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This issue is dedicated to the winning of the third annual Edith Wharton Essay Prize. The judges were: Editor, Carole M. Shaffer-Koros; Co-Editor, Linda Costanzo Cahir; and Associate Editor, Margaret Murray. The winner received an award of \$250. There were 16 entries.

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Perverting *Pride and Prejudice*: Wharton's American Alternative to the Novel of Manners: An Essay on *The House of Mirth*

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Abstract

In her autobiography *A Backward Glance*, Edith Wharton reflected on the opening lines of a novel fragment she penned at the age of eleven and described her early efforts as those of a "would-be novelist of manners" (73). In the century or so since Wharton's novels were first published, numerous critics have also bestowed the novelist of manners title upon her. Yet although Wharton is frequently studied in comparison with other writers—most often Henry James—only rarely has she been likened to Jane Austen, undoubtedly the most famous novelist of manners in literary history. As this essay shows, there are numerous compelling reasons to examine Wharton in conjunction with Austen, not the least of which is the fact that Austen was one of her favorite writers. This paper analyzes how and to what end Wharton manipulates the conventions of the novel of manners as originally popularized in England by Austen in the early years of the nineteenth century. *The House of Mirth* is read as a parodic and deeply tragic revision of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, with special attention paid to the ways in which Wharton "perverts" two of Austen's hallmarks: free indirect discourse and the customary marriage conclusion.

To attempt to situate the works of Edith Wharton in relation to those of other acclaimed novelists is to place oneself in territory that has been extensively charted by scholars for more

than a century. As Millicent Bell demonstrates in a critical overview of the author's career, readers have tended to regard Wharton's texts from a comparative perspective ever since their initial publication (1-19). Indeed, the thematic similarities between Wharton's fiction and that of her close friend Henry James, in particular, have been so frequently emphasized that today it is rare to find one of these authors discussed without some reference to the other.¹ Along these lines, recent studies of Wharton's popular 1905 novel *The House of Mirth* almost universally mention Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, a book with a somewhat comparable storyline published five years earlier.² Still other critics persist in classifying Wharton as a "pre-Modernist" whose works anticipate those of later writers like Sinclair Lewis and F. Scott Fitzgerald.³

Yet while comparisons of Wharton's novels to those of her American male peers are now so common as to be practically *de rigueur*, very few critics have compared her works to those of Jane Austen. To be sure, such an association seems at first rather counterintuitive; as Mary Nyquist notes, "the Atlantic, and nearly a century" separate these two women writers (44). Whereas Wharton describes the upper class of Old New York at the close of the nineteenth century, Austen takes for her subject the gentry of Regency England almost a hundred years earlier. Perhaps for this reason there exists little criticism comparing the two writers at length, although similarities between their works have been frequently noted in passing. Q. D. Leavis, to give one early example, mentions Austen more than half a dozen times in her influential 1938 article "Henry James's Heiress: The Importance of Edith Wharton," repeatedly using the English novelist's work as a touchstone of comparison between

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Wharton and James (124-56). Meanwhile, Hildegard Hoeller deems Wharton's "ironic, measured voice" in *The House of Mirth* "worthy of Jane Austen" (113), and Richard Poirer concludes that the novel "is indebted less to anything of a similar mode in James . . . than to the fiction of Jane Austen" (118). Poirer goes on to note that Austen and Wharton "are not entirely different in their relationship to society" (118-19), but later cautions that "any comparison to the English women novelists with whom [Wharton] deserves to keep company [must] end with a significant degree of contrast" (131). He ultimately concedes that Wharton, like Austen, is a novelist of manners, but "in a peculiarly American way" (131). Likewise, James Tuttleton refers to *The House of Mirth* as Wharton's "first major novel of manners," but qualifies this statement by noting that it is an unusual example of the genre (124). "The novel of manners is rarely the stuff of tragedy," he explains, and Lily Bart's death is most certainly tragic (127).

The well-read Wharton was intimately familiar with Austen's works, and, although known for her brutal criticism of fellow novelists, she definitely held Austen in high regard. In her theoretical manifesto *The Writing of Fiction*, she commended Austen for "touching on . . . the real issues of human comedy and tragedy" (63), and furthermore praised Austen's *Emma* as "perhaps the most perfect example of an English novel in which character shapes events quietly but irresistibly, as a stream nibbles away its banks" (129).⁴ Moreover, in his biographical *Portrait of Edith Wharton*, the writer's longtime friend Percy Lubbock described Wharton's disparaging attitude toward a string of famous nineteenth-century writers including Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, and Charlotte Brontë, but expressly mentioned her profound admiration for Austen. Reminiscing upon a typical winter's evening spent reading aloud in Wharton's company, Lubbock explained the seeming impossibility of finding a book to suit her fastidious tastes. He wrote: "It looks as though it would be hard to find the great work of a great master that would hold its own: are there any who are beyond reproof? Everybody on the spot names one—Jane Austen, of course, wise in her neatness, trim in her sedateness; she never fails, but there are few or none like her" (173). R.W.B. Lewis, in his own more recent biography of Wharton, relates a similar anecdote in which she is said to have exclaimed "Ah, Jane, you sorceress!" after listening to a friend read an excerpt from *Sense and Sensibility* (522).

It is not, therefore, illogical to suppose that Austen's influence can be seen in Wharton's work, however different the two women's novels might initially appear. Linda Wagner-Martin speculates that one reason *The House of Mirth* was so much more economically successful than other period texts chronicling the experiences of the "fallen woman," such as Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, is that Wharton consciously employed literary strategies to appease a potentially hostile audience (111). Wagner-Martin further suggests that although Wharton's narrative "appears to be conventional," it contains a powerful alternate subtext, as evidenced by the "surprising

division" among its modern readers concerning the culpability of other characters in Lily Bart's demise (112). In this spirit I argue that, by seeming to cater to the widely-held belief that anything written by a woman must be "domestic" and "sentimental," Wharton was able not only to reach a wider readership—an audience whose values and morals she was actively criticizing—but also to subvert the conventions of a traditional literary genre, the novel of manners. What better model to use for this trickery than the "sorceress" Jane Austen?

Still, however much Wharton appreciated the subtle nuances of Austen's literary style and perhaps even endeavored to emulate them, she must have recognized that the conventional novel of manners was not perfectly suited to her own purposes. While Austen frequently critiques the values of the upper class in her works, satirizing snobbery and distinguishing interior morality from exterior rank, today her novels are far more renowned for the happily-ever-after endings of their courtship plots than for their social criticism. Austen's heroines somehow always manage to marry for love, but money—usually a substantial amount of it—just happens to come along as part of the bargain.

At several key moments in *The House of Mirth*, Wharton pointedly mocks the implausibility of Austen's romantic plots. At one point the narrator tells us that Lily Bart "would not indeed have cared to marry a man who was merely rich . . . Lily's preference would have been for an English nobleman with political ambitions and vast estates; or, for a second choice, an Italian prince with a castle in the Apennines and an hereditary office in the Vatican" (35). Wharton's tone in describing Lily wavering "between the English earl and the Italian prince" seems at first intended to highlight the very impossibility of such a marriage for Miss Bart (35). Yet later we learn that "an Italian Prince, rich and the real thing, wanted to marry her; but just at the critical moment a good-looking step-son turned up, and Lily was silly enough to flirt with him while the marriage settlements with the step-father were being drawn up" (189). On the verge of obtaining lifelong financial security, Lily throws the opportunity away, Wharton insinuates, because of her fondness for "sentimental fiction" (35). Perhaps, we might suspect, Lily decided to hold out for her first choice husband, the wealthy English nobleman who unfailingly comes to the rescue at the end of all of Austen's novels.

Again, as other critics have implied if not stated directly, *The House of Mirth* is not a novel of manners in the traditional sense. Nonetheless, Wharton does at least superficially make use of many of its stylistic conventions. Tuttleton broadly labels the novel of manners as the place "where the streams of the self and of social history intersect" (9-10). This quality is perhaps most obviously manifested in the hallmark of Austen's literary style, the narrative technique of free indirect discourse. *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism* defines the term "free indirect discourse" as the combination of "aspects of the character's direct speech . . . with those of the tense and mode of the narrator's

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report” (118-119). Wharton was a firm believer in this sort of deft manipulation of multiple narrative perspectives. In a revelatory passage from *The Writing of Fiction*, she stated that free indirect discourse is essential to style and is more important to the development of a novel than even the selection of events to advance the plot. Literary form, she proclaimed, depends upon “the way in which [the incidents] are presented, not only in the narrower sense of language, but also, and rather, *as they are grasped and coloured by their medium, the narrator’s mind, and given back in his words*” (24, my emphasis).

In keeping with her own theoretical conception of the novel, Wharton employs free indirect discourse liberally in *The House of Mirth*. Although the majority of the novel is told from a third-person perspective, there are numerous moments when the narrative point-of-view subtly—yet certainly deliberately—slips into the mind of one of the characters. Perhaps the best example of this occurs in the novel’s opening scene, a chance encounter between Lily Bart and Lawrence Selden, the characters who become the novel’s would-be lovers. In describing this impromptu meeting, Wharton oscillates between two distinct viewpoints. The first is that of the third-person omniscient narrator, the second the comparatively limited first-person perspective of Selden himself. Lily’s viewpoint is conspicuously absent, a detail which serves to emphasize her objectification. The work begins *in medias res*, as follows:

Selden paused in surprise. In the afternoon rush of the Grand Central Station his eyes had been refreshed by the sight of Miss Lily Bart.

It was a Monday in early September, and he was returning to his work from a hurried dip into the country; but what was Miss Bart doing in town at that season? (3)
Here the semi-colon signals a shift from objective detail to subjective perception, and with this punctuation the

perspective shifts from the voice of the narrator to that of Selden himself. The sentence begins with a straightforward, indisputable, factual statement—“It was a Monday in early September”—and concludes with a question from Selden’s point-of-view—“But what was Miss Bart doing in town at that season?” (3). With this simple query, Wharton alerts us to both Selden’s propensity for suspicion and his society’s obsession with female propriety, two qualities that will prove to have a crucial effect on the eventual outcome of the narrative.

Later, of course, these same qualities will cause Selden to reject Lily and society to ostracize her after she is caught in a series of compromising positions, first with Gus Trenor and then with George Dorset. In this first scene, Wharton uses free indirect discourse to emphasize Selden’s instinctive and hypocritical tendency to question Lily’s behavior. He himself has just returned from an unexplained “hurried dip into the country,” an excursion that appears questionable at best given his apparent affair with a married woman. Nevertheless, he takes pleasure in the thought of Lily’s discomfort, and decides to put “her skill to the test,” knowing that “if she did not wish to be seen she would contrive to elude him” (3). In keeping with her famous assertion in *A Backward Glance* that “my last page is always latent in my first,” here Wharton delicately foreshadows the events of the rest of the novel (208). By blurring the distinction between Selden’s personal voice and the perspective of society at large, she demonstrates the destructive influence of the latter on Lily’s and Selden’s relationship.

Free indirect discourse is just one of several of Austen’s conventions that Wharton contrives to manipulate. In fact, the very storyline of *The House of Mirth* bears a remarkably strong resemblance to that of Austen’s 1813 work *Pride and Prejudice*, the quintessential and most famous example of the English novel of manners to date. Like Lily Bart, Austen’s heroine Elizabeth Bennet is a member of the upper class who finds herself in dire financial straits as the narrative begins. Because her father’s estate is entailed, Elizabeth and her four sisters stand to inherit nothing and to lose their home upon his death. If they wish to maintain the lifestyle they have grown up with, each must hope to find “a single man in possession of a good fortune” (5). However, the very lack of wealth that makes matrimony such an urgent matter for the Bennet girls also “materially lessen[s] their chance[s] of marrying men of any consideration in the world,” as one suitor contemptuously remarks (37). For both Lily and Elizabeth, therefore, the question of marriage is inseparable from the issue of money. As Poirer puts it, both characters “must calculate and invest their emotions with the coldness of financial speculators” in order to avoid social ruin (120).

Additionally, both heroines receive marriage proposals from crude men who are shunned by high society and have but one asset to recommend them—their wealth. In Lily Bart’s case this man is Sim Rosedale, a *nouveau riche* Jew who is trying desperately to ingratiate himself with New York’s most prestigious families. Rosedale proposes to Lily as if it were a

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Wall Street deal he's sure to clinch. When she politely declines, horrified at the thought of stooping so low, he responds with pragmatic cheerfulness:

Oh, if you mean you're not dead in love with me, I've got enough sense left to see that. And I ain't talking to you as if you were . . . I'm just giving you a plain business statement of the consequences. You're not very fond of me—yet—but you're fond of luxury, and style, and amusement, and of not having to worry about cash. (176-77)

As seen here, Rosedale refuses to believe that Lily is really rejecting him and his wealth. "But why ain't you straight with me—why do you put up that kind of bluff?" he asks, knowing full well the precarious state of her finances (177). He eventually takes leave of her but leaves the door open for her to change her mind, convinced that the harsh economic reality of the situation will soon force her to realize the error of her ways.

This most unromantic of marriage proposals seems to be taken directly from Austen, as Elizabeth Bennet receives an almost identical one in the course of *Pride and Prejudice*. Like Rosedale, Elizabeth's suitor Mr. Collins refuses to take "no" for an answer and mistakes her reticence to acquiesce as a gesture of coquetry, a bow to what he believes is "the established custom of [her] sex to reject a man on the first application" (105). "Believe me, my dear Elizabeth, that your modesty, so far from doing you a disservice, rather adds to your other perfections. You would have been less amiable in my eyes had there *not* been this little unwillingness," he says in an effort to be magnanimous (103). He further tries to persuade her by listing the "the advantages in [his] power to offer," namely the wealth he stands to inherit from her father's estate as a result of the entail (104). When he still cannot get her to agree, Collins resorts to mild threats, telling Elizabeth that she would do well to accept his offer since it is "by no means certain" that another so profitable one will ever be made to her (106).

Both Rosedale and Collins wish to marry because they believe that it will augment their social stature. Rosedale tells Lily that he wants "the right woman" to help him enter into the ranks of high society, someone who will make entertaining look "easy and natural" and "other women feel small" (175-176). Similarly, Mr. Collins asks Elizabeth for her hand because he has been told that marriage to a gentlewoman will ensure his acceptance among the landed gentry, in spite of the fact that his money has been acquired only recently. Yet, unfortunately for Rosedale and Collins, Lily and Elizabeth are both idealists who refuse to marry for the wrong reasons, in Austen's words "solely for the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment" (120).

For Lily, however, such idealism ultimately proves to be her downfall. Helen Killoran has referred to *The House of Mirth* as "a Cinderella story in reverse," and in most respects Wharton's work does seem to be an inversion of Austen's (25). Whereas *Pride and Prejudice* tells the story of Elizabeth's gradual ascent to marital felicity with the

handsome and wealthy Mr. Darcy, *The House of Mirth* depicts Lily's painful descent into poverty, solitude, and finally what appears to be suicide. When Elizabeth first encounters Darcy at a ball, he refuses to dance with her because he considers her "neither handsome enough" nor wealthy enough for a man like himself (13). Later, however, his feelings change, but she initially rejects him on account of his prior treatment of her and because his proposal dwells at length on "the inferiority of [her] connections" (188). Selden, on the other hand, is absolutely captivated by Lily's beauty when he bumps into her at the train station. But he is not a man of fortune, and although Lily cannot help being attracted to him she is incapable of overcoming the impracticality of a union with one of such comparatively meager means. "[Y]ou can't possibly think I want to marry you," she tells him early on (8), and when he subsequently suggests in earnest that they wed she rejects the idea with the incredulous question, "Were you serious?" (74). Only later, like Darcy, does Lily realize that her romantic feelings defy economic practicality.

Austen is renowned for always ending her novels by providing her heroine with a good marriage match. Indeed, part of the pleasure in reading *Pride and Prejudice* is the certainty that everything will work out as one hopes in the end. Throughout the work Austen foreshadows Elizabeth and Darcy's marriage, particularly when Elizabeth visits his ancestral home for the first time and thinks "that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!" (235). Thus, although Austen is at times quite critical of the institution of marriage, she ultimately upholds it in her works, undermining her social criticism by presenting this social structure as inevitable and desirable. Wharton, meanwhile, refuses to maintain the traditional marriage conclusion to the novel of manners, and instead offers another seemingly inevitable event—the death of Lily Bart.

Wagner-Martin argues that the ending of *The House of Mirth* gives readers the choice of viewing the work as a marriage-plot novel or critique of that genre. She is just one of many critics who believe that Selden was rushing to Lily's flat with the word "love" on his lips, intent on proposing marriage. She writes: "If the expected ending was the marriage of the protagonists, then the scene of the lamenting Selden, kneeling near Lily's dead body, is a satisfactory denouement" (127). In the same vein, Maureen Howard proclaims that the work "is a perverse marriage novel" (142). Yet regardless of whether Selden planned to propose or not, the tragic, non-nuptial conclusion serves to underscore the fact that *The House of Mirth* is *not* a traditional novel of manners.

The novel of manners has often been dismissed as a genre of fiction alien to America. Departing from the domestic sphere seems to have been a way for early American authors to distinguish their novels from the works of their English forefathers. In fact, it is almost as difficult to find a nineteenth-century British novel that is *not* a novel of manners as it is to find an American one from the same time period that does fall into this category. Critics such as Tuttleton have theorized

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that such a departure occurred because America's democratic ideals and presumed absence of class distinctions deprived the novel of manners of its primary subject matter (14). This view is supported by Alexis de Tocqueville's declaration in *Democracy in America* that "the effect of democracy is not exactly to give men any particular manners, but to prevent them from having manners at all" (qtd. in Tuttleton 16-17).

Not until the appearance of the novels of Henry James and Edith Wharton in the late 1800s and early 1900s did the term "novel of manners" start to appear in reference to fiction written by Americans. Yet as Killoran states "critics have always had a difficult time agreeing about whether *The House of Mirth* qualifies as an American novel of manners, a naturalist novel like Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, a realist, sentimental, or determinist novel, a tragedy, or something else" altogether (30). Part of the reason for this controversy, I believe, stems from the fact that Wharton's novel is not a traditional novel of manners but rather a satirically poignant revision of one, a work intended to demonstrate that genre's inability to adequately portray the new American social and economic class system.

This reading finds support in Wharton's own literary values, as articulated in the numerous critical essays penned throughout her life. Wharton was a staunch artistic conservative who believed that tradition was essential to the production of great literature. Consequently she held the view that European subject matter was better suited to novelistic purposes. "Balzac's provincial France, Jane Austen's provincial England . . . made up for what they lacked in surface by the depth of the soil in which they grew," she wrote in a scathing critical piece entitled "The Great American Novel" for the *Yale Review* in 1927, asserting her belief that traditional culture provides—and therefore produces—the best literary material (650). "Traditional society," she insisted in the same piece, "with its old-established distinctions of class, its pass-words, exclusions, delicate shades of language and behavior, is one of man's oldest works of art, the least conscious and the most instinctive" (652).

It was a traditional society and a traditional literary genre that Wharton chose as her material in crafting *The House of Mirth*. Taking Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* as her model, Wharton kept the basic elements of storyline and style, but rather than strictly adhering to the conventions of the novel of manners she manipulated them to create a tragic parody of the happy endings of Austen's works. If *The House of Mirth* were a Jane Austen novel, Selden would somehow have managed to amass a significant fortune, which he would have bestowed on Lily without hesitation in spite of her tarnished image, and they would have lived happily-ever-after. Instead, he is left only to kneel next to her dead body and reflect on the social corruption responsible for her demise. Meanwhile, we as readers are left to consider our own romantic expectations and the novel's refusal to cater to them.

Although Austen was writing in provincial England at the close of the eighteenth century and Wharton in metropolitan

America at start of the twentieth, both women's works explore the difficulties of courtship for women in a stratified social milieu. Both Wharton and Austen condemn the structures of their respective societies, which gave women few economically feasible options besides marriage (or death). Strangely, instead of being viewed as avant-garde social critics, both Wharton and Austen have been repeatedly accused of focusing too intensely on a limited aristocratic world while ignoring the plight of the lower classes. Then again, perhaps that is the essence of their genius—to conceal their works under the guise of typical domestic fiction and therefore allow their social critiques to reach a wider audience, an audience comprised of members of the very groups whose manners they were satirizing.

"True originality consists not in a new manner but in a new vision," Edith Wharton declared in *The Writing of Fiction* (18). She revealed just such a "new vision" in *The House of Mirth*, ironically by pretending to adhere to accepted literary conventions. As I have shown, *The House of Mirth* demonstrates the inability of the traditional sentimental novel of manners, as popularized in England by Austen, to describe the plight of the single, upper-class American woman at the turn-of-the-century. Through her manipulation of that genre, Wharton brought the American novel into its own and into the twentieth century, demonstrating the "true originality" that is the quest of every American writer.

Notes

¹ Bell explains that the "assertion that she was James's literary heiress annoyed Wharton" throughout her career (4). A letter to her editor at Scribner's dated June 25, 1904—shortly before *The House of Mirth* appeared in serialized form—reveals the extent of Wharton's frustration with the notion that she was James's protégée. "The continued cry that I am an echo of Mr. James (whose books of the last ten years I cannot read, much as I delight in the man) makes me feel rather hopeless," she wrote (Lewis, *Letters* 91).

² See Price, Alan. "Lily Bart and Carrie Meeber: Cultural Sisters." *American Literary Realism*. 13.2 (Autumn 1980): 238-45. See also Merish, Lori. "Engendering Naturalism: Narrative Form and Commodity Spectacle in U.S. Naturalist Fiction." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*. 29 (Spring 1996): 319-45.

³ See Coard, Robert L. "Edith Wharton's Influence on Sinclair Lewis." *Modern Fiction Studies*. 31 (1985): 511-27. See also Millgate, Michael. "Scott Fitzgerald as Social Novelist: Statement and Technique in *The Great Gatsby*." *The Modern Language Review*. 57.3 (July 1962): 335-39.

⁴ Several recent articles briefly note the influence of *Emma* on Wharton's oeuvre. Nyquist argues that *The House of Mirth* and *Emma* share "a significant number of concerns and strategies" (44), notably the fact that in each novel "the

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heroine measures herself against a standard set by her male counterpart, whose authority is legitimated by a sphere outside hers" (49). Howard also draws parallels between the two novels, declaring that "Wharton . . . loved her poor heroine from the first exemplary installment to the last, as Jane Austen loved the arrogant Emma and redeemed her with patience and humor" (154).

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From Lily Bart to Amoryllis: Mrs. Porter's Challenge to Mrs. Wharton

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I could not write of society, because I know just enough about it to know that the more I know, the less I wish to know.

(Gene Stratton-Porter, qtd. in Meehan 149)

This essay considers the nature of a relation, or how far one might exist, between two writers of a very different order: Edith Wharton and Gene Stratton-Porter.¹ Their careers advanced in parallel, and, although Wharton outlived and, eventually, would outlast her contemporary, their readership faded with a new generation. At the peak of their fame, from the early 1900s into the 1920s, Mrs. Porter and Mrs. Wharton were rival names in the best-selling charts, commanding voices that made an impact. While honours such as the Pulitzer went to Wharton, Porter established her own unique place with the reading public. William Lyon Phelps described her, in 1921, as "a public institution, like Yellowstone Park" (301); and the *London Times*, in her obituary in 1924, emphasised her popularity:

Mrs. Stratton-Porter was one of the small group of writers whose success, both in England and in America, was enormous. She was one of the real "big sellers," her novels being eagerly read and re-read by all sorts and conditions of people, children and adults. It is rare indeed for a writer to appeal, as she did, both to experienced readers equipped with standards of literary taste and to the most unsophisticated who live apart from the world of books. ("Obituary" 16)

Reviewed in some of the same journals, Wharton achieved clear superiority in terms of critical esteem, but in sales (*The House of Mirth* apart), Porter's novels had the lead. Between them, these two magisterial and prolific women seemed to have divided up the territory: Wharton becoming identified, in the main, with the analysis of "society," the wealthy, leisured urban classes; Porter with country-folk, nature and the land. Wharton's work seems to be present, however, as a reference-point, in much of Porter's writing;

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and, at its most intense, Porter's fiction acts out an extended battle with Wharton for the moral heart of the nation. As for Wharton herself, small references seem to acknowledge Porter's enterprise, and even to return the challenge.

Among Wharton's papers in the Beinecke Library is an item that gives Porter a literal presence in Wharton: an advertisement, with accompanying author-portrait, for Doubleday's third printing of *The Custom of the Country's* rival – *Laddie: A True Blue Story* (1913). Underlining phrases in red pen, Wharton tore it out of *Century* magazine, and, possibly, placed it, where it now lodges: in her manuscript notebook for *Literature*. Although Hermione Lee has described this document (604), it is worth highlighting here what Wharton emphasised: that Porter's other books "had reached the three million mark"; [*Laddie* was doing even better]. And that *Laddie* "goes to the heart of a vast reading public because it is true to life, a picture of genuine American people – people who love their homes; who [unlike those in *Custom*] figure neither in newspaper nor divorce court; who are the source of the real vitality of the nation."

To take a sideways glance can often help to dismantle boundaries and open up fresh views. These two writers who worked within the same period, the one born in 1862, the other in 1863, might appear to be segregated in opposite intellectual spheres. Edith Wharton's realm was that of high art; she sought truth in aesthetic values, drew on European tradition, and remained resistant to editorial demands for wholesomeness. Porter's art was popular, sloppily written, famously upbeat (*New York Tribune* said her pen "carries the reader along like a bug on a chip, right over the mill-race" (qtd. in MacLean 71); and fuelled by nostalgia for an all-American folksiness. Biographically, too, the women could not, seem more different – broadly, one with her roots in old New York society, but equally at home in Europe, dying in France in 1937; the other raised on a farm in northern Indiana (the setting of *Laddie*), and famous for her cabin-life on the Limberlost swamp; she later moved to California, ending her days there in an automobile accident in 1924. Or, in more random detail: one, a compulsive story-maker when young, who became noted for her taste, principles on interior decoration, her stunning gardens. She worshipped Walt Whitman, and always wrote poetry; she was severe about laxities of language; disapproved of jazz; loved motors; saw her novels screened in her life-time. Her married life evolved into separation from her husband; she retained enormous respect for Theodore Roosevelt. Much of this went into her writings. This was Gene Stratton-Porter. It could also, of course, have been Wharton. Vast differences remain, but this kind of convergence, or, in Raymond Williams's term, the writers' shared "structures of feeling" in relation to their culture (64-88), prompts questions about a possible dialogue.

Wharton's clipping resolves an initial query, one in part raised by her own satirical swipe in "The Pelican" at fashionable late nineteenth-century "influence studies": "the measure of ingenuity with which the lecturer established a

relation between two people who had probably never heard of each other, much less read each other's works" ("Pelican" 63). From this piece of evidence in her papers, Wharton had, it seemed, at least heard of Porter. Indeed, it would have been hard to avoid such acquaintance: as the *Laddie* clipping suggests, advertisement and brand recognition constituted a major part of Porter's impact. In *The Women Who Make Our Novels*, a new edition revised some three years after Porter's death, Grant Overton reckoned her earnings to have exceeded those of any other contemporary author; and, as he commented, "The tendency to become statistical, in speaking of the late Gene Stratton-Porter, is difficult to resist" (312). Overton's estimate – that, in all, her books had sold over 10,000,000 copies – is echoed elsewhere, as in *Good Housekeeping's* tag, "The 10 million Magician" (5).² As Porter's first major bibliographer, David MacLean, summed up: "Between 1895 and 1945, only fifty-five American books achieved sales of one million or more copies. Gene Stratton-Porter wrote five of them – far more than any other author of her time" (MacLean, vii).³ Such hyperbolic elements, captured in the clipping, entered into Wharton's own dismayed fascination with the dynamics of mass-culture, and with the wholesome family fare marketed to the American public; and her satires in the 1920s and 1930s, from *Twilight Sleep* through to *The Gods Arrive*, would draw powerfully on such phenomena.

Besides this, however, Doubleday's treatment of Porter throws into relief Wharton's own twin-edged relationship with marketing: her long-term sense of grievance at Scribner's low-key promotion of her own books, especially (as she noted early in their association) "in these days of energetic & emphatic advertising" (*Letters* 38). Doubleday's vigorous campaigns for Porter would produce ever more energetic and emphatic announcements, which appeared, with increasingly dramatic statistics, as her publication dates approached, and continued, with mounting excitement, as reprints followed fast. In fall 1911, for example, as Wharton declared herself "somewhat puzzled about the figures" for *Ethan Frome* (*Letters* 262), newspaper advertisements exclaimed over the triumphs of another new book of the season: Porter's *The Harvester* (a somewhat more idealised vision of a lonely farmer, love and longing, on an isolated country smallholding).⁴ Scribner's treated *Ethan* to discreet paragraphs: this was a "story of a typical New England village," "sharply outlined as New England pines against New England snow," "unforgettable" (Scribner's 583). *The Harvester*, in contrast, commanded centre-page publicity, often embellished with graphics, illustrations and lavish quotation, with direct address to its audience. In August, advertisements proclaimed, "First Edition Exhausted! . . . Sold out by day of publication. 25,000 more on press" (Doubleday [a] 7); in September, "Your Sisters and Your Cousins and Your Aunts are all reading *The Harvester*. . . . And they are doing it so greedily that the publishers can't print books fast enough for them. . . . Two tremendous printings in two weeks" (Doubleday [b] 527); and by December, "*The*

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Harvester, which in less than four months has reached its 125th thousand, is being issued in a beautiful leather binding in response to demand for a special Holiday edition” (Country Life 4). These sales are accompanied by equally astonishing figures for fresh reprints of Porter’s earlier books, packaging new and old together as Porter’s “Power Novels,” or “Books That Grow Stronger Day by Day” (Doubleday [c] 7; [d] 15). By February 1912, both *Ethan Frome* and *The Harvester* had sold in thousands: a respectable seven thousand for Wharton’s book, but in excess of one hundred and fifty for its competitor.⁵

In spite of the distance between them, in the booksellers’ and library ratings the writers’ names frequently appear in close proximity. In the American *Bookman*’s anniversary retrospective, in the January 1915 issue, for example, Edith Wharton features prominently in the early century, with *The House of Mirth* noted as a top-seller, during some “years of successive female domination” (*Bookman* 1915 478; photograph 479). In its summary of 1912’s annual sales, however, Wharton is absent, whereas *The Harvester* outshines everything: “by a margin of many hundred points, and with eleven appearances in the lists as against five each” for the also-rans (*Bookman* 1915, 480).⁶ In January 1914, both writers feature in the same journal’s monthly lists (584): Porter’s *Laddie*, which had entered in September 1913, still in third place, *The Custom of the Country* in sixth. Wharton, however, vanishes by February, with the entrance of *Pollyanna*, while Porter remains buoyant until topped by *Bambi* at the end of the year.⁷ The London edition of the *Bookman*, in February 1916, finds them on facing pages. “Miss Wharton” [sic] earns a tribute from a provincial reader, whose praise for *Fighting France* is commended in the journal’s competition for an amateur review: “Fearless must have been the investigator, and great her power of description, to have given us such a faithful record of the great world war” (Kerr 144). But Wharton’s name

is outshone by that of Porter, in a bold heading, with photograph, as subject of a special article “Gene Stratton-Porter: An Appreciation” (145-46).⁸

To give Porter due credit, however, her fame went beyond her sales record. As Overton emphasised: “Her distinction lay not in this, but in the amazing influence of her writing”; and he highlighted her pre-eminence in promoting “wide-spread interest in nature study,”⁹ and her strong “moral effect”:

Marked freshness and vigor of feeling, unmistakable sincerity and a very limited sense of humor were the qualities of Mrs. Porter’s fiction. To the millions who read her with ardor she was never absurd and not infrequently they found her deeply moving. (312)

As for other possible kinds of connection, tentative sightings come early, in Wharton. A Porter-esque figure is Mrs. Clinch in “Expiation,” a story significant, as Hildegard Hoeller demonstrates, within Wharton’s broader dialogues with realist and sentimental fictions (86-93). There could have been a number of possible real-life counterparts (Olive Thorne Miller or Kate Douglas Wiggin, for example, come obviously to mind);¹⁰ however, in December 1903, Porter would have been a strong contender. Mrs. Clinch’s writings, “How the Birds Keep Christmas!”; “Nests Ajar” and “How to Smell the Flowers,” and other samples of “pseudo-science and colloquial ornithology” (“Expiation” 205-06), acquired in mud and swamps, come close to Porter’s stream of recent titles, grounded in similar experience. Her articles and stories – such as “Bird Architecture” (1901), “The Birds’ Kindergarten” (1902), “The Music of the Marsh” (1902), and “Bob’s Feathered Interloper” (1903) – had culminated in her first book *The Song of the Cardinal*, a passionate talking-bird biography, published, to acclaim, in May, earlier that year. In August 1903, a review in the *Arena* had urged all boys and girls to read this book and predicted: “It will do for the birds of the forest what ‘Black Beauty’ did for the horse” (qtd. MacLean 60).¹¹ Beyond this, the book seemed set to counter “the money-madness of the past thirty years” (qtd. MacLean 61). Looking back, Porter herself described the *Cardinal*’s passage, claiming:

Probably more copies of it have been sold than of any bird story ever published. It has been adopted by State reading societies, put into public and private libraries, used as a text book in schools and colleges, delivered thousands of times in parts from public platforms, and was being translated into French when the war intervened. (“My Work” 148)

The Song of the Cardinal is indeed colloquial ornithology, where the bird is “‘jest a master hand at king’s English. Talk plain as you kin!’” (144), delivering messages throughout its year of courtship: “‘Good cheer! Good cheer!’ exulted the Cardinal” (11); “‘Wet year! Wet year!’” it warns the farmer (63).

Such notes continue long into Wharton’s career. *Hudson River Bracketed* (1929), for example, illuminates Mr. Spear, at a moment of ‘repressed excitement’ (108) with an allusion

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Did you publish a book, book chapter, or article on Wharton in 2007?

If so, please send a copy to Carol Singley, who is preparing the 2007 bibliographic essay on Wharton for *American Literary Scholarship*. She will consider your work for inclusion.

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from Halo and Lorry's childhood reading:

[They] had found, in a popular natural history book a striking picture of a bristling caterpillar sitting upright on its tail, with the caption: "The male Puss-Moth when irritated after a full meal." They instantly christened their progenitor the Puss-Moth . . . (108)

With the light touch Porter gave to her own illustrations, as in *Moths of the Limberlost* (1912), Wharton captures here the complications of family affections. In *The Fruit of the Tree* (1907), however, in the key series of excursions into natural settings, she deploys such notes in some of the strongest "outdoor" scenes in her fiction. Here, she realises, in detail, a union in a magical grove, complete with an anthropomorphised "ironical" grey squirrel (35); and a venture into a distant swamp, to dig out the roots of a rare orchid. Both are remarkable, in the narratorial observation of the touches of winter on the landscape, the "fine gradations of sound," (135), the coloration of different trees. In the picnic episode, Amherst and Justine play a sympathetic part, mediating the scene for Cicely and for the reader. Wharton presents the recovery of Amherst's "boyish wood-craft," which "came to life in this sudden return to nature" (301): with ornithological exactness, he spots a concealed marsh-wren's nest, and identifies "a swiftly-flitting olive-brown bird" as "a belated tanager in autumn incognito" (301). Justine is still closer to nature: so "free and flexible" that "she seemed akin to the swaying reeds and curving brambles" (300). Above all, she is revealed as a bird-woman, who guides the others "across the treacherous surface as fearlessly as a king-fisher" (300), persuasively imitates bird-calls, or "the scolding chatter of a squirrel in the scrub-oaks" (302) and enters empathetically into relating the autobiography of a world-travelling house-swallow: "I should put it all into my chatter under the eaves, that people in the house were always too busy to stop and listen to—" (303). Even her mood is caught in one of Wharton's sudden flights of simile, that extends and opens the scene, marking it, in retrospect, as the high point of Justine's history: "the buoyant moods when the spirit of life caught her in its grip, and shook and tossed through the spray of flying rollers. At such moments all the light and music of the world seemed distilled into her veins . . ." (303).

Such episodes as a whole, are close kin to what readers might find in Gene Stratton-Porter. By 1907, such features had Porter's name on them. The birdlife, moths, and flora, of the Limberlost swamp and Wabash river, captured in her photographs and nature writings, had begun to gain still wider audiences through her fiction. A background in *The Song of the Cardinal*, the Limberlost, with its detailing of birds, marsh-plants and effects of light, entered the foreground as the setting for Porter's still more powerful human stories. With its attendant Bird Woman and Swamp Angel, introduced in Porter's novel, *Freckles* (1904), and its sequence of sympathetic young protagonists in the fiction that followed, it would become a household word, far beyond the United States. In the British school-story, Angela Brazil's, *The*

Madcap of the School (1917), for instance, the girls would role-play Limberlost adventures. They "were all raving over the works of Gene Stratton Porter": "I'd give anything—just anything—to get into such a place," [one confides]. "Why don't we have things like that in England?" (40). Wharton, in her experimentation after *The House of Mirth*, might well have picked up the outdoor notes to take her characters, briefly, far out of her previous drawing-room scenes. But in producing her own anti-Lily, Justine who is worker, bird-talker, and in these passages "wood-spirit" (302), perhaps she herself showed Porter the way to navigate her swamps, to firmer moral ground.

For Porter, in writing back to Wharton, *The House of Mirth* remains a lasting image. For nearly two decades, her sequence of "girls" (Porter's term) represented alternative life-narratives, designed to cleanse for the reading public, a literary and domestic atmosphere polluted by the festering lilies of Wharton's world. Porter's essays and personal writings make plain her general views, as she mulls over contemporary novels:

To deny that the world contains the simply, kindly, moral folk such as I put into books is insanity; all of us are acquainted with the gentle, kindly, courteous men and women I describe. That their life picture is a true picture of all life, I never intended anyone to think, and I seriously doubt if anyone ever did. I know the folly, the fraud, the immorality, the intrigue of life. The daily papers reach even Wildflower Woods; sometimes I wish they did not, and sometimes I read the big books of realism written with tears tintured with blood and shame. I know their strength and truth to life. What I do not know is whether they accomplish any great work for the betterment of the world. ("My Work" 150)

Porter's own narratives provide what writers such as Wharton refused: tragedies with happy endings – often achieved after neglect, illness, abuse, shame, poverty, sexual secrets, even murder. They are founded in a nineteenth-century rhetoric of "home-building" – undermined, as Porter viewed it, by decadent art. For Porter, "homes 'are the bedrock of the nation. They are the place where souls come into being" (*Let Us Highly Resolve* 229). At the centre, is the cultural work of the healthy woman's body. Porter renews through her lilies the purity and vitality, blighted in Wharton's version. In *Michael O'Halloran* (1915), young Micky renames (and in time restores to health) the small girl he has rescued: "'You're like the lily flowers in the store windows at Easter. . . Little snow white lily! . . . Lily! That's what God made you; that what's I'm going to call you'" (46-7). In the parallel world of the adults, the good-hearted Leslie recoils from the "Horrors" of Nellie, a woman "deliberately moulded, drilled and fashioned" into preferring a life in society (234). And in her final fable, *The Magic Garden*, published posthumously (1926), the exquisite child-heroine, Amaryllis, grows up to preserve the ideal in the face of general social decline. This narrative, with a lily garden as its central symbol, turns on a new generation, keeping itself pure, to redress the blight of divorce, irresponsible wealth, and a motherhood which "doesn't want to be bovered" [sic] (65).

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Such characters enact the ambitions praised in Porter's essays: "when the time for marriage and the establishment of a home came, they [the men] meant to go to the country and marry sound, healthful girls who had not wasted their physical energies and dissipated their moral and physical strength in jazz dances and petting parties and cigarette smoking and tipping intoxicating drink" (*Let Us Highly Resolve* 129).¹²

Such elements come into focus early, in *A Girl of the Limberlost* (1909), a sequel to *Freckles* and Porter's first novel to follow the publication of *The House of Mirth*. This countered Wharton's Lily with her own most popular heroine: Elnora Comstock, musician, moth-collector and teacher. Elnora and her successors perhaps, however, owe something to their immediate predecessor – Justine Brent, Wharton's own Lily anti-type. Through their stories (of fruit that flourishes) Porter refracts some of Wharton's key tropes, to project a strong counter-plot for twentieth-century American art, and twentieth-century America.

First: the ornamental body, the centre-piece of a drawing-room, so tragically represented in Wharton's Lily. All Porter's narratives set out to redefine the lady – not through money, class or decorative function, but through sincerity and work – always both aesthetic and purposeful. Whereas Lily recoiled from the prospect of "apple-blossoms on blotting-paper" (*House of Mirth* 426) and the vision of the Women's Exchanges, Porter's heroines find satisfaction and financial support in diverse crafts and occupations, from botanical

flower-painting to orchid-collecting. These women embody a teleology of reproduction – they are to be celebrated not solely as biological but for transmitting cultural and moral values: the true "Home Feeling!" as *Laddie* expresses it (375). For girls, though marriage is the goal, Porter transforms the sphere of commodity. At first, as in Wharton, the spectatorial mode is pervasive. In presenting both Elnora's body and that of her rival, the city butterfly, Edith, Porter fills the text with mirrors, photographs, forms of tableau vivantes – images, which refract the girl's sense of herself as subject through others eyes – climaxing in a scene of actual voyeurism by a potential rapist. But Elnora, as her future husband, Philip Ammon, discovers, is different from the women of his circle. She embodies not exchange-value, but plenitude, use-value; and, as Peter Stoneley observes, will revitalise Philip, a dilettante, to save him from Mammon (113). After discussion of whether Philip's sister, the "strictly ornamental" Polly, in her "Viot hat, Picot embroidered frock, and three-inch heels" could capture moths, Elnora asks: "Well, then, does the Limberlost need a 'strictly ornamental' girl?"; and is answered robustly: "'No!' cried Ammon. 'You are ornament enough for the Limberlost'" (303) Within this series of portraits of Elnora, as a natural-born lady, the novel turns the consuming gaze back on itself; even the voyeur is redeemed at the sight of her "white radiance" (80). At the climax, natural glory, literally and figuratively, transfigures even the house of vanity, as a Yellow

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Announcement

The Edith Wharton Essay Prize

Instituted in the fall of 2005, the Edith Wharton Essay Prize has been awarded annually for the best unpublished essay on Edith Wharton by a beginning scholar. Graduate students, independent scholars, and faculty members who have not held a tenure-track or full-time appointment for more than four years are eligible to submit their work. The winning essay will be published in *The Edith Wharton Review*, a peer-reviewed journal, and the writer will receive an award of \$250.

All entries will be considered for publication in *The Edith Wharton Review* as well as for the Edith Wharton Essay Prize. Submissions should be 15-25 pages in length and must follow the new 6th edition MLA style, using endnotes, not footnotes. Applicants should not identify themselves on the manuscript, but should provide a separate cover page that includes their names, academic status, e-mail address, postal address, and the notation "The Edith Wharton Essay Prize."

To submit an essay for the prize, send three copies by October 1, 2008, to either of the co-editors of the *Edith Wharton Review*: Prof. Carole M. Shaffer-Koros, Dean, School of Visual and Performing Arts, VE-114-A Kean University Union, NJ 07083 or Dr. Linda Costanzo Cahir Willis 103-B Kean University Union, NJ 07083.

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Emperor moth enters a ballroom, fluttering “toward the centre cluster of glaring electric lights” (360). In time, such visions of the swamp transform even the hardened city beauty, the butterfly Edith; she concedes her man, seeks a more natural manner, and, in a splendid act of selflessness, embraces the prospect of true work.

Such tropes reverberate through Porter’s entire career — for example, Eileen in *Her Father’s Daughter* (1921)—“a rare creature, a kind of exotic thing, made to be kept in a glass house” (240); and an object of wonder to her robust step-sister: “‘She never could . . . do anything because she has always had to be saved for the sole purpose of being exquisitely beautiful. Talk about lilies of the field . . . —she’s a lily of the drawing-room!’” (194). These and other lilies, though given access to the hot-house, reject it for the home.

Second, and crucial to this dynamic, is the image of the city. Reminding readers that, “All of life is not lived in cities” (“My Work” 150), Porter presented her aesthetics as a healing mission, countering urban debility with natural vitalism. Her extraordinary evocations of the Limberlost are more than pastoral. As she explained in “Why I Wrote *A Girl of the Limberlost*,” her aim was to carry “my story of earth and sky” into darker, airless, enfeebled places—from “workers inside city walls” to “scholars in their libraries” (12546). As in *The House of Mirth*, the discourse of “nervousness” (writ large in Lily’s final phases)¹³ resonates in Porter’s environments: in her descriptions of the over-refined young women of the city, like Edith, in *A Girl of the Limberlost*, and in a long toll of city victims, from the Harvester’s Dream-Girl, to Eileen in *Her Father’s Daughter*. (The deceased father of that novel was a famous nerve surgeon.) The roar of the city is a constant, and it is to this that Porter offers the balm of the Limberlost. She fine-tunes its notes, as her characters teach city-folk to listen to its birds, to read its flowers; and, like Freckles singing, or Elnora playing on her forbidden violin, they find their voice to express (in one of Porter’s own titles) the “Music of the Wild.” Porter overturns the social Darwinism of Wharton’s world. Her Lilies, human or floral, are not cogs in a machine, “All of them strainin’ after something they can’t afford,” as wise Granny Moreland describes them in *The Harvester* (370); they are part of a benevolent evolutionary design. So, in *The Harvester*: they are “‘Pearls grown by the Almighty. . . . They are like you. Tall and slender, graceful, pearl white and pearl pure—those are the arrowhead lilies’” (252)

For Porter, the nation and the novel are, in young news-seller Micky’s words, the better for being “nice, clean . . . Sterilized! Deodorized! Vulcanized!” (*Michael O’Halloran* 70-71). Her texts are full of images of energy restored, sleep granted, spines stiffened, foul blood and foul language cleansed. A child’s boiling sores, a girl’s pale face, are countered in the exemplary robustness of all her protagonists—characters full of blood— not false blushes, but flushes, surges, hearty appetite, and (when appropriate) vigorous sexual desire. Such feelings are awakened in the heroine of *The Harvester*, for example, in an episode holding a baby

(551) – an awakening that, unlike Lily Bart’s similar encounter, presages a happy ending. To Porter’s gratification, readers responded. Jeannette Porter Meehan’s memoir of her mother cites letters from admirers worldwide. One, from Melbourne, Australia, in 1916, declares that Porter’s books “do one good to read them” and recounts the joy of a “Gene Stratton-Porter Night,” where participants spoke for their favourite character (qtd. Meehan 261); and similar tributes crowd Amazon’s reader reviews today.

In a third important network of signification, Stratton Porter moves readers from surface to essence. America in the early 1900s, she says in *The Harvester*, is a society of “‘seeming’” (320). “Distilling essences” is, as Marjorie Pryse suggests in the title of a wide-ranging article, typical of the woman regionalist, both as rhetoric and thematic of place. “Essences” fill Porter’s texts, too, in the characters’ creative transformations of the land into teas, syrups, dyes, spices, designs, carvings, music and song, the herbal medicines and “blood purifier[s]” which structure the plot of *The Harvester* (352), the exquisite iced fruit-juices, which express crucial moments of healing in the narrative of all her fictions; the Native American lore her characters appropriate. (Linda, in *Her Father’s Daughter*, most notably, publishes her art and recipes in a popular women’s magazine, and, like Porter herself, becomes a best-selling proselytizer for botanical knowledge.) At one level, these natural productions challenge the destructive distillation of the land into other precious liquids: oil, sap in the valuable trees, the cash-flow of dollars, shares and patents – which would become the fortunes of the city. But they also return readers to ideal forms, constructing her heroines as quintessential womanhood: the Swamp Angel, the Joy Lady, the Storm Girl, or the Dream Girl in *The Harvester*, who manifests herself in a shining wall of light: “First . . . like a slender birch trunk,” then like “a wild lily” (17).¹⁴ In their whiteness, unfortunately, the heroines come to signify another essence—that of pure white America. Porter’s abiding eugenicist concern with vigorous bodies and pure blood come to the fore, to dominate the fevered plotting of *Her Father’s Daughter* (1921) and *The Keeper of the Bees* (1925); and here, her relation to terrain becomes an overt white supremacist stay against the invasion of other races, the prospect of “race suicide.”¹⁵

In these post-war writings, readers today might see further resonances in Wharton, both in recent critical speculation about her own anxieties, and in sets of textual echoes. The general timbre of Porter’s 1919 essay, “Why I Always Wear My Rose-colored Glasses” reverberates perhaps in Pauline Manson, another undaunted optimist; or in the problems of literary taste that challenge Dicky in *Literature*, or Vance Weston in Wharton’s late epic diptych. But, in the words of Wharton’s Bishop in “Expiation,” within this long-term dialogue, Porter took seriously that: “It is the novelist’s hand which can pour balm on countless human sufferings, or inoculate mankind with the festering poison of a corrupt imagination” (236). Both inside and outside the text, she challenged Mrs. Wharton with novels which embodied “care

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for ‘legitimate words’” and which would produce the “sane, wise, home-loving, home-keeping” men and women America really needed (Porter, *Let Us Highly Resolve* 35, 173).

Notes

My thanks for helpful comments on this paper go to colleagues at the panel, “Edith Wharton in the Work of Other Writers and Artists,” Chair, Hildegard Hoeller, American Literature Association Conference Boston, May 2007.

¹ As Bertrand F. Richard explains, Gene Stratton-Porter always referred to herself as “Mrs. Porter,” using the hyphenated version of her name on her writings ([12]); her name is also seen without the hyphen. This essay follows Richards’s practice, and refers to her as Porter.”

² The advertisement highlighted a new serialisation: “Begin Gene Stratton-Porter’s Last Great Novel.”

³ Porter’s impact and status as a best-seller, were still a matter for note at the mid-century, and were given extended consideration in Hart’s *The Popular Book* (1950); this remains a thought-provoking contribution to discussions of this phenomenon.

⁴ Both books are listed in the “Women Novelists” section of “1,000 New Books of the Autumn.” in the *New York Times* (22 October 1911: 662).

⁵ These figures are taken, respectively, from R. W. B. Lewis (*Wharton Letters* 265, note 1); advertisement for *The Harvester* (Doubleday [e] 8). Hart notes that: “her five most popular books sold over 8,000,000 copies, for the most part during her own lifetime, a record not surpassed up to that date by any American novelist whose works were not used in schools” (212).

⁶ The magazine had also featured Porter in extended items in recent years: for example in the “Chronicle and Comment” pages in August 1912 (with photograph), and again in August 1915.

⁷ *Pollyanna*, by Eleanor H. Porter [another Mrs. Porter]. *Bambi* was not Felix Salten’s story about the eponymous young roe deer (1923); but Marjorie Benton Cooke’s novel (1914) about a lively young woman, Bambi[na].

⁸ Highlighted on the magazine’s cover, this article, by “C.W.” and Gene Stratton-Porter’s own self-appreciation, “My Life and Critics” which follows, are self-conscious rebuttals of a virulent attack by Frederic Taber Cooper in the *American Bookman*, the previous year (August 1915). Cooper’s targets ranged from “the open and unabashed self-satisfaction of her

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(Continued from page 12)

style” to “a cloying sweetness in her nature worship that puts a matter-of-fact readers somewhat out of patience” (670). Porter took particular offence, however, at his slurs on her accuracy of observation.

⁹ It is Porter’s work as an early environmentalist which more recent scholars find most valuable; for helpful overviews, see Plum (ed.), *Coming through the Swamp*, discussion in Long’s biography, *Gene Stratton-Porter*; and the documentary video, *Gene Stratton-Porter: Voice of the Limberlost*.

¹⁰ Olive Thorne Miller [Harriet Mann, 1831-1918], introduced to ornithology when she was aged fifty, went on to publish eleven bird books with Houghton Mifflin (1885-1915): titles included *Bird Ways* (1885), *Little Brothers of the Air* (1892), and *Upon the Treetops* (1897). For a contemporary overview, see Bailey (163-69). Kate Douglas Wiggin (1856-1923), best known as an educational pioneer and as the author of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1903), was also the author of the much reprinted *The Birds’ Christmas Carol* (1887).

¹¹ Porter always named *Song* as her first book, but it has since been argued that she was the author of the anonymous *The Strike at Shane’s* (1892) – a strike by farm animals against a vicious master, see Long (124).

¹² *Let Us Highly Resolve* was a selection of Porter’s long-running *McCall’s* series, “Gene Stratton-Porter’s Page,” launched in January 1922, and with a store of essays, continued posthumously until December 1927.

¹³ For fuller discussion, see Knights (vi-viii; xxvi-vii).

¹⁴ The Swamp Angel appears in *Freckles* and *The Girl of the Limberlost*, the Joy Lady in *Michael O’Halloran*, and the Storm Girl in *The Keeper of the Bees*.

¹⁵ For a detailed consideration of this aspect of Porter, focused on two of her novels, see Stoneley (115-21).

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Book Review

Totten, Gary, ed. *Memorial Boxes and Guarded Interiors: Edith Wharton and Material Culture*. Tuscaloosa: : U of Alabama P, 2007. x + 315 pp.

Shafquat Towheed
The Open University

A trenchant critic of the materialism and acquisitiveness of early twentieth-century American society, and at the same time an inveterate purchaser of houses, cars, works of art and books, Edith Wharton presents a creatively complex face to any assessment of her interaction with the material culture around her. The artefacts of material culture (consumer goods, technology, the built environment, interior design) are everywhere in her writing, and yet have rarely attracted the scholarly attention they deserve. Prefaced by Gary Totten's expansive and contextual introduction, the eleven essays in *Memorial Boxes and Guarded Interiors* go some way towards refocusing our attention to this relatively neglected aspect of her writing. "Material culture," Totten persuasively argues in his introduction, "serves as an indispensable component of the continuing literary and cultural importance of Wharton's work" (14).

The essays in this volume are divided into five sections, each corresponding to a major theme in the engagement between Wharton's writing and the realm of the material culture it (sometimes so uneasily) inhabits. In the first section, "Authority and Professionalism," Lyn Bennett examines

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Edith Wharton Collection Research Award

Deadline: March 15, 2009

Each year the Edith Wharton Society offers a Edith Wharton Collection Research Award of \$1500 to enable a scholar to conduct research on the Edith Wharton Collection of materials at the Beinecke Library at Yale University. Prospective fellows for the 2009-2010 award are asked to submit a research proposal (maximum length 5 single-spaced pages) and a resume by March 15, 2009 to Hildegard Hoeller at hilhlr@aim.com or at 395 South End Ave., #24L, New York NY 10280.

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

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

Ferda Asya
for her project

" Transatlantic Anarchism in the Fiction of Edith Wharton."

(Continued from page 14)

Wharton's critical reception at the hands of largely male reviewers (looking particularly at *The Decoration of Houses* and *The Age of Innocence*) as an expression of the material culture of literary professionalism, while Jamie Barlowe offers a detailed assessment of Wharton's cross-media collaboration with women producers, script writers, and dramatists, in bringing her books to the stage and screen. Jacqueline Wilson-Jordan rounds off the first section with a reading of Wharton's late ghost story, "Mr Jones," in which she stresses the relationship between the conventions of Gothic and transcending materiality.

In section II, "The Body," both essays look at the human body as the site and the subject of an increasingly contested debate over material form and its expression. In "Picturing Lily," Emily Orlando offers a sophisticated analysis of the relationship between the *tableaux vivant* and the material culture of the female form--Lily's "objectification as a work of art" (83)--while Deborah Zak contrasts this approach productively by locating the increasing anxiety over physical culture and the human body in an age of commodification in her reading of *Twilight Sleep*.

Section III, "Consumerism," brings together two new essays on *The House of Mirth*. Jennifer Shepherd offers a fascinating examination of the construction and destabilization of social categories in the novel through the constantly shifting frame of sartorial imagery, while Michael Duvall's assessment of the increasing dirt and disposability of a mass produced world creatively extends the analysis of previous scholars (such as Wai Chee Dimock) by suggesting a new relationship of people to the world of objects, one shared by both Wharton's fictional characters and her readers.

Engaging with Duvall's contention that Lily's redemptive death transcends the economics of exchange, Linda Watts argues that making over interior space fashioned self-identity in the period and was central to "transactions in the marital economy" (199); Lily's failure to transform her interior space is symptomatic of her inability to participate

wholeheartedly with the material culture of the marriage market. The other chapter, suitably titled "Interiors," in this section by Karin Roffman interrogates the representation of, and interaction with, museums in Wharton's fiction, although whether this constitutes an authorial endorsement or a critique is not examined further.

In the final section, "Technology," Gary Totten intelligently teases out the relationship between bodies and machines by juxtaposing the illustrations accompanying the serialisation of *The Fruit of the Tree* in *Scribner's Magazine* with the concerns evident in the text itself, while Carol Baker Sapora offers a particularly insightful analysis of the relationship between, on one hand, technological developments in the production of electric lighting, plate-glass and mirrors, and on the other, Undine Spragg's electrifying and luminous self-promotion in *The Custom of the Country*.

Inevitably, as with all edited collections, there are some notable gaps here. No fewer than four of the chapters base their arguments on *The House of Mirth*, while none offer substantial assessments of her New York novels other than *The Age of Innocence*, or of Wharton's considerable body of travel writing (surely an entire genre predicated by the material culture of its consumption?). It would have been useful to have had a chapter dealing with Wharton's lifelong engagement with the material culture of France (something that is ubiquitous in both her fiction and non-fiction writing), and a detailed analysis of her enduring attachments to both fast cars and formal gardens would not have been amiss. However, these omissions tell us more about the sheer intellectual diversity and appetite of Wharton's engagement with the material world around her than it does about any shortcomings of this fine edited collection of essays. *Memorial Boxes and Guarded Interiors* gainfully adds to our understanding of Wharton's representation (and sometimes, repudiation) of the material culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and therefore will be of use of to Wharton scholars from a wide range of perspectives.

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