EDITH WHARTON NEWSLETTER

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A NOTE ON WHARTON'S USE OF *FAUST*

by Linda W. Wagner

When Mephistopheles is tempting the young, innocent Margaret to take a lover, he prompts her use of the phrase "country's custom." This is the interchange:

"If not a husband, then a beau for you!
It is to the greatest heavenly blessing,
To have a dear thing for one's caressing."!

And Margaret replies, "The country's custom is not so." Mephistopheles' retort, "Custom, or not! It happens, though." With her characteristic irony, Wharton takes Margaret's suitably innocent defense (that unmarried women do not take lovers) and turns that maxim into its very opposite: Undine Spragg in *The Custom of the Country* takes lovers, even if not always married to them, as a means of improving her social and financial stature, not because — as in Margaret's case later in *Faust,* Part I — she thinks she loves them. Mephistopheles' use of the adjective "heavenly" is also twisted: Undine's husbands and lovers think of her as ideal, but much of the process of the novel is her disillusioning them. And while Margaret did not want to go against the custom of the country, Undine delighted in re-defining that custom, always to her own advantage.

A stronger similarity between Faust and Wharton's fiction occurs in *The Age of Innocence.* If we take Newland Archer as a Faust figure — hungry for knowledge, superior to his peers, set on changing his existence and country — then all the early passages in Wharton's novel, as Newland both scrutinizes his culture and meditates on his and May's roles in it, carry a double weight. They help to place Newland in the venerable tradition of "man who seeks knowledge," and may explain so many of the critics' tendencies to see Newland as the apparent narrative center of the book. In this reading, then, (which is suggested by the opening and closing scenes of the opera *Faust* used as frame for the novel), May becomes the epitome of innocence, Faust's Margaret; and Ellen Olenska becomes the Martha of Goethe's drama. But whereas Goethe sets innocence against experience in a conventional paradigm, Wharton embroiders that opposition with heavy irony. Margaret's pregnancy dooms her and leads to the murder of her child, and her incarceration and madness. May's, on the other hand, leads to her most obvious act of manipulation, telling Ellen that she is pregnant so that the would-be lovers' plans for a tryst are aborted. May knows only triumph.

For all his intentions, Newland fails to learn much beyond his own narrow boundaries of texts and life experiences. While Faust risks present-day life and eternal existence in his quest, Newland risks nothing. The tentative formulation of his relationship with Ellen shows his innate cowardice, just as the ending shows his reluctance to put anything of his — illusions as well as reputation — in danger. While Newland has known his Walpurgis Night before his marriage, he avoids any kind of sensual, physical involvement after it (leaving the carriage, touching Ellen's hands only).

The imagery of the novel, which is in some ways strangely melodramatic for Wharton, also suggests a Faustian concern. The New York world is termed "heaven" many times, by Ellen, early in the book. Similarly, Newland describes Ellen's existence with the Count (about which he knows very little) as "hell." He is

(continued on page 8)

MEETING AT "THE MOUNT"
Lenox, Massachusetts

Informal get-together, Saturday, June 14, 10 A.M. - 5 P.M.. Tour, planning for 1987 All-Wharton Conference, lunch, cocktails. $7. Write immediately to: Katherine Joslin, 1240 Oak, Evanston, IL 60202. Very inexpensive overnight accomodations available.

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Department of English, Long Island Univ.
Brooklyn, New York 11201
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THIS ISSUE continues a minor trend in Wharton criticism, the influence and relationship of Wharton to men writers, those of the past whom she drew from, Henry James with whom she shared a relationship of mutual stimulation, and the next generation of writers like F. Scott Fitzgerald who looked to her. Even our proposed special session for the upcoming MLA Convention in New York will focus on "Wharton and Her Men." Although some work has been done on her connection with women writers, I hope for some more exploration (and short articles) on Wharton and *The Princess de Cleves,* George Eliot, Vernon Lee, other women novelists at the turn of the century, and especially any later women writers who bear her influcence...MORE IMMEDIATELY, I would like some short articles on Wharton's attitude toward the French as revealed in her writings *(The Custom of the Country, The Reef, French Ways and Their Meanings.)* Although she chose to live in France in her latter life, I suspect she never abandoned her critical intelligence to her new surroundings. I need these articles by September I. . . .WHARTON SCHOLARSHIP AND ACTIVITIES continue to flourish. Adeline Tintner will deliver "The Architecture of Old New York: Edith Wharton's Quartet of Linked Short Stories" in April at a conference sponsored by The Society for the Study of Narrative Literature at Ohio State University. Carol Singley read a paper on *The Age of Innocence* at the recent Northeast Modern Language Conference at Rutgers University. . . . THE NEW YORK COMMITTEE of The Edith Wharton Restoration held a delightful and successful cocktail party at The Aaron Didier Galleries in New York to raise money for continuing work on The Mount in Lenox. . . . THE EDITH WHARTON SOCIETY will hold the annual walking tour of Wharton's New York in late April or early May. . . . FOR INCLUSION in the annual bibliographic essay in our fall issue, please send a copy of any article on Wharton you have published in 1984 or 1985 to Prof. Alfred Bendixen, Department of English, College of the Pacific, Stockton, CA 95211. . . . 1987 WILL BE THE 125 anniversary of Wharton's birth and the 75 anniversary of her death. It's not too late to arrange to spend an informal day together planning a major Wharton conferene at The Mount in Lenox, Massachusetts on Saturday, June 14. Inexpensive lodgings available. Contact Dr. Katherine Joslin, immediately at 1240 Oak, Evanston, IL 60202.

EDITH WHARTON AND F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

by Peter L. Hays

Arthur Mizener quotes a newspaper account of F. Scott Fitzgerald and Edith Wharton:

> Finding himself at Scribner's while (Edith Wharton) was there...he burst in on a conference in Mr. Scribner's own office and introduced himself to her. Indeed, he is reported to have thrown himself at her feet and said: "Could I let the author of 'Ethan Frome' pass through New York without paying my respects?"

Mizener continues: "The speech is perhaps a little too good to be true, but...there is no doubt about his admiration for Mrs. Wharton"[1] Given that admiration, testified to also by Fitzgerald's correspondence, it is surprising that a critic should link Fitzgerald's short story "The Cut Glass Bowl" with Henry James' *The Golden Bowl* or with Ecclesiastes 12:6, James' source for his title, [2] for the influence of Edith Wharton on that story is more obvious.

In both stories, there is a bowl which is a wedding gift. In Fitzgerald's story, a disappointed suitor gives the protagonist, Evelyn Piper, a cut-glass bowl because it is "as hard, beautiful, empty, and easy to see through" as she is,[3] although the story never bears out that description. However, after seven years of marriage, Evelyn is bored with her spouse and flirts with someone new and exciting, and her marriage suffers drastically when her husband comes home unexpectedly and hears "a hollow ringing note like a gong echoed and re-echoed through the house. (Evelyn's lover's) arms had (in his fleeing the house) struck the big cut-glass bowl" (pp. 99-100).

Mattie Silver's threat to Zeena also occurs after seven years of marriage. And in both stories there are a series of tragedies: in "The Cut-Glass Bowl," a loss of passion in marriage, business failure, the daughter's blood poisoning resulting in an amputated hand, the son's death, and then Evelyn's collapse onto the broken bowl; in *Frome* Ethan's father being kicked by a horse, giving away the family's money and then dying, Ethan's curtailed education, his mother's long illness and death, his long struggle to make the farm pay, and then the climactic attempt at double suicide. On a less important note, but extremely close in form, is the detail in Fitzgerald's introduction to his story, a history of cut-glass gifts, which includes "a promenading cat (who) knocked the little bowl off the sideboard" (p. 96).

"The Cut-Glass Bowl" was one of Fitzgerald's first professional stories, written in October 1919 (then published in *Scribner's Magazine* in June 1920 and collected in *Flappers and Philosophers* the same year). As John Higgins says:

> Fitzgerald's need in these early commercial stories to rely on the crutch of an artificial unifying device ...led him to seek unity and coherence through a dominant symbolic object....The bowl is the focus of a series

> of misfortunes that mark...decline into unhappiness....Thus for the first time in Fitzgerald the deterioration of a character through loss of youth, beauty, vitality, and ability to experience emotion becomes the dominant theme.[4]

While the red pickle dish is not *the* "dominant symbolic object," but rather one of several — including Ethan's diminished house, his crippled state, the very weather and landscape — it is an important symbol as wedding gift and private treasure of Zeena.[5] And certainly its destruction accompanies the final fracturing of Ethan and Zeena's marriage and anticipates the "loss of youth, beauty, vitality, and ability to experience emotion" that we see in the novel's epilogue.

At this time, early in his career, Fitzgerald was still depending greatly on literary models, Compton Mackenzie, for example, in *This Side of Paradise* of the same year. As Higgins goes on to say:

> That Fitzgerald was learning technique is shown (in "The Cut-Glass Bowl") not only by his experimenting with a central symbol, but also by his focusing on a few incidents for economy and by replacing "smart" writing with some sharp, concise imagery....The motifs of the decline of a marriage and the loss of youth and beauty are important foreshadowings of (later work).[6]

What has not been recognized before was that Fitzgerald was learning technique, the use of symbolism and sharp, concise imagery from, at least among others, Edith Wharton.

1. *The Far Side of Paradise* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1955, p. 168. The original account was by James Gray in the St. Paul *Dispatch,* March 2, 1926.
2. Sergio Prosa, *The Art of F. Scott Fitzgerald,* trans. Charles Matz and the author (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1965), p. 35.
3. F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The Cut-Glass Bowl," *Flappers and Philosophers* (New York: Scribner's, 1920), p. 97. All subsequent quotations from this story will refer to this edition and will be paginated in the text.
4. *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Study of the Stories* (St. John's Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 18-19.
5. See, e.g. Kenneth Bernard, "Imagery and Symbolism in *Ethan Frome,*" *College English* 23 (Dec. 1961), 182-183.
6. Higgins, p. 19.

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WHARTON AND JAMES:
Some Literary Give and Take

by Adeline Tintner

"Genius," says Peter Sherringham in *The Tragic Muse,* "is only the art of getting your experience fast, of stealing it, as it were"; (TM 127) a point of view to making the most of hints from writings of others that James was quite open about all his life. In 1902 when he received from Edith Wharton's sister-in-law, Mrs. Cadwalader Jones, a copy of *Crucial Instances* (1901) and *The Touchstone* (1900) he wrote that in addition to having "extracted food for criticism from both," he always found that, "If a work of imagination, of fiction interests me at all (and very few alas, do!) I always want to write it over in my own way, handle the subject from my own sense of it. *That* I always find a pleasure in, and I found it extremely in 'The Vanished Hand'. . . . I take liberties with the greatest" (HJ IV 237). At the moment he was taking liberties with Shakespeare (see "The Papers" as a redoing of *As You Like It),* Shakespeare who himself took liberties with the writings of others.[1] The letter to Mrs. Jones was written August 20, 1902 and James apologizes for not having answered her right away. Leon Edel has very neatly given us a schedule of what James was working on during the summer of 1902. During that time he was writing simultaneously (in addition to "The Beast in the Jungle") "The Papers" and "The Birthplace," both of which were finished by October and November.[2] "The Birthplace" shows signs of having been helped along by one of the tales in *Crucial Instances,* "The Angel at the Grave."

Both tales concern themselves with the perpetuation and care of the birthplace of a famous writer. James's is about a man who takes care of Shakespeare's birthplace but who gets so disgusted with the lies he has to tell about the origins of the Bard that he finally gives up. Although James records the "germ" in his notebooks, the development of the tale (on which he wrote sporadically in between the other tales) he may have learned from "The Angel at the Grave." The Wharton story concerns a woman's care of the birthplace of a once famous writer related to her. The detail seemingly helpful in solving James's problem was her introduction of a young man who encourages the woman caretaker to revive an interest in the now forgotten writer. James, by introducing a young American couple into "The Birthplace," Mr. and Mrs. Hayes, who appreciate what Morris Gedge, the curator, is doing in his curatorship, seems to reflect Wharton's similar intruder into the shrine in her tale. Her young man tells the lady, "Why this, you know,. . . . is simply immense!" Mr. Hayes in James's tale also congratulates Gedge for " 'you renew so the interest,' " when he remarks on what Gedge has done with the paucity of material known about "the Birthplace" (CTXI 456). It surely is consistent with the time-table of the writing of James's story that after having received *Crucial Instances* James got back to "The Birthplace" and rewrote Edith's story "in my own way."

But this is not the whole story. In "The Recovery," another of her tales in *Crucial Instances,* Edith shows

signs of having borrowed, to redo *her* way, from James's "The Tree of Knowledge" just published in 1900 in *The Soft Side*. In both tales the wife's knowledge of her artist husband's lack of talent (in which he supremely believes) is the issue, but Wharton in her version takes an independent tack. For James the point of view is that of Peter Brench, the family friend, who has been in love with the wife of the bad sculptor, Morgan Mallow, and who wishes to spare her the knowledge of the low quality of Morgan's productions because he erroneously thinks she will stop loving her husband if she knows. For Wharton the point of view is that of the wife, Claudia, who, after ten years of marriage to a greatly admired painter, Keniston, realizes he is a fraud, yet he, like Morgan, has complete "satisfaction" with his own "achievement." In "The Tree of Knowledge" her husband's lack of talent is no deterrent to Mrs. Mallow's love for him and her chief aim in life is to keep him from knowing that she knows. James's tale is a remarkable exercise on the way each one of the quartet of characters learns to understand the state of affairs in regard to himself. Knowing and its process in relation to the talents of both Morgan and his son Lance as received by each member of the family circle is the reason for the story's title. Wharton's tale, on the other hand, is an original variation on the theme, done from the viewpoint and psychology of the wife alone. It is concerned solely with Claudia's disillusionment with her husband's gifts and with her testing of his ability to see how lacking in talent he is. Unconcerned with protecting his ego, as the loving wife in James's tale is, Claudia's obsession is to measure his extreme egoism and his stupidity about himself. When exposure to the great masterpieces of European art shows him how he does not measure up to them, he plans to "stay out here till I learn how to paint" decent pictures. His wife "could have wept at his exquisite obtuseness" (L 274). Wharton's point is that although Keniston passes part of her test by realizing how badly his own pictures compare with great paintings, he fails the whole test by thinking he *can* learn to paint like them. Compared to James's tale of knowledge gained but concealed to protect the feelings of people who love each other, Wharton's tale shows an unpleasant woman who regulates her love for her husband according to whether or not he will face up to his inadequacy. It is Keniston we feel sorry for, not his heartless wife. Whereas James's tale is one of a good marriage, Wharton's is one of a bad marriage; it shows how the discovery of a husband's "obtuseness" in regard to his own capacities can destroy a wife's "ardor," not intensify it, for it never was really love. That "ardor gradually spent itself against dense surface of her husband's complacency" (L 263). (Vide Edith and Teddy!)

In the same volume her playlet story, "Copy," contains two now mature writers who reenact in Edith's way the tale of a similar couple in James's "Broken Wings" which had appeared in the December issue of the *Century* (1900). James's tale is a touching one of a woman writer and an artist who, meeting at a country house week-end, confess they have avoided each other after an aborted love affair because each one thought the other was too successful to be approached. The truth is that their "wings" have been "broken" and they are failures. Recognizing this and their feeling for each other they decide to join their forces and work seriously together, without catering to the heartless society that has exploited their talents.

Again, as in "The Recovery," there is both a similarity to "Broken Wings" as well as a fundamental change in Wharton's playlet, "Copy." A woman novelist who has written "Winged Purposes" (which recalls the title of James's tale) and who has also written *Pomegranate Seed* (which Wharton herself will publish in the future) meets again her old lover, a successful poet, but unlike the couple in James's tale, they are out to exploit their previous love affair by using their letters as "copy" for their memoirs. Their wings have not been broken but their hearts have become hardened. It is only in a last minute memory of their previous love that they give up their plans and they burn the letters. Mrs. Dale is a woman made bitter by the loss of love and Paul Ventnor has been made an exploiter by his success. James's story has been corrected in Wharton's way.

In "The Moving Finger" by Wharton which James had confusedly recalled as "The Vanished Hand" is a reminder of James's stories about painters in which he presents the notion that the painted model can act as a substitute for the person himself. Written and published a few months apart in 1900, James's "The Special Type" and "The Tone of Time" both revolve around a portrait treated as a person. "The Special Type" concerns a fine woman who, used as a correspondent in a divorce case, wants to keep the portrait of the man she was servicing so that scandel would be kept from the skirts of the woman he plans to marry and who does not deserve him. The picture will, for the loving correspondant, be "him," the man himself, to "make up" for her never having seen him "alone." In "The Tone of Time" a woman portrait painter executes on commission an idealized portrait of a gentleman who will stand for the buyer's deceased lover painted with the "tone" of fifty years ago.

In Wharton's version of the theme in "The Moving Finger" the portrait of the beautiful Mrs. Grancy is fought over after her death by the two men in love with her — its painter Claydon and her husband. The painter was accused of visiting Mrs. Grancy when alive only to see her portrait. For him "the portrait *was* Mrs. Grancy" (L 303). After her death her husband has Claydon age the portrait to keep up with his own aging. Claydon paints her as if she "knows her husband is dying" which hastens Grancy's death, after which Claydon obtains posession of the portrait. He explains his attitude to the portrait by contrasting himself with Pygmalion who "turned his statue into a real woman; *I* turned my real woman into a picture. . . . you don't know how much of a woman belongs to you after you've painted her!" (L 312). With her own cleverness in creating an original plot Wharton has redone the themes of the two tales by James, for in "The Special Type" the portrait of the man Mrs. Dundene loves "will be *him* for me....I shall *live* with it, keep it all to myself . . . ." (CTX 191). In "The Tone of Time" like Claydon the woman painter whose love had been taken from her by the picture's purchaser sees that

the latter "Unwittingly gives him back" (X 215) by refusing to give her the portrait.

In *The Touchstone* (in addition to the Jamesian names "Armiger" and "Touchett") one can find the traces of a dialogue from James's "The Given Case," a tale which appeared in *Collier's Weekly* at the end of December, 1898. There the final words between Philip Mackern and Margaret Hamer may have had something to do with the format of the final dialogue in *The Touchstone* between Alexa Glennard and her husband who has published for money a great dead woman novelist's love letters to him. James's heroine Margaret has finally broken her engagement to her fiancé to marry Philip whom she loves, but she feels guilty about the pain she will cause the jilted man because he "trusted" her. " 'But I pity him so that it kills me!' " When Philip says, " 'And only him?' " he implies he should be pitied for his sufferings. " ' It shall be the one you pity most.' " She responds with " ' Pity *me* — pity *me!*' " and the tale ends with "it was perhaps the deepest thing in his gratitude that he did pity her" (CTX 380). At the very end of *The Touchstone* Glennard says, as he regrets his publication of Mrs. Aubyn's letters, how " 'the worst of my torture is the impossibility of such amends?' " But when Alexa pities the dead novelist " ' Oh, poor woman, poor woman' " he answers, "Don't pity her, pity me!...." (T 153).

James, in turn, if he had perhaps read *The Touchstone* when it was first published in 1900, might have found something nutritive in its last pages for *The Wings of the Dove,* published the day after he wrote his letter of thanks to Mrs. Jones for the two books. Kate is telling Densher that although he was not in love with Milly while she lived, he was after her death; " 'she died for you then that you might understand her. From that hour you *did* . . . . And I do now. She did it for us' " (WD 403). Although Wharton's ending has a different significance, the presentation of a dead, betrayed woman who has transformed the character of her betrayer after her death is the same. We read in *The Touchstone,* " 'Don't you see that that's the gift you can't escape from. . . ? Don't you see. . . . that. . . . she's made you into the man she loved?. . . . That's worth suffering for . . . . — that's the gift she would have wished to give!' " In other words, like Kate and Densher, Alexa and Glennard "shall never be again as we were!' " (WD 405). Their transformation anteceded Kate and Densher's but again, we do not know whether James had read *The Touchstone* before or while writing *The Wings of the Dove.*

If the give and take between Wharton and James was a conscious game they played with each other (and we find reason for this possibility in *A Backward Glance* — (her relish for the "forces of malice and merriment" which went into his jokes, and his love of "abstract fooling") — or if it was in both of them an appetency for devouring anything which could further the machinery of their narratives, the answer is really unimportant, for the interaction of their talents has simply enriched their fiction for those for whom it was essentially made, their readers.[3]

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BOOK REVIEWS

Wendy Gimbel, *Edith Wharton: Orphancy and Survival.* Praeger Publishers, New York, New York, 1984. 170pp.

In *Edith Wharton: Orphancy and Survival,* published under the auspices of Landmark Dissertations in Women's Studies Series, Wendy Gimbel quotes Wallace Stevens: "And we make of what we see, what we see clearly/And have seen, a place dependent on ourselves." Gimbel examines houses in four Wharton novels as symbolic places, each expressing a possibility for selfhood. Following the courses of Lily Bart, Mattie Silver, Charity Royall, and Ellen Olenska, Gimbel describes how the exploration of a house becomes for each of these women a metaphor of the female search for identity. Throughout her book Gimbel questions how a woman arrives at a suitable accommodation between self and world.

Gimbel begins this convincing psychoanalytic study by tracing Wharton's own childhood experiences in the houses of her mother, and her failure to find sanctuary in any of them. In *A Backward Glance* Wharton described the grim landscape which circumscribed her childhood: "One of the most depressing impressions of my childhood is my recollection of the intolerable ugliness of New York." To ward off this hostile environment, Gimbel agrees with Cynthia Griffin Woolf, Wharton turned to language, which provided for her a protective structure. Gimbel contends that language, specifically the writing of fiction, takes Wharton out of a world in which she is an orphan and into a country where she can establish her own house. As proof, Gimbel shows how the four major novels, *The House of Mirth, Ethan Frome, Summer,* and *The Age of Innocence,* trace Wharton's journey into selfhood — that voyage of the "homeless waif into the land of letters." Some working definitions would have been useful here since many of the concepts Gimbel examines in her study — selfhood, identity, orphancy — are abstract ones.

According to Gimbel, Wharton translated her feelings of alienation into a fascination with orphancy. Orphancy became for Wharton a paradigm of the deepest dependency between self and world. In *The House of Mirth* Lily's orphancy underscores her role as victim in a patriarchal society. As Gimbel sees it, Lily must struggle if she is to achieve autonomy. To illustrate Lily's struggle, Gimbel traces Lily's progress from house to house. Finally, though, Lily takes an overdose of chloral and leaves a world which cannot accommodate her. To be orphaned, Gimbel contends, is to be without a self; to inhabit a house of one's own making is to achieve selfhood. This very interesting premise deserves further explanation, perhaps. Does one cease to be an orphan once one is housed? Could Lily Bart overcome her orphancy? Lily Bart cannot find a room in any available structure. The "house of mirth" offers her no shelter, and Lily is incapable of building a structure for herself.

In *Ethan Frome,* Wharton's second exploration of the issue of female autonomy, Mattie Silver is the orphan. In this novel, Gimbel says that Wharton shifts the weight of blame. While Wharton still accuses society of infantilizing women, a charge which Gimbel might have proved by example rather than by stating it as accepted fact, she further indicts Mattie for ignoring the valid claims of society. Without explaining what she means by society's valid claims, Gimbel concludes that Mattie is guilty of playing house at the expense of the Fromes' emotional structure. Gimbel finally sees Mattie as a mother-fixated orphan (not unlike Ethan himself) who mutilates herself in order to remain a child in the house of the mother.

In the next novel in this female saga, *Summer,* Gimbel claims, Wharton focuses on the incestuous house, the house of the father. The adolescent journey to independence involves leaving the father's house and establishing a non-incestuous structure. The orphan Charity Royall leaves the house of her guardian, but substitutes the flimsy, temporary structures of her lover Lucius Harney. At the end, Charity returns to the house of her father in need, once again, of his protection. Since the incestuous structure is a metaphor of regression in Gimbel's scheme, she sees Charity's agreement to inhabit the house of her father as an assent to infantiliztion. Gimbel barely mentions Charity's compulsive need to find her mother.

In all three of these novels the orphan has failed to achieve autonomy. In *The Age of Innocence,* however, Wharton celebrates the achievement of selfhood, the achievement of a creative balance between individual freedom and social form. Gimbel sees Ellen Olenska, the last of Wharton's orphans, reenacting the author's personal crisis and tracing its resolution. Ellen's separation from her brutal husband places her in a homeless state. She returns to New York and experiences all the liabilities of being female: being restricted, being thought inferior. Ellen, however, turns these limitations into sources of distinction, in ways that Gimbel does not make quite clear. Wharton's narrative dramatizes the working out of a way in which Ellen can honor the social order while rejecting its tendency to demand conventionality of the female. The achievement of independence for Ellen rests upon the precarious balance between the needs of the self and those of the world.

To chronicle the female's search for autonomy, Gimbel traces the orphan's search for a suitable house. In *The House of Mirth,* Lily Bart, an orphaned child, commits suicide in a dingy boarding house. In *Ethan Frome,* Mattie Silver remains trapped and paralyzed in the frozen farmhouse of a Terrible Mother. Charity Royall, the waif in *Summer,* limps back into a father's incestuous house. In *The Age of Innocence,* though, Ellen Olenska triumphs over her orphancy and finds a house of her own. The world in which she lives accepts the woman she becomes.

Gimbel juxtaposes some very interesting ideas in her dissertation, which recur in Wharton's work: selfhood, orphancy, domestic structure. At times, though, Gimbel seems to identify too closely Wharton's own journey from homeless waif to the land of letter with the journeys of her fictional orphans. Gimbel sets up a thoughful development scheme in which the infant, in order to attain autonomy, must separate from her mother (which Mattie Silver fails to do), leave her father's house (which Charity Royall fails to do), and find a house of her own (which Lily Bart fails to do). By the time Gimbel gets to her chapter on *The Age of Innocence,* however, she seems to be celebrating Wharton's attained selfhood as much as she is Ellen Olenska's. It is Wharton, finally, who has made of what she has seen a place dependent on herself.

Dale Flynn
University of California

Catherine M. Rae. *Edith Wharton's New York Quartet.* Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1984 xiv + 82 pp. $16.50

As R.W.B. Lewis notes in his introduction, Rae's study is the first full-length discussion of *Old New York,* a collection of four novellas which Wharton wrote during the early twenties and focused on the vanished society that shaped her. In a brief compass, Rae accomplishes several tasks most competently: she analyzes each novella, isolates elements shared by all four, and details the biographical, social, and historical background of Wharton's "New York Quartet."

Because Wharton's intent in *Old New York* is "to present her fictional case histories against a background of things as they were" (p. xiii), Rae begins with a biographical sketch of Wharton and a well-researched description of mid - and late-nineteenth century New York, the *mise-en-scene* of the novellas. While no new biographical information is presented, the sketch is useful in placing the quartet within the context of Wharton's life and artistic development. Even more valuable is the mapping of old New York, long since fallen victim to the bulldozer: in much of Wharton's work locale is crucial in setting tone and atmosphere, and particularly so in *Old New York.*

Biographical and historical details are not limited to the first chapter; relevant facts and parallels are interspersed throughout the study. Rae devotes a chapter to each novella, all of which feature a protagonist who "dares to be himself" (sic) and who attempts "to swim against the tides of disapproval" (p. xiii). In *False Dawn: The Forties,* Lewis Raycie is sent to Europe by his father to purchase popular seventeenth-century paintings, but returns with a collection of Italian primitives, having been influenced by a chance meeting with Ruskin. Lewis is disinherited, and the paintings moulder in an attic only to be converted into Rolls Royces, pearls, and furs by a later generation. Rae sees in this novella a parallel between Lewis's relationship with his father, who reduces his son "to a simpering state" (p. 20), and Wharton's relationship to her mother. Rae argues that the most serious theme in *False Dawn* is the parent-child relationship, though she also notes the importance of the ideas of

social rigidity and individual rebellion. The discussion of this novella emphasizes plot — the chapter gives an exhaustive summary of it — but the strong point here is Rae's sensitivity to Wharton's language and imagery, with which Wharton creates "an entirely credible atmosphere" and "sharply defined characters. . . presented with a minimum of description" (p. 27).

In examining the "uneasy relationship" between Delia Ralston and Charlotte Lovell in *The Old Maid: The Fifties* Rae again concentrates on plot. In this novella the two women struggle to claim Tina Lovell as daughter. (Tina is biologically Charlotte's daughter, the result of an affair with Clem Spender, whom Delia loved but rejected because he close art and Rome over law and New York.) Rae traces Delia's use and misuse of power over Charlotte, who cannot openly acknowledge her true relationship to Tina. Rae is critical of Delia, stressing her smugness and her envy of Charlotte, but admits that Wharton treats Delia sympathetically, particularly in the second half of the novella. Because Rae focuses more on plot than on character, she gives only passing notice to the "divisive forces" within each woman (p. 37), which I feel to be at the heart of *The Old Maid.* Thus for her the novella's theme insists that it is "a terrible, a *sacrilegious* thing to interfere with another's destiny," and condemns Delia for interfering. But Rae does not adequately account for the novella's ending, in which Delia triumphs over Charlotte in giving Tina motherly advice on the eve of her bridal, while Charlotte gets only the consolation prize of Tina's farewell kiss.

The chapters on *The Spark: The Sixties* and *New Year's Day: The Seventies* are the strongest in this study because Rae focuses more on character than on plot and in so doing demonstrates her excellence as scholar and critic. In *The Spark* Wharton "investigate(s) and evaluate(s) the far-reaching effects of a chance encounter with true greatness of spirit" (p. 45) — here, Walt Whitman — an encounter which enables Wharton's protagonist, Hayley Delane, to cope with an unfaithful wife and an obnoxious father-in-law. Although Wharton's satire centers upon a society that can produce women like Delane's wife, her intent in this novella is to measure the impact of the past upon the present (p. 46), an intent common to Wharton's fiction. Noteworthy about Rae's analysis of *The Spark* is her discussion of Whitman's influence on Wharton (pp. 46-9). Drawing upon Wharton's outline and notes for a projected essay on the poet, Rae concludes that Wharton admired Whitman's use of language and his philosophy of life, though she did not share his "confidence in the inherent goodness of the American citiizen" (p. 47). Rae also notes that by casting Delane in the image of Whitman, Wharton shows her esteem for her protagonist, who like her experiences a profound alienation from a frivolous society (p. 56).

Lizzie Hazeldean, "one of the most realistic and philosophical of Edith Wharton's heroines" (p. 63), dominates the chapter on *New Year's Day.* She enjoys one of the rare happy marriages in Wharton's fiction, but because her husband is terminally ill she is forced to prostitute herself to earn money and is therefore shunned by society. Rae calls *New Year's Day* the "most personal of the four novellas" (p. 61), and outlines the parallels between heroine and author, the most intriguing of which is an interest in Catholicism (Lizzie converts to the Church while Wharton, as evidenced by her library, was greatly interested in its saints, rituals, and religious orders). Because Lizzie deliberately chooses to live beyond the pale of society, Rae suggests that this "tribute to an independent spirit" is Wharton's justification for her own actions, especially her divorce of Teddy (p. 73). Rae also discusses other characters, most notably Mrs. Struthers, the "Shoe polish queen" of *The Age of Innocence,* who is based on Mrs. Paren Stevens, to whose son Wharton had been briefly engaged. But Lizzie Hazeldean is clearly the centerpiece of an insightful analysis of *Old New York's* final novella.

A final chapter outlines the common elements of the four novellas, and calls Wharton's "New York Quartet" a "remarkable achievement" because of its sharp character delineation, tight structure, and crisp writing (p. 78). Rae concludes her study by noting that when Wharton is concerned with locale her mood is nostalgic (p. 78) and that she is "kind. . . to her old home" (p. 79). While it is true that Wharton lovingly recreates a New York that had disappeared by the time she was writing these novellas, Rae's closing emphasis on Wharton's "happy nostalgia" downplays the strong vein of social criticism running through the collection, which Rae herself acknowledges in her preface. In spite of this somewhat misleading conclusion and the dependence on plot summary in chapters 2 and 3, however, Rae's work is a fine study of *Old New York.* The sensitivity to Wharton's language, the perceptive analyses of character, and wealth of background information make this study not only a solid introduction to *Old New York,* but a source of ideas for future scholarship on the novellas. Catherine M. Rae's *Edith Wharton's New York Quartet,* then, is a valuable — and needed — contribution to Wharton criticism.

Judith Funston
Michigan State University

Haunted Women. **edited by Alfred Bendixen. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1984. $14.95 cloth.** Thirteen ghost tales by the American women writers, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Kate Chopin, Sarah Orne Jewett, Harriet Prescott Spofford, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Madeline Yale Wynne, Grace king, Gertrude Atherton, and Edith Wharton plus excellent introductions are included. "By providing a literary form capable of dealing with fear and repression, terror and entrapment, the supernatural tale made it possible for women to express their nightmares as well a their dreams." FULL REVIEW TO APPEAR IN FALL ISSUE.

WHARTON-JAMES *Continued from page 5*

NOTES

[1]Adeline R. Tintner, " 'The Papers': Henry James Redoes *As You Like It.*" *Studies in Short Fiction.* vol. 17 no. 2, 1980, pp. 165-170.
[2]Leon Edel, *Henry James: The Master.* Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1972. p. 128.
[3]Adeline R. Tintner, "Edel's Henry IV." *American Literary Realism:* 1870-1910, vol. XVII, No. 2, Autumn, 1984.

KEY TO WORKS BY HENRY JAMES

CTX- - - *The Complete Tales of Henry James,* ed. Leon Edel, vol. X. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1964.

CTXI- - *The Complete Tales of Henry James,* ed. Leon Edel, vol. XI. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1964.

HJTV- - *Henry James Letters,* ed. Leon Edel, vol. IV. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984.

WD- - - *The Wings of the Dove,* vol. 2. New York: Scribner's, 1902.

KEY TO WORKS BY EDITH WHARTON

L - - - - *The Collected Short Stories of Edith Wharton,* vol. I, ed. R.W.B. Lewis. New York Scribner's, 1968.

T - - - - *The Touchstone.* New York: Scribner's, 1900.

FAUST *Continued from page 1*

to be May's "soul's custodian" in their marriage, and she is to be his "possession." All these are locutions that form the basis of *Faust,* as Mephistopheles tempts Faust and is abetted by Wagner, the true innocent (Wagner: "to know all is my ambition"). Just as Faust has more insight than his younger protege, and replies, "every deed of ours, no less than every sorrow,/Impedes the onward march of life," so May becomes, in *The Age of Innocence,* the more knowledgeable of the pair. The tribal farewell dinner, a rite of sacrifice, fixes the readers' impression of May, victorious, and Newland, so bewildered he barely remembers to speak to Ellen on his right.

The close of the novel gives us Newland as Faust ("We dread the blows we never feel, and what we never lose is yet by us lamented"), professing a belief in Faith, Hope, and Patience, yet doing so in reality to save his own life. It is rather Ellen, who delights in living for the moment, who illustrates the Faustian, "he who grasps the Moment's gift,/He is the proper man." It is also fitting that Newland's moment of prime decision — whether or not to marry May — takes place around Easter, the Christian image for rebirth, and the point in *Faust* when Heaven's voices occur. That he does not really "make" that decision, but accepts her decision in the telegram as final, places him even more firmly in the Faustian pattern. Circumstances are Newland's Mephistopheles, but circumstances are often the machinations of the Welland/Newland tribe. Newland's mother is delighted that her son has gotten past "the Siren Isle"; May is imagined throughout as Diana, virginal nature and healing; and Newland consistently reverses all the associations with his (and May's) name, in circumstances much less favorable to him than when they appear in Henry James' fiction. For Newland Archer, the journey to and through life has been anything but triumphant. His existence goes on, as he walks away from any encounter with Ellen, but the words of Faust's Margaret echo in the motivations of both Wharton's women, May as well as Ellen: "I've done, else, all things for the love of thee." Suitably, Margaret — despite her murders — is saved. And Newland, like Faust, just continues his futile life.

[1].The B.Q. Morgan translation, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust,* I (N.Y.: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1946).