

## IN MOROCCO: Edith Wharton's Heart of Darkness

by Judith E. Funston

The idea of Edith Wharton, accompanied by Walter Berry and a retinue of servants, motoring through the desert wastes of Morocco seems an incongruous one. Not only does her need for the amenities of civilization run counter to the harsh conditions of the desert -- it is difficult to imagine her "perspiring" in the heat of a Moroccan afternoon--but her cultivation and reputed fastidiousness seem diametrically opposed to the primitive conditions of North Africa. But the land, its people, and their customs profoundly affected Wharton, and her 1920 book *In Morocco* records not only places visited, but her often passionate responses to what she discovered in this alien land.

As she notes in *A Backward Glance*, she travelled to Morocco in the fall of 1917 at the invitation of General Lyautey, the Resident-General of France in Morocco. Although Wharton was specifically asked to attend the annual industrial exhibition, Lyautey arranged for her a three-week motor tour of the country, probably in recognition of her relief work in France during the war. It was, she remarks, her first real holiday since the war's beginning; and although she does not discuss it at length in the autobiography, the imagery she uses suggests the significance of this respite: "The brief enchantment of this journey through a country still completely untouched by foreign travel, and almost destitute of roads and hotels, was like a burst of sunlight between storm clouds" (357-8).

Wharton's description captures much of the mood of *In Morocco* and highlights the source of her "enchantment." In the first chapter she calls Morocco "a country without a guide-book" (21). Although she implies that her book will fill that void, her fascination with Morocco arises from its roadlessness and maplessness. In the preface of the first edition she ruefully acknowledges that with the resumption of Mediterranean passenger traffic, the Morocco she saw in 1917, which preserved "a life contemporary with the crusaders" (11) because the country was unmapped, would be washed away in a "great torrent of 'tourism'" (10).

But *In Morocco* is not so much a guidebook as it is a collection of sketches of Morocco's principal cities, customs, history, and architecture. Roughly the first half of this book is devoted to Wharton's impressions of such fabled cities as Fez and Marrakech and includes lively descriptions of the landscape and the people, always set within the context of



Photo From *IN MOROCCO*

the Moroccan past. The remainder of the book blends the contemporary and the historical as Wharton comments on the French presence in Morocco and sketches an overview of Moroccan history. But Chapter V, "Harems and Ceremonies," is the core of *In Morocco*, in that Wharton probes the heart of darkness of Moroccan culture, a culture predicated on male tyranny and female enslavement. Indeed, Wharton's feminism distinguishes this book from the typical collection of travel sketches. She has a deep sympathy for the young girls, "born and bred in an airy palace among pomegranate gardens and white terraces," incarcerated in the "painted sepulchre" of the harem (148); she is outraged at a patriarchal society which turns its women into listless "cellar-grown flowers" (151). In this respect, *In Morocco* is Wharton's most unadorned statement of her feminism.

Wharton's convictions color this book; *In Morocco* is a highly personal account of an alien land. Along with her feminism is her pro-Western stance which connects a host of negative attributes to "oriental" -- dilatoriness (122), promiscuity and neglect (155). Yet balancing her criticism is an eagerness to investigate Moroccan culture and life as deeply as possible in spite of her prejudices, even in spite of her moral indignation. Wharton's emotional responses to Morocco, far from being detrimental, ultimately enhance her account: her keen awareness of differences, not only between Western and "Oriental" cultures, but from city to city, quarter to quarter, makes vivid her rendering of Morocco for a Western audience.

All this demonstrates that *In Morocco* is more than a guidebook to an unmapped land. Wharton's own assess-

The Edith Wharton Newsletter  
Edith Wharton Society

Annette Zilversmit, Editor

Department of English, Long Island Univ.  
Brooklyn, New York 11201

Assistant Editor, Kathy Fedorko  
Bibliographic Editor, Alfred Bendixen

Executive Board  
Katherine Joslin

Alfred Bendixen  
Alan Price

Dale Flynn  
Annette Zilversmit

Membership: \$8.00

## In Morocco Cont.

in the 1927 preface--"this memory of the old Morocco" (15)-- accurately describes the book. Aware that "Morocco is too curious, too beautiful, too rich in landscape and architecture, and above all too much of a novelty, not to attract one of the main streams of spring travel..." (10), Wharton proposes to record "the strange survival of medieval life, of a life contemporary with the crusaders, with Saladin, even with the great days of the Caliphate of Bagdad" (11). In so doing, Wharton transforms "this memory of the old Morocco" into a work of art which demonstrates her sensitivity to physical and cultural landscapes.

Wharton saw "the central riddle" of North Africa embodied in contrast: "the perpetual flux and the immovable stability, the barbarous customs and sensuous refinements, the absence of artistic originality and the gift for regrouping borrowed motives, the patient and exquisite workmanship and the immediate neglect and degradation of the things once made" (127). Wharton's technique in *In Morocco* echoes the "central riddle" in that she depends upon contrast to convey her impressions of the country. Immediately obvious is that between city and desert. At the very beginning of her tour, on the trip across the desert to Rabat, Wharton's chauffeur loses the way and the car breaks down. Wharton (at least in retrospect!) sees this "mishap" as a glimpse into "the mysterious heart of the country" because the wilderness, where the least landmark "takes on an extreme value" (25), is the key to understanding the cities (29); the emptiness of the desert both magnifies and dwarfs human enterprise.

Contrast also dominates Wharton's experience of the city. At one moment she is in a crowded and colorful *souk* in Sale:

Everything that the reader of the *Arabian Nights* expects to find is here: the whitewashed niches wherein pale youths sit weaving the fine mattings for which the town is still famous; the tunnelled passages where indolent merchants with bare feet crouch in their little kennels hung with richly ornamented saddlery and arms, or with slippers of pale citron leather and bright embroidered *babouches*; and stalls with fruit, olives, tunny-fish, vague syrupy sweets, candles for saints' tombs,

Mantegnesque garlands of red and green peppers, griddle-cakes and condiments that the lady in the tale of "The Three Calendars" went out to buy, that memorable morning, in the market of Bagdad (36).

But in an adjoining street, the colors fade:

An even deeper hush than that which hangs over the well-to-do quarters of all Arab towns broods over these silent thoroughfares, with heavy-nailed doors barring half-ruined houses. In a steep deserted square one of these doors opens its panels of weather-silvered cedar on the court of the frailest, ghostliest of Medersas--mere carved and painted shell of a dead house of learning. Mystic interweavings of endless lines, patient patterns interminably repeated in wood and stone and clay, all are here, from the tessellated paving of the court to the honeycombing of the cedar roof through which a patch of sky shows here and there like an inset of turquoise tiling (37).

It is if the past, imaged forth in "half-ruined houses" and "patient patterns interminable repeated," can without warning engulf the *souk*.

The peculiar blend of past and present in Morocco charmed and intrigued Wharton. She quickly discovered a radical difference in the Western and "oriental" concepts of time. As she comments on the dance of the Chleuh boys, "the performance, like all things Oriental, like the life, the patterns, the stories, seemed to have no beginning and no end" (121); unlike Western linear time, Moroccan time is circular, with no apparent distinction between past and present. The past lives unself-consciously amid the present; and although she criticizes the "invincible repugnance to repairing and restoring" (33) which permits the country's architecture to deteriorate, she also recognizes that the conscious effort to restore can be deadening -- the restored Medersa of the Oudayas has "the lifeless hush of a museum" where students once prayed, studied, and argued (34). But where past and present are entwined, where tradition informs the rituals of daily life, Wharton finds the source of the magic, which inspires some of her finest prose:

The "unimaginable touch of Time" gives Chella its peculiar charm: the aged fig-tree clamped in uptorn tiles and thrusting gouty arms between the arches; the garlanding of vines flung from column to column; the secret pool to which childless women are brought to bathe, and where the tree springing from a cleft of the steps in always hung with the bright bits of stuff which are the votive offerings of Africa (40).

The past as she encountered it was a bewildering blend of refinement and savagery, creating a constant tension between enchantment and revulsion. On the one hand Wharton is charmed by Moroccan architecture with its intricate ornaments and patterns whose provenance is lost in time through endless borrowing. On the other hand, however,

she is disgusted by the enslavement of women in harems and by the love of blood ritual, such as the Sacrifice of the Sheep. She was, in fact, one of the rare Westerners to witness the dance of the Hamadchas, which commemorates the suicide of a faithful slave:

The dancers were well dressed in white caftans or in the blue shirts of the lowest classes. In the sunlight something that looked like fresh red paint glistened on their shaven black or yellow skulls and made dark blotches on their garments. At first these stripes and stains suggested only a gaudy ritual ornament like the pattern on the drums; then one saw that the paint, or whatever it was, kept dripping down from the whirling caftans and forming fresh pools among the stones; that as one of the pools dried up another formed, redder and more glistening, and that these pools were fed from great gashes which the dancers hacked in their own skulls and breasts with hatchets and sharpened stones. The dance was a blood-rite, a great sacrificial symbol, in which the blood flowed so freely that all the rocking feet were splashd with it (56).

Although Wharton's distaste for this ritual is clear, her fascination for the darker side of the human soul — a Conradian heart of darkness, as Cynthia Griffin Wolff rightly notes (297) — is also apparent. The novelist prevails in this instance. Here the art is deliberate in spite of the horror — she carefully leads up to the dramatic climax of her discovery that the red paint is human blood. Wharton is able to detach herself from her revulsion and to see that “the beauty of the setting redeemed the bestial horror” (54). She turns to the past to place the “horror” within the perspective of familiarity by noting that “in that unreal golden light the scene became merely symbolical: it was like one of those strange animal masks which the Middle Ages brought down from antiquity by way of the satyr-plays of Greece, and of which the half-human protagonists still grin and contort themselves among the Christian symbols of Gothic cathedrals” (54-5). In this ritualized dance she is able to recognize the universal dimension of “the bestial horror” at the heart of darkness, so that she could subsume her Moroccan experience into her fiction. In *The Age of Innocence*, the first major work of fiction following her journey, old New York practices tribal rituals as destructive as the dance of the Hamadchas, the only difference being the “taking of life ‘without effusion of blood’” (335).

But in Chapter V, “Harems and Ceremonies,” the artist bows to the feminist. This is not to say, of course, that Wharton abandons artistic control to denounce the evils of the harem, but that she permits a range of deeply-felt emotion to shape her descent into the Moroccan heart of darkness to a greater extent than in the book's other chapters. The chapter's opening relies on the contrast characteristic of *In Morocco*: a colorful, festive crowd is gathered to witness the “Sacrifice of the Sheep,” a bloody ritual conducted by the Sultan to ensure prosperity for the land.

The pattern of light and dark intensifies as Wharton

details her visits to four harems. A “golden-slippered being,” “blushing and dimpling under a jewelled diadem and pearl-woven braids,” conducts Wharton to the Sultan's harem, a world of “trivial dissimulations,...childish cunning, (and) idle cruelties” (141). The journey to a harem in Fez is literally a descent into hell:

The descent through the sleep tunnelled sheets gave one the sense of being lowered into the shaft of a mine. At each step the strip of sky grew narrower, and was more often obscured by the low vaulted passages into which we plunged. The noises of the Bazaar had died out, and only the sound of the fountains behind garden walls and the clatter of our mules' hoofs on the stones went with us. Then fountains and gardens ceased also, the towering masonry closed in, and we entered an almost subterranean labyrinth which sun and air never reach. (149)

As Wharton visits with the pale women in their “mouldering prison,” she is acutely aware that they were once girls who “trip(ped) unveiled on...blue terraces overlooking the gardens of the great, and, seen one day at sunset by a fat vizier or his pale young master, are acquired for a handsome sum and transferred to the painted sepulchre of the harem” (148). The counterpoint between light and dark which permeates *In Morocco* here becomes a discordant theme, overwhelming the splendor which so enchanted Wharton.

Wharton's anger at the systematic enslavement of women prompts her to indict a society in which “all these colourless eventless lives depend on the favour of one fat tyrannical man, bloated with good living and authority...accustomed to impose his whims...ever since he ran about the same *patio* as a little short-smocked boy” (152). Although Wharton

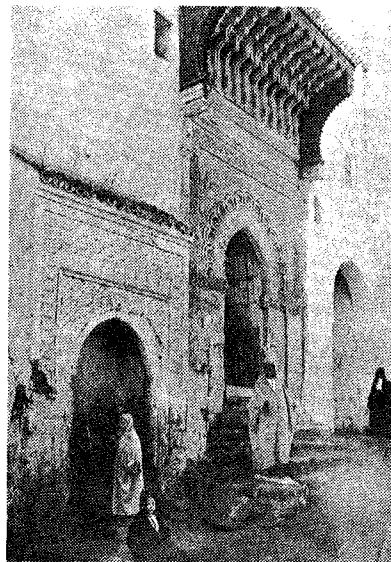


Photo From IN MOROCCO

writes this of a local dignitary whose harem she visited, it also reflects the society at large, whose appearance is deceptive: “nothing is as democratic in appearance as a society of which the whole structure hangs on the whim of one man” (130).

(continued on page 12)

## BOOK REVIEW

Mary Suzanne Schriber. *Gender and The Writer's Imagination: From Cooper to Wharton*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1987. 214 pages. \$22.

How do cultural stereotypes about woman's role affect the range of a writer's imagination? Mary Suzanne Schriber explores answers to this question in *Gender and the Writer's Imagination: From Cooper to Wharton*. Using the culture's concepts of woman's nature and woman's sphere as a frame of reference, Schriber examines the work of five nineteenth-century American novelists: Cooper, Hawthorne, Howells, James and Wharton.

Her study concludes that the culture's ideology of women can confine the writer in what Carolyn Heilbrun called the "prison of gender." The conventional horizon of expectations about woman's role can subvert the imagination, catch it unawares, and exercise control over the artistic enterprise. To varying degrees, Schriber says, this destructive power can be seen in the works of all four male authors, and even, to a certain extent, in the works of Edith Wharton.

Conventional heroines in stories faithful to the culture's assumptions about women are most commonly associated with James Fenimore Cooper, Schriber notes. But, in a further exploration of Cooper, she analyzes how Cooper stretches the characteristics traditionally assigned to women, adapts them to the frontier conditions of American life, and produces bold, cool-headed women like Mabel Dunham in *The Pathfinder*. Schriber's most interesting point about Cooper credits him with creating the first "American girls." Such a pure New World heroine, filled with the inner resources demanded by a new environment and polished by European manners, is Eve Effingham of *Homeward Bound*. But, Schriber adds, Cooper backs off from the truly independent Mary Monson of *The Ways of the Hour*. Having created a strong, intelligent woman who advocates property rights for women and divorce, Cooper retreats into the safety of cultural assumptions by declaring Mary insane. Essentially, he is more comfortable with traditional thinking than with his departures from it.

In Nathaniel Hawthorne Schriber perceives a writer consciously content with the culture's ideology of women but subconsciously restless. Hawthorne's notorious ambivalence appears in his characterization of Hester Prynne. Having created a fascinating, unorthodox woman in Hester, he undermines the meaning of that character and damages the unity of his own work by a series of puzzling narrative speculations. Schriber says that only when

Hawthorne works with a truly conventional heroine, like Phoebe Pyncheon in *The House of Seven Gables*, does his work achieve unity. The most arresting part of Schriber's discussion of Hawthorne is her reading of *The Blithedale Romance*, where she challenges standard interpretations of Zenobia by challenging the reliability of Miles Coverdale as narrator. If we recognize Coverdale's unreliability, Schriber explains, the novel may be read as a revolutionary work, and Zenobia may be seen as a woman of wit, commitment, energy and style. Schriber even questions whether a broken-hearted Zenobia really committed suicide or was murdered. But, as she admits, Hawthorne's text never really challenges Coverdale's version of events.

While Hawthorne is subconsciously uncomfortable with cultural definitions of sex roles, William Dean Howells consciously tests the boundaries of woman's sphere in such novels as *Dr. Breen's Practice* and, Schriber says, "has a more inclusive imagination of women than that of many other male writers." Since he avoided the subject of sexuality, Howells instead created heroines with atypical conflicts of career or aspiration. Thus, Grace Breen must cope with the challenges of a "masculine" career, and Persis Lapham must accept a diminished role in her husband's business as that business becomes increasingly successful. Yet ultimately, Schriber suggests, Howells sabotages his own efforts because he cannot envision new possibilities for women; he remains locked into patronizing attitudes about woman's place.

It is Henry James who most significantly bends such cultural "myopia" to his own artistic purposes. Using the accepted ideology as a point of departure, he undertakes to make something out of a culturally insignificant girl in *The Portrait of a Lady*, and he plays off the stereotypes of dark and fair heroines in such characters as Christina Light of *Roderick Hudson* and Charlotte Stant and Maggie Verver of *The Golden Bowl*. But, Schriber adds, James, like other male authors, clings to a belief in separate sexual spheres. He is perhaps unique in assigning the more interesting, wider sphere to women, but that realm is, nevertheless, exclusively woman's place.

As an inhabitant of that realm and victim of the cultural code, Edith Wharton deeply and freely imagines the consequences of such polarized thinking. Schriber analyzes how Wharton explores the plight of the intelligent woman in love with a less intelligent man in *Hudson River Bracketed*, *The Gods Arrive*, *The Touchstone*, and *Twilight Sleep*. Wharton takes on cultural perceptions about female sexuality, showing how they can lead to a fear of frigidity (in Anna Leath of *The Reef*), or to asexuality used as a weapon (in Undine Spragg in *The Custom of the Country*). On the other hand, Schriber acknowledges that Wharton, like the male writers, believes in the ideology of separate spheres. But in *French Ways and Their Meaning*, Wharton argues for a society that makes intelligent use of the complementarity of the sexes.


(continued on page 12)

# WHARTON STUDIES, 1986 - 1987: A Bibliographic Essay

by Alfred Bendixen


In the Fall 1985 issue, the *Edith Wharton Newsletter* provided a Guide to Wharton Criticism, 1974-1983," an annotated listing of critical essays that appeared during the ten years when Wharton was being rediscovered as a major writer. The Fall 1986 issue of the Newsletter included "Recent Wharton Studies: A Bibliographic Essay," in which I surveyed the work done in 1984 and 1985 and concluded that: "Wharton seems to be inspiring some of the most intelligent, most original, and most illuminating criticism in American literature." The work done in 1986 and 1987 continues to provide evidence of Wharton's ability to stimulate thoughtful and intelligent commentary, but most of these essays also continue to focus on a relatively small number of Wharton's works and a handful of issues. The criticism published in these two years contributes useful insights and valuable information, but rarely breaks new ground.

stimulate further interest in Wharton's life and work. Wharton studies have already received a substantial boost from the hugely successful conference held at The Mount last June, at which 66 papers were presented. Extensively revised versions of nine of these papers appeared in a special issue of *College Literature* (Fall 1987), — the very first issue of a scholarly journal ever devoted to Edith Wharton! — prepared with the editorial advice of the conference co-directors, Katherine Joslin and Annette Zilversmit. The issue includes Joslin's "Edith Wharton at 125," a useful examination of Wharton's changing critical reputation, with a particularly acute account of the problems caused by "ideological and misogynous prejudices" (193-206). Scholars should also pay attention to Zilversmit's highly selective and very valuable annotated bibliography of Wharton criticism which is offered as an appendix to the issue (305-309) and which describes several excellent essays that have not received sufficient attention.



During 1986-1987, Wharton received significant attention in two books: Shari Benstock's *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940* (Austin: Univ. Of Texas Press, 1986) and Mary Suzanne Schriber's *Gender and the Writer's Imagination: From Cooper to Wharton* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987). Both will receive separate attention in reviews in the newsletter. Harold Bloom produced a well-chosen selection of previously published criticism for the "Modern Critical Views" series, *Edith Wharton* (New York: Chelsea, 1986). Most of the essays included are already available in book form (in books by Ammons, McDowell, Lewis, Wolff, Lawson) but his collection makes some important pieces more accessible (the essays by Showalter and Dimock on *The House of Mirth*, Wershoven on *Summer*, and Smith on the ghost stories). Scholars will still need to consult the original articles, because Bloom's collection unfortunately drops the original footnote citations. Bloom's introduction is also surprisingly disappointing; many of his comments, including his assertions that Wharton's importance rests largely on *Ethan Frome* and *Custom of the Country*, seem to ignore the critical insights contained in the volume.

It seems likely that the publication of a selection of Wharton's letters (edited by R.W.B. and Nancy Lewis and now scheduled for publication in June 1988 by Scribners) will



Most of the essays on Wharton focused on single works, but two broader studies made substantial contributions. Amy Kaplan's examination of Wharton's apprenticeship in "Edith Wharton's Profession of Authorship" (*ELH*, Summer 1986, 53: 433-457) explores Wharton's early stories about writers, a book review on George Eliot, and her treatment of spatiality in *The Decoration of Houses*, perceptively discussing Wharton's efforts to achieve a professional identity. Kaplan shows that Wharton's writing "undermines the boundaries between feminine and masculine, private and public, home and business" and she offers what seems to me to be the most accurate and precise account of Wharton's place in our literary tradition: "at the intersection of the mass market of popular fiction, the tradition of women's literature, and a realistic movement that developed in an uneasy dialogue with twentieth-century modernism." The value of psychological approaches was demonstrated in Virginia L. Blum's "Edith Wharton's Erotic Other World" (*Literature and Psychology*, 1987, 33: 12-29), which uses Freudian psychology to analyze "the male fascination with the dead women" in three ghost

stories and four novels: *The House of Mirth*, *Ethan Frome*, *Summer*, and *The Age of Innocence*. Blum's account of Wharton's treatment of male psychology — her fascination with men unable to find "sexual and emotional fulfillment" — is acute and illuminating.

In addition, Susan Koprince's "Edith Wharton's Hotels" (*Massachusetts Studies in English*, Spring 1985, 10: 1-23) shows how the hotels in Wharton's fiction reflect "transience, a disregard of the past, and a lack of family ties." The only other general study was Marilyn's French's "Muzzled Women" (*College Literature*, Fall 1987, 14: 219-229), which wonders "why women writers have tended to grant their heroines fewer choices and greater constrictions than they themselves experienced." French's discussion includes Willa Cather, George Sand, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf as well as Wharton.



*The House of Mirth* continues to attract more critical attention than any other of Wharton's works. In general, the essays published on that novel seem less impressive and less original than in recent years, but most contain some useful insights. Robert Shulman's "Divided Selves and the Market Society: Politics and Psychology in *The House of Mirth*" (*Perspectives on Contemporary Literature*, 1985, 11: 10-19) argues that: "Lily Bart's divided self is an especially revealing example of the power of the possessive market society to divide people internally and to separate them from a community." The economic metaphors he notes have received fuller treatment (most notably from Wai-Chee Dimock's 1985 *PMLA* essay), but scholars may be interested in his discussion of the ways that Selden, Lily's mother, and Bertha Dorset represent aspects of Lily Bart's psyche.



One essay charted a promising direction for Wharton scholarship by employing the methods of recent feminist theory. Frances L. Restuccia's "The Name of the Lily: Edith Wharton's Feminism(s)" (*Contemporary Literature*, Summer 1987, 28: 223-238) emphasizes Wharton's and Lily's "doubleness, multiplicity, and elusiveness." Restuccia's essay makes use of the work of Roland Barthes, Peggy Kamuf, and Nancy K. Miller. Although the essay may overemphasize Lily's self-awareness, it provides an important counterpoint to the traditional feminist reading

of Lily as a mere victim. Restuccia is especially interesting when she explores connections between Lily and the acts of reading and writing: her essay not only shows how "multiplicitous, irreducible" Lily resists Selden's "misreadings" of her but also establishes some fascinating relationships between "femininity and written words." Roslyn Dixon's "Reflecting Vision in *The House of Mirth*" (*Twentieth Century Literature*, Spring 1987, 33: 211-222) challenges those who have attempted to find a moral touchstone in the novel. Arguing that Wharton's thinking was influenced by sociological theorists (especially Herbert Spencer and Emile Durkheim), Dixon asserts that Wharton consciously chose to "omit a moral center" in order to fashion a "sociological assessment of a society lacking in moral foundation." Dixon also attempts to link Wharton with modernism, noting that: "Rather than presenting an ideal, she reveals the actual from every angle, evaluating and reevaluating it within a constantly shifting perspective." This ambitious essay makes more claims than it can fully substantiate, but it places Wharton within an intriguingly new context.



Other essays have also attempted to relate Wharton's novel to one or more literary traditions. Carol Miller's "'Natural Magic': Irony as Unifying Strategy in *The House of Mirth*" (*South Central Review*, Spring 1987, 4: 82-91) argues that the novel's modern "vision of alienation" is derived from the ironic combination of naturalistic and romantic elements, and that irony serves as a "bonding mechanism" that overcomes "the intrinsic separation of writer and reader." A very different view of the novel appears in Robin Beaty's "'Lilies that Fester': Sentimentality in *The House of Mirth*" (*College Literature*, Fall 1987, 14: 263-275). Beaty challenges those who read the final deathbed scene as ironic by placing the ending of the novel within the sentimental tradition; critics should compare her argument to Showalter's 1985 essay. In "Vanity Fair in America: *The House of Mirth* and *Gone with the Wind*" (*American Literature*, March 1987, 59: 37-57), Paul Pickrel attempts to make a case for the influence of Thackeray's novel on Wharton's and Margaret

Mitchell's. Some may be relieved to see a recognition that Wharton was influenced by other male writers besides Henry James, and there is no doubt that Wharton greatly admired Thackeray, whose satiric wit and dramatic skill may have shaped her own treatment of the novel of manners. Nevertheless, many of the parallels Pickrel discovers between Becky Sharp and Lily Bart seem strained or trivial. Laura Niesen de Abruna's note, "Wharton's *House of Mirth*" (*The Explicator*, Spring 1986, 44: 39-40) explores the significance of Selden's reading of La Bruyere's *Les Caracteres* (1688), a satiric critique of the wealthy that reflects Selden's own sense of social detachment.



One new note has crept into recent criticism. The articles published in the past two years seem increasingly likely to complain about the limitations of feminist criticism, often charging that feminists have misrepresented Wharton's achievement and place in the literary tradition. The clearest example of this argument is R. B. Hovey's "Ethan Frome: A Controversary about Modernizing It" (*American Literary Realism*, Fall 1986, 19: 4-20), which takes issue with the "psychobiographical" approach of Wolff and the "psychomythic" one of Ammons. Hovey urges a return to older readings of the novel, in which Ethan is a more sympathetic figure and concepts of "realism" dominate our discussion of Wharton's methods. In the most original part of his essay, he also argues that a Freudian reading of the novel ought to focus on Zeena, whose "deepest wishes are fulfilled" at the end when her "sadism is gratified" and her "masochism is appeased." Cynthia Griffin Wolff has reaffirmed her views of both *Ethan Frome* and *Summer* in "Cold Ethan and 'Hot Ethan'" (*College Literature*, Fall 1987, 14: 230-245), which makes good use of the recently discovered letters to Morton Fullerton. Wolff sees *Summer* as a positive account of Charity's growth to maturation (which includes being able to accept the limitations of an imperfect world) and thus as a counterpart to Ethan Frome's regression into unrealistic fantasies.



Three essays added to our understanding of *The Age of Innocence*. The most important of these, James W. Gargano's "Tableaux of Renunciation: Wharton's Use of


*The Shaughran in The Age of Innocence*" (*Studies in American Fiction*, Spring 1987, 15:1-11) Shows that the allusions to Dion Boucicault's popular play are at least as important as those to Faust. Gargano argues that Wharton relies on a series of ironic parodies of the play's crucial parting scene to develop her theme of "renunciation and restraint." Linda W. Wagner's "A Note on Wharton's Use of *Faust*" (*Wharton Newsletter*, Spring 1986, 3: 1, 8) also emphasizes Wharton's ironic treatment of the allusions in the novel. Rhoda Nathan's "Ward McAllister: Beau Nash of *The Age of Innocence*" (*College Literature*, Fall 1987, 14: 277-284) discovers a source for Wharton's characterization of Lawrence Lefferts and Sillerton Jackson and evidence that the novel is also "a biographically derived social history."




*Custom of the Country* and *The Reef* also received some attention. Robert L. Caserio's "Edith Wharton and the Fiction of Public Commentary" (*Western Humanities Review*, Autumn 1986, 40: 189-208) uses his discussion of *The Custom of the Country* to deny that fiction can be "a literal historical description of the nation's life." Except for a few interesting comments on Elmer Moffatt and Charles Bowen (both of whom receive more attention than Undine Sprague), this dense and abstract discussion is unrewarding. The title of Jean Gooder's "An Introduction to *The Reef*" (*Cambridge Quarterly*, 1986, 15: 33-52) is a bit misleading. The first half of the article is a general overview of Wharton's work for British readers, apparently in response to the publication of a number of Wharton's works in the Virago series. Incidentally, it seems a shame that *The Fruit of the Tree* and *The Children* are available in paperback editions in England, but not in the United States. Gooder's discussion of *The Reef* focuses on the "absolute disruptiveness of natural passion" and offers the provocative assertion that the title alludes to the "sinister, hedonistic, incoherent, but above all *natural* vitality of the woman behind it, George Sand herself." Moira Maynard's "Moral Integrity in *The Reef*: Justice to Anna Leath" (*College Literature*, Fall 1987, 14: 285-295) finds much to praise in Anne Leath, "the thinking person's heroine: passionate, non-judgmental but morally discriminating."



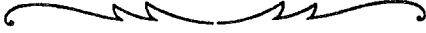





The short novels in *Old New York* have finally begun to attract the attention they deserve. Adeline R. Tintner's "The Narrative Structure of *Old New York*: Text and Pictures in Edith Wharton's Quartet of Linked Short Stories" (*The Journal of Narrative Technique*, Winter 1987, 17: 76-82) identifies works by Henry James, F. Marion Crawford and Balzac as models lists a number of Wharton's technical devices; and argues that the illustrations produced for the four volume boxed set illuminate Wharton's intentions. Tintner's most important points focus on Wharton's innovative treatment of structure: "She fashioned for each *novella* in her quartet what are essentially two short stories linked by the passage of time with two incidents and two flashes, the second illuminating the first." Margaret McDowell's "Edith Wharton's *The Old Maid*: Novella/Play/Film" provides a fascinating discussion of the ways in which Wharton's superb story was changed into the 1935 Pulitzer Prize winning play and the 1939 movie starring Bette Davis and Miriam Hopkins. McDowell carefully describes how these transformations ignored Wharton's concern with "historicity, a restrained style, the unrelieved focus on the two women, the use of single setting to unify the work, the careful and precise delineations of a limited number of themes, and the often destructive effect of a conventional and judgmental society on its citizens." Mary Margaret Richards' "'Feminized Men' in Wharton's *Old New York*" (*Wharton Newsletter*, Fall 1986, 3: 2-3, 12) offers some new insights into *False Dawn* and *The Spark*, emphasizing Wharton's awareness that men as well as women could be the victims of New York society: "These protagonists — feminized, dictated to, unable to use language effectively — have been affected by meetings with artists who have shown them a broader picture of what their lives could be and left them to struggle with that vision." The high quality of these three studies should inspire further work on *Old New York*, a book that has attracted less attention than any other of Wharton's major works.



Wharton's mastery of the short story seems to me to be the single most neglected aspect of her literary achievement. In "Edith Wharton's Act of Ellipsis" (*Journal of Narrative Technique*, Spring 1987, 17: 145-162), Jean Frantz Blackall helps correct this neglect by exploring the use of ellipsis in all 86 of Wharton's stories and carefully demonstrating Wharton's ability to evoke a wide range of responses from a single rhetorical device. Blackall's most important insight is the way that ellipsis entices "the reader to enter into imaginative collaboration with the writer." Her essay is also a reminder that we need more studies of Wharton's stylistic devices. The only study of a single short story was Alice Hall Petry's "A Twist of Crimson Silk: Edith Wharton's 'Roman Fever'" (*Studies in Short Fiction*, Spring 1987, 24: 163-166), a perspective discussion of the significance of knitting in the story which recognizes and demonstrates Wharton's subtlety and complexity. The ghost stories also received psychological treatment by Annette Zilvermit's "Edith Wharton's Last Ghosts" (*College Literature*, Fall 1987, 14: 296-305), which shows how Wharton used the supernatural in "Pomegrante Seed" and "All Souls" to provide "a metaphor for" the "internal fears" of women.



The only work done on Wharton's nonfiction was Mary Suzanne Schriber's "Edith Wharton and Travel Writing as Self-Discovery" (*American Literature*, May 1987, 59: 257-267), an account of the narrative devices in the travel books and the ways in which writing these books helped Wharton reach her decision to expatriate. Critics are increasingly relying on comments in *A Backward Glance* and *The Writing of Fiction* to support their arguments, but Wharton's travel books and other nonfiction merit more attention. The Fall 1987 issue of the *Wharton Newsletter* contained accounts of visits to Wharton sights in France by Carol Baker Sabora, Alan Price, Dale Flynn, and Kathy Fedorko.



Wharton's relationship to other writers has become an important focal point of recent critical attention. Discussions of the relationship between Henry James and Edith Wharton no longer portray her as a talented disciple attempting to imitate the master. Instead, we now see their

(continued on page 10)



# CORRESPONDENCE

## Dear Editor:

Here is a supplementary note to the issue of Fall 1987 of the *Edith Wharton Newsletter*. First, on the Colloque Edith Wharton at St.-Brice-sous-Forêt, 6 September 1987: I enclose some additional photos that may be of additional interest....

A note should be added to modify slightly Joan Templeton's account of the Colloque: the Pavillon Colombe (the Dove House) was originally the residence of a pair (2) of beloved and well-kept mistresses from Italy. (And an amusing coincidence is that the author of *The Wings of the Dove* -- *Les Ailes de la Colombe* -- used to call Wharton "eagle," "Firebird" or "Oiseau de Feu," and sometimes "Angel.")

On the interesting articles by Alan Price ("Tracking Wharton in Paris") and Dale Flynn ("My Edith Wharton Pilgrimage"): Both writers mention Wharton's residence in the rue de Varenne (the Faubourg St. Germain of Paris); Mr. Price specifies no. 53 and Ms. Flynn no. 58. Lest some readers wonder whether typos are involved here, perhaps it should be recalled that Wharton rented the George Vanderbilts' apartment at no. 58 in January 1907 and renewed the lease twice, relinquishing no. 58 in April 1909; her brother Harry Jones almost immediately found for her the larger and unfurnished apartment at no. 53, and she was able to move in by the end of the summer of 1909. Henry James wrote to ask Wharton whether no. 53 was on the same side of rue de Varenne as no. 58; it wasn't and isn't. So neither "58" nor "53" is a typo. Both articles mention the plaque on the Pavillon Colombe indicating it as Wharton's residence 1920-1937, but neither carries the important information that the plaque was put up there principally through the efforts of M. Jacques Fosse -- who was also principally responsible for the Edith Wharton day of 6 September 1987.

The diligent devotion and unstinting generosity of Monsieur Fosse deserve larger recognition. Ms. Dale Flynn mentions the welcome extended to her husband and her by the

Fosses. I had a similar experience in the autumn of 1985, when I was in St. Brice seeking information about the Pavillon Colombe in a local Pharmacie and, the princesse de Liechtenstein being in New York, was directed to the home of Monsieur Fosse. He and Madame Paulette invited my wife and me to lunch. We spent all the long afternoon there, delighted by the incredible *accueil* of Monsieur and Madame Fosse....

Lyall H. Powers  
University of Michigan

## Dear Editor:

If you think the following is valuable enough, perhaps you can find room for it in the *Newsletter*.

On page 66 of Carlos Fuentes' *The Old Gringo* (Harper & Row, 1986), he gives a character this background:

In the 1840's, her great-uncle had been one of the richest men in New York. He had a son of whom he was very proud, and sent him off to Europe to become a man. In addition, as a sign of fatherly confidence, he charged him with buying some Old Masters. Instead, "my marvelous Uncle Lewis" had bought paintings no one appreciated then: Giotto's and primitive masters. "You know what? My Great-uncle Halston disinherited him! He thought his son had made a fool of him by buying such horrible and crude paintings, totally unsuitable to be shown to ladies and gentlemen in the drawing room of a mansion on the shores of Long Island Sound.

Readers of Edith Wharton will, of course, recognize the plot of *False Dawn*, the name Lewis, and the five million dollars the pictures sell for at auction. Obviously Carlos Fuentes is also a reader of Edith Wharton.

Peter L. Hays  
University of California, Davis

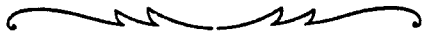
## MORE NEW ESSAYS ON WHARTON WANTED

**NEW ESSAYS READY:** The flourishing of Wharton scholarship is evidenced by several collections of essays published, about to be published and just beginning to be gathered. A judicious selection of reprinted essays and excerpts from eminent books on Wharton are to be found in the "Modern Critical View" series, *Edith Wharton* (New York: Chelsea, 1986) edited by Harold Bloom. Late Fall 1988 will see from Garland Press *New Essays on Edith Wharton*, a collection of over twenty new and original essays edited by Alfred Bendixen and Annette Zilversmit.

**CALLS FOR NEW ESSAYS CONTINUE:** Professor Millicent Bell is soliciting manuscripts for her forthcoming *New Critical Essays on Edith Wharton* in the G.K. Hall's series. Send ten-page manuscripts or inquiries to Professor Bell, Boston University, Department of English, 236 Bay State Road, Boston, MA 02215...For a collection of essays on the non-fiction works of Wharton (travel books, poetry, letters, autobiographies, criticism, war work, etc.) send material or inquiries to Professor Judith E. Funston, Multidisciplinary Program, Baker Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824.

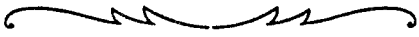
## Bibliography, Cont. from page 8

relationship as a dynamic process in which James and Wharton inspired, stimulated, and irritated each other in intriguing ways. The ways in which Wharton and James have rewritten each other's works has received extensive attention from Adeline R. Tintner. Her "Wharton and James: Some Literary Give and Take" (*Wharton Newsletter*, Spring 1986, 3-5, 8) explores the relationship between several stories by Wharton and James: "Angel at the Grave" and "The Birthplace"; "The Recovery" and "The Tree of Knowledge"; "Copy" and "Broken Wings"; "The Moving Finger" and James's artist stories; *The Touchstone* and *The Wings of the Dove*. In "Henry James's 'Julia Bride': A Source for Chapter Nine in Edith Wharton's *The Custom of the Country*" (*Notes on Modern American Literature*, Winter 1985, 9: note 16). Tintner argues that Wharton's novel converts the failed Julia into the successful Undine, "only to expand the ironies which enrich James's short tale into a six hundred page novel with an ending just as ironical." Wharton receives surprisingly little attention in Tintner's "Fiction is the Best Revenge: Portraits of Henry James" (*Turn of the Century Women*, Winter 1985, 2: 42-49), which discovers portraits of James in four of Wharton's pieces (including "The Eyes") but devotes most of its attention to Vernon Lee, Mrs. Humphrey Ward, and Olive Garnett. Building on and responding to Tintner's earlier work, Jean Frantz Blackall explores the complex "collaborative joking" of James and Wharton in "Henry and Edith: 'The Velvet Glove' as an 'In' Joke" (*The Henry James Review*, 7: 21-25). Blackall's essay also includes an interesting discussion of the way in which reference to hands and hand movements in Wharton's fiction often "expresses an emotional state" or "signify unexpressed sentiments or the tacit relationship between characters."



Wharton's relationship to other American writers is also beginning to receive some attention. The most important work in this vein was Elizabeth Ammons' "New Literary History: Edith Wharton and Jessie Redmon Fauset" (*College Literature*, Fall 1987, 14: 207-218), an insightful comparison of Wharton and an unjustly neglected Black

writer that casts new light on both Wharton and the nature of American literary history. In "Edith Wharton and 'The Cask of Amontillado'" (*Poe and Our Times: Influences and Affinities*, ed. Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV, Baltimore: Edgar Allan Poe Society, 1986) Eleanor Dwight argues persuasively that Wharton's "The Duchess at Prayer" owes as much to Poe as it does to Balzac and that Wharton may have adapted Poe's use of the chilling detail in other works. Peter L. Hays' "Edith Wharton and F. Scott Fitzgerald" (*Wharton Newsletter*, Spring 1986, 2-3) shows the influence of *Ethan Frome* on Fitzgerald's "The Cut-Glass Bowl." The subject of Wharton's influence on Fitzgerald and other writers merits more attention. For instance, I believe that Wharton had a major influence on Fitzgerald's depiction of the wasted lives of beautiful young people unable to escape from a frivolous society.

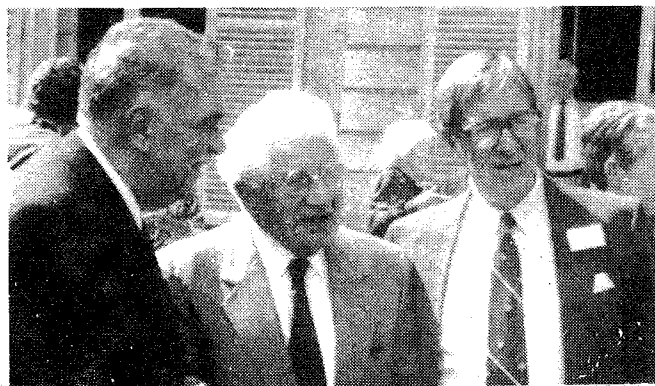


In the bibliographic essay for the Fall 1986 issue, I said that we needed "more studies of Wharton's experiments with fictional form; her relationship to intellectual, aesthetic, and cultural movements; her place in American literary traditions; her interest in the supernatural; her concepts of art and the artist; and her psychological insights into both women and men." Now it seems clear that we also need to pay more attention to those aspects of Wharton's achievement that have been often ignored: the neglected novels and *novellas*, the short stories, the travel books and other works of nonfiction. I hope that this survey of recent work and the previous bibliographic information provided in the *Newsletter* will help scholars to explore Wharton's achievements and produce studies that are both knowledgeable and illuminating. In order to make future bibliographic essays as accurate as possible, I hope that scholars will send me copies of their Wharton essays when they appear and inform me of any material that may have been inadvertently omitted.

Barnard College

# News and Notes of Members

- *The Collected Letters of Edith Wharton* edited by **R.W.B. Lewis** of Yale University and **Nancy Lewis** will arrive during June 1988 from Charles Scribner's.
- **Gloria C. Erlich** of Princeton Research Forum received two fellowships to continue her work on Edith Wharton. She was the recipient of a National Endowment for the Humanities Grant to study the entire collection of Morton Fullerton's letters at the University of Texas in Austin. She also spent one month at Yale University with access to all Wharton's papers under a Beinicke Library University Fellowship.
- **Lyll Powers** of The University of Michigan was the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship to prepare a scholarly edition of Henry James's letters to Edith Wharton.
- At the 1987 Annual Convention of The American Studies Association in New York, **Alan Price** of Pennsylvania State University, Hazleton, presented a paper entitled "Writing Home from the Front: Edith Wharton and Dorothy Canfield Fisher Present Wartime France to the United States, 1917-1919." (A revised and longer version of the paper will appear in the next issue of *The Newsletter*.)
- *Feminist Dialogics: A Theory of Failed Community* by **Dale M. Bauer** of Miami University has just been published by State University of New York Press (Albany.) It "examines the structure of four novels (Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance*, James's *The Golden Bowl*, Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, and Chopin's *The Awakening*) through the lens of Mikhail Bakhtin's critical framework." (A review will be forthcoming.)
- **Katherine Joslin** of Western Michigan University is completing a book on Edith Wharton for the Women Writer Series of Macmillan, London.
- Highly recommended for dual fans of murder mysteries and Edith Wharton is **John McAleer** of Boston College's own novel, *Coign of Vantage of The Boston Athenaeum Murders*. As McAleer himself writes, "Coign of Vantage is a novel of manners mystery involving Boston society. I rather think that Edith Wharton would have enjoyed it. I doubt that Teddy would have, however." It is A Foul Play Press Book of The Countryman Press, Woodstock, Vermont 05091.
- **Abby H.P. Werlock** of St. Olaf College read "The Reader as Heroine: Underlayering the Narrative(s) in Edith Wharton's *Hudson River Bracketed* and *The Gods Arrive*" at the Midland Conference on Language and Literature at Dana College.
- The Conference on Narrative Literature at Ohio State University held on all Edith Wharton session chaired by **Jean Frantz Blackall** of Cornell University. At this session **Alfred Bendixen** of Barnard College presented "Repression and Revelation in "Roman Fever," **Elsa Nettels** of The College of William and Mary read "Male and Female Narrators in Edith Wharton's Fiction," and **Jean Frantz Blackall** delivered, "Finding a Voice for *Ethan Frome*."...On another panel at this conference, **Annette Zilversmit** of Long Island University, Brooklyn, presented "Narration and Usurpation in Wharton's *The Old Maid*."



Attending the Colloquium for Edith Wharton at St. Brice-Sous-Forêt in September, 1987 are Jacques Fosse and Lyall Powers, flanking Dr. Artin, Edith Wharton's last medical attendant.

### *In Morocco*, Cont. from page 3

Behind the fairy-tale facades Wharton discovers "ignorance, unhealthiness, and a precocious sexual initiation" (153), but the enslavement of women represents the core of the Moroccan heart of darkness. Children are shaped by the system early on — a girl is married at eight or nine; at twelve a boy receives his first negress (153) — thus perpetuating it. Its taint is insidious and pervasive: a pet dove has the same vacant and resigned eyes as a woman in the seraglio (153), and Wharton herself is not immune to its influence — during one visit Wharton felt her own lips "stiffening into the resigned smile of the harem" (147). The evil of the harem vitiates life, for the children she meets are ghostly, livid, and waxen (160). The destructive nature of such a society is symbolized by one of the Caid's slave girls, a shabbily-dressed six-year old with "anxious joyless eyes" whose function in life is to anticipate her master's least need: "behind the sad child leaning in the archway stood all the shadowy evils of the social system that hangs like a millstone about the neck of Islam" (157).

Clearly charmed by the fairy-tale nature of Morocco, its people, and many of their customs, Wharton nonetheless feels increasing horror at the situation of Moroccan women the more she probes the shadow-world of the harem. Chapter V ruthlessly examines the nightmare beneath the fairy-tale. And although Wharton notes again and again the "abyss" between Moroccan and Western conceptions of life, her protestations hint at a real doubt that Western society essentially differs from Eastern where white women are concerned. *The Age of Innocence*, published three years after the trip, focuses on the heart of darkness beneath the sunny idyll of old New York: the novel explores a society where women are treated as chattels and are themselves trained to perpetuate such treatment.

While Wharton's feminism is most openly expressed in Chapter V, *In Morocco* taken as a whole can be seen as a statement of her feminism. As a woman travelling throughout Morocco, Wharton was entering uncharted territory, literally and figuratively, and her acute awareness of herself as a pioneer informs the book. Conscious that Morocco is "a country without a guide-book" (the emphasis is hers), she exercises the male prerogative of naming and mapmaking. As a manifestation of her feminism, Wharton's Moroccan experience lies at the center of her art; *In Morocco* offers us a glimpse of the artist as woman.

Michigan State University

#### Works Cited

- Wharton, Edith. *A Backward Glance*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933.
- . *In Morocco*. 1920, rpt. New York: Hippocrene Books, Inc., 1984.
- . *The Age of Innocence*. 1920, rpt. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968.
- Wolff, Cynthia Griffin. *A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton*. New York: Oxford UP, 1977.

### *Gender*, Cont. from page 4

In discussing Wharton, Schriber relies heavily on the work of such writers as Cynthia Griffin Wolff, Margaret McDowell, and Elizabeth Ammons, but her discussion of Wharton within the framework of her male counterparts provides a worthwhile perspective. And, rather than concentrate on such standards as *The House of Mirth*, Schriber devotes considerable attention to lesser known novels like *The Gods Arrive* and *Twilight Sleep*, a refreshing shift in perspective. In fact, throughout her book, Schriber selects lesser known works, like Cooper's *The Ways of the Hour* and Howell's *Dr. Breen's Practice*, and, through her astute analysis stimulates the reader's interest in knowing such works better.

Announcing her purpose, Schriber explains that she will explore the texts according to a six-part grid: author, context, text, medium, codes, and reader. While this sounds formidable and somewhat intimidating, the study is lucid and forthright. Schriber's extensive research never distracts from but only bolsters her clear arguments. The sections on the individual authors derive added significance from their juxtaposition with contemporaries examined in the same light. *Gender and the Writer's Imagination* is a wide-ranging and valuable study of the inter-relationships of art and society, of imagination and its limitations in nineteenth-century America.

Carol Wershoven, Palm Beach Junior College

