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NEWS and NOTES

The fourth annual American Literature Association Conference was held in Baltimore, May 28-30. Two Edith Wharton sessions were held. "The Narrative Art of Edith Wharton" was organized and chaired by Elsa Nettels. Papers given were "Edith Wharton's Beginnings," Jean Frantz Blackall; "Methods of Misdirections: Edith Wharton's Variations on Unreliable Narrator," Helen Killoran; "Edith Wharton and the Narrative of Secrets," Dale Flynn; and "Narrating the War," with Julie Olin Ammentorp. Kristin Olson Lauer conceived and moderated "*Ethan Frome* and *The Age of Innocence*: Revisioning the Neglected Classics." Presented were "Making a Spectacle of Herself: Edith Wharton's New England Vision," Margaret P. Murray; "Wharton and Fitzgerald: Revisioning the Lady Novelist," Kathy Hadley; and "Edith Wharton at the Movies: Retelling the Story," Diane Chambers . . . As in all odd numbered years, the ALA fifth annual conference will be held in San Diego in 1994 the weekend (actually Thursday through Sunday) following Memorial Day Weekend. To join ALA and receive its newsletter, send \$5.00 to Prof. Alfred Bendixen, English Department, California State Univ., LA, 5151 State University Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90032-8110 . . . **Between September 30 - October 3, 1993** ALA is holding a symposium on "American Women Writers" in San Antonio, Texas. Carol Singley of the Edith Wharton Society is organizing a panel on Wharton for this meeting . . . **The annual meeting of The Edith Wharton Society** will take place at the Modern Language Association's Annual Convention in Toronto December 27-30, 1993. Kathy A. Fedorko will chair the session "The Gothic in Edith Wharton," and Helen Killoran will moderate a panel on "The Visual Arts in Edith Wharton." . . . **A changing of the guard** has taken place at Edith Wharton's summer home, The Mount, administered by the Edith Wharton Restoration. Stephanie Copeland has become the new director and Scott Marshall has returned as deputy director. Lots of new directions seem forthcoming with these new caretakers.

Performing Women: Semiotic Promiscuity in "The Other Two"

by Mary Beth Inverso

In their introduction to Edith Wharton's "fiercely subversive" little fiction, "The Other Two," co-editors of *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, characterize the story as one that "explores the artifice of the supposedly romantic process by which a woman is constructed as a 'perfect wife'" (1170). Indeed the story does study the nature of artifice; more specifically, however, it scrutinizes the theatrical strategies of what Ellen Moers has identified as "performing heroinism."² Most surprising and uncanny is the manner in which Wharton anticipates the dynamics, delineated by modern feminist performance theory, of female performance and male audienceship.

At first glance, Wharton's tidy little fiction appears to evince scant interest in theatricality. Its surface concerns seem firmly situated on the more prosaic side of the footlights—business, marriage, money and divorce. A closer reading, though, reveals a pattern of imagery which is curiously and insistently theatrical. Alice Wharton's chameleon—like ability to assume a variety of personas, to "adjust" her performance to the proclivities of her various audiences is resolutely presented in theatrical terms. The "Other Two" thus encompasses not only Alice's two former husbands, but also her previous roles as their wife—roles which are imaged as discarded or at least revamped repertoires. Waythorn, who takes on the role of audience to his many-selved wife, himself resorts to the discourse of performance: he compares Alice to "a juggler tossing knives" (1197) and cynically deems her a clever set designer, one who knows "exactly how to manage the lights" (1197). At one point he imagines a younger Alice "lingering over the photographs of New York actresses" (1193). Each new role, he decides, is a "studied negation" of the previous one. Thus Alice is presented as an actress in everything but the actual designation.

The dynamics of female performance and male spectatorship here seems true to the structure identified by feminist theorists—the female on stage is constructed as a projection of the male gaze. Alice, though she never

openly admits as much, plays "for his delight." The effect of her performance is registered in the sense of possession which suffuses her husband-audience: "How light and slender she was, and how each gesture flowed into the next! She seemed a creature all compact of harmonies . . . Waythorn felt himself yielding to the joy of possession" (1189–1190). The sedate Waythorn finds himself in a state of "boyish agitation" as he awaits Alice's entrance.

It is also clear that the actress figure is from the beginning perceived by the male audience as an erotic object. This predisposition is an accurate reflection of cultural perceptions about actresses at the close of the Victorian era. Tracy C. Davis establishes the quasi-prostitute status of the actress in Victorian society:

. . . The theatre in general and actresses in particular appear frequently in Victorian erotica — so frequently that acting was the most often particularized occupational type of women. It seems that the content of Victorian erotica verifies . . . that the actress was inseparable from the whore and synonymous with sex . . . [I]n spite of the theatre's increasingly sympathetic reception, the popular culture continued to ascribe immorality and sexual indiscretion to actresses . . . (296)

Not surprisingly, Waythorn conflates actress with prostitute as is evident in the simile he applies to Alice: "She was 'as easy as an old shoe' — a shoe that too many feet had worn" (1196). "Easy," meaning "docile" or "agreeable," becomes redefined as "promiscuous." "Pliant" becomes "loose." The image of foot and shoe is not only sexual but also brings to mind the shoe as costume — the stage shoe, which, since it belongs to no one owner and need not fit precisely, may be worn by a series of actors in successive productions.

This categorization of the actress as an "easy" woman is partially attributable to the fact that, as Davis notes, "actresses were precluded from showing the laborious side

of their work" (297). In Victorian erotic fantasy, the hours of tedious training and rehearsal were completely expunged. Acting itself was misapprehended as easy and fun — not work in the proper sense. Waythorn, while he does acknowledge performance as an acquired skill, similarly plays down the effort of its acquisition. If Alice is a kind of knife-tossing juggler, "the knives [are] blunt and . . . would never hurt her" (1197). He too attributes the execution of a role to an inborn, unstriven-for talent — "acquiescence and tact" (1197).

Another factor which seemed to confirm the stereotype of the actress as the readily available woman was the public, exhibitionistic — hence unladylike — nature of her work. As Davis suggests, "An actress's public profession implied 'impurity' even when her costume, roles, and gestural idiosyncracies [sic] did not" (297). When women took to the stage, so went the prevailing sentiment of the day, they forsook their natural sphere, the private and domestic, and affiliated themselves with a public realm. Thus the acting woman exchanges homespace for an open arena. An Nina Auerbach remarks of George Eliot's performing heroines, "[T]hrough acting alone her women transcend incarceration in the private, domestic sphere" (260).

This sense of the disappearance of private space, or rather, its makeover into a public forum is definitely present in "The Other Two." Waythorn's mounting distress with his "easy" wife is paralleled by his apprehension that his personal space is being invaded and that his privacy is being violated. Thus he experiences Haskett's (Alice's first husband) visits as a series of intrusions into his domestic stronghold. "Not a corner of the house but was open to him," Waythorn meditates gloomily (1192).

By the finale of the story, the transformation is complete: homespace has become performance platform. Driven from the relatively accessible drawing room when a team of plumbers arrives to fix a leak, Waythorn retreats, accompanied by the seemingly ever-present Haskett, to the inner sanctum of his library den. Yet even this semi-seclusion is disturbed by the unexpected entry of Varick (Alice's second husband). Waythorn's most personal space has become a place of public assemblage. All is now in readiness for the entrance of Mrs. Waythorn. The scene is entirely hers. With unflappable stage presence, she addresses them, "propitiatory and graceful," like an actress delivering an epilogue to a stage audience.

Joseph Litvak's commentary about theatricality in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* could well serve as a gloss upon "The Other Two":

In *Mansfield Park*, the theatre, or the theatricality by virtue of which it disperses itself and col-

onizes the rest of the novel, becomes virtually synonymous with the inescapable context of all social existence and all political postures . . . *Mansfield Park* is about the incursion of public values upon private experience, about the theatricality of everyday life . . . (334)

As will become apparent, Wharton has a high regard for the protean genius of the actor; she perceives performance as neither lie, manipulation, fraud or soulless mimicry. The actor is a multifaceted personality, *not*, to invoke Nina Auerbach's term, "a dangerous psychic void" (255).

In fact, "The Other Two" traces Waythorn's progress from naive onlooker, to hostile, biased critic and finally to seasoned, appreciative connoisseur. Wharton's heroine emerges ultimately not as a perfidious schemer, but as a many-sided personality. She is, as Auerbach deems George Eliot's performing herones (and Eliot herself) a "multiple woman" (256). And she exhibits, like Eliot herself "the star's gift of transforming the critic into the ideal audience" (258). Thus Wharton, far from indicting the woman who acts, celebrates her as an icon of female transcendence.

It is entirely appropriate that there is nothing of the histrionic or flamboyant about Alice. Indeed the through line for her portrayal of Mrs. Waythorn is an understated decorum, along with, as Waythorn naively believes, "perfectly balanced nerves." This exceptional composure and poise, so admired by Waythorn, has the initial effect of prompting the reader to speculate that Alice may be vacuous — or at best quite superficial. (The "unperturbed gaiety" that Waythorn ascribes to her strengthens this impression.) It seems likely that Alice's ability to surmount obstacles "without seeming to be aware of them" is due to the fact that she truly *is* unaware of them.

This facile discounting of Alice's artistry is, however, rendered questionable by the manner of her entrance into text and room. At this crucial moment, as Waythorn observes with surprise, she has "neglected to assume the smile" that ought to have complemented her charming attire. This discomposure over the prospect of a visitation by a former spouse hints that Alice's serenity is not an effortless condition but rather a deliberately assumed mien. So discomfited is she, in fact, that she blushes under her husband's scrutiny.

Auerbach's brief discussion of the significance of the blush for the actress in performance demonstrates how this seemingly instinctive, unrehearsed physiological phenomenon can represent the height of consummate theatrical artistry. She cites George Bernard Shaw's comparison of Elenora Duse and Sarah Bernhardt with

distinct approval:

Bernhardt is described by makeup and mannerisms alone . . . In contrast . . . [h]er [Duse's] Magda is described not by the composition of its rouge, but by the blush that seems spontaneously to overwhelm her during a crucial scene. What intoxicates Shaw as a student of actors is not the sincerity of the blush, but the extraordinary virtuosity it represents . . . Duse's blush . . . marries disguise so perfectly to self-display that one cannot find the trick in it . . . For Shaw, Duse's blush provides a more powerful performance than Bernhardt's rouge. (259-260)

The capacity to blush on cue when one's role requires it, signifies, therefore, a perfect assimilation of the role by the artist.

One might contend, of course, that the blush, usually construed as a helpless revelation of the vulnerable inner self, is the signature of the "real" Alice, an Alice who is easily disconcerted. However, the fact that Alice's blush and other manifestations of her distress disappear so readily in obedience to her husband's "injunction" to "forget" suggests that Alice's blush is not unlike that of the accomplished Duse.

This interpretation of Alice's blush — that it represents a virtuoso *tour de force* — does, however, leave her open to charges of chicanery. There is something unsettling, after all, about one who can so easily "clear" her face "at once" (1186).

This delicate hint of duplicity in Alice prepares us for Waythorn's nascent dismay and hostility. By the evening of the following day, he is vaguely troubled by the very equanimity in her that he had previously found so soothing. He is no longer able simply to surrender to the spell of costume and setting: "She looked singularly soft and girlish in her rosy-pale dress, against the dark leather of one of his bachelor armchairs. A day earlier that contrast would have charmed him" (1189).

Waythorn's mounting disaffection for Alice is exacerbated by the intrusion of Haskett. It is Haskett, in fact, who, though unobtrusive as a stagehand, prods Waythorn's torpid imagination into life. Fixated by the semiotic revelations of Haskett's shabby tie, he begins to construct another Alice, an Alice whose existence he had hitherto never suspected. It is a fair measure of his intensifying animosity toward her that he envisions her in terms that suggest the vulgar, would-be starlet.

During this intermediate phase of his gradual transformation into ideal audience, Waythorn cynically equates

social climbing with role-playing, acting with artful duplicity. At this stage he regards her ability to shift from one role to another as evidence of her insincerity and connivery. The more convincingly she plays Alice Waythorn, a role which Waythorn believes must be in fundamental contradiction to that of Mrs. Haskett, the more assured he is that she is to be "convicted of duplicity" (1193).

It is also during this middle phase of his transformation that he reverts to the common prejudices against actresses — they are either indecent dissemblers or absolutely soulless. Given his own sense of spatial invasion, it is not surprising that he images Alice's "pliancy" in terms that suggest a violation of privacy and an easy surrender of selfhood:

Alice Haskett — Alice Varick — Alice Waythorn — she had been each in turn, and had left hanging to each name a little of her privacy, a little of her personality, a little of the inmost self where the unknown god abides. (1196)

During this intermediate phase too, Waythorn's scorn for the trumpery and derealization on which all stage illusion depends reaches its highest pitch. He even sympathizes with Haskett's concern that young Lily is going the way of her mother — "too anxious to please" and "don't [sic] always tell the truth" (1194). He disparages Alice's skills — the knives she appears to juggle are merely stage props, as blunt as domestic tableware.

Waythorn's contempt and sense of personal betrayal, however, gives way in time to a stage of "complete acceptance." He achieves this transition through his dawning realization that the loss of naivete, "the small change of his illusions," is but a scant price to pay for the "advantages" which accrue in doing so. He learns through his close observation of an accomplished actress at work that all art requires artifice and that the perfection of theatrical artifice is an apparent artlessness. The seasoned theatre-goer knows full well that levers, pulleys and switches operate backstage and is not at all disturbed by the knowledge. The now sophisticated Waythorn is finally able to appreciate the many faces of this multiple woman. Of course, the reader who mistrusts performance art and who regards it as a byword for duplicity is likely to endorse Cynthia Griffin Woolf's response:

The story ends on just such a note of irresolution. We still see Alice Waythorn through the unrelenting eyes of her third husband. But now she has become a grotesque, some specialized form of monster, endlessly mutating — willing to please, not malicious, but not — not quite — human. (109)

All actresses (and actors) ultimately choose between two modes of performance. One school of performance theory favors the performer who absolutely fuses emotionally with the role. The other school of thought advocates a detached, almost clinical, control over the role. The keynote for the former is intuition, for the latter, cognition. Alice chooses the latter — her performance mode is controlled, disciplined.

Both of course have their merits — either method can yield a stunning performance. But as Molly Haskell points out in her discussion of Meryl Streep as supreme example of an actress of control, this performance style makes for staying power:

Hard core movie lovers and aestheticians have always resisted Streep. Andrew Sarris sounded the note of opposition when he wrote that he preferred more intuitive and less controlled actresses, women with a sense of abandon. But intuitive actresses require someone to use them correctly. Debra Winger, Jessica Lange, Kathleen Turner are dependent on others and have their ups and downs, while Streep endures, her performances independent of her directors. Control is, of course, a key word with Streep. It's what prevents us from warming to her, yet it's part of her mystique . . . Control — that unwillingness to reveal or surrender the self is Streep's essence, and no small factor in her appeal. (70)

She further points out that, "Instead of merging with her roles, Streep completely metamorphoses" (70). This description of Streep, as opposed to that of the more "abandoned" actress, seems strikingly similar to the performance style of Alice.

Alice remains silent on the subject of her acting method. The selves she constructs are entirely her own creations, and she tells us nothing of their making. Stage presence, control, evasion are very much her essence. Together they constitute the secret of her endurance and her power. Waythorn comes eventually to understand that far from losing herself to her husband-audiences, she has, in fact, used them as she metamorphosed from role to role: ". . . Haskett's commonness had made Alice worship good breeding, while Varick's liberal construction of the marriage bond had taught her to value the conjugal virtues."

It is Alice who is able to transform her audience and bend them to her will. The finale of "The Other Two" converts an exclusively male bonding ritual into an inclusively feminine one. Alice breaks through the

encircling ring, "the intimacy of [the] blended cigar smoke" of her current and former spouses. Although Waythorn does initially experience this gathering in his den as an invasion of his privacy, the scene has by this point assumed a more comfortable atmosphere as the three share the warmth of the fireplace and enjoy Waythorn's cigars. Alice's entrance disturbs this little fraternity as she diffuses a freshness and fragrance that dispels the stuffiness of the cigar smoke. The feminine ritual of taking afternoon tea, a ritual over which she presides like a prima donna, replaces the exclusively male ritual of cigar-smoking — four teacups replace three cigars. Such a performer is, as Auerbach suggests, "not swallowed by crowds because she has the capacity to move them" (263). Alice's visitors, "as if drawn by her smile" accept their teacups, and then Waythorn, with admiration, delight and a laugh, steps forward to receive "the third cup" (1199) while the resourceful, ever-adaptable Alice Waythorn queens it to the very end.

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NOTES

¹ For the term "semiotic promiscuity," I am indebted to Joseph Litvak's "The Infection of Acting: Theatricals and Theatricality in *Mansfield Park*," *ELH* 53.2 (1986). See p. 345. Litvak, however, applies the term to a male character.

² See Ellen Moers' chapter on "Performing Heroinism" in her *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (New York: Anchor-Doubleday, 1977) 263-319.

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An Economy of Beauty: The Beauty System in "The Looking Glass" and "Permanent Wave"

by Sherrie A. Inness

The construction of feminine beauty is a prominent concern in Wharton's fiction. Of course, we all remember Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth* regarding her beauty as "the raw material of conquest" (40), while Undine Spragg is even more calculating about manipulating her beauty to gain power, prestige, and money. Even Undine's name — her father names her for the hair-waving lotion that was the first step in his commercial success — reveals that it is often impossible to separate Wharton's women characters from the beauty system that has constructed them. Thus, a closer study of Wharton's depiction of beauty can help to both elucidate a crucial theme in her literary works as well as explain how women are constructed by ideological assumptions about the nature of feminine beauty. Wharton's fiction explores the complicated relationship between women and beauty, examining how such factors as age, class, and socioeconomic status can alter how a woman is envisioned, as beautiful or as not beautiful. Such factors also influence how much agency the "beauty system," as it is called by Dean and Juliet Flower MacCannell, offers to a particular woman. To understand more fully the complexities of the construction of beauty, it is essential to examine the lives of women from different class, age, and economic levels in order to avoid the superficial assumption that beauty is always perceived in the same way by all women. This paper will focus on two of Wharton's short stories, "Permanent Wave" and "The Looking Glass," because they clearly show the different perceptions of beauty by women of various backgrounds.

Before we can approach these texts, however, we must first examine how the beauty system operates in the United States in the twentieth century. The MacCannells' article, "The Beauty System" (1987), can help us to understand the pervasive nature of feminine beauty ideology in our society. In this essay, the MacCannells discuss "an enormous complex of cultural practices that can be called the feminine beauty system" (208). "There is no other cultural complex in modern society which touches upon individual behavior," the MacCannells argue, "that is as rigorously conceived and executed, total, and minutely policed by collective observation and moral authority, than are feminine beauty standards" (208). It is exactly the enormity and totality of this system that makes it so difficult to map. The mass media, advertisements, the countless businesses (hair salons, beauty parlors, cosmetic manufacturers, the clothing industry, plastic surgeons, beauty spas) that are based upon perpetuating certain stereotypes of feminine beauty, the men who whistle at a woman wearing a thigh-high black leather mini-skirt, high heels, and a low-cut blouse —

these are only a few of the elements that work full-time to perpetuate certain ideas about what is and what is not acceptable feminine beauty. The economy of beauty is everywhere, and it is impossible for any woman to escape. The MacCannells suggest that a young girl has a choice when confronted with the beauty system: "She can accept herself as she is, or she can enter the beauty system, motivated by a belief in her own deficiencies as the taken-for-granted baseline condition justifying the numerous and often bizarre operations deployed against her body" (214). This argument, however, suggests that there is an outside and an inside to this cultural complex, and that a woman can step outside of beauty ideology to construct her own subjectivity. Instead, I view the beauty system as such an omnipresent entity that no woman can escape its dictates. Although a female might decide to give up some of the markers of stereotypical feminine beauty (for instance, she could avoid make-up, shun *haute couture*, and give little attention to a glamorous personal presentation), she still would be creating her subjectivity in relationship to the beauty system. Furthermore, others would still perceive her as someone who failed to meet certain hegemonic notions of feminine beauty. Certainly some women more openly embrace the beauty system than others, but all are categorized by its operations. Moreover, the girl is shaped and influenced by the beauty system far before puberty. As soon as she is born, the girl enters a world in which she meets or fails to meet a variety of cultural assumptions about beauty. The fact that various organizations hold beauty pageants for baby girls points out that beauty stereotypes are attached to females at an early age.

Given the often stifling nature of feminine beauty standards, it is hardly surprising that the MacCannells, as well as other feminist critics, soundly condemn the beauty system, suggesting that it normalizes boredom for women: "In all beauty books, it is taken for granted that most women will be agonizingly bored most of the time; that when they are alone, they will occupy themselves preening and their heads will be empty" (210). Here, however, the authors' own negative views of the beauty system color their analysis. They assume that preening and self-grooming inevitably entail boredom and empty heads. This connection, I suggest, is not always a given, and makes women into passive, coopted victims of the beauty system. This is a view that the MacCannells seem to support when they remark that a woman's "attractiveness is only an assembly of conventions borrowed from the beauty system to cover up her emptiness and ugliness" (222). According to this argument, a woman can have no agency if she follows the dictates of the beauty

system. This understanding is too monolithic to account for the nuances of a complex, multivalent, and polysemous system. Also, one might ask, where does it end? If a woman goes to a beauty salon to have her hair cut, is she trying to conceal her inner emptiness? If she attends daily aerobic classes, does she, like Jane Fonda, risk becoming what the MacCannells identify as "an entirely self-contained dialogic unit in which the only important relationship is with her own body" (232)? Can she ever display any agency when outfitting or grooming herself?

In Wharton's fiction, certain women do achieve a degree of power and influence because of their relationship to the beauty system. Working-class women in particular, such as Cora Attlee and Mrs. Heeny, are empowered by their roles as promulgators of the beauty system. Mrs. Heeny, the manicurist and masseuse for wealthy Mrs. Spragg in *Custom of the Country*, is supremely knowledgeable about the daily affairs of the famous and the rich. With her "reassuring look of solidity and reality" (4), Mrs. Heeny appears a much stronger figure than either Mrs. Spragg or Undine, both of whom rely on her as a "safe adviser" to the complicated social structure of elite New York (378). Because of her professional position within the beauty system, Mrs. Heeny gains agency that is denied to other lower-class women. She can cross the "sacred thresholds" of all wealthy households, and have far more status than women who lack her role within the beauty system. She regards her job as a masseuse as actually increasing her class standing: "Mrs. Heeny's democratic ease was combined with the strictest professional discretion, and it would never have occurred to her to regard herself, or to wish others to regard her, as anything but a manipulator of muscles; but in that character she felt herself entitled to admission to the highest circles" (486). Here, it is clear that Mrs. Heeny considers her job as conferring upon her the status that more traditional prestige fields like law and medicine offer to their practitioners. Only in her character as a masseuse does she feel entitled to "admission to the highest circles."

Of course, there are strict limitations to Mrs. Heeny's empowerment, since it is irrevocably connected to her role as a provider within the beauty system. If she loses this position, she will also lose her ability to transgress class boundaries. Mrs. Heeny's professional work constructs the beauty system, she herself is simultaneously being constructed by the system. Also, because the conventions of the beauty system establish stereotypes of beauty that are

looks (for example, Undine Spragg whose gowns are "almost as good as her looks" [316]), the conventions that Mrs. Heeny works to perpetuate automatically exclude her. As a working-class, older woman, she has no opportunity to achieve the status that this system offers to Undine or Lily Bart. Given the fleeting empowerment that even these beautiful women are offered under the beauty system, however, one must wonder if Mrs. Heeny's route offers more lasting benefits.

In "The Looking Glass," the reader gains a better understanding of the differences between the beautiful, elite women who accept their status as glorified objects within the beauty system and women like Mrs. Heeny, who, by manipulating the conventions of the beauty system, gain agency that they would otherwise lack. This short story focuses on the relationship between Cora Attlee, a masseuse to the rich and famous who goes from "one grand house to another, to give [her] massage and face treatment" (848), and wealthy Mrs. Clingsland, a woman who is devastated by the loss of her youthful beauty. Mrs. Clingsland, who requires daily reassurance from all that she has retained her beauty, is an obvious victim of the beauty system. Cora Attlee reflects,

Why, she made me tell her every morning that [she still was beautiful]; and every morning she believed me a little less. And she asked everybody in the house, beginning with her husband, poor man . . . But there [was] nothing he could have said, if he'd had the wit to say it, would have made any difference. From the day she saw the first little line around her eyes she thought of herself as an old woman. (847)

Wharton brilliantly portrays the trap that a woman inevitably falls into if she, like Undine or Mrs. Clingsland, has based her self-worth on her physical beauty. No one, not even her husband, can reassure Mrs. Clingsland that she is still beautiful because the beauty system sets such a high premium on youth. Thus, despite an older woman's attractiveness, in this system she will never have the same value as a younger woman.

The beautiful women who most fully internalize the standards of the beauty system without questioning their many limitations are the women who suffer the most when their attractiveness diminishes, as Mrs. Attlee knows:

[W]e don't . . . know anything about

old is like going from a bright warm room to one a little less warm and bright; but to a beauty like Mrs. Clingsland it's like being pushed out of an illuminated ballroom, all flowers and chandeliers, into the winter night and the snow. (850)

Here, what is depicted is not a monolithic beauty system in which all women have the same investment, but a complex economy in which some women are more invested than others. Ironically, it is the very same women who construct their subjectivities based on their commodification as beautiful objects who suffer the most from aging. Mrs. Clingsland, for instance, becomes obsessively attached to her former glamour. Cora recalls,

I began to be really worried about her . . . She got sour and bitter toward everybody, and I seemed to be the only person she could talk out to. She used to keep me by her for hours, always paying for the appointments she made me miss, and going over the same thing again and again; how when she was young and came into a ballroom, or a restaurant or a theatre, everybody stopped what they were doing to turn and look at her. (850)

Beauty is only constituted through the admiring and observing eyes of others, particularly the gaze of men (at least for heterosexual women).

Because beauty, at least as our society has constructed it, requires the omnipresent male gaze with its implicit desire, it encourages women themselves to pursue their own objectification in order to win the admiring glance that reassures them of their value in the beauty economy. Mrs. Clingsland can no longer believe her own perceptions of her beauty nor can she trust her husband's placating works. Only "the gaze of men struck dumb by her beauty" could affirm that her looks have not faded (849). She desires, as Cora comments, a "looking glass to stare into" that would only reflect her flawless beauty. It is impossible for her to ever find such a glass because she has aged and her beauty has begun to fade. Thus, to save Mrs. Clingsland from depression, Cora must fashion a fake male gaze by pretending to call up from the dead the spirit of a man who once worshipped Mrs. Clingsland. Ecstatic, Mrs. Clingsland quickly becomes hooked on the messages that construct a male who is eternally "struck dumb" by her beauty, and Cora must rely on an educated drunkard to supply her with the flowery, saccharine messages that Mrs. Clingsland

craves. It is not surprising that the questions Mrs. Clingsland asks of the supposed spirit are all about his perceptions of her beauty when he first met her. When she asks why he did not speak to her when he first was introduced, Cora informs her, "he was so blinded by your beauty that he couldn't speak — and when he saw you the next time, at that dinner, in your bare shoulders and your pearls, he felt farther away from you than ever" (853). Mrs. Clingsland completely believes the validity of these statements: "Blinded by her beauty; struck dumb by love of her! Oh, but that's what she'd been thirsting and hungering for all these years" (853). We see here that the beauty system only survives at the cost of human relationships. As the MacCannells astutely remark, "the contradiction at the base of the beauty system is that prescribed feminine beauty practices are believed to attract males, or bring the sexes closer together, while their real effect is to keep the sexes separate" (208). Mrs. Clingsland displays no compunction that her long-ago lover was emotionally distanced from her and made speechless because of her beauty. Indeed, the illusion of a woman's flawless beauty can only be sustained if the male viewers are distanced. Not only does the close observer notice the inevitable imperfections in anyone's physical appearance, but his statements, like Mr. Clingsland's reassurances, lose their power to validate a woman's beauty. Thus, the woman is left to search for another male who will validate her beauty. Wharton points out, however, that ultimately no man can offer a woman reassurance that her beauty will endure. It is actually Cora's manipulations and Mrs. Clingsland's desire to be reassured that allows Mrs. Clingsland to be gulled by this charade. The man himself exists as only an absence in the text. Not only is the former lover dead, but even his ghost is not present. Even the man who made up the sentimental statements dies at the end of the story, revealing the impossibility of any male forever maintaining the illusion that a woman's physical beauty is lasting.

Again, in the short story "Permanent Wave," Wharton depicts how incapable men are of supplying the admiration and continual head-turning that is necessary to perpetuate a woman's belief in her personal beauty. Although this is a story ostensibly about Mrs. Vincent Craig's last thoughts before she elopes with her lover and abandons her husband, it is also, as the title hints, an exploration of how beauty is constructed. The fact that Wharton changed the title from "Poor Old Vincent" to "Permanent Wave" suggests that my interpretation might reflect the author's own attempt to emphasize the construction of beauty within this text. Like "The Looking Glass," this story explores how a woman's reliance on the conventions of the beauty system can supplant her

relationships with men. Most critics, such as R.W.B. Lewis, have categorized "Permanent Wave" as one of Wharton's many fictional works that concentrate on what Lewis names "the marriage question" (xxv). Certainly, this is one way to interpret the story. It, however, can also be understood as an examination of how the beauty system imprisons women who accept and adopt its prescriptions too closely. Given this interpretation, it becomes clear why so much of the story focuses on Nalda Craig's obtaining a permanent wave at her hairdresser's. The first line of the story is: "It gave Mrs. Vincent Craig a cold shiver to think how nearly she had missed her turn at Gaston's" (789). Here, Mrs. Craig is more concerned about missing a beauty treatment than she is about her impending elopement. The salon is a "tiled sancturay" that offers Nalda a sense of security and peace. She feels tremendous relief once she enters this space:

Oh the relief — the release from that cold immediate menace! It ran down Nalda Craig in little streams of retrospective fear, as if she had been sleep-walking, and suddenly opened her eyes just as she hung above a precipice. Think of it! If she had to join Phil Ingerson at the station the next morning with a mop of lank irregular hair — for it wanted cutting as well as waving; and goodness knows, in the end-of-the-world places he and she were bound for, how soon she'd have another chance of being properly "done." (789-90)

Because Nalda constructs her subjectivity according to dictates of the beauty system, she is more fearful about not having a permanent wave than about the social censure that she will receive for running away from her marriage. According to the logic of this system, a "mop of lank irregular hair" is far more significant than concerns about relationships.

Furthermore, one can argue that Nalda is leaving Vincent for Phil not because of any shift in her affections, but only because Phil is still able to supply the admiration and the affirmation of her beauty that Vincent cannot. Nalda remembers that Vincent never knew "if her hair had been newly waved or not . . . It was that which had been such a disillusionment when they were first married; his not being at every moment acutely conscious of her looks, her clothes, her graces, of what she was thinking or feeling" (790). Pointedly, Nalda considers thinking and feeling only after her looks, her clothes, and her graces, reflecting their relatively minor importance in her cosmos. Even worse than not serving as a mirror to reflect

Nalda's beauty, Vincent complains about her hairdresser bills, showing that he might not always be amenable about supplying the large sums of money that are essential for a woman trying to maintain her status in the beauty system.

Nalda, like Mrs. Clingsland, searches for a man who will properly appreciate her beauty. She desires someone who will notice her careful investment in the beauty economy. Thus, it is not surprising that, when she thinks about her first meeting with Phil, she spends a great amount of time considering how she appeared:

It was at that skating party on the river . . . could she help it if she was prettier than the other women, and if her hair had been "permed" the day before, and looked as lustrous as a chestnut just out of the burr? It was funny, perhaps, to date such an overwhelming event as her first encounter with Phil Ingerson by the fact of her having been waved the previous day; but then being waved gave one, as nothing else did, no, not even a new hat, the sense of security and power which a woman never needed more than at her first meeting with the man who was to remake her life. (790-91)

Nalda or any woman who constructs her identity completely according to the beauty system is taught to believe that her only goal should be greater and greater compliance with the myriad requirements of the system. And, of course, this is a never-ending process because a capitalist society will always create new beauty products and styles that must be adopted if a woman wishes to continue to be perceived by others as beautiful. Nalda's extreme attention to her permanent wave emphasizes the importance of a beautiful woman keeping up with beauty technology. As Lois Banner informs us in her study of historical constructions of beauty in the United States, *American Beauty* (1983), the permanent wave machine was invented in 1906 by Charles Nessler, but only gained wide popularity in the late 1920s (215). "In 1927," Banner comments, "the electric waving machine . . . became a sensation" (271), and it continued to be highly fashionable in the 1930s. Thus, since Wharton's story, which was published in 1935, was focusing on a relatively new and popular beauty invention, it emphasized that the beautiful woman must stay up to date with changing public perceptions of beauty or risk losing her worth in the beauty economy.

Wharton's rhetoric, however, does suggest that women

should adopt a critical approach to beauty technology and its claims. Nalda, for instance, sits "with her Medusa locks in the steel clutch of the waver" (793). This comparison between the hideous Gorgon's locks and Nalda's newly permed hair suggests that perhaps technology is not able to create the beauty that it promises. Furthermore, the reference to Greek mythology and the magical — Gaston has "wizard fingers" (795) and he creates a "waving seance" (791) — produces the impression that beauty technology, complete with its tiled sanctuaries and high priests, might be only a new mythology that is ultimately unable to supply everything that it promises.

The magic provided by the beauty system is tenuous. Unless a woman finds a male who legitimizes all the expenditures of time and effort that she has given to the construction of herself as a subject, the beauty system can, as the MacCannells argue, potentially imprison her in a hopeless, empty cycle of boredom. Nalda waits for her permanent to be over and remembers how restless she used to become

during that interminable waving seance . . . When you had run through Gaston's supply of picture papers, and exchanged platitudes with the other victims . . . there was simply nothing to do but to yarn and fidget . . . She looked at the driven faces of the other women, desperately enduring the four hours' imprisonment with their own thoughts; then she sank back into her secret bath of beatitude. There was so much to occupy her thoughts; every word of Phil's, every glance his smile, his laugh, his comments on her dress and her looks (*he never failed to notice when she had been newly waved!*). (793)

Considering that Gaston owns a salon that is described as an "operating room" and ministers not to clients but "victims," the reader is unsure of how much agency these women, who are described as both prisoners and victims, possess. Wharton creates a dichotomy between the active agents (Gaston, Cora, and Mrs. Heeny) who reproduce the beauty system and those they serve. Although working-class people can gain influence from the beauty system that they would lack without it, it seems dubious as to whether the women who most fervently believe in the system's requirements can ever be more than prisoners, continually searching for male affirmation that they are beautiful. Certainly, Nalda, like Mrs. Clingsland, ultimately cannot obtain the male admiration that she

fervently desires; she fails to flee with Phil and remains with Vincent. One can argue that this is the only possible denouement to the story since the lover that Nalda imagines — an always desirous, affirming male — is impossible to obtain.

The different positions that Nalda, Mrs. Heeny, Cora Attlee, and Mrs. Clingsland occupy within the beauty system show how vital it is to examine both how women are constituted in this system as well as what possible agency women might obtain as workers within this same oppressive system. Wharton's fiction reveals that she understood the importance of analyzing this complex system with an awareness of the many different roles that it offers to women. Frequently, feminist critics overlook the complexity, and only condemn the beauty system for its hegemony over women's lives. This totalized approach to the beauty system privileges a certain select group of women who adopt a position of being above or beyond the dictates of the beauty system (as I have pointed out, I do not believe that anyone can escape this system), while simultaneously disparaging women who admit to any investment in the beauty economy. It is essential to examine how some of these women, particularly women who enter the beauty system as operatives, might gain personal agency in the same system that also confines them. By adopting a more carefully nuanced approach to the vast complexities of the beauty system, theorists will display sensitivity as to how women of different classes, ethnic backgrounds, and sexual orientations are constituted within the beauty system, but also manage to resist or find agency even within a hegemonic system.

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Pascal, Brontë, and "Kerfol": The Horrors of A Foolish Quartet

by Helen Killoran

By unravelling Edith Wharton's unique combination of techniques — literary allusion and misdirection — we discover that one of her finest ghost stories, "Kerfol," is also a historical murder mystery¹. Most critics of Wharton's ghost stories have suspended disbelief and accepted the "reality" of the ghosts². Yet if the ghosts are considered mistaken perceptions, forms of ambiguity intended to misdirect protagonists and readers together away from more horrifying realities, terrors of real life too threatening to face, the result is that Wharton can provide a satisfying entertaining ghost story and murder mystery, as well as a fascinating work of historical, literary, and psychological depth.

The clues to the realities from which characters and readers are misdirected are contained in a direct literary historical allusion to Blaise Pascal and indirect literary allusions to Emily Brontë. Approaching the story with the cold eye of Sherlock Holmes, we can unravel the logic behind the allusions and solve the mystery. This is the allusion to Pascal:

Poor Hervé de Lanrivain: it was a grey ending. Yet as I looked at his stiff and sallow effigy, in the dark dress of the Jansenists, I almost found myself envying his fate. After all, in the course of his life two great things had happened to him: he had loved romantically, and he must have talked to Pascal . . . (K 102)

In the story, Anne de Cornault has been accused of murdering her husband, but in court her defense is that her husband was killed by the ghosts of the dogs that he had strangled. This defense seems borne out by the fact that the narrator apparently sees the ghost dogs at the beginning of the story, in the frame tale.

On the other hand, the prosecutor says that Anne killed her husband because she was having a love affair with Hervé de Lanrivain. In the end the court reaches no definitive conclusion, but Anne is handed over to her husband's relatives and locked up as a madwoman while Hervé is released for lack of evidence. The story seems to have nothing whatever to do with Pascal.

Yet the allusion to Pascal is no accident. In the first part of his life Pascal was a superior mathematician whose strength was his brilliant logic. Later, he became a convert to Jansenism, a religious sect of French Roman Catholicism. At the historical period in which Wharton set "Kerfol" (1701), the Jansenists were engaged in a

serious religious and political war with the Jesuits; one that involved every type of atrocity including murder and espionage. The books Edith Wharton owned on the history of Jesuits³ are the source material for the following rather compressed outline of that conflict:

In 1636 a Roman Catholic priest from Holland named Cornelius Jansen was made a French Bishop. He wrote a book called *Augustinus* that seemed to interpret the writings of St. Augustine as supporting the doctrine of grace — that man is helplessly corrupt unless he receives the grace of God. However, the Jesuits preached that people have free will to choose between good and evil, but having chosen evil, can receive pardon by receiving the Sacrament of Penance. People presumed this doctrine was the source of various materialistic ventures that some Jesuits were involved in at the time.

Jansen's book became so popular as a source of conversation for socialites and intellectuals that those who agreed with Jansen, especially the priests and nuns of the Arnault family, formed a Jansenist sect in direct opposition to the Jesuits. Several doctrinal issues besides grace versus free will were in dispute, including the relativities involved in decisions about which sins Jesuits would forgive in confession (or the *pardon* as it is called in the story) and the infallibility of the Pope. But the result was that the Jansenist order, including a number of lay intellectuals, established headquarters at Port Royal and there members lived lives of extreme austerity and physical mortification. They were poor, they fasted constantly, and they were celibate. The Jansenists therefore felt free to condemn the Jesuits as worldly and evil, while they deeply resented what they regarded as ill-gotten Church wealth.

As a convert to the Jansenist sect, Pascal wrote *Provincial Letters* in which he carried on imaginary conversations with Jesuits using his own scathing logic to condemn their relativistic doctrines and make them look ridiculous. In letter number seven he even shows that by their own logic, it would be acceptable for Jesuits to murder Jansenists for disagreeing with them. (By the same logic it would be acceptable for Jansenists to kill Jesuits for disagreeing with them.) Among the important controversies tackled by Pascal was the infallibility of the Pope on matters of *fact* as well as matters of faith. The Jansenists said he was *not* infallible on matters of fact; the Jesuits said he was and accused the Jansenists of

Calvinism. The Jansenists were angry because the Pope was claiming as an infallible matter of fact that five points contained in Jansen's book were heretical. The problem was that none of the disputants on either side had bothered to read Jansen's densely philosophical book, and Jansen had died. So the entire quarrel was foolish.

One of the reasons the Jansenists accused the Jesuits of worldliness and corruption was that at the time of the story of "Kerfol" Jesuits were doing missionary work in China. Missionary work that had started brilliantly in the 16th century had by this time morally deteriorated, and there were some notorious Jesuits who had established an extremely profitable trade route between China and Europe that the Jansenists abhorred. The supreme irony in the whole business was that the French Jesuits in China were in doctrinal *agreement* with the French Jansenists, at least about the infallibility of the Pope on matters of fact. Because of the difficulty of translating Chinese words so as to make Christianity more palatable to Buddhist thinkers, the Jesuits in China didn't want Pope Clement XIII telling them as a matter of infallible fact how to translate Chinese. When Clement VIII died, Clement IX thought it desirable to put an end to the "foolish dispute."⁴ He established a tentative peace until 1701 when a new quarrel broke out. This one ended with the destruction of the Jansenist abbey at Port Royal and imprisonment of many Jansenist sympathizers.

The date of the events interpreted for us by Edith Wharton's narrator is 1702, one year after the new quarrel broke out. Furthermore, the author seems to have taken advantage of the various ironies of the dispute to title the story: "Kerfol." There is no "k" in the French language (except in a few imported words) but by spelling the "k" sound "qu," it is easy to arrive at the French phrase *querelle folle*, "foolish quarrel."⁵

With this background, and a little Sherlockian sleuthing, we can find evidence in the text to show how the murder of Anne's husband was not a result of an attack by ghost dogs, or a jealous lover, but a historical horror, the fallout of the conflict between the Jansenists and the Jesuits.

In fact, there is good reason to believe that Anne's husband was a Jesuit supporter in the habit of making bargains, for why would a lovely young girl marry a 62-year-old man described as ugly and brutal? At the beginning of the story we are told that Anne's father has squandered a fortune gambling and now lives "like a peasant in his little granite house on the moors." Fortuneless, de Barrigan could hardly provide his daughter with a dowry. Yet, after Yves de Cornault meets Anne for the first time, he rides home and returns immediately with "coffers laden on a pair of pack mules." It appears,

despicably, that Anne's father sold her to de Cornault. Further, the name "Barrigan" is remarkably close to "bargain," and the narrator says, "It was plain to all that [de Cornault] was content with his bargain" (K 88), for de Cornault needed an heir.

At home de Cornault acts devout, but he is said to live a different kind of life away from home. His activities are not mentioned, but when he returns from his trips he often brings gifts to his wife. These gifts are valuable, they are religious in nature, and many are clearly from China. Furthermore, most are brought in from Morlaix or Quimper, both port cities:

From Morlaix, a carved ivory junk, with Chinamen at the oars . . . ; from Quimper, an embroidered gown, worked by the nuns of the Assumption; from Rennes, a silver rose that opened and showed an amber Virgin with a crown of garnets; from Morlaix, again, a length of Damascus velvet shot with gold. . . ; and for Michaelmas that same year, from Rennes, a necklet or bracelet of round stones — emeralds and pearls and rubies — strung like beads on a fine gold chain. This was the present that pleased the lady best (K 89)

Having said that, the narrator contradicts himself and describes as most pleasing the gift of the little "sleeve dogs," which were Pekingese that originated in China. But in the 17th century the only Pekingese dogs in France were those stolen from Chinese royalty.⁶ So the evidence suggests that Yves de Cornault was secretly involved in the profitably corrupt Jesuit missionary trade.

Hervé de Lanrivain, on the other hand, was a Jansenist. The portrait of Hervé in his dark dress of the Jansenists with his ascetic look was painted by a pupil of Phillipe de Champaigne (1602-74), a Jansenist who painted the famous portraits of the Arnault family and other founders and important members of Port Royal. The narrator's romantic hint that Hervé joined the Jansenists because of his doomed love affair is pure imagination, because if Lanrivain was important enough to have his portrait painted even by a pupil of the great artist, Phillipe de Champaigne, he was not only deeply under their influence, but important in the movement. Additionally, given the fact that the final dispute that resulted in the destruction of Port Royal began in 1701, it is apparent that Lanrivain did not afterward "come immediately under the influence of the famous M. Arnault d'Andilly and the gentlemen of Port Royal" (K 102) because d'Andilly died in 1694. Nor could he have talked to Pascal who died in 1662 — or if he did he was elderly, not the "young man" the narrator describes. His dangerous year-long absence to "a foreign land," suggests

espionage against the Jesuits in China, for according to Edith Wharton's histories, travel to and from China took at least a year in the seventeenth century. Furthermore, since even lay Jansenists at Port Royal were celibate, and the Jansenists were a tightly knit group, the sympathy between Anne and Hervé was probably religious rather than romantic, in spite of the narrator's interpretation.

How can we deduce that Anne, probably a Jesuit supporter when she was still Anne de Barrigan, had become a Jansenist sympathizer? Suspicions about her husband's activities might be reason enough, but there is other evidence. Anne was painted by a pupil of the Clouets who were painters of the French court and therefore Jesuit supporters. The painting has the initials of her maiden name, "A.B.," so must have been commissioned by her father before her marriage in spite of the fact that the mistaken narrator dates it after her marriage. Though the narrator implies that the necklet or bracelet "pleased the lady best," the round stones on a fine gold chain "strung like beads," could describe a rosary. "Though no one could be found to say that there had been any signs of open disagreement between husband and wife" (K 93) Anne's act of hanging a rosary around the dog's neck would have been irreverent mockery of her husband's Jesuit materialism, because most Catholics would have been taught that such use of a rosary was sacrilegious, while the Jansenists, like Calvinists, preferred to strip away church ornament. Yves de Cornault never would have permitted a dog to wear a rosary. So when the beads were introduced as evidence, Anne lied in court to hide her Jansenist sympathies. The ruse failed; it was probably that very evidence that resulted in her imprisonment: "it was produced at the trial, and appears to have struck the Judges and the public as a curious and valuable jewel" (K 89). Furthermore, Anne's gift of the jeweled beads to Lanrivain would have represented not only a substantial donation to the Jansenist cause, but material evidence against her husband. That de Cornault retrieved it and used it to strangle her dog suggests that he and Lanrivain met somewhere and fought (Jesuit against Jansenist) that Hervé lost that fight, and that Yves was punishing Anne for "unfaithfulness" by killing her dogs and forcing her to lead the solitary life her Jansenist sympathies suggested.

Evidence that Anne's husband suspects her of being a Jansenist sympathizer is contained in their long discussion of faithfulness in which he implicitly threatens to kill her if she is unfaithful, but she coolly requests a tomb with a sculptured representation of herself with her dog at her feet. Yves ends the discussion by reminding her that "The dog is an emblem of fidelity."

"And do you doubt my right to lie with mine at my

feet?"

"When I'm in doubt I find out," he answered. "I am an old man," he added, "and people say I make you lead a lonely life. But I swear you shall have your monument if [notice the business word] you earn it."

"And I swear to be faithful," she returned, "if only for the sake of having my little dog at my feet" (K 94).

This is apparently a discussion about marital fidelity, but there is nothing in the text that precludes it from being a discussion of religious faithfulness as well, in which case Anne's oath to be faithful is ambiguous — faithful to what or whom? Interestingly, de Cornault's name seems to derive from the French, "*corne*," to be deceived by one's wife. The deceit could be religious, for in order to be buried in the chapel as she requests, Anne must also be faithful to the established Church, not the Jansenists. Her casual discussion of her burial seems further mockery of de Cornault combined with an implication that Anne is willing to die for her beliefs.

Furthermore, Lanrivain's year-long absence seems to eliminate any possibility of an affair between Anne and Hervé. He had pitied her and "she was surprised, for she had not supposed that anyone thought her an object of pity" (K 95). And what was Lanrivain's pity actually about? He knew the lonely consequences for Anne of her father's heartless contract because one of his tasks as a Jansenist was to spy on de Cornault's activities.

Yves de Cornault was the Lord of the Domain and as such he was Chief of the Assizes, the court, the means by which he could casually hang peasants as well as dogs. Naturally, his Jesuit sympathizing political appointees would have been in control of the court in which Anne was tried. She had little chance against it and she met the fate of other Jansenists at that time who were imprisoned for their views.

It was only after torture or pressure — perhaps a threat against her father — that Anne was made to say that it was Lanrivain she met the night of the murder. But the text says the "evidence against the young man was insufficient" so he was released. Politically, the opulent de Cornault/Jesuit court ("I can see the exchange of glances across the ermine collars under the Crucifix" (K 93)) would have found any possible way to convict a Jansenist, if they could, so perhaps he was innocent.

Who committed the murder? Here's one line of thought: Assuming that Hervé was innocent, that the ghost dogs were merely legend, and that Anne herself was not strong enough, there is only one character left, someone Anne would feel bound to protect. Her father.

By now angry at Yves de Cornault for the way he is treating his daughter, Barrigan is a prime suspect. Hoping to relieve her loneliness, he was probably the

source of the "stray" dogs Anne kept finding. He would have been the "gypsy" who sent her the pomander containing the message that Anne burned. It must have told her to drug Yves' wine then unlock the door at midnight. After the murder Yves de Cornault is described as "stone dead," and Anne's father is earlier associated with *granite*, so it is logical to conclude that Barrigan committed the murder with stones intended to make gashes and tears similar to dog bites. On the other hand, evidence from the frame tale supplies an equally logical argument as to why Hervé might have committed the murder after all.

The narrator tells the story from an account in records dated 1702, but the "book was written about a hundred years later than the Kerfol affair," or 1802, a distancing device that immediately casts doubt on the accuracy of the narrative (K 86). Yet the narrator who tells the story accepts as absolute truth that Anne de Cornault and Hervé de Lanrivain had been lovers. So an unreliable narrative is being recounted by an unreliable narrator. Since the unreliability of the narrator is the misdirective technique at the heart of this mystery, it is valuable to retell the frame tale examining at the same time ways in which the narrator is self-deluded — with the help of his host.

The story begins with the host, having shrewdly evaluated his guest, suggesting that the narrator ought to buy "the most romantic house in Brittany. The present people are dead broke, and it's going for a song" (K 80). The narrator then remarks that he is not at all romantic. That statement is contradicted later by his sighing line, "he [Lanrivain] must have loved romantically and he must have talked with Pascal." The narrator does consider the purchase, for he admits "under my unsociable exterior I have always had secret yearnings for domesticity" (K 80). He could almost have continued: "Let me hope my constitution is almost peculiar: my dear mother used to say I should never have a comfortable home, and only last summer, I proved myself perfectly unworthy of one."⁷

Here Edith Wharton has structured the frame tale on a generic allusion⁸ to the frame tale of what may possibly be the ultimate ghost story, *Wuthering Heights*, in which the equally untrustworthy narrator, Mr. Lockwood, writing in his diary dated 1801 (nearly the same year as the century old Assizes of Brittany were recorded) remarks about renting a house from Heathcliff: "I do not believe that I could have fixed on a situation so completely removed from the stir of society" (WH 3). Lockwood narrates his recent escape from domesticity (WH 15), and notes that he "had determined to hold [himself] independent of all social intercourse" (WH 25). In addition, like the narrator of "Kerfol," Lockwood is confronted by "ghost dogs" after he crosses the heath: "half a dozen

four-footed fiends of ghastly, though not ghostly, disposition" (WH 6). "Oh, hang it, — you comfortable beasts, you!" exclaims the narrator when he sees the ghost dogs of Kerfol.

The phrase reminds us that Heathcliff, like de Cornault, imprisoned his wife and hanged her dogs. De Cornault — dark, swarthy, bow-legged and with a "hanging nose" — resembles the Heathcliffian Byronic hero. The subtle allusions to *Wuthering Heights* not only underscore the unreliability of the narrator, but also help establish the tone of romantic horror in the minds of both reader and protagonist, while associating the narrator with the "deliberate heartlessness . . ." Lockwood says he is reputed to have ("how undeserved, I alone can appreciate" WH 15).

The narrator's host is quite anxious that "Lockwood" should visit Kerfol, so one afternoon he drops off the narrator at "a crossroad on a heath" with directions to "turn to the right and second to the left." Like Lockwood, the narrator gets lost. It is extremely doubtful that the house he actually reached was Kerfol, for he had "difficulty remembering whether he [the host] had said the first turn to the right and the second to the left, or the contrary . . ." But, he insists, he "stumbled on the right turn and walked across the heath till I came to an avenue . . . I instantly knew it must be *the* avenue" (K 80). He sits down to smoke in a spot where avenues radiate in every direction, not reflecting that most of them must lead to other houses (K 80).

The narrator mistakes all signs and directions, real and metaphorical, throughout his story. For instance, his host had let him to expect a moat, drawbridge and portcullis. So certain is he that he has reached the right place that he finds them there in spite of their absence: The "moat filled with wild shrubs and brambles" is no moat now if it ever was one, "the drawbridge had been replaced by a stone arch," so there is no drawbridge, and "the portcullis [had been replaced] by an iron gate," so there is no portcullis either (K 80). Furthermore, the caretaker and his daughter, who were supposed to show him the house, are nowhere to be found. And later when his hostess, undoubtedly suspecting where her guest went astray, asks him, "Did you see a lot of dogs?" she tells him what is very probably the truth: "There isn't one [a dog] at Kerfol" (K 86). He has been to the wrong house, a house with no moat, no drawbridge, no portcullis, and no caretaker, but several dogs where there should be none. Furthermore, while the "Kerfol" dogs seem exactly to match the description of Anne de Cornault's dogs, a comparison of the passages reveals clever Whartonian sleight-of-hand. There is as much room to suppose that the dogs do not match as that they do.

The narrator sees a "vague, rough, brindled thing, [that] limped up on a lame leg." Anne had a "brindled sheep dog puppy with blue eyes and broken leg." The narrator sees "a long haired white mongrel," while Anne had a "white dog with a feathery coat and one blue and one brown eye." The narrator sees "a white pointer with one brown ear" while Anne had an "old pointer," and the narrator sees a "small black greyhound with agate-colored eyes" while Anne had simply "a poor lean greyhound." The Pekingese seems to match most closely: "He was very small and golden brown, with large brown eyes and a ruffled throat" while Anne's pet was described as "a little golden brown dog" from the East. But the narrator's credibility is damaged by the fact that he is imposing new information on that memory. He was "not sure of his breed, but have since learned that it was Chinese . . ." (K 82)

The host's wife looks deeply thoughtful and, prompted by the narrator's experience, mentions the legend of the appearance of the ghost dogs on the anniversary of Cornault's murder. "Coincidentally" the next day the host produces the book of "Assizes" so that the narrator can read the romantic story of Kerfol directly from the court proceedings:

At first I thought of translating the old record. But it is full of wearisome repetitions, and the main lines of the story are forever straying off into side issues. So I have tried to disentangle it, and give it here in a simpler form. At times, however, I have reverted to the text because no other words could have conveyed so exactly the sense of what I felt at Kerfol; and nowhere have I added anything of my own (K 87).

On the contrary, this unreliable storyteller constantly adds and interprets, straying at times to "revert to the text." But that is inaccurate, also, because the original text is in another language. He begins by noting that the life of the sixty-two-year old Yves de Cornault was exemplary: "He attended mass daily, though he was perceived as an austere man . . ." During his frequent absences people said Cornault "led a life different from the one he was known to lead . . ." The narrator here dismisses an important clue: "But these rumors are not particularly relevant . . ." (K 87) If Cornault was secretly trading with the Jesuits, it would be quite relevant.

Certain other things begin to become clear by reasoning backward from the frame tale. We gradually come to know that the host's name is also Lanrivain. He coincidentally has the court records and the paintings of Anne de Barrigan and Hervé de Lanrivain in his library. Only the owner of Kerfol would have inherited the family portraits, including the painting of Anne de Barrigan. Pass-

ed down in the family, they came to rest in the library of the narrator's Lanrivain host, the "dead broke" present owner of Kerfol who is conferring with his attorney during much of the story. We can thus conclude that the narrator's host and his wife are highly motivated to build a romantic tale around Kerfol so that it will be easier to sell.

A substantiating clue is dropped later in the tale when the narrator casually mentions that his host is the "collateral descendant" of Hervé de Lanrivain (K 101). Legally, a "collateral" is a male in the line of inheritance. Kerfol could only come into the hands of a Lanrivain if the male Lanrivains were relatives of the Cornaults. Since Yves de Cornault had no living children at his death, the entailed estate would descend through the male line, another theme in common with *Wuthering Heights*.

Now a motive begins to emerge for Lanrivain as murder suspect. He not only despises Jesuit sympathizers, but he also has not forgotten the fight in which Yves de Cornault retrieved the beads, and he very likely stands to inherit Kerfol. One could argue that Lanrivain was impatient to inherit and concerned that a male child might be born when he finally revenged himself on Yves de Cornault. Though the priests and nuns of Port Royal owned no property, the "gentlemen of Port Royal" were landowners.

The host, urging his estate on "Lockwood," ironically calls the narrator "a solitary devil" who would love to live at Kerfol. Jansenists were called "solitaries" because of their lonely lives.⁹ But the empty-headed sentimental "Lockwood" is not about to buy Kerfol. Again echoing Brontë's Lockwood he remarks, "I had the sense of having escaped from the loneliest place in the whole world, and of not liking loneliness — to that degree — as much as I had imagined I should" (K 85).

He comments that it was "almost blasphemous frivolity" to suggest that Kerfol (home of a Jesuit-sympathizing Catholic) was the place for him, and his assumptions that Anne was a Jesuit supporter like her husband (based on the Clouet painting) becomes a source of an extreme prejudice against her that distorts his narration. The scornful Jansenist narrator who, we by now recognize, is usually at least partly wrong, relates that Anne:

. . . was not a clever woman, I imagine . . . She could not ply [de Cornault] with wine according to the traditional expedient, for though he drank heavily at times he had a strong head; and when he drank beyond its strength it was because he chose to, and not because a woman coaxed him (K 99).

In any case the narrator says that Yves de Cornault went to bed early complaining of "pains and fever." And later

"his servant carried him a cup of hot wine." If they had been drinking together, and if Anne drank too much, that would explain why she was crawling on her knees up the stairs when her husband was killed. Drinking could also explain her odd behavior at the trial:

One way of patching out incomplete proofs in those days was to put some sort of pressure, moral or physical on the accused person. It is not clear what pressure was put on Anne de Cornault; but on the third day, when she was brought in court, she "appeared weak and wandering" (K 92).

"... She went on to the end, with a kind of hypnotized insistence... [then] she was carried out of the court in a swoon (K 97-8). "The women in Brittany drink dreadfully," comments the hostess (K 86). Sentenced by her husband to lead a "solitary" life to punish her for her Jansenist sympathies, the devastatingly lonely wife had become alcoholic. Ironically, though the official Jansenists may have been "solitary," they did have each other and they were not imprisoned.

There are undoubtedly alternate ways to reason through the "foolish quarrel" between the Jansenists and the Jesuits and the relations between Hervé de Lanrivain and Anne de Barrigan and how those things might have resulted in the death of Yves de Cornault. Barrigan, the Jesuit sympathizer, or Hervé de Lanrivain, the Jansenist, equally could have killed Yves de Cornault, either of them thereby fulfilling the logic of Pascal's seventh letter, for such atrocities were common to both sides. The ambiguities are those of any work of art, however, and the exact identity of the murderer is of less importance than the fact that a new depth of understanding results from untangling the literary allusions and the historical misdirections of the untrustworthy narrator.

The misdirections contribute to the pleasant ghostly chill at the same time they buffer readers from real lurking horrors. The fascination shifts from ghost dogs to the murderous atrocities people can commit on neighbors and relatives in the name of religion or property, or on the basis of a foolish quarrel over the contents of a book none of them has read. The fascination shifts to the manipulations of a corrupt court, to the lengths people like the Lanrivain couple will go to sell something to the fatuous narrator by helping him create romantic self-deceptions. It shifts to cruelty to people and animals, to the revelation of religious prejudice past and present, to the tragedies of people imprisoned for religious views, and of lonely alcoholic women hidden from the social interaction that might help them. The sum of these horrors is far greater than the fantasy of a few "ghost dogs"

NOTES

1 Edith Wharton, *The Ghost Stories of Edith Wharton*. New York: Scribners, 1973. Subsequent citations are noted in the text.

2 An exception is Allan Gardner Lloyd-Smith, "Edith Wharton and the Ghost story" In Harold Bloom, ed. *Edith Wharton*. New York: Chelsea House, 1986, 89-97. Lloyd-Smith allows the possibility of "rational explanation" in some of the stories (p. 94).

3 Edith Wharton's library contained the following volumes some of which favored the Jesuits, some of which were prejudiced against them, and some that were fairly well-balanced: Bodley, John Edward Courtenay. *The Church in France*. London: Constable, 1906; Fülöp-Miller, René. *The Power and Secret of the Jesuits*. F.S. Flint and D. F. Tait, trans. New York: Viking P, 1930; Nicolini, G.B. *History of the Jesuits: Their Origin, Progress, Doctrines, and Designs*. London: George Bell, 1893; Pascal, Blaise. *The Provincial Letters*. Trans. Thomas McCrie. New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1872. Also see Jenkins, Robert C. *The Jesuits in China and the Legation of Cardinal de Tournon*. London: David Nutt, 1894.

4 Fülöp-Miller, 115.

5 Thank you to Jackie Vickers, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, for adding that at that historical time in Brittany people spoke Breton, a language that does include "K"s. Further, in Breton "ker" means "chez," or "at the house of." "Kerfol," then, can also mean "The Madwoman's House," reinforcing the concealed inner story by the hidden double meaning of the title.

6 American Kennel Club. *Complete Dog Book*. Garden City, New York: Garden City Books, 1954. Pekingese were called "Chinese sleeve dogs" because courtiers would carry them around in the large sleeves of their robes.

7 Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*. Eds. William Sale, Jr. and Richard J. Dunn. New York: W.W. Norton, 1990: 15. Subsequent citations will appear in the text.

8 A "generic allusion" is a literary allusion to another work in the same genre especially when genre is the point of the allusion. A "structural allusion," a type apparently invented by Edith Wharton, is an allusion upon which the skeletal structure of a story is wholly or partly based. For an extensive discussion of Edith Wharton's use of literary allusion see Helen Killoran, *The Sphinx and the Furies: Literary Allusion in the Novels of Edith Wharton*, diss. Washington, Seattle, 1989 or *Edith Wharton: Art and Allusion*, Tuscaloosa: U Alabama P. Forthcom-

Ghosts and Marital Estrangement: An Analysis of "Afterward"

by Janet Ruth Heller

According to Geoffrey Walton, *Tales of Men and Ghosts* (1910) contains "superficial stories . . . [that] are not very interesting contributions to a genre" (99). In *Edith Wharton: A Biography*, R.W.B. Lewis praises "The Eyes," one of the stories in *Tales of Men and Ghosts*; however, he argues that "Afterward," a less well-known work included in the collection, "begins promisingly but wilts into melodrama" (296).

"Afterward" has the Gothic elements of a ghost story, but it is really a psychological study about the emotional alienation of a husband and his wife. In this article, I will examine this underlying theme to reveal the full complexity of the story. I hope to show that "Afterward" is neither superficial nor melodramatic.

"Afterward" concerns the fate of Mary and Edward Boyne, an American couple, who have purchased an estate in Dorsetshire, England, with the proceeds of Edward's sudden windfall from the Blue Star Mine. The old country house, Lyng, is said to have a ghost that one does not recognize as a supernatural spirit "till long, long afterward" (*Collected Short Stories* 2.153).

Mary and Edward Boyne are physically close: the narrative is full of references to their embraces (see 156, 158, 162). Despite the outward camaraderie and affection of the Boynes's relationship, Wharton hints that Ned is estranging himself from his wife. Mary, who is the center of consciousness for the third-person narration, has noticed that when her husband takes long walks in the afternoon, "he preferred to go alone" (154). She has also noticed that her husband appears to be worried, under stress, and exhausted: there are new "lines of perplexity between his eyes" (154; see also 157-58). She senses an "undefinable change" in her husband and concludes "that there was a secret somewhere between them" (155; the italics are Wharton's). However, Mary's delight with the old house and its mysteries distracts her from deducing the real secret.

The first time that Mary and Ned glimpse the ghost, she notices "a shadow of anxiety . . . fall across his face," and Ned rushes away from her. When she asks him who the mysterious stranger was, his answers are evasive, and he changes the subject (157). Clearly, the ghost is connected to the growing marital estrangement.

At the beginning of Part II of the story, Mary thinks that Ned's distant figure is that of the ghost (158). This confusion is appropriate because the ghost turns out to be linked to the secrets that Ned is keeping from her and the lack of true intimacy in their relationship. More and

more often, Mary has the "sense of something mutely imminent" (159).

When Mary finds out from a friend's letter that her husband has been sued by Robert Elwell for unfair business practices in gaining the Blue Star Mine profits, she is astounded and confronts him. Wharton describes the husband and wife during this scene as if it were a battle between two enemies: "he and she studied each other, like adversaries watching for an advantage" (160). With this smile, their underlying alienation has come out into the open. Ned's embrace of Mary at the end of this scene (162) covers up his evasiveness about his business dealings. Only after Ned's disappearance does Mary learn from his lawyer that her husband ruined Elwell financially and emotionally, prompting him to commit suicide (174-75).

Wharton's stories consistently condemn those who try to evade the moral consequences of their actions. In "The Eyes," Andrew Culwin proposes to a woman he does not really love and encourages a young man who has no writing talent. Culwin absolves himself of responsibility for deceiving those who trust him. He tells himself that he is doing good deeds or "making people happy" (120, 125). In fact, he is using people to entertain himself (119, 124), rather than establishing a caring, reciprocal relationship. Both Culwin and Ned Boyne run away from the scene of their deceptions, and both are haunted by apparitions that remind them of their misdeeds.

However, Wharton does not blame Ned for all of Mary's ignorance. Mary concedes that she often had trouble paying attention when her husband discussed his business transactions in America. When Ned had free time, she tried to make the hours "an escape from immediate preoccupations." Now, in England, they often feel as though their new wealth, new home, and "new life" have "drawn [a] magic circle about them" (161). This is, of course, an illusion. Ned's dishonesty and Mary's escapism have disastrous results.

A central image of "Afterward" is a lamp being brought into or lighted within a dark room of Lyng. This image first occurs in the second paragraph (152) and is repeated frequently (154, 159, 167). The metaphor of enlightenment hints that there is a dark secret that must come to light. Note that "Lyng" is an appropriate name for the old mansion because Ned Boyne has told many lies.

In most stories about haunted houses, the ghost is connected with the history of the old home. However, in "Afterward," the ghost has nothing to do with Lyng's past

history: the ghost's two appearances are a result of Robert Elwell's desire for vengeance on the corrupt Ned Boyne. Boyne has brought his own haunted past to Lyng. Similarly, in "The Eyes," the apparitions reappear whenever Culwin mistreats or deceives another person, regardless of where he resides. Wharton's ghosts in these stories are generated by the conflicts and lies of the living; the ghosts are the outward signs of inward turmoil.

Avoidance of real intimacy is a major theme of both "Afterward" and "The Eyes." Culwin and Boyne conceal their true thoughts and emotions from people who want to be close to them. Culwin even enjoys feeling superior to those whom he entraps, and he makes fun of his devotees' stupidity (119, 124). Boyne keeps Mary in the dark about his business dealings, even when she questions him about Elwell (160-62).

The men in many of Wharton's stories are witty and charming but lack depth of character. Their wives fail to comprehend these character flaws because Wharton's heroines tend to idealize lovers and husbands. When the women find out that the males' charm is superficial, the disillusionment is very painful. For example, Delia Corbett in "The Lamp of Psyche" (1895) discovers that her second husband evaded military service during the American Civil War. Her disappointment leads her to abandon her "passionate worship" of Laurence Corbett and to substitute "a tolerant affection" (1.57). A similar disillusionment occurs for Lizzie Deering in "The Letters" (1910). She eventually realizes that her husband has deceived her about an important period of their courtship and that he will never focus his artistic ability to produce truly great paintings. Likewise, Mary Boyne believes that her husband is a good businessman and a promising writer, but he disappoints her on both counts.

Superficial charm concealing profound character flaws was typical of some important men in Edith Wharton's life. Her letters to W. Morton Fullerton, her lover from 1908 to 1910, praise his "extremely adaptable intelligence, varied gifts, & a charming personality." However, she urges him to give his life more direction: "I want to see your admirable intelligence directing a will as strong as it is fine, with a definite plan of life worked out, & a definite goal aimed at . . ." (*The Letters of Edith Wharton* 224). Fullerton seems to be a model for Wharton's

dilettante heroes such as Corbett and Deering.

Around the time that she was writing *Tales of Men and Ghosts*, Edith Wharton discovered that both her husband and Fullerton were having other affairs. Perhaps this deception served as a paradigm for the dishonesty of her fictional husbands.

According to Elizabeth Ammons, Wharton often argues in her fiction that "fairy-tale visions of love and marriage imprison rather than liberate men and women" (61). In "Afterward," Mary and Edward Boyne appear to be blissfully happy in their old mansion; however, Edward's dishonesty and Mary's lack of interest in his business dealings prevent their marriage from being really intimate. Their story has a tragic ending when Edward is spirited away by the ghost, which represents the hidden alienation and conflict between husband and wife. Mary remains alive but feels a "deepening apathy" (171) and numbness (171, 176), as if she were experiencing a partial death. In the final paragraph, her charming fairytale home has been transformed into "falling ruins" (176), the ruins of her decayed marriage.

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Film Review: *Ethan Frome*

When reviewing "hot Ethan" [Summer] for the Boston Evening Transcript, Edwin Francis Edgett, standing as point man for New England, demanded to know "Where in New England did Mrs. Wharton unearth . . . the people for the latest novel?" Director John Madden has returned to that imaginary mountain to find Liam Neeson (Ethan), Patricia Arquette (Mattie) and Joan Allen (Zeena), the cast of his superb adaptation of Mrs. Wharton's classic tragedy, *Ethan Frome*.

Let the literary purist beware: there are differences between novel and film (written by Richard Nelson), yet the end result is a seamless, tasteful rendition which is sure to attract a major audience. We, as Whartonians, must be grateful for the intelligence and artistic excellence of the cast. We are not eternally saddled with an embarrassment such as Gregory Peck's Captain Ahab or Daniel Day Lewis's strong-but-sensitive "Long Rifle." (Mr. Lewis will soon trade buckskins for brougham when he reappears in Martin Scorsese's *Age of Innocence*.)

As reader, we remember the stark, frozen "outcropping granite," and dwell endlessly on Wharton's relentless, unflinching vision of New England life. But we tend to forget she called her setting a "harsh and beautiful land," a vision echoed by the reviewer for the *Nation*, who saw it as a "wonder . . . that the spectacle of so much pain can be made to yield so much beauty." It is this vision of pain and beauty which remains intact in the able hands of John Madden.

Gone is Mrs. Wharton's much-explicated framing narrative. An inquisitive engineer is replaced by a busy-body minister, whose profession makes him privy to the secrets of Starkfield, a situation certainly more readily comprehensible to a 1993 audience of intelligent moviegoers. And we must remember that this is the target audience for the film, not a small coterie of Wharton scholars.

Filmed in Vermont, where snow is guaranteed, *Ethan Frome*

revised delivers love scenes so chaste they could almost pass the muster of Henry James. We have symbolism from D.H. Lawrence, and F. Scott Fitzgerald sends some pink silk to Starkfield, circa mid-nineteenth century. There is an attempt to establish Mattie as suicidal, which does not entirely work. At some crucial junctures questions beg answers; most importantly: why won't Mattie accept Ethan's offer to run away with her? Ethan's walk is a bit too much, but how else is Mr. Neeson to simulate "the jerk of a chain"? In spite of any quibbles, there are moments of transcendent brilliance: the split-second, slow-motion of the pickle dish; the cough onto the wedding ring during lovemaking; the scenes of the final sled ride.

One hopes that the Motion Picture Academy, which lately notices "small" films, will notice Liam Neeson's Oscar-worthy performance as Ethan. Joan Allen's Zeena never falters; such a character could easily turn into a caricature if left to the artistry of a lesser talent. A nearby viewer who never heard of Elizabeth Ammons summed up the perfection of Allen's performance when she cried out, "What a witch!" Patricia Arquette is at first, because of her blond hair, visually startling. Yet, complete with cherry-red fascinator, all preconceived ideas fade. She is Mattie Silver.

As we well know, there is no scenery to be chewed, no career-making parts to be played, no room for cinematic tour-de-force in *Ethan Frome*. In spite of this, director and cast have mined Wharton's mountain to deliver us a tiny gem of a movie.

Do not re-read the book before you see the film; it will save you endless, needless comparisons. Just go to the movies and enjoy the intact vision of Edith Wharton's *Ethan Frome*. This will be quite easy to do because John Madden's *Ethan Frome* is painfully beautiful.

Margaret P. Murray, Fordham University

Edith Wharton, Kate Spencer, and *Ethan Frome*

by Scott Marshall

The recent release of the film version is an opportune moment to re-examine one aspect relating to Wharton's writing of *Ethan Frome*: the real-life sledding accident in 1904 in Lenox, Massachusetts, which is generally believed to have served as the "inspiration" for the final suicide run that Ethan and Mattie make on a sled near the end of the story. In *Edith Wharton* (1975), R.W.B. Lewis summarized this as follows:

One event external to her life also contributed to the climax of *Ethan Frome*. In March 1904 there had been a disastrous sledding accident at the foot of Courthouse Hill in Lenox (Schoolhouse Hill in the novella). Four girls and a boy, all about eighteen and all but one juniors in Lenox High School, had gone coasting after school on a Friday afternoon. They made several exuberant runs down the mile-long slope, a descent on which a tremendous momentum can be achieved. On their last flight the young people's "double ripper" sled crashed into the lamppost at the bottom of the hill. One of the girls, Hazel Crosby, suffered multi-

ple fractures and internal injuries; she died that evening. Lucy Brown had her thigh fractured and her head gashed, and was permanently lamed. Kate Spencer's face was badly scarred. (p. 308)

The 1904 sledding accident has increasingly been acknowledged as a formative part of the story. When the novella was republished in paperback in 1987 by Viking Penguin Classics with an introduction by Cynthia Griffin Wolff, it also contained footnotes and an appendix by Sarah Higginson Begley. Begley included a full reprint of the coverage of the accident from the March 12, 1904 edition of *The Berkshire Evening Eagle*: "Lenox High School Girl Dashed To Her Death — Four Companions Seriously Injured — Miss Hazel Crosby, Who Was Steering, Lost Control of "Double Ripper" — Fatal Coasting Accident in Resort Town."

From 1902 through 1911 Edith Wharton's principal home was her country estate, The Mount, in Lenox. Although she was travelling in Europe with her husband Teddy at the time of the

March accident, it has been assumed by literary scholars that Wharton must have heard of or read about the accident and that she then transformed it into her fiction a few years later.

Wharton — as usual — was quite secretive about her sources and inspirations on *Ethan Frome* and she is never known to have mentioned the local real-life sledding accident to any one, not even in letters to friends. In her 1922 introduction to the Modern Student's Library edition of *Ethan Frome*, and in her autobiography, *A Backward Glance* (1934), she concentrated instead on her need to reproduce the rural landscape as she had seen it (as opposed to the "rose-coloured spectacles" of preceding women writers, *ABG*, p. 293) and of the decaying villages inhabited by "sad, slow-speaking people" (*ABG*, p. 153) which she had seen during her automobile explorations of the countryside. But she refused to say more: "So much for the origin of the story; there is nothing else of interest to say of it, except as concerns its construction" (M.S.L. edition of *EF*, p. v-vi).

What has not been generally known is that Wharton was personally acquainted with one of the injured victims of the 1904 accident, Kate Spencer, and that their friendship developed during the period when *Ethan Frome* was conceived and written.

Catherine (Kate) Spencer was born on December 26, 1887, the daughter of Alice Peck and Ellery Spencer. At the time of the accident, Kate — the only high school senior of the five on the sled — lived with her family on Fairview Avenue in Lenox. According to the 1904 newspaper account in *The Berkshire Evening Eagle*, she suffered the "dislocation of [her] right hip joint" in the accident. In addition, Lewis in *Edith Wharton* states that her "face was badly scarred." Lewis then links Kate Spencer with Ethan by pointing out that "Ethan Frome, when the narrator meets him at the opening of the tale, walks painfully with a lameness that checked 'each step like the jerk of a chain'; [and] there is an angry red gash across his forehead" (p. 308).

In 1902 Wharton became a volunteer Associate Manager (at times also called Assistant Manager) of the Lenox Library; she continued this work until her move to France in late 1911. By 1905 Kate Spencer, according to the library's annual reports, was working there as Assistant Librarian on a staff of three (Librarian, Assistant Librarian and 2nd Assistant Librarian). The two women came to know each other through their regular work at the library.

On July 7, 1909 Wharton, who was staying at Queen's Acre in Windsor, England with Howard Sturgis (see Lewis, p. 260-61), wrote to Spencer in Lenox:

I am so surprised, & so sorry, to hear of your decision to leave the library; & so especially regretful to learn that your doing so is owing to ill health. I had no idea that you had not been well, & only hope that rest & change will soon bring about such improvement that we shall see you at your post again. It has been a great advantage to the managers to have you & Miss White [the Librarian] in charge of the library, & we have all appreciated your courtesy & willingness to do your share of the work, & the pleasant spirit in which you did it . . ."

Wharton concluded by sending Spencer "my sincerest sympathy, & best hopes for your recovery, & for your return to the library . . ." The letter was forwarded from Lenox to Spencer at a bungalow by the sea on Staten Island, where she may have gone for rest and medical treatment.

In addition to the letter, the collection of the Lenox Library includes several gift tags for Christmas presents [year(s) unknown] in Wharton's handwriting: "For Miss Spencer from Mrs. Wharton." One can only speculate on the gifts — possibly books — that Wharton sent to the ailing young woman.

Wharton's acquaintance with Kate Spencer coincides with the origins of *Ethan Frome* as a brief exercise written in French to improve her proficiency in that language. Both Lewis in *Edith Wharton* (p. 296) and Cynthia Griffin Wolff in *A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton* (p. 161) date that effort to around 1907. The novella as we know it was begun not much more than a year after Wharton's surviving letter to Spencer.

If Wharton did indeed draw on her personal acquaintance with Spencer and the 1904 accident for her fiction, it should be noted that she had also found similar material in the tragic death of her good friend Ethel Cram in Lenox in July 1905. Cram, who had just been named as Associate Manager of the Lenox Library (to serve alongside Wharton), was returning home in a carriage from the library when a passing motorcar caused the horse to shy and her niece, who was driving, to drop the reins. An experienced horsewoman, Cram reached for the reins to regain control, but was kicked in the head by the horse and fell from the carriage. She remained comatose for several months — hovering between life and death — and thereby inspiring the situation that Wharton delineated for Bessy Amherst in *The Fruit of the Tree* (1907).

As for Kate Spencer, little is known following her contact with Edith Wharton at the Lenox Library. One wonders about her reaction to the sledding incident as it was described in *Ethan Frome*, as well as the resulting injuries for Ethan and Mattie, when the novella first appeared. Spencer never married and lived for the rest of her life in Lenox, for many years sharing a home with her brother, Edmund (1886-1953), who served as the town Postmaster from 1923-1934. In 1954 — at the time of a production of the play *Ethan Frome* by Owen and Donald Davis at the nearly Stockbridge Playhouse — *The Berkshire Eagle* ran an article recalling the 50th anniversary of the 1904 sledding accident. It was noted that: "Miss Spencer lives on Tucker Street and still suffers from facial injuries received in the accident" (August 26, 1954).

Kate Spencer died on February 18, 1976 and was buried in the cemetery of the Church on the Hill in Lenox. Nearby are the graves of two other participants in that terrible accident in 1904: Hazel Crosby, who was killed that day at age 18, and Lucy Brown, who lived until 1960. Only a few steps away also lie the graves of Teddy Wharton, his mother and his sister. All rest peacefully in the shadow of the white Congregational Church, which closely resembles its counterpart in Starkfield, as described in *Ethan Frome* by Edith Wharton.

Scott Marshall is the new Deputy Director of Edith Wharton Restoration at The Mount, beginning April 1, 1993.

Book Reviews

Edith Wharton. *The Cruise of the Vanadis*. Amiens: Sterns Editions, 1992. \$20.

Thanks to French scholar Claudine Lesage, who discovered the manuscript of Edith Wharton's 1888 travel journal of her cruise in the Aegean, the Wharton scholar can now read the novelist's earliest adult work. Fascinating both as biography and as travel writing, it shows the 26-year-old as superb observer, fearless and energetic traveller, possessed of a great sense of humor and a lively writing style, and always ready to enjoy being the boss.

Lesage found the manuscript, a leather-bound diary with only Edith Wharton's bookplate to identify it, in the public library at Hyères the town in the south of France where Wharton spent winters from 1918 until her death. Finally convinced it was Wharton's work, she had it published by Sterne at the University of Picardy. This discovery enables us, while Bosnia is in the headlines, to get a glimpse of that area a century ago, as Wharton and her party of three, her husband Teddy and Newport friend James Van Alen, visit Cetinje, the capital of Montenegro, next door.

Readers of *A Backward Glance* will remember how, several years after her marriage, Edith Wharton said to James Van Alen: "I would give everything I own to make a cruise in the Mediterranean," to which Van Alen replied: "You needn't do that if you'll let me charter a yacht, and come with me"¹. Edith was 26; Van Alen was 42 and a rich widower. His wife Emily, daughter of William Astor, had died in 1881. He had just completed building "Wakehurst" in Tudor style, with many rooms brought from Europe. He was a good athlete, enjoyed travelling, and had been to Greece. And his grandson would remember: "Grandfather enjoyed the company of the fair sex as well as good food and good wine and as a widower he was often rumored to be about to marry." Like Wharton he would become an expatriate and die in France. He left in 1920 when Prohibition started, stating that American was no fit place for a gentleman to live.²

It turned out Van Alen wasn't joking about the cruise. Wharton was captivated. The Whartons insisted on paying half the expense, a share that turned out to be equal to their estimated income for the year, from Edith's trust and Teddy's allowance: "In those days it was thought dishonorable to take financial risks one might be able to meet; and how were we to live for the rest of the year, since neither of us could have earned a penny?" Edith's much older brothers and her mother and Teddy's father delivered their condemnation in chorus: Mediterranean cruises were "a fad for the wealthy," like James Van Alen. Then Edith remembers a wonderful moment with her husband, whom she later divorced and who was long dead when she records it: "But my husband said: 'Do you really want to go?' And when I nodded, he rejoined: 'All right. Come along then.' And we went."³

On their return, the money miraculously was found. An elderly childless cousin died and left Edith a share of his fortune, "more than enough to pay for out taste of heaven." She kept a chronicle of the cruise — day-by-day, from February 18 to May 7, 1888, but it would not be published in her lifetime. The names of her two companions are never mentioned — Van Alen

is "our fellow traveler." She writes in a most professional way; the book is 137 pages of text and a delightful read. It shows Wharton as knowledgeable about plants, architecture and history, and a confident art critic, and foreshadows her first travel writing about Italy, which she started to publish seven years later.

The cruise began in Algiers and ended in Ancona, Italy, and covered a lot of the Eastern Mediterranean. The travellers stopped at Malta, in Sicily at Syracuse, Messina, Taormina, Palermo and Argenti, then went on to the Cyclades, Rhodes, Smyrna on the Asia Minor coast, Mount Athos, Athens, the Ionian Islands, and the Dalmation coast, Spalato (Split), Ragusa (Dubrovnik) and Cattaro. The *Vanadis* was 167 feet long, 333 tons, carried a crew of 16, including 2 cooks; and 5 passengers, the Whartons, Van Alen, a maid and valet. There was a separate bedroom for each passenger; the maid and valet had their own dining room. Wharton was ill twice.

In *The Cruise of the Vanadis* descriptions of beautiful and interesting sights are interrupted by the accounts of adventures and the occasional travel crisis. Whenever a gale blew up — it happened often — the *Vanadis*, despite its size, was forced to stay in harbor: "a violent north-west gale kept us prisoner in Corfu. The sea ran so high that we could not use any of the yacht's boats to go ashore in, and even in a large Corfu boat we were drenched and very nearly swamped."

They often left the boat to journey overland by train or carriage to rendezvous, which could lead to a crisis:

There was nothing for it but to rush down the cliff to Giardini if we wished to catch the train. Luckily we had sent my maid and the bags back to Messina by an earlier train, but even unencumbered as we were, it was a hard struggle to hurry down over the sharp loose stones, and I thought my ankles would turn before we reached the station. We were just in time to jump into the train, and at 7:30 p.m. we were once more on board the *Vanadis*.

Whenever the *Vanadis* called at a Greek island, particularly an obscure one, it was a major event. A crowd would gather: at Astypalia, a destination she described later in *A Backward Glance*, as the *Vanadis* entered the bay, "we saw the parish priest, followed by a crowd of peasants, watching our movements." Its passengers were very important persons, to be welcomed by the chief dignitaries. Edith, the only woman, with her two gentlemen consorts, was the center of attention. She enjoyed it: "Every window, door, balcony, and house roof was crowded with eager gazes as I rode triumphantly down the village street." She kept her poise even when a crowd of "savage-looking faces" pressed in. The women of Astypalia "gathered around us, grasping the folds of my dress in their excited curiosity. It became almost impossible to move, and we had to beat a retreat to the shelter of the cafe." There the one French-speaking islander apologetically explained that "the sight of a steamer was new to the inhabitants."

The incipient travel writer and novelist of manners is at work

here. She records the picturesque sights, creating tableaux of each stop, noting the architecture and types of houses in the foreground, the details of vegetation, the mountains and sky in middle and background, to create her total scene. Approaching up the bay towards Athens, she sees "a high sunlit rock with a chapel on its top — the peak of Lycabettus." She looks again: "and a little further on was another rock, like a huge platform of silver, crowned by a range of silvery colonnades, and relieved against an ethereal background of sapphire mountains" — her first sight of the Acropolis.

From the upper gallery of the Graeco-Roman theatre above Taormina "one of those scenes which reward one in an instant for thousands of miles of travels"; she sees "the indented line of the Sicilian coast" to the north, "southward, through the arches and columns of the theatre, the green valley plunges to the sea," and, over all, "crowning the landscape with a wonder and glory of its own, the white peak of Etna rises into the sky." Then she notes "the cloud of smoke drifting above Etna," the orchard of budding trees in the depths below;" and on the columns "their clustering sculpture of acanthus leaves" and "the clumps of real acanthus growing at their base," emphasizing the intertwined beauty of nature and art.

As in her later travel writing, she is testing her own authority and delights in disagreeing with the guidebooks. But she praises the impressions of those travellers she admires: Goethe (in Sicily), and notes incidents in Ulysses' travel, as described by Homer. She makes her dissatisfaction with good guides an advantage: "In fact the lack of books about this part of the world, though at times an annoyance, lends an undeniable zest to travelling and makes the approach to each island as thrilling as a discovery." She sees herself not as a tourist but as an explorer. Travelling with her included frightening and daring climbs up to monasteries perched on cliffs, and drives on narrow primitive roads over mountain passes to look down thousands of feet below.

She is fascinated by the look and the customs of the people on the different islands, and enters herself into their rituals. On the island of Milo, she and Teddy enter the house of an old man "of some importance in the village" to join the chief magnates while the rest of the population looked in through the open door. "A table was then put before us, with glasses, a decanter of wine, a glass bowl full of mastic paste, and some spoons. I did not know what was expected of me, but I took a spoonful of mastic paste out of the bowl and then laid my spoon down on the tray, and I found afterward that I had been inspired to do the right thing. The others followed by example, and then everybody had a glass of wine, which reminded us of the sweet wine so popular with the heroes of the Odyssey."

The women's costumes, the religious festivals, the artwork in the churches, the flowers and plants are all described in the most scrupulous detail — and less selectively than in the later travel essays, where she has learned to develop one or two themes. Here, all her impressions are copiously recorded.

In Tunis they reached a roofed bazaar where men in white robes sat in matted niches making yellow shoes: "hundreds of yellow shoes lined the walls of the dark little shops." Another turn, another bazaar, this time where the saddlers "were embroidering harnesses and bridles in gold and silver thread," and "lazy merchants, reclining on carpets, drank their coffee, and watched over their bales of silks and gauzes."

The writer who would later describe fashions in her historical novels to give authenticity and show character was fascinated

by what people were wearing. In Corfu they walked up and down the Esplanade to admire: "Greeks in white cloth jackets handsomely embroidered, fustenellas of white linen, and red leather shoes turning up in a sharp point adorned with large silk rosettes; Albanians in rough frieze coats, with their belts full of pistols and yataghans, Greek priests in flowing black robes, purple sashes, and curious comical black hats."

The women were even more picturesque. The Greek women wore "embroidered-velvet jackets, and red caps with long golden tassels." The peasant women of Corfu had on "finely plaited skirts of blue cloth and white chemisettes covered with gold and silver necklaces, and held in place with red ribbons twisted through them, and over this they wore white muslin veils edged with lace." The Dalmatian women were the best dressed. They wore "long coats of blue cloth covered with beautiful gold embroidery, and sometimes clasped by one or even two pairs of the heartshaped Dalmatian buckles in embossed silver, and sometimes they had aprons of lilac shot-silk, bordered with gold and a second sleeveless coat of rough blue cloth embroidered in red; while their hair, braided over each cheek, was simply covered with a handkerchief of flowered silk."

Another source of visual delight was the profusion of flowers and blossoming shrubs and trees, the plants of the south she would become intimate with in her own garden at Hyères in the 1920's. They visited a quarry in Syracuse, converted to a private garden. "Here nature seemed to outdo herself": "sheets of ivy poured over the high stone cliffs far above our heads, and in every crevice hung clumps of scarlet geranium, cactus, aloes, and prickly pear." Every turn revealed new beauties.

The festival of the Annunciation in Tenos, which falls on Greek Independence Day, turned out to be another of the sumptuous spectacles Wharton had thrilled to since childhood and could describe so vividly. She had to wait for an hour or more in an upstairs room full of "Greek ladies," having been placed in a window overlooking the quay. The procession bearing the Virgin's image finally arrived: "It was a wonderful scene, with the mass of brightly-dressed people, in which the white gowns of the women and the scarlet caps of the men recalled the vivid poppies and daisies of a Greek wheat field, the continual movement of hundreds of devout heads and hands, and the background blue sea and gaily-adorned ships which closed the picture in."

A recurrent Wharton theme, expressed later in *The Decoration of Houses* and *Italian Villas and Their Gardens* is that of beauty coexisting with utility, and she notices instances when beauty informs the everyday lives of the people: at Taormina "we lingered an hour at the theatre and then walked back through the town to the cathedral square, with its quaintly sculptured fountain where women were filling their classic jars from the nostrils of stone sea-horses."

The Aegean excursion of 1888 would be followed by constant travel, for all her life Edith Wharton alternated her stay-at-home writer's life with frequent journeys to Italy, to France (before she settled there), England, North Africa, Germany, Spain, destinations where she could feed her hungry eye and enjoy a sense of escape. Travelling inspired and soothed her. She longed to return to the Aegean and did, thirty-eight years later, in the spring of 1926, with her friends Robert Norton, Margaret Terry Chanler, Henry Spencer and Logan Pearsall Smith. They followed the original itinerary and added new stops. She concluded in *A Backward Glance*, "this cruise proved to me again what the first had so fully shown: that *Keine genuss*

ist vorübergehend [no pleasure is transitory] and that no treasure-house of Atreus was ever as rich as a well-stored memory."⁴

And a good travel account makes us stay-at-homes rich, too, even a century later.

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NOTES

1. Edith Wharton, *A Backward Glance*. New York: Appleton, 1934, p. 96.
2. William L. Van Alen, "Wakehurst". Philadelphia: Numismatic and Antiquarian Society of Philadelphia, 1974.
3. *A Backward Glance*, p. 98.

Other quotations are from Edith Wharton, *The Cruise of the Vanadis*.

To order *The Cruise of the Vanadis*: Send \$20 plus \$5 shipping and handling to Stern Editions, Université de Picardie campus, 80025, Amiens, Cedex, France.



Marilyn Chandler. *Dwelling in the Text*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

In the beginning of *Dwelling in the Text* Marilyn Chandler promises the reader a series of tours through some of the most prominent houses in fiction, and so we see the house as metaphor — by visiting Thoreau's cabin by Walden Pond, Roderick Usher's 'Mansion of Gloom,' Hawthorne's gabled dwelling, the stops on Isabel Archer's grand tour — Garden-court, Osmond's Florentine villa and the palazzo in Rome, the pigeon house of Edna Pontellier and the hideous room of the "Yellow Wallpaper," the houses of *The Age of Innocence*, Cather's Professor's House, Jay Gatsby's mansion, Faulkner's House of Sutpen, dwellings in fiction about suburbia after World War II, and the haunted houses of the wandering characters in *Housekeeping* and *Beloved*.

Chandler sees the house as a particularly rich symbol for Americans. A nation of settlers and builders, to this day we experience a conflict between civilization which is equated with "the loss of innocence, corruption, effeminacy and diminishment" and our idea of freedom associated with a romantic concept of the wilderness and outdoors. She deals with such issues as building as a male metaphor for the art of writing, the house

as part of the process of self-making, as an extension of the soul, as psychological space, as a prison, and rooms as interior space. She finds affinities between not so obviously like authors. Simplicity is simplicity whether it is that of Thoreau, the hermit by the pond, or of Edith Wharton, whose simplicity has to do with classic ideals of harmony and coherence.

Her chapter on Edith Wharton is one of the best. As Wharton's novels are enriched by a love of architecture and its history, and strong ideas on "the politics of space," her work is a likely subject for this kind of analysis. Chandler finds that Wharton exploits to the fullest "the architectural metaphors with a merciless irony that puts its own sharp twist on the old theme of American ambivalence." (149) This critic understands that the details of decoration are not just extraneous or cosmetic, as Edmund Wilson suggested years ago when he called Wharton the poet of interior decoration, and talked about her glittering and clanking pieces and *objets d'art*, "somehow extraneous to the people," and "rather inorganic." Chandler shows how these details are charged with important aesthetic and moral significance, and are fundamental to what she is saying about her characters. The characters are inseparable from their houses which "provide an index not only of social position but of individual psychology" — They are measures of "their wealth, their priorities, their authority, their recognition of consensually decreed standards of taste and behavior, and their various degrees of hesitancy to part with these standards." (157)

In her description of the houses of Mrs. Mingott, the Beauforts and the Van der Luydens in *The Age of Innocence*, Wharton gives us a "key to the social conventions that govern this small society" and the personal entrenchments of others — Newland's library, the Welland's mansion, and Ellen's little house on 23rd Street are to be seen against the backdrop of understanding the mansions of those social leaders.

Chandler's method of seeing house as text is a nice way to bring together the many strands in American literature. The reader comes away from reading *Dwelling in the Text* understanding the great importance of housemaking in America, although Americans seem happier in their simpler dwellings, their cabins, their pigeon houses, than in the big marble mansions they so yearn for. As Whartonians know, however, the light burned bright in *Ethan Frome's* little abode for only one night, and Edith Wharton herself found contentment in her many-roomed mansions — although was it because she was looking ultimately out over the Mediterranean, and not over Walden Pond?

Reference to Edmund Wilson: "Justice to Edith Wharton," in *The Wound and the Bow*, p. 200-01

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