosedale advances socially, he always remains, in the words of Judy Trenor, "the same little Jew who had been served up and rejected at the social board a dozen times" (*House of Mirth* 25).² But Wharton's refusal to grant Rosedale the ultimate prize of admission, marriage to the gentile woman, is only tangential to her main theme: to give an accurate and devastating account of upper-class New York society, an account that no novel dealing with the American upper class had provided so far.

Through the writing of *The House of Mirth* Wharton imbued a trivial subject with seriousness because of her moral outrage. Writing thus became a moral obligation to her. And in her pessimism about this hedonistic class, Wharton becomes Cahan's spiritual and artistic ally. Although Cahan's New York fiction does not deal at length with the German Jews, from whose ranks Rosedale hails, and focuses instead on the painful acculturation experiences of poor eastern European Jewish immigrants, he shares some fundamental cultural assumptions with Wharton. Foremost among these is a sense of cultural malaise, the assumption that neither aristocratic New Yorker nor recently arrived immigrant possesses sufficient ethical qualities to run the affairs of the country or to act as a positive moral force in society. For both writers this moral bankruptcy is the result of a perverted emphasis on material values that engulfs both native-born American as well as recently arrived Jewish immigrant.

On Cahan's part this attitude presents a marked contrast to the optimism expressed by other Jewish immigrant novelists of the period, such as Elias Tobenkin, Ezra Brudno, or Edward Steiner, all of whom envisaged a positive and productive cross-cultural fertilization between native-born and immigrant. Considered in this context, the skepticism expressed in Cahan's work is remarkable. He is one of the few writers of the immigrant generation to look beneath the superficial signs of acculturation and probe the complex issues of cultural, generational, and economic conflict. For Cahan, as for most other eastern European Jews, the possibility of returning home was not a viable alternative to staying in America. Such a possibility, of course, usually existed for the members of other immigrant groups. For this reason the question of acculturation and the beckoning of America as the new Promised Land was of such crucial significance to Cahan that he could not join those voices that uncritically sang hymns of praise to America. That those voices also belonged to fellow Jewish immigrant writers should not surprise us; after all, America as the new "Promised Land" with all the connotations that such

a biblical term evokes, plays a significant role in American-Jewish writing. But Cahan, always the skeptic in the tradition of the Russian intelligentsia, would not subscribe to such naive simplifications.³

Fascinating in this context is that Wharton and Cahan share the view that a union between native aristocrat and foreign-born immigrant is impossible; in fact, for both it is almost inconceivable even to envision a cross-ethnic marriage. Lily does not marry Rosedale, and when the millionaire David Levinsky, the protagonist of Cahan's masterpiece, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, finally meets a gentile woman to whom he is attracted so strongly that he considers marrying her, he decides against that step precisely because she is not Jewish. As Levinsky puts it: "I saw clearly that [proposing marriage] would be a mistake. It was not the faith of my fathers that was in the way. It was the medieval prejudice against our people which makes so many marriages between Jew and Gentile a failure. It frightened me" (527). I believe one can argue that both novelists are concerned about ethnically pure marriages, even if their reasons for wishing to maintain separate ethnic and cultural identities stem from different concerns. Indeed, their shared pessimism in the possibilities of cultural and ethnic reconciliation, of melting-pot fusion, becomes especially remarkable when we transport their concerns into our age of multiculturalism and ethnic self-assertion. The writers' refusals to grant their characters marriage licenses across ethnic lines is an indication of the emerging struggle between powerful cultural interest groups over the fate, direction, and ultimate ownership of American literature.

The question of identity is explored to an extraordinary degree by both Wharton and Cahan. At first sight, the issue of what it means to be an American may not seem paramount to Wharton's characters because most of them feel at home in and with the land. Yet when we recall Ellen Olenska's sense of "foreignness," Lily Bart's sense of never having had a "home," or Charity Royall's sense of shame because she was "brought down from the mountain," we can argue that Wharton, like Cahan, depicts marginal outside characters. Whereas in Wharton's case the marginal figure is most often female, and in Cahan's case the immigrant, for both writers the question of the "outsider's" identity is of central importance.

This identity is typically determined by social relationships and is related to a character's ability to partake in an orgy of consumption. For Cahan's immigrant heroes the emphasis on material values, especially clothing, becomes the most important way to define themselves as Americans.⁴ When David Levinsky, on his first day in New York, submits to a trip to the barber shop where his beard and side locks are shaven off and is then fitted with an American-made suit, he not only adapts to the ways of his new country, but also proclaims the beginn-

ing of a new identity. For with these new clothes come new habits, and the relentless pursuit of material possessions becomes the defining trait of Levinsky's character. In this novel and in his other tales Cahan explores the eastern European Jews' intense fascination and identification with the urban American lifestyle that was epitomized by material consumption. Andrew Heinze has compellingly documented that:

Acquiring American speech, participating in American institutions, and making economic advances were important in the search for a new cultural identity, but vast numbers of people with little sense of the language and limited exposure to institutions were engaging, virtually from the moment they entered the streets of New York City, in a new cycle of consumption that defined a uniquely American approach to life. (10)

Of course, Jewish immigrants did not invent this emphasis on consumption; they successfully copied it from native-born Americans and in this way started the process of replacing traditional (Jewish) religious authority with consumption-oriented (gentile) culture. Indeed, conspicuous consumption is the hallmark of Wharton's American rich, a consumption for which human beings are readily sacrificed. Just as Cahan's characters dress in an "American" way, thus signaling their awareness of clothing as a building block of a new identity, so Wharton's characters are often defined by what they wear; this is especially true for women, whose "worth" depends upon their artful display of lavish dress. In the same way that Lily Bart's rich gowns serve to set her apart from the common urban crowd and provide her with her particular identity, David Levinsky, through his choice of clothing, signals that he has abandoned old communal ties and habits and that he has embarked on his career as a rising capitalist, a career that nearly dehumanizes him.

Of course, an identity based on clothing and other elements of consumption is by definition transitional and provisional; it is one of becoming rather than being. Just as the identity of Cahan's heroes is always in the making, Lily Bart reinvents and redefines herself for each new potential suitor. Both authors finally assert that identity as a stable force, as a basis for making moral judgments, is not possible in a society dominated by relentless pursuits of material possessions. And since the concept of an identity-in-the-making, of being able to redefine character almost at will, is a distinctively American concept, Wharton and Cahan are ultimately united in their criticism not only of American life but of an entire cultural system based on such values.

American society is thus defined by both Wharton and

Cahan as being concerned with only the glittering surface; the right kind of clothing has become more important than steadfastness of character or communal ties. It is absolutely fitting, then, that Levinsky becomes a clothing manufacturer; his company manufactures the clothes that sell ready-made dreams of self-definition to the rising American middle class.⁵ But even Levinsky's millions cannot be a substitute for spiritual values; his moral dislocation is the result of "the difficulty of ever meaningfully getting the diverse parts of his life all together" (Chametzky, *From the Ghetto* 140). Just as the majority of Wharton's characters are contemptuous of the opinions of those who possess fewer material goods than they do, so Levinsky, through his reading of Darwin and Spencer and his amassed wealth, compensates for his lack of inner coherence and becomes convinced of his own intellectual superiority. Cahan's indictment, like Wharton's, is that financial success, the amassing of a great fortune, goes hand in hand with spiritual failure and emotional impoverishment.

The exploration of relationships, or the lack thereof, in the lives of their characters is another area of commonality between Wharton and Cahan. David Fine points out that Cahan's "heroes are painfully aware of their exile; whatever outer success they achieve in America, they are rarely permitted to forget what they have lost" (121). While New World consumerism defines the characters' experiences and actions, the spiritual values that they were brought up with in eastern Europe remain a moral force they can never fully cast off. Cahan's protagonists are thus "both unable and unwilling to extricate themselves from the grip of the past" (Fine 121). The result is a singular moral and emotional dislocation which prevents the characters from entering into rewarding intimate relationships. Similarly, in Wharton's upper class New York, marriage is based solely on economic factors; it is a material transaction for mutual economic and social gain and advancement, not a union of shared spiritual values or love. The marriage business is strictly the continuation of a necessary social performance. The fact that neither Lily nor Levinsky marries signifies their authors' verdict on a sterile and inhuman society which is ruled not by human emotions but only by cold and passionless business considerations. Such a society, Wharton and Cahan assert, perpetuates greed for ever more material goods, not human life.

Cahan's heroes are so profoundly alienated from the past that relationships formed in Europe normally do not survive in America; at the same time they yearn for the remembered emotional warmth of childhood. As a consequence, they are condemned to live in a desolate emotional wasteland without promise for a more fulfilling future. This, again, is also the predicament of Wharton's protagonists — bound inextricably to the past, the best

of them realize that they have become relics of an outdated social and economic order. Lily Bart is as much the product and victim of her society as she is — because of her moral scruples — the relic of an earlier, somewhat higher-minded New York.

The Rise of David Levinsky and *The House of Mirth* are important works of American literature. As David Fine remarks about Cahan's work: "The novel's ambiguous mixture of material success and spiritual failure, its insistence on the high cost of assimilation, and its concern with the identity crisis bred by the Americanization process place it squarely in the forefront of twentieth-century 'minority voice' fiction" (139). Wharton's novel shares Cahan's cultural pessimism and establishes a direct link between his world view and that of the then upper classes of American society. Both novelists are tied together by the spiritual emptiness and dislocation their protagonists experience; after all, Cahan's heroes pursue wealth and social position with as much passion and zeal as any Wharton character. The difference is, of course, that Cahan's characters do so unabashedly, while many of Wharton's characters pursue the same goal clandestinely. As David Levinsky muses toward the end of his life history:

I often convict myself of currying favor with the German Jews. But then German-American Jews curry favor with Portuguese-American Jews, just as we all curry favor with Gentiles and as American Gentiles curry favor with the aristocracy of Europe. (528)

Here we find the entire social hierarchy at one glance, a social hierarchy not only applicable to immigrant Jews, but also to Wharton's upper class. Cahan recognizes that for Americans there is always the realm of the *beyond*, of yet another social circle that is even more exclusive than one's own; and it is not without irony that Lily Bart's seal reads "beyond." Her beyond is, of course, meant to be one of spiritual possibilities outside the realm of her own social set, but it also accurately reflects the American psyche in its often frantic search for the ever-elusive final frontier. David Levinsky realizes that his past and present "do not comport well" (530), that is, that he is unable to connect past and present, that his identity is disrupted, and that, as a result, he has no future. Lily never comes to this realization; her function within her culture has never allowed for much self-reflection. Lily Bart and David Levinsky are, ultimately, mirror images of one another: neither develops an identity or relationships that would give either emotional or moral stability. "Cahan's novel is a commentary on the experience of his generation, an ironic response to the consequence of the demise of traditional society's authority on his fellow Jews and Americans" (Baumgarten 38), just as Wharton's novel attacks the consequences of treating women as

purely ornamental creatures destined to marry wealthy men. In both novels economics becomes more important than human emotions, and both novelists have their characters pay the price in terms of spiritual impoverishment and bankruptcy — a similarity in outlook that arises from a shared pessimistic and deterministic view of human nature. The collision of cultures, and the inability of the individual to find a secure haven in American society, the high costs of material success in human terms, and the spiritual failure of American society form the background against which both Wharton and Cahan paint their bleak pictures of loss. At the end of the story, Levinsky may be rich, but he finds out that he has acquired his wealth “at the expense of his inner spirit” (Chametzky, *From the Ghetto* 143). His world has become as void as that of Wharton’s “irresponsible pleasure-seekers” (*A Backward Glance* 207). In the end, there is no center to provide stability to the lives of David Levinsky or Lily Bart.

NOTES

¹ The concept of cultural mediation is explored by Jules Chametzky in “Immigrant Fiction as Cultural Mediation,” first presented at the 1981 MLA Convention, and reprinted in *Our Decentralized Literature*: 58-67.

² In her study of Rosedale’s function in the novel, Irene Goldman points out that “his successful entry into society is a devastating indictment, particularly in light of Lily’s expulsion. His very acceptance deep into the folds of society becomes proof that society is in an irretrievable decline” (33).

³ David Fine perhaps best summarizes Cahan’s stance when he writes:

While all the immigrant novelists of the period described the disparity between the expectations and the actualities of America, only Cahan among them pursued the psychological implications of that disparity, its permanent cost to the psyche. Only Cahan, among the pre-World War I, first-generation immigrant novelists, refused to turn his heroes into preachers or propagandists, refused to blink his eyes as he faced the chasm which lay between Old World values and New World experience. (138)

⁴ In addition to the lure of conspicuous material possessions, new American-made clothing could, as Andrew Heinze states,

“blunt the bitter memories of persecution that seemed to be embedded in old clothes from across the sea” (90-91). Through fashionable clothing immigrants could thus visually declare their willingness to become part of a consumption-oriented society.

⁵ Ironically, Lily Bart, toward the end of her life, finds employment as a hat maker; but unlike Levinsky, she is no success — her previous occupation as “self-creating artistic object” (Wolff 111) has rendered her wholly incapable of adapting to the world of manual labor.

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Edith Wharton and Louis Bromfield: A Jeffersonian and a Victorian

by Daniel Bratton

When Edith Wharton presented Louis Bromfield with her autobiographical *A Backward Glance* in the spring of 1934, she inscribed a bookplate attached to the right-hand fly-leaf "From a Victorian to a Jeffersonian." As though to signify her Victorian partisanship, the bottom of the plate is formally engraved "Mrs. Wharton." The book is now part of the library at Malabar Farm, near Mansfield, Ohio, where from 1939 until his death in 1956 Bromfield conducted his renowned experiments in ecological farming. When he received Wharton's gift, however, Bromfield was living north of Paris, in Senlis, where he and his wife had leased the ancient Presbytere de St. Etienne in 1930-31, ten years after Wharton purchased the near-by Pavillon Colombe in St. Brice-Sous-Foret.

That Wharton designated herself a Victorian is consistent with a remark she made to Sara Norton some years before, while at work on *The Age of Innocence*: "I am steeping myself in the nineteenth century, which is such a blessed refuge from the turmoil and mediocrity of today—like taking sanctuary in a mighty temple" (Lewis, *Edith Wharton* 424). That she addressed her young compatriot as a Jeffersonian is equally appropriate given his deep-seated belief in agrarian ideals and a natural aristocracy. Nor is it surprising, if we compare Wharton's seventy-two years of age to Bromfield's thirty-eight, that she should have stressed her affiliation with the previous century.

What is arresting in this dedication, in fact, are the implied nuances between the "Victorian" Mrs. Wharton and "Jeffersonian" Bromfield. What these signifiers represent might be explored from a number of angles; if, however, we take Bromfield's first novel, *The Green Bay Tree* (1924), as his seminal representation of the fate of the natural aristocrat in the "modern, post-Darwinian world" (Anderson 172), and relate it to Wharton's *Twilight Sleep* (1927), the novel in which she most directly addresses the fate of Jeffersonian ideals in twentieth-century America, we discover that the two narratives underscore not only the philosophical links between the two writers but also the temperamental and ideological differences suggested by Wharton's discriminating inscription.

The Green Bay Tree was the first in what Bromfield described as "panel novels in a screen which, when complete, will consist of at least a half-dozen panels all interrelated and each giving a certain phase of the ungainly, swarming, glittering spectacle of American Life" (Foreword to *Possession*). Although he completed only four of these proposed panel novels, *The Green Bay Tree* effectively illustrates one distinct phase in this spectacle: the destruction of Jeffersonian democracy by the Hamiltonian forces of "wealth, prosperity and bigness" (220).

As Julia Shane, a Midwestern farmer's daughter who through her virtue and talent has risen to the ranks of new-world aristocracy, explains, "it's the Town which counts nowadays. The day of the farmer is past" (69). Indeed, when Julia dies mid-way through the novel, the narrator observes that her day—when the concept of a natural aristocracy could be translated into a social and cultural reality—had passed "with the coming of the mills and the vulgar, noisy aristocracy of progress" (167).

The torch of gentility passes to Julia's daughter Lily, whose languid air and willowy movements suggest her literary kinship with Wharton's Lily Bart. Like her mother, Lily Shane gives short shrift to the forces of conspicuous consumption; in fact, her antipathy towards the noisy aristocracy of Ohio's Western Reserve is so strong that she not only refuses the hand of the State Governor, though carrying his child, but also takes up permanent residence in France.

Miss Shane soon discovers, however, that the old world with its hereditary aristocracy is no haven from the forces she has attempted to flee. When her house in the country is occupied by the Germans during the Battle of the Marne, a soldier demands of Lily,

"And where have we to go? If we sought to escape where have we to go? There is no place. Because the monkeys...have civilized all the world,...They have created a monster which is destroying them. There is no longer any peace....It is the monsters, Madame, who are at the bottom of all this. Ah, commerce, industry, wealth, power" (301).

Fleeing the "inferno of fire, steel and smoke" (1) produced by the American plutocracy, whose interests are served by men like the Governor, Lily finds herself not in an old-world Eden, but a "trampled garden" (302).

Yet she has no spiritual home to which she might return. Indeed, she has no physical home, for the only building in the new world to which she remains attached, the great brick ancestral home with "Strawberry Hill Gothic" features, has mysteriously burned to the ground, leaving nothing behind but a hole full of Jamesian *objets d'art*, "the beautiful things which encumbered the site of the proposed railroad station" (258).

After the War, Lily, observing the victory celebrations in the Place de la Concorde from a little alcove of the Hotel Crillon "as if conscious that in that moment she was at the very heart of the world" (321), articulates to the visiting Governor—now a U.S. senator—her argument with America:

"If I were to go back, I should find nothing. Cypress Hill burned....I was thinking that if I'd been born in France, I would have memories of a village and green country and pleasant stone houses. The people would be the same always....I have nothing to be loyal to...I couldn't be happy there because there's nothing but noise and ugliness. I suppose that somewhere in America there are towns full of realities that one could love, but they aren't in my part of the country. There's nothing there." (327)

Certainly Lily's feelings of deracination must have expressed Bromfield's own sentiments at the time, for six years after the publication of *The Green Bay Tree* the Bromfields would take out an eighty-year lease on the Presbytere, with no intention of returning to America (Granly 5).

What attracted Bromfield to France more than any other country was the continuity and permanence of its culture, and the carefully modulated harmony between French culture and agriculture. Here Wharton and Bromfield were in complete agreement. In *A Motor-Flight Through France* she would write, "in northern France, where agriculture has mated with poetry instead of banishing it, one understands the higher beauty of land developed, humanised, brought into relation to life and history....In France everything speaks of a long familiar intercourse between earth and its inhabitants..." (5).

Yet, in comparing her words to a passage written in a similar vein in Bromfield's *Pleasant Valley*, we sense an essential difference between Wharton's and Bromfield's responses to this higher beauty:

I was aware...of what it was that attracted me to Europe and most of all to France...when I returned home, I knew that permanence, con-

tinuity, alone was what I wanted...a piece of land which I could love passionately, which I could spend the rest of my life in cultivating, cherishing and improving,...which I might leave together, perhaps, with my own feeling for it, to my children who might in time leave it to their children... (7-8)

Although *Pleasant Valley* was published in 1943, four years after Bromfield fled what he called a "dying Europe," it is clear that for some time prior to his return to America Bromfield had entertained the idea of recreating the graces and humanized values of old-world civilization in his native land. It is equally clear that Wharton did not share his belief that old-world ideals could be realized on American soil.

In turning to *Twilight Sleep*, we discover the sources of her pessimism. While Wharton was never in sympathy with the pioneering spirit of Bromfield's geographical region—in *Hudson River Bracketed* (1929) she argues that the pioneers left what was most valuable behind them—her rejection of mass cultural Jacksonian democracy did not diminish her belief that a citizenry enlightened by education and a cultivated leisure class with strong rural ties could produce a civilized republic. Yet *Twilight Sleep*, especially in its resolution, suggests that the values of contemporary America had become so inimical to the spirit of Jeffersonian democracy that its representatives now found themselves victims of the very forces within society most responsible for the perpetuation of intellectual and spiritual idealism.

Historian Stow Persons has designated these forces the gentry and social-economic elite. To Wharton, the well being of the American leisure class depended upon these groups' accommodation of each other, with the gentry maintaining a strong influence over politics, business practices, and social observances; however, in *A Backward Glance* she observes that "from the first the spirit of our institutions has caused us to waste this class instead of using it" (95-95). When Old New York's continuation of European standards of gentility was arrested by the wedding of the plutocracy to mass culture, that city's history became paradigmatic of the failure of American society to propagate an aristocracy.

The characters in *Twilight Sleep*, positioned within or caught between these groups of elite, body forth the dissolution of the American leisure class after World War One. The protagonist, Nona Manford, an attractive fusion of gentry values and nouveau-riche vitality, is finally victimized by the Veblenian forces of conspicuous leisure and conspicuous consumption in arguably the most violent scene in all Wharton's fiction. Jim, Nona's half-brother from her parvenu mother Pauline's first marriage to a crochety, bigoted Old New Yorker, desperately clings to his father's archaic old-world standards while

being humiliated by his wife Lita, a 'twenties flapper bent on starring in movies. Arthur Wyant, Wharton's Old New Yorker, inhabits a "derelict habitation in a street past which fashion and business [have] long since flowed" (40), in contrast to his former wife, who has "stamped her will and her wealth on every feature" (94) of her palatial country estate. Her second husband, Dexter Manford, is a Midwestern candidate for natural aristocracy who, in devoting his energies to his ambition to enter the Eastern aristocracy of wealth, has sold his birthright, sacrificed his virtue and misdirected his talent.

It is richly symbolic that at the end of the novel Nona should be shot when Arthur Wyant, following a code of honour which Ralph Marvell's family would have understood only too well, attempts to shoot Dexter Manford: Wyant has discovered that his usurper both in bed and in society is having a dalliance with Jim Wyant's wife, Undine Spragg in her latest literary incarnation. Nona, a Bromfieldian natural aristocrat if ever there was one, finds herself helpless to prevent the chaos engendered not only by the irresponsible, pleasure-seeking parvenues, but also by the vitiated gentry, heirs to old-world values. She becomes a sacrificial lamb to those forces within American society that have destroyed any hope for a twentieth-century fertilization of Jeffersonian ideals. The last sentence of the novel finds Nona confined to her bed, wishing she were in a convent "where nobody believes in anything" (373).

Wharton does, however, suggest alternatives to the futile lives of her characters. The most notable of these is presented when Dexter Manford, trapped at one of Pauline's suffocating dinner parties, retreats into the memory of his childhood in the rural Midwest:

He had a vision of his mother, out on the Minnesota farm...saw her sowing, digging potatoes, feeding chickens, saw her kneading, baking, cooking, washing, mending, catching and harnessing the half-broken colt to drive twelve miles in the snow for the doctor.... And there the old lady sat at Delos, in her nice little brick house, in her hale and hearty old age. built to outlive them all. — Wasn't that perhaps the kind of life Manford himself had been meant for? Farming on a big scale, with all the modern appliances his forbears had lacked, outdoing everybody in the county, marketing his goods at the big centres, cutting a swathe in state politics like his elder brother? Using his brains, muscles, the whole of him, body and soul, to do real things, instead of all this artificial activity, this spinning around faster and faster in the void...(79)

Here we have the gentry ideal for the natural aristocrat, recruited from the ranks of the honest yeomanry.

Yet how realistic is Manford's little fantasy about returning to the farm? He quickly admits to himself, "that dream of a Western farm was all rubbish. What he really wanted was a life in which professional interests were somehow impossibly combined with great stretches of country quiet, books, horses, and children — ah children!" (80). A victim of Wharton's historical determinism, Manford can only imaginatively bridge the chasm between his professional fulfilment as a lawyer to the Eastern plutocracy and the urgings of his pioneer blood for a simpler, more vital way of life.

Even upon toning down his dream of large-scale farming—a vision apropos of Malabar Farm—to a more restricted conception of simple country life, opposed to the frenzied round of activity in his wife's overstocked, overheated, overdone estate, Manford acknowledges the impossibility of reconciling his conflicting ambitions. That he envisions "boys of his own—teaching them about all sorts of country things" (80) underscores not only his frustrated need for continuity but also his forlorn attempt to anchor himself to the earth and living things.

Further, though his farming background has given him an affinity with nature, certainly more of an affinity than that felt by Bromfield's Lily Shane, who is removed from the soil by at least two generations (*The Green Bay Tree* 138), the cultural and intellectual poverty of his childhood run counter to Manford's becoming an heir to the genteel tradition. Even Harvard Law School failed to bring him into a comfortable relation with cultivated society. In its heyday genteel society had avoided stagnation by recruiting from the ranks of rural Americans who, through their virtue and talent, were able to rise above their social stations—men like Dexter Manford. Now, in Wharton's post-war America, the self-made man, no longer aspiring to gentry ideals, finds himself unable to connect to larger cultural patterns.

Wharton is not suggesting a return to old Mrs. Manford's spartan life on the Midwestern farm: her friend Hamlin Garland had long before debunked the American pastoral myth. Rather, she is arguing for an incorporation into the exigencies of modern life of the older morality, the genteel ethical code, and the recapture of traditional values through renewed contact with the land. That in the last pages of *Twilight Sleep* Dexter and Nona Manford find themselves overwhelmed by the anarchy that dooms the leisure class speaks volumes.

By contrast, Louis Bromfield would move from the despair of the panel novels to a buoyant advocacy of Jeffersonian agrarianism, particularly in his non-fictional writing of the 'forties and 'fifties. His novel *The Farm*—published just one year before Wharton's *A Backward Glance*—is a pivotal work in this development, for while Johnny, the autobiographical persona, follows in the footsteps of Lily Shane and other earlier Bromfieldian

protagonists by leaving his multigenerational family farm in Ohio and heading for Europe, the author's return to his new-world rural roots is clearly anticipated. Bromfield would write that during the period he created this novel it was "as if I were under a compulsion....Toward the end I found myself spending more and more of my sleeping hours in the country where I was born and always what I dreamed of was of Ohio and my own county" (*Pleasant Valley* 4-5).

Charles A. Miller observes in his book *Jefferson and Nature*, "To speak very generally, if the ages preceding and following the Enlightenment are viewed with respect to their dominating social institutions, then what stand out are the church and feudalism on one side and large corporate enterprise on the other side. It is in the middle period, the Enlightenment, in the space between the eras of dominating social institutions, that Nature has room to breath" (8). In *The Farm* Bromfield argues that antebellum Ohio, particularly the Western Reserve, was essentially eighteenth century in its social institutions, allowing Man and Nature breathing space. "The roots of corruption," he writes, "lay in [Hamilton's] teaching — that the government should be, not in the hands of the democrats, or aristocrats, but of plutocrats. Out of the beliefs and teachings of Hamilton had come the decay..." (334).

In *The Green Bay Tree* the pristine air of the Enlightenment has become contaminated; from *The Farm* onward Bromfield would search for ways to rescue Jeffersonian agrarian ideals from the plutocrats. It is in his condemnation of Hamilton and the "money-changers" that Bromfield's view diverges from Wharton's. Indeed, his attacks on bankers provide a final insight into the signification of the bookplate with which this investigation began.

Edith Wharton would write to Royall Tyler in 1934,

The other day Louis Bromfield, who is in New York, wrote me: "There was a terrible scandal in Connecticut last week. A white girl married a banker." There is too much sour grapes for my taste in the present American attitude. The time to denounce the bankers was when we were all feeding off their gold plate; not now! At present they have not only my sympathy but my preference. They are the last representatives of our native industries.

(Lewis, *The Letters of Edith Wharton* 573)

In the end, Wharton's preference was for Bromfield's detested money-changers — those whom, along with the New England shopkeepers, he held most responsible for the failure of Jeffersonian democratic ideals. Here, in the middle of the Great Depression, Wharton was offended not by Bromfield's racial pejorative but by his slur upon Eastern bankers!

We are reminded that Wharton was, after all, a daughter of the East, descended from Manhattan land developers; Bromfield a son of the West, descended from Jeffersonian farmers. It is ironic that Wharton, with her profound sense of the past, should finally have sought refuge in the century which Bromfield blamed for the destruction of eighteenth-century Enlightenment.

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The Perils of Politeness in a New Age: Edith Wharton, Martin Scorsese and *The Age of Innocence*

by Linda Costanza Cahir

The best films that are based on literary works both explicate the literature and exploit it as a means of promoting the filmmaker's private vision. Our own explication of the literature might be quite unlike the filmmaker's. We may "read the book" quite differently from him, envision it differently, but in the most effective literature to film conversions, the filmmaker, equipped with express ideas, is faithful to the literature, faithful *in his own fashion*. Exemplary of this point is William Wyler's *The Heiress*, his film version of Henry James's *Washington Square*. Wyler cast beautiful Olivia de Havilland as plain Catherine Sloper, and while de Havilland is the antithesis of *my* version of Catherine, she is magic communicating Wyler's meaning: even great beauty can appear drab when self-esteem is obliterated.

In the most successful book to screen transitions, we see that the literature whet some puissant appetite in the filmmaker, that he had definite ideas about what he read, and that the film reconstituted the literature in such a way that the movie emerges as separate aesthetic text, which articulates the filmmaker's own separate universe of meaning. Illustrative of this is Ernst Lubitsch's *silent* screen version of Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan*—a play whose worth clearly lies in the interplay of words. Lubitsch's silent version of Wilde's play is his gloriously audacious assertion that cinematic language can be as witty as verbal language. He irreverently exploits Wilde's text as a means of celebrating the fact that cinema can do things that theater simply cannot.

Thus, two essential characteristics seem to determine the success of a literature-based film. First, the filmmaker must have definite ideas concerning the integral meaning of the literary text and the skill and willingness to communicate his views of the text's meaning; and, second, he must have the audacity to create a film that stands as a world apart, that somehow exploits the literature in such a way that an independent aesthetic offspring is born. These two essential characteristics get at the heart of what is wrong with Martin Scorsese's much awaited film, *The Age of Innocence*.

Scorsese's film never really breaks away from Wharton's text into its own self-reliant text. Unlike Lubitsch

who jettisoned Wilde's literal words in order to get at the cinematic equivalent of Wilde's wit, Scorsese depends, in large part, on the repeated practice of culling and truncating lines from Wharton's novel—lines, which instead of being incorporated into the acting-script, are delivered via Joanne Woodward's voice-over narration. The narration diminishes dramatic potency. Essentially, Wharton's writing ends up doing much of the movie's work, and the actors, mute and muted, are reduced to a pantomimesque performance. They are visual inserts, writ large, much like the sign-language performers who translate a television show for the hearing impaired. Each time that Woodward speaks, we are pulled away from the movie and back to the book. We are reminded of just how good Wharton's writing is. And, each time this happens, we temporarily exit the world of the film. It fades in consequence of its own ill-chosen narrative device.

The voice-overs remind us that Wharton's writing throughout *The Age of Innocence* is masterful, and, that while the novel is about restraint, Wharton's prose never approaches a repressed writing style. Her writing, while always exquisite, is assertive and vigorous—even playful, at times, and, at times, irreverently humorous and richly insinuating. Scorsese seems to confuse the discourse with the methodology. His *film* is restrained, tamed—repressed into vacuity. Consequently, it never becomes what we longed for it to be: the prodigious offspring of the prodigious parent.

The film never articulates definite ideas regarding the integral meaning of Wharton's novel. In interview after interview Scorsese claims that the novel is about unfulfilled love. He remarks: "What attracted me to book was the...love story, and a love between two people, whether successful or unsuccessful, is common to everyone" (Production Notes, 3).

If, indeed, the primary theme of *The Age of Innocence* is love (my *Age* is not), the film never makes clear what, exactly, provoked the fervid love of Ellen Olenska (Michelle Pfeiffer) and Newland Archer (Daniel Day-Lewis). While the movie should be able to stand as a thing apart from the novel, those who see Scorsese's film, never having read Wharton's book, in all likelihood will be con-

fused over what, exactly, provoked Ellen and Archer's love. This vagueness is consequent of Scorsese's treatment of the novel's early crucial scene, Newland's plea that Ellen abandon her plans for divorce.

In Wharton's text, Newland himself grows baffled over the extent to which he believes in the very cause that he, as a lawyer and a family member, is asked to promote. His argument, i.e., that Ellen should abandon her plans for divorce and conform to the customs of their genteel tribe, strikes him as a composite of "stock phrases" (111). He begins to see the horror in blind compliance to rules and he begins to understand, in a way that he never did before, the deadly hypocrisy at the heart of old New York's social code of conduct. Simultaneously, Newland also realizes "the ugly reality," that an individual's happiness often must be subjugated to the more compelling interest of maintaining the social structure. The individual, on occasion, must be sacrificed to the collective interest; personal happiness must, at times, defer to society's greater needs.

In Wharton's book, Newland's newly-awakened ambivalence is his agony. Normally self-possessed and complacently sure of life's way, he loses his footing here. His unforeseeable confusion discombobulates him, and this, not the sensitivity of the subject of divorce, ultimately makes him awkward. He winces at his own words in the torment of his confusion.

Ellen, married to a profligate, grows to love Newland for the rarity and sincerity of the rectitude that he exhibits; and, he comes to love her for forcing him to think, for subtly insisting that he examine his life, and for inspiring him to venture a look behind the social veil. Archer's and Ellen's *raisons d'amor* begin in this crucial scene where he raises the subject of her divorce.

For some reason, Scorsese did not consider the scene critical. The sequence in the film seems really quite inconsequential, just a way of getting Ellen and Archer alone in a room so that we can *feel* how powerfully drawn each is to the other. What they actually discuss seems secondary to the natural attraction that is ignited here. Scorsese's Archer, indeed, looks awkward delivering society's "stock phrases," as he appeals to Ellen to forgo her divorce; but his discomfort grows from his feelings of embarrassment. He is not ambivalent about the cause he has been asked to promote. Instead, it seems he feels that all this prattle about manners and social codes is such transparent hoopla that he acts mortified having to defend it to the worldly and beautiful Ellen, as if it's just so uncool to have to voice such "old fashioned ideas" to her. So, instead, Day-Lewis flirts with Pfeiffer; head modestly down, he repeatedly looks up at her through his long dark eyelashes. His inflections tell her that he is only delivering the family line.

Meanwhile, Pfeiffer's Ellen, much like Wharton's

Ellen, responds to the actual words that he is speaking; she takes them to heart, and tells Day-Lewis's Archer, "Very, well; I will do what you wish." Her response seems bizarre (People in our audience laughed) as if she missed the point of what Newland was *really* trying to say to her. Whatever caused this dichotomous acting — vague direction on how Pfeiffer and Day-Lewis should play the scene or the faulty editing together of their diverse takes — the bungle occurs at a crucial moment. Consequently, not only does this film sequence empty the scene of all of Newland's ambivalence, but it also creates an embarrassing discordance between how the two actors interpret this scene that they share.

In removing Newland's ambivalence, Scorsese removes the platform on which the love between Ellen and Archer is constructed. The only way left to make sense of their love is to recognize that *The Age of Innocence* has been transformed into a Hollywood romantic paradigm, the first assumption of which is that the two romantic leads will, of course, fall in love with each other. Under this model, reasons are immaterial.

However, light years away from this facile Hollywood model, *The Age of Innocence* is Wharton's most complex and slippery work. It is an open puzzle that begins with the title. To one extent, we see that Wharton is mercilessly ironic in referring to this age as innocent; to the other extreme, we, like her, cherish that time of innocent adherence to morals that that age professed to believe. The novel is a puzzlement.

Wharton's novel creates a conundrum that is insolvable. The dilemma at the center of *The Age of Innocence* questions: How can we switch between worlds or tear away the social material that shaped us and comes to surround us, how can we violate the very social ethics, the sharing of which compels another's love, without destroying that element of the self and the relationship that both generated and sustains that love? In *The Age of Innocence*, Wharton (like Tolstoy in *Anna Karenina*) knew that while lovers may want to consider the world irrelevant, they can not because they carry the world within them.¹ Society is unavoidably a part of each of them, part of what caused each to love the other in the first place. Lovers are not exempt from the intrusions of the world; they, too, are continually shaped and formed by the society they inhabit; and, so, when they choose to change their world, they invariably choose to change themselves, and consequently their relationship, as well.

In *The Age of Innocence*, manners are, thus, understood to be more than superficial acts, tied to polite conduct. The novel asserts that the customs and the manners we absorb from our world form, in part, who we are; they help define the Self. When a person sheds customs, he invariably sheds a part of his own skin. This is necessary to do at times (as Wharton's own divorce and

her emigration to France illustrate). *The Age of Innocence* reminds us that, while we are always free to change customs, and in certain cases have a moral responsibility to do so, in any changes we evoke, we should be fully cognizant and heedful of the effects our choices have, not only on others, but also on the revising of Self. *The Age of Innocence* dramatizes the struggles and the outcome of two characters, Ellen Olenska and Newland Archer, who are mindful of the effects of such choices. In consequence, they opt to restrain their passion. Thus, "forbidden love," the provocative "hook" of the film's trailers, at best, trivializes Ellen's and Archer's struggle.

Scorsese's failure at converting Wharton's novel into his film comes as quite a surprise if we consider that some of his best work is literature-based: *The Last Temptation of Christ* is his passionate reworking of Kazantzakis's book of the same name. In that film Scorsese splashes his religious turmoil, ambivalence, and uncertainty up there on the screen for all to see, and he does so with such probative fervor, that it leaves us infected with ideas. *Life Lessons*, Scorsese's contribution to the anthology film *New York Stories*, and, arguably, the best contribution to an anthology in all of film history, is based on Dostoyevsky's *The Gambler*. And, *Taxi Driver*, Scorsese's monumental signature piece, is a reworking (I believe) of Dostoyevsky's *Notes From Underground*. These films document the great pendulum of human nature: the swing between stasis and action, between conformity and rebellion, between the violence of repression and the repression of violence, or, in short, Scorsese's films map the very vacillation that is the pith of Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*.

Thus, it comes as no surprise that Scorsese's two best scenes in *The Age of Innocence*, the scenes that make us tingle because they remind us that we are, after all, watching a master at work, are suffused with a tension born of this swing between great repression and great violence.

The first of these is a brief, but chilling moment: May Welland's (Winona Ryder) success at an archery trial. For the first time, May lets us peek behind the mask of girlish, unthinking sweetness that she constantly assumes. She raises her bow (somehow Ryder looks taller in this scene), and straight-backed, fully self-assured, and unflinchingly, she aims straight for the heart of the target and pierces it through. May is the real archer in the family; when the trial demands it, unflinchingly, she nails hearts. This scene, beautiful in its brevity and potent in its sudden burst of violence from the seemingly docile May, is a moment of formidable filmmaking. Up to this point, Scorsese has held Ryder back—repressed her performance. (Ryder describes her acting in this movie as "minimalist" and claims that throughout the filming Scorsese kept asking her to "give less.") But, in this scene all stops are pulled, and we see that Winona Ryder, the

actress, and her character May Welland seem to share a wicked delight in having fooled us. Here they make us realize that there is more to both of these ladies, more layers upon layers of dark complexity, than we ever dreamed.

The second of these two successful scenes is May's farewell dinner to Ellen. This dinner (which, in sequencing the same series of images that we saw at the van der Luyden's dinner, asks that we compare the two events) becomes a "quiet conspiracy" of assassins. The Family, we see, benevolently protects those who pledge loyalty (the point of the van der Luyden dinner), but annihilates any member who is disloyal. The assassination, done with smiles, is as violent as anything Scorsese has filmed. But, these masterful Scorsese moments are rare in this film.

Perhaps it is reverence for Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* that makes Scorsese go soft. Something—an outsider's awkwardness before the excesses of refinement—something—seems to have short circuited (restrained) Scorsese's efforts to transform Wharton's great novel into his great movie. The sequences, themselves, are beautifully composed; the craftsmanship is mesmerizing. There are clever and pure cinematic moments: a soft left/right wipe that closes like a curtain foreshadows Archer's comment that May is like a closed curtain; an eerie, abruptly inserted matte shot of Mrs. Mingott's mansion off Central Park visualizes how alien this "inaccessible wilderness" felt to New York society of the 1870s; and, intentionally disruptive editing implies that art should not always be predictable. Thus, when Sillerton Jackson looks through his opera-glass to see Ellen Olenska, we expect the camera to show us Ellen, as he sees her. Instead, Scorsese cuts to a long shot of the stage, followed by a three-quarters shot of Ellen's opera box, as viewed from the stage.

The film also has moments of haunting poignancy: the undulating mass of bowler hats, persisting against wind and rain - an image which somehow suggests that beneath this homogenized surface, each man's sad face is different; the resignation to despair often apparent in Pfeiffer's eyes; and, the image of Archer and his grown son, products of very different ages, who, none-the-less, wear the same basic polka-dot tie, but somehow wear it differently.

Scorsese's wink of the eye to his film aficionados results in some charming moments as when Scorsese's own beloved dog, Zoe, bolts across the field of the archery club; when his daughter Domenica, playing the girl whose parasol Archer mistakes for Ellen's, holds Zoe as if she were a stress-buffer; when Scorsese, himself, appears as a wedding photographer; and, when the faint clip-clop sound of a horse-drawn carriage pulling away can be heard by those who sat to the very end of the credits.

A punctilious attention to detail went into the making

Consuelo Vanderbilt and *The Buccaneers*

by Adeline R. Tintner

R. W. B. Lewis has noted that Edith Wharton had been friends from early girlhood with a group of women who included Consuelo Yznaga (the Duchess of Manchester) and the Jerome sisters, "a cluster of comely trans-Atlantic invaders in the 1870's" to whom she "would devote her last and remarkable, though unfinished, novel, *The Buccaneers*" (Lewis, 41). He also notes that Conchita Santodios of *The Buccaneers* "combines features of Minnie Stevens and of Edith's friend, the former Consuelo Yznaga" (Lewis, 528). Actually, when one narrows down to a close reading of the novel, one can find a more specific source connected with these women which creates the chief model for the novel.

The international marriage behind the marriages of the young American girls in Mrs. Wharton's novel, *The Buccaneers*, may well have been the marriage of Consuelo Vanderbilt, the American heiress of the Vanderbilt millions, to the ninth Duke of Marlborough, as well as the subsequent scandals connected with their separation. The summer before the marriage in 1895, Consuelo's mother, Alva Vanderbilt, had discovered that her daughter was in love with Winthrop Rutherford, the son of a professor of astronomy at Harvard and a distinguished photographer, a relationship she wished to break up because she had destined Consuelo, then an eighteen-year-old, for a brilliant, aristocratic, English marriage. Alva had met the Duke of Marlborough in England and invited him to Newport, an invitation which he accepted the following September. He spent two weeks there, was agreeable to the match and the wedding took place on November 6, 1895.

William K. Vanderbilt had written in the marriage contract that he would deliver over to the Duke of Marlborough two million five hundred thousand dollars, which, after the Duke's death, would revert to Consuelo. In 1920 the marriage was dissolved and finally annulled, just a few years before Edith Wharton began to write her novel in 1934 and at a time when the scandal was known throughout the world. Apparently, as early as 1907, the Duke and Duchess were at odds with each other (Brough, 291). Rather than divorce, they agreed to separate at the suggestion of King Edward VII and they lived together

only for a short time. In 1920, after their civil divorce on July 4, which was a virtual independence day for Consuelo, she married for love Colonel Louis-Jacques Balsan, a retired officer with the French army, wealthy enough to lead a gentleman's life. In 1926, because of Balsan's Catholic family, Consuelo applied for an annulment, which she obtained from the Vatican.

The whole problem had started when Consuelo, at seventeen, became secretly engaged to Winthrop Rutherford. At that point her mother took her to Europe. The documents in the annulment case of the divorce from the Duke, which were presented to the Rota, indicate in Consuelo's own words "that if I had succeeded in escaping, she [her mother] would shoot my sweetheart and she would therefore be imprisoned, and hanged, and I would be responsible" (Brough, 293). After she was married to the Duke of Marlborough, "the arrogance of the Duke's character...created in me a sentiment of hostility. He seemed to despise anything that was not British, and therefore my feelings were hurt" (Brough, 294). She related that she had broken down and wept, "she had nobody to whom she could turn" (Brough, 294). "Sarcastic comments on all things American" (GG, 40) were made by the Duke of Marlborough. His "archaic prejudices [were] inspired by a point of view opposed to my own" (GG, 40). She also stated in her autobiography that "Marlborough spoke of the link in the chain. He meant that there were certain standards that must be maintained" (GG, 70).

We are thus at that point in *The Buccaneers* where Laura Testvalley enters the novel. For Annabel St. George or Nan, Wharton's heroine, close in appearance to Consuelo (Fig. 1), could only turn to her governess when she found that her husband of an arranged marriage, the Duke of Tintagel, also despised anything that was not British. Alva Vanderbilt herself admitted to the Rota, "I forced her to marry the Duke. I have always had absolute power over my daughter, my children having been entrusted to me entirely after my divorce....I therefore did not say, but ordered her to marry the Duke" (Brough, 295). Moreover, Miss Harper, Consuelo's own governess, played a role in these proceedings that may

well be behind Laura Testvalley's role. Miss Harper was Consuelo's English governess, although she had both French and English governesses in her adolescence. When she said she wanted to marry her beau, her mother said that she would kill him if she ran away with him. "Even my governess, usually so calm, was harassed" (GG, 37). "How gratefully then I looked to Miss Harper for consolation and advice, how wisely she spoke of the future awaiting me in her country, of the opportunities for usefulness and social service I would find there, of the happiness a life lived for others can bring" (GG, 38). "And in such gentle appeals to my better nature, she slowly swung me from contemplations of a pure personal nature to a higher idealism" (GG, 38). "Marlborough proposed to me in the gothic room where the atmosphere was so propitious to sacrifice" (GG, 40).

Naturally, Mrs. Wharton does not follow all the specific details of this case. The St. Georges, her heroine's rich family, were not the outstanding millionaires in America the W.K. Vanderbilts were and the St. Georges were not divorced as the Vanderbilts had been. Nor was Mrs. St. George a replica of the tyrannical Alva Vanderbilt, but the situation is generally the same—the rich American mothers desperately want their daughters to marry into the English aristocracy and the daughters find that life is not the romantic dream they thought it might be. The forced engagement of the young heiresses of American fortunes to British aristocrats seemed to create the same kind of problems. The classical example, *par excellence*, was that of Consuelo Vanderbilt married to the Duke of Marlborough. Her solution too was the solution that Edith Wharton described for Nan St. George, a second marriage with a more congenial man whom she loves. The trajectory of the lives of the fictive heroine and the real American heiress seems to be the same and we may assume that the model from real life reinforced the authenticity of her own fiction. Of course the character of Laura Testvalley is her own invention and is, in a way, her own personality solving and helping to solve the problem. But Edith's own governess, Anna Bahlmann, who became her literary agent, also played a role in her own life. That same Anna Bahlmann had been a governess in the Rutherford family and she became Edith's *fräulein*. I believe that Laura Testvalley must have a lot of Anna in her, especially when we read her quotations from Clärchen's song from Goethe's *Egmont*. Edith Wharton took Anna Bahlmann in 1904 as her secretary and literary assistant while she was writing *The House of Mirth*. In 1909, she traveled with her to Germany and she stayed with Edith in the 53 rue de Varenne apartment. She was there while Edith got her divorce in 1913 and she went with her on her trip to Algiers during the war. She continued to play an important part in Wharton's life until her death in 1916. In a similar fashion, Miss

Harper, Consuelo's governess, played a focal part in her life and became one of the chief figures in the annulment proceedings, testifying to the forced marriage of Consuelo to "Sunny" Marlborough.

PART II

Why would Edith Wharton borrow the Marlborough case? It is probably because she herself in a way was closely involved with it. Winthrop Rutherford, whose love affair with Consuelo Vanderbilt Alva wanted to break up in order to make a more illustrious match, was not only a close neighbor of Edith's as a young girl in Newport, but Edith herself was somewhat enamored of Winthrop. Wharton wrote in her autobiography that the boys of that family were extraordinarily handsome and "were the prototypes of my first novels" (Brough, 47). She had also acquired from the Rutherfords the governess who was to become her close friend and literary executor. One of the Rutherford daughters was to become Mrs. Henry White, a close friend of Edith's as the years went on and who also was close to Henry James.

In 1883, Edith Wharton was twenty-one, had already come out and either she or her parents went to Mrs. Vanderbilt's spectacular costume ball of that year, since they were related to Mrs. Astor, the arbiter of New York society, who, after the ball, finally received the Vanderbilts. One of the outstanding features of this ball was the unusual dancing of the Virginia reel and, as we read a description of that reel by one of the Vanderbilt descendants, we can recognize why Wharton must have used it as the source of her greatest scene for *The Buccaneers*, that of the Christmas ball at the Duke and Duchess of Tintagel's country house, Longlands. Here is the Vanderbilt ball as it ends: "A few of the older guests left after two o'clock that morning, but by six o'clock the party was still going strong. As Tuesday's sky paled above the city, Alva led a Virginia reel, her sign that the fancy dress ball had officially ended" (Vanderbilt, 120).

Here is the scene Wharton modeled after it in *The Buccaneers*: Laura sits down at the piano and plays, "rattling off a noisy reel which she was said to have learned in the States and down the floor whirled the dancers" (*Buccaneers*, 278). Then there is a discussion about the origin of the reel, which the English guests learn finally is as English as they are. Then the reel takes on a much more significant turn. It continues with the couples "forming a sort of giant caterpillar...spinning off...down the length of the Waterloo room...and the Raphael drawing room beyond" (*Buccaneers*, 281-82). The onlookers see "the wild train...sweeping ahead of them down the length of the Sculpture Gallery...and up the state staircase to the floor above...Door after door was flung open, whirled through and passed out again, as the train pursued its

turbulent way" (*Buccaneers*, 283). It is at this point that the young Duchess Nan and Guy Thwarte, who will become her love, dropped out of the dance and go into her sitting room containing the Correggio *Earthly Paradise* paintings. Since Correggio never painted such a series (although he does have about seven unrelated mythological paintings, one of which is in the British Museum and which once belonged to the Marquis of Londonderry), they are there to emphasize the sexual and sensual elements of love which Nan does not enjoy with Ushant, the censorious Duke of Tintagel.

Other personalities revolving around the Vanderbilt circle and impinging also on Edith Wharton's world included the Belmonts. Alva married August Belmont's son after her divorce from William K. Vanderbilt, which took place a short time before the marriage of Consuelo to Sunny Marlborough. The elder Belmont had appeared earlier in Wharton's work as Julius Beaufort in *The Age of Innocence*. The marriage of Consuelo and the Duke, as well as the successful introduction of the Vanderbilts into New York society, was engineered by Consuelo Yznaga, the Duchess of Manchester (Lewis, 41). She had been a good friend of Edith Wharton's in her girlhood and, in the early nineteenth hundreds, again became a very close one and would naturally know and keep Edith posted as to the private details of the aristocratic marriage. It was she who, as Lady Mandeville, helped organize the 1883 Vanderbilt ball at which the Virginia reel was danced until dawn. That was the year when Edith Wharton was engaged to Harry Stevens, son of Mrs. Paran Stevens, who we know did attend the ball as Queen Elizabeth. So Edith herself may have been there. She also was close to George Vanderbilt all through her life and there are published letters in which she describes her visits to the huge American castle in Asheville built by him.

In general it is clear that the scandal of Consuelo's separation and final divorce had a long life, beginning with Consuelo's marriage in 1895 and ending around 1930 after her second happy marriage. Since she lived into the 1960s, she was always in the society news for as long as Edith Wharton lived. After 1906 or 1907 and in her later years, Wharton frequented the aristocratic and exclusive drawing rooms of the British aristocracy, which included the Marlborough set.

The legal separation between Consuelo and the Duke took place in 1907, but the divorce, on the advice of Edward VII, was held off until 1920, long after the Monarch's death. Halfway between the two dates in 1913 Edith got her own divorce after she too had delayed as long as she could, although her living apart from Teddy took place not much long after the separation between Consuelo and the Duke. Because of the similarity of the situations in the network of friends and acquaintances that united their social worlds, Consuelo's dramatic mar-

riage and the circumstances accompanying it would interest Wharton. It seems to be a larger than life illustration of "The International Scene" begun by Henry James. James himself had made use of the story of Consuelo's father, William K. Vanderbilt, hiring a correspondent to allow him to divorce Alva. James used this situation to create his tale, "The Special Type." It was time for Wharton to make her own invention based on the most notorious international marriage, as well as one of the most touching, of the twentieth century, but treated from a different angle from the international marriage she portrayed in *The Custom of the Country* (1913) in which the heroine or anti-heroine is hard-boiled and ambitious, exactly the opposite of both Consuelo Vanderbilt and Anabel Tintagel, her fictional *alter ego*.

For there are many aspects of Nan which tally with the personality of Consuelo Balsan, as she became after her divorce, revealed from biographies and her own autobiography, *The Glitter and the Gold*. Consuelo did not elope romantically as Nan did. Although her governess helped in getting her annulment many years later, Miss Harper did not have, we are to believe from the unfinished novel, the necessary romantic and revolutionary character of Laura Testvalley to abet an elopement and give up by that action chances for her own happiness as Laura had.

Let us review those elements in *The Buccaneers* which seem to reflect specifically the Vanderbilt-Marlborough scandal. We find a reflection of "Sunny" Marlborough's nickname in "Seedy," Lord Seadown, in the novel. "Sunny" was named so after one of his other titles, Lord Sunderland. Consuelo tells us that, "The Earl of Sunderland had married the daughter of the first Duke of Marlborough" (GG, 82). The theme of the very rich girls without the sanction of New York society conquering the English aristocracy is very close to the Vanderbilt case for, although their extreme wealth and Alva's great aggressiveness could not finally keep them out, they were not considered equal to the original four hundred members of New York society. Although they finally got to Newport, their early years were spent at Saratoga, like the St. Georges in *The Buccaneers*. The fake title of "Colonel," which Mr. St. George assumed in the novel, corresponded to the fake title of "Commodore," which was that of the first Vanderbilt to make a fortune. R.W.B. Lewis says that Honourslove, the beautiful home of the Thwartes in England, is patterned on Lady Elcho's "Stanway" where Mrs. Wharton was often a house guest after 1900. (Lewis, 528). Wharton also became friendly with Harry Cust, who had courted and loved Consuelo Marlborough after her marriage and was a member of the society of the "Souls," among whom extramarital affairs were very common, although Consuelo appears not to have had any (Winston Churchill's mother, however,

did). These connections would have reinforced Wharton's knowledge and interest in recreating a fictional equivalent of the Vanderbilt affair.

But even more convincing is the character in the novel of Concita Closson, who is the first of the American girls to marry into the British aristocracy. She is closely patterned on Consuelo Yznaga, as Lewis had noticed (Lewis, 528). Consuelo Yznaga was part Brazilian and partly American, just as Concita in the novel was partly Cuban and partly American. Consuelo Yznaga becomes first Lady Mandeville, then Lady Manchester, and arranges the marriage between Consuelo Vanderbilt and the Duke, just as Concita in the novel facilitates the introduction of her American friends to the peerage. Concita becomes Lady Marable (and the name Marable suggests Marlborough). It was Nan's "indifference to money and honours" that the young duke of Tintagel valued, a characteristic which had also attracted Sunny who saw that Consuelo Vanderbilt did not appreciate the social value of marrying a duke.

In her synopsis of how the novel would end, Wharton states that the time she deals with is the eighteen-seventies, "the first time the social invasion had ever been tried in England on such a scale," and "admired at Saratoga, Long Branch and the White Sulphur Springs, they [the St. Georges] fail at Newport and in New York." (Bu, 356).

Since the Vanderbilt's acceptance into Society, though reluctant, took place at the time of the ball in 1883, it is not too far from the eighteen-seventies and Edith Wharton herself was on the scene when Consuelo came out at the age of 17, as she had herself in 1894. Consuelo "had no secretary and the job of writing and handling all the invitations was a burden in itself, but Sunny believed such wholesale entertaining was an essential part of her education as Duchess" (Brough, 112). Consuelo herself more generously tells us that, "Since it was then considered ill-bred not to answer all letters oneself, I had no secretary" (GG, 81). In Chapter XIX, Book 3 of *The Buccaneers*, Wharton shows us Nan, now the Duchess of Tintagel, laboriously also writing out invitations by herself with instructions on how to write and sign them according to protocol. (Bu, 239).

Consuelo, who visits the poor tenants on her estate, "read to the blind" and, at Christmas, she went "from house to house with toys for the children" (Brough, 125). She instructed Sunny's agent to offer work on the roads when there was hunger in the villages. This incurred Sunny's anger, but Consuelo said she could not tolerate such "striking contrast between their riches and other people's poverty" (Brough, 130). "When I announced my desire to provide work for the unemployed," Consuelo wrote, "it was labelled as sentimental socialism; but unable to reconcile our life of ease with the hardships of those who, ... were yet our neighbours, I dispatched funds to in-

stitute relief work. Unfortunately the men...sent a letter to my husband, who, to his indignant surprise, discovered that the roads on his estate had been mended and his generosity exalted. It was only then that I discovered how greatly he resented such independent action and had I committed *lèse majesté* it could not have been more serious" (GG, 100).

Nan, in like manner, does the same kind of charitable work and also gets scolded by an irate Ushant Tintagel. Nan felt that "to help and befriend those dependent on him was a service she could render him" (*Buccaneers*, 251). But when she wants to have the drains fixed to wipe out typhoid fever, he disapproves and forbids her to go to the cottages while she is pregnant. She does and has a miscarriage. Like Consuelo, she is "fated to be a stranger among strangers" (Brough, 260). Sunny Marlborough "kept himself detached from humankind...denying himself the existence of emotion" (Brough, 201), just as Ushant did.

But Wharton of course does not follow the details of the Vanderbilt case which involve the gradual separation and civil divorce in 1920 followed immediately by the marriage of Consuelo to Jacques Balsan. Wharton, through the introduction of the governess, Laura Testvalley, a member of the revolutionary and romantic family, which included Dante Gabriel Rossetti, acts as the *agent provocateur* of an elopement. That produced the scandal for the novel. The scandal in the Vanderbilt-Marlborough marriage was the final divorce, as well as the separation, events not condoned by British society. The notoriety of the affair and the goodness and gentleness of the American heiress who suffered from the ambitions of her mother touched the newspapers and readers of the world, as well as giving them the glamour of a picture of aristocracy close to royalty. Since the Marlboroughs gave the name of their London house to the Marlborough Set, the circle dominated by Edward VII, when Prince of Wales and later as king, everyone was interested in the story and Edith Wharton, who was so close to the main participants of this international drama, made profitable use of her knowledge in the general plot of her novel about how the "Invaders" of American society captured the British aristocracy.

What seems to have suggested the title and the leading concept behind this novel about the invasion into society of a band of gentle pirates is John Esquemeling's seventeenth century book, *The Buccaneers of America* (1678), a twentieth century reprint (circa 1925) of which Edith Wharton owned. There is no date on the volume reprinted by George Rutledge and Sons in London. It was part of those books from Edith Wharton's library which were inherited by Sir Kenneth Clark and stored at Saltwood Castle, England, and sold in 1984 by Maggs Brothers of London. It would therefore have been available to Edith

Wharton a few years before she began her novel.

The Dutch author is very hard on the character of Captain Morgan, the most famous of the band of pirates known as the buccaneers, a member of which band was the author himself. The buccaneers were the chief marauders of the New World, the continent of America; their domination and cruelty had been equaled only by their extraordinary adventuresomeness. Andrew Lang, who introduced the first volume, does not try to extricate the buccaneers from the imputations made by Esquemeling that the torture of their victims and their destruction of cities made them terrifying criminals in the eyes of the civilized world. It is the publisher who praises "the unparalleled courage of the buccaneers; the strangeness of their performances; the novelty of their exploits and with all, the glory and grandeur of valour which here is seen to be inherent to our English nation and is pregnant of great actions in the present as in the former ages" (E, 289). The presence in Edith Wharton's library of this volume, which in essence exposes and yet exalts the exploits of these bandits, suggests that it may have contributed metaphorically to the exploits of the American adventuresses and their assault on English society. It is here a question of the bitter bit. The young American beauties exact a revenge on the seventeenth century buccaneers who invaded the Western hemisphere by repeating their conquests in reverse and invading England as their predecessors had invaded America.

New York City

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The Perils of Politeness

Continued from page 14

of this film. The china, the food, the costumes, and the etiquette were each overseen by an expert in each of these fields. A dialogue coach helped the actors achieve the right articulated sounds. (Pfeiffer preferred to train by listening to recordings of Louis Auchincloss.) Mary Beth Hurt (Mrs. Beaufort), Alexis Smith (Mrs. van der Luyden), and Miriam Margolis (Mrs. Mingott) even had their portraits painted so that their likenesses would hang in their cinematic homes. Locations were rigorously scouted, and this rigor was rewarded. The Pi Kappa Phi fraternity house in Troy, N.Y. that served as Mrs. Mingott's home and the current Philadelphia Academy of Music which served as the old New York Academy of Music are both remarkably similar to Wharton's descriptions of these places. Perhaps most effective of all is Scorsese's redressed interiors of the Tilden House on Gramercy Park (now the National Arts Club), which became the Beauforts' house and ballroom, a recreation that feels so authentic that my reaction was: So, *that's* what the Beaufort place *really* looked like.

But, those moments when we believe in the cinematic reality of Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence* are rare. While, Scorsese's film is certainly ages and ages away from anything done by Merchant and Ivory, the movie—clever, attentive to detail, and handsomely manufactured—lacks ideas, audacity...vision. As we watch *The Age of Innocence*, we want to look through the screen—or, at the least, feed on every single frame; but, in the end this feast of images really does not add up to anything very substantial, perhaps because Scorsese's picture, ultimately, is polite. It's artistic.

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NOTES

¹ Wharton held *Anna Karenina* in high regard. In "Permanent Values in American Fiction," she considers Tolstoy's Anna one of those "characters which so possess us with their reality" that we come to think of them as "real people whom we have known and lived with" (604).

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New Directions in Wharton Criticism: A Bibliographic Essay

by Alfred Bendixen

The *Edith Wharton Newsletter*, the forerunner of the present *Review*, began providing regular bibliographic information on Wharton scholarship in the Fall 1985 issue, which contained an annotated "Guide to Wharton Criticism, 1974-1983," the result of the collaboration of a dozen contributors. An ongoing examination of the criticism appeared in my bibliographic essays in the Fall 1986 and Spring 1988 issues of the *Newsletter* and the Spring 1990 issue of this *Review*. A review of the scholarship that appeared in 1990-1992 leads to several clear conclusions. Edith Wharton is now clearly established as one of the major writers of American fiction, and major journal and presses seem eager to publish studies of her literary achievements. *The House of Mirth* is now the most studied, the most written about, and the most praised of her works. Nevertheless, scholars are now also actively exploring other aspects of her career, including the later novels, the short stories, and her lifelong fascination with the gothic. Feminist approaches continue to dominate Wharton criticism, but there is increasing interest in defining the cultural context out of which her work emerges—perhaps as a result of the new historicism. The revelations about her relationship with Morton Fullerton have also led to increased biographical speculation about her life, especially about the ways her personal and sexual experiences might have shaped her fiction. Some of the most interesting articles show the influence of semiotics and narratology as they explore Wharton's view of language and her often subtle portrayals of failed communication. Another recurring motif in recent criticism is the exploration of Wharton's skillful rendering of setting (the use of houses, architecture, and place) to convey character and define moral dilemmas.

The work of future Wharton scholars has been made much easier by the recent publication of two excellent bibliographies. Stephen Garrison's *Edith Wharton: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990) should be applauded as the definitive primary bibliography and a model of this kind of scholarship. Also impressive is the well-organized and easy to use *Edith Wharton: An Annotated Secondary Bibliography* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990) by

Kristin O. Lauer and Margaret P. Murray. The annotations are full and reliable. Scholars can now easily track down virtually all of the Wharton criticism published up through 1987.

Much of the scholarship that appeared in recent years originated in conferences or special sessions sponsored by the Edith Wharton Society. To celebrate the 1988 publication of a selected edition of Wharton's *Letters*, edited by R.W.B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis, the Wharton Society sponsored a conference in New York devoted to exploring the role of letters in Wharton's fiction as well as her life. Many of the papers presented there have been expanded and published in various scholarly journals as well as in a special issue of *Women's Studies* (1991, Vol. 20, No. 2) devoted to "Reading the Letters of Edith Wharton" and edited by Annette Zilversmit. The work of the Wharton Society is also reflected in another collection, *Edith Wharton: New Critical Essays* (New York: Garland, 1992), edited by Alfred Bendixen and Annette Zilversmit. In his introduction to the volume, Bendixen emphasizes the editors' desire to employ fresh approaches and explore the neglected texts. Essays from this collection will be hereafter cited as *EW: New Essays*.

Wharton received substantial and thoughtful attention in several books. Since these books have been or will shortly be reviewed at greater length in this *Review*, they will be mentioned only briefly here. Several of these books provide useful introductions to and overviews of Wharton's life and art. Of special value in this respect is Margaret B. McDowell's thoroughly revised edition of her earlier Twayne Book, *Edith Wharton* (Boston: GK Hall, 1990). McDowell is one of the pioneers of modern Wharton scholarship; this revised text deftly sums up the major facets of Wharton's career and precisely delineates her artistic achievements. University teachers should urge their librarians to replace earlier editions with this revision. Wharton scholars will also appreciate the solid scholarship, fresh insights, and lively style of Katherine Joslin's *Edith Wharton* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991). Joslin also provides some valuable comments in "Reading Wharton's Letters" (*Review*, 1990, 12: 235-47).

Biographical and analytical approaches are also

blended in Susan Goodman's *Edith Wharton's Women: Friends and Rivals* (Hanover; University Press of New England, 1990) which dispels the view of Wharton as a misogynist and demonstrates the complexity of female relationships in Wharton's life and art. Goodman's essay, "A Safe Forum: Edith Wharton's Correspondence with Sara Norton" (*Women's Studies*, 1991, 20: 109-120) provides a brief account of one of Wharton's closest friendships with another woman. For an account of Wharton's more problematic relationship with her mother, we can turn to Goodman's "Edith Wharton's Mothers and Daughters" (*Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Spring 1990, 9: 127-131). Some of Goodman's most interesting comments appear in her discussion of autobiography in "Competing Visions of Freud in the Memoirs of Ellen Glasgow and Edith Wharton" (*Colby Library Quarterly*, December 1989, 25: 218-26).

The most ambitious recent attempt to enlarge our understanding of Wharton's life and its relationship to the fiction is Gloria Erlich's psychoanalytically oriented book *The Sexual Education of Edith Wharton* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), which contains new information on her relationship with Morton Fullerton. An introductory overview of Erlich's ideas can be found in her article, "The Sexual Education of Edith Wharton" (*Literature and Psychology*, 1990, 39: 25-49). Erlich's "The Libertine as Liberator: Morton Fullerton and Edith Wharton" (*Women's Studies*, 1991, 20: 97-108) introduces some of her findings on the Fullerton relationship.

Of the books devoted primarily to analyzing Wharton's fiction, two deserve special attention. Candace Waid's well-written and persuasive study, *Letters from the Underworld: Fictions of Women and Writing* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), provides a number of original readings of the fiction as well as a fascinating analysis of the role of writing, myth, and the female artist. Waid has given us an important book on an important subject. Barbara A. White's *Edith Wharton: A Study of the Short Fiction* (New York: Twayne, 1991) provides the first full length consideration of Wharton's short stories. White's perceptive treatment of theme and technique demonstrates a keen literary sensibility as well as a thorough knowledge of Wharton scholarship. Although I am not fully convinced by her provocative suggestion that Wharton may have been an incest victim, her analysis of the sexual anxiety that runs throughout much of the short fiction is acute and insightful. Excerpts from the chapter suggesting the possibility of incest appeared in the Spring and Fall 1991 issues of the *Edith Wharton Review*.

The belief that Wharton was a victim of incest also appears in David Holbrook's *Edith Wharton and the Unsatisfactory Man* (London: Vision Press, 1991), which links this suspected incestuous experience to Wharton's

depiction of weak and ineffectual men and her unhealthy view of sexuality. A more conventional feminist view can be found in Mary E. Papke's *Verging on the Abyss: The Social Fiction of Kate Chopin and Edith Wharton* (Westport: Greenwood, 1990). Janet Goodwyn's *Edith Wharton: Traveller in the Land of Letters* (New York: St. Martin's, 1990) surveys all of the fiction and has some interesting comments on the author's sense of geography and landscape. Catherine E. Saunder's Harvard Honors Essay, *Writing the Margins: Edith Wharton, Ellen Glasgow and the Literary Tradition of the Ruined Woman* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987) is also a solid piece of work. In *Edith Wharton's Prisoners of Shame* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), Lev Raphael employs affect psychology and meticulously demonstrates that Wharton's characters reveal all the features and gestures associated with shame. Even critics whose orientation is more Freudian will appreciate Raphael's close readings of several neglected novels. Earlier versions of Raphael's book appeared in several articles.

The House of Mirth continues to attract more attention than any other text, and the quality of the criticism remains remarkably high. The most significant recent contribution to our understanding of this novel is Linda Wagner-Martin's entry in the Twayne Masterworks series, *The House of Mirth: A Novel of Admonition* (Boston: Twayne, 1990). In addition to placing the book into the appropriate feminist contexts, Wagner-Martin develops a shrewd analysis of Wharton's sophisticated manipulation of narrative technique, especially of the subtle strategies that subvert literary and social conventions and undercut many of Selden's presumptions. In "Language, Gender, and Society in *The House of Mirth*" (*Connecticut Review*, 1989, pp. 54-63), Louise K. Barnett focuses on Lily Bart's inability to find a "saving language" amid the social codes that govern and restrain women's speech.

Another feminist reading of the novel offers some perceptive remarks on the role of legal and human relationships: Elaine N. Orr's "Contractual Law, Relational Whisper: A Reading of Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*" (*Modern Language Quarterly*, March 1991, 52: 53-70). The way in which houses can define and confine a character receives thoughtful attention in Annette Larson Benert's "The Geography of Gender in *The House of Mirth*," (*Studies in the Novel*, Spring 1990, 22: 26-42.). The reasons for Lily Bart's demise also receive acute attention in Clare Colquitt's "Succumbing to the 'Literary Style': Arrested Desire in *The House of Mirth*" (*Women's Studies*, 1991, 20: 153-262). Colquitt's most original comments probe Lily's relationship to her rival, Bertha Dorset, and establish thematic links between the novel's ending and Melville's "Bartleby." There are also intriguing comments in William E. Cain's "Wharton's Art of

Presence: The Case of Gerty Farish in *The House of Mirth*" (*EW Newsletter*, Fall 1989, 6: 1-2, 7-8).

In "Reading Mrs. Lloyd" (*EW: New Essays*), Judith Fryer places the *tableaux vivants* in *The House of Mirth* into cultural context, identifying and explicating the sources for this central scene in the novel. Of related interest is Reginald Abbott's commentary on the role of Art Nouveau in this scene and elsewhere in the novel: "'A Moment's Ornament': Wharton's Lily Bart and Art Nouveau" (*Mosaic*, Spring 1991, 24: 73-91). Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class* forms the basis for the insightful discussion of Lily Bart's character in Ruth Bernard Yeazel's "The Conspicuous Wasting of Lily Bart," (*ELH*, Fall 1992, 59: 213-34). The metaphors of failed communication are the subject of Jean Frantz Blackall's "The Intrusive Voice: Telegrams in *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*" (*Women's Studies*, 1991, 20: 163-168).

The Age of Innocence also received careful attention from several other critics. Perhaps the most important of these readings is Kathy Hadley Miller's "Ironic Structure and Untold Stories in *The Age of Innocence*" (*Studies in the Novel*, Summer 1991, 23: 262-272). Miller compels us to explore the ways in which Newland Archer's viewpoint is continually undercut and urges us to recognize the real untold stories of May and Ellen. This reading is supported by Evelyn E. Bracasso's commentary on eye imagery in "The Transparent Eyes of May Welland in Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*" (*Modern Language Studies*, Fall 1991, 21: 43-49). Donald Pizer's "American Naturalism in its 'Perfect' State: *The Age of Innocence* and *American Tragedy*," surprisingly but persuasively places this novel into the context of naturalism, arguing that Wharton's and Dreiser's novels represent the artistic maturity of this literary movement. The significance of house imagery is explored in detail in Ada Van Gestel's "The Location and Decoration of Houses in *The Age of Innocence*" (*Dutch Quarterly Review of Anglo-American Letters*, 1990, 20: 138-53). The ways in which references to hands underscore the difference between May and Ellen is noted in Jim McWilliams' "Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*" (*Explicator*, Summer 1990, 48: 258-270). John J. Murphy relates *The Age of Innocence* to Cather's fiction in "Imitation and Anticipation of 'Mrs. Wharton' — Cather's *Alexander's Bridge*" (*EW Review*, Winter 1990, 7: 10-12).

The Custom of the Country drew more commentary than usual. Wharton's use of business and economic metaphors are ably analyzed in Beverly R. Voloshin's "Exchange in Wharton's *The Custom of the Country*" (*Pacific Coast Philology*, November 1987, 22: 98-104). Voloshin's comments on Undine Sprague as a capitalist should be compared to those in Wendy M. DuBow's "The Businesswoman in Edith Wharton," *EW Review*, Fall

1991, 9: 11-18), which contrasts Lily Bart and Undine Sprague in terms of their mastery of business values and the ensuing implications for feminist criticism. Less convincing is Ellen Dupree's attempt to find reasons to admire Undine in "Jamming the Machinery: Mimesis in *The Custom of the Country*" (*American Literary Realism*, Winter 1990, 22: 5-16). Those who complain of not finding any heroes or role models in Wharton's fiction should look at Rosemary Erickson Pierce's "Clare Van Degan in *The Custom of the Country*" (*Studies in American Fiction*, Spring 1989, 17: 107-110), which argues that this character provides an important moral counterpoint to Undine.

The value of feminist theory is exemplified in Rebecca Blevins Faery's "Wharton's Reef: The Inscription of Female Sexuality" (*EW: New Essays*), which raises a number of important questions about the novel's treatment of sexual obsession and textuality. The linguistic intricacies of this novel form the focus of Scott DeShong's "Protagonism in The Reef: Wharton's Novelistic Discourse" (*EW Review*, Fall 1991, 9: 19-23), which argues that the book is about the inefficiency of language. Elizabeth Lennox Keyser details the way in which unmailed and unread letters shape the relationships between characters in the novel in "The Ways in Which the Heart Speaks: Letters in *The Reef*" (*Studies in American Fiction*, Spring 1991, 19: 95-105).

Summer continues to attract critical scrutiny. In "Charity at the Window: Narrative Technique in Edith Wharton's *Summer*" (*EW: New Essays*), Jean Frantz Blackall explains how Wharton developed narrative strategies enabling her to portray the inner life of a fundamentally inarticulate protagonist. Less convincing is Christine Rose's "Summer: The Double Sense of Wharton's Title" (*ANQ*, January 1990, 3: 16-19) which notes that "Summer" is also an architectural term referring to a "supporting beam or girder". The influence of post-structuralism on close reading is clear in Peter L. Hay's penetrating study of how metaphors convey sexuality: "Signs in *Summer*: Words and Metaphors" (*Papers on Language and Literature*, Winter 1989, 25: 114-119). Two scholars place the novel into intriguing cultural contexts. In "Summer and Its Critic's Discomfort" (*Women's Studies*, 1991, 20: 142-152) Kathleen Pfeiffer's maintains that Wharton aligns Charity and America and that the novel ultimately expresses the author's ambivalence towards American ideals. Monika M. Elbert's "The Politics of Maternity in *Summer*," (*EW Review*, 7, Fall 1990), connects Wharton's treatment of motherhood to the first world war and its massive destruction.

The role of World War I in Wharton's life and art also drew the interests of other scholars. Alan Price continues to cast light on Wharton's relief work in "Edith Wharton at War with the American Red Cross: The End of

Noblesse Oblige" (*Women's Studies*, 1991, 20: 121-131). Price also makes a compelling case for the importance of the neglected war story, "Coming Home," in "Edith Wharton's War Story" (*Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 1990 8: 95-100). One of the most intriguing readings we have had of Wharton's war fiction appears in Judith Sensibar's "'Behind the Lines' in Edith Wharton's *A Son at the Front: Rewriting a Masculinist Tradition*" (*Journal of American Studies*, August 1990, 24: 187-198) which continues the exploration of Wharton's rendering of male sexuality that Sensibar developed in her earlier essay on *The Children* (which now appears in expanded form in *EW: New Essays*).

A few critics illuminated some of Wharton's neglected works. In "To Form a More Perfect Union: Gender, Tradition, and the Text in Wharton's *The Fruit of the Tree*" (*EW: New Essays*), Deborah Carlin analyzes Miltonic echoes and Edenic allusions in order to define Wharton's ambitious but not fully realized attempt to confront the limiting effects of social and literary traditions. Judith E. Funston's "Clocks and Mirrors, Dreams and Destinies: Edith Wharton's *The Old Maid*" (*EW: New Essays*) uses the images of clocks and mirrors to raise larger questions about motherhood and the ways in which women can find their identity in a repressive society. Penelope Vita-Finzi's book, *Edith Wharton and the Art of Fiction* (New York: St. Martin's, 1990), focuses on *Hudson River Bracketed* and *The Gods Arrive*. Its primary value stems from the careful attention to the ways these novels grew out of the earlier draft of *Literature*. Abby H.P. Werlock's "Edith Wharton's Subtle Revenge?: Morton Fullerton and the Female Artist in *Hudson River Bracketed* and *The Gods Arrive*" (*EW: New Essays*) asserts that the true artist in these novels is Halo Spear, not Vance Weston, and traces the relationship between these two characters to Wharton's own earlier affair with Morton Fullerton.

Wharton's poetry finally received valuable attention. A new translation of E.K. Brown's essay "Edith Wharton's Poetry" (*EW: New Essays*) makes accessible the most useful overview of Wharton's work in this genre. Catherine Bancroft's "Lost Lands: Metaphors of Sexual Awakening in Edith Wharton's Poetry" (*EW: New Essays*) perceptively analyzes three poems dealing with sexual awakening.

The short stories are also beginning to receive the attention they deserve. In "Gender and First-Person Narration in Edith Wharton's Short Fiction" (*EW: New Essays*), Elsa Nettels provides a detailed examination of Wharton's frequent reliance on male narrators. A sound overview of Wharton's short fiction can be found in Evelyn E. Bracasso's "The Evolution of Theme and Technique in Selected Tales of Edith Wharton" (*Journal of the Short Story*, Spring 1991, 19: 41-50). John

Halperin pays attention to the formative years of six authors in *Novelists in Their Youth* (New York: St. Martin's, 1990); the chapter, "Edith Wharton's Dressing Room" (pp. 161-200), focuses on the way her parents' unhappy marriage shaped her themes and notes that the early short stories reveal a willingness to question convention. In "'The Muse's Tragedy' and the Muse's Text: Language and Desire in Wharton" (*EW: New Essays*), M. Denise Witzig provides a refreshing analysis of this tale's intricate treatment of language and desire, absence and presence, the female muse and the woman writer. The relationship between the letters and the woman artist in *The Touchstone* drew intelligent attention in two essays: Julie Olin-Ammentorp's "Edith Wharton, Margaret Aubyn, and the Woman Novelist" (*Women's Studies*, 1991, 20: 133-139) and Denise Witzig "Letter(s) from an Unknown Woman: Edith Wharton's Correspondence with Authority" (*Women's Studies*, 1991, 20: 169-176).

The use of gothic and supernatural elements received more attention from feminist critics in the last few years than in the entire history of Wharton criticism. Of special value is Kathy Fedorko's feminist analysis of gothic motifs in "Edith Wharton's Haunted Fiction: 'The Lady Maid's Bell' and *The House of Mirth*" (in Lynette Carpenter's and Wendy Kolmar's *Haunting the House of Fiction*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991, pp. 80-107). The same volume also includes Jannice G. Thomas's "Spook or Spinster? Edith Wharton's 'Miss Mary Pask'" (pp. 109-19), which scholars may wish to compare to Ellen Powers Stengel "Edith Wharton Rings 'The Lady's Maid's Bell'" (*EW Review*, Spring 1990, 7: 3-9). Margaret P. Murray charts the psychological archetypes underlying Wharton's gothic fiction in "The Gothic Arsenal of Edith Wharton," (*Journal of Evolutionary Psychology*, August 1989, 10: 315-324).

Carol Singley and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney use Lacan to establish intriguing connections between the acts of writing and the repressed woman: "Forbidden Reading and Ghostly Writing: Anxious Power in Wharton's 'Pomegranate Seed'" (*Women's Studies*, 1991, 20: 177-201). Carol J. Singley's "Gothic Borrowings and Innovations in Edith Wharton's 'A Bottle of Perrier'" (*EW: New Essays*) skillfully places this story of male violence into both literary and psychological contexts. Margaret McDowell's "Edith Wharton's Ghost Tales Reconsidered" (*EW: New Essays*) attempts to define the special qualities of the ghost stories Wharton wrote in her final years. Annette Zilversmit provides one of the most provocative readings of Wharton in "'All Souls,' Wharton's Last Haunted House and Future Directions for Criticism" (*EW: New Essays*), which maintains that the depiction of fear and flight in the story suggests a lesbian subtext and calls on critics to engage in a probing exploration of the psychic

wounds of Wharton's women.

Those interested in Wharton's relationship with Henry James will welcome the chance to review the entire extant correspondence in *Henry James and Edith Wharton: Letters, 1900-1915* (New York: Scribners, 1990), ably edited by Lyall H. Powers. Most of the letters are by James, but there are three letters and four postcards that do not appear in the Lewises's selection. Wharton's relationship to other writers also received comment. Judith E. Funston offers "Macaws and Pekingese: Vivienne De Watteville and Edith Wharton" (*EW Review*, Spring 1990, 7: 13-14). In three essays, Adeline R. Tintner recounts how Wharton is portrayed in the fiction of others, specifically Paul Bourget and Louis Auchincloss: "Portrait of Edith Wharton in Bourget's *L'Indicatrice*," (*EW Review*, Spring 1990, 7: 10-12); "Justice to Teddy Wharton: Louis Auchincloss's 'The Arbiter'" (*EW Review*, Winter 1990, 7: 17-19); and "Punishing Morton Fullerton: Louis Auchincloss's 'The Fulfillment of Grace Eliot'" (*Twentieth-Century Literature*, Spring 1992, 38: 44-53).

The Wharton conference in Paris in 1991 led to a number of related pieces in the *Edith Wharton Review*. The Spring 1991 issue featured a special supplement on "Edith Wharton in Paris" and three related articles by Adeline R. Tintner: "Edith Wharton and Paul Bourget," "Memories of Bourget from Across the Sea," and an important French preface to *The House of Mirth*. Annette Zilversmit provided a thoughtful tribute in "Homecoming to Edith Wharton" in the Fall 1991 issue. The Spring 1992 issue of the *Edith Wharton Review* was devoted to a special issue on Wharton in Paris, edited by Katherine Joslin and Alan Price, the directors of the immensely successful Paris conference. Three articles in it explore Wharton's relationship to other writers: Viola Hopkins Winner, "The Paris Circle of Edith Wharton and Henry Adams"; Judith Saunders, "Edith Wharton Gertrude Stein, and France"; and Jean Frantz Blackall, "Imaginative Encounter: Edith Wharton and Emily Bronte." In "Italian Foregrounds and Italian Backgrounds: *The Valley of Decision*," Gianfranca Balestra explains the centrality of the Italian setting in Wharton's first novel. Wharton's private life appears vividly in Carol J. Singley's

"Edith Wharton's Last Weeks and the Garden at St. Brice." Finally Wharton's international reputation is illuminated in four essays: Keiko Beppo, "Is Edith Wharton Read in Japan?"; Jean Meral, "Why Wharton is Not Very Popular in France"; Teresa Gomex Reus, "Responses to Wharton in Spain"; Gaetano Prampolini, "Edith Wharton in Italy." Scholars will certainly look forward to the publication this fall of Joslin's and Price's *Wretched Exotic: Essays on Edith Wharton in Europe*. Related to these concerns are Leon Edel's graceful memoir "Summers in an Age of Innocence: in France with Edith Wharton" (*NY Times Book Review*, June 9, 1991, pp. 3,44,49) and Mary Suzanne Schriber's new edition of *A Motor Flight Through France* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991).

A few other pieces merit comment. Those interested in new approaches to Wharton will value Garry M. Leonard's "The Paradox of Desire: Jacques Lacan and Edith Wharton," (*EW Review*, Winter 1990, 7: 16-18). Scott Marshall's "Edith Wharton on Film and Television," (*EW Review*, Spring 1990, 7: 15-17) tells us of new media interest in Wharton.

In previous bibliographic essays, I called on scholars to expand the dimensions of Wharton scholarship, to explore neglected works and subjects. When I began undertaking the task of reviewing Wharton scholarship, feminist approaches to Wharton's work were still relatively new and Wharton's position in the canon was — at least to some critics — questionable. It is my pleasure to conclude my final bibliographic essay with the statement that Wharton criticism is remarkably healthy and growing stronger. Edith Wharton now seems permanently enshrined in the canon of major American writers, and critics are employing an increasingly wide range of sophisticated methods as they examine both theme and technique. Although much remains to be done, it is now clear that there are scholars actively engaged in exploring almost every aspect of Wharton's life and art. In future issues of this *Review*, Clare Colquitt of San Diego State University will assume the role of official bibliographer and continue to chart the direction of Wharton scholarship. Scholars should inform her of their publications and any works that I may have inadvertently missed.

California State University, Los Angeles

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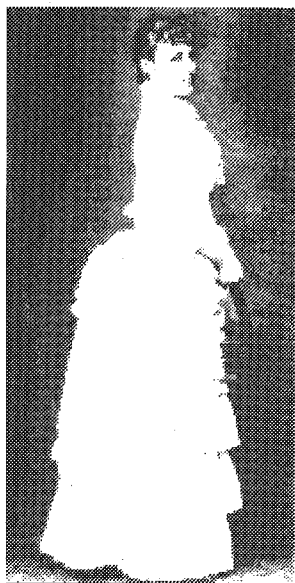
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Book Reviews

Barbara A. White. *Edith Wharton: A Study of the Short Fiction*. New York: Twayne, 1991.

Wharton scholars and general readers alike will be interested in Barbara White's *Edith Wharton: A Study of the Short Fiction*, the first full-length work focusing on Wharton's short fiction alone. In its pages White not only examines thoroughly and sensitively a number of Wharton short stories (both well-known and lesser-known), but suggests a number of theories about Wharton the writer and Wharton the woman.

Those familiar with White's work through the passages excerpted in *The Edith Wharton Review* are aware of the part of White's work surest to attract attention and stir controversy: her claim that Wharton was an incest survivor. This claim (also made by Gloria Erlich's *The Sexual Education of Edith Wharton*) is surely one of the most interesting, if not troubling, in current Wharton criticism.

Her book is cautious in its claims. She writes, for instance, that "certainly the odd father-daughter stories...would make more sense if the terrible secret the characters were bent on hiding were incest..." (41). Not until page 42, following a discussion of a number of stories representing incest or incestuous situations (which she defines as male corruption accompanied by a woman's tacit collaboration [47]) does she openly state "I think Wharton was probably an incest victim in early childhood. Of course, this contention cannot be proved...but it is certainly suggested by her writings and explains some still unanswered questions about her life."

Certainly different readers are likely to respond to such a claim in different ways. Some may find the very tentativeness unconvincing: if such a claim can be made only in such tenuous terms (note the "feeling" and "intuition," the tentative quality of "would make more sense if," the claim that Wharton was only "probably" an incest victim), why make it at all? Others will object to the critic's intrusion into a part of Wharton's life so private (if indeed White's theory is correct) that Wharton herself had no clear memory of it; in a note White paraphrases Katherine Joslin's recent claim that "the unveiling of [Wharton's] letters to Fullerton, for instance, would have horrified Wharton" (White, p. 118, note 78). How much more, then, would Wharton have been horrified by such a claim about incest?

Yet many others will find White's argument, if not entirely convincing, at least powerfully suggestive. Indeed she is correct: the incest theory does explain certain recurring situations in Wharton short stories, as well as explaining rather odd "coincidences," such as Wharton's giving her own father's name, Mr. Jones, to a ghost who "protects the 'secret past'" (40) in the short story of the same name. She adds that it is hard to "miss the sexual connotations of the keys, lock, secret doors, and velvet folds in 'The House of the Dead Hand'" (40) — images that recur in "Mr. Jones."

One of the most interesting applications of White's theory concerns the coincidence between the description of Culwin and Wharton's father in "The Eyes." White notes that although earlier critics have suggested Walter Berry, Morton Fullerton, and Henry James as the model of Culwin, it may well be George Frederic Jones who was Wharton's model:

In her brief account of her father in *A Backward Glance*, Wharton depicts a man similar to Culwin in both a broad sense and in specific details. The wealthy, dilettantish Mr. Jones prefers to lead a leisurely life in Europe and has "unrealized literary gifts." He possesses a comfortable library appointed in oak and filled with books with dark bindings (BG, 64). Also like Culwin, he enjoys giving dinner parties because of his "gastronomic enthusiasm" (BG, 64); ("gastronomy" is the only science Culwin reveres [29]). Most important, in her physical descriptions of her father Wharton always emphasizes his "intensely blue eyes" (BG, 2). When she describes his death fifty years after the event, she says she is "still haunted" by the look in his eyes (BG, 88). (67)

The book, however, is not entirely, or even mostly, about the incest theory; it has a number of other valuable contributions to make to the field of Wharton criticism. It is, first of all, a coherent reconsideration of the short stories as a group; although it more or less adheres to the "traditional periodization of Wharton's work" as established by Edmund Wilson (27), it discusses these periods with a thoroughness that requires readers to reconsider their usual conceptions of what Wharton short stories are "about." As White points out, most readers and critics think of Wharton's short stories as being about marriage and relationships, a trend begun by the work of R.W.B. Lewis. "Yet," White argues, "the twenty-four stories published before 1902 reveal a different Wharton" (27), as do the stories written and published after World War I. The early stories, White argues, focus on themes including "the responsibilities of the artist, the nature of art and perception, courage versus cowardice, past versus present, and female experience, especially its claustrophobic tendencies" (27); the late stories, perhaps more startlingly, focus on "the revenge of the dispossessed, those in society, female or male, who have the least power" (99).

In the late stories, White points out, Wharton creates an unprecedented number of servants as narrators or "reflectors" (a term of Wharton's which White adopts). This fact leads to interesting speculation about Wharton's conservatism, particularly in her later years. White argues that "It is...hard to find support for Elizabeth Ammons's 'hunch,' based on Wharton's novels, that age, life in Europe, and postwar conservatism triggered 'class-bias' in the later work" (98); yet she concedes that "To some extent she [Wharton] was always socially and politically conservative in that she never showed any inclination to renounce her class and race privileges and never could imagine any institutions to replace the one she criticized in her writings" (85). In spite of this conservatism, White argues that "Wharton's movement toward female and lower-class reflects also suggests [that] her horizons were broadening to incorporate people excluded from the mainstream" (85). She further speculates on a biographical basis for such broadening:

One can detect in...any of the servant stories the aristocratic writer's guilt and fear. Although Wharton was known for treating servants well in her personal life, she also recognized at some level the arbitrariness of her having servants at all, and especially as she aged and became more dependent, she may

have feared that they could torment or abandon or rob or even kill her. (97)

This is, again, an interesting theory, though not one White backs up with evidence from, say, the letters or the diaries.

Another such line is White's discussion of Wharton as female artist. Her treatment of the short stories reveals a decided gender shift in the short story reflectors in the different periods of Wharton's career: early stories have more female narrators, middle period stories almost exclusively male narrators, and late stories a mixture of both, with a preponderance of female narrators in the last few stories. White argues that "In [Wharton's] stories about art, woman increasingly become object rather than subject; instead of artist she is muse" (36). Further, she notes Wharton's anxiety over being a female artist: "That Wharton goes to such extremes in dredging up stereotypes of the authoress and then condemning her [as in "The Pelican"] indicates anxiety over being thought a producer of sewer gas [i.e. bad art], rather than a reasoned judgment that women shouldn't write" (34). Thus, in the middle stories, White argues that

If the author could not surmount the crime of being female, she could at least make amends and legitimate her fictions by adopting male points of view. The use of male reflectors and first-person narrators also gave her the opportunity to characterize men in more detail... (58)

White goes on to apply such insights to the long-standing and contradictory accusations that Wharton was both misogynist and misandrous.

Yet another line of inquiry concerns the distinction between Wharton as theoretician and Wharton as practitioner of the short story. White notes that in spite of Wharton's advocacy of adhering to strict rules of writing, Wharton did not always follow these rules herself; indeed, some of Wharton's best short stories are those that depart from her own theories. She speculates that "Wharton might have accomplished even more than she did with the short story had her conception of form been less rigid" (4).

As the above discussion may suggest, the central strength and weakness of Barbara White's book are one and the same: it raises a number of provocative issues without completely answering them. This may be due in part to the format of the work which adheres to the standard for the Twayne short fiction series.

White sees her own work as "introductory" (xiii), and indeed such is the case—though the book is certainly introductory in the best sense possible. The book introduces general readers to Wharton and her short stories; scholars will appreciate White's thorough research, her response to earlier criticism, her discussion of both long-standing and new issues in Wharton criticism. Certainly both scholars and general readers will appreciate White's sensitive, thoughtful, and balanced treatment of a number of Wharton short stories, including "Roman Fever," "The Other Two," "Angel at the Grave," "The Eyes," and "After Holbein," among others. Certainly the book opens up productive fields of Wharton criticism. It ought, among other things, to facilitate an increased study of the cross-fertilization of Wharton's short fiction and novels. Although, as White points out, the relationship between Wharton's short stories and her novels is not a simple one, this study of the stories provides critics a new ground and new standards for examining Wharton's work in both genres.

Julie Olin-Ammentorp, Le Moyne College

Candace Waid. *Edith Wharton's Letters from the Underworld: Fictions of Women and Writing*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1991. \$29.95. Rap. \$10.95.

The relationship between Edith Wharton's public authorship and gender has been the focus of much recent criticism (see, for example, Kaplan, Schriber, and Showalter). Josephine Donovan, in her book *After the Fall*, and we ourselves, in our essay "Forbidden Reading and Ghostly Writing: Wharton's 'Pomegranate Seed,'" have analyzed the Persephone figure as an expression of Wharton's anxiety about female writing. Candace Waid develops these topics further in her engaging analysis of problems of female authorship in Wharton's poetry and fiction. She detects in Wharton's representations of "failed artists, unfinished texts, and anxieties about silence, inarticulateness, and suffocation" (3) a profound ambivalence toward writing. Waid traces this ambivalence to a nineteenth-century ideology of separate spheres, which required female writers to leave the secure world of the mother for the forbidden underworld of male experience. To Waid, Persephone represents the "potentially authentic woman artist," whose difficult journey is not so much an abduction as an escape: from maternal and "pastoral asexuality" to the secret, often eroticized, knowledge of language (201, 199). Wharton resisted, Waid argues, a feminine aesthetic of concealment—the legacy of the sentimentalists—that privileged ornamentation and decoration over substance and depth. Instead, Wharton's challenge was to taste the forbidden fruits of masculine letters without fear of punishment. Waid convincingly demonstrates how characters from Margaret Aubyn to Lily Bart, Ethan Frome, and Ralph Marvell emblemize this quest for authorship.

Waid also explains Wharton's literary anxiety in terms of her ambivalence toward the United States, arguing that while Wharton was compelled to portray American realities such as commercialism and greed, she was also convinced that they "threaten[ed] to devour the American artist" (172). It is certainly true that Wharton, a self-described "exile" (5), had a complex relationship with America; however, when Waid observes the "near absence" of American "authors as forces in her fiction" (6-7), she seems to refute and overlook her own later claims that Wharton revised Mary Wilkins Freeman, as well as short-changes Wharton's apparent debts to Poe, Hawthorne, and Whitman. As Waid herself explains, Wharton engaged in ongoing dialogue with female predecessors, especially the local colorists. But Wharton's disparagement of Hawthorne and praise of Whitman also suggest that she, like other writers, was keenly aware of traditions yet determined to leave her own mark.

In an impressive reading of *The House of Mirth*, which she terms "a complex allegory about women and art" (17), Waid describes Lily as a failed writer. Time after time, Lily abdicates the authorship necessary to shape her own story, relinquishing her opportunities to Lawrence Selden and, especially, to Bertha Dorset. Waid convincingly demonstrates that Lily and Bertha's rivalry is over the power of letters—not only love letters, which embody the forbidden underworld of erotic experience, but language and meaning itself. Bertha, like Elsie Ashby in Wharton's story "Pomegranate Seed," boldly uses writing to shape events for her own purposes; Lily, like Charlotte Ashby, struggles first to decipher these codings and then to assert her narrative authority over them. In the *tableau vivant* scene, which Waid calls the novel's "signature piece," Lily "stands as an emblem of the woman as poet" (30, 29). But even if Lily were

to claim the power of writing for herself, as Waid implies, what plot could she possibly invent instead of the romance, which prescribes either marriage or death? If the missing "word" at the end of *The House of Mirth* is, as Waid argues, "mourning" (41)—and not "love" or "faith," as other critics claim—then it is mourning for the dea(r)th of acceptable endings for women.

By juxtaposing *Ethan Frome* and *Summer*, Waid shows how Wharton uses the mother—who can represent barrenness as well as fertility—to express her anxiety about literary production. She prefaces her analysis with cogent discussions of Wharton's poetry, which argue that the desire for knowledge—carnal and literary—turns on painful wounding or violation. Similarly, *Ethan Frome* suffers in "a prison of inarticulateness" (62) which is related to the querulous voices of the two women who wait for him. Waid's last chapter further connects Ethan's silence to the suffocating demands of women, and mothers especially, who can "sacrifice full lives to a life of caretaking that would cripple motivation and impede ambition" (178).

In Waid's discussion of *Summer*, the mother plays an equally important role. After discussing Wharton's defense of her New England fiction and critique of local color—topics familiar to many readers—Waid focuses on textual and biographical similarities between Wharton and Mary Wilkins Freeman (whom Waid calls by her birth name). In particular, she reads *Summer* as a revision of Freeman's story "Old Woman Magoun." Whereas Freeman chooses death and the vision of a blissful, maternal heaven for her protagonist Lily Barry rather than consign her to a brutal, legalistic male world, Wharton allows her heroine to survive and save her child. The fact that Charity survives only because Royall rescues her shows how much more positively Wharton depicts the male world than Freeman does. Waid's interpretation hinges upon a view of Royall as a generous father who facilitates new cycles of generativity: his marriage to Charity "domesticates the horror of incest." A question arising from this reading—one that Waid does not explore—is whether such dependence on "stable hierarchies and the benevolence of paternal authority" (118) is itself a cause for female literary anxiety.

In *The Custom of the Country*, as in *Ethan Frome*, Waid finds another male character who represents the female writer. In this richly allusive chapter, she demonstrates how Ralph Marvell's susceptibility to artifice blinds him to Undine's consuming moral emptiness. Marvell mistakenly views Undine as his muse, "as a water nymph, a goddess of the waves" (148); but, named after a chemical hair treatment, she is merely a commercial product. Waid brilliantly explains how this devouring entity—whom she associates with the predatory eagle that represents the United States—strips language of meaning.

Edith Wharton's Letters from the Underworld analyzes Wharton's relationship to gender and language with thorough research and ingenious close readings. Waid's studies of classical mythology yield sensitive, often original interpretations of Wharton's poetry as well as fiction. The final chapter, in particular, with its discussion of *The Touchstone* and the ghost stories—fiction written at the beginning and end of Wharton's career—demonstrates her lifelong quest for literary authority. Occasionally, however, Waid's research overwhelms or even contradicts the logic of her argument. Many readers will enjoy Waid's use of puns in her analysis; but some readers of *The House of Mirth* chapter, for example, may not agree that the name Bertha Dorset means "birth door" (47), or that during the *tableau vivant* scene, the audience exclaims "Oh!" because

it recognizes "the resemblance between the first two letters on the tree (LL) and the first two letters in Lily's name (LI)" (30). And Waid misidentifies a character in one of the key texts in her book: the husband in "Pomegranate Seed" is named Kenneth, not "Ned" (195).

Waid shows the difficulty, for Wharton, of leaving the static world of women and surviving in the male world of knowledge and power. Persephone embodies Wharton's ambivalence as she finds herself on the threshold of two gendered worlds: that of sentimental foremothers, whom Wharton rejects, and that of male writers, who might reject her. Waid effectively demonstrates that Wharton found the prospects of female writing and female silence equally frightening. Future scholarship may develop her ideas further. We might consider Wharton's "writing" in the context of different modes of discourse and kinds of texts: exploring, for example, tensions between writing and reading, orality and literacy, textuality and iconography, and distinctions among embedded texts which range from love letters and plays to cheque books and legal testimony.

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