



EDITH WHARTON REVIEW

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Edith Wharton in Translation: The Italian "Boom" by Gianfranca Balestra	1
Film Review: "The House of Mirth and the Lower Depths of Tragedy" by Linda Costanzo Cahir	2
The Court of the Tuileries: Reflections on Archer's Retreat in <i>The Age of Innocence</i> by John Arthos	8
O all you beauties I shall never see: An Unpublished Edith Wharton Letter by David H. Porter	13

The *Edith Wharton Review* is the official publication of The Edith Wharton Society. It is published at the Department of English, Kean University, Union, NJ. Manuscripts approx. 9-20 pp. should follow the new MLA style and be submitted in triplicate to Dr. Carole M. Shaffer-Koros, Director, MA in Liberal Studies Program, Willis 307C, Kean University, Union, NJ 07083.

- Editor**
Carole M. Shaffer-Koros
- Associate Editor**
Kathy Fedorko
- Assistant to the Editor**
Elissa Young
Robert Koros
- Advisory Board**
Annette Zilversmit
- Bibliographic Editor**
Clare Colquitt
- Editorial Board**
Donna Campbell
Linda Costanzo Cahir
Hildegard Hoeller
Julie Olin-Ammentorp
Augusta Rohrbach
Sharon Shaloo
Frederick Wegener

Volume XVI, No. 2

Fall, 2000

Edith Wharton in Translation: The Italian "Boom"

Gianfranca Balestra
University of Siena, Italy

"A review in the *Antologia* ought to give the book a continental 'boom,' & what I care for much more, perhaps the chance of being translated into Italian." Writing to Brownell in 1902, Edith Wharton expressed her interest in an Italian translation of *The Valley of Decision*, her first novel set in eighteenth-century Italy. Thirty years later in *A Backward Glance*, she was still hoping for an Italian translation of this book, to be published with an introduction by Vernon Lee.² *The Valley of Decision* was not translated until 1999, one of the latest enterprises within a real Wharton "boom" in Italy. Other neglected works have been translated in recent years, while new translations of works already available in Italian are being published, old translations are

being reissued with new introductions, and new selections of stories are being edited. In 1991 Gaetano Prampolini offered a first overview of Wharton's reception in Italy.³ I will take off from there, concentrating on recent events and only briefly referring to previous ones when necessary.

With the long overdue publication of *The Valley of Decision*, all of Wharton's works dealing with Italy have now been translated. This historical novel was included by the small publishing company Diabasis in a series named "Biblioteca padana," which offers literature and history books dealing with the Po valley in northern Italy, that is Wharton's "valley of decision." None of the major publishing companies were willing to take a risk on this somewhat flawed and outmoded novel, which remains a book for a few

(Continued on page 3)

EDITH WHARTON SOCIETY BUSINESS MEETING AND DINNER

Thursday, December 28, 2000

Washington, DC MLA

Business Meeting: 5:15 – 6:30 p.m., Park Tower Suite 8216, Marriott

Dinner: 7 p.m., The Red Tomato Restaurant

2030 M St. N.W., Washington D.C.

For menu choices, cost and reservations, click on www.gonzaga.edu/wharton/ or contact Abby Werlock by phone: (570) 297-2696

FILM REVIEW

"*The House of Mirth* and the Lower Depths of Tragedy"
Linda Costanzo Cahir, Centenary College

In *The House of Mirth*, the world that Wharton depicts is a "blatantly vicious" one. "It is mean, very mean" Olivia Stewart, the producer of the film, told me in a recent conversation. As she spoke, I remembered back to Martin Scorsese's 1993 film of *The Age of Innocence*, a sumptuous, high budget film, beautiful in its technical mastery and authenticity of detail. However, too reverential in its depiction of that same, moneyed Whartonian world, Scorsese's film softened the viciousness and, in consequence, missed its mark. But Stewart's comment hit it. Her assertion demonstrated a high mindfulness of an essential quality of a Wharton novel, without which any translation (cinematic or linguistic) misses a crucial, defining characteristic of her work. Beneath the surface elegance, Wharton's society is a perfidious one, cancerous in its slow, undifferentiated devastation.

Stewart had a high level of artistic involvement in the film's production, not just budgetary and organizational involvement; and her comment, in conjunction with what I knew of Terence Davies's work, heightened my interest in seeing the film. *The House of Mirth*, in its linear narrative structure, its subject matter, and its setting, was a pronounced departure for Davies. His other films are elliptically structured, beautifully nagging explorations of memory as yearnings and nightmares, of psychological enigmas and horrors, and of remembrance delivered in spare and beautiful black and white images or suppressed coloring. Davies' subject is the personal past narrated through meticulous composition, layered, and often structured through haunting, juxtaposed shots. Far removed from Wharton's wealthy 1905 New York social set, Davies's other films take place in his autobiographical world of working class Liverpool (*Distant Voices, Still Lives; The Long Day Closes; the "Robert Tucker"/Liverpool trilogy*;). *The House of Mirth* marked a significant, and curious, departure for him; and it is admirable that Davies, the talent often described as "the most promising director in British cinema," would be so brave as to break with the proven pattern of his success and take on a project so antithetical to his much-admired style and sensibilities.

His *The House of Mirth* is a film worth seeing, so successful in its capacity to deliver the tones and undertones of Wharton's novel that detailed complaints about the film's few faults (there are some) seem petulant. In the wash, the cinematic strengths conquer the shortcomings, the most pronounced of which, for faithful readers of Wharton's book, may be those rare scenes in which Davies (he also wrote the screenplay) alters details of the novel. Readers of *The House of Mirth* have concretized ways of seeing characters, insinuated events, and implicit meaning. These ways of seeing Wharton's novel may not

jibe with Davies's view. His film, in the best sense of the term, tests responsibilities. It makes us ask what duty a literature-based film owes to its parent text and what duty viewers have to consider interpretations outside of their own.

The film, overall, is respectful of Wharton's novel and alterations to the book are rare, though that rarity makes them more conspicuous when they occur. One such alteration occurs approximately mid-way through the film. In a beautifully composed sequence, one where images—the use of cinematic language not verbal language—deliver drama, a char-woman, Mrs. Haf-fen (Mary MacLeod), visits Lily with the express purpose of selling Bertha Dorset's love letter to Lawrence Selden (she thinks Lily wrote them). Lily (Gillian Anderson), at first confused by what is being offered, slowly *understands*, and the dawning levels of understanding register, at variant speeds, through a range of emotional and cerebral responses. The acting of both Anderson and MacLeod is authentic, subtle, and complex. The camera, guided by a wise sensibility that refuses to resort to the easy close-up, keeps discretely at a distance (largely mid and full shots), and, in doing so, increases the feeling of mounting tension (and disgust) in the room and in Lily. (I marveled at the skill, the beauty.) Lily Bart, resilient, decisive, and ever-graceful, purchases the letters. The char-woman leaves, but the scene continues. Lily, holding Bertha's social and economic future in her hand, quietly—and with a hint of menace—says, "If you would forgive your enemy, first inflict hurt on them [sic]. Bertha, how could you be so stupid?" The lines Lily speaks are not Wharton's, and, arguably, they are out of character for her; but, equally tenable is that they are appropriate to what Lily is feeling at the moment. In Wharton's book, Lily keeps the letters, after all, instead of destroying them as she initially intended, because a "revived" memory of "Bertha Dorset, smiling...victorious" rekindles Lily's distaste for and resentment of Bertha.

Gillian Anderson is a wonderfully credible Lily, complex and divided—strong and weak, surefooted and uncertain, substantial and shallow—and lovely in all the ways that Lily Bart must be. Most notable is Laura Linney as Bertha Dorset, a force of self-absorbed, cold narcissism in soft, becalming white organza. All visual lightness and dainty, Linney, with a subtle tilt of the head or a cock of the eyebrow, betrays the hard, nasty kink and rapacious willfulness that is Bertha. While neither Gillian Anderson nor Laura Linney incarnate my Lily or Bertha, each works effectively in the film's overall view of character. Strong, also, were Anthony LaPaglia's Simone Rosedale, all block-level and solid energy, and Eleanor Bron's Mrs. Peniston, ever pinched and immobile in vinegary rectitude. The one apparent weakness in the film is

(Continued on page 17)

(Continued from page 1)

Wharton aficionados and is hard to find. In a useful afterword, Rita Severi presents this difficult work and explains its cultural background: Wharton's years of preparation through her travels to Italy and her reading of Italian history and literature. References to the writer's own comments on this novel as well as to its critical reception further contribute to its understanding.

Italian Villas and Their Gardens was first translated in 1983 and reprinted in 1991. It is a beautiful book, with forty-three color and over a hundred black and white illustrations. There are only three reproductions of the original drawings by Maxfield Parrish, while the others are paintings, drawings, engravings and prints from various periods and sources. The preface is by Sir Harold Acton, an expatriate English writer who lived in a Renaissance mansion in Florence and was a connoisseur of Italian art and gardens. In spite of more recent publications on the subject, he considers Wharton's work still valuable and an essential source of information, as some of the villas and gardens have since disappeared, destroyed by the war or by urban development and industrialization, while others have been fortunately preserved and restored.

Italian Backgrounds finally found its way to a publisher in 1995 when it was presented at airports in Italy and New York as part of a promotion aptly named "On Board Library-A Book on the Fly." This welcome and long awaited translation is, however, incomplete, leaving out three essays: "The Sanctuaries of the Pennine Alps," "What the Hermits Saw," and "Sub Umbra Liliorum." The reader unfamiliar with the original might remain unaware of the selection made, since no explanation is offered and the only evidence that can be found is in the small print of the acknowledgments that reads "Da *Italian Backgrounds*" (From *Italian Backgrounds*). The introduction by Attilio Brilli, a renowned scholar of the "Italian journey," underlines the originality of Wharton's perspective, her attention to the unexplored, and her use of art to bring out a landscape.

Two precious volumes, edited by Gaetano Prampolini, present together Wharton's Italian tales, that is, short stories set in Italy, some of them translated here for the first time. *Pienezza di vita* (1993) includes six stories from 1891 to 1904: "The Fullness of Life" (which gives the title to the collection), "Souls Belated," "The Muse's Tragedy," "The Duchess at Prayer," "The Confessional" and "A Venetian Night's Entertainment." *La collezione Raycie* (1996) includes six stories from 1904 to 1934: "The House of the Dead Hand," "The Letter," "The Daunt Diana," "The Eyes," "False Dawn" and "Roman Fever." In his introductions Prampolini outlines the development of Wharton's relationship to Italy, and stresses how these stories are nourished by her

"extraordinary knowledge of its art, history, natural and cultural landscapes." Wharton is seen as a pivotal figure for her use of neglected periods such as the Eighteenth century and the Risorgimento, for her discovery of Italian backgrounds, and for her penetrating portrayals of Americans in Italy.

Wharton's short stories in general have received a certain amount of attention. Although there is no complete collection in Italian, there are many selections. Some of them present translations of volumes originally published in English, others propose new selections, sometimes organized around a unifying theme. The ghost stories have been published in three versions. The first translation by Gabriella Ernesti dates from 1974 and has been reprinted many times since, more recently by the publisher Bompiani with an introduction by Gilberto Finzi, who outlines some of the theories of the fantastic-structuralist as well as psychoanalytic--before presenting Wharton's peculiar representations, of which "Kerfol," "Mr. Jones" and "Afterward" he considers the best. This edition reproduces *The Ghost Stories of Edith Wharton* published by Scribner's in 1973, with the same illustrations by Laszlo Kubinyi, Wharton's original Preface and an Autobiographical Postscript taken from *A Backward Glance*. The same translation was reissued in 1995 by a small publisher--Editoriale Opportunita Book--with an introduction by Marina Premoli, who offers a general profile of the author. Under the same title, *Storie di fantasma*, one can find also the translation of the original 1937 volume *Ghosts*, with "A Bottle of Perrier" instead of "The Looking Glass" and the stories ordered in a different way. The introduction by Gianni Pilo and Sebastiano Fusco briefly recounts some moments of Wharton's development as a writer: in a world dominated by social conventions, even the appearance of a ghost is seen as a violation of the ultimate convention that separates the living from the dead.

Seven tales of writers and artists are translated in *Racconti di scrittori e artisti*: "Copy," "Expiation," "Xingu," "His Father's Son," "The Pelican," "The Dilettante," "The Verdict." They are translated by seven different people as part of a project for the Master's Degree in Literary Translation at the University of Venice--including the director of the course, Rosella Mamoli Zorzi. In the introduction, Francesca Bisutti De Riz stresses Wharton's use of irony and her representation of the various degrees of misunderstanding between the artist and her public that generate the solitude of the former.

Triangoli imperfetti brings together three stories of adultery and death: "Joy in the House," "Atrophy," and "The Day of the Funeral." As Elena Racca Bruno writes in the introduction, the "imperfect triangles," formed by the various possible combinations of she, he and the other, contain a space of solitude. In these stories the third side of the triangle is missing, being either sick or dead by suicide. The narrative situation is a recurring one in

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

Wharton's fiction, where the impossibility of love is marked by social conventions and/or moral awakenings.

In *Vecchia New York*, the *Old New York* title is used to contain only two of the original novellas - *False Dawn* and *The Old Maid*--with the addition of *Bunner Sisters*. This 1988 publication by "La Tartaruga"--the Italian feminist press that was among the first to rediscover Wharton--has been the source of more recent editions: in 1996 *The Old Maid* was reissued separately in a new economical series, while "False Dawn" was included in a volume presented as a choice of the best stories by Wharton entitled *Roman Fever and Other Stories* (1995). In fact this selection (without "False Dawn") was first published in 1988 and made available in Italian the title story together with "Xingu," "The Other Two," "Souls Belated," "The Angel at the Grave," "The Last Asset," "After Holbein" and "Autres Temps."

Also *Madame de Treymes* was published as a separate work, with an introduction by Attilio Brilli--"The Lesson of the Master"--which explicitly foregrounds Henry James's influence. This is considered Wharton's most Jamesian tale, for its use of the international theme, or rather the "Franco-American subject" in a way that resembles the Master's early period rather than the more complex later treatment in *The Ambassadors*. However, James's influence is not seen as a limitation, but rather as a brilliant tribute that achieves originality.

Other long short stories published separately are *The Letters as La collina di Saint Cloud* and *Her Son* under the title *Per un figlio*, both translated by Chiara Gabutti for Guanda in 1995.

Ethan Frome is probably Wharton's most translated book in Italy. Her very first work to appear as long ago as 1927, it has seen many versions since. The original title is now finally restored, after many attempts to find something probably more appealing to an Italian ear than the foreign name of the protagonist, which was often kept as a subtitle: *Condannati alla vita* (*Condemned to Life*, 1927), *Gli infelicissimi* (*The Very Unhappy*, 1931), *Un caso terribile* (*A Terrible Case*, 1953), *L'incidente* (*The Accident*, 1963), *Amore disperato* (*Desperate Love*, 1980). The most important edition is no doubt the one with parallel texts translated by Emanuela Dal Fabbro in 1995, with a scholarly introduction by Cristina Giorcelli. "'Gusto del martirio' ed espiazione: il vortice di *Ethan Frome*" ("A Taste for Martyrdom' and Expiation: *Ethan Frome's* Vortex") is, in fact, an extended essay (fifty pages long), with more than one hundred footnotes that aptly take into account all relevant criticism. Every textual aspect is analyzed, from the narrative frame and the role of the narrator, to the function of space, from the importance and symbolic meaning of names, to the use of colors and other imagery. Moreover, the text is placed within the Wharton canon and within the great tradition of the American novel. Of special note are intertextual references to Hawthorne, in particular thematic and structural analogies with *The Blithedale Romance*.

Rizzoli reprinted in 1994 a 1963 translation by Greti Ducci, with a new brief but perceptive introduction by Vito Amoroso. In 1993 Guanda reprinted Marcella Hannau's 1953 translation for Longanesi (already reissued in 1970 and 1979). An economical edition of *Ethan Frome* is included in the series "Tascabili Economici Newton" that offers classic works of 100 pages for 1000 Lire (about 50 cents). It presents a new translation by Lucio Angelini and an introduction by Tommaso Pisanti. Unfortunately under the heading "Introductory Note by the Author" we find not Wharton's Introduction, but the narrative frame by the anonymous narrator. This blunder should not detract from the merits of Newton Compton, a publishing company that has undertaken the commendable enterprise of offering most of Wharton's works in inexpensive paperback editions, with short introductions and bibliographical notes.

Strangely enough, *Summer* also was among the first works to be presented to the Italian public, in 1933--a period when not many American books were being translated--under the title *La figlia della montagna* (*The Daughter of the Mountain*). More recently (1984, reprint 1993) a new translation was published by La Tartaruga, together with the "Beatrice Palmato" text and an afterword by Emanuela Dal Fabbro, who had already written an essay on this "unpublishable fragment."⁴ Dal Fabbro reads Charity Royall's story as a tale of female initiation, whose stages are marked by spatial coordinates and body experiences. At the end of her journey Charity has recomposed the fragments of her geography and recovered the space of her origins; she has achieved knowledge of the body--her mother's and her own--and is ready to accept her own maternity.

The Touchstone, which first appeared in Italy as early as 1929, was newly translated in 1995 by Marina Premoli. The title of the introductory essay by Gianfranca Balestra, "Il mercato delle lettere" ("The Marketing of Letters"), focuses on the commercial exploitation of writing, when private messages become objects for public consumption. The letters are seen as absent signifiers of female creativity and sexuality, metaphors for writing itself and the multiplicity of readings.

All of Wharton's major novels are available in Italian. *The House of Mirth*, first translated by Clara Lavagetti in 1957, was reissued with an introduction by Benedetta Bini in 1993, "L'arte inutile di Lily Bart". Lily Bart's "useless art" is the construction of herself as an *objet d'art*, an image for the gazes that interpret and contaminate her. In spite of some moments of disclosure, Lily's multiple images do not make up an identity and her ultimate artistic creation is the inevitable cold mask of death. Bini stresses the importance of space in the novel, especially the function of the station in the opening scene as a place of anonymity and modernity although not yet a place of confusion of bodies, languages and identities as in Dreiser, Dos Passos and the movies. A new version of *The House of Mirth* by Paolini is proposed with an introduction by Guido Fink, who touches on some of the

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

possible readings of the novel and suggests parallels with other famous literary heroines, from Eliot's Gwendolen Harleth in *Daniel Deronda* to Emma Bovary, from Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles to Kate Chopin's Edna Pontellier, from Crane's Maggie to Dreiser's Carrie.

The Age of Innocence had been available in Italian since 1960, long before Scorsese's film made it known to a wider public. That first translation was reprinted many times, while in 1993 a new version was published with an introduction by Tommaso Pisanti, giving a general profile of Wharton and her career, and considering this novel in the context of her literary development and attitudes toward New York society.

The Custom of the Country, in the 1984 translation by Maria Teresa Sereni, was reprinted many times, while in 1994 a new translation by Luciana Bianciardi was published by Newton Compton with an introduction by Fiorenzo Fantaccini, entitled "Undine Spragg's 'Class' Struggle." Among other things, Fantaccini places the novel in the social context it satirizes as well as in the literary tradition of the novel of manners; he identifies narrative strategies and stresses stylistic devices such as the recurring ethnological terminology and battle imagery; he refers to the Fletcher and Massinger's play as a source for the title and as possible intertext.

The Children was first translated in 1945, reprinted in 1989, and translated again in 1995 with an introduction by Tommaso Pisanti, who stresses the modernity of the themes and of the socio-psychological analysis. Wharton's treatment of the middle-aged protagonist's passion for a teen-ager cannot be compared with Nabokov's *Lolita*, but is not devoid of tormented if controlled eroticism.

The Reef was among the last novels to be translated, first in 1993 and then in 1995. In the introduction to the first translation, "Censura del desiderio e linguaggio della passione" ("Censorship of Desire and the Language of Passion") Gianfranca Balestra underlines the role of verbal and physical language in a novel of female sexual awakening, written after the author's own discovery of passion. The narrative structure is also briefly analyzed, together with the possible metaphorical meanings of the reef. In the introduction to the 1995 translation, "Edith Wharton fra istinto e conservazione" ("Edith Wharton Between Instinct and Conservation"), Eraldo Affinati recognizes in *The Reef* a recurring preoccupation in Wharton's fiction: the conflict between instincts and conventions.

The Glimpses of the Moon was first published as *Raggi di luna* in 1992 in a translation by Mario Biondi, himself a writer of some renown. A different version by Mariagrazia Bianchi Oddera was published in 1997 under the different title *Gli sguardi della luna* with an introduction by Tommaso Pisanti, who stresses the cosmopolite dimension of the novel and Wharton's ability to capture and satirize the new times, a late "belle

Èpoque" of easy money and loose morals.

Of the Vance Weston novels, only the second, *The Gods Arrive*, was translated under the title *Il canto delle Muse* (*The Muses' Song*). The translator is Marta Morazzoni, a writer on her own, who recently received the Campiello, one of the most important Italian prizes for literature. Probably this novel was chosen over *Hudson River Bracketed* because of its European background. Although it can be read independently without any problem, this is one instance when an introduction would have been useful. Marta Morazzoni is also the author of the recent first translation of *Twilight Sleep*.

Even *The Buccaneers*, Wharton's unfinished posthumous novel, was translated in 1994, not in the scholarly format edited by Viola Hopkins Winner, but in the one completed by Marion Mainwaring. Unfortunately the Italian version is announced on the cover only as edited--instead of completed--by Mainwaring; her substantial contribution is not even clarified in the ambiguous endnote. As Mamoli Zorzi⁵ writes in a justly angry review, it is impossible for the Italian reader to realize that over a hundred pages of the novel were in fact written by Mainwaring. The reviewer criticizes as well the Italian tendency to accept passively whatever comes from the States, including emendations dictated by the current rage for political correctness.

Wharton's autobiography *A Backward Glance*, first translated in 1984, was reprinted in 1994. A most interesting work from the biographical point of view is *Lettere a Morton Fullerton 1907-1931*, a little book edited by Marina Premoli, which reveals to the Italian public Wharton's intense love affair. The editor translates and presents together Wharton's letters, passages from her love diary "The life apart/ Mon âme close," and even her poem "Terminus." As the title of the introductory essay ("Un' anima dischiusa") implies, Wharton's soul is here disclosed through a fascinating juxtaposition of intimate thoughts (the diary) and the attempt to communicate or, sometimes, mitigate them in the correspondence. Abundant footnotes clarify situations and obscure references, while a chronological note completes the biographical information. Although based on second-hand sources--the selection of letters to Morton Fullerton included in *The Letters of Edith Wharton* edited by R.W.B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis and excerpts from the diary quoted in Lewis's and Wolfe's biographies--the result is original and might be taken as a suggestion for a more scholarly English edition, now that the Love Diary has been published.

Another significant sign of the Italian interest in Edith Wharton is the translation of non-fiction works such as *The Writing of Fiction, In Morocco* and *A Motor-Flight Through France*. In 1996 *The Writing of Fiction* was published in a series entitled "Strumenti per scrivere e comunicare" ("Tools for Writing and Communicating"), where writers are supposed to explain their work and

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

reveal their technical devices and preferences, in a sort of autobiographical tale where theory and experience meet. In 1997 *In Morocco* was published with an introduction by Rosella Mamoli Zorzi⁶, followed in 1998 by *A Motor-Flight Through France*, with Mary Suzanne Schriber's introduction. A comparison between the two books, produced by the same publisher in a rather refined lay-out, shows how important it is to have a competent editor who knows about the writer, the text and its context. This is obviously the case with Zorzi, while Schriber's rich and scholarly introduction is spoiled in Italian by the translation, which, for instance, refers to Percy Lubbock as a woman friend of Wharton.

As can be seen from these notes, only a few works are still missing for the Italian reader: the already mentioned *Hudson River Bracketed*, *The Fruit of the Tree*, *The Marne*, *A Son at the Front*, *The Mother's Recompense*, some of the short stories and essays, her letters and poetry. But Wharton's Italian "boom" continues, and some of these may be on their way. Publishers are investing in Wharton, and readers can choose among various editions at different prices and with different levels of concern for quality of translation and critical information.

In this brief survey I have not examined the translations themselves or evaluated their adequacy, nor have I compared different versions or tried to account for the proliferation of translations of the same book. Instead, I have considered the numerous introductions, which can be at times just perfunctory presentations of the writer, but in some cases are critical essays in themselves. In fact, they constitute a significant critical corpus in a panorama where independent scholarly work appears to be still rather scarce, although on the rise.

Notes

¹ Edith Wharton. Letter to William Crary Brownell, literary consultant at Scribner's. June 25th, 1902. Scribner's Archives. Princeton.

² See *A Backward Glance (Novellas and Other Writings)*. New York: The Library of America, 1990), 884. A partial Italian translation of *The Valley of Decision* (a hundred and seventy typewritten pages which cover part of the first book) is held at the Beinecke Library. In "Il Settecento italiano di Edith Wharton" I tried to present the story of this translation and of Vernon Lee's proposed introduction, which had appeared as a review in the Italian journal *La cultura (Il viaggiatore italiano)*. Renzo S. Crivelli and Luigi Sampietro eds., Roma: Bulzoni, 1994).

³ Gaetano Prampolini, "Edith Wharton in Italy." *Edith Wharton Review* 9.1 (1992): 24-26. Paper presented at the "Edith Wharton in Paris" Conference, June-July 1991.

⁴ Emanuela Dal Fabbro, "La 'Beatrice' di Edith Wharton." *Letterature d'America*, 1, 2 (1980): 43-66.

⁵ Rosella Mamoli Zorzi, "Una storia di 'Bucanieri' e [...] pirati contro la scrittrice Wharton." *Il gazzettino*, Venezia, 5 agosto 1994.

⁶ *In Morocco* is also the object of an interesting essay by Cristina Giorcelli, who underlines, among other things, Wharton's 'orientalist' prejudice as well as her white Protestant and democratic perspective. (Cristina Giorcelli, "In Morocco di Edith Wharton," in Radhouan Ben Amara ed., *Viaggiatori d'Oriente e d'Occidente: variazioni sul mito di Ulisse*, Cagliari: AV, 1999).

Bibliography of Italian Translations

The Age of Innocence.

L'età dell'innocenza. Trans. Amalia D'Agostino. Milano: Feltrinelli, 1960. Reprints: Longanesi, 1979; TEA, 1988. Trans. Pietro Negri. Introduction by Tommaso Pisanti, "La 'signora' della narrativa." Roma: Newton Compton, 1993.

The Buccaneers.

Bucanieri. Ed. Marion Mainwaring. Trans. Chiara Gabutti. Parma: Guanda, 1994.

The Children.

I ragazzi. Trans. Lucilla Jervis Rochat. Torino: Frassinelli, 1945; reprinted with an introduction by Marilyn French. Milano: Longanesi, 1989. Trans. by Elena Grillo. Introduction by Tommaso Pisanti, "Ci salvano i ragazzi." Roma: Newton Compton, 1995.

The Custom of the Country

L'usanza del paese. Trans. Maria Teresa Sereni. Milano: Longanesi, 1985. Trans. Luciana Bianciardi. Introduction by Fiorenzo Fantaccini, "La lotta 'di classe' di Undine Spragg." Roma: Newton Compton, 1994.

Ethan Frome

Condannati alla vita. Trans. Gastone Rossi. Milano: Sonzogno, 1927.

Gli infelicissimi. Trans. Luisa Mazzolani. Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1931.

Ethan Frome. Trans. Pietro Bottini. Milano-Roma: Jandi Sapi, 1946.

Un caso terribile: Ethan Frome. Trans. Marcella Hannau. Milano: Longanesi, 1953. Reprinted 1979.

L'incidente (Ethan Frome). Trans. Greta Ducci. Milano: Rizzoli, 1963. Reprinted as *Ethan Frome*, introduction by Vito Amoroso, 1994.

Ethan Frome. Trans. Lucio Angelini. Introduction by Tommaso Pisanti. Roma: Newton Compton, 1994.

Ethan Frome. With parallel texts. Trans. Emanuela Dal Fabbro. Introduction by Cristina Giorcelli, "Gusto del martirio' ed espiazione: il vortice di Ethan Frome." Venezia: Marsilio, 1995.

The House of Mirth

La casa dell'allegria. Trans. Clara Lavagetti. Milano: Mondadori, 1957. Reprinted as *La casa della gioia*.

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1983. Reprinted with an introduction by Benedetta Bini, "L'arte inutile di Lily Bart," 1993. *La casa della gioia*. Trans. Pier Francesco Paolini. Introduction by Guido Fink, "Una casa per Lily Bart." Roma: Newton Compton, 1994.

The Glimpses of the Moon

Raggi di luna. Trans. Mario Biondi. Milano: Corbaccio, 1992.

Gli sguardi della luna. Trans. Mariagrazia Bianchi Oddera. Introduction by Tommaso Pisanti, "Edith Wharton rivisitata." Roma: Newton Compton, 1997.

The Gods Arrive

Il canto delle Muse. Trans. Marta Morazzoni. Milano: Corbaccio, 1995.

Madame de Treymes

Madame de Treymes. Trans. M. Bonsanti. Introduction by Attilio Brilli, "The Lesson of the Master". Firenze: Passigli, 1992. Reprint 1996.

Old New York

Vecchia New York. Trans. Maria Giulia Castagnone. Contents: *Falsa partenza*, *Le sorelle Bunner*, *La zitella* (*False Dawn*, *Bunner Sisters*, *The Old Maid*.). Milano: La Tartaruga, 1983. Reprint 1988.

La zitella. Reprint of *The Old Maid*. Milano: La Tartaruga, 1996.

The Reef

La scogliera. Trans. Marina Premoli. Introduction by Gianfranca Balestra, "Censura del desiderio e linguaggio della passione." Milano: La Tartaruga, 1993. Trans. Pier Francesco Paolini. Introduction by Eraldo Affinati, "Edith Wharton fra istinto e conservazione." Roma: Newton Compton, 1995.

Summer

La figlia della montagna. Trans. Salvatore Rosati. Lanciano: Carabba, 1933.

Estate. Trans. Maria Giulia Castagnone. Milano: La Tartaruga, 1984. With the "Beatrice Palmato" fragment. Afterward by Emanuela Dal Fabbro. Reprinted in 1993.

The Touchstone

La pietra di paragone. Trans. Gastone Rossi. Milano: Sonzogno, 1929.

Trans. Marina Premoli. Introduction by Gianfranca Balestra, "Il mercato delle lettere." Milano: La Tartaruga, 1995.

Twilight Sleep

Il sonno del crepuscolo. Trans. Marta Morazzoni. Milano: Corbaccio, 2000.

The Valley of Decision

La valle della decisione. Trans. Roberto Luppi Pittigliani. Afterward by Rita Severi, "Il romanzo italiano di Edith Wharton." Reggio Emilia: Diabasis, 1999.

Short Stories

Febbre romana. Racconti. Trans. Maria Luisa Agosti. Milano: LaTartaruga, 1988. Contents: "Febbre romana" ("Roman Fever"), "Xingu", "Gli altri due" ("The Other Two"), "Anime smarrite" ("Souls Belated"), "L'angelo presso la tomba" ("The Angel at the Grave"), "L'ultima carta" ("The Last Asset"), "Alla maniera di Holbein" ("After Holbein"), "Autres temps."

Reprinted in 1995 as *Febbre romana e altri racconti*, with "Falsa partenza" ("False Dawn") trans. Maria Giulia Castagnone.

Pienezza di vita. Racconti italiani. Trans. Maria Novella Mercuri. Preface by Gaetano Prampolini. Firenze: Passigli, 1993. Contents: "Pienezza di vita" ("The Fullness of Life"), "Anime attardate" ("Souls Belated"), "La tragedia della Musa" ("The Muse's Tragedy"), "La Duchessa in preghiera" ("The Duchess at Prayer"), "Il confessionale" ("The Confessional"), "Lo spasso di una notte a Venezia" ("A Venetian Night's Entertainment").

La collezione Raycie. Racconti italiani. Trans. Maria Novelli Mercuri and Patrizia Bernardini. Preface by Gaetano Prampolini. Firenze: Passigli, 1996. Contents: "La casa della mano morta" ("The House of the Dead Hand"), "La lettera" ("The Letter"), "La Diana Daunt" ("The Daunt Diana"), "Gli occhi" ("The Eyes"), "La Collezione Raycie" ("False Dawn"), "Febbre romana" ("Roman Fever").

Racconti di scrittori e artisti. Introduction by Francesca Bisutti De Riz, "I misteri dei giardini di Wharton House." Venezia: Supernova, 1996. Contents: "Diritti d'autore" ("Copy") trans. Marina Coslovi; "Espiazione" (Expiation) trans. Silvia Menegazzi; "Xingu" trans. by Valeria Reggi; "Figlio di suo padre" ("His Father's Son") trans. Elisabetta Pastorella; "Il pellicano" ("The Pelican") trans. Lorenza Catullo; "Il dilettante" ("The Dilettante") trans. Benedetta Marini; "Il verdetto" ("The Verdict") trans. Rosella Mamoli Zorzi.

Storie di fantasmi. Translation of *The Ghost Stories of Edith Wharton* by Gabriella Ernesti (1974). Introduction by Gilberto Finzi. Milano: Bompiani, 1988. Reprinted with an introduction by Marina Premoli. Milano: Editoriale Opportunità Book, 1995.

Storie di fantasmi. Translation of *Ghosts* by Gianni Pilo. Introduction by Gianni Pilo and Sebastiano Fusco, "Edith

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

Wharton, la 'Signora' della narrativa nordamericana." Roma: Newton Compton, 1994.

Triangoli imperfetti. Translation and Introduction by Elena Racca Bruno. Milano: Tranchida, 1994. Contents: "Allegria in casa" ("Joy in the House"), "Atrofia" ("Atrophy"), "Il giorno del funerale" ("The Day of the Funeral").

La collina di Saint Cloud. Translation of *The Letters* by Chiara Gabutti. Parma: Guanda, 1995.

Per un figlio. Translation of *Her Son* by Chiara Gabutti. Parma: Guanda, 1995.

Non-Fiction

A Backward Glance

Uno sguardo indietro. Trans. M. Buitoni Duca. Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1984. Reprint 1994.

Italian Villas and their Gardens

Ville italiane e loro giardini. Trans. Matilde Dandolo and Giovanni Uzielli (1983). Preface by Harold Acton. Firenze: Passigli 1991.

Italian Backgrounds

Paesaggi italiani. Trans. Francesca Melli. Introduction by Attilio Brilli, "L'occhio incantato di Edith Wharton." Milano: Edizioni Olivares, 1995. Contents: "Una stazione di posta sulle Alpi" ("An Alpine Posting-Inn"), "Sogno di una settimana di mezza estate" ("A Midsummer Week's Dream"), "Un santuario toscano" ("A Tuscan Shrine"), "Marzo in Italia" ("March in Italy"), "Milano pittoresca" ("Picturesque Milan"), "Paesaggi italiani" ("Italian Backgrounds").

A Motor-Flight Through France

Viaggio in Francia. Trans. Giuseppe Bernardi. Introduction by Mary Suzanne Schriber. Padova: Franco Muzzio, 1998.

In Morocco

In Marocco. Trans. Anna Mioni. Preface by Rosella Mamoli Zorzi, "Un fulgore di luce tra nubi di tempesta." Padova: Franco Muzzio, 1997.

The Writing of Fiction

Scrivere narrativa. Trans. Chiara Gabutti. Parma: Pratiche, 1996.

Lettere a Morton Fullerton 1907-1931. Edited, translated and with an introduction by Marina Premoli. Milano: Archinto, 1990.

The Court of the Tuileries: Reflections on Archer's Retreat in *The Age of Innocence*

John Arthos,
Denison University

The ending of *The Age of Innocence* surprises most first-time readers. After thirty years of separation from his beloved Ellen Olenska, Newland Archer travels to Paris where she has been living, and after some hesitation, and at the last moment, decides not to meet her and renew their life together. Archer is brought literally to her doorstep, where she awaits him, the reunion is free from any impropriety, and all he has to do is walk up to meet her. But he hesitates outside her apartment and, after thoughtful reflection, turns and walks back slowly to his own hotel. Why? Two answers suggest themselves, or rather, two versions of the same answer. The first is that he is a weak man who would rather dwell in the past, preferring the fantasies he has nursed over a lifetime to a real relationship. The second is that he is doing exactly as he says—preserving "the last shadow of reality" that he possesses, preferring the real to the imaginary (363). Both answers, I think, have implications for one of Wharton's persistent themes, the relation of imagination to life.

Although the first thirty-three chapters of *The Age of Innocence* occur over one period, the engagement and early marriage of Newland Archer and May Welland, and the 34th chapter, the last chapter, occurs more than thirty years later, with all the appearance of an epilogue, it is this last brief chapter toward which everything else has been leading. The subject of the novel is the *image* that takes shape in a person's mind and subsequently directs that person, in this case, Newland Archer: "When he thought of Ellen Olenska it was abstractly, serenely, as one might think of some imaginary beloved in a book or a picture: she had become the composite vision of all that he had missed. That vision, faint and tenuous as it was, had kept him from thinking of other women" (349). In the 34th chapter, Archer has to know how to protect that image.

In a few economic strokes, Wharton so deftly executes the transition in time between the 33rd and 34th chapters, that one cannot say precisely where the time shift occurred. Archer is sitting at a desk writing and he overhears someone say, "Why, this used to be one of the old Cesnola rooms" (346), and he is caught up instantly in an image of Madame Olenska moving away down the room, with all the force of an unexpected memory. The long passage of time is noted only in passing, and the reader notices this information incidentally, while Archer is totally absorbed by the significance of the vision to his life: "The vision had roused a host of other associations, and he sat looking with new eyes at the library which, for over thirty years, had been the scene of his solitary musings and of all the family confabulations" (346). He

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

values this profusion of memories: "It was the room in which most of the real things of his life happened[...]" It is the real location of his life. For this reason, when Archer's son Dallas asks him to go along on a trip to Paris, he has become so wedded to the habit of this place that he is loath to break away.

The first reading (failure and sterility) sees in this preference the evidence of Archer's diminished state. He has shrunk, tamed by his social role and the conspiracies of his tribe: "But Archer had found himself held fast by habit, by memories, by a sudden startled shrinking from new things" (353). This smaller man fears exposure to what he could no more sustain, and he knows it. The comfort of convention and habit, the safety of memory, has killed off what was best in him: "Something he knew he had missed: the flower of life: (349).

And then, suddenly, he stands looking out of his hotel window in Paris, where his son has brought him. At this point he has no thought of meeting Ellen, who has long been to him in his imagination "the composite vision of all that he had missed," but with this proximity, his heart beats strangely and wildly in a way that he cannot control (349). When fate dictates that he shall pay a visit, he must suddenly "deal all at once with the packed regrets and stifled memories of an inarticulate lifetime" (359). He sits on a bench in the Champs Élysées wondering about these rapid developments. Suddenly, after a life of absence, without fanfare, she is a few streets away and they are to meet. The event appears abrupt and oddly anticlimactic: "There was nothing now to keep her and Archer apart—and that afternoon he was to see her" (359). It seems so starkly commonplace, in such contrast to his own emotions, that we are thrown off balance.

Quite matter of factly his son Dallas arranges the meeting, and Archer goes with him to keep the appointment. Ellen is living on a square near the Invalides. When the two Archers arrive, Newland pauses outside the apartment building on a park bench to collect himself, and he sends his son up ahead of him. Then Newland walks away. We are not told why, we are not told how Ellen Olenska responds; the narrative simply stops. His turning away into silence, the mere physical act, is the last note of the last page, and the narrative simply withholds explanation. The ending contains elements that Ricoeur might call the inexhaustible opacity of the symbol. Everything in the novel works towards the reunion of the two, and this termination creates the kind of charged, empty space more usually evoked from the economy of the short story. But Archer's silent departure is the more startling for its peculiar suddenness.

What does Archer's sudden exit mean? He is not cowardly, he wants to see Ellen, he is not ashamed of himself. Why then? The story from its beginning is

refracted in that turning away, and in a way even more radical than the reader's return to the beginning with Marcel Proust's decision to write the book of his life, readers begin to read *The Age of Innocence* only on that last page, in the attempt to understand that decision. We must retrace everything that led up to that moment, look for clues to its meaning, and begin the work of reading.

Only in retrospect do we understand that everything has prepared for the ending. Archer is one who takes pleasure in "the ghostly advantage of observing unobserved" (136). In the opening pages Archer is late to the Opera (where he will meet Ellen the first time), "because he was at heart a dilettante, and thinking over a pleasure to come often gave him a subtler satisfaction than its realization" (4). He is in the habit of cultivating expectation, so that when he becomes engaged to May Welland "already his imagination, leaping ahead of the engagement ring[...] pictured her at his side in some scene of old European witchery" (7). Nevertheless on a whim he is capable of impulsive acts, as when, against all propriety, he goes to meet Countess Olenska for the first time. During this period in their lives, Archer feels awkward and embarrassed in the Countess's presence, and yet he visits her out of a sudden and unexplained impulse: "Suddenly Newland Archer felt himself impelled to decisive action" (16). It is thus that he moves towards her, as in the end he moves away. The story is working at every point, as it turns out, to prepare for the last page.

In this sense the story tells itself backwards from the beginning. Madame Olenska misses the announcement of Archer's engagement because she has not attended the ball where the announcement is made. Her actions, at the very beginning of their fateful relationship, mirror Archer's at the end. In the following exchange, Archer queries May Welland about Ellen's presence:

"But I haven't seen her yet. Has she come?"

"No; at the last minute she decided not to."

"At the last minute?" he echoed, betraying his surprise that she should ever have considered the alternative possible. (25)

Archer's imagination, which at the end he must protect, is remarked throughout the novel (43, 71, 104), for he constantly speculates on the way his life might be different: "[...]He had often pictured to himself what it would have been to live in the intimacy of drawing-rooms [...]" (103). The theme of the novel is ostensibly the extent to which Archer's life falls short of his impassioned imagination. He sees himself prefigured in the person of his friend Winsett, "the sterile bitterness of the still young man who has tried and given up" (125), and indeed Archer has a premonition that finally he similarly will become "a ghost stalking through a necropolis" (313). He watches as if from the outside as he and May die

(Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9)

slowly in the anaesthetic of "the placid and luxurious routine of their elders" (127), and he looks on with the curious distant eye of an observer as he is "buried alive under his future" (140). He fears that his own sepulchrous life will transform him into someone who cannot feel the loss—and he wakes up one day to see his fear accomplished: "Here was the truth, here was reality [...]" (142). It is a reality which will dull "the very angles whose sharpness he most wanted to keep" (205). He becomes the ghost-witness of his premonition and hears in his mind "a rather empty and echoing place" (209). Even his most precious memories become empty of their meaning: "It seems cruel[...]that after a while nothing matters" (312).

For Archer, May represents the personification of this doom, "the innocence that seals the mind against imagination and the heart against experience" (147). A spirit deluded by the faint and insubstantial pleasure of a fantasy which never feels its own impotence, "she smiled dreamily upon the possibility; but he perceived that to dream of it sufficed her. It was like hearing him read aloud out of his poetry books the beautiful things that could not possibly happen in real life" (148 [emphasis added]).

Some of this weakness has always existed in Archer himself, the willingness to accept the dream in place of life, and on the turning of this balance between dream and life we must judge Archer's choice. Fate conspires ruthlessly against him, but in his own mind, finally, the issue of his life is decided. The choice between life and an alternative to life, the picture in the mind—the image—is broached long before the last page of the novel, where Archer makes the choice. In the 22nd chapter, when Archer hears of Ellen's impending visit from Washington to a home nearby, he forms a desire to steal from a distance her image to fix in his mind:

He was not sure that he wanted to see the Countess Olenska again; but ever since he had looked at her from the path above the bay he had wanted, irrationally and indescribably, to see the place she was living in, and to follow the movements of her imagined figure as he had watched the real one in the summer-house. The longing was with him day and night, an incessant undefinable craving, like the sudden whim of a sick man for food or drink once tasted and long since forgotten. He could not see beyond the craving, or picture what it might lead to, for he was not conscious of any wish to speak to Madame Olenska or to hear her voice. He simply felt that if he could carry away the vision of the spot of earth she walked on, and the way the sky and sea enclosed it, the rest of the world might seem less empty. (225)

At this point, his choice in favor of fantasy is nearly

complete. Why? Why is he unsure that he wants to see the Countess Olenska again? How has he become the flaneur who pursues a phantom to steal a look? He has an incessant undefinable craving only for the *image*. If he could just carry away the vision he would have enough. Why? Why is this image enough?

When later Archer does meet Ellen they speak from opposite sides of a room and do not close the distance: "Archer was conscious of a curious indifference to her bodily presence" (245). He does not touch her, intuitively sensing that the distance safeguards this moment. The love that would be expressed by touch would be superficial next to this, and he chooses not to break the spell: "His one terror was to do anything which might efface the sound and impression of her words; his one thought, that he should never again feel quite alone" (245). That is, his one thought for his own preservation is that he must do nothing that would destroy the fragile "impression" that he has created in his mind. Later, this satisfaction at refraining from physical contact provides him "a tranquillity of spirit that surprised as much as it sustained him" (247). They have found in their circumstance "the perfect balance" (247), a standard that will allow them both to be distant and close at the same time. Ostensibly this balance helps them observe the proprieties of their respective social positions, but, additionally, the arrangement probably satisfies another of Archer's propensities: "The conviction remained with him of having saved out of their meeting much more than he had sacrificed" (248). He has saved something, an impression that he may carry away, and upon which he may feed. He always looks forward in time—"His whole future seemed suddenly to be unrolled before him" (229)—and now he believes he has captured a permanent image that will accompany him down that corridor.

The bulk of the novel presents Newland's and Ellen's hesitation dance between duty and love. They are on the brink of running off together when circumstances conspire to force their separation, and the two lovers remain apart for over thirty years, maintaining a complete break. Against this backdrop the last chapter plays out. After Newland sends his son up to Ellen's apartment, he remains on a park bench deep in thought, and his faculties of invention begin to work. He imagines Dallas ascending the lift to the fifth floor, being greeted and admitted. He imagines Ellen's grace in receiving him, the way she would seat herself, the words she would speak. He remains glued to the bench because "It's more real to me here than if I went up" (363). His decision represents the apotheosis of the imagination. His "fear lest that last shadow of reality should lose its edge" keeps him from her (363). That is the explanation for his decision. He waits for a few more minutes and then leaves.

The narrative breaks off, and the reader may only speculate about his action. Does he fear being disappointed or fear to disappoint? No, he knows that she

(Continued on page 11)

(Continued from page 10)

would not disappoint, and he has no vanity about himself in that way. Is he saying that he has irretrievably lost the reality through the history of abnegation, and so he would rather preserve the memory than destroy the spell? The phrase "shadow of reality" has one meaning or another depending on which side of the phrase the accent falls. The shadow of reality is John Locke's faint impression; the shadow of reality is Plato's ideal. Archer really means his statement that Ellen is more "real" in his thoughts on the park bench than she would be in person. He has been taught by distance. That was the point learned in Boston and rehearsed through the years. He has been formed by that distance. The image or the picture allows the relationship to continue, the perfect balance.

The problem is that all these musings and decisions prove unsatisfactory. May is the dream that denies the reality; Archer cannot forget that the image never quite matches the reality. Once after their distance had become routine he meets Ellen and sees the difference between the impression and the person: "But then you come; and you're so much more than I remembered" (290). His choice to leave the park bench at the end reveals Archer's final recognition of a ruined life. At least he will keep his memory intact, but he has only the impoverished image, Plato's pale reflection – the faint imagined impression of Ellen in the mind of a stooped and broken man withdrawing into the late afternoon. But this is only one way to regard Archer's decision. Let us start a second time.

The nearly transcendent quality of the last chapter is the strongest warning against a too facile conclusion about Archer's motive. That chapter's difference, its understatement, its ambiguity, set it off in such a way that the rest of the story seems suddenly only preamble. The journey to the encounter, from which one might expect high drama, unfolds like the soft breath of an afterthought. Archer must spend the day in Paris idly, and he walks quietly about the city and thinks. In many of her works, Wharton presents her great revelation scenes occur as encounters with light and weather, and with the simplicity of an effect of nature.* So Archer's final resolution is explicable only in terms of the clarity of an afternoon in the Tuileries. In *The Age of Innocence* Paris is beguiling without complexity—the physical description relies almost entirely on the mention of place-names, and the quality of the light. He walks toward the Place de la Concorde and the Chamber of Deputies, he stands before the wide prospect of the Place Vendome, and suddenly the story seems permeated by that rarefied air. Archer's musings are punctuated periodically by an awareness of the brilliant light of mid-day. The very clarity and simplicity of the light seem to require his

honest self-examination. But the narrative is so preoccupied with Archer's thoughts that Paris is only the further manifestation of them. His backward glances, his awareness that he has achieved the foretold sterility, his relationship with his son, are all caught up in the visit, so that the impending meeting becomes almost incidental, and only half real:

Archer knew that Madame Olenska lived in a square near one of the avenues radiating from the Invalides; and he had pictured the quarter as quiet and almost obscure, forgetting the central splendor that lit it up. Now, by some queer process of association, that golden light became for him the pervading illumination in which she lived. (360)

The scene fades into soft light, stillness, and uncertainty. Dallas only guesses at the location – "It must be here[...] wonder which floor" – and Archer cannot be certain why he hesitates to go up. It takes almost nothing to send him away – the drawing of the awnings – as if a part of him had been aware all along that this would end quietly, and he only needed a reason: "At that, as if it had been the signal he waited for, Newland Archer got up slowly and walked back alone to his hotel." The entire weight of the story rests on this last peculiar and half-considered act. The temptation is to see it as simply the final recognition of Archer's diminished self. But such an interpretation does not come to grips with the strange power of the scene.

What accounts for the persistent image of Archer sitting on the park bench in indecision, like patience sitting on a monument? The hesitation is natural enough, and Archer gives it an understandable pretext. Perhaps Dallas was indecorous to force such an encounter after so much time. How could anyone else understand the way two people reconciled themselves to such a separation, and the feelings, the defenses, or the accommodations such a length of time has created, ? And yet, Ellen is a real and living person, the absolute center of his life, to whom he had given himself utterly, and in relation to whom everything meaningful began. How could he resist the temptation to pick up from that point, absent the one obstacle? The text suggests a simple answer – that he has been formed by the conventions of his life, that he has become his renunciation. For this reason to be plausible one must imagine that the mutual ardor of the pair had leached out somehow in the interval so that Archer's quiet choice does not offend reason.

Yet another insistent question hangs about the periphery: does he consider how she will understand his refusal to see her? Would she misinterpret it? Perhaps he feels confident she will understand, since, both having lived through the same distance, and both knowing each other intimately, she will recognize why he responds as he does. Or perhaps he feels he owes her no explanation; that years ago she herself had enforced their distance.

(Continued on page 12)

(Continued from page 11)

He has built his life in response to that decision, and he has become a person who no longer needs their old intimacy.

The last possibility is entirely plausible, but at a cost. If the original impulse had had any authority, if that love was an imperative that compelled one course of action, then—once the prohibition disappeared—the injunction to reunite could not be disobeyed. To have walked away would not have been either honorable or right. In this light the explanation becomes clear. Archer is not really alive anymore. He has been feeding on the spectral shadows of that love for so long that he is insipid. His steady diet of memories has made him anemic, only half alive. Like the body of the chronically ill that has become transformed into the host of its illness, Archer is a shadow, and it is only a shadow that passes from the scene.

I say that this interpretation is plausible at a cost, and not just at a cost to him, because I think this sort of thinking has significant implications. Love of this kind implies a kind of promise, a betrothal, and the promise exists within the feeling itself; there can be no separation. How then does such a betrothal undo itself? The conventional answer is that people grow and change, so that such promises lose their binding force. But I prefer to think that the betrothal does *not* undo itself. It still exists, but it remains only in the shadow. Archer stays completely faithful to the dream by not going to see Ellen. He has shrunk so much that, by renewing his relationship, he would dishonor what remains of the promise. Archer's one real virtue is that he sees acutely how far he has fallen, and he refuses to harm the one genuine part of his life.

The kernel of this idea was a standard topos of the Victorian novel. In Anthony Trollope's *The Small House at Allington*, Lily, the heroine, is jilted by a scoundrel, but by then it is too late for her; she has given her love. When a decent man comes along afterwards and begs for her hand she is powerless: "I should be disgraced in my own eyes if I admitted the love of another man, after—after—[...] gave myself to him, and loved him, and rejoiced in his love[...]" (336, 380). In this case a proposal of marriage was given and withdrawn, but the convention requires only that the heart be given over: "[...]It cannot be undone or forgotten[...]. There are things that will not have themselves buried and put out of sight, as though they had never been" (380). Lily chooses to remain single, "widowed," as she says. As much as this conceit smacks of an ideology of female virtue that modern readers are anxious to put away, it provides a legitimate insight into the promisory nature of betrothal, a covenant that also surfaces in Archer's abstention.

The novel itself contains some support for this

theory. Archer's decision to leave without explanation is prefigured in a scene between two lovers in the theater production of *The Shaughraun* in Chapter Thirteen:

When her wooer turned from her she rested her arms against the mantle-shelf and bowed her face in her hands. On the threshold he paused to look at her; then he stole back, lifted one of the ends of velvet ribbon, kissed it, and left the room without her hearing him or changing her attitude. And on this silent parting the curtain fell. (114)

After seeing the play Archer remarks to Madame Olenska: "I was going to leave the theatre in order to take the picture away with me" (118). He would have left before the conventional ending, just as he will leave the park bench at the end. The scene is reenacted between himself and Ellen shortly thereafter (135), and repeats itself again and again (217-18). After Archer fails to speak to Ellen on the pier at Newport, imagination trumps reality, not from character weakness but justly and correctly:

The young man, as he followed his wife into the hall, was conscious of a curious reversal of mood. There was something about the luxury of the Welland house and the density of the Welland atmosphere, so charged with minute observances and exactions, that always stole into his system like a narcotic. The heavy carpets, the watchful servants, the perpetually reminding tick of disciplined clocks, the perpetually renewed stack of cards and invitations on the hall table, the whole chain of tyrannical trifles binding one hour to the next, and each member of the household to all the others, made any less systematized and affluent existence seem unreal and precarious. But now it was the Welland house, and the life he was expected to lead in it, that had become unreal and irrelevant, and the brief scene on the shore, when he had stood irresolute, halfway down the bank, was as close to him as the blood in his veins. (220)

The chiasmatic reversal is exactly what transpires at the end. Archer sacrifices the reality to keep the dream, but in doing so he has kept the more real thing. This is the reverse of the earlier conclusion, that he was somehow less for having made this decision. From this point of view, Archer is not an indecisive character given to reverie. Both Ellen and Newland are principled in act, choosing to reject what would diminish their great secret. Theirs are simply acts of negation; they would rather live with the consequences of denial than harm the one real thing. He is a broken man, a hollow man, a set of conventions, and for this reason he honors the memory and his promise in this final act by not diminishing it. What he says earlier in the novel as he stares at May Welland applies here as well: "Here was the truth, here was reality" (142)—here, momentarily, on the park bench, staring up in the fading light.

(Continued on page 13)

(Continued from page 12)

Works Cited

- Proust, Marcel. *The Past Recaptured*. New York: Modern Library, 1959.
- Trollope, Anthony. *The Small House at Allington*. London: Oxford UP, 1963.
- Wharton, Edith. *The Age of Innocence*. Ann Arbor: State Street P, 1996.
- . *Madame de Treymes and Three Novelas*. New York: Simon, 1995.
- . *The Reef*. New York: Scribner's, 1970.
- . *The Custom of the Country*. New York: Scribner's, 1941.
- . *The House of Mirth*. New York: Scribner's, 1905.

O all you beauties I shall never see: An Unpublished Edith Wharton Letter

David H. Porter*

Skidmore College and Williams College

By a stroke of good fortune I found some years ago in a Sarasota bookshop a copy of *A Backward Glance* that contained a handwritten letter from Edith Wharton to her younger cousin, Le Roy King. The two-page letter was enclosed in a hand-addressed envelope pasted on the book's front end-paper. The letter was mailed to King in Newport, Rhode Island, and has a Newport bookshop marker, though no ownership signature or bookplate. *A Backward Glance* appeared in 1934, and the letter was written in October 1935, suggesting the possible scenario of King purchasing the book in 1934, then pasting Wharton's letter into it when it arrived the following year.

Le Roy King was for years an occasional player in Wharton's life.¹ When she was writing *The Marne*, for instance, she read him an early version "to get his military view of the story,"² and at the time of her death Le Roy and his brother Frederic served as co-executors of her American will.³ That King should choose to keep this letter in Edith's autobiography seems the more likely in that it too is family-related—a response to King's condolences over Mary Cadwalader Jones ("Minnie"), Wharton's sister-in-law and companion, who in September 1935 had died in England at age 84, shortly after completing a visit with Edith in France. Given Wharton's loving comments on Minnie, on other members of the extended family, and on Le Roy himself, one can understand why this letter might have been tucked away in a special place.

An elegant, narrow black border frames both envelope and stationery, and the lining of the envelope is also black, as is the stationery's embossed

letterhead. It seems likely that Wharton ordered this stationery in memory of Minnie, especially since the whole previous month had been dominated by her passing.⁴ News of Minnie's death came soon after her return to England, as Edith comments in the letter.⁵ Since at the time Minnie's daughter, Beatrix Farrand, was ill in New York, and her husband, Max Farrand, unable to get away from his duties at the Huntington Library in California, Edith herself immediately headed for England to represent the family and to handle arrangements for the funeral—all at a time when she was still recuperating from a serious stroke in April. In a letter of September 30, 1935 to Bernard Berenson, also acknowledging a note of condolence, Wharton describes what she has been through:

Your word of sympathy went to my heart, for I know you loved Minnie and appreciated her rare qualities. I have had an exhausting week in London, but now she is quietly at rest in the lovely little churchyard of Aldbury, where we buried her among her old friends, the Wards and Arnolds. I got back the day before yesterday, so tired that I can make no plans at present. The doctor says I am no worse, except for the fatigue, but I feel as if I had lost two months of progress toward health. I had no idea that "la mort de quelqu'un" could produce such a series of complications and such endless correspondence & cablings."⁶

Her letter to Le Roy King, written almost a month later, strikes a different note. Not only does Edith now look past her own exhausting involvement to the fact that for Minnie, at her age, a swift passing was surely to be desired, but she also moves deftly from sadness over Minnie to compassion for Le Roy, whose wife had died suddenly in Newport the previous April.⁷ Addressed to Le Roy King Esq. at Indian Spring, Newport, the letter exemplifies Wharton's expressive eloquence, her ability to say much in a few words:

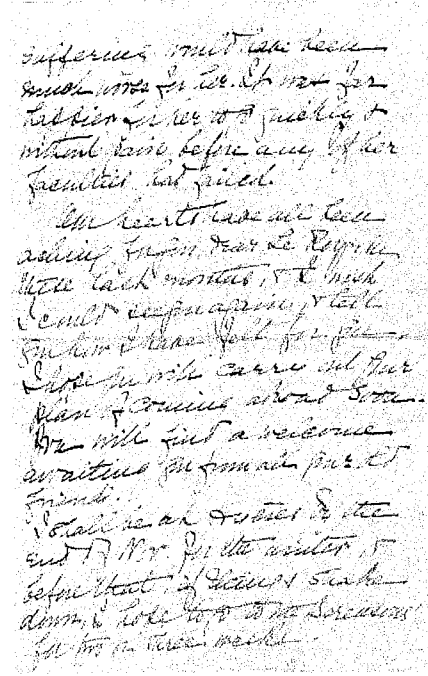
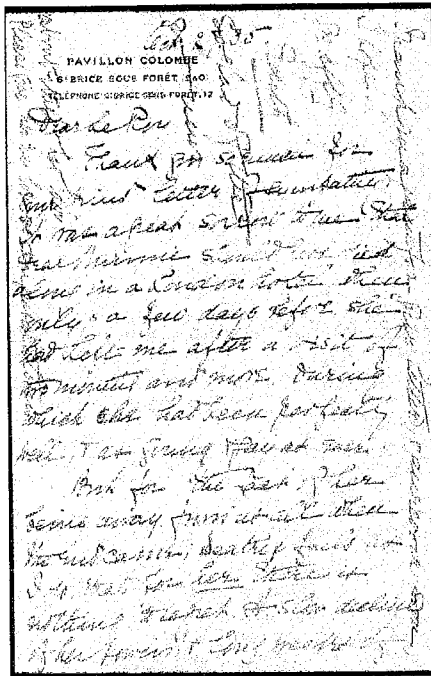
Pavillon PavillonColombe
St. Brice-sous-Forêt (S & O)
Oct. 27, '35

Dear Le Roy,

Thank you so much for your kind letter of sympathy. It was a great sorrow to me that dear Minnie should have died in a London hotel, when only a few days before she had left me after a visit of two months and more, during which she had been perfectly well, and as young & gay as ever.

But for the fact of her being away from us all when the end came, Beatrix feels, as I do, that for her there is nothing to regret. A slow decline of her powers, and long weeks of suffering, would have been much worse for her. I was far happier for her

(Continued on page 14)



Facsimiles of the autograph letter by Edith Wharton. Reduced approximately 2:1. (Reprinted by permission of the Estate of Edith Wharton and the Watkins/Loomis Agency).

(Continued from page 13)

to go quickly & without pain, before any of her faculties had failed.

Our hearts have all been aching for you, dear Le Roy, in these last months, and I wish I could see you again, and tell you how I have felt for you. I hope you will carry out your plan of coming abroad soon. You will find a welcome awaiting you from all your old friends.

I shall be at Hyères by the end of Nov. for the winter, & before that, if things shake down, I hope to go to the Berensons' for three weeks.⁸

Thank you again for your letter, & au revoir soon, I hope.

Yrs affly,
Edith

So glad of the good news about Ethel and her baby.⁹ Please give her my love & congratulations.

That Wharton should acutely feel Minnie's passing was to be expected. Ever since her marriage to Edith's brother Frederick in 1870, Minnie had been close to her young sister-in-law, and the relationship became even closer after Minnie and her husband separated a few years later. Not only did Minnie serve

as Edith's colleague and companion in all manner of ventures—literary, philanthropic, personal¹⁰—but the bond was further strengthened by Edith's close relationship with Beatrix, Minnie's only child, who shared Edith's talent and fascination for gardening and landscape architecture.¹¹ Edith's dedication of her last book, *The World Over*, to Minnie in 1936, the year after her death, reflects their long friendship: "For my dear sister, Mary Cadwalader Jones, who for so many years faithfully revised me in proof and indulgently read me in print."¹²

That said, the relationship was not without its tensions. R. W. B. Lewis describes Minnie as "Edith's beloved and sometimes exasperating sister-in-law,"¹² and something of that exasperation comes through in a letter Edith wrote Minnie in June 1925:

Dearest Minnie:

Thank you very much for cabling me the news of Mrs. Winthrop's death; but why? [...] Really, it's useless to cable about any but intimate friends or intimate relatives, like dear Ethel King—and please don't send flowers except on occasions such as Ethel's death[...] I mention this because it is really a waste of money & trouble to keep announcing by cable deaths of old acquaintances, or friends not communicated with for years[...]¹³

It is ironic that when in 1935 Edith writes Berenson
(Continued on page 15)

(Continued from page 14)

about Minnie's own death the same issue of the "correspondence & cablings" that accompany "la mort de quelqu'un" again looms large. Wharton had for years provided Minnie significant financial support, a responsibility, even burden, she felt keenly in the early 1930s as income from both her estate and her writing declined sharply.¹⁴ Even Minnie's last visit to Paris, coming as it did when Edith was still recuperating from her stroke, evoked ambivalent feelings, as we see from a comment in a July 25 letter to John Hugh Smith: "[...]my poor old sister-in-law arrives this afternoon for a fortnight. I shall be glad when that fortnight is over."¹⁵

In Wharton's letter to Le Roy Jones there is no hint of these tensions. How close Le Roy was to Minnie I have not been able to discover, though it is clear that he knew both her and Beatrix well. That Edith's June 1925 letter to Minnie, cited above, twice mentions Ethel King, Le Roy's mother, as one person whose death *did* merit cablings and flowers hints tantalizingly at closer ties within the extended family, and it is possible that these contribute to the tone she strikes when she writes Le Roy about Minnie's death in 1935.

That letter's elegiac tone owes even more, I suspect, to Edith's own growing sense of mortality. The death of Walter Berry in 1927, which Edith felt deeply, ushered in a period in which she lost one friend after another¹⁶ and herself suffered life-threatening attacks in 1929 and 1935—harbingers of the stroke that would take her life in 1937. The theme of mortality sounds frequently in Edith's writing during this period, whether in her stories, her diary, or her letters.¹⁷ At times the topic evokes black humor, as in an August 1930 letter to Gaillard Lapsley about her tragedy-beset staff:

Imagine that, just a month after poor Roger's death, the house being full, & a long line of guests in the offing, I was suddenly told that the new cook had been found lying in the kitchen covered with blood!!! Most of the local doctors were of course away, but we got a little young 'Ersatz' from Sarcelles, who turned out to be very clever. He said at once it was a hemorrhage caused by an abscess on the liver, & that he (the cook) would probably die in the night.¹⁸

More often the tone is despairing. In a 1933 letter she comments on the diseases that have stricken Elise and Gross, two women who had served her for years: "The strain on my heart-strings[...]is severe, for since Walter's death I've been incurably lonely inside, and these two faithful women kept the hearth-fire going."¹⁹ A diary entry from the same period is even darker: "All my life goes with those two dying women."²⁰ On the sudden death of Geoffrey Scott, a young friend who was editing the recently discovered Boswell papers, she writes, "Oh[...] what a

mockery it all is! He had got on his feet, he had pulled himself out of all the sloughs, he was happy, ambitious, hard at work, full of courage & enthusiasm. The Furies had been letting him simmer."²¹ Further contributing to her sense of life's fragility were the ravages nature visited upon her gardens, which she viewed as a projection of herself.²² After their destruction in 1929 she wrote Lapsley, "Oh, Gaillard, that my old fibres should have been so closely interwoven with all these roots and tendrils"²³; four years later she writes Berenson that her "lost roses & lilies of 1933" remind her of Santayana's lines, "O all you beauties I shall never see, What a great lover you have lost in me."²⁴ As in this last passage, she often relates the theme to herself. To Mary Berenson, just recovered from a near-fatal disease, she writes in 1933 of death's attractiveness, "I have known that long shadowy tunnel, and how it lures one on."²⁵

The brief letter published here also reflects these intimations of mortality. That Le Roy too had suffered a recent loss encourages Edith to move beyond the grief and exhaustion that dominate the Berenson letter to the generous compassion that characterizes this one. Implicitly, too, this compassion includes herself: when she writes that for Minnie "a slow decline of her powers, and long weeks of suffering, would have been much worse," we surely sense Edith's own recent and lengthy recuperation from a stroke that left her temporarily debilitated—and that presaged what lay ahead.

Characteristically, though, Edith ends on an upbeat note. R. W. B. Lewis has pointed out that throughout this period, as her older friends died, Edith constantly sought out younger people—indeed, her invitation to Le Roy, her "gregarious and much younger second cousin,"²⁶ reveals the same instinct. And while awareness of mortality pervades much of her writing during these years, both her letters and her stories abound in humor, energy, new adventures. In a letter to Mary Berenson a year after Minnie's death she alludes to the health problems plaguing Mary and another friend, then comments, "I wish I knew what people mean when they say they find 'emptiness' in this wonderful adventure of living, which seems to me to pile up its glories like an horizon-wide sunset as the light declines. I'm afraid I'm an incorrigible life-lover and life-wonderer & adventurer."²⁷ And when in 1932, on the occasion of Gross's eightieth and Edith's seventieth birthday, Minnie wrote a letter of consolation about the "woes and privations of old age," Edith responded, "The farther I have penetrated into this ill-famed Valley the more full of interest, and beauty too, have I found it. It is full of its own quiet radiance, and in that light I discover many enchanting details which the midday dazzle obscured."²⁸

The same brave delight in life shines through the conclusion of Edith's letter to Le Roy King. There is the warm invitation to visit her in France, and the promise of welcome from his old friends, underscored by her "au

(Continued on page 16)

(Continued from page 15)

revoir soon, I hope." There is Edith's anticipation of her annual visits to the sunshine of Hyères, and to the Berensons in Florence. Not least, there is her delight in "the good news about Ethel and the baby." Even as the light declines, Edith continues to revel in new life, and in the sunset glories.

Notes

¹ On King, see , R. W. B. Lewis, *Edith Wharton. A Biography* (New York, 1985) 197, 208, 227, 407; R. W. B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis, *The Letters of Edith Wharton* (New York 1988) 408, 412. In subsequent notes these works are cited as "Lewis" and "Letters." Wharton on one occasion refers to Le Roy as "good gay L.R.K."—ironically, since he had shown up as Edith and Morton Fullerton were bidding farewell at the Gare du Nord and "all unconscious" had lingered "between us to the last" (Lewis 227).

² Alan Price, *The End of the Age of Innocence. Edith Wharton and the First World War* (New York 1996) 157.

³ Shari Benstock, *No Gifts From Chance. A Biography of Edith Wharton* (New York, 1994) 456 (hereafter cited as "Benstock").

⁴ The gesture seems more sincere on this occasion than at the death of Minnie's former husband, Frederick, when Edith comments to Minnie on the "inky paper" and adds, "His death having been known here to a few of my friends, I had to go through the hollow gestures of conventional mourning" (Letters 407).

⁵ For a fuller account of Minnie's visit and subsequent illness, see Benstock 445.

⁶ Letters 590.

⁷ Her obituary appears in the *New York Times* for April 15, 1935.

⁸ Wharton's keen anticipation of this visit is clear from her August 14 letter to Bernard Berenson: "I'm hugging the idea that I may get to Italy toward the end of Oct., but I don't want to ask the Dr. too soon?" (Letters 589).

⁹ The Ethel referred to is apparently Le Roy's sister. His mother, Ethel Rhineland King, had died in May 1925 (obituary, *New York Times*, May 16, 1925).

¹⁰ See, e.g., Lewis 366 (Minnie "as Edith's irreplaceable representative in the United States" in support of the war effort in France), 430 (Minnie's extensive research for *The Age of Innocence*), and 451-453 (Minnie's masterminding of Edith's 1923 visit to the States to receive an honorary doctorate from Yale).

¹¹ On Beatrix Farrand, see Lewis 173: "Minnie, a city woman to her fingertips, could scarcely tell one shrub from another. Her daughter 'Trix,' however, already far outstripped Aunt Edith in matters horticultural and was on her way to becoming one of the great landscape gardeners of her generation." Her greatest triumph was the design for the gardens at Dunbarton Oaks: see Lewis 516.

¹² Lewis 5.

¹³ Letters 485.

¹⁴ In 1931 she comments, "My own income is much reduced, and I have to help Minnie out to the tune of \$5000 a year" (Letters 536). On Edith's declining income, and her sense that she must keep writing to support Minnie, see Lewis 506ff., where he quotes her saying, "If I don't [write], Minnie will have no motor—nor I either, much longer."

¹⁵ Letters 588.

¹⁶ In 1929 she writes Gaillard Lapsley, "Only a little while ago you & I were saying, 'Why do our friends die one after the other?'" (Letters 523).

¹⁷ Among the many late stories that touch on this theme, see esp. "The Pomegranate Seed" and "After Holbein."

¹⁸ Letters 528. A month later she comments, again to Lapsley, on the fulfillment of this prophecy, adding a few other details: "Cook No. 2 died last week—Louisa has the shingles—and the half-hour hurricane last week wrecked my two cut-leaf maples next the house and wiped out all flowers and vegetables" (Lewis 494).

¹⁹ Letters 561

²⁰ Lewis 514. . The two women died soon after. On September 13 Wharton mentions Elise's recent death as a reminder of "Time's wingèd chariot"; a week later she comments that Gross's death "makes my life seem emptier than ever" (Letters 569, 570).

²¹ Letters 523.

²² Cf. Lewis 487: "Edith's gardens were a projection of her own nature."

²³ Lewis 487.

²⁴ Letters 562.

²⁵ Lewis 495.

²⁶ Lewis, *Edith Wharton* 197. On Wharton's delight in younger people during this time, see Lewis 493, 498-499, 513, 516, et al.; Benstock 425ff.

²⁷ Letters 598. With this letter, cf. the exchange between Mary and Edith recorded by Benstock 412-413; and the comment of Lewis, 495: "But if, as she approached seventy, Edith Wharton could appreciate the appeal of those dark regions, it only intensified her awareness of what the land of the living might yet hold in store for her." For other manifestations of this same eagerness to savor life while she could, see Lewis 515 ("I am possessed by a strange fever to fill up some of the numerous lacunae in my world map before the curtain falls"), Letters 569 (the "sound of Time's wingèd chariot is always with me since Elise's death, and there are so many places I want to see & store up").

²⁸ Benstock 431.

APPENDIX: Le Roy King

To understand Wharton's letter, it was necessary to learn more about Le Roy King and his family. Since King appears frequently in Wharton's life, and details about him are not readily available in Wharton biographies, I offer the following information,

(Continued on page 17)

(Continued from page 16)

for which I owe warm thanks to my wife, Helen Porter, who diligently tracked it down.

Le Roy King's parents were Le Roy King (d. 1895) and Ethel Rhineland King (d. 1925) of Newport, RI. Siblings were Frederick R. King and Ethel King, later Mrs. Charles H. Russell. Le Roy's first marriage, to Mary Isabel Lockwood, ended in divorce. A second marriage, in June 1934, to Katherine Bulkeley Lawrence, ended with her sudden death less in April 1935 (to which Edith Wharton refers in the letter published here). His third wife, Pamela Sutherland, was left a widow when King died in Newport in 1962 at the age of 77.

King received his BA from Harvard in 1906 and his law degree from Columbia in 1913. From 1907-1919 he served as a private secretary at the United States embassy in France and as an army lieutenant during World War I (a period during which he frequently shows up in Wharton's life). After the war King practiced law in New York, and from 1933-1937 he served on the National Emergency Council, a New Deal often described as FDR's "super-cabinet." Further details appear in his *New York Times* obituary (July 10, 1962).

Le Roy's career added distinction to a family already distinguished in both Newport and New York. His mother's father had been president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, his brother Frederick served with distinction on the board of Columbia, and several members of the family were very active in the work of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, where the Chapel of St. Columba was built by the King family. Among Le Roy's direct ancestors were Capt. Phillip King of Devonshire, England, who settled in New England in the 17th century, and Peter Stuyvesant, of New York.

Edith Wharton Panels at Washington DC MLA

Once again, as an Allied Association, The Edith Wharton Society will sponsor two academic sessions at the annual MLA Conference. This year's meeting will be held from December 28 to 30 in Washington DC (see p 18). An annual business meeting and Society dinner will be held on December 28 (see p 1).

Notes and Queries: New Feature

If you have a brief note, observation, or question about Edith Wharton or her work, please send it to the Editor for possible publication in this new column.

(Continued from page 2)

Eric Stoltz's Lawrence Selden, a performance that demonstrates the difference between acting being stilted (as Stoltz's was) and character being outwardly stilted as a screen for emotional excesses just beneath (Selden). Stoltz's weaker acting, along with Dan Aykroyd's (Gus Trenor), were eclipsed, however, by the strong, resourceful performances of others in the film, most noticeably the women (in major and minor roles). In this feature of his direction, Terence Davies is reminiscent of George Cukor, famous for his genius, generosity, and grace in directing women.

Independently financed and made for eight million dollars (the amount that corresponds, roughly, for example, to the amount Scorsese's studio-financed film was allotted for distribution and promotion), the look of the film is, nonetheless, handsome, and the recreation of turn-of-the-century New York is fascinating to watch. After considering several other locations, the filmmakers shot in Glasgow, Scotland, where among the imposing buildings and mansions used is The Glas-

gow City Chambers, considered the masterpiece of William Young's career (he also designed Marble Hall).

The pace of the film is slow, and the cumulative effect of the pacing is the effect of the novel, itself: its tragedy happens slowly, over time. While the film's tone is largely and appropriately somber, it has the most unexpected moments of levity and visual/verbal wit. Davies adds wickedly comical winks and brandishes, made more comic because each is so abruptly inserted, so unexpected, and so charming. While the humor is Davies's, the plot of the film is Wharton's, and most of Davies's alterations are rather inconsequential and in the interest of time. Two noted exceptions would be that: 1). The film's Lawrence Selden does not have the nuances or dominating plot value that he has in the book and 2). the film shows Lily, at the "end of her tether," attempting, unsuccessfully, to extort Bertha Dorset with the love letters. This second alteration may generate the most aggressive criticism

(Continued on page 18)

(Continued from page 17)

of the film from loyalists to the book.

The novel ends with Lily's unwillingness to harm Lawrence Selden and Bertha Dorset, even though to do so would be lifesaving for her. She destroys their old love letters rather than use them for her benefit. Lily, repeatedly misjudged by Selden and viciously double-crossed by Bertha, does not respond in kind because to do so would constitute confederation with an immorality that she is incapable of endorsing. Lily's idealism, her innocent faith that she can conduct herself otherwise, and her way of loving are her most captivating and worthy traits. In the end, although she dies, hers is a death that reaches a kind of transcendence (not unlike Melville's Billy Budd). What is ultimately the finest of Lily's character triumphs, transcending the ugliness of her world and making us grieve that probity, fine character, and right conduct are egregious handicaps in an unscrupulous, praetorian world. In Wharton's book, what is most significant about Lily is not destroyed by society's *frivolity*. In the film, it is.

"First and foremost, *The House of Mirth* is a tragedy," Davies explains and Stewart emphatically agrees. Wharton, herself, may also have agreed, as both Lily's disintegration in the book and Wharton's famous quote about it, suggest. Wharton said of *The House of Mirth*: "a frivolous society can acquire dramatic significance only through what its frivolity destroys." That frivolous society--that house of mirth--brings about Lily's death, it destroys her. The film asks us to consider the breadth and magnitude of that ruination.

In the film, Lily is destroyed in a more complete and a more constitutive way than she is in the novel. She is hardened to a moral sinking, compelled by survival. The vileness of her society has eroded her inner worth, made a spoil of her integrity, and instructed all us in tragedy.

But, is *The House of Mirth*, first and foremost, a tragedy, as the Davies/Stewart collaborative team believe or, first and foremost, is it a paean to the triumph of Lily's finer self? In having Lily attempt to leverage Bertha with the letters, the film achieves exactly what it wants to do: it points, full finger, to the what the filmmakers view as the novel's most dominate component: the vile social corrosiveness that produces tragedy.

"If there had been no suffering there would be no films," Davies once commented in a statement now often-quoted. After seeing this movie, the singular image that loops in my memory, reeling and insisting on visiting me at the oddest times, is that of a dissipated Lily, at the end of her tether, letters in hand, knocking on the Dorsets' door, only to be turned away. It is a suffering sequence, beautiful, unforgettable, and faithful to Wharton, faithful in *its* fashion.

The filmmakers' interpretation of *The House of Mirth* was not always mine, but as I watched the movie, slowly, my feelings coursed over the fissures, filling in the

(Continued on page 19)

The Edith Wharton Society gratefully acknowledges the generous contributions of Donors in support of the work of the Society. Since December 1999 these include:

Barbara Becker

Jean Blackall

Linda Costanzo Cahir

Kathy Fedorko

Dale Flynn

Harvard Knowels

Ellen MacDonald

Elsa Nettels

Julie Olin-Ammentorp

Sarah Bird Wright

Institutional support:

Department of English, LeMoyne College

Gonzaga University

Kean University

Edith Wharton Society Sessions at MLA

326. Edith Wharton as Transnational

Thursday, December 28, 3:30-4:45 p.m.,

Park Tower Suite 8212, Marriott

Program arranged by the Edith Wharton Society. Presiding: Abby H. P. Werlock, Saint Olaf Coll.

1. "'To Develop the Conscious': Edith Wharton's Uniquely Configured Internationality." Linda E. Chown, Grand Valley State Univ.
2. "Wharton's *Age of Innocence* and Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*," Allan Hepburn, Univ. of Toronto
3. "Wharton's *In Morocco*: Feminism and Orientalism," Anouar Majid, Univ. of New England

772. Edith Wharton and Mass Culture

Saturday, December 30, 12:00 noon-1:15 p.m.,

Wilson B, Marriott

Program arranged by the Edith Wharton Society. Presiding: Edie Thornton, Univ. of Wisconsin, Whitewater

1. "Wharton and Commodification in Film and Literary Production," Jamie R. Barlowe, Univ. of Toledo
2. "*The Old Maid*, Popular Magazines, and the Adoption Debate," Carol J. Singley, Rutgers Univ., Camden
3. "Misreading *The House of Mirth*: Middle-Class Readers and Upwardly Mobile Desire," Amy L. Blair, Cornell Univ.

(Continued from page 18)

fault lines, guiding me--gently--to the lower depths of tragedy, and insisting that I consider other readings of Wharton's book besides my own.

The House of Mirth: Written and directed by Terrence Davies; based on a novel by Edith Wharton; produced by Olivia Stewart; director of photography, Remi Adefarasin; edited by Michael Parker; music by Sadrian Johnston; production designer, Don Taylor; released by Sony Picture Classics. Running time: 140 minutes.



ERRATA

Please note that in the Spring 2000 issue of *The Edith Wharton Review* in the article "Marriage in *The Glimpses of the Moon*", in the second paragraph on the top of the page *Glimpses* is spelled wrong. In paragraph four, the second line should read "they" instead of "the have thought," and in paragraph seven, an "a" should be inserted before "complete union." On the third line of paragraph eight, "of" should be inserted between "philosophy" and "marriage." In Works Cited under *Gold, Harriet*, the words in the Work are repeated twice.

The Editors regret these proofreading errors.

Officers of the Edith Wharton Society

President

Abby Werlock (werlock@epix.net)
St. Olaf College

Past-President

Dale Flynn (dbflynn@ucdavis.edu)
University of California-Davis

Vice-President

Augusta Rohrbach (rohrbach@radcliffe.edu)
Harvard University

Secretary

Julie Olin-Ammentorp (olinamme@maple.lemoyne.edu), LeMoyne College

Treasurer

Carole Shaffer-Koros (ckoros@home.com)
Kean University

Membership

Dale Flynn (dbflynn@ucdavis.edu)
Campus Writing Center
University of California-Davis
1 Shields Avenue
Davis, CA 95616

At-Large Members of the Executive Board

Donna Campbell (campbell@gonzaga.edu)
Linda Costanzo Cahir (lcahir@erols.com)
Hildegard Hoeller (hoeller@babson.edu)
Sharon Shaloo (S_Shaloo@email.msn.com)
Frederick Wegener (fwegener@csulb.edu)

MEMBERSHIP

Annual membership in the Edith Wharton Society, including subscription to two issues of *The Review*, is \$20 and \$25 for institutions as well as countries outside the USA. Documented student rates: \$15 US and \$20 foreign members. Conference presenters must be members.

Please check your label for expiration of your current membership. Volume and issue number (e.g., 16-2) or a date (e.g., 1-99) indicates the issue when your subscription expires. Send check made payable to The Edith Wharton Society in *US dollars only* to: Dale Flynn, Campus Writing Center, University of California-Davis, 1 Shields Avenue, Davis, CA 95616.

The Edith Wharton Society

Membership Form

To join or renew your membership, complete this form and make your check payable in US dol-
lars and drawn on a US bank to The Edith Wharton Society.

Mail form and check to:

Dr. Dale Flynn
Campus Writing Center
1 Shields Avenue
University of California at Davis
Davis, CA 95616-8546

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

INSTITUTION _____

E-MAIL ADDRESS _____

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY

___ STUDENT (US) \$15.00

___ INDIVIDUAL (US) \$20.00

___ INTERNATIONAL INDIVIDUAL \$25.00

___ INTERNATIONAL STUDENT \$20

___ INSTITUTIONAL \$25

ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS

___ Donor \$50

___ Contributor \$100.00

___ Sponsor \$150.00 +