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EDITH WHARTON AT YALE

A Special Issue, Part II

Guest Co-Editors

Clare Colquitt, Susan Goodman, Candace Waid

This second "Edith Wharton at Yale" issue opens as the conference itself did, with Cynthia Griffin Wolff's talk on "Edith Wharton and the Ladies' Matinee." This affectionate address with the accompanying four articles further commemorate the "sense of community" that in April 1995 brought Edith Wharton scholars to Yale. Additional essays, mostly from that conference, celebrating Wharton's art will soon appear in the forthcoming collection, "Edith Wharton: A Further Glance," co-edited by Clare Colquitt, Susan Goodman, and Candace Waid.

Clare Colquitt, San Diego State University

Edith Wharton and The Ladies' Matinee

by Cynthia Griffin Wolff

More than a century after her birth, Edith Wharton is, if not unique, then "special"--to all of us, and (what is even more tantalizing) to an ever-increasing number of readers today. And that fact is worth examining.

*Several months ago, I got a call from a British journalist. The film of *The Buccaneers* was about to be released, and he was doing a review essay on Edith Wharton. "What has given her this remarkable surge in popularity?" he wanted to know. "What makes her so unusual?" I gave inadequate responses to the gentleman's machine-gun questions, but his call set me thinking--and has prompted my brief remarks today.*

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CONFERENCE NEWS

1997 is another banner year for all Wharton conferences.

NEMLA (Northeast Modern Language Association) Annual Meeting • April 4-5 - Philadelphia, PA.

THE AGE OF INNOCENCE AND BEYOND: RETHINKING THE LATE EDITH WHARTON

Chair and organizer: Meredith Goldsmith, Columbia University

1. ***"The House of Mirth Revisited: Glimpses of the Late Edith Wharton"***
Hildegard Hoeller, Expository Writing Program, Harvard University
2. ***"The Mother's Recompense: Manners, Morals, and Middle-Age Desire"***
Irene Goldman, Ball State University
3. ***"Edith Wharton's 'Roman Fever': The New Woman in the Old World"***
Annamaria Formichella, Tufts University
4. ***"Portrait of Pragmatism: Edith Wharton's *The Reef*"***
Robert Goree, Columbia University

ALA (American Literature Association) Conference • May 22-25 - Baltimore, MD

EDITH WHARTON'S EXOTICISM

Chair and Organizer: Abby Werlock, St. Olaf College

1. ***"Exotic Wretchedness: Edith Wharton and Gilded Cage"***
Annette Benert, Allentown College
2. ***"Edith Wharton's 'Kerfol' and the Perversion of Courtly Tradition"***
Carole Shaffer-Koros, Kean College of New Jersey
3. ***"Soldier, Spies, Seduction, and Slavery in 'A Bottle of Perrier'"***
Helen Killoran, Ohio University, Lancaster

EDITH WHARTON AND THE ANXIETY OF AUTHORSHIP

Chair and Organizer: Annette Zilversmit, Long Island Univ., Brooklyn

1. ***"Publicity, Gender, and Authorship in *The Touchstone* or A Portrait of the Artist as a (Dead Woman)"***
Mark A. Eaton, Boston University
2. ***"Wharton and the Burdens of European Fiction"***
Richard Kaye, New School of Social Research
3. ***"Dangerous, Desirable 'Communities of Spirit': Constructions of Literary Authority in the Edith Wharton-Zona Gale Letters"***
Deborah L. Williams, Zona College
4. ***"Telling the Story that Can't be Told: Hartley's Role as Dis-eased Narrator in 'The Lady's Maid's Bell'"***
Jacqueline S. Wilson-Jordan, Northern Illinois University

(To attend conference, write to Alfred Bendixen, Eng. Dept, California State Univ., Los Angeles, CA 90032)

**Edith Wharton Society All-Wharton Conference
June 12-14 - Lenox, MA**

EDITH WHARTON AT THE MOUNT

A Celebration of the Centenary of Publication of *The Decoration of Houses*

Co-Directors:

Carole Shaffer-Koros, Kean College and Alan Price, Pennsylvania State University

Plenary Addresses

“An Ethics of Space”

Wai Chee Dimock, Brandeis University

“Wharton and Aesthetics”

Eleanor Dwight, New School for Social Research

Round Table Discussion

“Future Directions in Wharton Research”

Clare Colquitt, San Diego University

Cynthia Griffin Wolff, MIT

Katherine Joslin, West Michigan University

Patricia Willis, Beinecke Library, Yale University

Annette Zilversmit, Long Island University, Brooklyn

Registration Fee: \$150.00 (includes all meals). Send check payable to Kean College of NJ by April 15, 1997 to Carole Shaffer-Koros, 58 Normandy Drive, Westfield, NJ 07090-3432. For housing and other information write above address or ckoros @ turbo.kean.edu

**MLA (Modern Language Association) Annual Convention
Dec. 27-30 - Toronto, Canada**

CALL FOR PAPERS

“EDITH WHARTON’S CULTURAL CONTEXTS: *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH*, *THE CUSTOM OF THE COUNTRY*, AND *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE*.”

Cultural background for one or more of these novels. Abstracts or 8-10 page papers by March 30 to Carol Singley, Dept. of Eng. Rutgers University, Camden, NJ 08102.

Discretion and Self Censorship in Wharton's Fiction: "The Old Maid" and the Politics of Publishing

by Jessica Levine

In early 1921 Edith Wharton completed "The Old Maid," the first of four stories that were eventually collected in a volume called *Old New York*. Wharton's editor at D. Appleton & Co. Rutger B. Jewett, had some difficulty finding a magazine that would take this story of a young woman named Charlotte Lovell who has had an illegitimate child and is rescued from her shameful dilemma by her cousin, Delia Ralston. The editor of *Ladies' Home Journal*, for example, wrote him that the "Edith Wharton story is a bit too vigorous for us." And the story was also rejected by *The Metropolitan* and *The Saturday Evening Post*. *Redbook* was finally motivated to publish it when *The Age of Innocence* won the Pulitzer prize in May 1921 and was selected as "the American novel [of the year] which shall best present the wholesome atmosphere of American life and the highest standard of American manners and manhood."¹ As R.W.B. Lewis puts it in his biography of Wharton, "An award of wholesomeness thus coincided with a rejection on the grounds of distasteful sexuality." Wharton, who was criticized during her lifetime for the "coldness" of her fictions, was surprised by the prudish reaction to "The Old Maid," and indeed it was unusual in her career. The opposing reactions to *The Age of Innocence* and "The Old Maid" nonetheless raise the question--how could an author be seen, virtually simultaneously, as both wholesome and indecent? This article will explore the ways in which Wharton worked self-consciously on the boundaries of decency, which she sometimes questioned but usually respected.

Wharton's correspondence with Rutger B. Jewett in the early 1920s provides an interesting record not only of her

impatient awareness of American philistinism but also of Jewett's attempts to counsel her about the limitations of the contemporary magazine market. We will see that literary censorship was clearly on Wharton's mind before the composition of "The Old Maid" and affected her treatment of her subject. I will argue that a similarity exists between, on the one hand, the discreet tactics Delia uses to keep her "fallen" cousin and her illegitimate child in the social mainstream and, on the other hand, the fictional tactics Wharton used to maintain her own position in the mainstream of American letters while addressing themes shocking to the literary establishment of her day. In addition, I will suggest that the mixed reaction to this story and the one that followed it, "New Year's Day," led her to eschew sexual themes (and the critique of American prurience that went along with them) in the last two stories she wrote for *Old New York*.

The first notable exchange between Wharton and Jewett on the subject of censorship appears in a 1920 letter of Wharton's about David Graham Phillips's *Susan Lenox: Her Fall and Rise*. Phillips's novel recounts the sexual "fall" of an illegitimately born, working-class girl, who, like Theodore Dreiser's Carrie Meeber, passes through the vale of sin without being essentially corrupted. Like Dreiser's protagonist, Susan Lenox ultimately achieves professional success as an actress but not happiness. The novel also bears comparison to *Sister Carrie* in that its treatment of sexual themes led to a tortuous publishing history. Completed in 1908, *Susan Lenox* was held back by Appleton, which had published some of Phillips's earlier works but considered this

one too "advanced." Phillips would continue to revise the manuscript until his assassination three years later. After his death, Appleton sold the serial rights to Hearst's *Cosmopolitan*, which did not print it until 1915. When the novel was finally published in book form in 1917, the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice threatened to bring Appleton to court; the publishers chose to avoid legal proceedings by issuing an expurgated version of the novel.² Whether Wharton read the original 1917 edition or the 1919 expurgation is not clear.³ In her letter she judges it

a great book, full of almost all the qualities I most admire in a novelist . . . [T]here is far too much unnecessary moralizing and lecturing. But the tremendous vitality of the book survives even this drawback, and it remains, on the whole, the most remarkable novel I have read in a long time. I am told that it has been suppressed in America, and if this is so it is an interesting commentary on the fact that the police acts as our literary censors. If it is true that the book is out of circulation, could you unofficially help me to a copy?⁴

Wharton's reasons for liking the book are not hard to guess. It is fast-paced, full of vivid description and characterization, and addresses an issue important to her, namely, the disastrous consequences for young women of a total lack of sexual education. Moreover, the novel treats two themes that Wharton would develop in "The Old Maid" and "New Year's Day," respectively: the difficulty that illegitimately born girls have in finding husbands and the fine line, for economically dependent women, between sexual relations motivated by love and prostitution. Wharton may have also admired Phillips's courageous determination, expressed in the preface to the novel, to avoid both Anglo-Saxon prudishness and Continental salaciousness and to write about sexuality with "simple candor and naturalness": "Treat the sex question as you would any other question. Don't treat it reverently; don't treat it rakishly. Treat it naturally."⁵

In response to Wharton's letter, Jewett writes, "Your joke about police censorship is more true than you realize." He continues with a story about some policemen in Central Park who were asked by "Anthony Comstock's successor" to judge upon the decency of a work and "found many offensive terms in it, especially the word 'belly'"; as a result, the book was suppressed.⁶ Jewett then quotes from a letter that Brand Whitlock (the author of reform-minded novels about social injustice in the Midwest) sent him the week before:

The great literary revival that was promised

after the war does not seem to have come off and things in our line seem generally to be in a low state. I know of nothing new that has been published in France that you would care to re-publish in America, or that you would dare to re-publish in America unless you wish to raise the ghost of Anthony Comstock, and that would be even a worse calamity than the publication itself.⁷

Anthony Comstock was a reformer who helped found the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice in 1872 and whose efforts led, the following year, to a Congressional act closing the mails to "obscene and indecent matter" of all kinds.⁸ The "successor" mentioned by Jewett would be John S. Sumner, the stockbroker turned lawyer who was chosen to head the New York vice society when Comstock died in 1915.

Jewett concludes his letter by promising to send Wharton a copy of the book, the unexpurgated version if he can find it. Wharton, who hadn't realized an expurgated version had been published, responds by admonishing him (or Appleton) for conceding that point: "I confess that I regret it for it seems to me that your position would have been stronger if you had waited until intelligent public opinion compelled the withdrawal of the grotesque censorship."⁹ In this exchange Wharton demonstrates a liberal attitude about the treatment of sexuality in contemporary fiction and stands up for authorial control over textual production. As for Jewett, he demonstrated his solidarity with her point of view through his support of *Susan Lenox*. At the same time, as both an editor and a resident of the United States writing to an expatriated author, he assumes the role of social historian, the conveyor of hard, unnegotiable facts about the effects of censorship on the literary scene.¹⁰

Those facts, at the time of Jewett's letter, were not encouraging and merit a brief summary here.¹¹ Let us begin by stepping back a few years to World War I, when a Committee on Public Information created by President Wilson launched a wartime propaganda campaign that portrayed the American soldier as a paragon of moral excellence to be contrasted with the brutal, sexually violent German soldier. Embarked on a quest for purity, Congress appropriated four million dollars to combat prostitution and venereal disease at home.¹² Three obscenity laws passed during this period were used to suppress not only radical and pacifist publications but also books that challenged the wartime ideals of sacrifice and purity.¹³ In addition, the War Department notified the American Library Association in 1918 that certain books circulating from camp libraries

should be removed. The resulting blacklists were reprinted in the American press and assumed to be relevant for libraries on the homefront as well.¹⁴

Clashes over censorship became more heated and frequent after the war when a new generation of publishers (including Thomas Seltzer, Richard Simon and Max Schuster, Alfred Harcourt and Donald Brace), intent on publishing a new generation of authors, clashed with the New York vice society, whose resolve had been fortified by wartime rhetoric and methods. Between 1918 and 1922 John Sumner brought to court a series of suits in which he attempted to censor books written by well-known authors and published by respected houses. Although the majority of the cases were ultimately decided in favor of the defendants, the repeated prosecutions created an atmosphere of intimidation that affected publishers' decisions. The dramatic tactics employed by the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice were illustrated when it targeted Thomas Seltzer for publishing D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*, Arthur Schnitzler's *Casanova's Homecoming*, and the anonymous *A Young Girl's Diary*, with a preface by Sigmund Freud. Armed with the appropriate warrants, Sumner descended on Seltzer's office and seized eight hundred copies of the offensive books. According to Paul Boyer, "[a]dding insult to injury, [Sumner] forced Seltzer to transport the books to police headquarters in his own truck."¹⁵

Although Sumner lost the case against Seltzer when it came to court, the intimidation created by such episodes became clear in the outcome of his next attack, which targeted Horace Liveright for publishing the Roman classic by Petronius Arbiter, the *Satyricon*. Although Liveright, one of the more flamboyant and courageous publishers of his era, won the case, he went on to reissue, on his own initiative, an expurgated trade edition of the *Satyricon*, which met with commercial success.¹⁶ The compromise, however unusual for Liveright, was not unusual for the time. Although newspapers and general-circulation magazines sometimes questioned a specific prosecution, on the whole they approved of Sumner's agenda. In discussing yet another censorship case, this time against James Branch Cabel's *Jurgen* (first published in 1919), Boyer notes, "Of thirty publishers asked to sign the *Jurgen* protest only seven complied."¹⁷ Similarly, neither *Publisher's Weekly* nor *The Library Journal* made a move to protest censorship. The American Civil Liberties Union was also, at this time, uninterested in the issue. Notably, John W. Hiltman, the president of Appleton and of the National Association of Book Publishers as well, also declined to participate in the protest.¹⁸ Wharton, who was interested in selling copies and securing large advances, was not working

with one of the more daring publishing companies of her era.¹⁹

"The Old Maid," written in early 1921 only a few months after Wharton and Jewett's exchange about *Susan Lenox*, begins in a fashion relevant to our discussion. Indeed, the opening pages suggest that Wharton had censorship consciously on her mind. Set in the 1850s, the story begins with the portrait of one of old New York's preeminent families, the Ralstons, whose intellectual conservatism is illustrated in the following description of their religion:

An edulcorated Church of England which, under the conciliatory name of the "Episcopal Church of the United States of America," left out the coarser allusions in the Marriage Service, slid over the comminatory passages in the Athanasian Creed, and thought it more respectful to say "our Father *who*" than "*which*" in the Lord's Prayer, was exactly suited to the spirit of compromise whereon the Ralstons had built themselves up.²⁰

The Ralstons are textual editors whose sensibilities are so delicate that they need to censor the "coarse" and threatening aspects of their religious texts. The passages emphasizes that the transformation of the institution of religion takes place at the level of language, through the substitution, for instance, of proper names and relative pronouns. The Ralstons' sweetening of religion, typical of mid-nineteenth-century sentimentalism, also recalls the avoidance of the "unpleasant" that rules the élite portrayed in *The Age of Innocence*.

Old New York's censorship of religion forms an appropriate introduction to the story of "The Old Maid," which focuses on two women, cousins, who work together to conceal the "unpleasant" fact that one of them has had an illegitimate child. The unmarried Charlotte Lovell, using the excuse of lung disease, disappears into the South for the duration of her pregnancy, in effect "censoring" her sexual transgression from public knowledge. But the fruit of that transgression is ultimately recuperated by the conservative world of old New York when Charlotte, first by herself and then with Delia's help, finds a way of keeping her daughter with her, thanks to a series of clever fictions. First she starts a day-nursery, whose orphans include a "mysterious" foundling--her own child--whom she names Clementina, or Tina, after the child's father, Clement Spender. Some years later, she and Tina move in with Delia, upon her invitation, and in the newly formed family, Delia becomes the founding child's "Mamma" and Charlotte her aunt. (Delia's generosity is partly motivated by the fact that she and Tina's father were

once in love; Charlotte caught him on the rebound after Delia rejected him.) The final recuperation of the illegitimate child takes place in the story's conclusion, when Delia legally adopts Tina, thereby giving her not only the Ralston name she herself acquired through marriage, but also the dowry and the inheritance she needs to marry one of her own set. Tina's recuperation is thus achieved thanks to a team of two storytellers who are adept at manipulating the world's perceptions of her. Delia turns out to be an especially artful story-teller--so artful that she goes from providing the story's point of view to being the actual scriptor of Charlotte's and Tina's words and actions.

Delia's power stems from her socially superior and secure position; she is by birth, marriage, wealth, and reputation, advantageously placed to assume control of the situation. "I must manage it in my own way . . . Only trust me," she says to Charlotte (392). And Delia, because she has always adhered to the strict Ralston ideas and codes without sacrificing her questioning spirit, is ideally suited to throw a veil over the situation and to be Charlotte's protector. Charlotte, by contrast, has less latitude of action. Impoverished, single, and the bearer of a guilty secret, she must deny her passionate nature and parody the social forms that confine her in order to hide her sexual transgression: "she became more and more like the typical old maid: precise, methodical, absorbed in trifles" (406). When Tina, following the example of Delia's own children, calls Delia "Mamma" and Charlotte "Aunt Chatty" (a wonderfully ironic nickname, given Charlotte's old-maidish reserve), the distortion pains Charlotte less than it pleases her, for it serves to conceal the truth of their relation. Charlotte thus pays for her one moment of sexual connection by forfeiting not only marriage, but also the maternal tie to her own daughter, whom she now has to share with Delia.

The struggle between the two cousins for the right to mother Tina is fiercest in the last chapters. Tina, now a young woman, has fallen in love with Lanning Halsey, the only one of "the sturdy and stolid Halsey cousins . . . to whom a prudent mother might have hesitated to entrust her daughter" (413-14). Lanning is not a perfect match because, like Tina's father, he has an artistic temperament preventing him from settling on a profession. Moreover, the annuity he receives from his parents will be threatened if he himself makes an unsuitable match--and Tina, because of her unknown birth, is unsuitable. Fearing that history will repeat itself, and that Tina and Lanning will consummate their love outside marriage, Charlotte resolves to take Tina away from New York and the society she cannot marry into because of her birth. But Delia frustrates her plan and substitutes her own

vision for Charlotte's when she devises a solution her cousin cannot refuse--legal adoption.

Delia's decision to adopt Tina is presented as an unconventional measure requiring great courage. She risks, for instance, starting rumors that her own husband (who is now dead) was the child's father. As she envisions taking this step, she realizes how far she has succumbed to the Ralston conformism, how unrelated "to the vivid Delia Lovell who had entered that house so full of plans and visions" (420). Delia takes stock using a series of images that make her resemble her old-maid cousin, suggesting that she has been deeply affected by the restraints she helped Charlotte impose upon herself. After her one great action of taking the foundling under her wing, "nothing else seemed worth trying for . . . she felt as detached as a cloistered nun." Looking at the inside of the house she never had the initiative to renovate, she describes it in gothic terms: "she understood that she was looking at the walls of her own grave" (420). Consequently, when she does decide to adopt Tina, she seeks to resuscitate her own self from the dead, to be true to her own version of reality:

[A]gain, for a moment, it might be worth while to live . . . No, not for Clement Spender, hardly for Charlotte or even for Tina; but for her own sake, hers, Delia Ralston's, her forfeited reality, she would once more break down the Ralston barriers and reach out into the world. (421)

Delia's "reaching out into the world" will actually lead to secure a place for Tina in her own social class. The image of Delia breaking down barriers and reaching out into the wider world in order, ultimately and discreetly, to change her own narrow one evokes Wharton's project in "The Old Maid," as she broached a universal topic, illegitimacy, that was still taboo to the genteel society she wrote for and about.

Our sense that Delia, in her final, brave but discreet flouting of convention, becomes a figure for the author is confirmed by the scene immediately following, in which Delia imagines and thus "writes" for the reader scenes from Charlotte's secret past and present life. It is late in the evening, and Delia has gone up to her room. But Charlotte has remained downstairs in the parlor in order to wait up for Tina, who has gone to a ball with Lanning Halsey. As the quarter hours tick away, Delia, too, finds herself waiting and wondering why Tina is late. Then, looking out the window, she sees "Tina and Lanning Halsey, walking home alone in the small hours from the Vandergrave ball!" (423). The exclamation point registers Delia's shock and surprise--Tina should have returned in a carriage, and not unchaperoned

with a young man, trailing her thin slippers through the snow. Delia then has, for the first time, a vision of how Charlotte and Clement Spender consummated their relationship long ago:

Delia began to tremble like a girl. In a flash she had the answer to a question which had long been the subject of her secret conjectures. How did lovers like Charlotte and Clement Spender contrive to meet? What Latmian solitude hid their clandestine joys? In the exposed compact little society to which they all belonged, how was it possible--literally--for such encounters to take place? . . . [N]ow, at a glance, she understood. How often Charlotte Lovell, staying alone in town with her infirm grandmother, must have walked home from evening parties with Clement Spender, how often have let herself and him into the darkened house in Mercer Street, where there was no one to spy upon their coming but a deaf old lady and her aged servants, all securely sleeping overhead! Delia, at the thought, saw the grim drawing-room . . . ; she pictured the shaft of moonlight falling across the swans and garlands of the faded carpet, and in that icy light two young figures in each other's arms. (423-24)

Wharton is using Delia here to provide more than point of view. Delia is filling in a missing portion of Charlotte's story by imagining a sequence of events that the reader may believe exact. Delia's vision is, however, also highly subjective in its fusion of a sentimental notion of love with the gothicism often used to describe love long gone: there are swans and garlands in the patterned carpet and moonlight, too, but the pattern is faded, the light icy, and the house dark and grim. (There is a kind of resurrection of amorous corpses here.) By modern-day standards, the scene certainly does not go beyond the boundaries of good taste. But Delia does spell out--and answer--some of the questions that any reader, with an ounce of prurience, would have asked on learning about Charlotte's pregnancy--when, where, and how?

Having imagined Charlotte's encounters with Clem, Delia now understands the danger Tina is running and why Charlotte is waiting up for her. The scene that follows, in which Charlotte interrupts a farewell that might have turned into a sexual encounter, is also given us through Delia's imagination: ". . . Delia could imagine how quietly and

decently the scene below stairs would presently be enacted: no astonishment, no reproaches, no insinuations, but a smiling and resolute ignoring of excuses" (424). There follows a paragraph in which Delia's inner monologue renders Charlotte reprimanding Tina as she walks in the front door with Lanning: "What, Tina? You walked home with Lanning? You imprudent child--in the wet snow . . ." The speech ends with Charlotte's abrupt dismissal of Lanning. Delia's mental performance of her cousin's speech is so on target that she times its ending exactly: "His dismissal had taken exactly as long as Delia had calculated it would" (424). Charlotte thus contributes to "saving" Tina from a dismal fate, but Wharton has Delia script the scene.

If Delia emerges here as a figure for the author, her "style" is later described in the account of the adoption. Delia's decision to adopt Tina is, of course, generally considered peculiar; however, public opinion finally does not credit any of the rumors about Delia's husband's "past," for "[p]eople were reluctant to charge a dead man with an offense from which he could not clear himself" (431). As for Delia's own children, who stand to lose a portion of their inheritance because of it, they "abstained from comment, minimizing the effect of their mother's whim by a dignified silence. It was the old New York way for families thus to screen the eccentricities of an individual member" (432). In a fortunate twist, the gentleman's code of honor and discretion that ruled old New York helps Delia take a daring step. But most of all, it is Delia herself who "had (it was Sillerton Jackson who first phrased it) an undoubted way of 'carrying things off'" (432). Her daring is compared to that of Mrs. Manson Mingott, that figure of institutionalized unconventionality already seen in *The Age of Innocence*:

What Mrs. Manson Mingott had accomplished by dint of epigram, invective, insistency and runnings to and fro, [Delia] achieved without raising her voice or seeming to take a step from the beaten path . . . [A]s Sillerton Jackson said, she behaved as if her adopting Tina had always been an understood thing, as if she wondered that people should wonder. And in the face of her wonders theirs seemed foolish, and they gradually desisted. (432)

Delia's strategy consists of refusing to acknowledge the shocking unconventionality of her action. I stress this point because it is important for thinking about Wharton's own authorial strategies. Eschewing Mrs. Mingott's flashy modus operandi, she chooses the path of a staged and therefore

observable discretion. Acting *as if* what she was doing were completely normal, she manages to change the response of her potential critics and thus, ever so subtly, the codes of old New York.

Delia's daring but prudent handling of Tina's adoption facilitates the young woman's marriage and thus, albeit indirectly, the greater social changes to come. Tina's marriage, like that of Newland Archer's son, Dallas, at the end of *The Age of Innocence* (also to an illegitimate daughter), signals the advent of more explicit communication between the sexes. The difference between Tina's generation and Delia's is underlined by the liberal Dr. Lanskill, whose comment about men and women in the 1850s-- "People didn't tell each other things much in those days, did they?" (426)--recalls Dallas's description of his own parents' marriage in the 1870s: "[Y]ou never told each other anything. You just sat and watched each other, and guessed at what was going on underneath. A deaf-and-dumb asylum, in fact!" (1298). In both stories, the change in mores enables the younger generation to make matches based on real love instead of social tradition or family interest. But Wharton clearly saw the greater openness she heralded in these works as reserved to interpersonal relations and not available to literature. Indeed, Wharton's correspondence with Jewett suggests that she was distressed by the literary restrictions of her era.

The capacity of American society to absorb, after initial shock and rejection, the "unpleasant"--illustrated by Tina's absorption into New York society--was ultimately illustrated by the subsequent chapters of "The Old Maid's" history. *Redbook*, let us recall, was finally encouraged to publish it when *The Age of Innocence* won the Pulitzer prize in May 1921 and was selected "as the American novel [of the year] which shall best present the wholesome atmosphere of American life and the highest standard of American manners and manhood."²¹ "The Old Maid" would, moreover, prove to be one of Wharton's more popular works and, in the mid-1930s, was turned into a motion picture starring Bette Davis as Charlotte and Miriam Hopkins as Delia.

In sum, Tina's story of social recuperation eerily presaged the fate of the book itself--or not so eerily, if we credit Wharton's strong sense of the dialectical nature of cultural change. For Delia's method of using the "bonus points" she has earned with her conformism in order occasionally to break social codes resembles Wharton's own professional strategies. There is indeed a sense in which the "wholesomeness" of *The Age of Innocence* provided Wharton with the capital she needed to market the stronger themes of "The Old Maid." This is not to say that Wharton sat down and consciously planned to alternate less daring

fictions with more daring ones. Rather, she oscillated during her career between more and less shocking works, using her respectability to address "vigorous" themes (to quote *Ladies' Home Journal*) but backing off when editorial reactions threatened her chances of publication. Indeed, as we shall see, Jewett's repeated recommendations of restraint after "The Old Maid" was published, encouraged Wharton to avoid sexual themes in the last two stories she wrote for *Old New York*.

So let us now return to Wharton's dialogue with Jewett about American puritanism. Wharton's expressed her frustration to him once again in this reaction to another rejection: "I am so puzzled by the verdict of the Metropolitan Magazine on 'The Old Maid' that I despair of ever understanding the point of view of the American public. Have the readers of The Metropolitan never read 'The Scarlet Letter' or 'Adam Bede' to mention only the two first classics that come to mind? And how about my own 'Summer'?"²² Jewett responded to Wharton's distress by explaining the American literary scene in a series of three letters written in 1921-22. Again, we should keep in mind while reading Jewett's correspondence that Wharton completed during this period "New Year's Day" and "False Dawn"--two more stories that deal with the narrow-mindedness of old New York, the first in matters of sexual conduct, the second in the area of aesthetic judgment. (A fourth story, "The Spark," also about the limitations of American aesthetics, would be completed in September 1923 and conclude Wharton's work on *Old New York*).²³ Jewett reacts to Wharton's bewilderment about the rejections of "The Old Maid" as follows:

Like our English cousins, we still find it difficult to face certain facts frankly. The existence of the illegitimate child is less real if not referred to. Adultery is a word which should never occur except in the Bible. The New England conscience is not confined to the Atlantic seaboard. Personal contact with those afflicted with it, however, has convinced me that it seldom keeps the possessor from transgression, though it prevents him from enjoying the thing which he has decided to do.²⁴

It is unlikely that Jewett was telling Wharton in this letter anything she did not already know, but clearly he felt--either because of her indignation or because of his difficulty placing "The Old Maid"--that she needed to be reminded of her audience's puritanism. Yet she chose at this point in time to write another story that was as daring in its own way.²⁵

"New Year's Day," written in January and February of 1922, narrates the extra-marital affair of a young woman, Lizzie Hazeldean, whose husband is dying of a heart ailment. Everything leads the reader to believe that the affair is affording Lizzie an "escape" from the sick-room, until the conclusion of the story, which takes place after her husband's death, reveals that she considered the affair an act of prostitution. Indeed, her lover gave her as "gifts" sums of money which she needed to take adequate care of her dying husband. The story goes so far as to place the word "prostitute" in its heroine's mouth. A year after the affair has ended, she announces to her ex-lover: "You thought I was a lovelorn mistress; and I was only an expensive prostitute."²⁶ In typical fashion, Wharton thematizes the linguistic indiscretion she has just committed by having the narrator convey the lover's shock thus: "Mistress? Prostitute? Such words were banned."

Jewett submitted the story to *Red Book Magazine*, which had, let us recall, accepted "The Old Maid." A letter from Jewett, written in April 1922, gives evidence of the magazine's reaction to the new story: "The editors found the theme of NEW YEAR'S DAY a trifle strong for home circulation. They were a bit fearful of offending subscribers, but their desire to have a companion story to THE OLD MAID, and the masterly manner in which you told the story finally won the day."²⁷ Two letters from June 1922 are more specific in their discussion of magazine standards. In the first letter, dated June 1, Jewett repeats the request from Karl Harriman, the editor of *Red Book*, that Wharton's "next story be less strong in theme."²⁸ He conveys Harriman's reasoning as follows:

As Harriman stated his case, he made a contract with his readers that they could place the *Red Book* for the coming year on the round center table under the library lamp, to be enjoyed by the whole family. This, he states, places certain obligations on his soul, which he is bound to fulfill. If a story is too frank, it means letters of protest and loss of subscribers.

The standards of literary propriety Jewett is describing here differ little from the Victorian codes that existed in the mid nineteenth century. True, by the 1920s the Victorian practice of reading aloud had given way to private, if shared reading; the dining room table with the gas lamp hanging overhead and the family gathered round had been replaced by the round coffee table with electric lighting. But the sense of an innocent, easily offended sensibility at the core of domestic

life was still there. Indeed, the newer "picture magazines" that Wharton might have been interested in, like *McClure's*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*, shared the cautiousness of the Gilded Age periodicals, albeit for different reasons. The older, genteel magazines, like *Century*, *Scribner's*, and *Harper's*, had been prudish because their dependence upon subscription made them feel "a responsibility of cultural custodianship bestowed by 'cultivated' readers."²⁹ As for the magazines that sprang up during the Progressive Era, they were occasionally led into forbidden territory by their crusades. On the whole, though, an inherited decorum and a fear of censorship, variously disguised, led the new generation of editors to adhere to the same standards of propriety that had guided the old, even as they argued for more vigorous, "masculine" prose.

In seeking publication for her works in this period, Wharton confined herself, for political and economic reasons, to the middle sector of magazines, which stood between the older, more expensive magazines and the newer, so-called "yellow" magazines. The older publications could not compete with the higher rates paid by the illustrated magazines. *Scribner's* provides a case in point. Wharton's long-standing relationship with the Scribner firm, which had published her first work of fiction in 1890 and later accepted many of her works for both magazine and book publication, began to fray in the mid 1910s, when she contracted with Appleton for both *Summer* and *The Glimpses of the Moon*. Appleton placed *Summer* with *McClure's*, which brought the serial rights for it for the generous sum of seven thousand dollars, a price *Scribner's* could not match.³⁰ In addition, *Scribner's* circulation had been declining since 1912.³¹ By the late 1920s its decline in prestige as well would be acknowledged by Wharton and her editor.³² As for the better-paying Hearst magazines, Wharton would refuse throughout her career to publish in any of them; Jewett repeatedly acknowledges that fact in their correspondence without ever pressing her to change her mind.³³ The rest of Jewett's letter of June 1 demonstrates that he understood her limitations, but the list of options he offers is not long.

I have several requests on file from editors. Outside the yellow group of Hearst periodicals there are comparatively few magazines that pay the prices which I have been securing for your serials and short stories, so I do not bother with any requests from any sources which cannot pay top-notch prices. Here are some trails which are worth following:

1. *Ladies' Home Journal* -- They

pay good prices but can print only certain types of stories, never anything that deals too frankly with the sex problem.

2. *Saturday Evening Post* -- This magazine prefers modern stories, preferably of American life. A magazine for men rather than for women, which means more frankness is permitted than for the *Ladies' Home Journal*, but they have not the same freedom that is granted in the *Red Book* or *Pictorial Review*.

3. *Woman's Home Companion* -- A good medium, can pay high prices, not afraid of sex when handled in a serious way, especially if some moral lesson is included.

4. *Pictorial Review* -- You know the make-up of this magazine.

5. *Delineator* -- Can pay high prices; are almost as restricted in choice of stories as the *Ladies' Home Journal*.³⁴

6. *Red Book* -- The editors are interested in anything you write, but at present prefer stories of Old New York which fit in with the stories already purchased.³⁵

Why did Jewett provide Wharton with such a survey? Having described the limitations of *Red Book*, he may have been anticipating that Wharton would want to try publishing in another magazine. Having read both "The Old Maid" and "New Year's Day," he may have decided this was the moment to draw for Wharton a clear picture of the contemporary publishing scene, in order to encourage her to temper her writing for the sake of both her popularity and her pocketbook. Indeed, Jewett's list provides a concise but not reassuring picture of the middle sector of magazines in the 1920s. Their persisting adherence to genteel restrictions would give any but the most timid writer pause. The list seems to record a range of restrictiveness, with the *Ladies' Home Journal* and *The Delineator* at a more prudish end of the spectrum; *Red Book*, *The Pictorial Review*, and *Woman's Home Companion* at the "franker" end; and the *Saturday Evening Post* somewhere in between. It should be recalled, however, that Jewett's letter had begun with a description of *Red Book*, by its editor Harriman, as a magazine meant to go "on the round center table under the library lamp, to be enjoyed by the whole family." When the notion of "frankness" is thus placed in its context, the range available to Wharton narrows considerably.

A letter written by Jewett at the end of June 1922

returns to the topic of censorship, a little more defensively this time:

Perhaps it is difficult for you to sense the limitations which bind the magazine editor. They are not the only victims of the bromidic taste and the moral tremors of our dear reading public. One of our novels was strangled because youth and innocence was led astray by a young priest . . .

In a recent issue of the *Publishers Weekly* I note that a grand jury in New Zealand has just found a publisher guilty of blasphemy because he included in his paper a poem of Sassoon's. Stewart & Kidd, one of our American publishers, was recently fined a thousand dollars for selling unexpurgated editions of Rabelais and Boccaccio. This sounds impossible, nevertheless it is a fact, and throws some light upon the problems which confront the magazine editor.³⁶

There is no evidence that Wharton consciously decided to adjust her fiction to the parameters Jewett drew for her in these letters. However, the next and last two stories she wrote for *Old New York*, "False Dawn" and "The Spark," were tamer in theme than the first two. Both address the issue of American narrow-mindedness not in the area of sexuality but in the area of aesthetic appreciation. In "False Dawn" a young man on his European grand tour amasses a collection of pre-Raphaelite paintings that are ridiculed by his father and the New York elite he belongs to when he returns home. Indeed his father, who had commissioned his son with the collection while saddling him with his hopelessly conventional tastes, leaves him no money in his will, only the paintings. The son confirms his position as an ostracized member of society when he dares to show the pictures publicly. We later learn, however, that the son's advisors in purchasing included none other than John Ruskin, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and William Morris. Two generations after his death, the paintings are revealed to be masterpieces by Mantegna, Giotto, and Piero della Francesca. The story was accepted for publication in the more restrictive *Ladies' Home Journal* in August 1922. Like *The Age of Innocence*, "The Old Maid," and "New Year's Day," "False Dawn" shows the risks the individual runs when he opposes the will of the Family; however, it completely eschews sexual themes. As for "The Spark," it turns on the encounter, during the Civil War, of an Old New Yorker named Delane, who was seriously wounded in battle, with a

nameless man who used to visit and comfort him during his recovery. This man, whose compassion and greatness of soul made an indelible impression on Delane, turns out to be Walt Whitman. (Here, of course, the theme of unconventional sexuality is neatly tucked away in a name.) When the narrator reads Delane some of Whitman's verse, his response is: "He was a great chap: I'll never forget him. -- I rather wish, though," he added in his mildest tone of reproach, 'you hadn't told me that he wrote all that rubbish.'"³⁷

"False Dawn" and "The Spark" describe the elite of Old New York as incapable, because of its closure to new ideas, of appreciating great innovators in art and literature. The theme is not a new one in Wharton's work -- it was developed in *The Age of Innocence* -- but the irony here is particularly strong, benefiting as it does from Wharton's selective name-dropping. And when we consider the publication difficulties encountered by "The Old Maid" and the stream of letters from Jewett requesting restraint, the avoidance of sexual topics in the last two stories written for *Old New York* appears intentional. Indeed, "False Dawn" and "The Spark" can be seen as a commentary not only upon the limitations of old New York but also upon the prudishness of American literary culture in the early 1920s; they also express, however, Wharton's hope that the next generation might be able to appreciate her more daring works.

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NOTES

1. R.W.B. Lewis, *Edith Wharton: A Biography* (New York: Fromm International, 1985) 433.
2. For Appleton's handling of *Susan Lenox* until 1915, see Charles A. Madison, *Publishing in America* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966) 180. (Madison states incorrectly that John Sumner did not find the 1917 edition objectionable.) See also Paul S. Boyer, *Purity in Print: The Vice-Society Movement and Book Censorship in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968) 48-49.
3. A letter written by Wharton to Sinclair Lewis in August 1921 states: "Your book and *Susan Lenox* (unexpurgated) have been the only things out of America that have made me cease to despair of the republic -- of letters." (R.W.B. Lewis, *Edith Wharton* 433). The letter suggests that Wharton did read the unexpurgated version at some point, though not necessarily at the time of the earlier letter to Jewett. Between the July 1920 letter to Jewett and the letter to Lewis, a year passed -- sufficient time for her to have received from Jewett a second, unexpurgated copy of the book.
4. Edith Wharton, letter to Rutger B. Jewett, 28 July 1920, Wharton Archive, Beinecke Library, Yale University. All other letters quoted in this article may be found in the same archive, unless otherwise indicated.
5. David Graham Phillips, *Susan Lenox: Her Fall and Rise*, in 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1919) vol. 1, x.
6. Jewett, letter to Wharton, 16 August 1920.
7. Whitlock would go on, in 1924, to lobby the American Academy of Arts and Sciences on behalf of Wharton. As a result, she received a Gold Medal. See R.W.B. Lewis, *Edith Wharton* 460.
8. Closer to Wharton's time, Comstock was one of the first to decry the production of Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* in New York City in 1905.
9. Wharton, letter to Jewett, 13 September 1920.
10. Jewett would go so far as to include, in a letter to Wharton dated February 6, 1922, a newspaper clipping about the censorship of books. Wharton did not keep the clipping.
11. My discussion of censorship in this period is indebted to Boyer, *Purity in Print*.
12. Boyer, *Purity in Print* 57.
13. The Espionage Act of 1917, the Trading-with-the-Enemy Act, and the 1918 Sedition Amendment. See Boyer, *Purity in Print* 58.
14. Some threatening books were not completely banished from libraries but sequestered in closed stacks or made available only to certain sectors of readers (doctors, students, et al.). See Evelyn Geller, *Forbidden Books in American Public Libraries, 1876-1939* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984) 117-18.
15. Boyer, *Purity in Print* 80.
16. Other cases discussed by Boyer include the first trial against James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which attracted little attention at the time. Margaret Anderson, publisher of the *Little Review*, was fined \$50 in 1920 for printing Leo Bloom's erotic daydream about Gertie McDowell. (See Boyer, *Purity in Print* 84-85). *Ulysses'* big victory would have to wait another thirteen years. Entertaining anecdotes about Horace Liveright can be found in Edward de Grazia, *Girls Lean Back Everywhere: The Law of Obscenity and the Assault on Genius* (New York: Random House, 1992) 128-49.
17. Boyer, *Purity in Print* 91.
18. For the beginning of the "Clean Books" Crusade, see Paul S. Boyer, *Purity in Print* 99-119.
19. It is interesting to note, as an aside, that when the

- Appleton firm was in its youth, it dared to create a stir by publishing Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859), which was followed by the works of Herbert Spencer. See Madison, *Book Publishing in America* 31-32.
20. Edith Wharton, "The Old Maid," in *Novellas and Other Writings* (New York: The Library of America, 1990) 373. Further references to this work will be to this edition and will be given in the text.
 21. R.W.B. Lewis, *Edith Wharton* 432-36.
 22. Wharton, letter to Jewett, 23 May 1921.
 23. My dating of the four stories is indebted to Cynthia Griffin Wolff, *A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton* (New York: Oxford UP, 1977) 436, n. 15. Wolff notes that Wharton often worked on several pieces of fiction at once, but she was able to compose the following summary: "The correspondence with Appleton suggests that she wrote 'The Old Maid' in early 1921; her journal lists 'New Year's Day' as having been written in January and February of 1922; 'False Dawn' was accepted for publication in *The Ladies' Home Journal* in August 1922; and she finished 'The Spark' under some pressure from Appleton in September 1923."
 24. Jewett, letter to Wharton, 9 June 1921.
 25. The daring nature of the story is questioned in an article by Leslie Fishbein, "Prostitution, Morality, and Paradox: Moral Relativism in Edith Wharton's *Old New York: New Year's Day* (*The Seventies*)," *Studies in Short Fiction* 24, 4 (Fall 1987): 399-406. Fishbein argues that "Wharton's novel is not the anomaly that contemporary critics would have us believe" (406) when placed alongside other, morally relativistic works of drama, fiction, and film of the 1920s in which fallen women take on heroic proportions. Although it is true that Wharton has company, Fishbein misses the larger point that all these works were "anomalies" when they first appeared and remained so until they succeeded in changing their audiences' horizons.
 26. Edith Wharton, "New Year's Day" in *Novellas and Other Writings* 532.
 27. Jewett, letter to Wharton, 27 April 1922.
 28. Jewett, letter to Wharton, 1 June 1922.
 29. Christopher Wilson, *The Labor of Words: Literary Professionalism in the Progressive Era* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1985) 43.
 30. R.W.B. Lewis, *Edith Wharton* 395-96.
 31. For a brief history of the rise and fall of *Scribner's Magazine*, see Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, volume IV: 1885-1905* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1957) 717-32.
 32. See Jewett, letter to Wharton, 6 January 1928: "The Scribners and the Century are no more 'literary' now than many of the popular magazines which have enormous circulations and can afford to pay top prices for serialization. . . . The relative position of these magazines has changed radically as the years have passed. Once they stood aloof in splendid literary isolation. That day has gone by." To which Wharton responded (19 January 1928): "I agree with you -- to my regret -- about Scribner's. There is nothing left of the old tradition . . ."
 33. See, for example, the letter from Jewett to Wharton (28 May 1928): "The other day one of the editors of the *Cosmopolitan* asked me why you did not wish any of your work to appear in the New York periodicals controlled by Hearst. I said I had never asked you and had no idea, that you had expressed a preference not to have your stories in the Hearst magazines, and as it was impossible for you to meet the demand for half of the offers submitted to you, I was content to place your work elsewhere." I have found no statement by Wharton about her reasons for avoiding Hearst publications, but her avoidance of the yellow-journalism empire is not surprising.
 34. *The Delineator* would prove itself more liberal than this in 1931 when it agreed to publish Wharton's *The Gods Arrive*. A letter from Oscar Graeve at that magazine, dated 15 May 1931 and addressed to Jewett, comments: "The situation [in *The Gods Arrive*], that of a man and woman unmarried and living together, is a little startling for magazine publication but fortunately, *Delineator* is the most liberal-minded of the women's magazines, and this fact, together with the prestige of Mrs. Wharton's name will, I believe, enable us to publish the novel without any serious loss of readers. We will, of course, get some protests." (*The Gods Arrive* had already been rejected by *The Saturday Evening Post*.)
 35. It is worth noting that two magazines on Jewett's list would be bought up by Hearst in the 1930s: in 1934 Hearst purchased *The Pictorial Review*; in 1937, he acquired *The Delineator* and merged it with *The Pictorial*. See Peterson, *Magazines in the Twentieth Century* 154, 156.
 36. Jewett, letter to Wharton, 29 June 1922.
 37. Edith Wharton, "The Spark," in *Novellas and Other Writings* 488.

Italian Background: Edith Wharton's Debt to Vernon Lee

by Penelope Vita-Finzi

Edith Wharton acknowledges her "great debt" to Vernon Lee in a letter written in November 1904 which accompanied a copy of *Italian Villas and their Gardens*, the book she had dedicated to Vernon Lee. Vernon Lee is a presence in the background not only of this book but of all Edith Wharton's work about Italy. As it is to the background of Italian Renaissance paintings that Edith Wharton tells us we must look to discover the actual world of the artist, so it is to Vernon Lee that we must look to understand the real basis of Edith Wharton's Italy.

Vernon Lee's own background was largely Italian. Born Violet Paget in France to British parents, she spent a peripatetic childhood in Germany, France, Switzerland, and Italy before the family finally settled in Italy. She was the half-sister of Eugene Lee-Hamilton, an invalid and reclusive minor poet to whose care Vernon Lee devoted some twenty years of her life. Wharton admired Lee-Hamilton's verses, and his admiration of a sonnet of Edith Wharton's led to her being invited to visit, a rare honour, and to her first meeting with Vernon Lee in 1894. Maurice Baring, who was a close friend for many years and considered Vernon Lee to be "by far the cleverest person [he] ever met in [his] life, and the person possessed with the widest range of the rarest culture," wrote of her that above all: "She was at home among Italian books, pictures and music, and in the eighteenth century. . . .

She had breathed that air all her life; it was native to her" (Gunn 135). Despite her ties with England and France, she felt most at home in Italy and among her Italian friends. Villa Il Palmerino, Maiano, outside Florence, which was her home from April 1889 until her death (apart from interludes

elsewhere including the war years in England), bears an inscription in Italian which translates as follows:

In this house lived Violet Paget (Vernon Lee) writer 1856-1935. She wrote poetry and prose, on philosophy, history, story and art. Unassuming, bighearted, harmonising life and intellect, she dedicated herself to the search for truth and beauty. She chose to live in Italy which she knew and loved. She bestowed an immortal inheritance on posterity with her works.

Such an epitaph anyone might envy--some might have queried the "unassuming" and "bighearted"--although posterity has not yet come to appreciate the "immortal inheritance." But, in recent years, her short stories in particular have begun to achieve a wider recognition for their quality.

When Edith Wharton met Vernon Lee in 1894, she was already familiar with her much-admired *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* and other works, and she knew of her formidable reputation as a talker. R. W. B. Lewis tells us in his biography that Wharton regarded Vernon Lee as "the first truly cultivated woman that she had yet encountered" (75): he surmises that the effect of this meeting on Edith Wharton, in a vulnerable state at this time, was exciting but disturbing and may even have contributed to Wharton's breakdown in 1895. (Incidentally, Vernon Lee herself suffered from severe bouts of neurasthenia from 1887). Well might Wharton have felt overawed by Vernon Lee in 1894. Only six years older than Edith Wharton, she had already

published fourteen books, including five works on aesthetics, notably *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy*, while Wharton had published only a few poems and short stories. Already recognized by this date for her intellect, Vernon Lee expressed her ideas with great force and little tact. She aroused feelings of apprehension not only in Edith Wharton but in Henry James as well. A decade earlier, James had described her as "a most astounding young female" who possessed "a prodigious cerebration." Though in an 1887 letter to Edmund Gosse, James referred to Lee as "a really superior talker," his opinion changed after Lee satirized him cruelly in her short story "Lady Tal." In January 1893 he warned his brother William that "she is as dangerous and uncanny as she is intelligent which is saying a great deal. Her vigour and sweep are most rare and her talk superior altogether." He further advised that William "draw it mild with her on the question of friendship. She's a tiger-cat!"

Violet Paget adopted the *nom de plume* of Vernon Lee in 1887 because "no one reads a woman's writing on art, history or aesthetics with anything but unmitigated contempt" (Letter to Mrs. Jenkin, 18 December 1878). Unusually, it became her preferred name for social as well as literary purposes. The adoption of an androgynous name was more than a useful literary disguise; it also indicated a sexual ambivalence: her biographer, Peter Gunn, describes her habit of wearing black silk dresses with a "high Gladstone collar"; Lord Clark, meeting her towards the end of her life, claimed that "she looked somewhat grotesque, as she wore men's clothes"; Nicky Mariano, Bernard Berenson's secretary and friend, remembered the quaint elegance in her mannish attire. Lewis, more frankly, asserts that Vernon Lee "dressed in a mannish style with collar and tie, and she was indeed lesbian in her inclinations (72-3)." In her preface to the privately printed letters of Vernon Lee, Irene Cooper Willis, her executrix, writes that "up to middle age she was continually in a state of violent agitation as to her relationship with some woman or other (i-xiv)." It is Dame Ethel Smyth, herself bisexual and notoriously outspoken, who gives the most affectionate and sensitive insight into this side of Vernon Lee:

I believe the tragedy of her life was that without knowing it she loved the *cultes* [the women she took up] humanly and with passion; but being the stateliest and chastest of beings she refused to face the fact, or indulge in the most innocent demonstrations of affection, preferring to create a fiction that to her these friends were merely intellectual necessities. (28)

Edith Wharton was, perhaps, oblivious to Vernon Lee's

sexual inclination, despite the obvious clues; for as we know she had little time for the lesbian coterie in Paris of Natalie Clifford Barney. Or was it that Vernon Lee's dazzling intellect and conversation blinded or reconciled Edith Wharton to her lesbianism? Surely Edith Wharton would have not written to her in 1932: "we shall kiss again with tears over the twins in our joint cradle" if she had thought that Vernon Lee was lesbian.

At any rate, the extant correspondence between the two women shows that, despite mutual affection and admiration, Edith Wharton retained much of the awe that she had felt at their first meeting. There are twenty-three letters, written between October 1901 and February 1933, from Edith Wharton to Vernon Lee in the Lee collection in the library of Somerville College, Oxford, and four letters from Vernon Lee to Edith Wharton in the Beinecke. Although we have but a sample of a, presumably, larger correspondence, several of these letters do relate to one another: two of the Wharton letters are replies to two of Lee's, and the last letter of Lee's in the Beinecke is a reply to Wharton's final letter in the Somerville collection.

An important preoccupation of both correspondents is with their health-- only nine of Edith Wharton's letters and one of Vernon Lee's fail to mention illness. There could be several reasons for this: the breakdowns suffered by both women in the past, difficult family backgrounds, loneliness, and sexual repression. Equally, ill health may have been a convenient social excuse. From Wharton's letters in particular, one suspects that she is relieved that illness and domestic crises prevent their meetings. A return visit by Vernon Lee to Sainte Claire proposed in 1925 had, it seems, still not taken place by 1930. Writing from Bologna that October, Edith Wharton cited one of her favourite images from Goethe: "My Guardian Fury seems to have decided that we are not to meet, & apparently she is actively supported by yours--for I cannot think that one Fury could keep us apart for so long."

Of greater interest to posterity than the references to ailments are the references to literature. The earliest letter in the Beinecke collection, written in October 1902, some eight years after Vernon Lee's first meeting with Edith Wharton, accompanied Lee's manuscript of her enthusiastic article on *The Valley of Decision* for the Italian journal *La Cultura*. The letter refers to "your fine novel" and to a letter previously sent to Edith Wharton by Eugene Lee-Hamilton in which he, rather extravagantly, puts Edith Wharton on a par with Stendhal. In her article, Vernon Lee, having given a resumé of the plot, praises Wharton's historical authenticity and empathy:

Mrs. Wharton's novel is indeed a wonderful account of historical truth, both in the actual facts and in their human environment--a truth which, however, is not merely objective. . . . Mrs. Wharton gives us something more: a picture, a series of pictures, viewed through an artist's personality and translated into artistic symbols: the subjective truth of the soul of an age and of a country, revealed through the eyes of a real writer.

Edith Wharton's reply of December 31, 1902, evidences her delight in these opinions and her consciousness of her debt to Lee:

To tell you what pleasure your article on my book has given me I should have to go back to the days *quand j'avais vingt ans et le coeur me battait* when your *Euphorion* and *Eighteenth Century Studies* were letting me into that wonder world of Italy which I had loved since my childhood without having the key to it. To rehearse all this in detail would be delightful to me but tiresome to you; so you must take for granted the sensations with which I read your article, unless you can look back to a moment in your literary life when you heard yourself approved by the one person whose opinion you most valued.

From letters such as this and from examining Vernon Lee's learned and exuberant *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy*, it is clear how much Wharton was indebted to Lee for the background to *The Valley of Decision* and for specific scenes and characters--Alfieri, for example. Their last letters, as well as the first, discuss *The Valley of Decision*. In her final letter to Lee in the Somerville collection, written when Wharton was composing *A Backward Glance*, she refers to an introduction Vernon Lee completed for a projected Italian translation of the novel:

I did so enjoy setting down all I could remember of those good old days, & my visits to the Palmerino, & the Italian translation of "The Valley of Decision" which so mysteriously vanished in the *oubliettes* of the *Nuova Antologia*, and your beautiful introduction to it which I still cherish.

In her reply of February 1933, the last letter in the Beinecke collection, Lee, at the age of seventy-seven, admits to aphasia

and complains of her chronic deafness and tinnitus. Further, she confesses, she cannot even remember writing this introduction:

You mention your willingness & my attempts to get the *Valley of Decision* into Italian. And I note that you speak of "cherishing" my introduction to that book. I only remembered (as often happened when I was not yet reduced to senility) my intention of doing myself the pleasure of writing such an introduction but to do it nowadays, even in English, is beyond me. Now it seems the thing is in existence, apparently in your possession. That makes me return to my old wish for an Italian translation. . . . [W]ould you empower me, since that introduction exists, to offer the *rights gratis* to publisher & translator, any payment going to the latter?

Edith Wharton's first letter also alludes to a future project:

This year, finalmente, I am going to do the long deferred articles on Italian villa gardens; not from the admiring-ejaculatory, but, as much as possible from the historical & architectural stand-point; & I shall want all the help and advice you are willing to give me.

That help and advice was generously given: in her memoirs Wharton pays tribute to Vernon Lee for practical help with research for *Italian Villas and Their Gardens*. Moreover, Edith Wharton's dedication makes plain that she was inspired by Vernon Lee's aesthetics as well: "To Vernon Lee who, better than anyone else, has understood and interpreted the garden-magic of Italy." Vernon Lee suggested villas for inclusion, provided introductions, and accompanied Edith Wharton to those near Florence. Percy Lubbock describes the two women visiting one villa:

[Vernon Lee] most surprising, most interesting, most exasperating of women, in her power and her humour, her tenacity and her perversity--Vernon Lee holds her ground . . . in the twinkling ilex-shade of that old garden. . . . What a figure! Edith admired her, but scarce knew how to treat her. (Gunn 182)

Vernon Lee had published *Genius Loci* in 1898 and was to follow it during the course of her lifetime with eight volumes of essays on travel and the "spirit of place." Irene

Cooper Willis speculates that the intensity of Lee's response to "art and nature" and travel derived from lack of personal ties:

What Vernon Lee lost by avoidance of simple human contacts she set herself to find in art and nature. . . . She was acutely sensitive to landscape and the spirit of places, and I think that her greatest gift to her friends lay in this delightful sensibility and the writing that sprang from it.

The self-confidence that Edith Wharton showed by invading Vernon Lee's territory in *Italian Villas* may have stemmed partly from Lee's enthusiasm and generous praise of *The Valley of Decision*. Wharton's "discovery" of the terracottas of San Vivaldo increased her confidence even more. These were figures in seventeen remaining small chapels created at the beginning of the sixteenth century to model in miniature the sanctuaries of Jerusalem so that pilgrimages could be made without travelling to Palestine.

In July 1894, a few months after meeting the redoubtable expert on Italian art who had, apparently, reduced her to silence, Edith Wharton gloated to Edward Burlingame that she had found some terracottas the previous spring which were "entirely unknown, even Miss Paget (Vernon Lee) who has lived so long in Italy & devoted so much time to the study of Tuscan art, never having heard of them or of San Vivaldo." Wharton takes pleasure in trumping Vernon Lee. The fact that the Presepio from San Vivaldo was hanging in the Bargello in Florence at the time indicates that the terracottas were known. It is improbable that Vernon Lee did not know it.

In Edith Wharton's day, the figures were attributed by local tradition to the seventeenth-century artist Giovanni Gonnelli. Recounting her visit to the site in her article "A Tuscan Shrine," reprinted in *Italian Backgrounds*, Edith Wharton asserts instead that five of some twenty groups of figures and five individual figures belonged to the late fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries rather than the seventeenth century. She also connects some details of the figures and their surroundings to the school of the later della Robbias. On her return to Florence she confirmed her conjecture that a Presepio in the Bargello had been removed from San Vivaldo and was attributed to Giovanni della Robbia or his school. (This is no longer the case.) Wharton then succeeded in persuading Professor Ridolfi of the Royal Museums in Florence, solely on the evidence of her single visit and some photographs, to endorse the earlier dating and the connection with the della Robbias. His rather tentative opinion later seems, in some quarters, to have crystallized

into a definite attribution to Giovanni della Robbia. Ridolfi's emphasis, in fact, comes in his final sentence: "I therefore declare with absolute certainty that it is a mistake to attribute these beautiful works to Giovanni Gonnelli, and that they are undoubtedly a century earlier in date."

Ridolfi made no attribution to Giovanni della Robbia, and such an attribution has never been generally accepted by art historians in Europe from Bernard Berenson to the current expert on the della Robbias, Giancarlo Gentilini. In Gentilini's most recent work, *The della Robbias and their Imitators* (1992), he discusses the five groups Wharton described. In his view, however, only one may possibly derive from Giovanni della Robbia's workshop.

We must admire Edith Wharton for recognizing the connection between the terracottas and the Presepio in the Bargello, but in doing so she implicitly acknowledged that the terracottas were known and that one at least was dated as early sixteenth century. To censure her for assuming that some of the sculptures were by the hand of Giovanni della Robbia or his school would be unjust. After all, the Presepio was publicly attributed to Giovanni della Robbia. Indeed, she was certainly more cautious in her attribution than some who came after her who turned speculation into hard fact. Nonetheless, had Wharton consulted Vernon Lee about the terracottas rather than congratulate herself on her "discovery," she might have avoided her erroneous, if tentative, attribution. With her much greater knowledge of Tuscan art, Vernon Lee would surely have advised caution and more study of the San Vivaldo sculptures.

The Somerville correspondence shows that Edith Wharton valued Vernon Lee's opinion on her later work also. Although Edith Wharton writes to her in 1907: "I don't send you my 'opuses' as they are novels nowadays, & I know novels bore you," her letter of July 1928 thanks Vernon Lee for liking *Twilight Sleep* and asks her to read *The Children* due to appear later in the year: the dedication to that novel--"To my patient listeners at Sainte-Claire"--apparently included Vernon Lee. In her November 1928 letter Wharton explains:

I don't believe you really think I meant anything but what I said in my 'dedicace' of the "Children." But if you *don't* know the great figure you've been, in letters & friendship to me & many others, it's time you learnt it, & I'm proud to be your informant! So there.

The Children clearly met with Vernon Lee's approval. As Wharton writes in January 1929: "I am so glad you like 'The Children'--so far!" In May 1931 she writes: "Thank you for

what you say of 'The Children.'" Vernon Lee's final sentence in the 1933 letter reads: "write another the *Children* for the delectation of your old friend (on the shelf) Vernon."

In February 1926 Vernon Lee praises *The Writing of Fiction*: "Contrary to my prudent habit, I wanted to read your book before thanking you for it. . . . [T]he chapter which interests me most is the chapter on Proust." Her recent consecutive reading of him had increased her admiration and her repulsion and "made the problem he presents only the more mysterious." Lee advises: "I wish you with your novelist's *flair* would tackle that problem at greater length, and write with less *piety* for you evidently wrote under the influence of his death & the revelation of his invalidism." She agrees with Wharton's criticism of Proust's occasional lapses in moral sensibility and in probability, and compares Proust and Wagner.

Vernon Lee's profound understanding and knowledge of music was a "sanctuary" in which Wharton could not intrude.

Responding to Vernon Lee's final work, *Music and Her Lovers*, Edith Wharton admits to her "outsider" status as a "music lover":

It was chilling to realize not only that I was only a hearer, but *why* I was, & could never be more but must remain outside. . . . What fun to be inside, in the sanctuary, and how I envy you that gift! The other day, before leaving Paris, I heard the glorious Mozart Mass . . . & thought of all the beauties I was missing, while all the while I seemed to be literally drowned in them.

She continues in a sprightly fashion:

Well, if I cannot read your last book, you can't read mine either --so there!--& I get a sort of mean comfort in that thought. If you can't be interested in a young man [Vance] pursuing culture, why should I fawn on you for understanding thoroughbass [theory or science of harmony].

Despite Edith Wharton's hope expressed in her letter of January 1930--"I rather particularly want you to like *Hudson River Bracketed*"--Vernon Lee's approbation for this novel had not been forthcoming. *The Gods Arrive*, however, met with a warmer reception:

I have *enjoyed* much of your last book, Altho', as you know about its predecessor, I am constitutionally unable to take an interest in young people of genius tho' I enjoy their work sometimes--But I liked very much certain episodes; the Spanish one and the delicious supper after Fountainebleu.

Whereas Vernon Lee's last letter to Edith Wharton ends with a plea for another *The Children*, Wharton's final letter to Lee concludes with a desire that Lee write her life's story: "do your memoirs. They will be a hundred times better than mine, & a joy to us all--& to you in the doing." But Vernon Lee left instructions for her executrix: "I absolutely prohibit any biography of me. My life is my own and I leave that to nobody."

As her literary mentor, Vernon Lee inspired Edith Wharton with the spirit of Italy and provided her with much of the background for her writing about that country, a debt Wharton acknowledges. As a reading of their correspondence suggests, mutual admiration characterizes the relationship between these notable women of letters. On her side, Vernon Lee wistfully refers to Wharton's "novelist's *flair*." Lee's readers were always a small discerning band, one that has shrunk rather than grown over the years with changes in taste, education, and style of travel. Irene Cooper Willis considered that "she was too intellectual to be a good novelist, too indifferent to natural human instincts." By the end of her life Vernon Lee might well have envied Wharton's reputation as a novelist as much as Wharton had envied hers as an intellect, aesthetician, and talker when they first met in 1894.

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Rival Arts? Filming *The Age of Innocence*

by Brigitte Peucker

As a latecomer among the so-called "sister arts," film alludes to, absorbs, and undermines the language of the other arts in order to carve out a position for itself among them. Precariously placed between the arts of literature and painting, the space of film is in some ways problematic: as an amalgam of image and narrative, film is a heterogeneous medium, a hybrid that emerges out of traditionally sanctioned cultural forms. Film's struggle to carve out a territory for itself and its struggle for legitimacy have marked film from its beginnings and still mark many films today. In consequence, the intriguing issue of cinematic adaptation is most appropriately viewed against the backdrop of a broader approach to the interrelation of the arts in cinema, since it is that interrelation that determines film as a medium.¹

The conjoining of image and narrative is figured in Wharton as well: preoccupation with the visual is central to her writing. In *The Age of Innocence* as elsewhere, for example, Wharton frequently makes use of painting in order to delineate her characters. It tells us a great deal about the dashing Julius Beaufort that he "ha[s] the audacity to hang 'Love Victorious'"--a painting Wharton calls "the much-discussed nude of Bouguereau"--in his drawing room (23). It is telling, too, that the portrait executed of Mrs. Henry van der Luyden twenty years ago is still "a 'perfect likeness'" of this lady who, as Wharton puts it, "ha[s] been rather gruesomely preserved in the airless atmosphere of a perfectly irreproachable existence," entombed like the image of the portrait in a kind of "life-in-death" (52). And Newland Archer, one of Wharton's "collectors" and a man of sensibility, escapes from the strict decorum and from what he

takes to be the stifling lack of imagination of New York society into a world of literature and painting. Somewhat predictably, then, Newland falls in love with the Countess Olenska, *in part* because she represents the "decadent" European world of culture and also because, as her grandmother notes, she is a woman whose portrait has been painted nine times. For Newland, art is both the suppressed realm of the imagination and the erotic; it is not at all surprising, therefore, that he chooses the art museum as the setting of their tryst.

Film understood as a medium in which different representational systems--specifically those of painting and writing--at times collide, at times replace, but always *supplement* one another makes film a medium particularly congenial to the artistic concerns of Wharton, whose work not only manifests a pronounced interest in the visual, but whose mode of allusion so frequently involves the *multiple layering* of painterly and writerly references. As Cynthia Griffin Wolff has pointed out, for example, *The Age of Innocence* derives its title from the Reynolds portrait of that name and is connected by this means--"a private pun"--to James's *The Portrait of a Lady*, rendering Newland Archer the subject of Wharton's "Portrait of a Gentleman" (312). Candace Waid has allowed us to see that *The House of Mirth*, another novel that has recourse to a Reynolds portrait, alludes via Reynolds's painting both to Ariosto's story of Angelica and Medora and to the many other artists--Tiepolo among them--who have chosen to depict it (29). Both of these instances of intertextuality--and there are many similar moments in Wharton's writing--draw simultaneously upon

painting and literature, creating a textual overlay, a palimpsest of sorts, that is at once imagistic and verbal.

Any filmmaker who, in adapting a literary text to film, has done his or her homework carefully--and it seems to me that, whether one likes his film or not, Scorsese *has*--would certainly have noticed this method of layering representational systems in Wharton's work--precisely because it is this that makes adapting her work to film cinematically challenging, a working out of what it means to transpose one medium into another and, even more importantly, because this necessitates a conscious working-through of the relation of film to writing and painting. Indeed, the manner in which Scorsese addresses these concerns makes it quite evident that, in preparation for shooting *The Age of Innocence*, Scorsese had not only seen Philip Moeller's 1934 adaptation, but Eric Rohmer's *Marquise of O . . .*, another film that is notable for the manner in which it approaches a literary text suffused with references to the visual arts--the novella of that title by Heinrich von Kleist. The relation of the visual to the literary and their transumption by film is the central preoccupation of Rohmer's *Marquise*. And Rohmer, like other French New Wave directors a writer on film as well as a filmmaker, in his turn learned a great deal from the films of F. W. Murnau, a German art historian-turned-filmmaker of the 1920s, from whose work the French New Wave directors developed their theory of the filmmaker as auteur. Indeed, Rohmer himself wrote a book about Murnau that remains one of the most sustained meditations upon the relation of painting to cinema (see Rohmer, *L'organisation*).

But what does this have to do with Scorsese's adaptation of Wharton? By my next example, I'd like to suggest that it has a great deal to do with it. At one decisive moment in Wharton's novel--in Newport, after the honeymoon that marks his marriage to May Welland--Newland Archer is sent down to the water to fetch Ellen, the Countess Olenska, who is standing immobile near a "pagoda-like summerhouse" facing the bay (215). Newland pauses at a distance, contemplating Ellen as a spectator might view a sculpture, and decides that he will go to her only if she turns before a certain sailboat reaches Lime Rock. He will go to her only, that is, if her inanimate figure -- her body as "sculpture"--will, like Pygmalion's Galatea, magically come to life. (Pygmalion, the sculptor of classical antiquity, fell in love with his own work of art and, as Ovid tells us, took the sculpture of Galatea to bed with him.) But the moment in which Newland watches Ellen by the bay takes on an additional significance in Scorsese's film. In imitation of Wharton, Scorsese uses painting to evoke social position,

taste, and the historical moment that he is representing. But he uses it also to say something about his chosen medium of film as when, for instance, the camera sweeps across a long canvas--one of the landscapes that hang in Ellen's house--as though in imitation of a brushstroke, emphasizing by this means that film has the diegetic flexibility and the temporality that painting lacks. Predictably, then, when Scorsese approaches Newland's decisive moment in Newport, he makes it decisively and complexly cinematic.

Whereas Wharton tells the reader that the immobile Ellen is "gazing at a bay furrowed with the coming and going of sail-boats, yacht-launches, fishing-craft and trailing black coal-barges hauled by noisy tugs" (215), Scorsese radically reduces the movement in this scene to one: to the movement of a single sailboat--not out to sea, as in Wharton--but very slowly from right to left across the cinematic frame. In this scene, Scorsese's film is very pointedly quoting *Nosferatu*, Murnau's 1922 classic, a film known among film directors, scholars, and fans alike for its visual beauty. A hallmark of Murnau's visual style--pointed out by Alexandre Astruc, a French critic of the *Cahiers du Cinéma*--is a technique known as the "invasion of the frame," a technique by means of which a moving object is represented as slowly and deliberately entering an otherwise static cinematic frame (69-73). Imagine a large 19th-century sailboat ever so slowly entering the cinematic frame from right to left, a frame devoid of anything but a seemingly motionless sea and sky. The effect of this "invasion," then, is to call attention to the introduction of movement--and therefore narrative, story--into the stasis of painting.

As I mentioned earlier, Murnau was trained as an art historian and derived many of his images from painting. The one that we have been conjuring up, for instance, is based upon the coastal paintings of the German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich, one of Murnau's favorite sources. More pointedly than many filmmakers, Murnau calls attention to the manner in which film subsumes pictorial moments within the flow of its narrative. Although his carefully composed frames must of necessity give way to one another--since that is the nature of the medium--the tension between the static images of painting and film's capacity for animating these images is one of the motivating forces of Murnau's film. In *The Age of Innocence*, Scorsese's allusion to Murnau--mediated by Rohmer, no doubt--is not only an homage to an early filmmaker enshrined by the tradition, but comments also on film's indebtedness to the compositional practices of painting, while flaunting film's capacity for movement--and hence for storytelling. Very often in film, such moments present the medium of film as triumphing over

the other visual arts.

In Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence*, however, this scene takes on an additional significance. Not only does the image of the sailboat recall the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich, but the motionless figure of Ellen, her back to her spectators--to Newland and to the spectator of the film as well--is an example of Friedrich's famous *Rückenfigur*, a human figure in the act of looking, viewed from behind. At this moment in Scorsese's film, then, the figure of the woman is multiply encoded as a figure of art. At once (1) an enactment of a scene from a novel, (2) a reference to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, (3) a quotation of another scene in *Nosferatu* in which a woman sits motionless in a seaside graveyard, gazing out to sea, and (4) a cinematic allusion already a quotation of another Friedrich painting: all of these layered allusions, so much in the mode of Wharton's textual layering, are suddenly intensified as we realize that in this scene from Scorsese's film Michelle Pfeiffer is enacting a tableau vivant--an important point to which I'll return.

In this scene at the bay and elsewhere in his film, Scorsese consciously adapts Wharton's technique of layering one representational mode with another: he alludes to his precursors in the art of "painterly" film--to Murnau and to Rohmer--via the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich. At this point it will be useful to recall the manner in which, as Cynthia Griffin Wolff puts it, Wharton uses a "private pun" in order to allude to James's novel by way of Reynolds's painting (333). Wolff's suggestive phrase--the "private pun"--or what we might call, in allusion to *The House of Mirth* "the word which made all clear"--is of course, "portrait." Indeed, *The Age of Innocence* retains in its title a residual trace of the tableaux vivants so central to *The House of Mirth*. Once again the path to this awareness is through yet another text: this time it is *Vanity Fair*, in which a series of what Thackeray calls "charade-tableau[x]" is enacted in the picture gallery of Gaunt House (530). In Thackeray's novel, the "charade-tableau" is a form of visual representation -- helped along by music -- that uses the human body as a vehicle to spell out syllables of words. Here images, as one might put it, serve as riddles whose solution is verbal. This is precisely the nature of Lily Bart's tableau in *The House of Mirth*, a tableau vivant which, as Candace Wald has pointed out, dramatizes a painting whose subject is writing (27-31).

But Michelle Pfeiffer's tableau vivant in Scorsese's film is not only yet another sign of this director's involvement with Wharton's writing and its complicated conjunction of literature with painting. Film, too, has an abiding interest in tableau vivant, for tableau vivant moments in film--moments of arrested motion--remind us by contrast that the "motion

picture" is the first medium that is able to animate visual representation, that is able to make the painting "come to life." From the point of view of the human perceptual apparatus, it is motion that confers the impression of three-dimensionality upon the image. Tableau vivant moments in film set up a tension between the two- and three-dimensional, between stasis and movement, between the "death" of the human body in painting and its "life" in cinema.

Siegfried Kracauer, the noted film theorist, has contended that there are no films on the subject of art in which the camera is not featured (ix). And, indeed, flashy camerawork is everywhere apparent in Scorsese's film. Interestingly, it is Michael Ballhaus, Fassbinder's cameraman, who is Scorsese's cinematographer in *The Age of Innocence*. The German director Rainer Werner Fassbinder, also very much concerned with the conjunction of literature, painting, and theater, was a director in whose films artifice and formal arrangements can be understood as erotic display. The ostentatious movement of the camera in *The Age of Innocence*, so typical of films Ballhaus shot for Fassbinder, calls attention to itself, underlining the way in which the camera virtually generates space and gestures toward the three-dimensionality of that cinematic space in the process. Camera motion also affects our perception of the human body in film: in *The Age of Innocence*, the camera's striking mobility forms a pronounced contrast to the relative immobility of the characters as when, for instance, they are seated at table in shots that almost suggest tableaux vivants. At such times the camera zooms in and moves in circles, tracking around the actors as though to expose the painterly stasis in which they are entrapped.

But Ballhaus's prominent camerawork has yet another point of connection to Wharton. The credit sequence of Scorsese's film, with its operatic soundtrack and the repeated (erotic) image of an unfolding flower shot in time-lapse photography first opening, then finally going to seed, is followed by the first diegetic shot of the film, a close-up of a chrysanthemum. The camera then tracks back to reveal a bunch of chrysanthemums, part of the stage set of *Faust*. One of these flowers is plucked, and the camera draws back to reveal the garden scene with Gretchen holding the flower by means of which she will symbolically dismember--or deflower--herself. After this operatic "defloration," the camera, in what we discover to be an extreme close-up of Newland Archer's evening attire--the frame is black--pans to the left to focus on his boutonniere, on the white gardenia in his lapel. A few shots later, Newland's gaze through opera glasses (another famous cinematic citation, by the way²), followed by shots from his point of view, ally the camera with

Newland's gaze. This sequence of shots establishes Newland's gaze and the sensibility of the connoisseur and spectator as the determining sensibility of the camera. The shots that follow, of several other men looking through opera glasses--Larry Lefferts, arbiter of style in Wharton's novel, is the most prominent among them--confirm the conjunction of camera and opera glass in joint connoisseurship. Under such a gaze the woman as flower must ever be aestheticized and, like Gretchen and her model, Ophelia, consigned to death--if not to an actual death, then to a death in art.

Like the sequences from the Scorsese film I have discussed, Philip Moeller's 1934 film of *The Age of Innocence* simultaneously addresses concerns of Wharton's writing and of filmmaking, perhaps most clearly in the scene in the Metropolitan Museum. This scene begins in a room that contains a few classical sculptures of male and female nudes among which the Countess Olenska and Newland Archer walk; in this film too, there's a suggestion of Pygmalion and Galatea. Soon they enter the room containing the Egyptian collection, where they converse among Egyptian sculptures and encounter a mummy, labeled "A Woman Who Lived in Egypt." The label functions as an interesting diversion from the factuality of the female corpse and its "mummification," its preservation in art. In Egyptian culture, art and the preservation of the body go hand in hand: Egyptian art at once defies and is in complicity with death, expressing, as André Bazin has put it, "the mummy complex," or what Bazin has called the "psychological ambition" of all art to "embalm time" (9-11). By means of this setting, the 1934 version of the film addresses the issue implicit in the Galatea story and in tableau vivant, which may be read either as the "bringing to life" of painting, or as the "killing off" of the living body into the stasis of art. Again the fate of Lily Bart looms large. Her corpse, as Candace Waid has pointed out, is a still life, a tableau mort (38).

But in what sense is this scene in the Egyptian collection to be understood as specifically cinematic? On the one hand, it probably alludes to an early Hitchcock film, *Blackmail*, released in 1929, which includes an astonishing chase sequence through the Egyptian collection of the British Museum. *Blackmail* contains the first of several museum sequences in Hitchcock's films, many of which are concerned with precisely the issues which we have been discussing, with the delineation of film, narrative, and painting, and with the "killing off" of the female body into the aesthetic--*Vertigo* is a prime instance of this. On the other hand, it is important to understand that for early writers on film like Vachel Lindsay, film images are best understood as "hieroglyphics": Lindsay develops his notion of "photoplay-hieroglyphics" as analogous

to Egyptian picture-writing (362). The scene in the Egyptian collection, then--somewhat surprising to the spectator as it may be--serves as a reminder that film is indeed a "mixed medium," a form of "picture writing." Finally, as the term "picture writing" could reasonably serve as another metaphor for the simultaneously verbal and imagistic allusions in Wharton, a metaphor for what I earlier called the "multiple layering" of visual and verbal allusion, it seems a particularly resonant choice. Paradoxically, in this scene "hieroglyph" is "the word which makes all clear."

I will conclude by briefly recalling to mind the scene at the end of Scorsese's film, the moment at which the golden light shining on the Countess's window in Paris recalls Newland Archer's "decisive moment" at Newport to his memory. Wharton tells her readers that for Newland "by some queer process of association, that golden light became for him the pervading illumination in which she lived" (359).

Wharton's readers recognize that light as the auratic glow of the aesthetic. This moment in Paris serves as Wharton's private tribute to James (Wolff 333-34). But in his film Scorsese elaborates on this moment to play once again on the painterly quality of his earlier, multivalent scene. When, this time, in Pygmalion-like fashion, Newland Archer succeeds in making his Galatea come to life--she turns, if only briefly, in his imagination--we realize that at this moment, for Scorsese, film has triumphed over painting by means of its capacity for movement and the representation of life.

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Notes

¹ I have addressed this issue at greater length in *Incorporating Images: Film and the Rival Arts* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995).

² Most notably it occurs in Fritz Lang's first *Dr. Mabuse* film, but it is more generally a self-conscious reference to another lens, that of the camera.

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Refracting the Odyssey: Edith Wharton's Travel Writing as the Cultural Capital of Her Fiction

by Sarah Bird Wright

Writing about his own literary career in 1912, William Dean Howells remarked, "We were all travelers before we were novelers"; his comment also applies to the aesthetic journey of his fellow writer Edith Wharton.¹ She too was first a traveler, and her actual journeys enabled her to develop, in her travel texts, the persona of the connoisseur. This persona drives her fiction as well as her travel writing, the latter a means of establishing the cultural voice which is embodied most powerfully in her fiction. There is a correlation, as Howells suggests, between the act of traveling, entailing as it does the gathering of experiences, and the writing of fiction. In Wharton's case, this connection was repeatedly reinforced; her travels were re-enacted as she wrote about them, and the cumulative "cultural capital" they produced became a constant resource for her fiction. Wharton's works of travel are marked by what Pierre Bourdieu terms cultural "competence."² They manifest not only a thorough knowledge of art and architecture, but also an ability to juxtapose these visible forms against a complex narrative background of mythology, history, and literature. Her cultural competence, or taste, allows her to integrate the intellectual and imaginative approaches to travel, the quality most desired by her audience.

The connoisseurship Wharton develops in the course of her actual travels is articulated in each of her works of non-fiction, beginning with her first book, *The Decoration of Houses*.³ In this joint effort with the architect Ogden Codman, she establishes a hierarchy of taste conforming to Bourdieu's theory that aesthetic values are a form of cultural capital. Addressing the deficiencies of bourgeois American

standards of house design and ornamentation, Wharton constructs, from a European point of view, what she believed was missing in America. In crucial ways, she later seems to take her own advice as she devises domestic settings in her fiction. In *Italian Villas and Their Gardens*, Wharton not only offers a scholarly account of the gardens and, to a lesser extent, the villas, but also evokes the leisured and cultivated lives that take place within these structures as an example of the practice of "taste"; such vignettes presage her invention of gardens and landscape as well as her practice of constructing characters through their houses and gardens. In *Italian Backgrounds* Wharton is both scholar and art historian, giving an account of her reattribution of the terra-cottas at the monastery of San Vivaldo to Giovanni della Robbia.⁴ Here she is also a wide-ranging connoisseur, bringing an extensive aesthetic and intellectual background to her travels and scanning her memory for paintings conforming to the visual landscape before her in an act of what John Frow calls "recontextualization." Writing of the "new discipline of connoisseurship for the eye" that arose in the course of the nineteenth century, Frow describes a world centered on the "cultivation and display of 'taste.'"⁵ As he explains, the act of "recontextualization" integrates the memory of paintings and the actual "picturesque" landscape. Wharton goes on to weave the images thus formed into her fictional settings. She is the "divine amateur," as Blake Nevius suggests,⁶ an observant traveler, fixing mental images of lakes, ruins, paintings, sculptures, terraced islands, frescoes, courtyards, and buildings that will later figure in her fiction.

The ligatures between Wharton's French travel texts

and her fiction are also insistent. *A Motor-Flight Through France*, coinciding with the early years of her gradual relocation to France, is distinguished by what she terms the "bon mouvement of the imagination" (MFF 151), when she posits interpretive structures (quasi-fictional or dramatic vignettes) to "restore an atmosphere" to a church, a theater, a lake, a painting. *Fighting France, from Dunkerque to Belfort*, a volume of essays written about her journeys to the front during World War I, evokes what she later recalled as "the terrible and interminable epic of France's long defense" (BG 351). Price observes that she wrote it "with an eye for . . . Tolstoyean detail amid the sweep of battle."⁷ Wharton mourns the loss of the "thousand and one bits of the past that give meaning and continuity to the present" (FFD 58), placing a premium on material culture in both fiction and non-fiction. Wharton's post-war volume of essays, *French Ways and Their Meaning*, underlies her fictional portrayals of France during the Belle Époque and World War I. Written to interpret France to American servicemen stationed overseas after the war, the book was ordered for all ships' libraries by the Department of the Navy. Here Wharton attempts to resolve the superficial misunderstandings her compatriots had experienced in the trenches and villages of France by illuminating the enduring mores and philosophical outlook of the French.

Within these works of travel there are recurrent motifs, or, to use Foucault's term, "discursive formations."⁸ These formations, or "thematic utterances," also serve as useful avenues for examining Wharton's fiction: descriptions of art and artifacts; observations about gardens, flowers, and landscape; allusions to pageantry, masquerade, and theater; and references to historical or mythological events and personages. These thematic utterances are staples of many of her novels, particularly *The Valley of Decision*, *The House of Mirth*, *The Custom of the Country*, and *A Son at the Front*, in addition to the novella *False Dawn*.⁹ In the aggregate, these motifs or governing statements make up the "cultural portraiture," to borrow a phrase used by Janet Goodwyn,¹⁰ that is an enduring component of Wharton's travel writing and her fiction.

As Mary Suzanne Schriber has observed, "Wharton's travel books can reasonably be understood as a kind of fiction." After a journey, Schriber suggests, Wharton would gather her recollections, "fabricate a narrator, introduce suspense, and generate drama through metaphors and personifications."¹¹ At the same time, it may be argued that her fiction can be considered a form of travel and that Wharton frequently intended to convert her actual travels into fictional settings. On her 1906 "motor-flight" through

France, for example, she noted that the small town of Étampes, near Fontainebleau, was "featureless and disappointing; yet, for that very reason, so typical of the average French country town--dry, compact, unsentimental, as if avariciously hoarding a long rich past--that its one straight grey street and squat old church will hereafter always serve for the *ville de province* background in my staging of French fiction" (MFF 33). In her extensive travels, especially the motor-car "flights" that allowed her to skim through more towns and countryside than her former journeys by diligence or train had permitted, Wharton clearly regarded the places she saw even briefly as a provisional archive, a storehouse, for her fiction.

Wharton's first novel, *The Valley of Decision*, may be seen as an extended illustration of the intersection of her actual travels, travel writings, and fiction. She recalls in *A Backward Glance* being worried that this work was not "in any sense of the term a novel at all, but only a romantic chronicle, unrolling its episodes like the frescoed legends on the palace walls which formed its background." She seems to have feared intellectual itineracy, doubting whether she would ever have enough "constructive power" to create anything beyond "isolated character studies."¹² In its depiction of landscape, Italian architecture, and interior furnishings and paintings, Wharton's first novel reflects the cultural capital gleaned from her actual travels and from her journeys taken in the texts of Goethe, Goldoni, Arthur Young, and others. Wharton weaves a tapestry of art, pageantry, landscape, and history establishing a close intersection with her travel books that would not be equalled until the juncture of *Fighting France* and *A Son at the Front*.

The *commedia dell'arte*, which might be called the verbal analogue of the Baroque, is an enduring trope in Wharton's fiction and non-fiction. This is the "comedy of skill," the peripatetic Italian theater of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries based in part on improvisation and incorporating such famous stock characters as Arlecchino (or Harlequin), Brighella, Columbine, and Pantalone. The *commedia* is an important element in the setting, plot, and characterization of *The Valley of Decision*. One reviewer termed the late-eighteenth-century Italy depicted in the novel a "glittering, many-colored pageant," with "powdered gentlemen, rouged ladies, abbés, friars, French hair-dressers, Columbine and Scaramouch, gilt coaches, levers, vapors, pet monkeys and turbaned blackamoors to mind them."¹³ Sufficient vestiges of this Italy lingered during Wharton's annual visits there in the late nineteenth century to permeate her imagination and make the world of the *commedia* an important element within the

novel. For instance, she imagines a performance in Vercelli marked by an "inexhaustible flow of jest and repartee . . . with which the comedians caught up each other's leads, like dancers whirling without a false step through the mazes of some rapid contra-dance" (VD 200-01). A similar passage occurs in *Italian Backgrounds*, where she spins a fanciful vision of a long-ago *commedia* performance in the now dusty and shabby Farnese Theater at Parma in which "Isabel and Harlequin and the Capitan Spavento . . . build on the scaffolding of some familiar intrigue the airy superstructure of their wit" (IB 122-23). Such visionary theater goes beyond feigning to fictional invention, the improvisatory dialogue a catalyst for shaping the contours of the characters.

Two fictive travel narratives are embedded within *The Valley of Decision*, suggesting the prominence of this type of writing as part of the method and impetus for her development as a novelist. One is the youthful odyssey of Odo Valsecca through the imaginary duchy of Pianura to which he is heir presumptive. His tour educates him in connoisseurship as well as in politics and economics. As a boy, Odo first encounters his early tutor, Cantapresto, on the road with a troupe of *commedia dell'arte* players near his grandfather's castle. Later he keeps intersecting with them at Chivasso, Vercelli, and at a villa on the Brenta Riviera, becoming fascinated with the actress Mirandolina of Chioggia, who plays Columbine. Some critics found Cantapresto and Mirandolina more convincing as characters than the many literary, royal, and political personages who people the book.

Wharton also gives priority to the art and architecture of the Baroque in the novel as she had in *Italian Backgrounds*. In that work she describes the Baroque as a "style *de parade*" which values emancipation from convention over studied decorum. In defending the Baroque, Wharton counters Ruskin's objection that its devotees took liberties with classical principles, crowding elements one on top of another and violating the traditions of antiquity. Instead, she sees the Baroque as the "spectacular and external life which had developed from the more secluded civilization of the Renaissance as some blossom of immense size and dazzling colour may develop in the atmosphere of the forcing-house from a smaller and more delicate flower" (IB 184-85). In *Italian Backgrounds* and *Italian Villas and Their Gardens* she praises the intricate friezes of dancing angels and wistful *putti* in Baroque churches; the "mossy urns," the elaborate fountains, and grottoes in the gardens of Italian villas; and the revels of "demi-gods" in the paintings and frescoes of Tiepolo, Luini, and Michelozzo. In *The Valley of Decision* the "external" life of the Baroque is enacted: all

emotion is open and explored, even to fantastic excess, as in some fountain sculptures and ceiling frescoes. Here, fictions supplant actuality, yet they have a truth rooted in existing works of art.

The Valley of Decision extends the travel text into new realms. In an act of "recontextualization," Wharton calls into being imaginary artists and envisions sublime paintings by known artists that never existed. One example is the *trompe l'oeil* ceiling frescoes, purportedly by Tiepolo, of Olympian revels in a villa on the Brenta Riviera. This is the canal/river connecting Venice and Padua, lined with manor houses where the aristocracy once repaired for the *villeggiatura* [vacation] season. There are "figures of fauns, bacchantes, nereids and tritons, hovered over by a cloud of *amorini* blown like rose-leaves across a rosy sky, while in the centre of the dome Apollo burst in his chariot through the mists of dawn escorted by a fantastic procession of the human races" (VD 392). This passage recalls Wharton's praise of such frescoes in *The Decoration of Houses* as "the most beautiful" of all forms of ceiling adornment, from the "broad Virgilian landscapes of the Carracci" to "the piled-up perspectives of Giordano's school of prestidigitators, culminating in the great Tiepolo" (DH 97). In *Italian Backgrounds*, Wharton describes several actual frescoes of Tiepolo, including one in the Church of the Scalzi at Venice, where angels whisk along the Holy House of the Virgin of Loreto "with a vehemence which makes it seem a mere feather in the rush of their flight." In *The Valley of Decision* she adapts the more secular features of Tiepolo's known works to the imaginary frescoes, thus satisfying the requirements of her fictional setting. She was familiar with that setting because of her actual Italian travels, particularly the excursions undertaken in 1903 to the villas described in *Italian Villas and Their Gardens*. In that work she mentions the "charming pleasure-houses" lining the shores of the Brenta from Strà to Fusina (IV 245). The novel thus borrows from and animates the rich store of cultural capital first established in *The Decoration of Houses* and more fully expressed in her two Italian travel texts.

The second travel narrative in *The Valley of Decision* is an interpolation, after Odo Valsecca becomes Duke of Pianura, purporting to be an unpublished fragment from the diary of the Englishman Arthur Young, agricultural theorist and travel writer. "Young" presents an assessment of economic conditions in Italy in the light of his earlier study of French agriculture and politics. Skillfully incorporated in the text, the parodic fragment mocks "Young"'s preoccupation with agronomy and the discomforts of travel on which he focuses at the expense of aesthetic concerns. He describes his

journey from Mantua to Pianura:

From MR. ARTHUR YOUNG'S
*Diary of his Travels in
Italy in the Year 1789.*

October 1st. Having agreed with a *vetturino* to carry me to Pianura, set out this morning from Mantua. The country mostly arable, with rows of elm and maple pollard. Dined at Casal Maggiore, in an infamous filthy inn. . . . (VD 544-58)

In his *Travels in France and Italy* the actual Arthur Young gives a similar account of his journey from Piacenza:

11th . . . Having agreed with a *vetturino* to take me to Turin, and he not being able to procure another passenger, I went alone to Firenzola. . . . Sleep at Castel St. Giovanne. . . . Dine at Vogara, in a room in which the chimney does not smoke; which ought to be noted, as it is the only one free from it since I left Bologna.¹⁴

Only the practical inconveniences of travel concern Wharton's "Young." He is portrayed as bargaining for carriages and suffering in inferior inns. To him landscape is never more than "arable"; to associate the scenery with paintings by Giorgione or Rosa, in the act of "recontextualization" Frow describes, would be entirely alien to his perception. Wharton's "Young" goes even further in renouncing art, stoutly defending his decision to inspect the estates of the Marchioness of Boscofolto rather than tour her art collection. "For what," he inquires, "are the masterpieces of Raphael or Cleomenes to the sight of a good turnip field or of a well-kept dairy?" Wharton's parody of the diary sets up a dialectic between Odo as connoisseur, now educated by his prolonged travels, and the practical Englishman Young, obsessed with agricultural conditions and his physical needs: food, shelter, and the circumstances necessary to provide them. There is a multiplicity of discourse, in that Young is also an actual person whose diary is fabricated, just as Tiepolo is a known painter whose works are invented. The imaginary paintings and the interpolated diary fragments are quasi-historical narrative extensions lending authenticity to the novel.

In presenting "Young," Wharton not only juxtaposes the connoisseur and the Philistine, but also gives priority to her own vision of travel, a vision inevitably bonded to art, as opposed to the form of travel espoused by her parents and their friends in the earlier decades of the nineteenth century. In *A Backward Glance*, she observes that, before Ruskin, few

well-educated tourists knew how to "observe and enjoy" during the course of their travels; "the intellectual few, at the end of the eighteenth century, had been taught by Arthur Young to travel with an eye to agriculture and geology" (BG 63). Many of them were, perhaps, like her father, George Frederic Jones. Although he gave her Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice*, Wharton later recalled him, on their last journey to Europe, as having "a vague enjoyment in 'sight-seeing,' unaccompanied by any artistic or intellectual curiosity, or any sense of the relations of things to each other."¹⁵

Wharton's anxiety as to whether she would ever have enough "constructive power to achieve anything beyond isolated character studies" was answered affirmatively in *The House of Mirth*, where Lily Bart is prized not only for her beauty, but also for her discrimination and ability to perform as connoisseur. The *tableaux vivants* serve to refract Lily and to establish her, publicly, as the embodiment of taste. Wharton states that such *tableaux* are "waxworks" only to "unfurnished minds." To those who are sufficiently enlightened aesthetically, these sights offer glimpses of what Wharton terms "the boundary world between fact and imagination" (HM 140). This passage echoes her description of the Lake of Iseo in *Italian Backgrounds*, in which the trope of the *commedia dell'arte* figures. Imagining the villages along the shore as the stage-set of "some comedy in the Bergamasque dialect, with Harlequin in striped cloak, and Brighella in conical hat and wide green and white trousers," Wharton writes: ". . . if ever the boundaries between fact and fancy waver, it may well be under the spell of the Italian midsummer madness" (IB 34-35). Here she constructs an aesthetic epiphany, a region where art and life coalesce; she then fixes and embellishes that region with her own fictional divagations.

Wharton's knowledge of paintings, gleaned from her travels and articulated in her travel books based on Italy, serves to provide a "furnished" mind for Lily. In selecting her subject for the *tableau*, Lily considers many well-known paintings, including Tiepolo's *Cleopatra*, before deciding to portray Reynolds's *Mrs. Lloyd*. When she appears in the *tableau*, Lily is seen by several of the men who are guests as a potential artifact, in part because of her sophistication about art and literature. The collecting of artifacts plays a vital part in the novel, especially for those who are at varying stages on the path to connoisseurship. Simon Rosedale does not yet have the absorbing passion of Percy Gryce, who is preoccupied with the Gryce collection of Americana, for a narrow field. Percy Gryce finally lacks the wider sensibility of Lawrence Selden, who collects good editions which are still valued for their words and collected to read. Although

Lily begins by being highly collectible herself, at the end of the novel, she has withered as an artifact. Rosedale finds her in a boarding house, surveying in disgust the "peacock blue parlour, . . . bunches of dried pampas grass, and discoloured steel engravings of sentimental episodes." He lays his hat "distrustfully on the dusty console adorned with a Rogers statuette" (HM 313). Such a statuette is an emblem of cheap sentimentality, part of what Wharton terms, in *The Decoration of Houses*, the "debasement of bibelots" caused by "the substitution of machine for hand-work" (DH 191). In describing the boarding house, Wharton presents explicit examples of the inferior taste she sought to correct in *The Decoration of Houses*.

In *The Custom of the Country*, written a few years after *A Motor-Flight Through France* and after her decision to settle in France, Wharton uses the provenance of material artifacts, as well as the land itself, to point up the flawed grasp of European civilization in the New World. Culturally incompetent and lacking taste, Undine Spragg not only crassly attempts to sell the Boucher tapestries presented by Louis XV to the family of her third husband, Raymond de Chelles, but she even suggests disposing of the family chateau itself. At this suggestion her husband's face changes as if "a deadly solvent had suddenly decomposed its familiar lines," and he responds, "Ah, you don't understand" (CC 297). The French passion for its native cultural capital underlies much of *A Motor-Flight Through France*, *French Ways and Their Meaning*, and *Fighting France, from Dunkerque to Belfort*, as well as *The Custom of the Country*. That capital also includes a respect for the land. In *Motor-Flight*, Wharton describes France as a place "where agriculture has mated with poetry . . . [and] each blade of grass . . . is there by an old feudal right which has long since dispossessed the worthless aboriginal weed" (MF 5). What makes life "decent and honourable" for the French is the cherished legacy of material artifacts, dwellings, and the land itself. French civilization, as Wharton expresses it in *French Ways and Their Meaning*, "extends to the whole of life" and is an education that "forms speech, forms manners, forms taste, forms ideals, and above all forms judgment" (FWM 113). In *The Custom of the Country*, a paradigm of that civilization is constructed, then thrown into relief by Undine's debasement of it.

Like *The Custom of the Country*, Wharton's 1924 novella *False Dawn*, set in the New York of the 1840s, points up the inadequacy of the American hierarchy of taste. Halston Raycie, a self-satisfied man of wealth, has obliterated his family's historic settler's cottage, once Benedict Arnold's headquarters. In an exercise of Frow's "recontextualization," he has proudly replaced it with the "'Tuscan Villa'" from

Downing's "'Landscape Gardening in America'" (FD 6).¹⁶ The "majestic stone-coloured dwelling" with its specimen "weeping beech" on the lawn overlooking Long Island Sound represents two serious blunders on the part of Raycie. His generic villa is disconnected from its native landscape and his specimen tree is of English, not Italian, derivation. In *Italian Villas and Their Gardens*, Wharton chastises Americans who fail to understand that the Italian villa, garden, and topographic setting are interrelated. Successful emulation depends on comprehending the "spirit" and not the "letter" of Italy (IV 12). The specimen beech and the lawn do not reflect Italy but derive from an English horticultural blight:

Many indeed are the parterres and terraces which have disappeared before the Britannic craving for a lawn, many the olive-orchards and vineyards which must have given way to the thinly dotted "specimen trees" so dear to the English landscape-gardener, who is still . . . the slave of his famous eighteenth-century predecessors, Repton and "Capability Brown." (IV 21)

While Wharton condemns Raycie for his cultural incompetence, Downing is equally culpable, having written a volume that has exploited Americans' affection for Italy and encouraged the importation of villa designs to less than appropriate settings.

Wharton's depiction of Raycie derives not only from the connoisseurship conferred by her extensive Italian travels, but also from her thorough understanding of his social class, in which the idea of philanthropy had achieved a certain status. Hoping to insure posthumous fame by founding an "heirloom gallery" of large-scale religious and secular masterpieces, Raycie sends his son Lewis to Italy, instructing him carefully: "'Raphael, I fear, we can hardly aspire to; but a Domenichino, an Albano, a Carlo Dolci . . ., one or two of Salvator Rosa's noble landscapes . . .'" (FD 53). On a Swiss mountaintop, Lewis meets the young John Ruskin, who is on a sketching expedition. As a result, he experiences an aesthetic epiphany. Ruskin recognizes the gifts of the connoisseur and surmises that Lewis is "'one of the privileged beings to whom the seeing eye has been given'" (FD 70). When they dine together, Lewis perceives that Ruskin's "world of associations and references" is far richer than his own as Ruskin transforms each of his hesitant comments into a "many-faceted crystal flashing with unexpected fires" (FD 73). In *The Valley of Decision*, Wharton fabricates the ceiling of Tiepolo and the entries from the travel journal of Arthur Young to lend credence to her connoisseurship.

Similarly, in *False Dawn* she fortifies her aesthetic theories by depicting the historical Ruskin's travels and conversation.

Falling under Ruskin's influence, Lewis comes to prefer the Italian primitives of Piero della Francesca and Giotto di Bondone to the work of such minor painters as Lo Spagnoletto of the Neapolitan School and the Florentine painter Carlo Dolci. As *False Dawn* suggests, the young American's eyes are "opened to a new world of art" and his excitement has "something of the apostle's ecstasy" (FD 78-79). He believes it his mission to reveal that world to others, and proudly collects little-known Italian primitives rather than those his father has proposed. When the paintings are unpacked in America, the elder Mr. Raycie is enraged and abandons the idea of the Heirloom Gallery while Lewis and his devoted wife, Beatrice ("Treeshy"), toil the remainder of their lives soliciting visitors for their own small gallery of unappreciated primitives. The cultural "capital" Lewis has accumulated in Europe yields few dividends during his lifetime. In writing that Ruskin attributed the trait of the "seeing eye" to Lewis Raycie, encouraging him to trust his own discriminating vision, Wharton recalls her characterization of the French people in *French Ways and Their Meaning*, where she terms the "seeing eye" the "first requisite" of taste (FWM 52).

The plot of *False Dawn* re-enacts, to a certain extent, the efforts of the American James Jackson Jarves to persuade his countrymen to appreciate early Italian art. Jarves also embarked on a pedagogical Grand Tour of Europe, bought works of art for wealthy Americans, and became a collector of previously neglected Italian paintings of the thirteenth through the sixteenth centuries, only to find them unappreciated by his fellow countrymen. He tried in vain to sell the collection to the Boston Athenaeum. In 1871, 119 of the early paintings were finally sold to Yale College for \$22,000.¹⁷

In *False Dawn* there seems to be a curious repudiation of the anti-Gothic stance Wharton takes in *Italian Backgrounds*. In that work she endorses the Baroque and disagrees with many of Ruskin's theories. One explanation may be that, in the person of Lewis Raycie, Wharton almost re-enacts her own youth, when she became an ardent disciple of Ruskin's. In "Life and I," she states,

And then I came upon Ruskin! His wonderful cloudy pages gave me back the image of the beautiful Europe I had lost, and woke in me the habit of precise visual observation. The ethical and aesthetic *fatras* [jumble] were easily enough got rid of later, and as an interpreter of visual

impressions he did me incomparable service.¹⁸

Throughout her life she valued Ruskin's legacy of precise visual observation, but not his notion that art and morality were inevitably linked. Indeed, this dogma may have been among the *fatras* she disavowed. The plot of *False Dawn* forced Wharton to reinvent the Ruskin who had first awakened her nascent connoisseurship and helped her discover her privileged possession of the "seeing eye." She later came to approve of several painters on the senior Mr. Raycie's list, but not at the expense of disregarding Giotto and Piero della Francesca. Ruskin taught her how to see, yet with her vision Wharton came to value the fantastic lushness of the bloom of the Baroque. Even though she came to denounce many of his tenets, *False Dawn* is a text which allows Wharton to acknowledge her genuine and lifelong debt to Ruskin. Moreover, this novella is a pivotal work in its sustained exploration of the values and perils of connoisseurship, a theme playing as important a role within her fiction as her non-fiction.

The subject of art, as one of Foucault's "discursive formations," was intrinsic to Wharton's fiction as well as non-fiction. It has an important role in her 1923 novel *A Son at the Front*. This work and *Fighting France, from Dunkerque to Belfort* are the most closely related of any of Wharton's fiction/travel pairs, even more consonant in tone, subject matter, and rhetorical attributes than, for instance, *The Valley of Decision* and *Italian Villas and Their Gardens* or *Italian Backgrounds*. Both works deal with the monstrosity of World War I, the novel on an individual scale and *Fighting France* on a wider plane of horror. In her documentary report of her travels to the front, Wharton depicts the ravaged landscape and "murdered houses" in whose "exposed interiors the poor little household gods shiver and blink like owls surprised in a hollow tree. . . . Whiskered photographs fade on morning-glory wallpapers, [and] plaster saints pine under glass bells" (FFD 153). In this sympathetic rendering of eviscerated interiors, Wharton seems a mature, humanitarian writer very different from the didactic young critic who, in *The Decoration of Houses*, despised the "flat meanderings of wall-paper patterns" and tawdry bric-à-brac. In *Fighting France*, both humble domestic artifacts and major treasures, such as sculptures and paintings, serve—even in scenes of their destruction—as radiant testaments to the finest aesthetic instincts and to the domestic tranquility that once prevailed in France.

In *A Son at the Front* art has a somewhat different function. The plot turns on the efforts of an American portrait painter, John Campton, long a resident of Paris, his

ex-wife Julia, and her millionaire husband, Anderson Brant, to secure safe duty for John and Julia's son George, to whom Brant is equally devoted. Born in France, George is actually subject to mobilization and secretly determined to fight at the Front. All of the parental figures conspire in vain to save him, despite Campton's jealousy of the mutual affection between George and his stepfather. Campton has painted a portrait of George but donated it to the Luxembourg Museum rather than allow Brant to buy it. In the novel, works of art are not the much-mourned casualties of war they are in *Fighting France*. Here art endures but the power of aesthetic objects is somehow warped: they have the power to fracture relationships, to generate misunderstandings, and to perpetuate hate. Campton's portrait of George, and his early sketch for it, become commodities in the tangled web of war relief societies; they are bartered, sold, and withheld for both favors and cash.

During the war, Campton is unable to paint because he believes the present world is one in which art has "lost its meaning" (*SF* 128). When a wounded soldier, René Davril, a promising young Cubist painter, admires his work, he signs a "half-finished study" for the portrait of his son George and sends it to him. This incomplete work of art results in much difficulty after Davril's death, finally being returned to Campton by the dead artist's family. He then offers it to a picture-broker for auction, the proceeds to be donated to "The Friends of French Art" for the Davril family's benefit. The family again rejects assistance but asks that the proceeds be used to provide employment for families of fallen artists. At first keeping himself detached from the war, Campton reverses his position and immerses himself in war work, horrified at the "incalculable sum of gifts and virtues" required to make up the daily meal of the "monster," the war (*SF* 150). The study is an offering to appease the "monster," while the portrait itself is used by Campton as a weapon against Brant. After George is killed, the inconsolable Campton is finally approached by George's friend Boylston to design a monument for his son.¹⁹ The grieving father nearly refuses, knowing how much comfort it would give Brant to spend a large sum for it, but he finally agrees to do so. Instructing Boylston not to let Brant "come here and thank me--at least not for a long time!" (*SF* 425), Campton pulls out his old sketches of George; as the novel ends, he begins his last act of portraiture, one that is still divisive rather than restorative.

It seems fair to say that the deepest foundations for Wharton's novels and many of her short stories lie in the "discursive formations" or "thematic utterances" that reside in her travel texts. Art and artifacts are metaphors that not only

construct the interior settings but also define the liminal biases and proclivities of her characters. In many ways, landscape and gardens, and their mode of husbandry in Italy and France, reflect her concept of *patria* and indirectly justify her own expatriation. Wharton's cultural portraiture, in her fiction as well as non-fiction, is framed by her knowledge of the past and her profound grasp of literature. Spectacle and theater assume an essential role in her fiction, tantamount to an Attic chorus enacting small rituals that increase in dimension and significance.

The full scope of Wharton's connoisseurship, arguably the lens shedding the most light on her art and achievement, is only clear when her travel texts, including *The Decoration of Houses*, are compared with her fiction. Her travel writings are not only a product of her own biography, but an autobiographical culmination of the identity she most valued.

More alchemist than reporter, Wharton is the connoisseur whose wide comprehension of art, literature, and history yokes disparate fields together. She is both the scholar whose precise knowledge confers authority and the traveler whose curiosity first turns and prepares the fallow ground of idle reflection. Through her travel writing, Wharton emerges as the "divine" amateur whose empirical observations are flavored with whimsy yet rooted in lucid reasoning. Wharton, like Howells, was a "traveler" before becoming a "noveler," her literal journeys shaping the fictional terrain of the "Land of Letters" in whose citizenship she gloried (*BG* 119).

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Notes

1. Howells's remark occurs in an essay describing his relationship with the House of Harper and is quoted in Joseph Henry Harper, *The House of Harper: A Century of Publishing in Franklin Square* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1912), 325-26.
2. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 66.
3. The works of travel discussed are *The Decoration of Houses*, with Ogden Codman (New York: Scribner's, 1897), cited in text as *DH*; *Italian Villas and Their Gardens* (New York: Century, 1904), cited in text as *IV*; *Italian Backgrounds* (New York: Scribner's, 1905), cited in text as *IB*; *A Motor-Flight Through France* (New York: Scribner's, 1908), cited in text as *MFF*; *Fighting France, from Dunkerque to Belfort* (New York: Scribner's, 1915), cited in

- text as *FFD*; and *French Ways and Their Meaning* (New York: Appleton, 1919), cited in text as *FWM*. Wharton's autobiography, *A Backward Glance* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), is cited as *BG*.
4. In 1893, the Whartons visited the monastery of San Vivaldo, Italy, in order to see some terra-cotta statues of which she had heard. Wharton recalled seeing similar terracottas in Florence and came to believe they were the work of Giovanni della Robbia and not the seventeenth-century artist Giovanni Gonnelli. She had them photographed and her intuition was verified at the time, although art historians are now more cautious, holding only that the style of the groups Wharton identified is similar to that of della Robbia. Eleanor Dwight gives a useful overview of the scholarship succeeding Wharton's reattribution of the statues (*Edith Wharton: An Extraordinary Life* [New York: Henry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1994], 284).
 5. John Frow, "Tourism and the Semiotics of Nostalgia," *October*, 57 (Summer 1991), 143-44.
 6. Blake Nevis, *Edith Wharton: A Study of Her Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953), 22.
 7. Alan Price, *The End of the Age of Innocence: Edith Wharton and the First World War* (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), 45.
 8. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Random House/Pantheon, 1972), 145-47.
 9. The works of fiction discussed are *The Valley of Decision* (New York: Scribner's, 1902), cited in text as *VD*; *The House of Mirth* (first published by Charles Scribner, 1905; edition cited in text is Random House, Vintage Books, Library of America Edition, 1990), abbreviated as *HM*; *The Custom of the Country* (first published by Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913; edition cited in text is Penguin, 1987), abbreviated as *CC*; *A Son at the Front* (New York: Scribner's, 1923), cited in text as *SFF*; and *False Dawn* (New York: Appleton, 1924), cited in text as *FD*.
 10. *Edith Wharton: Traveller in the Land of Letters* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1990), 3.
 11. "Edith Wharton and Travel Writing as Self-Discovery," *American Literature*, 59 (May 1987), 261.
 12. *A Backward Glance* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1934), 205; cited in text as *BG*.
 13. Gertrude Hall, "One of the Unconquerable Army," *Book Buyer*, 24 (April 1902), 196; rpt. in *Edith Wharton: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. James W. Tuttleton et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
 14. Arthur Young, *Travels in France and Italy* (London: Everyman's Library, J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1915; rpt. 1976), 295-96. Young's journey through France and into Italy took place in 1789.
 15. "Life and I," *Edith Wharton: Novellas and Other Writings*, ed. Cynthia Griffin Wolff (New York: Library of America, 1990), 1096.
 16. Andrew Jackson Downing, a horticulturist and landscape architect from Newburgh, New York, influenced American taste of the mid-nineteenth century by designing homes in the "Italian villa" style, which Ralph Adams Cram later attacked as "very white and much balconied." His books included *Landscape Gardening in America* and *The Architecture of Country Houses* (Russell Lynes, *The Tastemakers* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949], 21-29).
 17. The lamentable story of the failure of the Athenaeum to acquire the paintings was in all probability known to Wharton, since her friend Charles Eliot Norton was among the trustees of that institution who, in 1859, contributed \$5,000 toward the purchase of the Jarves Gallery and urged other donors to subscribe sufficient funds "to obtain a gallery of paintings which will be of permanent value, and which in its kind will be unrivalled in America." Since the funds were not subscribed, the project was suspended. (James Jackson Jarves, *The Art-Idea*, ed. Benjamin Rowland, Jr. [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960], 13).
 18. "Life and I," 1084.
 19. The novel is dedicated to the memory of the young American painter Ronald Simmons. Excluded from active service by a weak heart, he assisted with her war relief work, but died of pneumonia. As another "wreath" on Simmons' grave, she depicted him as Boylston (R.W.B. Lewis, *Edith Wharton: A Biography* [New York: Harper & Row, 1975], 457).

Letter to the Editor

To the Editors:

As a postscript to my article, "Edith Wharton on Film and Television: A History and Filmography" ("Edith Wharton at Yale" issue, Spring 1996), I have heard from several sources, who have supplied interesting additions.

Although my article focused on feature films, noting that the first mention of a commercial film was in *Summer* (1917), Meredith Goldsmith at Columbia University has notified me that the film industry is represented through the medium of newsreels as early as *The House of Mirth* (1905). Among the publicity at the Van Osburgh wedding in Chapter VIII is "the agent of a cinematograph syndicate . . . setting up his apparatus at the church door. It was the kind of scene in which Lily had often pictured herself as taking the principal part" (139). Goldsmith adds that "it might be interesting to consider the implications of Wharton's placing the cinematograph agent at the society wedding, perhaps coding it as a kind of silent melodrama."

In addition, William B. Larsen of the University of Tennessee has informed me that Alan Price, in his new book, *The End of the Age of Innocence: Edith Wharton and the First World War*, discloses that Wharton utilized the power of film to raise funds for her wartime charities. According to Price: "In another effort to gain recognition for her charities, she [Wharton] made arrangements with the official in charge of the *Direction du Cinématographe de l'Armée* to make films of the convalescent homes at Gorslay and Arromanches and several of the Children of Flanders colonies. The films would be carried by Justin Godart, former undersecretary of the Ministry of Health, who was to depart shortly for the United States, where he was to speak about Wharton's charities" (150, also see 162 and 165).

Finally, I wish to add that permission to quote in my article from the writings and the correspondence of Edith Wharton was granted by the Edith Wharton estate and the Watkins/Lomomis Agency.

Thank you very much,
Scott Marshall, Deputy Director of the Edith Wharton Restoration



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BOOK REVIEWS

Edith Wharton: The Uncollected Critical Writings.
Edited and with an introduction by Frederick
Wegener. 331 pages. Princeton: Princeton
University Press, 1996.

by Julie Olin-Ammentorp

Frederick Wegener has done Edith Wharton, Wharton scholars, and general readers of Wharton alike, a great favor in producing this fine volume. As the "Note on the Texts" explains,

This edition assembles all of Edith Wharton's miscellaneous uncollected critical writings, including reviews, essays, literary eulogies, introductions and prefaces to her own work or the work of others, and items of related interest . . . (xv).

The volume also includes, for the first time in English translation, Wharton's eulogy of Jean du Breuil de Saint-Germain, as well as a translation of "Memories of Bouret Overseas." As the contents suggest, this volume offers new insights into Wharton's work and thought, making available many useful texts what were previously open only to those with the resources to travel to the various Wharton archives.

Frederick Wegener's introduction is, in itself, a substantial contribution to Wharton scholarship: it serves as a well-focused lens for viewing the essays he has edited so meticulously. Wharton's "anxiety of authorship" has become widely accepted by scholars; Wegener shows that this gender-related anxiety extended to her critical writing as well. He argues persuasively that Wharton discounted the critical skills of the few women she knew who possessed them, and in her fiction "routinely and brutally satirized" women involved in "critical or interpretive activity" (11). Her male critics fare better, and in *Hudson River Bracketed* "it [is] yet another male critic who serves not only as Vance's reluctant mentor but as Wharton's own mouthpiece" (13).

Wegener writes astutely, too, of other issues that

emerge and re-emerge from Wharton's critical writings: her alertness to form and cadence in poetry; her belief in organic form and what she called "objectivity" in fiction; her insistence that literary criticism itself needed improvement and played an important role in literary production; the lack of any real change in her aesthetic standards from the beginning of her career to its end. Wegener sounds a bit apologetic for the tone of the later essays, which he calls "obstreperous and intemperate" at one point (33), "acerbic and truculent" at another (37). In any case, as Wegener states, this collection illustrates the ways in which Wharton's critical writing "stubbornly defies classification" (31), and observes that "even those long familiar with her career will find a number of surprises in this material, which should present some welcome, if occasionally embarrassing, challenges to Wharton's enthusiasts of all ideological postures" (43-44).

Wharton as critic — despite her apparent anxieties about that role — speaks out clearly and firmly as early as 1902, with her first major review. Readers today will often disagree with many of her literary judgments: for example, she relegates all but one of Keat's sonnets to the "keepsake level" (96), and dismisses the vast majority of English Victorian fiction: "again and again the whole immense machinery of the passions is put into motion for causes that a modern school-girl would smile at" (124). Yet Wharton knows what she is about from the outset, and if some of the early essays bear heavily on minor subjects, they also show the fledgling writer establishing her own principles and aesthetic guidelines.

Many of Wharton's observations seem prescient or oddly predictive of reactions to her own work. Her remark about the "immense machinery of the passions" in the Victorian novel is one she echoes in a 1936 introduction to a new edition of *The House of Mirth*: by the time the novel was reissued, Lily Bart's actions — so scandalous to Old New Yorkers — might leave readers asking "why I had chosen the tame and blameless Lily Bart as a victim of avenging moral forces" (268-269). George Eliot's later novels, she claimed in 1902, suffered from her isolation and "ossification" in that

period of her life (77); by the 1930s, many literary critics were complaining that Wharton's work suffered from the same problems. Reading these pages inevitably makes one wonder how Wharton might react to the large body of literary criticism that has accumulated around her own work. "It has happened to me," she wrote late in her career, "as to most novelists, to have the odd experience, through the medium of reviews or dramatizations of their work, to see their books as they have taken shape in other minds: always a curious, and sometimes a painful, revelation" (263).

Wharton's later essays, especially "The Great American Novel" (1927), "Tendencies in Modern Fiction" (1934), and "Permanent Values in Fiction" (1934), clinched Wharton's reputation as a literary conservative. Wharton comes across in these essays as elitist, anti-modernist, and possibly threatened: her own world, as she explains more gently in "A Little Girl's New York," seems so far back in history — and so perhaps did her literary style. The most frustrating aspect of these essays may be, however, Wharton's refusal to analyze the "new novelists" in any detail. To her, modern fiction did not meet her two great standards for literature - that it contain characters that seem "real" to its readers, and that it deal with some "general law of human existence" (177). In retrospect, it seems a pity that a writer as fine as Wharton could not, in

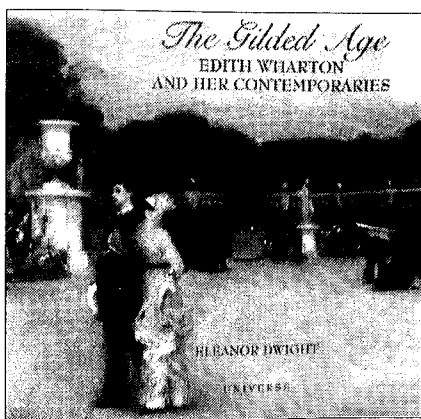
spite of her admiration of Proust, appreciate a work like Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*.

Wharton herself acknowledged, however, that even the best of literary critics could easily misjudge the works of their contemporaries. If some of Wharton's judgments seem faulty, if her criteria sound dated or even naive in the context of literary criticism today, Wharton also has insight that would reappear in the work of literary critics half a century later. If Wharton was at times haunted by the ways in which others viewed her works, so, early on — in 1903, prior to the publication of all her greatest novels — she pointed to the quality that would give her own best work its enduring quality:

The value of books is proportionate to what may be called their plasticity — their quality of being all things to all men In this sense it may be said that there is no abstract standard of values in literature The best books are those from which the best readers have been able to extract the greatest amount of thought of the highest quality (99).

Le Moyne College





The Gilded Age Edith Wharton and Her Contemporaries Eleanor Dwight

" . . . Illustrated with gorgeous color reproductions of works by Hassam, Prendergast, Sargent and other artists of the era . . . an elegant visual mini-history." —*Publishers Weekly*

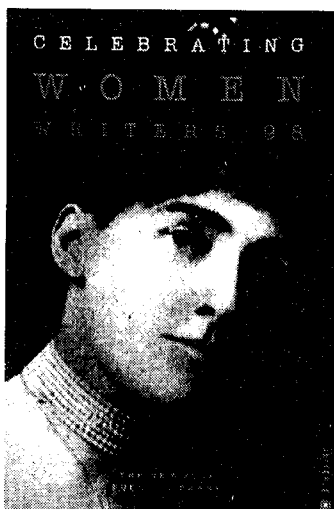
"The book explores not just the literature but also the art and architecture of America's most prosperous class in the late 19th century . . . the age of innocence hasn't passed." —*Town & Country*

Acclaimed Edith Wharton biographer Eleanor Dwight's engaging text explores how Wharton, Henry James, Mark Twain, and other writers of the period used the reactions and dilemmas of Americans abroad as the basis for many of the themes in their novels. Dwight's stimulating discussion of parks and palaces, the arts, and European travel and society is illuminated by the paintings and words of the most brilliant observers of the era—artists and writers whose characters and works stand as examples of the American experience at the end of the nineteenth century. Their critical and amusing descriptions of the competitive building of mansions, art collecting, and social rituals provide a lively commentary of a time in which such fascinating personalities as J.P. Morgan, Stanford White, and Caroline Schermerhorn Astor played an important role. Here too are some never-before-published, beautiful reproductions of paintings by John Singer Sargent, William Merritt Chase, Maurice Brazil Prendergast, and others whose portraits and city scenes provide a glimpse into the simple elegance of the time. Dwight's thorough book list of recommended reading enhances the beautiful compilation of words and images, making *The Gilded Age: Edith Wharton and Her Contemporaries* a valuable resource and splendid keepsake for lovers of the period and of its creative forces.

Eleanor Dwight, author of *Edith Wharton: An Extraordinary Life*, guest curated the 1994 exhibition *Glancing Backward: Edith Wharton's New York* at the National Academy of Design. She is co-curator of a forthcoming Edith Wharton exhibition at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., and has written numerous articles on travel, gardens, and literature. She teaches at the New School for Social Research in New York.

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Eleanor Dwight. *The Gilded Age: Edith Wharton and Wharton and her Contemporaries*. New York: Universe Publications, Rizzoli International Publishers, 1996. 80 pages. \$18.95.

by Adeline Tintner

This beautiful book was designed as a *vade mecum* to accompany an exhibition to be held from September 26 through January 25, 1997 at the National Portrait Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution. The show will be called *Edith Wharton's World: Portraits of People and Places*, which professor Dwight is co-curating with Viola Winner. But it is much more than a guidebook. It is an experience in "the language of silence," as Richard LeGallienne phrased it, in that form of communication created by visual art to explicate what cannot be achieved by written text alone. The square book, truly a handbook, just 7-1/2 by 7-1/2 inches, was designed in Singapore by Nai Y. Chang and contains 47 illustrations, all in fine color except for the seven photographs that are interspersed to document some of the paintings and to situate them in reality. For instance, the photograph of the croquet game held on Lenox lawn of the Anson Phelps Stokes home is a support for the grouping of the leisure activities that the Gilded Age characters are engaged in, to which nineteen of the paintings bear witness. Leisure activities is a contradiction in terms for engagements in spectatorship. Croquet, yachting, attendance at a hunt ball, lolling around on lawns, or stretching out on deck chairs, sipping 5 o'clock tea, or enjoying an informally relaxed but dressy dinner party are not exactly work-outs. There is a tennis game painted by George Bellow where it is hard to find those who have been or are about to play and to detach them from the crowd of spectators in a non-apparent game. There is a world of difference between the sports of the Gilded Age and those of our present time.

The other paintings are portraits of a dozen friends of Wharton and members of her social circle. The book starts out with three portraits of the authors who have made the Gilded Age into literature — Edith Wharton herself, Mark Twain and Henry James — and, although Mark Twain gave the title of this book from his own novel, Wharton's world in no way resembles that of his Colonel Sellers, whose duped victims end up on poverty, something Twain himself had experienced. Wharton's was a charmed circle of those who lived in a luxuriously protected society, for neither she nor her friends saw anything of "down town" nor did most of

their menfolk, for they lived on rents that had become enormously inflated so that their lives could be devoted to leisure and social activities. In Wharton's case, the making of fiction from what she saw of this society rescued her from the indolence of her contemporaries and her success and her maturity in the marketplace during her maturity permitted her to continue this luxurious life. Wharton made her fiction out of her ironic elements in her society and from the brutality with which it treated those members who could not keep it up because of the disappearance of their fortunes. Wharton led, as Henry James noted, a "facilitated" life and, although Wharton was used to the comfort and freedom of that life, she was well aware of its essential frivolity.

The text which accompanies this collection of carefully chosen illustrations is the usual reader-friendly prose yet filled with scholarly information (but without pendency or those footnotes which interrupt the flow of words) we are familiar with from Eleanor Dwight's fine biography of Edith Wharton in which hundreds of photographs are by their very choice the product of an art in itself. In that book, Dwight was able to teach us something about Wharton's gifts from the rare photographs of the three gardens invented, designed and maintained by the novelist herself. Such information comes only through illustration and not through text and, in this much slighter but equally informative book, Dwight exhibits her own visual expertise for using pictorial materials to illustrate some truths about her subjects not otherwise perceptible. For instance, in her introductory painting by Maurice Prendergast of a crowded visit to the Mall in Central Park, one of four paintings of the Park contained in this book, the crowd itself is more democratic than the inhabitants of the other photographs, but they are painted ascending and descending the steps of the Mall's Veronese-style architecture, whose princely atmosphere gilds even a commonplace crowd on a Sunday in the Park. Yet the other three scenes set within the Park show us more of the upper-class inhabitants of the city. For instance, William Chase's *Lilliputian Boat Lake* exhibits a more aristocratic sport for the young, that of launching model boats, and the little boy seen on the left-hand side is wearing a sailor suit, the typical upper-class raiment for small boys of that period. It appears in a number of Sargent portraits of upper-class little boys and also in an unfinished story by Henry James called "Hugh Merrow," in which a young boy has been painted in a sailor suit. The fourth Central Park scene is flanked by a quotation from Paul Bouret, Wharton's close friend, to describe the Park on Sunday as an "immense emporium of ready-made clothes." Yet we see the average citizens pained by Prendergast as spectators lined up in a row in an imitation

British Rotten Row scene watching the carriages of the members of the Gilded Age. They are not the "pleasure carriages, packed full with women and children," as Bourget notices, but the carriages of the leisure class. If one cannot be a member of the Gilded Age, one can at least sit and watch it at one's more humble leisure.

Even the socialites find often sitting and watching are the extent of their activities. Mrs. Gardner and her friend idling on the pillows of a gondola is seen in what is a separate Venetian section of the book, comprising a group of six paintings and two photos of the Curtis and Gardner circle in Venice. It includes a painting by Ralph Curtis, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Curtis, who fled Boston to live in their grand Palazzo Barbaro in Venice, whose interior here, in both photograph and the well-known Sargent painting, illustrates how luxuriously members of the Gilded Age lived when abroad. Even the Child Hassam painting of a large group of well-dressed, even over-dressed, walkers across the Brooklyn Bridge contrasts comically with our present day marathon runners. A girl drifting on the lagoon in a Venetian gondola furnished like a room in a palazzo in one painting could hardly be called active when we think of what activity means in today's sailing, running and tennis. The photographs showing the Burden wedding and the Gardner dinner exhibits the members of each party slouching in their seats, a position that reminds one of the Etruscans' banquets and of their lazy, reclining way of dining.

The section of the book in which the portraits, as opposed to those scenes showing leisure events, are placed has been organized again in a reasonable and orderly fashion. Following the portraits of the three authors are the two family portraits of the most outstanding and typical families of the Gilded Age: the Vanderbilts and the Astors. The first, the Vanderbilts, shows an energetic, numerous clan in an interior which is not too dependent on European models. Fifteen Vanderbilt members are all dressed up to attend the opera *en masse*, a number which includes a couple of servants and one stay-at-home person not dressed for the opera with a book on her lap. The picture is titled *Going to the Opera* (The family of William Henry Vanderbilt). The group gives off an almost electric amount of energy one feels it still needs to consolidate its social position. The second group, *A Portrait of the Astor*

Family, shows a distinctly different social stance. The family members are limited to six, and are dressed in a princely fashion. They sit in a room which is a sumptuous imitation of a hall worthy of a British earl. The standing figure at the center of the picture, the Mrs. Astor, shows in her position and in her regal yet subdued dressing, her power to make or break the social career of her contemporaries. The grouping depends on that modeled on the VanDykes of the British stately homes of aristocratic families.

The next portrait grouping shows some of the lesser members of the Four Hundred. Mrs. Fiske Warren and her daughter, as painted by Sargent, is accompanied by a photograph of her in the act of being painted by the artist with his back to us in vague emulation of Vermeer's "Fame." They head the section of the book called *The Arts* and they are followed by two paintings involved with museums: the first an interior of the Metropolitan Museum and then a portrait of Isabel Gardner, who created her own museum, ending with William Chase's *Portrait of a Painter's Studio*. Finally, the trio of Boldini's *Counselor Vanderbilt*, Sargent's *Egerton Winthrop* and *Elizabeth Chandler Winthrop* follow. He was a collector of rare books and eighteenth century paintings and furniture and was Edith's mentor for her art historical background. Elizabeth Winthrop (Mrs. Chapman) is a work of art in herself with her courtly yet deeply religious self-presentation and shows her pride in her ancestry with a family portrait on the left and a religious shrine on the right behind her on the wall. It is an unusually thoughtful picture by Sargent. My lengthy analysis of the placement of these illustrations attempts to reveal Dwight's wordless but thought-out design. It opens the eye of the spectator, as well as the reader of these pages, to truths about the personages which are better expressed visually than textually.

The Wharton readership would do well to attend the exhibition at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery in the Fall and Winter of the next year, since both Eleanor Dwight and her co-curator, Viola Winner, also gifted with visual curatorial skills, will encourage the spectator to develop a more intelligent reading of pictures in order to augment their sense of Edith Wharton's age and fiction.

New York City



continued from pg. 1

Edith Wharton does seem somehow "special"--her life and work a turning point both in literature and in life--a comprehensive cause for celebration. Why? The irrefutable excellence of her work is not a sufficient explanation (that would explain her worthiness to be studied, but it could not explain her unique appeal--that something "special" that sets her apart from so many other superb writers--or even women writers). Oddly, my thoughts kept returning to a mystery from my own very little girlhood--one that dealt with narratives at an almost ridiculous remove from the elegance of Edith Wharton's work--that phenomenon called "the ladies' matinee." Movies (in the afternoon!) that I occasionally attended with my mother.

I remember only a few in detail from my toddler days--many more from furtive hours watching the AMC channel of our television. But the overall impression hasn't changed during the many intervening decades. They presented a puzzle--these daytime dramas in the dark--for there was something uniquely "right" about these movies--and at the same time, something terribly wrong!

What was right? These were narratives that dealt with our world--my mother's and my aunt's and my grandmother's world--that is, a world where the quandaries of females (usually grownups, but sometimes even daughters) were the main feature.

What was wrong? Something elusively counterfeit about the solutions that were postulated. Consider the portrayal of "the wife" and "her role." Your doctor tells you that you have a fatal disease: don't burden your husband; just die quietly after planting the tulips. DARK VICTORY: BETTE DAVIS. My [unacceptable] variant was get a second opinion, and fight like hell to stay alive. Or--your husband has taken up with a younger woman: be patient; be understanding. And when he returns (remember, this was the movies), be forgiving and grateful. My [unacceptable] variant was to change the locks and hire a lawyer. Or--you fear that your husband may have married you merely for money (may even be attempting to kill you): adopt an anguished expression, cry a lot, and hope that he's really a good guy. GASLIGHT: INGRID BERGMAN, CHARLES BOYER, JOSEPH COTTON. SUSPICION: JOAN FONTAINE, CARY GRANT. My [unacceptable] variant: hire a detective and find out the truth.

True, these movies had their share of females who thought a little bit the way I did; but these women were clearly Monsters. Often they murdered people, and you always knew that the worst thing in the world would be to have one of these Monsters for a Mommy (a fact which has been confirmed in books like Mommy Dearest). Moreover, their spellbinding loathsomeness only highlighted the virtues of all those good, long-suffering women.

After a while, I figured out the paradox of that dark, damp world that was the Ladies' Matinee: the ladies' problems were authentic enough--sickness, poverty, an unhappy (or even abusive) marriage. But for decent women--and above all, normal women--there was only a single solution: passivity and acceptance and the hope for that ultimate solution--to be "saved," ideally by a handsome hero.

Thus at one level, the level of the problem itself, "reality" was not being ignored; however, at the logical next level, only something other than reality--fantasy or (what was worse) propaganda was being offered as a possible option. To put the issue more pointedly: the movies of the ladies' matinee did a major job of what Jane Tompkins has called "cultural work"; they preached the gospel that good women were essentially disempowered women, and that any woman who acts with power or authority must be a Monster.

Consider this: for each of the scenarios I presented, the variant response was not unacceptable because it seemed vicious (in fact, it is not vicious to fight for life, divorce a duplicitous husband, or discover the truth about your mate). So these responses were simply unacceptable, by stipulation. Because they enacted power and initiative!

However, there is a crucial difference between the "cultural work" done by the fictions of the ladies' matinee and that of the sentimental novels about which Tompkins has written. As Tompkins observed,

[T]he two questions these female novelists never fail to ask are: what is power, and where is it located? . . . The fact is that [in the mid-nineteenth century] American women simply could not assume a stance of open rebellion against the conditions of their lives for they lacked the material means of escape or opposition. They had to stay put and submit. And so the domestic novelists made that necessity the basis on which to build a power structure of their own.

Instead of rejecting the culture's value system outright, they appropriated it for their own use. . . .

In the American sentimental novels, passivity becomes its own form of power--desirable only because real power is unavailable!

However, toward the latter part of the nineteenth century, the limitations in women's lives had become less ruthless; and by the era of the matinee movie, things had changed altogether. By then, the lesson of passive acceptance was purveyed not because women lacked power, but because they could have power. And especially after the Second World War, they knew as much because they had (for the brief period of the conflict) enacted it. Thus the matinee movie became an all-too-effective mode of sustaining the illusion of necessary passivity and demonizing a woman of power.

We can deplore the effectiveness of the propaganda; however, who can doubt the influence of those dark fictional worlds? Narrative is power; and in the immortal words of Woody Allen, we [women] have all too often "bought it." Thus the ladies' matinee narrative (which eventually moved out of the movie houses and right into our living rooms) produced first, women's endurance during the depression, next, women's endurance during the Second World War, and then women's redomestication during the 1950s--our willingness to believe in the world of "Donna Reed" and "Daddy Knows Best." Peter Brooks has put the matter brilliantly: "Our lives are ceaselessly intertwined with narrative, with the stories that we tell and hear told, those we dream or imagine or would like to tell. . . ." Because narrative is power, American women have been more or less consistently disempowered by this one crucial element in their culture. Although they could often discern and define their problems, the scope of their possible solutions has been crudely curtailed--dictated and affirmed by others--as in those filmic narratives of the ladies' matinee.

Challenging the sanctioned boundary conditions for any given narrative, then, is always a power play; sometimes it amounts to an act of revolution. And this realization helped me to understand that "something special" about Edith Wharton.

Wharton began her work at a crucial period: women had begun to acquire non-negligible powers (the control of money, the right to jobs); however, no acceptable narrative of female empowerment had been created, and--even more dismaying--the old narratives of the "normal" woman's necessary passivity still held sway. Indeed, perhaps the singular message of the ladies' matinee began to be forcefully delivered at this juncture (several decades before the popularity of motion pictures), for there was much in even the best narratives of the later nineteenth century that dictated docility to women who were no longer legally prohibited from becoming empowered!

Even Edith Wharton herself suffered from the crippling narratives that described American women's lives; all of us who have studied her know this painful fact. What made her "special" was her successful resistance--her determination to blaze new trails--an instinct for pioneering innovation that took one form in her life and another in her work.

In the construction of her life, she became a new kind of "Representative Woman," creating and enacting bold new narratives of feminine possibility. Henry James's heroine, Isabel Archer, had been in what could only be termed an abusive marriage; and even with the power that inherited money had magically conferred, she turned away from freedom, sacrificing all possible forms of personal happiness for the ephemeral vision of self-sacrifice and implausible deliverance. A LADIES' MATINEE HEROINE. But Henry James's friend and colleague, Edith Wharton, empowered herself by pursuing a financially successful career; and after struggling with a miserable marriage for many years, she ultimately renounced the ladies' matinee narrative paradigm of endurance and self-sacrifice. Instead, she took a lover, got a lawyer, protected her earnings, divorced her husband, and took responsibility for her own destiny. In personal terms, then, Edith Wharton blazed the trail of empowerment for women--becoming a model of hard work, incalculable philanthropy, and above all, joy in living! "An incorrigible life-lover & life-wonderer & adventurer," she wrote at the end of her life. She had style and grace and good taste; and if she also had faults, her life was nonetheless a remarkable prototype of female independence.

In her work, innovation took a different form. Wharton's novels bridged the gap between two categories that until her time had been separate. On the one hand, there were novelists who wrote scathingly about women's plight, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps [Ward], or Charlotte Perkins

Gilman or David Graham Phillips; however, their work could be pigeon-holed and then dismissed by the larger literary community as principally "polemic." On the other hand, there were "serious" novelists who were thought to be addressing "comprehensive" or "general" issues, Henry James or W. D. Howells; and when these authors addressed "the 'woman problem'" (as they often did), their narratives, however sensitive, tended to affirm conventional gender roles. And however distant artistically, they shared this vision of gender with the tawdry melodramas of the ladies' matinee movie.

Edith Wharton exploded this gender-tyranny by writing fiction that engrossed both categories: "serious" novels about "general" issues that were also scathing accounts of the limitations that had been imposed upon women's lives--novels that urged not static complacency, but vital, conscientious social change. In Wharton's work, "the 'woman problem'" is always a symptom of some more general social malady. It cannot be corrected in isolation; and so long as it remains, society at large will suffer. For in Wharton's estimation, men and women both require the same things: love and work. Adequate and honorable roles to play--roles that are commensurate with their talents and energies, and roles that are affirmed reciprocally by others. For in Wharton's estimation, no individual can find "fulfillment" in solitude. Thus her novels demand change for both men and women--not merely for the good of women, but for the good of the community as a whole.

In her life she enacted power; in her work she defied it. But she accomplished both with such intelligent grace that few could recognize the radical vision that both embodied. There is much to applaud--and much to honor. Let us, then, celebrate--together--with truly Whartonian vitality and a continuing and ever-expanding sense of community!

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