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THE INDEPENDENT WOMAN IN THE WORK OF EDITH WHARTON

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ABSTRACT

THE INDEPENDENT WOMAN IN THE WORK OF EDITH WHARTON

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Edith Wharton looked at the past as an anthropologist might look at a foreign culture. By approaching her work through her own experience and a lifetime of travel, Wharton came to view modern civilization as primitive and barbaric, lying under the thin veil of Respectability. Her writings reflect the life of one intellectually independent woman's testimony to the modes of entrapment, betrayal and exclusion devised for women in the first decades of the American and European twentieth century.

Chapter One examines some of her early writings, and shows how she drew upon her own life for her fiction. Exploring the theme of independence, Wharton wrote a short story called "The Valley of Childish Things" (1896), which summarizes the position she would hold for the rest of her life, her commitment to the independent "new woman." Chapter Two is a discussion of Wharton's non-fiction documentation of the war years recorded in Fighting France: From Dunkerque to Belfort (1915), and then French Ways and Their Meaning published in 1919, in which Wharton attempts to explain French customs. Chapter Three exolores In Morocco (1920), and The Age of Innocence (1920). It charts Wharton's own journey into the heart of darkness where she experiences the eternal persistence of man's uncivilized self, and concludes by showing how her Moroccan experience influences her Pulitzer Prize winning novel, The Age of Innocence.

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PREFACE

Edith Wharton looked at the past as an anthropologist might look at a foreign culture. By approaching her work through her own experience and a lifetime of travel, Wharton came to view modern civilization as primitive and barbaric, lying under the thin veil of Respectability. Her writings reflect the life of one intellectually independent woman's testimony to the modes of entrapment, betrayal and exclusion devised for women in the first decades of the American and European twentieth century.

Chapter One will examine some of her early writings, and show how she drew upon her own life for her fiction. In the summer of 1891, Wharton completed a short story called "The Fullness of Life." This unhappy portrait of marriage launches one of Wharton's most elaborate images, drawn from the interior design of a house, "to provide an almost nakedly revealing summary of her psychological...relationship with her husband." [1] However, it is also Wharton's observation on the inequality of marriage in general. For Wharton marriage imposed confinement on women, it limited their independence and intellect as they became only ornamental objects in their husbands' household.

Exploring the theme of independence further, Wharton wrote another short story called "The Valley of Childish Things" (1896), which summarizes the position she would hold for the rest of her life, her commitment to the independent "new woman." The

central theme of this work is that men have many more options then women. Wharton's statement is that the independent "new woman" who chooses to follow the hard pathway out of the valley of childish things is judged harshly. As it is safer to remain forever in a state of childish dependency, it is easier for most women not to seek opportunities that are available in the outside world to men. This story clearly marks the separate spheres of the two sexes Alexis de Tocqueville had observed in 1830, suggesting to American cultural critics an abysmal fracture in the structuring of society.

In 1898, Wharton wrote The Decoration of Houses, a creative attempt on her part to reconcile the vast division between the separate spheres. The purpose of the house for Wharton was to create a space where a small community of family members, and a society of friends, could live within the larger world. Although it could be argued that the very distinctions between the public and private, between the world and the house, mark the book as one for leisure-class consumption, Wharton saw a larger significance when she states that "it is a fact recognized by political economists that changes in manners and customs,... usually originate with the wealthy or aristocratic minority, and are thence transmitted to the other classes" (5). One year later Thorstein Veblen's book, The Theory of the Leisure Class, appeared. Veblen's argument is somewhat different than Wharton's. He writes that architecture is a symbolic repre-

sentation of a nation's material conditions and cultural expectations. He attributes the division between male and female to a social Darwinist evolution of a leisure-class distinguished by "an ownership of the women by the able-bodied men of the community." [2] Women were an index to culture. Veblen argues that since the woman's position in the scheme of life of any community is an expression of the socioeconomic development of that community, the disintegration or breakdown of cultural patterns is evidence of a progressive discontent on the part of the "new woman" with the discrepancy between her prescribed place in the exigencies to the economic situation.

Veblen's theory that the leisure-class serves as an ideal to which all classes aspired was shared by Wharton, although contrary to the ideals she set forth in The Decoration of Houses. For both Wharton and Veblen the reorganization of the American environment based in the image of improvement rather than on the real substance misinterpreted the role of women in society.

Wharton constructs The House of Mirth to expose a society that insists on marriage, not freedom, as the highest estate for women in life as well as in art. Lily Bart's slow descent from favour among the wealthy until her death in the bedroom of a shabby working-class boarding-house shows exactly what Wharton saw as the crucial issue facing the independent woman. Lily's feelings of "being rootless" stem from a lost tradition that

would have provided her with a home and strong kinship ties (319). Although Lily dies, Wharton succeeds in her design. Lily becomes an independent woman through her knowledge of herself and her surroundings. Wharton's comment in The House of Mirth that Lily's misfortune had made her "supple instead of hardening her, and a pliable substance is less easy to break than a stiff one," gives us insight into Wharton's own philosophy of life, and her creative vision of what an independent woman should be like (36).

After Wharton took up residence in France in the year 1910, she weighed the idea of French intelligence and the acceptance of a time-approved order against the binding commitment of the American image of marriage, and its psychological affects on the "new woman," and like few other writers of the day, she began to draw upon her earlier fiction for her writings. In The Reef (1912), which takes place in France, Wharton moves her characters onto foreign ground to act out a contemporary drama. Sophy Viner is Wharton's independent "new woman." Sophy means to seize life. Like Lily she does not want to marry, but wants a chance to live her own life. Finally, Wharton creates a heroine who will not remain passive, but acts. However, in August 1914 the First World War began and became Wharton's priority for several years.

Chapter Two will be a discussion of Wharton's documentation of the war years recorded in Fighting France: From Dunkerque to

Belfort (1915), and French Ways and Their Meaning (1919), in which Wharton explains French custom. In Fighting France, she observes that war calls not only for the fighters to mobilize, but that "for each French household, for each individual man or woman in France, war means a complete reorganization of life" (14). Wharton's response to this cataclysmic event is her concern with the consequences of war on women in particular. However, at a time of death and destruction, Wharton saw what the equality of women could achieve. It became clear to her that at a time of war, women normally lacking in value or status are relied on to rebuild the past. Wharton saw the women of France as independent and intelligent. This marks a significant change in Wharton's outlook. Wharton sees her ideal independent "new woman" in the free expression of France's national genius, "the rule above the personal," and humanity that has far wider duties and desires than those of domestic relations.

Chapter Three will examine the influence of Wharton's non-fiction travel work In Morocco (1920) on her Pulitzer Prize winning novel The Age of Innocence (1920). In The Age of Innocence, Wharton goes back half a century in her attempt to create an independent heroine who is conscious of the continuity of custom and conformity, a heroine who could be politically aware and survive in a culture that boasts of woman's equality while retarding her progress. It could be argued that The Age of Innocence can be seen as a feminine act

of victory for Wharton as well as for Ellen Olenska. Although Ellen is banished by "the tribe," she does not return to her husband, but lives a full and independent life while Newland Archer, like Isabel Archer in James's A Portrait of a Lady, is trapped in an unhappy marriage. Ironically, Wharton's most accepted American novel is one in which she explores the primitive and barbaric nature of American patriarchal society while making its victim the most independent person in her work.

ENDNOTES

1. Cited in R.W.B., Lewis, Edith Wharton: A Biography (New York: Fromm International, 1985) 65-66.

2. Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class (New York: Penguin, 1987) 22-23.

CHAPTER ONE

THE INDEPENDENT WOMAN IN THE FICTION OF EDITH WHARTON

In the past Edith Wharton's artistic achievements were often marginalized by her critics and readers. They categorized her within the stereotype of an aristocratic grande dame who wrote novels about the upper classes of old New York while the major social problems around her passed her by. While she was alive her literary status declined; and in her later years her novels came to be seen as nostalgic evocations of a lost past, a past that appeared tragic and somewhat irrelevant to the mainstream of American life. An extreme form of this criticism directed at Edith Wharton is expressed by Vernon L. Parrington in his article "Our Literary Aristocrat" (1921). He writes that:

> She belongs to the "quality," and the grand manner is hers by right of birth....She is too well bred to be a snob, but she escapes it only by sheer intelligence.... She is unconsciously shut in behind plate glass, where butlers serve formal dinners, and white shoulders go up at the mere suggestion of everyday gingham....if she had been forced to skimp and save and plan, she would have been a greater and richer artist, more significant because more native, more continental. But unfortunately her doors open only to the smart set; the windows from which she surveys life open only to the east, to London, Paris, Rome. She is one of our cosmopolitans, flitting lightly about and at ease with all who bear titles. [1]

He says that "the stay-at-home American" secretly resents this kind of activity. "After all what are titles to him," and "for that matter, what are the vulgar rich of New York?" [2] He con-

cludes with the argument that once Wharton's craftsmanship is acknowledged as great, one can see her subject matter as sheer waste.

While some critics were willing to acknowledge the technical brilliance of Wharton's social observation and to admit that she could, at times, be critical of certain aspects of the aristocratic world, the consensus was that Wharton primarily opted for the tradition and convention of the New York of her youth as the only alternative to the chaos and emptiness of absolute individual freedom.

This consensus cast Wharton into a lost world where she remained for most critics and readers among the voices whispering the last enchantments of the Victorian age. However, it could be argued that this oversimplified appraisal cast most women writers into the same category of critical oblivion as Edith Wharton.

In her article "Melodramas of Beset Manhood" (1977), Nina Baym has argued that women have been excluded from American literature because of a concept of literature that was essentially male. She suggests that Vernon L. Parrington's selection of authors in Main Currents in American Thought (1927), established a tradition in which artistic considerations were subordinated to a historical examination of American ideas written from the point of view of a Jeffersonian liberal. The earliest American literary critics evaluated the literature of the day as

the "most American" work rather than the "best" work. Baym writes that "inevitably, perhaps, it came to seem that the quality of 'Americanness,' whatever it might be, constituted literary excellence for American authors. Beginning as a nationalistic enterprise, American literary criticism and theory has retained a nationalistic orientation to this day." [3] She argues that the idea of what is American is no more than an idea, and "despite the theoretical room for an infinite number of definitions of Americanness," critics have generally agreed "that America as a nation must be the ultimate subject of the work." [4]

Baym has argued that Lionel Trilling is "the most influential exponent of this Americanness,...his work has particular applicability because it concentrates on the novel form." [5] Quoting from his essay, "Reality in America" (1940), she writes that although Trilling argues that Parrington doesn't understand the culture, and "culture is his [Trilling's] real concern," he really has no quarrel with Parrington. He does not disagree over the value of literature, but writes that it is valued only as a set of "documents" which provide "suggestive testimony to what America was and is." [6] Baym concludes that:

> One might think that an approach like this which is subjective, circular, and in some sense nonliterary or even antiliterary would not have had much effect. But clearly Trilling was simply carrying on a long-standing tradition of searching for cultural essence, and his essays gave the search a decided and influential direction toward the notion of cultural

> essence as some sort of tension. Trilling succeeded in getting rid of Bryant and Greeley, and his choice of authors is still dominant. They all turn out--and not by accident--to be white, middle-class male, of Anglo-Saxon derivation or at least from an ancestory which had settled in this country before the big waves of immigration which began in the middle of the nineteenth century. [7]

Clearly, membership in this dominant middle-class white Anglo-Saxon group formed the nucleus for critical opinion. Although this consensus excludes many groups, it does not outwardly appear to exclude women. In fact, Baym states "nineteenth-century women authors were overwhelmingly white, middle-class, and Anglo-Saxon in origin." [8]

Ironically, Edith Wharton fits Baym's description of professional male writers who were slightly alienated from the group they belonged to, and yet did not belong to the so-called "mainstream." If Trilling is interested in culture, then why does the label of social historian or novelist of manners minimize Wharton's achievements? If in fact many critics agreed with John Harvey's assessment that "Wharton's major achievement is the satiric revelation of a collapsing society," [9] then why was this strength held against her, and why was she perceived as "the memoralist of a dying aristocracy?" [10] Although Wharton seemed historically interesting, she has been described as lacking that national perspective which total democracy romanticizes and idealizes.

These critical attitudes towards Wharton's work support Baym's argument that the woman writer "has entered literary history as the enemy." [11] In Leslie Fiedler's influential book, Love and Death in the American Novel (1960), he describes women authors as creators of the "flagrantly bad best seller" against which "our best fictionists," all male, have had to struggle for "their integrity and their livelihoods." [12] This certainly implies that stories about women could not contain the essence of American culture which means that the matter of American experience is inherently male. If the critics' assumption is that all readers are men, then the novel is an act of communication among and about males. Women seen as agents of a permanent socialization and domestication are threatening to the heroes who wish to reject society for the purposes of self-discovery and self-assertion. Baym has argued that men feel threatened by women because they are necessary to socialization, as well as being "the locus of powerful attraction" for most men. [13] Even though women are not the source of social power, they are experienced as such. Baym points out that while not all women "are engaged in socializing the young, the young do not encounter women who are not." [14] Then, from the point of view "of the young man, the only kind of women who exist are entrappers and domesticators." [15] She writes that:

> First, because everybody has social and conventional instincts: second, because his deepest emotional

> attachments are to women. This attraction gives urgency and depth to the protagonist's rejection of society. To do it, he must project onto the woman those attractions that he feels, and cast her in the melodramatic role of temptress, antagonist, obstacle, a character whose mission in life seems to be to ensnare him and deflect him from life's important purposes of self-discovery and self-assertion. [16]

Inasmuch as these critics are carrying on a long-standing tradition which began around the 1920s, it is important to establish why women became an obstacle to be omitted from history as well as from literary theory. Historically, by 1920, the Woman's Movement had secured the vote, which had come to symbolize the entire struggle for equality, and to embody all the demands for women's rights. Although the radical origins of feminism, and the disturbing questions raised by veterans like Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton or their contemporary, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, were ignored, the new suffragists had defined the vote for women as a means of humanizing government. With the advent of Progressivism there was a general commitment to reform which meant a larger effort to extend democracy and eliminate social injustice. William H. Chafe has argued that:

> Progressivism meant a great many things to different people, but in large part it represented an effort to clean up the most obvious causes of corruption, disease, and poverty. Within such a context, the suffragists argued convincingly that extension of the franchise to females would help in the task of improving society. [17]

Women gained the vote because reformers believed they "would add a sympathetic bloc to the electorate and provide the leverage necessary to secure social-welfare legislation." As well, "Progressivism also provided a vehicle by which millions of hitherto-uninvolved middle-class women became politicized." [18] The consensus of opinion was that the woman's movement had a strong base of support among women themselves, and what united most of the reformers was the belief that the vote for women represented an essential step towards the protection of the home and the child and the betterment of society. It appears that once women were no longer wards of the state, but free and equal citizens their visibility receded. They had succeeded in what the reformers had allowed them to succeed in, and they became the agents of socialization and domestication. Even though they are not the source of social power, they are experienced as having such power. Although the general consensus of opinion is that women are equally represented in history as well as in the literary canon, they are, in fact, excluded from both. As Baym has shown that to assume that women writers are included because their gender made them part of the consensus is futile. She says that "the presence of these women and their works is acknowledged in literary theory and history as an impediment and obstacle, that which the essential American literature had to criticize as its chief task." [19]

Edith Wharton wrote about independent women who wished to reject society for the same reasons as men, and she is not the only writer to do so. In fact, there are many books by women in cluding such major authors as Ellen Glasgow and Willa Cather, that "project a version of the particular myth we are speaking of, but cast the main character as a woman." [20] There are heroines such as Thea in Cather's The Song of the Lark (1915), Dorinda in Glasgow's Barren Ground (1925), or Anna Leath in Wharton's The Reef (1912). Baym's answer to the question as to why there is not any criticism written about these independent celibate women is because these heroines "are said to be untrue to the imperatives of their gender, which require marriage, childbearing, domesticity. Instead of being read as a woman's version of the myth, such novels are read as stories of the frustration of female nature. Stories of female frustrations are not perceived as commenting on, or containing, the essence of our culture, and so we do not find them in the canon." [21]

M. Elizabeth Monroe's study of the modern novel is typical of the way that women writers, as Baym has argued, were seen as obstacles to be criticized while still being part of the critical consensus. In her critical study, Monroe explains that there were various reasons why Wharton's subject matter seemed to lack significance. [22] She writes that:

> There is a determined prejudice in America against the novel of society. It has never enjoyed a wide vogue and has had to struggle against the imputation of thinness and unreality, as though life had somehow shunned the wealthy classes. Mrs. Wharton saw the limitations of her subject even more clearly than her critics....The society was trivial and shallow in the extreme. It carried the seeds of disintegration from the beginning, because having no stable roots in tradition, or the influence of a church, or even in a well-established code of manners, it was nourished only on wealth and convention.[23]

However, Monroe's judgment that Wharton had set herself the task of describing the decline of the New York aristocracy of wealth fails to describe adequately the use to which Wharton put her depiction of her past.

Wharton looked at the past as an anthropologist might look at a foreign culture. In A Backward Glance (1933), she writes that the descendents of this social aristocracy "are better able to measure the formative value of nearly three hundred years of social observance: the concerted living up to long-established standards of honour and conduct, of education and manners" (5). She explains that "the value of duration" asserts itself against "the welter of change," and that sociologists are recognizing the contribution that three centuries of tradition brings to the moral wealth of the United States (5). Even seen negatively, Wharton writes, with the passing of time, these traditions have acquired an unsuspected value. She reflects that:

> When I was young it used to seem to me that the group in which I grew up was like an empty vessel into which no new wine would ever again be poured. Now I see that one of its uses lay in preserving a few drops of an old vintage too rare to be savoured by a youthful palate; and I should like to atone for my unappreciativeness by trying to revive that faint fragrance (5).

> That I was born into a world which telephones, motors, electric light, central heating..., X-rays, cinemas, radium, aeroplanes and wireless telegraphy were not only unknown but still mostly unforeseen, may seem the most striking difference between then and now; but the really vital change is that, in my youth, the Americans of the original States, who in moments of crisis still shaped the national point of view, were the heirs of an old tradition of European culture which the country has now totally rejected (6-7).

Wharton continues by saying that the compact world of her youth which has receded into the past can only be dug up by the assiduous relic-hunter, and it was her opinion that the smallest fragments are worth collecting and putting together "before the last of those who knew the live structure are swept away with it" (7). At the end of of her autobiography, Wharton concludes with her rhapsodic vision that although humanity must stumble on there are many magical moments of delight. She writes that although:

> The world is a welter and has always been one; but though all the cranks and the theorists cannot master the old floundering monster, or force it for long into any of their neat plans of readjustment, here and there a saint or a genius suddenly sends a little ray through the fog, and helps humanity to stumble on, and perhaps up (379).

Unfortunately Monroe's study of Wharton's novels complies with the consensus of critical opinion. Although Monroe acknowledges Wharton as "the greatest novelist America has known," she argues that Wharton's novels are an exercise in obscurity, and puts the fault on the gods for bestowing Wharton the gift of tragedy at the very moment in history when the tragic view of life was impossible. She concludes her survey by indicating that Wharton's moral values in many of her novels are confusing, but even more than that "she was working with material that had not the stuff of greatness in it." [24]

Even though Alfred Kazin writes in his study "On Native Grounds" (1942), that Edith Wharton's great subject should have been the biography of her own class, and recognizes that Edith Wharton, who believed so passionately in the life of art, remains an unusual American, "one who brought the weight of her personal experience to bear upon a modern American literature," Wharton critics still remain full of reservations. [25] In the mid 1950's critics began to reexamine Wharton's work, but it was not until R.W.B. Lewis wrote his Pulitzer Prize winning book, Edith Wharton: A Biography (1975), in which he utilized previously unavailable letters and diaries, that the image of the repressed, arrogant grande dame that had done so much damage to her literary reputation was shattered.

In his Preface, Lewis writes that Edith Wharton's literary

achievements were great. "On the literary side, Edith Wharton was almost without peer in her American generation as a judge of achievement in fiction and poetry....Her dedication to her own creative task...was complete, no one worked more strenuously or revised more thoroughly. It was her habit of deprecating her talent when measured against that of the great masters of fiction--that could be construed by the unperceptive as indicating a less than wholehearted involvement." [26] However, it is Lewis's opinion that Edith Wharton's writings are among the handsomest achievements in our literature, and he wonders as do other admirers of Edith Wharton, whether her reputation might stand higher if she had been a man.

Edith Wharton was writing about independent women at a time in history when it was woman's right to be happy and self-determined, although it was society's insistence that the highest estate was the married one. Wharton came of age as a writer at a time in American literary and social history when the debate on "the woman question" quickened the national literature. Not only did she enter the debate; she was one of its key figures. Her fiction records her public argument with America on the issue of freedom for women over more than four decades of some of the most significant upheaval and change and finally stasis in the history of women in the United States.

Edith Wharton took an anthropological approach in her work.

Through her own lifetime experiences, she saw modern civilization as primitive and barbaric lying under the thin veneer of Respectability. Her writings reflect one intellectually independent woman's testimony to the female experience under modern historical and social conditions, to the modes of entrapment, betrayal and exclusion devised for women in the first decades of the American and European twentieth century. Wharton traces the fortunes of all womankind and exposes as false the notion that civilization is intellectually or morally progressive. In 1920, in her guide-book, In Morocco, published just prior to The Age of Innocence, while visiting a Moroccan dignitary's house she comments on the similarity of the women's appearance, and observes that except for the vacant expression of their faces this group could have been that "of a Professor's family" in any part of the world "decently costumed for an Arabian Nights' pageant in the college grounds" (185). She goes on to say that she "was never more vividly reminded of the fact that human nature, from one pole to the other, falls naturally into certain categories and that Respectability wears the same face" not only in an Oriental harem, but as a universally accepted condition of all mankind (185). The only direct exchange of words between the dignitary's wife and Edith Wharton was her hostess's questioning if she had any children. Wharton's answer no brought the response from another woman that "in Islam a woman without children is considered the most unhappy in the world" to which she replied

"that in the western world also childless women were pitied" (185). This conversation not only acknowledges that Wharton perceives herself as limited to her world and its conventions, but shows the universality of these conventions which define women's role, and indicates how women share similar limitations in all cultures.

Edith Wharton was writing at the same time that The Golden Bough first appeared, and in her own text refers to Sir James Frazer's study of myths, which was then one of the most influential works of the twentieth century. The striking depth of his work permeates the cultural strata of our time, and most especially our literature, from the most significant to the most ephemeral works. Sir James Frazer combined the intellectual thought that early Victorian England was controlled by the notion of progress together with that which the later period felt, the impress of evolution. In combining these two existing ideas Frazer exults in the opportunity afforded the modern historian to trace the fortunes not merely of a single race or nation but "of all mankind, and thus enabling us to follow the long march, the slow and toilsome ascent, of humanity from savagery to civilisation." [27] In The Golden Bough there is the vision, almost rhapsodic in tenor, of man's stubborn movement toward the

realization of a better world which emerges largely through Frazer's point of view. However, Frazer documents harsh evidence from contemporary savage tribal behavior and urban civilized violence alike to remind us that man is very far indeed from substantial moral and intellectual progress:

> The Golden Bough documented the primitive barbarism, while the age itself recorded the contemporary equivalent in such things as the Corn Law riots, the appalling living conditions of the urban slums, the Hyde Park riots of 1886, and the Dock Strike of 1889. The repugnance felt over these latter expressions of savagery led Frazer,...to regard civilization as no more than a thin veneer over an inferno of primitive terrors and passions.[28]

Edith Wharton like Sir James Frazer was affected by the changing world around her. For her the most profound changes were brought about by the Woman's Movement. Edith Wharton ignored the technological achievements of the day, and her distance from even so conservative a phenomenon as the Woman's Building was immense. Writing in her own surroundings, Wharton was working out her own relationship to the American character, and its effects on the imagination. At the age of thirty-one Edith Wharton was just becoming aware of her own situation as a woman. While many American women were vocal and supported the Nineteenth Amendment, she was not among the activists. Separated by class and temperament, she held herself aloof on the question of the vote; and certainly never joined any women's clubs.[29]

In her early writings Edith Wharton drew upon her own life for her fiction. In the summer of 1891, she completed a short story called "The Fullness of Life." Although revisions were suggested by her editor, Edith Wharton returned the story unchanged. As R.W.B. Lewis has argued, the dreamlike quality of the story was a fairly direct literary transcription of her married life which she had no heart to tinker with further. The story is about a nameless woman sinking through a peaceful stupor to her death. When she awakes in the next world, on the threshold of eternity, where she is interrogated by the Spirit of Life about her earthly experience, she complains that she has never known "the fullness of life." "You were married," says the Spirit; "yet you did not find the fullness of life in your marriage?" "Oh, dear no," she answers with some scorn; "my marriage was a very incomplete affair." [30]

This unhappy portrait of marriage launches one of Edith Wharton's most elaborate images, drawn from the interior design of a house, to provide an almost nakedly revealing summary of her psychological and sexual relationship with her husband. However, as Lewis has said, it is also an observation on the inequality of marriage in general. It expresses the loneliness, the isolation, and the vacuity of being that women experienced once they have taken their marriage vows. In "The Fullness of Life," she writes that:

> I have sometimes thought that a woman's nature is like a great house full of rooms: there is the hall, through which everyone passes in going in and out; the drawing room, where one receives formal visits, the sitting room, where the members of the family come and go as they list; but beyond that, far beyond, are other rooms, the handles of whose doors are never turned; no one knows the way to them, no one knows whither they lead; and in the innermost room, the holy of holies, the soul sits alone and waits for a footstep that never comes. [31]

For Edith Wharton marriage imposed confinement on women, it limited their independence and intellect as they became only ornamental objects in their husbands' household.

Exploring the theme of independence further, Edith Wharton wrote another short story called "The Valley of Childish Things" (1896), which summarizes the position she would hold for the rest of her life, her commitment to an intelligent and independent "new woman." Although this story is rich in implication, the central theme is that men have many more options than women. "The Valley of Childish Things" tells of a little girl who lives in a valley entirely populated by children, but who is determined to go out and see the world. After observing the great cities and the way men work, she grows into womanhood. On her way back to the valley, she meets a former boy-playmate who had also visited the outside world and achieved manhood. They return together, full of schemes of transforming their valley, but once inside, while the woman retains her ambition and maturity, the man reverts to childhood. Finally, the woman is ignored by the

other inhabitants of the valley and shunned by the man because she has not cared for her complexion. Wharton's statement is that the intelligent and independent "new woman" who chooses to follow the hard pathway out of the valley of childish things is judged harshly. Assuming that it is safer to remain forever in a state of childish dependency, it is easier for most women not to seek the opportunities that are available in the outside world to men. This story clearly marks the abysmal fracture of the separate spheres of the two sexes Alexis de Tocqueville had observed in the 1830s. Paradoxically, while it was society's insistence that marriage was the highest estate for women, it was Edith Wharton's insistence that men's expectations of wives and modern women's expectations of themselves could be vastly different matters. Men were afraid of intelligent women and did not want mates who were their equals.

In The Decoration of Houses, Wharton attempts to reconcile the vast division between the separate spheres, and this book maps out the ideal domestic spaces: the lady's drawing-room as a symbol of American life. Feminine in origin and character, the drawing-room becomes the center of family life; minimizing its contact with the ouside world, and setting the tone for articulation between the inside and outside world.

One can argue that the very distinction between the public and the private, between the world and the house, marks the book as one for leisure-class consumption, Wharton saw a larger significance when she states that "it is a fact recognized by political economists that changes in manners and customs, no matter under what form of government, usually originate with the wealthy or aristocratic minority, and are thence transmitted to the other classes. Thus, the bourgeois of one generation lives more like the aristocrat of a previous generation" (5). However, Edith Wharton's concern for the relationship between art and life manifested in her later books becomes apparent in her determination to create a new environment of her own design, to live and work in.

The idea of a house for her was to create a space where a small human community of family members, and a society of friends could live within the larger world, with its array of dissatisfactions. In The Decoration of Houses, this feeling for the organic ties of life underlies the chapter on the decoration of the nursery and schoolroom. Unlike any other writer on decoration, Edith Wharton brings her own childhood experiences to light, and expresses values that she deemed important in the creation of a more ideal world.

In coming to terms with her own situation as a woman, and having established her commitment to women, Edith Wharton turns

her concern to the relationship of childhood environment, learned behaviour and adult independence. She believes that "to teach a child to appreciate any form of beauty is to develop his intelligence" (174). For Edith Wharton art is a factor in civilization, and the feeling for beauty needs as careful cultivation as the other civic virtues. She writes that:

> To teach a child to distinguish between a good and a bad painting, a well or an ill-modelled statue, need not hinder his growth in other directions, and will at least develop those habits of observation and comparison that are the base of all sound judgments. It is in this sense that the study of art is of service to those who have no special aptitude for any of its forms; its indirect action in shaping aesthetic criteria constitutes its chief value as an element of culture (174).

For Edith Wharton, the subject of this book is not leisure-class consumption or a survey of houses, but the quality of the lives of the men, women and children in them, and the classical question of how to live.

One year later Thorstein Veblen's book, The Theory of the Leisure Class, appeared. His argument on the architecture of the day was somewhat different than Edith Wharton's. He writes that architecture is a symbolic representation of a nation's material conditions and cultural expectation. He attributes the division between male and female to a social Darwinist evolution of a leisure class distinguished by "an ownership

of the women by the able-bodied men of the community." [32] Women were an index to culture. Veblen has argued that since the woman's position in the scheme of life of any community is an expression of the socioeconomic development of that community, the disintegration or breakdown of cultural patterns is evidence of a progressive discontent on the part of the "new woman" with the discrepancy between her prescribed place in the accepted scheme of life and the exigencies of the economic situation. [33]

Veblen's theories materialized from his observation of studies based on how the environment might determine cultural behavior. In the mid-1890s, Gwendolyn Wright points out in Moralism and the Model Home, novelists and academics, bureaucrats and physicians were expressing a heightened awareness of the influence of one's surroundings:

> Frederick Jackson Turner's famous address on "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," read before the American Historial Association in Chicago in 1893, forcefully expounded a theory of national institutions, from literature to government,...Lester Ward's Dynamic Sociology, was one of the many texts connecting environmental factors to income, intellectual stimulation, and social position. stressing their decisive role in individual achievement. Soon Ellen Semple introduced the study of geography as a human science to the University of Chicago,... academic reformers,...moved beyond the scientism of a strictly Darwinian awareness of environmental adaptation and stages of development. They agreed, for the most part, that social problems could be prevented if knowledgeable experts could understand and manipulate the basic institutions of work, politics,

> social life, and the family. The reorganization of the physical environment, and especially the planning of homes, was the obvious way to begin. [34]

At a time in the shifting cultural patterns when women imagined shared freedom with men, here is the paradox: as women moved increasingly outside the home they became a cause of social disorder. Few observers saw women seeking individual fulfillment outside the home as progress. As Wright has argued, "most of then saw the birthrate, the divorce rate, and other statistics as evidence of sudden, impending crisis in American family life. Few were able to see the pattern which had actually begun in the nineteenth century. It was not that the family was less stable, as it seemed, but that there were more possibilities for change and variation. It was the mother cult of the late nineteenth century that was declining." [35] To most observers this contemporary situation seemed apocalyptic, and the consensus of opinion was the need to regulate homes and make them more alike in order to reinforce certain values in all American families. Wright points out that "controlling aesthetic disorder seemed a way of controlling society. As a symbol both of feminized and incorporated America, White City became the prototype," and "now the City Beautiful movement would provide the infrastructure for a perfect planned society over America." [36]

Then, by the turn of the century, local improvement societies all over the country were making plans for civic

construction projects, and the general consensus was that it was for the good of the public. And, the moral implications of the City Beautiful movement were made clear in religious publications like The Congregationalist, where Henry Demarest Lloyd extolled the benefits advanced technology would bring to every American household. Lloyd wrote that:

> Equal industrial power will be as invariable a function of citzenship as the equal franchise. Power will flow in every house and shop as freely as water. All men will become capitalists co-operators....Women, released from the economic pressure which has forced them to deny their best nature and compete in unnatural history with men, will be re-sexed....The new rapid transit, making it possible for cities to be four or five hundred miles in diameter and yet keep the farthest point within an hour of the center, will complete the urbanization of every metropolis. Every house will be a center of sunshine and scenery. [37]

Lloyd's statement that "all men will become capitalists co-operators," clearly means the exclusion of women as equal citizens and his remark that all women "will be re-sexed" and remain at home in the "center of sunshine and scenery" complies with Veblen's argument that propriety requires respectable women:

> to abstain constantly from useful effort and to make more show of leisure....Her sphere is within the household which she should "beautify" and which she should be the "chief ornament". [38]

Inasmuch as Veblen saw architecture as evidence of a nation's

material conditions and cultural expectations, he argued that institutions acted "on individuals to reinforce directly the cultural values the institutions represented symbolically." His book documents the ways in which "conspicuous consumption" was replacing conspicuous leisure as the most visible means for demonstrating an individual's cultural reputation. "And architecture constituted a definite part of this trend: styles were usually based, he charged on pretense and display, as well as on shelter and personal expression." [39] It was Veblen's belief that "the values of waste, expense, and elevation from familiarity with vulgar life represented the principal determinants of form." [40]

Most social and aesthetic reformers in Chicago were hostile towards Veblen's criticism, and were smugly convinced that he was wrong. As Veblen points out, their approach to reform relied on "the image of improvement rather than on real substance." He did not believe that gathering statistics on environmental problems could "by itself raise awareness and generate solutions for every problem." [41] Veblen sees modern society in a conflict between the instincts which promote evolutionary adjustment and those which retard such adjustment. In this context the role of the leisure class is both plain and crucial. The class is the embodiment of all the anti-evolutionary impulses which have survived from the past into the present. As Veblen analyzed

"the behaviour of the American leisure class, it exemplified all of these archaic survivals. The barbarian's drive to excel his neighbor is in modern society served by wasteful production and consumption, the cult of the meretricious, the flash of female fashion, and the vogue of expensive furniture and home decoration." [42]

Veblen argued that the social relations of the sexes appear fixed by nature; and the entire good of civilization is based on the home with a male as the head of the household. Women, he said, in a "leisure-class" culture do not have the right to discuss such issues as civil rights or the suffrage movement, except through the head of the household to which they belong. They are useless, but expensive, and valuable as evidence of pecuniary strength. It was Veblen's theory that the leisure-class served as an ideal to which all classes aspired.

This assumption is one that Edith Wharton shared, although contrary to the ideals she had set forth in The Decoration of Houses. However, for both Wharton and Veblen the reorganization of American environment based on the image of improvement rather than on the real substance misinterpretated the role of women in society. They saw that although the leisure-class wife is economically dependent on men, she does fulfill a significant function in the marital economy: that of conspicuous consumer for the male. Accordingly, the leisure-class wife has a specific

job to perform in deferring like a servant to her husband's wishes. She is human chattel with an ornamental function, the valued domestic trophy whose leisure dependence, and expenditure evidence her husband's financial prowess. For Wharton as for Veblen the leisure-class wife is not a person to be envied. She is a symbol to be studied, a totem of patriarchal power.

Then, Monroe's criticism in which she blames the gods for bestowing Edith Wharton the gift of tragedy "at the very moment in history when the tragic view of life was impossible" indicates the way in which Wharton's work is misread. Edith Wharton was aware that conflict, pain and tragedy was terrifying to Americans, and she understood the American attitude towards art, as well as life. In French Ways and Their Meaning, Wharton writes that:

> What Mr. Howells said of the American theatre is true of the whole American attitude toward life (65).
>
> 'A tragedy with a happy ending' is exactly what the child wants before he goes to sleep: the reassurance that 'all's well with the world' as he lies in his cosy nursery. It is a good thing that the child should receive this reassurance; but as long as he needs it he remains a child, and the world he lives in is a nursery-world. Things are not always and everywhere well with the world, and each man has to find it out as he grows up. It is the finding out that makes him grow, and until he has faced the fact and digested the lesson he is not grown up--he is still in the nursery (65-66).

Even though Wharton was well aware of what the American audience expected, she remained committed to the grown up, intellectually independent woman. However, if "the American attitude toward life" is unrealistic, and their idea of the real is based on what Veblen defined "as the image of improvement rather than on real substance," it becomes clear that the social institutions that design the environment to determine cultural behavior, could also determine the type of literary heroes or heroines to represent "the whole range of attitudes and ideals, achievements and failures that defined civilization in the United States." [43]

In 1902, when The Valley of Decision was published, some critics said the novel would undoubtedly become a classic. However, their understanding of Edith Wharton's fiction was different than her intention in writing it. It was not Wharton's objective to write a novel about the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, or of two people's individual history, but of a social phase that reflected the changes in her own culture and its repressive attitudes. Wharton was confronting the needs of the individual against the claims of family, tradition and community, as well as the nature of the community, and particularly its effects on women. It was the same thread of purpose that Wharton was seeking in all her fiction as the old century gave way to the new. As R. W. B. Lewis writes:

> In The Valley of Decision, she was working out the

> question partly in political terms, by reference to the tension between Odo's liberal and conservative impules. For Edith, the question was at once larger and more intimate: how to preserve, or recover, the best of the past--the values, styles, and associations of her past --while risking the new, the emancipated, even the unorthodox. [44]

Edith Wharton was acutely aware of the misrepresentation of her work. In A Backward Glance she writes that:

> The amusing thing about this turn of the wheel is that we who fought the good fight are now jeered at as the prigs and prudes who barred the way to complete expression-as perhaps we should have tried to do, had we known it was to cause creative art to be abandoned for pathology (127)!

Ironically, Wharton concludes this chapter by acknowledging that the year after the publication of The Valley of Decision, she was finally being rewarded for her long months of toil and perplexity she had undergone in writing it. She writes that "I was only beginning to be known as a novelist, but on Italian seventeenth and eighteenth century architecture, about which so little had been written, I was thought to be fairly competent" (129).

At this point it is difficult to maintain the stereotype of Edith Wharton as an aristocratic grande dame who wrote novels about the upper classes of old New York while the major social problems around her passed her by. From our vantage point one can see that Edith Wharton's concern for the

social conditions of her day, and the inequality of rights and freedom for women, are concerns that women share today. As Betty Friedan has argued, in America it was believed that a woman could identify with nothing beyond the home "not politics, not art, not science, not events large or small, war or peace, in the United States or the world, unless it could be approached through female experience as a wife or mother translated into domestic detail."[45] In her influential book The Feminine Mystique (1963), Friedan called on women to recognize what society was doing to them and to demand equal rights and opportunities. She explains:

> Encouraged by the mystique to evade their identity crisis, permitted to escape indentity altogether in the name of sexual fulfillment, women once again are living with their feet bound in the old image of glorified feminity. And it is the same old image, despite its shiny new clothes, that trapped women for centuries and made feminists rebel.[46]

Then, Friedan's argument that women were judged harshly for wanting to be more than just a wife and mother coincides with Wharton's argument about the intellectual independent "new woman."

Inasmuch as Edith Wharton was seen as a prisoner of convention who violated her own traditions in her personal life as well as by her choice of career, one can challenge Wharton's supposed literary conservatism with her own words. In her autobiography she expresses her awareness of the literary con-

servatism of the day. In her attempts to defend herself she places her own literary beginnings into the context of the time, and admits that her career really started with some criticism, when:

> a well-known New York editor, offering me a large sum for the serial rights of a projected novel, stipulated that no reference to "an unlawful attachment" should figure in it; when Theodore Roosevelt gently rebuked me for not having caused the reigning Duke of Pianura (in "The Valley of Decision") to make an honest woman of the humble bookseller's daughter who loved him; and when the translator of Dante, my beloved friend, Professor Charles Eliot Norton, hearing... that I was preparing another "society" novel, wrote in alarm imploring me to remember that "no great work of the imagination has ever been based on illicit passion" (127)!

It is impossible to reconcile Edith Wharton the prudish aristocrat with the writer who fought such attitudes, and who not only sympathized with George Eliot, but defended her. Wharton writes that George Eliot was "a conservative in ethics. She felt no call to found a new school of morals. A deep reverence for the family ties, for the sanctities of tradition, the claims of slowly acquired convictions and slowly formed precedents, is revealed in every page of her books....All George Eliot's noblest characters shrink with a peculiar dread from any personal happiness acquired at the cost of the social organism; yet her own happiness was acquired at such a cost."[47]

Clearly, Edith Wharton's expressed awareness of Eliot's

situation, and its twisted reflection in her work, must have given Wharton greater insight into her own life and work. It appears that Wharton was gathering her forces for a defense of woman in an overwhelmingly masculine society and literary culture.

Although the societies that Wharton depicts are ones in which money is of extreme importance and the source of power, the women in these worlds can not achieve success or wealth other than through association with a male, which means they have no direct power. While they uphold certain superficial and unimportant customs and traditions, no conventional woman in Wharton's novels makes any significant judgments for her world; she is merely expected to live by the rules and obey them. In The Age of Innocence, Wharton shows exactly how old New York is dominated by patriarchal structures. Although Newland Archer examines the idea that women should be as free as men, "it was agreed in his world to regard this problem as non-existent," because "nice women, however wronged, would never claim this kind of freedom" (44). Even though Archer questions women's freedom, he concludes that his marriage to May is what he wants, "what he had a right to, in order that he might exercise his lordly pleasure in smashing it like an image of snow" (46).

However, Wharton points out that these reflections were "habitual to young men on the approach of their wedding day"

(46). Archer is fully aware that the child-woman as Elizabeth Ammons has argued is created by women for men: she is manufacted in all her artificiality and innocence of life because she is "supposed to be" what men want and by "right" shall have. Ammons writes that "she is, in other words, a male idea. And though Archer has doubts, the scheme must please most men, or at least those in power. For American society, as Edith Wharton portrays it, is resolutely patriarchal." [48]

Then, in Wharton's "masculine New York" even Mrs. Manson Mingott who figures as the grand "Matriarch of the (Mingott) line," functions only as a useful matriarchal substructure in a firmly patriarchal culture (13). Granny Mingott is trapped by rules she did not make, and although she would dare to do "whatever man dared (within Fifth Avenue's limits)" she never violates any of the real taboos (12-13). Although the inflexible New York ritual prescribed that the betrothed couple must receive "the venerable ancestress' blessing" before setting their marriage date, their union had been "long foreseen by watchful relatives, and carefully passed upon in family council" (27-29). Wharton's point is that Granny Mingott's approval of their engagement is as necessary as "her unqualified admiration" of May's engagement ring (29). As a widow who has acquired her wealth through marriage she, too, is dependent upon male protection, societal approval. Wharton writes, early in the novel, that this "high and mighty old lady, who, in spite of having been

only Catherine Spicer of Staten Island, with a father mysteriously discredited, and neither money nor position enough to make people forget it, had allied herself with the head of the wealthy Mingott line" (13).

It becomes obvious that New York Society tolerates Mrs. Manson Mingott because she is "the head of the wealthy Mingott line" (12). In his chapter on the "Influence of Mother-Kin on Religion," Sir James Frazer notes that:

> wherever the ancient preference for the female line of descent has been retained, it tends to increase the importance and enhance the dignity of woman;...But this social advance of women has never carried so far as to place men...in a position of political subordination to them. Even where the system of mother-kin in regard to descent and property has prevailed most fully, the actual government has...remained in the hand of men. [49]

Frazer's statement coincides with Wharton's remark about leisure-class old New York's attitude towards women. Wharton shows that in a patriarchal society, property does increase the importance of woman, but only insofar as she participates in the inflexible rituals, where she remains a child, innocent from the realities of life, and confined to her own sphere. Mrs. Manson Mingott, who reigns as venerable ancestress in this "elaborate system of mystification" is only a figurehead for female power. Wharton writes that "the immense accretion of flesh which had descended on her in middle life like a flood of

lava on a doomed city had changed her from a plump active little woman with a natural phenomenon," and since "the burden of Mrs. Manson Mingott's flesh had long since made it impossible for her to go up and down stairs," or to leave her home, "with characteristic independence," she "established herself (in flagrant violation of all the New York proprieties) on the ground floor of her house" (28). Mrs. Manson Mingott's position of dignity symbolizes the unreality of the "set of arbitrary signs" woman live by in a dominant patriarchal structure (45). Her limited existence confines her to the ground floor of her house, and Mrs. Manson Mingott, like the woman in "The Fullness of Life," sits alone in the window of her sitting room "watching calmly for life and fashion to flow northward to her solitary doors" (27).

In writing The House of Mirth (1905), Edith Wharton became an important thinker and critic of the day. In this novel, she examines the dilemma of the young American woman whose objective in life is independence but whose one option is marriage. In situating Lily Bart's crisis of adulthood in the context of a larger historical shift, Wharton cast her heroine outside of society where she begins to form her own values, and to act and to grow independently. She becomes a symbol of what her society cannot accept, and a danger to those within it. Through Lily, Edith Wharton creates her idea of what an intellectually inde-

pendent woman should be.

When the novel opens Lily Bart is seen at Grand Central Station, "in the act of transition between one and another of the country houses that disputed her presence at the close of the Newport season" (3). Lily's position as a woman is clearly set out through her meeting with Lawrence Selden. While he assumes that her vocation is marriage, and sees her "so evidently the victim of the civilization which had produced her, that the links of her bracelet seemed like manacles chaining her to her fate" (7). It is Lily who explores the difference of independence for a man and a woman. She says that a girl must marry while a man may if he chooses. She observes that a man's coat may be shabby, but that doesn't keep people from asking him out to dine. Lily explains that if she were shabby no one would have her: "a woman is asked out as much for her clothes as for herself. The clothes are the background, the frame, if you like: they don't make success, but they are part of it....We are expected to be pretty and well-dressed till we drop-and if we can't keep it up alone, we have to go into partnership" (12).

For Edith Wharton, Lily Bart is an example of what the modern woman's freedom from Victorian strictures had become. Although the American culture boasted that its women were free to work outside the home in dignified occupations, could marry if they pleased and could divorce if they had to, Edith

Wharton examined the disjunction between the sound of popular optimism and reality as she saw it. Although she acknowledged that the position of women in American society was the crucial issue of this century, she did not see changes occuring for their benefit. This becomes clear in The House of Mirth, as Wharton charts Lily's expulsion from the leisure-class that Veblen had depicted. Wharton dramatizes Lily's perfect training for the important role society expects of her, to serve as a rich man's wife. Lily's slow descent from favour among the wealthy until her death in the bedroom of a shabby working-class boardinghouse depicts exactly what Wharton saw as the crucial issue facing the independent women, especially at a moment in history when intellectuals like Henry Adams and C. Stanley Hall noted that the New Woman not only threatened the American home, but the very survival of the race. Edith Wharton understood that the American woman was far from being a new or whole being. What she saw as the crucial issue of the century and questioned was how a woman could maintain her intelligence and independence in a society where independent women who chose careers, remained childless, or preferred to remain single were equated to criminals? As late as 1902, President Theodore Roosevelt wrote that the most important question in this country, is the question of race suicide and any woman wishing to remain single:

> desires to be "independent"-that is, to live one's life purely according to one's own desires-are in no sense

> substitutes for the fundamental virtues,...the woman who deliberately avoids marriage, and has a heart so cold as to know passion and a brain so shallow and selfish as to dislike having children, is in effect a criminal against the race, and should be an object of contemptuous abhorence by all healthy people. [50]

Society dictated that networks of legal and institutional structures must be developed to influence family patterns and discourage individual achievement. Schools and labor force needs reinforced each other, leading women to raise their children in success oriented ways. In an industrial society made up of capitalists co-operators, the family became both the training ground and the measure of economic success, and close relations among women gave way under the weight of economics, laws and customs. Most married women fulfilled the expectations of womanhood, and throughout the century, the household remained the focal point of their existence. As Alice Kessler-Harris has suggested, although "many women protested, and others made lives for themselves outside its confines, most exceptions had a rough time economically. Employers welcomed women as secondary workers, treating them as if their services were marginal and their pay merely supplemental. Laws regulating property, divorce and birth control, standards of propriety in dress, manners and speech, all confirmed accepted roles for women." [51] They were to support their husbands emotionally, to organize their households so their husbands could affectively commit themselves to work, and were solely responsible for raising their children with a

proper respect for work, thrift and authority.

Thus, in writing Lily Bart's story, Edith Wharton conveyed society's prejudices towards women. If Lily refuses marriage because she values personal freedom over security, and is not willing to spend her life owned and ruled by a man any more than she wants to spend it dependent on her old-fashioned aunt Mrs. Peniston, she is destroyed by a materialistic society that causes families to compete for money, divides women from one another, and denies any bond of affection which exists outside the accepted framework of marriage.

Because Lily cannot identify with this society, she refuses to marry Dillsworth, Gryce, Selden and Rosedale, and ends, as Elizabeth Ammons has suggested, "in a sexual confrontation in which the head of the entire economic and social system, its most powerful august patriarch-a man Wharton even names Augustus-literally tries to force Lily into submission."[52] Ammons writes that:

> This encounter between Gus and Lily stands at the center of The House of Mirth structurally and thematically. It is a violent, ugly scene and probably the most important episode in the book. In its perfect coalescence of predatory economics and sexual politics, the scene explains why Lily, who works very hard to line up prospective husbands, finally lets them all get away from her: she does not want to be owned by any man.[53]

Lily's struggle demonstrates why it is "a miserable thing... to be a woman" (7). Nor does her story exist in isolation, it has significance for, and touches every woman in the novel from the richest, Mrs. Charles Augustus, to the poorest, Nettie Struthers. Lily is misjudged by the the people she once trusted. Although Selden comments upon "the cruelty of women to their kind," he does nothing to help Lily (219). As a single woman with no kinship ties, and no home, Lily is forced to compete for a husband, and the relationships between women in this novel are frequently hostile. As Ammons has argued "forbidden to aggress, on each other directly, or aggress on men at all, women prey on each other-stealing reputations, opportunities, male admirers-all to parlay or retain status and financial security in a world arranged by men to keep women supplicant and therefore subordinate." [54] However, in Lily's descent, and in her acknowledgement that she could never become part of such a society, she grows intellectually, and the reader discovers her genuine feelings, and what it really means to have become no more than a beautiful object. Lily discovers that her sense of deep empoverishment was that "of an inner destitution compared to which outward conditions dwindled into insignificance" (318). As Lily realizes that it was miserable to be poor, "to look forward to a shabby, anxious middle-age, leading by dreary degrees of economy and self-denial to gradual absorption in the dingy communal existence of the boarding-

house," she becomes more acutely aware of "the sense of being swept like a stray uprooted growth down the heedless current of the years:"

> That was the feeling which possessed her now - the the feeling of being rootless and ephemeral, mere spindrift of the whirling surface of existence, without anything to which the poor little tentacles of self could cling before the awful flood submerged them. And as she looked back she saw that there had never been a time when she had had any real relation to life. Her parents too had been rootless, blown hither and thither on every wind of fashion, without any personal existence to shelter them from its shifting gusts (318-319).

Wharton constructs The House of Mirth to expose a society that insists on marriage, not freedom as the highest estate for women in life as well as in art. Lily's feeling of "being rootless and ephemeral" stem from a lost tradition which would have provided her with a home and the security of strong kinship ties. The depth of Lily's tragedy becomes apparent to her when she relives the moment she sat in Nettie Struther's tenement kitchen while the young woman prepared supper and fed her baby. " Such a vision of the solidarity of life had never before come to Lily....All the men and women she knew were like atoms whirling away from each other in some wild centrifugal dance: her first glimpse of the continuity of life had come to her that evening in Nettie Struther's kitchen. The poor little working girl who had found strength to gather up the fragments of her

life, and build herself a shelter with them, seemed to Lily to have reached the central truth of existence" (319). Thus, Edith Wharton succeeds in her design. Lily becomes an intelligent and independent woman through her knowledge of herself, and her surroundings. Wharton's criticism of American marriage, especially in the leisure-class, which is obsessed with producing ornamental wives, is achieved when Lily sees that a "man's faith as well as the woman's courage" is a necessary element in the bond of marriage, and rejects the image of marriage in terms of conspicuous consumption (320). The novel ends with Seldon kneeling besides Lily's dead body. As he consoles himself by blaming the conditions of their lives for keeping them apart, the reader cannot identify with Lawrence Selden nor accept his evaluations as the moral center of the novel, but sees him as nothing more than the a cruel spokesman who condones society's prejudices.

Although The House of Mirth earned huge commercial success, it did not earn the same approval from the press. As R.W.B. Lewis has stated, Wharton "was attacked for having provided a warning about modern American society rather than a hope; for not having shown a means of escape for society's victims; for having chosen a subject which was 'utterly unsuitable for conversion into literature, which demands ideals and humor'; for not having introduced finer specimens of humanity, and for not

exposing enough good in the characters she did present. Such was a large portion of the atmosphere in the American literary marketplace circa 1905." [55]

Edith Wharton's achievement is enhanced by the fact that she did not write about women who represented the feminization of American culture, but about heroines, who, as victims of their circumstance, strive to remain independent of the patriarchal structures imposed on them. As ambivalent individuals, her heroines act freely and are acted upon. Edith Wharton's comment In The House of Mirth that Lily Bart's misfortune had made her "supple instead of hardening her, and a pliable substance is less easy to break than a stiff one," gives us insight into Wharton's own philosophy of life, and her creative vision of what an intellectual and honest adult should be like (36).

Two years after The House of Mirth, The Fruit of the Tree (1907) was published. However, as R.W.B. Lewis has noted it was deemed unsuccessful because there are too many subjects in the book. In fact the novel focuses on three people: John Amherst, an intelligent and idealistic man who has gone into the business of supervising a cotton mill; Bessy Westmore, a lovely young widow who owns the mill; and Justine Brent, a nurse who had been Bessy's old school friend. Bessy and John meet when she comes to inspect the factory, they fall in love and marry.

Bessy's taste for leisure living and indolence quickly clash with Amherst's idealistic desire to reform the mills, and the marriage is unsuccessful. Bessy takes a severe fall from her horse after Amherst leaves her, and suffers a paralyzing blow to the head. Lingering in crippled pain with no hope for recovery, she is nursed by Justine during her illness. Justine responds to Bessy's pleading by administering a lethal overdose of morphine that mercifully lets Bessy die peacefully. Amherst returns after her death. He falls in love with Justine, they marry and collaborate in the bettering the conditions of their workers. For a short time they seem ideally happy. Then Justine is blackmailed by the doctor who wanted to keep Bessy alive for his own experimental purposes, and Amherst learns that Justine has killed Bessy. This bitter knowledge takes their happiness away forever. Although at the beginning of the novel, Amherst told Justine that he believes in mercy killing, all is forgotten. They continue as partners in running the mill, but their marriage is beyond repair. But, what is the problem of the novel? For years critics have been confused by Wharton's variety of subjects. Cynthia Griffin Wolff in A Feast of Words has questioned whether it is the topic of euthanasia, "the need for industrial reform, the old problem of idealized expectations coming up against the harsh realities of real-world existence, marriage, the role of women, the devastating results of failures in communication between the sexes, men's unrealistic expect-

ations of women, the insufficiency of women's education and of the roles they are given to enact, the list could go on and on." [56]

It is R.W.B. Lewis's opinion that if Edith Wharton "had clung to her first intention of calling the book 'Justine Brent,'" she would have written "a tightly packed novella devoted to the young woman's moral and psychological crisis, she might have composed one of her strongest shorter works of fiction." [57] However, it could be argued that Justine's nature is articulated in contrast to Bessy's, as "a deliberate chiaroscuro effect in the limning of heroines that Wharton had already used several times." [58] Bessy is beautiful and dependent, the product of society's false expectations for women: as her father's friend Mrs. Ansel remarks, "Isn't she one of the most harrowing victims of the plan of bringing up our girls in the double bondage of expediency and unreality, corrupting their bodies with luxury and their brains with sentiment, and leaving them to reconcile the two as best they can, or lose their souls in the attempt" (281)? The reader cannot condemn Bessy because she cannot escape her predicament, but is asked to see her in contrast to Justine, who is an independent woman deeply committed to humanitarian causes. When she visits Bessy's home, she insists upon defining their relationship clearly. "She was not in the least ashamed of her position in the household, but she chose that every one else should

be aware of it, that she should not for an instant be taken for one of the nomadic damsels who form the camp-followers of the great army of pleasure" (220). Justine unlike Lily is not visiting her friend for the sake of finding a husband. She has her own profession as a nurse, while Bessy like Lily is seen only as a beautiful object. Justine is not only capable of looking after herself, but her vocation as a nurse gives a quotidian substance not only to her "feminine imagination" but to her general inclination to feel "pity for all forms of weakness" (315). At the moment Justine makes her decision to listen to Bessy's plea, she feels that at the center of her being there is an unfailing confidence in her own stability and regeneration. "She was more concerned with Bessy's fate than her own-her poor friend seemed to have so much more at stake, and so much less strength to bring to the defence her happiness. Justine was always saved from any excess of self-compassion by the sense, within herself, of abounding forces of growth and self-renewal, as though from every lopped aspiration a fresh shoot of energy spring; but she felt that Bessy had no such sources of renovation, and that every disappointment left an arid spot in her soul" (318). The images Justine draws from nature are different than the "rootless...mere spindrift of the whirling surface of existence," that Lily expresses. Justine's character affirms her capacity for endless renewal, a surging of power that corresponds with the passage of the seasons.

And while Bessy's environment like Lily's is the drawing room or the bedroom, Justine's is the forest.

> Justine, leading the way guided them across the treacherous surface as fearlessly as a king-fisher, lighting instinctively on every grass-tussock and submerged tree-stump of the uncertain path....so free and flexible in all her motions that she seemed akin to the swaying reeds and curving brambles that caught her as she passed (300).

In writing The Fruit of the Tree, Edith Wharton created through Justine the qualities that she would have liked to have seen the "new woman" possess. Justine is not only intellectually independent, she is also aware of her body and its needs. Cynthia Griffin Wolff has argued that Edith Wharton could not handle the language of Justine's sexual longings and:

> at this point, the dynamic relationship between life and art is working very much to her disadvantage, and she is limited in the range of available fictional worlds by the insufficiency of her experience in the actual world. Thus, confronted with the difficulty that should have been central to the novel, she lapses into evasions: she introduces other "subjects"--many, many other subjects. [59]

It could be argued that Edith Wharton planned the novel to contain many subjects. Edith Wharton saw the effect of the feminization of culture as a dangerous misconception of reality for women. Like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, one of the founders of the woman's rights movement, and writer and lecturer Charlotte

Perkins Gilman, Edith Wharton believed that happier marriages, happier homes, happier men and happier women could be achieved by a union of common interests rather than economic independence. However, this egalitarian conception of marriage could only exist when men and women realize as Gilman advocated that "they are human and that humanity has far wider duties and desires than those of the domestic relations." [60]

What Edith Wharton's heroine Justine represents is the freedom that the American culture boasts of. The novel's brutal ending does not indicate Wharton's lack of vocabulary of "fictional experience," but shows the psychological and sexual control that American culture exercises over its women. The contrast between Justine and Bessy dissolves as Wharton shows that they are both victims of a dominant patriarchal society that deems women as either subservient or invisible. In fact, one can see that Bessy, given the right direction could, be an independent woman in her own right.

However, both Justine and Bessy are defeated because neither has male intellectual support, and neither can withstand male disapproval. It is only because of Bessy's death that Amherst realizes his dream of factory reform, and at the end of the novel he raises Bessy's memory to sainthood while Justine, the living representative of the "new woman," is rendered speechless. Edith Wharton raises all these issues in order to show the inequality

and brutality that any intelligent, independent woman must face when she leaves the valley of childish things. Justine, like the married woman in "The Fullness of Life," is painfully aware that her marriage is "a very incomplete affair."

Although The Fruit of the Tree failed to capture the reading public, Edith Wharton succeeded in creating one of her most intriguing heroines. As R.W.B. Lewis has pointed out "she lent to her a number of her own features: her ironic temper, her cultivated and amused sense of human incongruity, her quickness and warmth of spirit, her intense if uncertain moral seriousness." Lewis suggests that Justine is the first of Wharton's women to have an undeflected awareness of her body and her physical needs;

> but she is also made to carry Edith's feelings that "fate had held her imprisoned in a circle of well-to-do mediocrity"--from which, like Edith, she had fled into the darker prison of a disappointing marriage. [61]

Edith Wharton's opinion of marriage had not changed since she wrote "The Fullness of Life," (1891). Marriage and the intellectual, independent woman are antithetical. In writing Ethan Frome (1911), the darkest portrayal of the marriage theme, Edith Wharton writes a novel that does not end in death or marriage. It appears that when Wharton took up permanent residence in Paris around the first of the year 1910, she was

ready to discard old patterns. In France, Edith Wharton found a quality of life more powerfully present than elsewhere, a quality which her innermost nature craved.

Millicent Bell describes it as "that conscious continuity of custom and conformity which had revealed itself to her at Nohant as the order to which George Sand was ultimately obedient-this, to Edith Wharton, was the very essence of the French tradition she loved." [62] In her travel book A Motor-Flight Through France, published in October 1908, as Bell notes, Wharton gives a curious account which tells as much about the woman writing it as the woman about whom she writes. Edith Wharton had been startled to find George Sand's home so dignified and respectable "conscious in every line of its place in the social scale, of its obligations to the church and cottages under its wing" and yet Wharton pictures the time "when one recalls the throng of motley characters who streamed in and out of that quiet house-the illegitimate children of both sides, living in harmony with one another and with the child of wedlock, the too-intimate servants, the peasant playmates." [63] Here was a woman of immense talent and an irregular private life whom Edith Wharton could feel an affinity for. Especially in that "dark disordered period" when the "incoherent and inconceivable existence" led the timid Madame Dudevant into the great George Sand, the author who conveyed not only the unhappiness of her condition, but her growing hostility to the institution of marriage. [64]

As Wharton travels in France on the road to Arras beyond Boulogne, she describes how the scene evolved into a philosophy on the way "nature may be utilized to the utmost clod without losing its freshness and naturalness." Wharton emphasizes "that cultivation is the proper use of one's resources, that instinct and impulse become civilized only after they have submitted themselves to the plow and the pruning hook-or to discipline, tradition, standards." [65] Her geographical distance from America gave her the freedom to work out "the problem that had perplexed her since her since her youth, the problem of the relation of intelligence and social power." As Bell has argued:

> It was the presence in France of long-inherited habits and standards that made, Edith Wharton thought, for that social instinct which puts the rule above the person in essential matters, leaving the conscience happier and freer in unessential things. It was the acceptance of a time-approved order that lay at the basis of French manners and French taste. [66]

For Wharton proof of "long-inherited habits and standards' and "the acceptance of a time-approved order" was the essence of their civilization. She felt "for the French, intelligence had a place in all aspects and ranks of life, that there was respect for its embodiment in books, science, or art even on the part of the most ignorant Frenchman, and that France, unlike America, expected this of peasant and aristocrat alike." [67]

In Paris Wharton could enjoy her success as a writer rather than being afraid of frightening her fashionable friends as she had in America. In A Backward Glance, she writes that one of the many distinctions between the social world of New York and Paris was that in Paris no one could live without literature. Wharton delighted in the interest she aroused as a professional writer, and states that:

> If the French Academy had served no other purpose than the highly civilizing one of linking together ociety and letter, that service would justify its existence. But it is a delusion to think that a similar institution could render the same service in other societies. Culture in France is an eminently social quality, while in Anglo-Saxon countries it might also be called antisocial. In France, where politics so sharply divide the different classes and coteries, artistic and literary interests unite them; and wherever two or three educated French people are gathered together, a salon immediately comes into being (261-262).

Although Edith Wharton thrived in a milieu "in which the old douceur de vivre was combined with an intelligent interest in current ideas and events," she remained constant in her dedication to the American independent woman. Just before settling in Paris, Wharton had written "Madame de Treymes" (1906), and, as R. W. B. Lewis points out, something of Edith Wharton's sense of herself went into her portrait of the American born Marquise de Malrive. In this novella, set in Paris, Lewis has argued, "the latest in a series of stories upon the same or closely re-

lated theme, Edith Wharton seems to have been suggesting that the psychic imprisonment of women occur anywhere and under the most gracious of conditions." [68]

However, in the comfort of this setting Edith Wharton found a more meaningful existence. She weighed the idea of French intelligence and "the acceptance of a time-approved order" against the binding commitment of the American image of marriage, and its psychological affects on the "new woman." Like few other writers of the day, Wharton began to draw upon her earlier fiction for her writings. As R.W.B. Lewis has observed, she began to create "new novels in part out of the emotional and psychological ingredients of old novels." [69] Even though neither Justine Brent nor Fanny de Malrive succeed in their marriages, Edith Wharton succeeds in creating an intellectual independent woman who could confront a hostile world. In The Reef (1912), which takes place in France, Edith Wharton moves her characters onto foreign ground to act out a contemporary drama. Anna Leath represents the traditional American heroine while Sophy Viner like Justine is the independent "new woman." However, Sophy means to seize life. Like Lily she does not want to marry and she tells Darrow "you see I'm all for self-development and the chance to live one's life. I'm awfully modern, you know" (62). Sophy is instrumental to Anna's success. Sophy has achieved a moral philosophy which she adheres to, and she is a necessary light for Anna to experience in search for truth. Although the

ending is abrupt and somewhat tragic in Anna's quest for truth, there is wisdom too. Through Sophy, Wharton creates a heroine who will not remain passive, but who acts, and Sophy demonstrates how "her experience had made her free without hardness and self-assured without assertiveness" (27). Because of Anna's encounter with Sophy, she grows as she realizes the integrity of Sophy's philosophy rather than condoning what patriarchal society insists on as Respectability for its women. Anna will not become trapped in a spiritless marriage, and through her penetrating search for truth becomes Wharton's ideal intellectually independent "new woman."

However, in August 1914, the First World War began and became Wharton's priority for several years. In her documentation of the war years recorded in Fighting France: From Dunkerque to Belfort (1915), she begins by looking at Paris, and its citizens. Edith Wharton observes that war calls not only for the fighters to mobilize, but "for each French household, for each individual man or woman in France, war means a complete reorganization of life" (14). She visits "the lamentable ruins of the village of Auve," and writes that although she sees many more after Auve, "this was the first, and perhaps for that reason one had there, most hauntingly, the vision of all the separate terrors, anguishes, uprootings and renderings apart involved in the destruction of the obscurest of human communities" (58). As Wharton travels through France she notes the horrors of death and

destruction as a piously planned and methodically executed deed:

> From the opposite heights the poor little garden-grit town was shelled like a steel fortress; then, when the German entered, a fire was built in every house, and at the nicely-timed right moment one of the explosive tabloids which the fearless Teuton carries about for his land-Lusitanias was tossed on each hearth.... One old woman, hearing her son's death-cry, rashly looked out of her door. A bullet instantly laid her low among her phloxes and lillies; and there in her little garden, her dead body was dishonoured (98-99).

Wharton's response to these cataclysmic events included a concern with the consequences of war on women in particular. Wharton not only witnessed how technology misused and defiled the natural freshness of nature, but how its possessors dishonored human life. This recognition led to her many contributions to the war effort.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE INDEPENDENT WOMAN IN THE NON-FICTION OF EDITH WHARTON

Edith Wharton did not witness the war as an observer but, as a woman, and as a writer, she saw the necessity in rebuilding the past for future generations. Wharton's contribution to the war effort was great: she not only raised funds, organized relief for refugees, founded hospitals and hostels, created jobs for war widows and homeless women, took in orphans, she also described the dreadful realities of war. In Fighting France: From Dunkerque to Belfort (1915), Wharton observes, and experiences, the reorganization of Paris and its citizens during wartime, she sees the women of France as intelligent. She notes that they understand the politics of war and the quality of life, and she writes that the woman of France "has not the advantage of our discipline in the hypocrisies of 'good form': when she is called on to be brave, she must draw her courage from her brains" (236). She goes on to explain that they supply moral courage in their actions as well as in their words. Wharton's perspective on war-time France and the French is unique: at a time of death and destruction, Wharton sees what the equality of women could achieve, and it becomes clear to her that at a time of war, women normally lacking in value or status are relied on to rebuild the past. In the last chapter of Fighting France, it is Wharton's opinion that France's national genius survives because of the free expression of her women, and she writes that

"the whole civilian part of the nation seems merged in one symbolic figure," courage made visible by every Frenchwoman (237). Wharton now sees her ideal independent "new woman" in the free expression of France's national genius, the rule above the personal, and humanity that has far wider duties and desires than those of domestic relations. However, Wharton remains constant in her commitment to the American woman. In French Ways and Their Meaning (1919), Wharton writes, from her own experience, about the Frenchwoman's place in society in comparison to the American woman's place in a culture that boasts woman's equality but, in fact, retards their progress. In the Preface to French Ways and Their Meaning, Wharton writes not only what she admires about the French, but describes a philosophy that she adheres to in her own life and work. Wharton writes that:

> Sooner than any other race the French have got rid of bogies, have 'cleared the minds of shams,' and gone up to the Medusa and the Sphinx with a cool eye and a penetrating question (ix-x).

This philosophy gives us some insight into the importance of Wharton's non-fiction work, and the influence it has on her later fiction. If Wharton's early novels have been seen as a series of penetrating questions that disrupt the complacency of society and raise defensive responses, it could be argued that her work provokes defensive responses that her non-fiction, long neglected or misread, could answer. Even though Edith Wharton

spoke little of her good works during the war, and even less of her non-fiction work, Fighting France, and French Ways and Their Meaning, it is obvious that it was her intention to document the past for the present, and future generations. Thus, Wharton is unique in her perspective as a writer. She not only writes about her own culture, but sees the importance of understanding other cultures as well. Living in France during World War 1, Wharton writes about war-time France and the French, because as she points out in her autobiography called A Backward Glance, that although she believes "it may be useless to revive such controversies now; [it is important] to put the facts [down] once more on record for a future generation who may study them with eyes cleared of prejudice" (339).

Wharton's non-fiction work, Fighting France is important for its accurate account of Paris, and her citizens from the moment war broke out. In the first chapter, Wharton recalls the look of Paris as the rumour of war was being circulated. Returning to France from a motor trip in July, 1914, Wharton arrives at the gates of Paris at sunset, and compares the look of Paris to a princess lying peaceably besides the river Seine. Her first impression is that this great city was made "for peace and art and all humanest graces" (6). But, Wharton's concern for the relationship between art and life extends beyond the city in praise of all who live in this environment. She writes that al-

though "the next day the air was thundery with rumours" of war, nobody believed them, and "the whole incalculable weight of things-as-they-were, of the daily necessary business of living, continued calmly and convincingly....Paris went on steadily about her midsummer business of feeding, dressing, and amusing the great army of tourists who were the only invaders she had seen for nearly half a century" (7). Nonetheless Wharton observed that everyone understood the nature of the other work being carried on, and she notes that:

> The whole fabric of the country's seemingly undisturbed routine was threaded with noiseless invisible currents of preparation, the sense of them was in the calm air as the sense of changing weather is in the balminess of a perfect afternoon (7).

Wharton admires the calm of the French nation as they stoically await further news of war. She notes that the only words spoken by everyone was to declare that "we don't want war-mais il faut que cela finisse" (7). Nobody wanted war as Wharton points out and "all who spent the first days of August in Paris will testify to the agreement of feeling on that point. But if war had to come, then the country, and every heart in it, was ready" (8).

In the days that follow, Wharton witnessed the mobilization of an armed nation. She observes that when the people of France were told that General Mobilization was necessary, they all continued quietly about their affairs. Wharton writes that "there

were no cheers, no gesticulations: the dramatic sense of the race had already told them that the event was too great to be dramatized" (8). Wharton likens the effects of war to "a monstrous landslide" that disrupts an orderly laborious nation's routine, annihilates its industries, tears family members apart, and buries "under a heap of senseless ruin the patiently and painfully wrought machinery of civilization..." (9).

Wharton personally experiences the effects of this "monstrous landslide." While sitting at the open window of a restaurant on the rue Royale, Wharton sees exactly how mobilization disrupts a nation, and her immediate response is to capture the moment. She describes the scene by writing that at first she saw strange crowds streaming by, there was a sudden break in the normal flow of traffic, and then:

> like the sudden rupture of a dyke. The street was flooded by the torrent of people sweeping past us to the various railway stations. All were on foot, and carrying their luggage; for since dawn every cab and taxi and motor-omnibus had disappeared. The War Office had thrown out its drag-net and caught them all in. The crowd that passed our window was chiefly composed of conscripts, the mobilisables of the first day, who were on the way to the station accompanied by their families (9-10).

From this vantage point, Wharton also becomes aware of a sort of quiet humour that was the note of the street (11). In the restaurant she says that the "befrogged and redcoated band poured

out patriotic music," while the crowds outside the restaurant thickened. She notes that "the loiters outside began to join in the war-songs," and all the way "down the rue Royale, towards the Madeleine, the bands of other restaurants were attracting other throngs, and martial refrains were strung along the Boulevard like its garlands of arc-lights" (11). Even though Wharton enjoys this night of singing, and the gallant acclamations to defend France's honour, she then looks beyond the loiterers and into the horrible reality of the night. Wharton's depiction of the steady stream of conscripts is haunting. She describes the faces of these men as serious "but not sad; nor was there any air of bewilderment--" only "the stare of driven cattle" (11-12). But, Wharton also notices a quality powerfully present in all of the conscripts and she recalls that:

> All these lads and young men seemed to know what they were about and why they were about it. The youngest of them looked suddenly grown up and responsible: they understood their stake in the job, and accepted it (12).

As Wharton watches the wives and families of these men trudging alongside them, "carrying all kinds of odd improvised bags and bundles," she sees exactly what the relationship between intelligence and social power means. In the midst of despair, Wharton bears witness to the effects of France's long-inherited habits and standards which make social instincts the rule above the

personal. Wharton sees the proof of long-inherited habits and standards as the essence of French civilization.

Inasmuch as Wharton took an anthropological approach in her work, she sees France's national genius symbolized by its spirit of solidarity in the face of war, and in every man, woman and child's ability to disengage themselves from the confusion of war by maintaining "a cheerful steadiness of spirit" (11). Thus, in Fighting France, Wharton looks at Paris and its citizens and observes that when

> an armed nation mobilizes, everybody is busy, and busy in a definite and pressing way. It is not only the fighters that mobilize: those who stay behind must do the same. For each French household, for each individual man or woman in France, war means a complete reorganization of life (14).

However, mobilization is only one of the concomitants of martial law. Wharton says "that martial law is not comfortable to live under--at least till one gets used to it" (18). She writes that to the neutral civilian, it "seemed certainly to be the wayward pleasure of complicating his life; and in that line it excelled in the last refinements of ingenuity. Instructions began to shower on us after the lull of the first days" (18). Restaurants were closing rapidly, and most hotels were being hastily transformed into hospitals. Within the first week most of the shops had closed "the greater number bearing on their

shuttered windows the notice 'Pour cause de mobilisation,' which showed that the 'patron' and staff were at the front" (22). After these hasty preparations Wharton then experiences what she describes as "a great wave of stillness," (24). She observes that the silence of the deserted streets in the city is always "so much deeper than the silence of wood or field", and describes that:

> The heaviness of the August air intensified this impression of suspended life. In the quarter I inhabit...the shuttered streets were mute as catacombs, and the faintest pin-prick of noise seemed to tear a rent in a black pall of silence" (24).

Wharton notes that "Paris scorned all show of war. While smaller cities were swarming with soldiers no glitter or arms was reflected in the empty avenues of the capital." She concludes that what "kept the reality of war from Paris was the curious absence of troops in the streets" (25).

In The Guns of August (1962), Barbara W. Tuchman's depiction of Paris at the onset of the war corresponds with Wharton's on the scene documention. In her chapter, "The Front is Paris," Tuchman writes that:

> The Grands Boulevards were empty, shop fronts were shuttered, buses, trams, cars, and horse cabs had disappeared. In their place flocks of sheep were herded across the Place de la Concorde on their way to the Gare de l'Est for shipment to the front. Un-

> marred by traffic, squares and vistas revealed their purity of design. Most newspapers having ceased publication, the kiosks were hung meagerly with the single-page issue of the survivors. All the tourists were gone, the Ritz was uninhabited, the Meurice a hospital. For one August in its history Paris was French- and silent. [1]

However, Wharton is accutely aware that behind these shuttered stop fronts, life still goes on for the families of the soldiers, and since war means a complete reorganization of life, Wharton's primary concern is how these men, women and children will survive in the face of death. Wharton sees that without their regular means of livelihood, immediate provisions will have to be made for them, and within eight days of the outbreak of hostilities, Edith Wharton plunged into work. In a letter to Bernard Berenson dated August 22, 1914, Wharton writes that:

> Finding that no one had thought of coming to the help of the unemployed work-girls, I have opened a work-room where I feed them & pay them 1fc a day. My compatriots (mostly unknown to me) have come to my aid, & we have 20 women working already, & I long to enlarge it & take in many more. The...women who have turned their drawing-rooms into hospitals...& are now making shirts for the wounded, are robbing the poor stranded ouvrieres of their only means of living. [2]

Wharton concludes this letter by saying that her 'ouvroir' has excited a good deal of interest, and hopes to get more help to carry it on. The ouvroir did succeed, and gave employment to as many as one hundred women at a time. With Wharton procuring

work orders through her connections in France and America, she created jobs for the Parisian seamstresses who had been deprived of work when the fashionable ladies in the Faubourg took to sewing garments for the troops.

However, this was not the only effort Wharton became involved in. Edith Wharton like many others had hoped the war would be over, with a French triumph, within a few months. But, as Barbara W. Tuchman explains "the Battle of the Marne was one of the decisive battles of the world not because it determined that Germany would ultimately lose or the Allies ultimately win the war but because it determined that war would go on." [3] The frightful British casualties during the Battle of Ypres were only an omen of the horrors to come. Although the officers and men of the BEF held their ground, and stopped the Germans in Flanders, they literally fought until they died.

Wharton now witnessed the effects of the German advance, the senseless ruin that war caused, in a "hideous flood of savagery," as the rear-guard of the Allies' retreated on Paris, and as the lamentable horde of the Belgian and French refugees flooded into the city. In a letter to Gaillard Lapsley in November of 1914, Wharton writes that "my sense is completely living again in the year 1000, with the trump imminent....There are so many people who seem nowadays like left-overs--dead flies shaken down out of a summer hotel window curtain! We shall never lodge in <u>that</u>

summer hotel again." [4]

This description of "so many people who seem like left-overs -dead flies shaken down out of a summer hotel window curtain" can be used as a metaphor to accurately describe the "Refugees" whom Wharton sees as a dingy stream filtering through all the the currents of Paris life, so that:

> wherever one goes, in every quarter and at every hour, among the busy confident strongly-stepping Parisians one sees these other people, dazed and slowly moving--men and women with sordid bundles on their backs, shuffling along hesitatingly in their tattered shoes, children dragging at their hands and tired-out babies pressed against their shoulders: the great army of Refugees. Their faces are unmistakable and unforgettable. No one who has ever caught that stare of dumb bewilderment--or that other look of concentrated horror, full of the reflection of flames and ruins--can shake off the obsession of the Refugees (33).

Wharton sees the look in their eyes as part of the look of Paris. The dark shadow that crossed their paths, and instantaneously changed their lives was as Wharton observes beyond their understanding. As she wrote to Lapsley that "we shall never lodge in that summer hotel again," in Fighting France, Wharton takes it upon herself to document the facts, if not to resolve the present horrors, at least as an account of war for future generations. In this book, she describes not only how technology misused and defiled the natural freshness of nature, but how its possessors dishonoured human life, and she questions how these people will

survive now that their homes have been destroyed. She writes that:

> These poor people cannot look across the borders to eventual triumph. They belong mostly to a class whose knowledge of the world's affairs is measured by the shadow of their village steeple. They are no more curious of the laws of causation than the thousands of overwhelmed at Avezzano. They were ploughing and sowing, spinning and weaving and minding their business, when suddenly a great darkness full of fire and blood came down on them. And now they are here, in a strange country, among unfamiliar faces and new ways with nothing left to them in the world but the memory of burning homes and massacred children and young men dragged to slavery, of infants torn from their mothers, old men trampled by drunken heels and priests slain while they prayed beside the dying (35). (my emphasis).

Wharton's immediate response to these cataclysmic effects of war is to help those who had been dishonoured. In A Backward Glance, she explains that she became involved in this effort when

> The Red Cross was engrossed by its immense task in the field and in the military hospitals, the government relief services were disorganized and totally unprepared for the sudden influx of refugees, and immediate help had to be given. Charles Du Bos, with a group of French and Belgian friends, had improvised an emergency work called L'Accueil Franco-Belge, which had already rendered great service, but risked being swamped by the increasing throng of applicants, and the lack of funds. I was asked to form an American committee, and to raise money; I did both, and speedily found myself, inexperienced as I was, unable to carry this new burden as well as my big ouvroir (346).

However, in a letter dated January 12, 1915, to Mary Berenson, Wharton writes that "the Hostels are getting along well, but they take a lot of nursing, & reams of letter writing." [5] In A Backward Glance, Wharton attributes the success of the relief work to her friends that came to her aid, "giving money and time" (346). But, Wharton pays special tribute to Mrs. Royall Tyler. She says that one day Mrs. Royall Tyler came to see her, and asked how both she and Mr. Tyler could help. Wharton writes that she "knew them both too little to guess at their capacity" but she liked "the simple way in which the offer was made," and she "took on" both husband and wife (348). She explains that:

> Royall Tyler rendered me immense help until our entry into the war enrolled in in the United States Intelligence service; while of his wife I can only say that she found the Accueil a tottering house of cards, and turned it into solid bricks and mortar. Never once did she fail me for an hour, never did we disagree, never did her energy flag or her discernment and promptness of action grow less through those weary years. The real "Magic City" was that which her inexhaustible resourcefulness raised out of our humble beginnings, and it was thanks to her that each fresh emergency was met by new and far-seeing measures of relief, so that in addition to five thousand refugees permanently cared for in Paris, and four big colonies for old people and children, four large and well-staffed sanatoria for tuberculous women and children (348-9).

But, more funds had to be raised for this evergrowing work, and Wharton explains that "when the ardour of our supporters began to flag...another effort was presently required, and this time it fell to my lot to put together 'The Book of the Homeless', a

collection of original poems, articles and drawings, contributed by literary and artistic celebrities in Europe and America" brought in another large sum (349).

However, even this was not enough. France needed more than the charitable funds that Wharton could raise from American sources, and the "good work" she was involved in. Inasmuch as it had been Wharton's opinion since the war began that no civilized race could remain neutral, and that it was "to America's interest to help stem this flood of savagery by opinion if it may not be by action," she was discouraged by America's neutral stand. [6] Looking back in time, it becomes clear that Wharton had great insight into the politics of her time. As Barbara Tuchman has argued "rigidly, puritanically attached to neutrality, Woodrow Wilson was driven to take and maintain a stand on traditional neutral rights." [7] Tuchman writes of Wilson:

> Knowing that war stifles reform, he was bent on keeping the country out of a foreign adventure that would frustrate his program. But beyond that, he had a grander and ulterior reason....He wanted to keep out of war in order to play a larger, not a lesser, part in world affairs....On Agusut 18, in famous statement, he commanded his countrymen to be "neutral in fact as well as in name, impartial in thought as well as in action," and explained that the ultimate purpose of neutrality was to enable the United States "to speak the counsels of peace" and play the part of impartial mediator."... He wanted "to serve humanity," bring to bear the force the moral force--of the New World to save the Old World. [8]

However, Wharton did not see war torn France being brought to peace "through mediation under the flag that was 'the flag not only of America but of humanity.'" [9] Wharton's awareness of America's policy to be an "impartial mediator" only adds fuel to her argument that France, on the contrary, has had to fight for her existence ever since she has had any. In French Ways and Their Meaning, Wharton writes that "again and again, in the past, she has seen her territory invaded, her monuments destroyed, her institutions shattered; the ground on which the future of the world is now being fought for is literally the same as the Catalaunian plain (the "Camp de Châlons") on which Attila tried to strangle France over fourteen hundred years ago" (33). Wharton asks us to "try to picture life under such continual death," and imagine the "intense dread lest any internal innovations should weaken the social structure and open a door to the enemy" (34). She concludes by saying that France is different than America because

> the French have nearly two thousand years of history and art and industry and social and political life to "conserve"; that is another of the reasons why their intense intellectual curiosity, their perpetual desire for the new thing, is counteracted by a clinging to rules and precedents that have often become meaningless (35).

Thus, early in 1915, when the French Red Cross asked Wharton to report on the needs of some military hospitals near the front,

she felt the urgency to describe the desperate sitation of the people living in continual menace of death in the war-zones. Wharton's observations are important because she travelled to the front at a time when foreign correspondents were excluded from the war-zone, and in A Backward Glance, Wharton explains how she convinced the General in charge to allow her to travel behind the lines. It becomes clear that for Wharton it was important to inform the American reader not only of the dreadful realities of war, but to share her own experiences of a culture she admires. In the midst of despair, Wharton witnesses the strength of a nation that understood the politics of war and the quality of life in the face of death. She writes that as soon as she was given leave "to visit the rear of the whole fighting line, all the way from Dunkerque to Belfort," she "did so in the course of six expeditions, some of which actually took her into the front line trenches; and, wishing to lose no time in publishing [her] impressions, [she] managed to scribble the articles between [her] other tasks, and they appeared in 'Scribner's Magazine' in 1915, and immediately afterwards in a volume called Fighting France" (352 & 353).

If Wharton's non-fiction has any function, it is to contradict the accepted stereotype of Wharton, and to see that she is true to her own type, the independent woman. In The Twenties, Frederick J. Hoffman has argued that woman were unlikely raconteurs of the male war experience. Hoffman writes

that:

> She was but one member of an older generation that thought as she did about the war: non-participants, women for the most part,...saw the issues of war much more simply...than did the writers of the so-called war generation. The war was a mission for her; and though she was not unaware of "fathomless mud, rat-haunted tranches,...there was an inevitability, a rightness, in the proceedings, which sustained her in her own Red Cross work in Paris. [10]

However, in Fighting France, Wharton documents the facts of war. She travels to Châlons and sees "on their way from the station, a long line of 'éclopés'--the unwounded, but battered, shattered, frost-biten, deafened and half-paralyzed wreckage of the awful struggle" (49). She writes that "these poor wretches, in their thousands, are daily shipped back from the front to rest and be restored; and it is a grim sight to watch them limping by, and to meet the dazed stare of eyes that have seen what one dare not picture" (50). Wharton leaves Châlons and drives northeastward towards the hills of Argonne, and then to the lamentable ruins of the village of Auve (described at the end of Chapter 1). Wharton sees war as a deliberate destruction of all traditional structures, and all things that give meaning to life, "the photographs on the walls, the twigs of withered box above the crucifixes, the old wedding dresses in brass-clamped trunks, the bundles of letters laboriously written and as painfully deciphered," Wharton states that of "all the thousand and one bits of

the past that give meaning and continuity to the present--of all that accumulated warmth nothing was left but a brick-heap and some twisted stove-pipes" (58). Wharton then describes the insufficient medical facilities for the wounded in these remote communities. She visits churches that were converted into hospitals, and writes about the pitiful sick soldiers lying under earth-coloured blankets. "The doctor's 'worst cases' - a few of them wounded, the greater number striken with fever, bronchitis, frost-bite, pleurisy, or some other form of trench sickness too severe to permit of their being carried farther from the front" (68).

Travelling within the military zone, Wharton was exposed to experiences inaccessible to the civilian, and in a letter to Henry James dated May 14, 1915, she writes:

> Yesterday we went to see the incredibly destroyed Gerbéviller, where we spent a very interesting hour with Mr. Liegay, who acted as mayor during the German invasion, & who took us over the lamentable ruins of what must have been his once charming old house, with a terraced garden overhanging the valley, & told us the tale of his three days in the cellar, with wife & other womankind, their house blazing above their heads, & the Germans shooting & torturing people all through the town. The details are fantastic--[11]

For Wharton this horror-of-war picture supercedes all others. It is clear that Wharton's intention is to document an account of war for future generations. Wharton's theme is different than

the theme Malcolm Cowley stresses in his study of the lost generation of American writers, the effects of the war on male consciousness. Wharton had no time to develop what Cowley refers to in Exile's Return as "a spectatorial attitude." [12] Wharton not only writes about the war, but as an intellectually independent woman, she contributes in many different ways in her effort to help the "refugees," and rebuild the past.

In Fighting France, Wharton writes that in Gerbéviller "all perspective is lost in chaos....Her ruins seem to have been simultaneously vomited up from the depths and hurled down from the skies, as though she had perished in some monstrous clash of earthquake and tornado; and it fills one with a cold despair to know that this double destruction was no accident of nature but a piously planned and methodically executed human deed" (98). She first describes this poor little garden-girt town that was shelled, but then she sees the most hellish scene of all: a woman murdered and her dead body raped and mutilated (as described in Chapter 1, p. 61). For Wharton the dead woman's dishonoured body symbolizes the useless brutal savagery of war. Wharton writes about the violation of traditional structures, and the deliberate slaughter of the men, women and children in defenceless towns to illuminate the dire situation that war imposed on France. However, at the most crucial moment, when Wharton experiences the hand of time stopping before her, and witnesses the senseless paralysis of a whole nation's activities, she sounds a

joyful note as she writes "beside me, on my writing-table, stands a bunch of peonies, the jolly round-faced pink peonies of the village garden" (93). Even though she realizes that these flowers were picked in the garden of a ruined house in Gerbéviller, Wharton writes that since leaving Paris she has passed "through town after town spread out in its last writhings;" but she reflects that "before the black holes that were homes," everywhere she looked, she saw "flowers and vegetables springing up in freshly raked and watered gardens" (93). She explains that her

> pink peonies were not introduced to point the stale allegory of unconscious Nature veiling Man's havoc: they are put on my first page as a symbol of conscious human energy coming back to replant and rebuild the wilderness....Even in the most mortally stricken there were signs of returning life: children playing among the stone heaps (94).

Wharton writes that while the town of Gerbéviller "had been red with horror--flame and shot and tortures unnameable;... at the other end of the long street, a woman, a Sister of Charity, had held her own like Soeur Gabrielle at Clermont-en-Argonne, gathering her flock of old men and children about her and interposing her short stout figure between them and the fury of the Germans. We found her in her Hospice, a ruddy, indomitable woman who related with a quiet indignation more thrilling than invective the hideous details of the blood three

days; but that already belongs to the past, and at present she is much more concerned with the task of clothing and feeding Gerbeviller" (102-103). For Wharton, Soeur Gabrielle represents rebirth, rebuilding, flowers, and all the rituals that symbolize female structures. Wharton describes Soeur Gabrielle's work in the exact words the sister used as she prepared to house two thirds of the population that have "come home. The return to this desert! You see," she explains

> there are the crops to sow, the gardens to tend. They had to come back. The government is building wooden shelters for them; and people will surely send us beds and linen....Heavy boots, too--boots for field-labourers. We want them for women as well as men--like these. (103-104).

Soeur Julie then smiled, and turned up a hob-nailed sole. She said that "I have directed all the work on our Hospice farm myself. All the women are working in the fields--we must take the place of the men" (104). Wharton responds to this by saying "I seemed to see my pink peonies flowering in the very prints of her boots" (104)!

Then, at a time of death and destruction, Wharton sees what the equality of women could achieve, and it becomes clear to her that at a time of war, women normally lacking in value of status are relied to rebuild the past. Women enter into men's work and rebuild structures, and create their own societies. If

the past stood for a kind of order that was a necessary counter-balance to war, Wharton saw something was to be said about disorder. Wharton saw the women of France as intelligent. She notes that they understand the politics of war and the quality of life.

In the last chapter of Fighting France, Wharton writes that:

> the attitude of the French people, after fourteen months of trial, is not one of submission to unparalleled calamity. It is one of exaltation, energy, the hot reserve to dominate the disaster. In all classes the feeling is the same: every word and every act is based on the resolute ignoring of any alternative to victory (225).

Wharton goes on to explain what the national tone is, and what conditions and qualities seem to minister to it. Wharton sees the proof in the harmonious spirit of the French people, not only when they are under attack, but more especially when they return to civilian life and accept all kinds of privations in their daily routine. Wharton then describes the Frenchwoman's contribution in the work force. She says that:

> No one who has come in contact with the work-people and small shop-keepers of Paris in the last year can fail to be struck by the extreme dignity and grace with which doing without things is practised. The Frenchwoman leaning in the door of her empty boutique still wears the smile with which she used to calm the impatience of crowding shoppers. The seamstress living on the meagre pay of a charity work-room gives her day's sewing as faithfully as if she were working for

full wages in a fashionable atelier (226-227).

Wharton points out that "the habitual cheerfulness of the Parisian workwoman rises, in the moments of sorrow" (227). She describes several commendable deeds performed by women who worked to support their families since the beginnning of the war. Wharton expresses her admiration for these women, but especially for the

> young girl of sixteen [who] heard late one afternoon that her only brother had been killed. She had a moment of desperate distress; but there was a big family to be helped by her small earnings, and the next morning punctually she was back at work. [As well as for the women] in this same work-room, [who] have one half-holiday in the week,...yet if an order has to be rushed through for a hospital they give up that one afternoon as gaily as if they were doing it for pleasure (227).

Wharton sees the Frenchwoman's contribution to the war effort as equal to that of the Frenchman's. She experiences women fighting selflessly in all walks of life for the survival of the French nation. It is Wharton's opinion that because the Frenchwoman's temperament is sensitive to the needs of others, she readily accepts responsibility whenever necessary. Wharton sees the importance of the Frenchwoman who keeps the lights of France brightly burning at home, as well as in the heart of every Frenchman fighting for France.

Wharton sees the women of France as intellectually independent. It is Wharton's opinion that the women of France supply the moral courage in their actions as well as in their words. Wharton writes that the "Frenchwoman, as a rule, are perhaps less instinctively 'courageous,' in the elementary sense, than their Anglo-Saxon sisters, [and] they are afraid of more things, and are less ashamed of showing their fear" (235). But, she then defines the quality of courage and writes that "French courage is courage rationalized, courage thought out, and found necessary to some special end; it is, as much as any other quality of the French temperament, the result of French intelligence" (233). Wharton states that this display of reasoned courage "is visible in the hasty adaptation of the Frenchwoman to all kinds of uncongenial jobs....since the war began" (236). The courage displayed by the mothers of France, and the French war-nurse who nurses any French soldier as though she were caring for her own kin. Wharton says that although she "sometimes mislays an instrument or forgets to sterilize a dressing;...she almost always finds the consoling word to say and the right tone to take with her wounded soldiers. That profound solidarity which is one of the results of conscription flowers, in war-time, in an exquisite and impartial devotion" (237). Wharton sees the Frenchwoman as intellectually independent because she understands the politics of war, and states that the French nation has survived because of the free expression of its women.

The war years were not only Edith Wharton's priority for several years, but marked a significant change in her outlook. Living as a permanent resident on the Left Bank of the Seine, Wharton enjoyed what literary women found of value in Paris, notably: the opportunity and freedom for serious literary pursuit. Wharton highly valued her life in France, and as Shari Benstock in Women of the Left Bank suggests, "Wharton sought to define herself by the standards of French culture; in doing so, she consciously put aside aspects of her American heritage and upbringing that she found self-seeking, unrefined, and chauvinistic." [13] Benstock's then goes on to say that throughout Wharton's "fiction, private writings, and memoirs, she obsessively replayed the elements of the American experience she thought to have stunted and impeded her intellectual and spiritual growth. [14] However, Wharton's depiction of her past experience is very different than Benstock's. In A Backward Glance, she looks back at "the slow stammering beginnings" of her literary career, and questions "whether it is a good thing for the creative artist to grow up in an atmosphere where the arts are simply nonexistent" (121). But, she then answers her own question by saying that "I am inclined to think the drawbacks were outweighed by the advantages;...I had to fight my way to expression through a thick fog of indifference" (121-122).

Wharton took an anthropological approach in her work in order to trace the fortunes of all womankind. Although she was

aware that women share similar limitation in all cultures, Wharton remained constant to the American "new woman." Even though her writing had been interrupted during the war years, Wharton's commitment to the American woman never ceased. Wharton's opinion that the feminization of American culture was unrealistic remains unchanged. Although Wharton dealt with this theme in her early work, she now writes about French culture, and about woman's place in French society from her own experience as an independent women. As Shari Benstock suggests, "she sought in every form of French life--particularly in its social and cultural norms--to escape the crudity and constraint of American life as she observed it and lived it in her own marriage. She saw marriage as the social contract that forced the woman's 'withdrawal from circulation,' that sealed her fate in loneliness, vanity, sentimentality, and--often--mental illness. If American marriage contracted the woman to a life of isolation, the French marriage assured her a life of social influence." [15]

In A Backward Glance, Wharton remarks that although many women "found their vocation in nursing the wounded, or in other philanthropic activities," during the war, and that "the call on their cooperation had developed unexpected aptitudes which, in some cases, made them into happy people," it is obviously Wharton's vocation, and her concern, to write about women and their position in society. She explains that her "first respite came when she was free to return to her own work" (356). In the

"Preface" to her book French Ways and Their Meaning, published in 1919, Wharton writes that "this book is essentially a desultory book, the result of intermittent observation,...having been written in Paris, at odd moments, during the last two years of the war" (v). She says that the conditions of war made "more consecutive work impossible," but gave her "unprecedented opportunities for quick" observations and "notation" (v). Wharton describes the world since 1914 like a house on fire. She explains that:

> All the lodgers are on the stairs, in dishabille. Their doors are swinging wide, and one gets glimpses of their furniture, relations of their habits,...that a lifetime of ordinary intercourse would not offer. Superficial differences vanish and so do superficial resemblances; while deep unsuspected similarities and disagreements, deep common attractions and repulsions, declare themselves (v & vi).

However, it soon becomes obvious that these intermittent observations are important to Wharton's work. It is Wharton's opinion that it is from "these fundamental substances that the new link between France and America [will be] made, and some reasons for the strength of the link ought to be discoverable in the suddenly bared depths of the French heart" (vi). She suggests that if the Americans "probe below the surface," they will see that "the superficial dissemblances" in the French character spring "from the same stem as many different-seeming characteristics of [their] own people" (vi & vii). Wharton sees "the French [as]

the most human of the human race," and suggests that "the most profitable way of trying to interpret French ways and their meaning is to see how this long inheritance may benefit a people which is still, intellectually and artistically, in search of itself" (xi).

Wharton then turns her attention to the role that Frenchwomen play in French life. She writes that the Frenchwoman "plays a much larger and more interesting part in men's lives" and that "no one who has seen Frenchwomen since the war can doubt to their great influence on French life, French thought, French imagination and French sensibility" (120-121). However, in her chapter called "The New Frenchwoman," Wharton explains that "there is no new Frenchwoman; but the real Frenchwoman is new to America" (98). She continues her argument by saying that:

> It would be easy enough to palm her off as a "new" Frenchwoman because the war has caused her to live a new life and do unfamiliar jobs; but one need only look at the illustrated papers to see what she looks like as a tram-conductor, a taxi-driver or a munition maker. It is certain, even now, that all these new experiences are going to modify her character, and to enlarge her view of life; but that is not the point with which these papers are concerned (99).

For Wharton the point "with which these papers are concerned" is to show American women that "there is no new Frenchwoman." I would suggest that Wharton wrote this book specifically for the American "new woman." Because of her lifetime commitment

to her American sisters, and because of her own experience of American culture, Wharton sees the French woman's place in the very heart of society as an important social influence. When Wharton suggests that any differences between Americans and the French "are mostly on the surface and our feeling about the most important things is always the same." it is her decided intention to show the American woman exactly what the differences are, and suggests that if they understand the cultural differences between the two nations, they may be able enrich their own lives (15). Even though Wharton comments that some of the characteristics about the French character may seem "dangerously disintegrating," and "others provokingly unprogressive," she concludes with her own enriched philosophic view that:

> as long as enriching life is more than preserving it, as long as culture is superior to business efficiency, as long as poetry and imagination and reverence are higher and more precious elements of civilisation than telephones or plumbing, as long as truth is more bracing than hypocrisy, and wit more wholesome than dulness, so long will France remain greater than any nation that has not her ideals (149). (my emphasis).

For Wharton it becomes essential that the American "new woman" sees and understands the quality of her Frenchwoman's life. She writes that in "the highly civilised countries--such as France--...real living,...is a deep and complex and slowly developed thing, the outcome of an old and rich social experience" (102). Wharton cautions that "it cannot be 'got up' like gymnastics, or

a proficiency in foreign languages;" but that "it has its roots in the fundamental things, and above all in close and constant and interesting and important relations between men and women" (102). She sees that it is not only important for American woman to learn something about the real Frenchwoman, but that it is important for them "to learn to know the Frenchwoman as she has always been; to try to find out what she is, and why she is what she is. After that it will be easy to see why the war has developed in her certain qualities rather than others, and what its after-effects on her are likely to be" (99-100). Wharton then turns the frequently heard suggestion that American women hold a superior position in society on its head. In these essays, Wharton vividly describes exactly what the differences between the Frenchwoman and the average American woman are. She begins by suggesting that although this proposition is fairly evident, it is not always easy to explain. She playfully contemplates various questions about whether the Frenchwoman "dresses better, or knows more about cooking, or is more 'coquettish,' or more feminine,' or more excitable, or more emotional, or more immoral" (100). Wharton gets right to the heart of the matter. She says that although these reasons have been suggested none of them furnish the complete answer because "millions of American are,...coquetish, feminine, emotional, and all the rest of it; a good many dress as well as Frenchwomen" (100). Although Wharton recognizes that the real reason is not

flattering to America's national vanity, she remains true to her commitment and writes that the difference "is simply that, like the men of her race, the Frenchwoman is grown up" (100). Wharton then goes on to give a detailed explanation as to why the American woman is not really "grown up" :

> the world she lives in is exactly like the most improved and advanced and scientifically equipped Montessori-method baby-school. At first sight it may seem preposterous to compare the American woman's independent and resonant activities--her "boards" and clubs and sororities, her public investigations of everything under the heavens from "the social evil" to baking-powder, and from "physical culture" to the newest esoteric religion--to compare such free and busy and seemingly influential lives with the artless exercises of an infant class (101).

Wharton states that the problem of this system is that American women unlike Frenchwomen are secluded and cannot develop their own individuality. She describes the Montessori school "as a baby world where, shut up together in the most improved hygienic surroundings, a number of infants noisily develop their individuality" (101). Wharton concludes that American women are not really "grown up" in comparison to their French sisters because "American women are each others' only audience, and to a great extent each other's only companions, that they seem, compared to women who play an intellectual and social part in the lives of men, like children in a baby-school" (102). It is Wharton's opinion that American society, by separating women

from the world, has limited their intellectual and aesthetic capabilities. She sees them developing their individuality in a void, "without the checks, the stimulus, and the discipline that comes of contact with...masculine individuality" (102-103). However, Wharton continues by pointing out several other "ways in which the Frenchwoman's relations with men may be called more important than those of her American sister" (103). In the first place, she writes that "in the commercial class, the Frenchwoman is always her husband's business partner" and secondly, "the lives of the French bourgeois couple are based on the primary necessity of getting money to live on, and of giving their children educational and material advantages" (103). Wharton points out that in small businesses the woman is always her husband's clerk or bookkeeper, or both, but above all she is his business adviser. Wharton explains that we should look to France "as a model of thrift, of wise and prudent saving and spending" because "no other country in the world has such immense financial vitality, such powers of recuperation from national calamity" (104). Wharton then describes the outcome of the last war, "the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, when France, beaten to earth, her armies lost, half her territory occupied, and with all Europe holding aloof, and not a single ally" to help "defend her interests" and "when France was called on by her conquerors to pay an indemnity of five thousand million francs in order to free her territory of the enemy, she raised the sum, and paid it off,

eighteen months sooner than the date agreed upon" (104). Wharton attributes these amazing results to the decisive part "played by the millions of wives and mothers whose thrift and prudence silently built up her salvation in 1872" (105). Wharton claims that the importance of the Frenchwoman's part in society stems from the part she plays at home. It is Wharton's opinion that because she has always been personally involved in the daily affairs of her husband's job that she is more grown up than others. Wharton sees her as being more interesting, and more apt to living life. The Frenchwoman becomes Wharton's creative vision of what an independent woman should be like. She sees that the Frenchwoman's misfortune, like Lily Bart's misfortune, has made her "supple instead of hardening her, and [that] a pliable substance is less easy to break than a stiff one." Thus, Wharton's philosophy of life is embodied in the achievements of the Frenchwoman. Wharton sees the Frenchwoman's contribution as essential to the survival of the French nation. She not only shares her husband's personal life, but is his business partner as well. Unlike the American woman, she does not live in the isolation of her separate spheres:

> Every economist knows that if France was able to make that incredible effort it was because, all over the country, millions of Frenchwomen, labourers' wives, small shopkeepers' wives, wives of big manufacturers and commission-merchants and bankers, were to all intents and purposes their husbands' business-partners, and had had a direct interest in saving and investing millions and millions piled up pay France's ransom

in her day of need (104-105).

Wharton's attempt "in these articles," to single out, as typically "French" in the best of that many sided term, "the qualties of reverence, taste, continuity, and intellectual honesty," is to show the keen French intelligence established through centuries of real living which is developed out of rich social relations between men and women (17 & 18). Wharton's opinion is that women need male companionship "not only because the man is the stronger and the closer to reality that his influence is necessary to develop woman to real womanhood;" but because:

> the two sexes complete each other mentally as well as physiologically that no modern civilisation has been really rich or deep, or stimulating to other civilisations, which has not been based on the recognised interation of influences between men and women (103).

Wharton sees the famous French "Salon," as the best school of talk and of ideas that the modern world has known "based on the belief that the most stimulating conversation in the world is between intelligent men and women who see each other often enough to be on terms of frank and easy friendship" (117). Here, Wharton finds the perfect environment to live and work in. It is her experience that the French care passionately for ideas, but ideas that integrate art into life.

At this point it becomes obvious that Wharton is appealing to her readers, her audience of women readers, to listen to her ideas. She writes that "women (if they only knew it!) are generally far more intelligent listeners than talkers; and the rare quality of the Frenchwoman's listening contributes not a little to the flashing play of French talk" (25). Her definition of French taste is in "the way the women put on their hats," and "taste, whatever it may be, is not, after all, the same thing as art....but it is the atmosphere in which art lives and outside of which it cannot live" (40). It now becomes clear that Wharton is not only writing to illuminate the Frenchwomen's place in society for an audience of American women, but she is also explaining her own reasons for preferring France to the United States (40). Living in France, and experiencing the French culture, Wharton has successfully integrated her idea of life and art into her daily living. In Wharton's own words it is because the French have instinctively applied the same rules to living "that they applied to artistic creation" (40).

In the past these essays have been dismissed by most critics as "a hurried, rambling book, though not lacking in the usual perceptive and delicate observations of the French reverence for life." [16] R.W.B Lewis has argued Wharton pits the French woman against her American counterpart, and admires her because she is,

> a truly free spirit who stands beside her husband or lover in his work as in his idle hours, while the American woman disappears from sight upon marriage and withers away in the company of her children and wives of other men....only the French are capable of the ideal combination. [17]

However, in a recent article called "Writing Home From The Front," Alan Price suggests another way for Wharton's essays to be read. He writes that "the second wave of propaganda from expatriate writers came after the United States entered the war in April of 1917," and that Edith Wharton set herself the task of explaining French customs to an American audience. Price states that even though "the ostensible audience may have been the American doughboy,...the real audience was the wives and mothers of American servicemen, as we shall see wnen we examine where the articles were first published and the subjects with which they dealt." [18] Price suggests that although Wharton's insights may be seen as "problematic in their criticism of American women and American values," he writes that her "collection may be read," not only "as her most thorough published explanation of why she chose to live most of her adult life in France," but also because it gives the reader "the chance of discovering truths as well as reacquainting" themselves "with the official values of another time." [19]

Therefore, when Wharton writes that "the first thing for the American woman to do is to know <u>the Frenchwoman</u> as she has always

been; to try to find out what she is, and why she is what she is," she is not insulting her American counterpart (99). Although Wharton does believe that they can learn a great deal from the intellectual independence of the Frenchwoman, it is Wharton's opinion that "the more civilised a society is, the wider is the range of each woman's influence over men, and of each man's influence over women. Intelligent and cultivated people of either sex will never limit themselves to communing with their own households" (112). In these essays Wharton weighs the idea of French intelligence and the acceptance of a time-approved order against the binding commitment of the American image of marriage, and its psychological effects on women.

Perhaps Wharton's experience of war gave her a broader understanding of the narrowness of American culture, and reminded her that Progressivism did not insure equal rights for the "new woman." Thus, these essays can be appreciated as an expression of Wharton's anxiety for the future of the American woman. She sees that the popular image of American women as superior to men is as unrealistic as the image of equality between the two sexes. It had always been society's insistence that marriage and motherhood are the highest estate for women. However, it was Wharton's opinion that men's expectations of their wives and modern women's expectations of themselves are vastly different matters. From this vantage point, we can see that in French Ways and Their Meaning, she is not insulting the American woman, but

appealing to her intelligence. It was Wharton's belief that happier marriages, happier homes, happier men and happier women could be achieved by a union of common interests rather than economic independence. However, this egalitarian conception of marriage could exist only when men and women realized that they are human, and that humanity has far wider duties and desires than those of domestic relationships. Wharton writes that "real civilisation in America" has been retarded because of the equal, but separate spheres. She sees that real equality for men and women is achieved only "when they have the range of interests that real cultivation gives, need the stimulus of different points of view, the refreshment of new ideas as well as new faces" (112).

Wharton explains that although in America "there is complete freedom of intercourse between boys and girls," it does not exist "between men and women; and there is a general notion that, in essentials, a girl and a woman are the same thing" (114). She says that from the day of her marriage the American woman is "cut off from men's society in all but the most formal and intermittent ways. On her wedding-day she ceases, in any open, frank and recognised manner, to be an influence in the lives of the men of the community to which she belongs" (116). However, Wharton argues that in France the marriage union completes and transforms a woman's character and her point of view. She writes that "a girl is only a sketch; a married woman is the finished picture,

and it is only the married woman who counts as a social factor" (105). Although it is Wharton's point of view that all womankind share similar limitations in all cultures, she sees that the French wife has less legal independence than the American...wife, and is subject to a good many legal disqualifications from which woman have freed themselves in other countries" (105). However, she writes that this is only the technical situation, the practical facts are that:

> the Frenchwoman has gone straight through these theoretical restrictions to the heart of reality and become her husband's associate (105-106).

In order to define the Frenchwoman's place in society, Wharton discusses the different objectives between the French and American view of money-making. She writes that "Americans are too prone to consider money-making as interesting in itself....If a man piles up millions in order to pile them up, having already all he needs to live humanly and decently, his occupation is neither interesting in itself, nor conducive to any sort of real social development....No life is more sterile than one into which nothing enters to balance such an output of energy" (107-108). Wharton then explains the difference of "the French view of the object of money-making" (108). She writes that "for the immense majority of the French it is a far more modest ambition, and consists simply in the effort to earn one's living and put by

enough for sickness, old age, and a good start in life for the children" (108). It is Wharton's observation that although "this conception of "business" may seem a tame one to Americans;...its advantages are worth considering" (108). The immense superiority is the time that men and women spend together. "Time, in the middle of the day, to sit down to an excellent luncheon, to eat it quietly with his family,...to read his paper...to go off on Sundays and holidays," but "time, almost any day, to feel fresh and free enough for an evening at the theatre" (108-109). Although Wharton writes that the great mass of men and women do grow up and reach maturity through their contact with the material world of business, and industry, she insists that the essential element in "growth and...maturing [can only] take place in the intervals between these activities" (109). It is Wharton's opinion that "in lives where there are no such intervals there will be no real growth" (109). Americans estimate business success by their individual results, and "they regard the fact that a man has made money as something intrinsically meritorious" (109). However, Wharton finds such a life sterile compared to what constitutes real living, because "every Frenchman and every Frenchwoman takes time to live" (110). Wharton not only suggests that the Frenchwoman symbolizes the heart of French civilisation. She writes that "if Frenchmen care too much about other things to care as much as we do about making money, the chief reason is largely because their relations

with women are more interesting" (111). She goes on to explain that:

> The Frenchwoman rules French life, and she rules it under a triple crown, as a business woman, as a mother, and above all as an artist. To explain the sense in which the last word is used it is necessary to go back to the contention that the greatness of France lies in her sense of the beauty and importance of living. As life is an art in France, so woman is an artist. She does not teach man, but she inspires him (111-12).

Looking back in time from our vantage point, one can see that Wharton's observation of the abysmal problem in the structuring of American society is not unfounded. In the 1830s Alexis de Tocqueville observed that in America the independence of the American woman is irrevocably lost in the bonds of matrimony. It was his opinion that although an unmarried girl is less constrained than elsewhere, a wife is subjected to stricter obligations. He observes that "religious communities and trading nations entertain peculiarly serious notions of marriage: the former consider the regularity of woman's life as the best pledge and most certain sign of the purity of her morals; the latter regard it as the highest security for the order and prosperity of the household." [20] His suggests that because:

> The Americans are at the same time a puritanical people and a commercial nation; their religious opinions as well as their trading habits consequently lead them to require much abnegation on the part of woman and a constant sacrifice of her pleasures to her duties, which

is seldom demanded of her in Europe. [21]

He concludes by stating that in America "the inexorable opinion of the public carefully circumscribes woman within the narrow circle of domestic interests and duties and forbids her to step beyond it." [22]

Like Wharton, de Tocqueville believed that women were not only experienced as having equal rights, they, in fact, imagined that they had achieved equality. In his chapter called "How The Americans Understand The Equality Of The Sexes,"de Tocqueville states that although democracy destroys or modifies the different inequalities that originate in society, it does not "ultimately affect that great inequality of man and woman which has seemed, up to the present day, to be eternally based in human nature."[23] Even though he attributes the strength of the Americans to the superiority of their women, he sees their lofty position as one of extreme dependence. He notes that the lot of women who are confined within the narrow circle of domestic life is much different than man's, even though "they consider both of them as beings of equal value." [24] But, what de Tocqueville finds even more perverse is in the great change "which takes place in all the habits of women in the United States as soon as they are married,' a change by no means that "ought solely to be attributed to the constraint of public opinion; it is frequently imposed upon themselves by the sole effort of their own will." [25]

He takes the idea further by stating that:

> I never observed that the women of America consider conjugal authority as a...usurpation of their rights, or that they thought themselves degraded by submitting to it. It appeared to me, on the contrary, that they attach a sort of pride to the voluntary surrender to their own will and make it their boast to bend themselves to the yoke, not to shake it off. Such, at least, is the feeling expressed by the most virtuous of their sex; the others are silent; and in the United States it is not the practice for a guilty wife to clamor for the rights of women while she is trampling on her own holiest duties. [26]

Clearly, Wharton's view that when women are confined within the narrow circle of domestic life, they become more childlike, irresponsible and socially segregated is not an imagined or isolated observation. De Tocqueville's prophetic insights of the abysmal fracture he saw foreshadowing the future of a democratic individualistic American society, and Veblen's theories of the leisure class have been fully realized. In a more recent study called Moralism and the Model Home, Gwendolyn Wright shows how domestic architecture structured the environment in which we live today, and how the image of the standardized model home became the rallying symbol for numerous social causes. Wright has argued that the radical feminists in the 1890s, who demanded equal rights, the vote, and in some cases, fundamental changes in the class structure were no longer perceived as a threat by moderate reformers. She explains that:

> By the 1920s, the feminist movement itself, like the alternative styles of home and family acceptable during the 1890s--at least in theory--would be almost forgotten. Americans seized upon the fanciful tradional (but technologically modern) dwelling and the lighthearted, youthful woman as symbols of their contentment. Few people would want to discuss alternatives. [27]

In French Ways and Their Meaning, published in the year 1919, it is Wharton's intention to show the American woman that she must participate in all walks of life. Since it is her opinion that all womankind share similar limitations in all cultures, and all marriages have limitations, her argument is that perhaps the "new woman" should recognize the dangers of the feminization of America. In this book Wharton compares American marriages to French marriages to show the American woman how limited her life becomes once she marries. While Wharton clearly views the American marriage as a social contract that forces women to withdraw from society, which stunts her intellectual and spiritual growth, she sees the French marriage as assuring the Frenchwoman a life of social influence. Wharton explains that the root of this problem rests on the Anglo-Saxon conception of marriage: the inevitable link between fidelity and family responsibility. She writes that "to understand the difference between the Latin and the Anglo-Saxon idea of love one must first of all understand the difference between the Latin and Anglo-Saxon conceptions of marriage. In a society where marriage is supposed to be determined solely by reciprocal inclination, and

to bind the contracting parties not only to a social but to a physical lifelong loyalty, love, which never has accepted, and never will accept, such bonds, immediately becomes a pariah and a sinner" (127). "The French," Wharton argues to their credit, "separate these two incompatible but necessary components of human relationships, thus providing the needed stability for the family while allowing women [and men] the option of love outside the boundaries of the marital law." [28] "Marriage, in France," writes Wharton "is regarded as founded for the family and not for the husband and wife" (128). It is not designed to make a couple individually happy, but,

> to secure their permanent well-being as associates in the foundation of a home and the procreation of a family. Such an arrangement must needs be based on what is most permanent in human states of feeling, and least dependent on the accidents of beauty, youth, and novelty. Community of tradition, of education, and, above all, of the parental feeling, are judged to be the sentiments most likely to form a lasting tie between the average man and woman; and the French marriage is built on parenthood, not on passion (128).

Wharton now sees her ideal independent "new woman" in the free expression of France's national genius, and she advocates that women must contribute to society not only for their own sake, but for the greater good of all humanity. She explains that woman's participation in the community is "an asset to the mental life of any country" (117). She writes that "in France, as soon as a woman has a personality, social circumstances permit her to

make it felt" (117). She then asks her reading audience a question that Americans have often smiled at. What difference does it make Wharton asks if a young girl spends her girlhood in seclusion, "provided she is free to emerge from it at the moment when she is fitted to become a real factor in social life" (117-118)? Wharton is aware that her solution will be questioned and she responds by explaining how "the French freedom of intercourse between married men and women affects domestic life, and the happiness of a woman's husband" (118). She concludes with her lifelong philosophy on the importance of enriching life, rather than only preserving the outward concept of it. She writes that although "it is hard to say what kind of census could be devised to ascertain the relative percentage of happy marriages in the countries where different social systems prevail" and "until such a census can be taken, it is at any rate, rash to assert that the French system is less favourable to domestic happiness than the Anglo-Saxon" (118). However, she explains that:

> it acts as a greater incentive to the husband, since it rests with him to keep his wife's admiration and affection by making himself so agreeable to her, and by taking so much trouble to appear at an advantage in the presence of her men friends, that no rival shall supplant him. It would not occur to any Frenchman of the cultivated class to object to his wife's friendship with other men, and the mere fact that he has the influence of other men to compete with is likely to conduce to considerate treatment of his wife, and courteous relations in the household (118-119).

Thus, Edith Wharton remains constant in her attempt to create an intellectually independent heroine who is conscious of the continuity of custom and conformity and who grows intellectually and independently (even if not in the guise of a George Sand or an Edith Wharton), one that the American culture will accept. A heroine who could be politically aware and survive in a culture that boasts of woman's equality while retarding their progress.

The content of these two non-fiction books makes it obvious that Wharton drew upon her own life for her fiction and non-fiction, and in Chapter Three, I will examine the influence of Edith Wharton's non-fiction travel work In Morocco (1920) on her Pulitzer Prize winning novel The Age of Innocence (1920).

ENDNOTES

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4. Lewis, 342.

5. Ibid., 346.

6. Ibid., 335.

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9. Ibid., 376.

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12. Malcolm Cowley, Exile's Return. (New York: Penguin, 1986) 38.

13. Shari Benstock, Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940 (Austin, U of Texas P, 1986) 65.

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21. Ibid., 201.

22. Ibid., 201.

23. Ibid., 211.

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25. Ibid., 202.

26. Ibid., 212.

27. Gwendolyn Wright, Moralism and the Model House, 156-7.

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CHAPTER THREE

A FEMININE ACT OF VICTORY FOR EDITH WHARTON

In 1917, Edith Wharton travelled to North Africa, and three years later published her travel work In Morocco. Although she begins the book with the statement that "to land in a country without a guide-book, is a sensation to rouse the hunger of the repletest sight-seer," In Morocco is not only a record of the places she visited, but Wharton's own passionate response to the primitive conditions of this alien land, its people and their customs (3). This chapter will examine Wharton's own journey into the heart of darkness where she experiences the eternal insistence of man's uncivilized self, and the primitiveness of the patriarchy pushed to its logical and depressing extreme, and will conclude by showing how her Moroccan experience influences her Pulitzer Prize winning fiction novel, The Age of Innocence (1920).

By the time Wharton writes The Age of Innocence, her opinion on the universal condition of woman was fully formed, and her commitment to the intellectually independent woman continued to be her priority. Like a professional anthropologist, Wharton travels back to America of 1870 to examine women's lot, their economic dependence, their sexual repression, the double standards, propriety and marriage, and to show how their lives compare to women living in Morocco in 1920. In In Morocco,

Wharton sees that "the women of the richer classes, mercantile or aristocratic," like the women in the "little hieroglyphic world" of New York "never leave their harems [homes] except to be married or buried" (52). Wharton also observes that the unhealthy ignorance that characterizes Moroccan culture is as destructive as the symbol of the "innocence" that pervades New York society. In In Morocco, Wharton writes that:

> Ignorance, unhealthiness and a precocious sexual initiation prevails in all classes. Education consists in learning by heart endless passages of the Koran, and amusement in assisting at spectacles that would be unintelligible to western children, but that the pleasantries of the harem make perfectly comprehensible to Moroccan infancy. At eight or nine the little girls are married, at twelve the son of the house is 'given his first negress'; and thereafter, in the rich and leisured class both sexes live till old age in an atmosphere of sensuality without seduction (194-195).

In The Age of Innocence, the focus of Wharton's criticism is on the infantile quality of this world. Through Newland Archer, the spokesman for "masculine New York" society, Wharton explores the primitive attitude of the New York world, and its insistence to preserve all the tribal rites "that seemed to belong to" them since "the dawn of history" (12, 179). Although Archer sees the dangerous, and destructiveness of "the social system he belonged to," and "what a powerful engine it was, and how nearly it had crushed" Ellen Olenska, he remains "a dilettante" at heart, who only dreams of life outside "his carefully built-up world" which

"would tumble about him like a house of cards" if he dares to venture out of the safety of this "labyrinth" (4, 13, 75, 189).

But, it is also Wharton's design to create an atmosphere of sensuality without seduction in this "hieroglyphic world." Wharton's purpose in placing Archer's bride-to-be, and her mother on the threshold of "bouton d'or drawing room (where Beaufort had had the audacity to hang 'Love Victorious,' the much-discussed nude of Bouguereau)," is so that Archer can see both May, and the seductive picture of Bouguereau's nude at the same time (23). Wharton then describes May, and her picture is very different than the one she stands below. She portrays May as childlike, and it is obvious that her intention is to make both Archer, and her reading audience, aware of these differences. Wharton describes May Welland as innocently hanging "on the threshold," about to join the dancers, but hesitating, holding "her lilies-of-the-valley in her hand,...her face a little pale, her eyes burning with a candid excitement" as "a group of young men and girls were gathered about her, and there was much hand clasping, laughing and pleasantry on which Mrs. Welland, standing apart, shed the beam of a qualified approval. It was evident that Miss Welland was in the act of announcing her engagement" (23). However, later, when Archer pictures his forthcoming marriage to May "becoming what most other marriages about him were: a dull association of material and social interests held together by ignorance on the one side and hypocrisy

on the other," even though Archer realizes that May is the "creation of factitious purity, so cunningly manufactured by a conspiracy of mothers...and grandmothers and long-dead ancestresses," and she is "supposed to be what he wanted," he also realizes that this "conspiracy" blinds, and enslaves women (44, 45, 46). But, Archer continues to see women only as symbols of the "innocence" that pervades New York, and even when he realizes that the "innocence" May possesses is the "innocence" that "seals the mind against imagination and the heart against experience," Archer closes his heart and remains trapped in this seductive world where only his "pleasure and the passion of [his] masculine vanity" exist so that "he might exercise his lordly pleasure" (146, 46, 47). After two years of marriage, when Archer is tired of "the deadly monotony" of his life, "weary of living in a perpetual tepid honeymoon, without the temperature of passion yet with all its exactions," instead of speaking the truth about his feelings or anxieties, he evades the unpleasant and remains in this "little hieroglyphic world, where the real thing was never said or done or even thought, but only represented by a set of arbitrary signs" (239, 45). It is not ironic that when Archer wonders if May is dissatisfied with their life, his response is that if she "had spoken out her grievances he might have laughed them away" (293).

Even though Archer feels superior to the gentlemen who represent old New York gentility, because "he had probably read

more, thought more, and even seen a good deal more of the world, than any other man of the number," he realizes that their strength lies in their solidarity (8). Archer sees that although "singly they betrayed their inferiority;... grouped together they represented 'New York,' and the habit of masculine solidarity made him accept their doctrine on all issues called moral" (8). Inasmuch as Archer "instinctively felt that in this respect it would be troublesome--and also rather bad form to strike out for himself," he assumes his right to be critical of the women who were the terrifying product of this system (8). Since "Archer entirely approved of family solidarity," he feels "a thrill of possessorship in which pride in his own masculine initiation was mingled with a tender reverence for" May's purity (12, 7). It appears to be Archer's opinion that "innocence" is more apparent in the childish women of this world, and that women, once pressed into the mold of "factitious purity" never change. Although Archer feels a sense of doom when he observes that May's face has "the vacant serenity of a young marble athlete" which would probaby "thicken," like her mother's face "into the same middle-aged image of invincible innocence," he feels threatened by Ellen Olenska, who has been out in the real world and "had to look at the Gorgon" (142, 146, 288). When Archer looks at Ellen, sitting among a group of older women, he sees that their "smooth plump faces...struck him as curiously immature compared with hers," but "it frightened him to think what must have gone to the

making of her eyes" (63). Even though Ellen's "pale and serious face appealed to his fancy as suited...to her unhappy situation," her maturity, and the depth of her insight to see the truth unsettles Archer. When he ponders over her "mysterious faculty of suggesting tragic and moving possibilities outside the daily run of experience," Archer sees that Ellen has rebelled against the very society that she has come home to, to obtain her freedom (15, 76, 63, 115). However, fear of freedom makes Archer uneasy and he believes "that Count Olenski's accusation are not ununfounded" (116). Archer is unable to see Ellen as the intellectually independent woman that she is, and it is his conviction like the rest of masculine New York that she is guilty of having an affair with her husband's secretary, who helped her escape from her unhappy marriage. Archer's response is mixed:

> The conditions from which she had fled were intolerable, past speaking of, past believing; she was young, she was frightened, she was desperate--what more natural than that she should be grateful to her rescuer? The pity was that her gratitude put her, in the law's eyes and the world's, on a par with her abominable husband. Archer had made her understand this, as he was bound to do; he had also made her understand that simple-hearted kindly New York, on whose charity she had apparently counted, was precisely the place where she could least hope for indulgence (116).

However, Archer also "felt himself drawn to her by obscure feelings of jealousy and pity" (116). His jealousy came from Ellen's "thirst for even the loneliest kind of freedom. But the

idea of Beaufort gnawed him" (77). Even though Archer feels that he must protect Ellen and her honour from the other members of "masculine New York," he still categorizes her in the same way as his former mistress, Mrs. Thorley Rushmore, the women whom he once enjoyed, and now pities (96). Like all the other generous minded men of old New York, Archer lords his power over women, since it is assumed that "a woman's standard of truthfulness was tacitly held to be lower" than man's and "she was the subject creature,...versed in the arts of the enslaved" (305).

However, it was not Wharton's only intention to show women's "innocence" as destructive, and the focus of her criticism in The Age of Innocence, is on the destructive quality of the American patriarchal system, and its aversion to the intelligent female. Wharton's most poignant criticism of masculine New York is expressed through Ellen Olenska, who has not only experienced the tyranny of masculine New York towards its women in the past, but also understands that her future freedom lies in their hands. When Ellen appears in Granny Mingott's box, having just run away from her unhappy marriage, it is immediately obvious that she sees beyond the cunning, destructive childishness of patriarchal New York. Ellen is not ignorant of the hypocrisy of this world with its double standards of freedom for its men, and the rigid conventions it imposes on its women. Ellen understands that it is not marital fidelity that is valued in New York, but that the appearance of it is essential in order

not to disrupt masculine New York's scandalous lifestyle. When Ellen first sees Archer she says that she remembers him as a child. Her first words to Archer are that "we did use to play together, didn't we?...You were a horrid boy, and kissed me once behind a door; but it was your cousin Vandie Newland, who never looked at me, that I was in love with...Ah, how this brings it all back to me--I see everybody here in knickerbockers and pantalettes" (18). Ellen exposes the destructive cruelity of the childish games they are still playing as grown men, and the hypocrisy of the double standards of this highly cultivated culture. Obviously, Archer does not see what Ellen sees, and he never will. When their eyes meet Archer sees the agreeable expression in Ellen's eyes, but he is "shocked that they should reflect so unseemly a picture of the august tribunal before which, at the very moment, her case was being tried" (18).

The intrusion of Ellen Olenska frightens and disturbs New York society, and The Age of Innocence is the story of how this society deals with her. Ellen Olenska comes home to the United States to escape an unsuccessful marriage with a Polish Count, and she desires her freedom in order to wipe out her unhappy past. However, even though American laws allow a woman to divorce, society dictates that marriage is the highest estate. Ellen cannot obtain her divorce, and she is considered dangerous by a society that cannot include intellectually independent women into their "little hieroglyphic world."

It is Wharton's opinion that because Archer's old New York is inhibited by the childish qualities that their society value, they lack "intellectual honesty," and the courage to see the truth. In French Ways and Their Meaning, Wharton draws on her own childhood experience, and suggests that intellectual honesty is important for children so that when they become adults their mental maturity will contribute to the moral quality of their own lives, as well as to the greater good of society at large. She writes that such inhibitions

> take the imagination far back to the childhood of the human race, when terrors and taboos lurked in every bush; and wherever fear of the thing it has created survives in the mind of any society, that society is still in its childhood. Intellectual honesty, the courage to look things as they are, is the first test of mental maturity. Till a society ceases to be afraid of the truth the domain of ideas it is in leading-strings, morally and mentally (58-59).

However, in The Age of Innocence, Ellen is the only person who possesses the courage to see things as they are, while Archer and the rest of his world are arrested in a perpetual state of childlike "innocence." Ellen's presence, and the ideas she sparks about women having the same freedom as men, is too risky for this world. Although Archer considers the idea of freedom for women, and has ambitious plans for the development of making his future wife into the wife he would like her to be since

> he did not in the least wish the future Mrs. Newland Archer to be a simpleton. He meant her (thanks to his enlighting companionship) to develop a social tact and readiness of wit enabling her to hold her own with the most popular married women of the "younger set," in which it was the recognized custom to attract masculine homage while playfully discouraging it. If he had probed to the bottom of his vanity (as he sometimes nearly did) he would have found there the wish that his wife should be as worldly-wise and as eager to please as the married lady whose charms had held his fancy through two mildly agitated years (7).

The irony of this passage creates the impression that Archer is an egotistical young man who blithely adheres to the double standard of masculine New York. Archer does not see that Ellen is the woman he is looking for. She has "the experience, the versatility, the freedom of judgment" necessary for a successful married life, but she is not the one he will marry. Archer is inhibited by the childish beliefs of his society, and is afraid to see the truth, and seals his heart against experience. He can only sees the danger in questioning the moral values of his world, and readily agrees with society's decision to regard this problem as non-existent (43). Archer then justifies this reasoning by explaining that, of course

> 'Nice' women, however wronged, would never claim the kind of freedom he meant, and generous-minded men like himself were therefore--in the heat of argument--the more chivalrously ready to concede it to them. Such verbal generosities were in fact only a humbugging disguise of the inexorable conventions that tied things together and bound people down to the old patterns (43-44).

Archer like everyone else he knows, would prefer not to deal with Ellen. He could not really see why her fate should have the least bearing on his" (47). "And, in spite of the cosmopolitan views on which he prided himself," Archer "thanked heaven that he was a New Yorker, and about to ally himself with one of his own kind" (32).

In this "hieroglyphic world" divorce is taboo. Wharton's portrayal of patriarchal American society, and the unchanging exorable conventions that bind people together reflects the unchanging conditions in Morocco. In In Morocco, Wharton's chapter on architecture is her most telling comparison to the world represented only by arbitrary signs, in America, and the world she describes in Morocco. Wharton writes that:

> The whole of civilian Moslem architecture from Persia to Morocco is based on four unchanging conditions: a hot climate, slavery, polygamy and the segregation of women. The private house in Mahometan countries is in fact a fortress, a convent and a temple: a temple of which the god (as in all ancient religions) frequently descends to visit his cloistered votaresses. For where slavery and polygamy exist every house-master is necessarily a god, and the house he inhabits a shrine built about his divinity (266).

It becomes obvious that this most telling comparison of Moroccan architecture resembles the structure of old New York society in The Age of Innocence. The "unchanging condition" of architecture in Morocco appears to be similar to the unchanging primitive and

barbaric treatment of the American patriarchal system towards its women. At the top of the pyramid in masculine old New York are the van der Luydens, who are not only the architects of the morals of society, but whose four homes represent the ideality of "fashionable" old New York. The van der Luydens divide their time "between Trevanna, their place in Maryland, and Skuyter-cliff, the great estate on the Hudson which had been one of the colonial grants of the Dutch government to the famous first govenor, and of which Mr. van der Luyden was still 'Patroon'" (51). But, when they descend to visit old New York, they reside in "their large solemn house in Madison Avenue," which "was seldom opened," and then "they received in it only their most intimate friends" (51). On the other hand, Ellen's "hired" house, far down West Twenty-third Street, where "small dressmakers, bird-stuffers and 'people who wrote' were her nearest neighbors" is thought of as unacceptable for old New York's "fashionable" society (68). Although this street is considered respectable, Ellen has "never been in a city where there seems to be such a feeling against living in des quartiers ex-centriques" (74).

While travelling in Morocco, Wharton probes a culture based on male tyranny and female enslavement. Even though Wharton says that "there are few points of contact between the open-air occidental mind and beings imprisoned in a conception of sexual and domestic life based on slave service and incessant espionage," her depiction of the generations of child-like women

in The Age of Innocence, who spend their lives with their eyes bandaged before they descend into the family vault is not essentially different than the "colourless eventless lives" of the women living in harems, in Morocco (193). In "In Morocco: Edith Wharton's Heart of Darkness," Judith E. Funston writes that:

> although Wharton notes again and again the 'abyss' between Moroccan and Western conceptions of life, her protestations hint at a real doubt that Western society essentially differs from Eastern where white women are concerned. The Age of Innocence,...focuses on the heart of darkness beneath the sunny idyll of old New York: the novel explores a society where women are treated as chattels and are themselves trained to perpetuate such treatment. [1]

In In Morocco, Wharton paints a vivid picture of the dangerous, destructive "innocence" that characterizes the quality of these women's lives. She writes that:

> These languid women on their muslin cushions toil not, neither do they spin. The Moroccan lady knows little of cooking, needlework or any household arts... And all these colourless eventless lives depend on the favour of one fat tyrannical man, bloated with good living and authority, himself almost as inert and sedentary as his women, and accustomed to impose his whims on them ever since he ran about the the same patio as a little short-smocked boy (193).

For Wharton, the segregation of women was horrible, and these imprisoned beings, and the expression of vacuity on their faces haunted her.

Thus, it is Wharton's decided intention to show that the enslavement of women was essential to the structure of both cultures. Like the Moroccan world of ignorance and intrigue, Archer's "little hieroglyphic world" is "held together by ignorance on the one side and hypocrisy on the other" (45). Here, every man like "the slippered Fazi merchant," in Morocco, dreams of a leisurely life that consists of "ease, music" and "the affairs of his harem." In The Age of Innocence, Lawrence Lefferts represents this ideal (90). Like the house-masters of the Mahometan countries, who descend frequently on their cloistered votaresses, Lefferts, the "high priest of form," has created "a shrine about his divinity," that Archer sees as the enviable ideal. "He had formed a wife so completely to his convenience that, in the most conspicuous moments his frequent love affairs with other men's wives, she went about smiling unconsciousness, saying that 'Lawrence was so frightfully strict'; and had been known to blush indignantly, and avert her gaze, when someone alluded in her presence to the fact that Julius Beaufort...had what was known in New York as 'another establishment'" (45).

In Edith Wharton's Argument with America, Elizabeth Ammons has argued that "in The Age of Innocence,...the free expression of female sexuality represents a profound threat to patriarchal power, and is therefore assiduously guarded against. Turned around: the most desirable wife in the eyes of the patriarchate

(and marriage, of course, is the sine qua non of patriarchal power) is not sexual, whether she is one of many women in a harem in Marrakech,...or Mrs. Newland Archer in leisure-class New York." [2]

For Wharton, the principles of "the chosen specimens" guarding their hieroglypic world are not entirely unlike those of the Moroccan chieftain whose first thoughts were always defensive. In In Morocco, Wharton writes that

> each little centre of culture and luxury in Moghreb was an islet in a sea of perpetual storms. The wonder is that, thus incessantly threatened from without and conspired against from within--with the desert on their doors, and their slaves on the threshold--these violent men managed to create about them an atmosphere of luxury and stability (267).

Obviously, she sees the parallel between the chieftains of this violent world, and the primitive tribal world of old New York. In The Age of Innocence, Ellen Olenska is as much a threat to masculine New York's "atmosphere of luxury and stability" as "the hungry hordes who" threaten to overthrow the Moroccan chieftain. Ellen's desire to lead her own life, independently, upsets New York society's most basic principles of order and authority. Ellen's openness threatens to expose masculine old New York's pleasurable life, and their adulterous affairs, which are tolerated, because they are hidden. Since Ellen poses a real threat within the old patriarchal order in her rebellion against

the masculine ideal of feminine weakness, and against marriages that enslave women, she is forced to return to Europe. Thus, the silent organization which held Archer's world together was determined like the tribal chiefs to maintain its appearance of stability, and Ellen, who was falsely accused of being her husband's secretary's lover is now falsely accused of being Archer's lover and is "eliminated" from the tribe (334).

Wharton sees the unhealthiness of this destructive world where "the rich and leisured...of both sexes live" in fear of scandal more than disease. In this deceptive atmosphere "all...amiable and inexonerable persons" who "were resolutely engaged in pretending to each other," live like the people of Morocco, in a similar sedentary state of sensuality without seduction." It now becomes clear that Wharton's intention is to show that "innocence" is "only an artificial product," and that every person in this world is doubly trapped by their refusal to grow up in fear of being alienated from the tribe that lives in this valley of childish things.

The picture Wharton paints of old New York in The Age of Innocence, with its retreat from the real, and consequent imprisonment of the self is the same picture she describes in her short story "The Valley of Childish Things," and a reality she witnesses in the primitivism of Moroccan culture, which serves to confirm the eternal insistence of man's uncivilized self. Eliza-

beth Ammons says that as lovely as this book is, it "amounts to a sort of laboratory study of the fundamental, primitive attitudes that mold patriarchal aversion to the mature female." [3]

Thus, in writing The Age of Innocence, Wharton uncovers the psychological and sexual control that America still exercises over women, and she describes the rituals that civilized New York society upholds, and that "played a part as important in Newland Archer's New York as the inscrutable totem terrors that had ruled the destinies of his forefathers thousands of years ago" (4). Although none of the New York rituals compare to the bestial horror of the dance of the Hamadchas which she witnessed in Morocco, it was Wharton's opinion that civilized old New York had its own way "of taking life 'without effusion of blood'" (335).

By contrasting the past with the present, Wharton like Sir James Frazer, in In Morocco traces the link between the violence of contemporary savage tribal behavior and urban civilized behavior "back to the depths of that ensanguined grove where Mr. Fraser plucked the Golden Bough" (56). When Wharton travels across the desert in Morocco, she looks into "the heart of a savage Saharan camp," and at first, is surprised at the serenity and balance of this hidden oasis (148, 157). But, as she questions "how came such fragile loveliness to survive,... behind a screen of tumbling walls, of nettles and offal and dead beasts," she realizes that these questions

> inevitably bring one back to the central riddle of the mysterious North African civilization: the perpetual flux and the immovable stability, the barbarous customs and sensuous refinements, the absence of artistic originality and the gift for regrouping borrowed motives, the patient and exquisite workmanship and the immediate neglect and degradation of the thing once made....Revering the dead and camping on their graves, elaborating exquisite monuments only to abandon and defile them, venerating scholarship and wisdom and living in ignorance and grossness, these gifted races, perpetually struggling to reach some higher level of culture from which they have always been swept down by a fresh wave of barbarism, are only people in the making (157).

Obviously, for Wharton, the contemporary tribal behavior of this "mysterious North African civilization" does not essentially differ from what Thorstein Veblen analyzes as the behavior of the American leisure-class, which exemplifies all of the above archaic traits, as well as the barbaric desire to surpass his neighbor (as discussed in Chapter 1, 32). In her chapter called "A Sketch of Moroccan History," Wharton writes that the ethnologist who attempts to define the racial background of Morocco "is faced by the same problem as the historian of modern America who should try to find the racial definition of an 'American'" (222-223). She goes on to explain that:

> For centuries, for ages North Africa has been what America now is: the clearing-house of the world. When at length it occured to the explorer that the natives of North Africa were not all Arabs or Moors, he was bewildered by the many vistas of all they were or might be: so many and tangled were the threads leading up to them, so interwoven was their pre-Islamite culture with worn out shreds of older

and richer societies (232-233).

In The Theory of the Leisure Class, Veblen has argued that American society aspires to leisure-class ideals. However, he recognizes the dangers of emulation, and sees that the re-organization of this society is based only on the "appearance" of change, rather than on real change. Veblen writes that "there is no class and no country that has yielded so abjectly before the pressure of physical want as to deny themselves all gratification of this higher or spiritual need." [4] Veblen's theory of the American leisure-class is similar to Wharton's understanding of the mysterious North African civilization. Veblen observes that the "perpetual flux and immovable stability" that prevails in primitive civilizations pervades modern American civilized communities where

> the lines of demarcation between social classes have grown vague and transient, and wherever this happens the norm of reputability imposed by the upper class extends its coercive influence with but slight hindrance down through the social structure to the lowest strata. The result is that the members of each stratum accept as their ideal of decency the scheme of life in vogue in the next higher stratum, and bend their energies to live up to that ideal. [5]

From this vantage point, it becomes clear that contemporary American society and North African civilization share many of the same archaic traits. Veblen has argued that an environment,

unrealistically based only on images lacks the creativity for change, while the "ideal of decency" is divined by the conspicuous consumption of desirable things, and the need to constantly reach "the next higher stratum" on pain of forfeiting one's "good name and their self-respect." [6] Wharton sees similar qualities in the customs of the Moroccan tribes, in their "gift for regrouping borrowed motives," and in their need to reach some higher level of culture, and it appears to be her opinion that they remain intellectually and artistically ignorant because their ideals are based on unrealistic expectations. For Veblen modern man is living still within the same dark shadow of primitivism, and possesses the same primal tribal characteristics for regrouping in his blind desire to "conform to the accepted code, at least in appearance." [7]

Therefore, Wharton is not alone in her view that contemporary America is not unlike the unstable Moroccan culture. Wharton looks at her past as an anthropologist looks at a foreign culture, and in A Backward Glance, she explains why contemporary America is unstable. Wharton writes that the New Yorkers of her day neglected state and national politics, "from which they had long disdainfully held aloof, by upholding the sternest principles of business probity, and inflicting the severest social penalties on whoever lapsed from them " (22). Wharton sees that the root of the problem stems from "the weakness of the

social structure of my [her] parents' day" their "blind dread ofinnovation," and their "instinctive shrinking from responsibility" (22). These are the same qualities that the New Yorkers in The Age of Innocence possess, and that Wharton criticizes because they live in an irresponsible state of perpetual childhood.

In 1917, when Wharton was invited on an official tour to Morocco, she accepted General Lyautey's invitation. Although Judith E. Funston has suggested that General Lyautey probably arranged this holiday for Wharton "in recognition of her relief work in France during the war," it is Wharton's decided intention to see, and write about the customs of another culture. [8]

In a letter to André Gide dated August 10, 1917, Wharton writes that Gide's "beautiful evocation of the desert" from his book L'Immoraliste, in which he narrates his own adventures in North Africa, and compares the customs and morality of its culture to his own, has given her "an advance-taste of what is waiting for [her] there." [9] She then tells Gide that she "will be conducted by an auto from Tangier to Fez, Rabat, and even it seems, as far as Marrakech," and even though she realizes that the trip will be extremely tiring, Wharton says that "the itinerary tempts [her] very much." [10]

Therefore, Wharton's trip to Morocco was more than a well

deserved holiday. In the Preface of the first edition of In Morocco, Wharton describes her intention when she writes that she began this book because "Morocco still lacks a guide-book," and she wishes "to take a first step toward remedying that deficiency" (vii). Wharton sees that "Morocco is too curious, too beautiful, too rich in landscape and architecture,... not to attract one of the main streams of spring travel as soon as Mediterranean passenger travel is resumed," and once this deluge of tourism "is let loose," she exclaims, "no eye will ever again see Moulay Idriss and Fez and Marrakech as I saw them" (ix) (my emphasis). Through her own experiences, as a woman, and as a writer, Wharton saw that war had many diverse results, but the one dominant theme transcending all others was her belief that the world before 1914 was a time that never could be restored. Thus, Wharton, the writer sees that in spite of

> the incessant efforts of the present French administration to preserve the old monuments of Morocco from injury, and her native arts and industries from the corruption of European bad taste, the impression of mystery and remoteness which the country now produces must inevitably vanish with the approach of the "Circular Ticket." Within a few years far more will be known of the past of Morocco, but that past will be far less visible to the traveller than it is to-day (ix).

Wharton then goes on to explain that her impressions during the last phase of war are important since they record the past, and she writes that:

> to see Morocco during the war was therefore to see it in the last phase of its curiously abrupt transition from remoteness and danger to security and accessibility; at a moment when its aspect and its customs were still almost unaffected by European influences, and when the 'Christian' might taste the transient joy of wandering unmolested in cities of ancient mystery and hostility, whose inhabitants seemed hardly aware of his intrusion (6).

At first Wharton experiences "the transient joy of wandering unmolested in cities of ancient mystery and hostility," and as Judith E. Funston explains,

> As a woman traveling throughout Morocco, Wharton was entering uncharted territory, literally and figuratively, and her acute awareness of herself as a pioneer informs the book. Conscious that Morocco is 'a country without a guide-book,'...she exercises the male prerogative of naming and mapmaking. As a manifestation of her feminism, Wharton's Moroccan experience lies at the center of her art. [11]

Although Funston has argued that In Morocco offers us a glimpse of the artist as a woman, it is important to see that Wharton the artist remains constant in her commitment to woman by writing about her own lifetime experiences, and that her concern for the quality of life is clearly expressed throughout her work. In her early non-fiction work, The Decoration of Houses (1898), as well as in her later non-fiction work, Fighting France: published in 1915, and French Ways and Their Meaning, published in 1919, Wharton is constantly searching for ideas that integrate art into life, in order to improve the quality of life for men, women and

children. In Morocco, Wharton integrates life into art, as she first records her impressions as a writer, but as Wharton wanders invisibly into the dark heart of Moroccan culture, she is shocked by the hostility of a culture predicated on male tyranny and on female enslavement, and this book clearly manifests Wharton's passionate response, as a writer, and as a woman, who probes below the surface of appearance, and witnesses the vulnerable position of all men, women and children who live in a culture founded on slavery. In Morocco is an important, and an illuminating document, in which Wharton describes her impressions, of the different people who inhabit this ancient land. Thus, Wharton's feeling for the organic ties of life goes beyond the animation of Tangier's market-places and steep Arab streets swarming with people in European clothes. Wharton looks "beyond the last dip of 'the Mountain,'" into the world of mystery, as she steps over the threshold into a primitive world. In the many-walled town of Fez, Wharton describes the distances as so great, and "the streets so narrow, and in some quarters so crowded, that all but saints or humble folks go about on mule-back" (88). Wharton then writes that:

> Some of these descending lanes were packed with people, others as deserted as a cemetary; and it was strange to pass from the thronged streets leading to the bazaars to the profound and secretive silence of a quarter of well-to-do dwelling houses, where only a few veiled women attended by negro slaves moved noiselessly over the clean cobblestones, and the sound of fountains and runnels came from hidden courtyards and over garden-

walls (89).

She goes on to explain that the noise of water "is as characteristic of Fez as of Damascus," and that "the central artery of the city is not a street but a waterfall;" and she says that "tales are told of the dark uses to which, even now, the underground currents are put by some of the dwellers behind the blank walls...of those highly respectable streets" (89). But, then Wharton reaches the central bazaar where she sees what promises to be a "fantastic revelations of native life," and she vividly describes the

> negro water carriers, muffled women, beggars streaming with sores, sinewy and greasy 'saints,' Soudanese sorcerers hung with amulets made of sardine-boxes and hares'-feet, longlashed boys of the Chleuh in clean embroidered caftans, Jews in black robes and skull-caps, university students carrying their prayer-carpets, bangled and spangled black women, scofulous children with gazelle eyes and mangy skulls, and blind men tapping along with linked arms and howling out verses of the Koran, surge together in a mass drawn by irrestible suction to the point where the bazaars converge about the mosques of Moulay Idriss and El Karouiyin (91).

Wharton then says that "the crowd in Oriental cities is made up of many elements, and in Morocco Turks, Jews and infidels, Berbers of the mountains, fanatics of the confraternities, Soudanese blacks and haggard Blue Men of the Souss, jostle the merchants and government officials with that democratic

familiarity which goes side by side with abject servility in this land of perpetual contradictions" (89-90).

Then it becomes clear that while Wharton transforms her Morocco experience into a work of art, she is acutely sensitive to the light and dark shades of the "perpetual contradictions," and the deceptive appearance of this society, and she consistently inscribes these contradictions throughout her entire work. At the end of her chapter on Fez, Wharton creates a perfect tension between the refinement and the savagery she encounters as she moves back in time. She observes that:

> in a rich man's doorway slaves are sleeping, huddled on the tiles. A cock crows from somebody's dunghill; a skeleton dog prowls by for garbage....Everywhere is the loud rush or the low crooning of water, and over every wall comes the scent of jasmine and rose. Far off, from the red purgatory between the walls, sounds the savage thrum-thrum of a negro orgy; here all is peace and perfume. A minaret springs up between the roof like a palm, and from its balcony the little white figure bends over and drops a blessing on all the loveliness and all the squalor (118-119).

In her chapter called "General Lyautey's Work in Morocco," Wharton writes that General Lyautey who "has twice saved Morocco from destruction: once in 1912, when the inertia and double dealing of Abd-el-Hafid abandoned the country to the rebellious tribes who attacked him in Fez, and the second time in August, 1914, when Germany declared war on France" (209). Wharton states that once the military danger had subsided, General

Lyautey as one of the clear-sighted administrators "began his great task of civilian administration. His aim was to support and strengthen the existing government, to reassure and pacify the distrustful and antagonistic elements, and to assert French authority without irritating or discouraging native ambitions" (211). Although Wharton is always charmed, and intrigued at what she sees, she is always aware of the mystery and hostility that underlies the beauty of this alien land, and as she travels further and further into this land, she begins to feel vulnerable, and sensitive to the hostility that surrounds her. This becomes obvious from her remark that "everywhere behind the bristling walls and rock-clamped towers of old Morocco lurks the shadowy spirit of instability....Change is the rule in this apparently unchanged civilization, where 'nought may abide but Mutability'" (235). In Morocco, Wharton sees the primitiveness of this patriarchal culture pushed to a despairing extreme. Even though Wharton acknowledges that certain changes have taken place under the French imperial regime, she understands that women's lot has not. She sees that "overripeness is indeed the characteristic of this rich and stagnant civilization" where "buildings, people, customs, seem all about to crumble and fall of their own weight" (85). But, most telling is Wharton's remark that "nothing is as democratic in appearance as a society of which the whole structure hangs on the whim of one man" (85, 163).

Wharton's pattern of light and dark then intensifies as she visits Marrakech, the great market of the south. She says that "the south means not only the Atlas with its feudal chiefs and their wild clansmen, but all that lies beyond of heat and savagery" (134). Wharton goes on to explain that "the population of this old city of the southern march has always been even more mixed than that of the northerly Moroccan towns. It is made up of the descendants of all the peoples conquered by a long line of Sultans who brought their trains of captives across the sea from Moorish Spain and across the Sahara from Timbuctoo" (134). But, then Wharton senses something more in this meeting of peoples in the bazaar, and she notes how the physical landscape suggests the darkness of this culture. She states that the souks of Marrakech are dark, fierce and fanatical like its people. Although she says that "they are mere mud lanes roofed with rushes, as in South Tunisia and Timbuctoo, and the crowds swarming in them are so dense that it is hardly possible, at certain hours, to approach the tiny raised kennels where the merchants sit like idols among their wares," Wharton is aware that there is something more dear than bargaining to "the African heart," which animates "these incessantly moving throngs" (135). She feels that "the Souks of Marrakech seem, more than any others, the central organ of a native life that extends far beyond the city walls into secret clefts of the mountains and faroff oases where plots are hatched, and holy wars formented"

(135). Here, Wharton experiences the "unimaginable touch of time," and she sees how the past and the present are entwined, and how traditions and rituals are woven into daily life (29). However, as she probes deeper into this land of darkness, she sees exactly what constitutes a society structured on "the whim of one man," and Wharton's documentation of this savage scene becomes a descent into hell as she glimpses far over the hot yellow deserts where

> negroes are secretly brought across the Atlas to that inmost recess of the bazaar where the the ancient traffic in flesh and blood still surreptitiously goes on....All these many threads of native life, woven of greed, and lust, of fetichism and fear and blind hate of the strangers, form, in the souks, a thick network in which at times one's feet seem literally to stumble. Fanatics in sheepskins glowering from the guarded thresholds of the mosques, fierce tribesmen with inlaid arms in their belts and the fighters' tufts of wiry hair escaping from camel's-hair turbans, mad negroes standing stark naked in niches of the walls and pouring down Soudanese incantations upon the fascinated crowd, consumptive Jews with pathos and cunning in their large eyes and smiling lips, lusty slave-girls with earthen oil-jars resting against swaying hips, almond-eyed boys leading fat merchants by the hand, and bare-legged Berber women, tattooed and insolently gay, trading their striped blankets, or bags of dried roses and irises, for sugar, tea or Manchester cottons--from all these hundreds of unknown and unknowable people, bounded together by secret affinities, or intriguing against each other with secret hate, there emanates an atmosphere of mystery and menace more stifling than the smell of camels and spices and black bodies and smoking fry which hangs like a fog under the close roofing of the SOUK (136-137). (my emphasis).

This picture creates the mysterious and menacing "atmosphere,"

that Wharton encounters in this patriarchal culture constituted solely on abject servility of both its men and its women.

Judith E. Funston has argued that Chapter V, "Harems and Ceremonies," "is the core of In Morocco, in that Wharton probes the heart of darkness of Moroccan culture,...and indeed Wharton's feminism distinguishes this book from the typical collection of travel sketches." [12] Here, Wharton is deeply touched by the women she sees, and it is clear that in this chapter, she feels overwhelmed by her own emotions as she responds to the "pale flock" of young girls and women of the harem, who are caged "in stuffy curtained apartment[s]" (187, 192). She is sympathetic to these women, and understands the hopelessness of their lot and her description of her meeting with them indicates this. Wharton says that after a brief exchange of compliments, the women fell silent under the watchful eye of their guardian, and that she felt drained by the benumbing process of conversing through an interpreter. She writes that:

> after struggling for a while longer with a conversation which the watchful brother-in-law continued to direct as he pleased, I felt my own lips stiffening into the resigned smile of the harem (187).

Wharton sees the vacant expression imprinted on these women's faces, and their remote and passive eyes haunt her. After her visit Wharton reflects "what thoughts, what speculations,... go

on under the narrow veiled brows of the little creatures destined to the high honour of marriage or concubinage in Moroccan palaces" (187)? Wharton is totally disillusioned by this systematic enslavement of women, and she explains how these young girls "are brought down from mountains and cedar forest, from the free life of the tents where the nomad women go unveiled," while others who are "born and bred in an airy palace among pomegranate gardens and white terraces" (187-188). Wharton is outraged at the idea that while these girls are tripping unveiled on the "blue terraces overlooking the gardens of the great," they are seen by "a fat vizier or his pale young master," who can acquire them for a handsome sum, and transfer them "to the painted sepulchre of the harem," where a patriarchal society turns these women into listless "cellar-grown flowers" (188, 192).

It could be argued that it is Wharton's decided intention in In Morocco, to document women's lot in another culture. Wharton begins her search for women, and tries to understand the role they play in this culture in the first chapter. It is Wharton's design to describe the physical landscape first in order to show her audience exactly what the dark mystery of this culture is. When she speaks of the desert as an immense waste of fallow land, an empty land made up of parched earth and rock, "an earth as void of life as the sky above it of clouds," Wharton is using the desert as a metaphor, in order to magnify the immense waste of the lives of the women, who are enslaved behind the

blind mysterious house-fronts that represent the overwhelming splendors of harem life (9, 189). Wharton is horrified by the stagnant atmosphere that these women live in, and she is extremely sensitive to the isolation these women's experience within their prison walls. Her remark "that no one from the outer world should come to remind these listless creatures that somewhere the gulls dance on the Atlantic and the wind murmurs through olive-yards and clatters the metallic fronds of palm-groves" is her indictment on the cruelty inflicted on these women, who dwell in limbo at the gates of the inferno. Thus, Wharton's account of her own descent into the mouldering prison called a harem is poignant. In "an almost subterranean labyrinth which sun and air never reach," Wharton touches the heart of darkness with her own hand, and the reader can feel her heart sink as she describes her own

> descent through the steep tunnelled streets [which] gave one the sense of being lowered into the shaft of a mine. At each step the strip of sky grew narrower, and was more often obscured by the low vaulted passages into which we plunged. The noises of the Bazaar had died out, and only the sound of fountains behind garden walls and the clatter of our mules' hoofs on the stones went with us. Then fountains and gardens ceased also, the towering masonry closed in, and we entered an almost subterranean labyrinth which sun and air never reach (189).

For Wharton, the mysterious splendor of Morocco is deceptive. Wharton is disgusted by the enslavement of women in the harems,

and her statement that "the scenery" in the desert "is always the same," becomes a metaphor for the sameness of women's lot in Morocco both in the desert and in the cities (9).

In The Age of Innocence, Wharton's depiction of Mrs. Archer, Newland Archer's mother, is representative of the sameness of women's lot in old New York, which is not essentially different than the sedentary lives of the women in Morocco. In In Morocco, Wharton writes that while visiting a dignitary's home, she is told that women of the highest class never have any desire "to travel, or to visit the Bazaars," they occupy themselves solely "with their household and their children, and the rest of their time is devoted to needlework" (186). In The Age of Innocence, Wharton states that Mrs. Archer "was a shy woman" who "shrank from society," but quickly adds that she lived a quiet life" squeezed...into narrower quarters below," while the upper floor was dedicated to her son, Newland (33-34). Wharton says that in this atmosphere of "unclouded harmony of tastes and interests" she "cultivated ferns in Wardian cases, made macrame lace and wool embroidery on linen" (34). Even though "Mrs. and Miss Archer were both great lovers of scenery," which they admired on their rare trips abroad, they considered "architecture and painting as subjects for men," which clearly suggests their limitations, are not unsimilar to those of the women in harems (34, 35). Here, Wharton uncovers the psychological and sexual control that the patriarchy in both America and the Eastern world

exercises over women, who are isolated and enslaved within their physical environment. Wharton carefully charts Mrs. Archer's family tree, and writes that "Mrs. Archer had been born a Newland, and mother and daughter, who were as like as sisters,... tall, pale, and slightly round shouldered, with long noses, sweet smiles and a kind of drooping distinction, like that in certain faded Reynolds portraits" (35). It becomes obvious that Wharton is not writing about a strong female line, but is comparing the women who dwell in masculine New York to the women of Morocco, who also wear the same look of somewhat melancholy respectability, and live behind mysterious housefronts. Mrs. Archer, and her daughter Janey, not only resemble the pale, frail cellar grown flowers of Morocco but they revere their son and brother, and cater to his every whim: while Archer, like the leisure-class house-masters of Morocco, enjoys this shrine which his mother and sister have built about his divinity, and strongly feels that it is "a good thing for a man to have his authority respected in his own house" (35). It is Wharton's point of view that the women of old New York like the women of Morocco are unconscious of the outer world, and when Ellen enters the scene with different ideas of what life is supposed to be, she is shunned. As Elizabeth Ammons has argued Wharton's criticism "of the patriarchy is in her emphasis of the absence of sexual passion in the harem, which is supposedly the most sexy of all male-oriented systems....and in The Age of Innocence, that the free expression of female

sexuality represents a profound threat to patriarchal power, and is therefore assiduously guarded against." [13] In Archer's eyes, and in the eyes of masculine New York, the most desirable women are those who are slaves to tradition, like his mother, his sister and his wife May, whose memory he venerates after her death. When he looks at the first photograph May had given him, he becomes aware that throughout her life she had always been the same "generous, faithful, unwearied" person, "but so lacking in imagination, so incapable of growth, that the world of her youth had fallen into pieces and rebuilt without her ever being conscious of the change. This hard bright blindness had kept her immediate horizon apparently unaltered. Her incapacity to recognize change made her children conceal their views from her as Archer concealed his; there had been, from the first, a joint pretense of sameness, a kind of innocent family hypocrisy," (348). Wharton's statement that May died "thinking the world a good place, full of loving and harmonious households like her own" represents the unreality of her world (348). Wharton's description of May "having snatched" her son "from the grave, and given her life in the effort," and then going "contendedly to her place in the Archer vault in St. Mark's, where Mrs. Archer already lay safe" is the natural end for the child-woman created for men, who conforms to the masculine ideal of feminine weakness. But, here, like in her description of the inevitable fate of the young girls, who spend their lives in the twilight of the

harem, Wharton is outraged. One of the final ironies in this novel is Archer's discovery of May's intelligence and courage to see the truth, only after her death. The day before her death, May had confided to her eldest son that she knew that they would be safe with their father, "and always would be, because once, when she asked" him he had given up the one thing he wanted (356).

Thus, Wharton's commitment to the intellectually independent women is apparent throughout her work. In the first chapter of In Morocco, she begins her search for woman, and her statement that in the desert "every landmark takes on extreme value," and "for miles one watches for the appearance of a human figure," clearly signifies Wharton's intention to see the human condition of this alien land through a woman's eyes (9). When she sees two mysterious riders, Wharton writes that the most exciting experience for her was her "encounter of the first veiled woman heading a little cavalcade from the south," and she immediately prophesizes that "all the mystery that awaits us looks out through the eyeslits in the grave-clothes muffling her" (10). Wharton's statement "that until one has known the wilderness one cannot begin to understand the cities," indicates her intention to show that the women who live in the remote and dangerous desert are just as enslaved by their physical environment as the women who dwell in "secretive silence" in "well-to-do dwelling houses" in the cities (89).

In The Age of Innocence, Wharton examines the sameness of women's lives in masculine old New York through Ellen Olenska's eyes. In the first chapter, Ellen's mysterious appearance in Granny Mingott's opera box is as significant for Wharton as her encounter with her first veiled women. Ellen's remark to Archer that "this dear old place is heaven," suggests that Ellen, who has travelled afar, and now mysteriously returns to this society bounded together by secret affinities, will uncover the truth underlying the sunny idyllic face of old New York (18). The fact that Ellen refers to this place as "heaven" seems to correspond with Wharton's observation of the monotony of the unchanging conditions in Morocco, and Wharton's realization of the radical difference between the Western and oriental concept of time is important. Although Western time is linear, and Moroccan time is circular, Ellen's arrival into this deceptive world of old New York reveals that the trends of her culture are comparable to the monotony of "oriental" life, which Wharton finds to have no beginning and no ending. It is Wharton's intention to demonstrate the unchanging condition of New York society through Ellen's decided differences. Wharton writes that although "it was generally agreed in New York that the Countess Olenska had 'lost her looks,'" and "many people were disappointed that her appearance was not more 'stylish'-for stylishness was what New York most valued," there was "about her the mysterious authority of beauty, a sureness in the carriage of

the head, the movement of the eyes, which without being in the least theatrical" were "full of conscious power" (59, 61). However, it is Ellen's "conscious power" that stirs up deep feelings in Archer, and old New York society. Archer sees that Ellen is "the kind of person to whom things were bound to happen, no matter how much she shrank from them and went out of her way to avoid them" (116). But, Archer's attitude to Ellen is ambivalent; while he admires her quietness, he distrusts her "conscious power," and feels that she is different because, she has "lived in an atmosphere so thick with drama that her own tendency to provoke it had apparently passed unperceived, and it was precisely this quality, and the odd absence of surprise in her that gave Archer the sense of her having been plucked out of a very maelstrom: the things she took for granted gave the measure of those she had rebelled against" (116). Although Archer is disgusted with the "sameness" of his life in well-to-do New York, and tries to understand Ellen's point of view, he feels threatened by her wanting to be part of old New York society, and is shocked when she pleads with him to allow her "to do what you all do,"and desires to "feel cared for and safe" (75). However, when Ellen states that "being here is like-like being taken on a holiday when one has been a good little girl and done all one's lessons," Archer becomes angry (77). Even though she feels Archer's disapproval, she goes on to say that she likes New York for its "the straight-up-and downness, and the big honest labels

on everything" (77)! But, Archer knows that she will be a difficult person to assimilate into New York, and the idea of Beaufort, and all the other men whom Ellen may meet, makes him uncomfortable, because he knows that she cannot accept their overtly patriarchal attitude seriously. His reply to her is sarcastic, "everything may be labeled--but everyone is not" (75). Since Archer has already labeled Ellen, he advises her to follow the counsel of the older women of their society, because "they like and admire" and "want to help" you, but Ellen speaks openly of the evasion of this hieroglyphic world when she cries out,

> oh, I know--I know! But on condition that they don't hear anything unpleasant. Aunt Welland put it in those very words when I tried....Does no one want to know the truth here, Mr. Archer? The real loneliness is living among all these kind people who only ask one to pretend (78)!

Wharton does not see a difference between Eastern culture or Western society where women are treated as chattels, and are then trained to perpetuate such treatment. When Ellen is denied her freedom, her divorce, Archer soothes her by saying "but aren't you as free as air as it is" (112)? His explanation of freedom is that she is financially independent, therefore, no one can touch her, and his advice to her seals her fate. This is ironic since Archer sees that his own fate is sealed, and dreads the thought that "for the rest of his life he would go up every evening between the cast-iron railings of that greenish-yellow

doorstep, and pass through a Pompeian vestibule into a hall with a wainscoting of varnished yellow wood," but it becomes obvious that "his imagination could not travel" beyond that (72). Archer lacks the intellectual honesty, and the courage to act, a quality that Ellen possesses, and shares with him. His advice to Ellen is not to divorce because the risk of what the newspapers might say "may be infinitely disagreeable and painful" (112). Even though Archer concedes that "it's all stupid and narrow and unjustified...one can't make over society," and since he is part of this society, it is obvious to him that "the individual, in such cases, is nearly always sacrificed to what is supposed to be the collective interest: people cling to any convention that keeps the family together" (112). However, Archer cannot cover the ugly reality of the conditions his society imposes on its women, and it becomes obvious that Archer expects Ellen to become another "product of the system" (8). Ellen does sacrifice her own happiness for the "family." She unselfishly places May's happiness above her own, and lives courageously with the idea that:

> If it's not worthwhile to have given up, to have missed things, so that others may be saved from disillusionment and misery--then everything I came home for, everything that made my other life seem by contrast so bare and so poor because no one there took account of them--all these things are a sham or a dream (242).

But, while Ellen lives by the rules set up for her, Archer struggles against the life he has chosen, and he holds Ellen somewhat responsible for his predicament. He says to her that it is "you" that "gave me my first glimpse of a real life, and at the same moment you asked me to go on with a sham one. It's beyond human enduring--" (242). However, the "real life" that Archer imagines with Ellen is just a dream, because Archer cannot see the reality of his situation. What Archer wants is to somehow get away with Ellen "into a world where words like that--(words like mistress and adultery) categories like that--won't exist. Where [they] shall be simply two human beings who love each other, who are the whole of life to each other; and nothing else on earth will matter" (290). This, of course, is only a fantasy, and Ellen's reply is that "we'll look, not at visions, but at realities" (289). Ellen, who has seen the Gorgon, sees the reality of their situation, and she tells Archer the brutal truth:

> Oh my dear--where is that country? Have you ever been there?" she asked; and as he remained sullenly dumb she went on: "I know so many who've tried to find it; and believe me, they all got out by mistake at wayside stations: at places like Boulogne, or Pisa, or Monte Carlo--and it wasn't at all different from the old world they left, but only rather smaller and dingier and more promiscuous" (290).

Because of her love for Archer, Ellen refuses to cover up the truth of what adultery would mean, and she explains to Archer

that we can be "near each other only if we stay far from each other. Then we can be ourselves. Otherwise we're only Newland Archer, the husband of Ellen Olenska's cousin, and Ellen Olenska, the cousin of Newland Archer's wife, trying to be happy behind the backs of the people who trust them" (290-291). Obviously, Ellen understands that an clandestine affair would transform their love into the hypocritical form of patriarchal New York order. But, Archer remains trapped in the childish inhibitions that seal his mind against imagination and his heart against experience, and as Carol Wershoven has argued that "the sense of frustration that fills this novel occurs because Archer, like Selden (in The House of Mirth), finally commits himself...too late." [14] But, even then, Archer's realization that Ellen is the woman he "would have married if it had been possible for either of [them], implies futility" (169). Wershoven suggests that "Ellen's reply is ironic, for just as Lily Bart takes Selden's counsel and becomes the free and moral self that eludes him, so Ellen has heeded Archer's empty words and lived by them." [15] Ellen is Wharton's intellectually independent woman; she not only sees the truth, but speaks freely, and does not evade the issue. When Archer reproaches her for telling him to marry May, she speaks her mind, and says

> it's you who've made it impossible?...Isn't it you who made me give up divorcing--give it up because you showed me how selfish and wicked it was, how one must sacrifice one's self to preserve

> the dignity of marriage...and to spare one's family the publicity, the scandal? And because my family was going to be your family--for May's sake and for yours--I did what you told me, what you proved to me that I ought to do...I've made no secret of having done it for you (169)!

However, Archer's attitude towards Ellen remains ambivalent throughout the novel. At the farewell dinner for Ellen, as Archer sits at the table of this fine dinner, the realization of what the occasion represents is brought home to him: and presented in anthropological terms by Wharton, who analyzes New York in the same terms as Morocco. "There were certain things that had to be done, and if done at all, done handsomely and thoroughly; and one of these, in the old New York code, was the tribal rally around a kinswoman about to be eliminated from the tribe" (334). Although Archer finally understands that all of New York imagined that he and Ellen "were lovers" and "for months, the centre of countless silently observing eyes and patiently listening ears," and "now the whole tribe rallied about his wife" to banish Ellen, he retains the appearance of dignity and decency that his society so highly values (335). Archer remains the same throughout the novel, and with Ellen gone, he can restore his life to its original state of "innocence."

Archer never has the courage to act against his New York upbringing, and some thirty years after the farewell dinner, Archer reflects that:

> He had been,in short, what people were beginning to call "a good citizen." In New York, for many years past, every new movement, philanthropic, municipal or artistic, had taken account of his opinion and wanted his name....His days were full, and they were filled decently. He supposed it was all a man ought to ask (347).

It is clearly Wharton's intention to show that Archer is a still a dilettante at heart, and even though he knows that he has missed "the full flower of life," his reflections of life and his marriage conform to what the American public wants in their art as well as in their own lives, a tragedy with a happy ending (as discussed in Chapter 1, 33). Even though Archer's life is tragic, he resolves it by defensively justifying his actions, and

> when he thought of Ellen it was abstractly, serenely, as one might think of some imaginary beloved in a book or a picture: she had become the composite vision of all that he had missed That vision, faint and tenuous as it was, had kept him from thinking of other women. He had been what was called a faithful husband; and when May had suddenly died--carried off by the infectious pneumonia through which she had nursed their younger child--he had honestly mourned her. Their long years together had shown him that it did not matter if marriage was a dull duty, as long as it kept the dignity of the duty: lapsing from that, it became a mere battle of ugly appetites. Looking about him, he honored his own past, and mourned for it. After all, there was good in the old ways (347).

Here, clearly Wharton's Moroccan experience influences her writing of The Age of Innocence, her first major work of

fiction following the journey. In Morocco, Wharton steps over the Conradian threshold of the invisible, and sees "the mysterious heart of the country" (14). Even though she repeatedly notes the "abyss" between Moroccan and Occidental conceptions of life, her protestations suggest that perhaps there is essentially no difference in the childish, and destructive attitudes which predicate both these patriarchal cultures. When Wharton enters the the city of Moulay Idriss, "which was still said to be resentful of Christian intrusion," as one of the rare Westerners, she witnesses the dance of the Hamadchas. Although at first she delights at the sight of the women she sees above the square in Moulay Idriss, and writes that "the crowded roofs, terraces and balconies" were "packed with women in bright dresses" who looked like a flower field on the edge of a marble quarry," she quickly adds that these women and their "bright dresses were as unusual a sight as the white walls, for the average Moroccan crowd is the color of its houses" (50-51). She notes that this throng of women appear only as stage props, and who are "therefore to be seen in public only when some street festival draws them to the roofs" (51). "The illusion," Wharton writes "is as complete as though they were the ladies in waiting of the Queen of Sheba," and that radiant afternoon at Moulay Idriss, above the vine-garlanded square and against the background of piled-up terraces, their vivid groups were in such contrast to the usual gray assemblages of the East that the

scene seemed like a setting for some extravagantly staged ballet," and "for the same reason," Wharton continues "the spectacle unrolling itself below us took on a blessed air of unreality" (52). As Wharton stands and watches this composite scene, she sees the way in which women in patriarchal cultures exist only as stage props, or as imaginary lovers in books, and as Judith E. Funston suggests, in this ritualized dance Wharton "is able to recognize the universal dimension of the 'bestial horror' at the heart of darkness, so that she could subsume her Moroccan experience into her fiction." [16] Wharton writes that

> any normal person who has seen a dance of the Aussaouas and watched them swallow thorns and hot coals, slash themselves with knives, and roll on the floor in epilepsy must have privately longed, after the first excitement was over, to fly from the repulsive scene. The Hamadchas are much more savage than Aissaouas,... and knowing this, I had wondered how long I should be able to stand the sight of what was going on below our terrace (52-53).

But, Wharton adheres to the same philosophy of life that she admires in the French, and writes about in <u>French Ways and Their Meaning</u>. She says in her chapter called "Intellectual Honesty," that the French are

> not afraid of anything that concerns mankind, neither of pleasure and mirth nor exultations and agonies.... The French are intrinsically a tough race:...They have no idea that life can be evaded, and if it could be they would not try to evade it (64-65).

Thus, Wharton detaches herself from revulsion at this bestial horror by placing this scene within the context of the familiar, she goes beyond the superficial, and notes that "in that unreal golden light the scene became merely symbolic" (53). Even though Wharton's distaste for this "blood-rite" is clear, her concern for mankind enables her to see the darker side of the human soul (53). As she watches the blood flowing freely, and splashing on all the rocking feet, she gradually understands what this savage scene signifies. She writes that it finally "became evident that many of the dancers simply rocked and howled, without hacking themselves, and that most of the bleeding skulls and breasts belonged to negroes" (55). In this atmosphere of frenzy, Wharton the writer relates the story of Hamadch, who was "a powerful saint of the seventeenth century" (56). She writes that "Hamadch, it appears, had a faithful slave, who, when his master died, killed himself in despair, and the self-inflicted wounds of the brotherhood are supposed to symbolize the slave's suicide" (56). Once again Wharton experiences how the threads of the past are woven into this present scene, and she describes the fatalistic smile of a country which is constituted on slavery and male tyranny. She says that although the origin of this ceremony may be traced back to rituals such as those described in Sir James Fraser s The Golden Bough, she sees the advantages of "the more naive interpretation," which "enables the devotees to divide their ritual

duties into two classes" (56). But, here, Wharton's art is deliberate in spite of the horror, of the "blood-rite" being performed before her, and she vividly describes the dancers who

> were all dressed in white caftans or in the blue shirts of the lowest classes. In the sunlight something that looked like fresh paint glistened on their shaved black or yellow skulls and made dark blotches on their garments (54).

At this moment Wharton the woman sees the darkness of man's nature, and she now understands what her fascination for this scene is. As Wharton observes the savage nature of a society constituted on slavery, she realizes how childish inhibitions stunt mental growth and maturity. But, this scene also makes it clear for Wharton that intellectual liberty can only exist when there will be changes in men's, not women's attitudes, because in a patriarchal system only men's ideas matter. Wharton now explains that the white caftans, being free men, address the saint by simply rocking and writhing, while the "slaves belong to the slave, and must therefore stimulate his horrid end" (56). While Wharton stands and watches "the humble blue shirts drip with blood," she is able to recognize the universal dimension of this barbaric ritual that fascinates her, and it becomes clear that this ritual does not essentially differ from the tribal rituals of the masculine society Wharton portrays in The Age of Innocence. In the sunny world of old New York, Wharton creates a

society predicated on male tyranny and female enslavement. Wharton's remark about leisure-class old New York's attitude toward men of obscure origin compares to the democratic familiarity Wharton describes in In Morocco, "which goes side by side with abject servility in this land...where the sedentary and luxurious types--prevail" (90). In The Age of Innocence, Wharton states that "if society chose to open its doors to vulgar women the harm was not great, though the gain doubtful; but once it got in the way of tolerating men of obscure origin and tainted wealth the end was total disintegration" (338). Then, in The Age of Innocence, women are tolerated, but clearly "men of obscure origin and tainted wealth" are society's rivals, as well as any man who dares not to adhere to masculine old New Yorks morals (332). Clearly, Wharton's statement is that the male line prevails over the female line, and that Western society has the same deceptive appearance as Eastern culture: it is constituted on an invisible class structure between men, as well as women. In The Age of Innocence, she describes a leisure-class society that takes life "without effusion of blood," and which places the "appearance" of decency above courage. In the destructive, barbaric dance of the Hamadchas, where the white caftans rule and the humble slaves drip with blood, Wharton sees that the symbolism of old New York's barbaric rituals are not unlike that of the male upper classes in Morocco, whose symbolic sacrifice is only for the appearance of, rather than for the

real. While the tribe ruthlessly eliminates Ellen, Archer, not unlike the "blue shirts" is enslaved in the brutal traditional rites of a culture "that had ruled his forefathers thousands of years ago" (4).

But, ironically, Ellen Olenska is not afraid of risks, nor does she evade life. Like Wharton, she has opened her eyes to a larger world, and she cannot conform to New York's patriarchal attitude of "blind conformity to tradition," (240). Although Ellen is fully aware of the vulnerability of her position in this society, she asserts her intellectual independence in an attempt to change Archer's patriarchal attitude towards women. However, she soon realizes that intellectual freedom does not exist either for men or women in a patriarchal society. Her remark to Archer that she sees his society as a carbon copy of all traditional societies and that "it seems stupid to have discovered America only to make it into another country," goes beyond Archer's understanding because he is too involved in his own life to see her meaning (240). And when Archer seeks her out at the van der Luyden's country estate, he is shocked by her pronouncement that there is no freedom in this country, nor any place where one can be alone. Ellen's question that "is there nowhere in an American house where one may be by one's self," and her observation about her feeling as if she were "on the stage, before a dreadfully polite audience that never applauds," ironically, foreshadows her fate at the farewll dinner

that eliminates her from New York's midst (133-134). Ellen is like the throng of women in Morocco, who appear only as stage props to be seen in public when they are summoned to a festival. However, Ellen, like Wharton the writer, is able to detach herself from the horror of the scene, and although this is the dramatic climax in the novel, Ellen will create a new life because she is Wharton's intellectually independent women. Even though this scene rises to new heights of barbaric cruelty, Ellen, the artist, stands "before a dreadfully polite audience," while they proclaim their "unalterable affection" for her now that her passage for Europe was engaged (334). While Archer sits at the head of his elegant table, and as he sees the "brutal horror" of the scene unrolling before his eyes, he marvels

> at the silent untiring activity with which her popularity had been retrieved, grievances against her silenced, her past uncountenanced, and her present irradiated by the family approval (334).

Thus, Wharton writes exactly what the American public wants, a tragedy with a happy ending. However, this is ironic because the novel ends, as Carol Wershoven suggests, "with a pair of gentle negatives:" although "Archer's life (is) not entirely wasted," and May's marriage (is) intact" but stultifying, "the most satisfying final impression is that of a free Ellen Olenska, who, having been expelled from New York, has lived as an independent woman, safe from her husband, surrounded by the cul-

ture and variety of Paris." [17] Then, The Age of Innocence can be seen as a feminine act of victory for Edith Wharton as well as for Ellen Olenska. Although Ellen is the most obvious victim of this cruelty of evasion, she rises above the patriarchal structures imposed on her. If it is too late for Archer to re-define himself, Ellen escapes from New York with her identity in tact. Ellen is the only character in the novel who adheres to the philosophy Wharton governs her own life and work by, and it is ironic that "the most explicit statement of values of the novel is made by Monsieur Riviere, the man rumored to have been Ellen's lover." [18] It is his belief that:

> it's worth everything, isn't it, to keep one's intellectual liberty, not to enslave one's powers of appreciation, one's critical independence? (A person must, he says, preserve his) moral freedom,...one's 'quant `a soi.'...The air of ideas is the only air worth breathing....Voyez-vous,... to be able to look life in the face: that's worth living in a garret for, isn't it (200)?

As Carol Wershoven suggests, "this statement stands in direct opposition to the attitudes and behavior of old New York, and is a code that only one character in the novel besides Riviere himself lives by. Only Ellen Olenska can fully look life in the face." [19]

Wharton presents Ellen's expulsion from the suffocation of masculine old New York, as a release for her, an opportunity for

her to open the door to a new life. Granny Mingott guarantees Ellen's financial independence, and the novel ends with the sun shining on her apartment in Paris. Ironically, in writing her most accepted American novel in which she explores the primitive and barbaric nature of American patriarchal attitudes towards its women, Wharton writes "beyond the ending" by creating a new form of novel that does not end in death or marriage, and by making the novel's victim, the most intellectually independent heroine in her work. [20]

ENDNOTES

1. Judith E. Funston, "In Morocco: Edith Wharton's Heart of Darkness." Edith Wharton Newsletter. Spring, 1988, Vol. V, 1, 12.

2. Elizabeth Ammons, Edith Wharton's Argument with America. (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1980) 141-142.

3. Ibid., 144.

4. Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class (New York: Penguin, 1987) 85.

5. Ibid., 84.

6. Ibid., 84.

7. Ibid., 84.

8. Funston, 1.

9. R.W.B. Lewis & Nancy Lewis, eds., The Letters of Edith Wharton (New York: Scribners, 1988) 397.

10. Ibid., 357.

11. Funston, 12.

12. Funston, 1.

13. Ammons, 142-143.

14. Carol Wershoven, The Female Intruder in the Novels of Edith Wharton (New Jersey: Fairleigh UP, 1982) 85.

15. Cited in Ibid., 85.

16. Funston, 3.

17. Wershoven, 90.

18. Ibid., 93.

19. Ibid., 93.

20. Cited in Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Writing beyond the Ending. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985) 4.

CONCLUSION

To conclude is only to begin again, and it is my intention to examine some of Wharton's later works in order to show how she continues to develop her intellectually independent woman to assume the role of the mother figure. Although Wharton is sympathetic to the social matron, who defends and promotes conventions, her most favourable heroines are those who possess both traits.

In The Age of Innocence (1920), Ellen Olenska defies stereotyping. Ellen supercedes the conventions old New York lived by. She shows great kindness to Ned Winsett's little boy, prompting Newland Archer's comment that "there was nothing extraordinary in the tale: any woman would have done as much for a neighbor's child. But it was just like Ellen, he felt to have rushed in bareheaded, carrying the boy in her arms" (123). Wharton depicts Ellen not only as an independent woman, but also as a caring mother figure, and her description, at the end of the novel, of Ellen befriending young Fanny Beaufort, when she was sent to the Assomption in Paris, as well as her devotion to the first Mrs. Beaufort, indicates that the same Ellen who is capable of individual thought and expression is also capable of nurturing others. Thus, beginning with Ellen Olenska in The Age of Innocence, and culminating with Laura Testavalley in The Buccaneers (1937), Wharton portrays heroines who understand the benefits of society, accept its restrictions, and paradoxically

lead more enlightened lives.

In Edith Wharton's Argument with America, Elizabeth Ammons has argued that "after The Age of Innocence, which marks a sort of pause during which she applied to the decade of the 1870s the type of feminist social criticism that had worked from The House of Mirth through Summer, Edith Wharton turned her attention to the present, the 1920s, and wrote novels declaring motherhood woman's best and most fulfilling job in life." [1]

However, I argue that Wharton's commitment to the intellectually independent woman, who achieves self-knowledge remains her priority throughout her career. Wharton raises the same issues in her later novels as she does in her early work by questioning how an intelligent, but unskilled, leisure-class young woman can be economically independent, and fulfill her desire for a worthwhile occupation and a satisfying love relationship? She provides no answers, but in her art, as in life, Wharton creates the fluctuations and ambivalences that she experiences as an individual, who lives in the same structured society as her heroines. For Wharton, the idea of marriage and motherhood is, as she writes in French Ways and Their Meaning, a "community of tradition of education, and, above all, of the parental feeling," which "are judged to be the sentiments most likely to form a lasting tie between the average man and woman; and the French marriage is built on parenthood,

not on passions" (128). As discussed in Chapter two, Wharton points out the problems of marriages, and the idea of motherhood in American culture. Therefore, since married women and mothers defend and promote patriarchal conventions, Wharton sees the intellectually independent woman as a mother figure, who not only advocates personal expression, but whose actions are imbued with the greater good of humanity.

The Glimpses of the Moon (1922) tells the story of a leisure-class woman whose predicament is not unlike Lily Bart's. Wharton's heroine, ill-equipped to support herself independently, at first takes advantage of her wealthy friends, but then changes her attitude and grows. As Wharton writes:

> That moment, to her watcher, seemed quicker than a flash yet as long as a life-time. There she was,... the old Susy, and yet a new Susy, curiously transformed, transfigured almost, by the new attitude in which he beheld her (319).

The Mother's Recompense (1924), shows how a divorced woman survives in a barbaric culture, and maintains her independence and grows intellectually, while in The Twilight Sleep (1927), Nona Manford, at the age of twenty, is the only person who faces reality and, who genuinely cares about her family. Nona is the only intellectually independent person in the novel, and her role is an extremely difficult one:

> There were moments when Nona felt oppressed by responsibilities not of her age, apprehensions that she could not shake off and yet had not enough experience of life to know how to meet....It was as if, in the beaming determination of the middle-aged, one and all of them, to ignore sorrow and evil, "think them away" as superannuated bogies...as if the demons the elder generations ignored baulked of their natural prey, had cast their hungry shadow over the young (47-48).

In The Female Intruder in the Novels of Edith Wharton, Carol Wershoven explains that:

> The title of the novel refers specially to a new process by which childbirth can be made painless, but it refers more generally to all the different attempts that the book's characters make to avoid pain. Like The Age of Innocence, The Reef, and The Children, Twilight Sleep is a novel about evasion. Each character in the book, with one exception, has one goal: to get through life without suffering; and each numbs his sensibility in a different way through the pursuit of pleasure, through bad faith, through false credos, or through self-delusion.[2]

Obviously, Wharton is fully aware that there is no future for young women in a barbaric materialistic society, and in her realization that the future for women is the same as the past, Wharton's writes her unfinished novel The Buccaneers, which reveals her rhapsodic vision of the intellectually independent woman. In A Backward Glance, Wharton writes "another...character haunts me to day. Her name is....Laura Testavalley. How I should like to change that name! But it has been attached for

some time now to a strongly outlined material form, the form of a character figuring largely in an adventure I know all about, and have long wanted to relate" (202). In The Buccaneers, Wharton returns once again to a time she knows to recreate the future intellectually independent woman, and Laura Testavalley becomes governess, mother, sister and friend to the jubilant band of young women whom Wharton dubs "the Buccaneers." As Carol Wershoven suggests:

> They are the new, the free, the future, and Laura through them, will help to form the future. She teaches them to behave "like ladies" in the truest sense; her definition of the term is based not on class distinctions or snobbery, but on natural goodness and the poise that comes from accepting oneself. Her own innate gentility is the example the young girls will follow. [3]

Edith Wharton achieves greatness in her attempt to create equality for all women through the future generation of intellectually independent women who will assume the role of the mother figure.

ENDNOTES

1. Elizabeth Ammons, Edith Wharton's Argument with America (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1980) 157.

2. Carol Wershoven, The Female Intruder in the Novels of Edith Wharton (New Jersey: Fairleigh UP, 1982) 131.

3. Ibid., 153.

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