Edith Wharton was one of America's most popular and prolific writers, becoming the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1921. In a publishing career spanning seven decades, she lived and wrote through a period of tremendous social, cultural, and historical change. Bringing together a team of international scholars, this volume provides the first substantial text dedicated to the various contexts that frame Wharton's remarkable career. Each essay offers a clearly argued and lucid assessment of Wharton's work as it relates to seven key areas: life and works, critical receptions, book and publishing history, arts and aesthetics, social designs, time and place, and literary milieux. These sections provide a broad and accessible resource for students coming to Wharton for the first time while offering scholars new critical insights. Of interest to English and American studies departments, the volume will also appeal to researchers in gender studies, film studies, book history, art history, and transatlantic studies.

Laura Rattray is Senior Lecturer in American Literature at the University of Hull. She is editor of the two-volume The Unpublished Writings of Edith Wharton (2009) and Edith Wharton's The Custom of the Country: A Reassessment (2010). She is on the editorial board of the Edith Wharton Review and has recently been awarded a Leverhulme Fellowship for a new study of Wharton and Genre.
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7 Edith Wharton, 1933, dressed in a modern suit and brimmed cloche hat. Photo credit: Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. 219
Notes on Contributors

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Notes on Contributors

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Hill since 1988; she recently retired. The recipient of Guggenheim, Rockefeller, National Endowment for the Humanities, and other fellowships, she received the Hubbell Medal for lifetime work in American Literature in 2011. She wrote several books on Wharton for the Twayne series and edited The Portable Edith Wharton for Penguin (2003). Her biographies include books on Zelda Fitzgerald, Sylvia Plath, Gertrude Stein, Barbara Kingsolver, and Ernest Hemingway.
Abbreviations

EDITH WHARTON PRIMARY SOURCE ABBREVIATIONS


CC  The Custom of the Country (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913).


DH  The Decoration of Houses (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1897).

FF  Fighting France, from Dunkerque to Belfort (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1915).


HM  The House of Mirth (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1905).

IB  Italian Backgrounds (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1905).


**List of Abbreviations**

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<td>VD</td>
<td><em>The Valley of Decision</em> (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1902).</td>
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<td>WF</td>
<td><em>The Writing of Fiction</em> (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1925).</td>
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**SECONDARY SOURCE ABBREVIATIONS**

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January 2012 marked the 150th anniversary of the birth of Edith Wharton. While many economies continued to flounder, this author’s stock proved notably resilient. Anniversary events included radio dramatizations, day-schools, interviews with enthusiasts and scholars, newspaper and magazine articles on both sides of the Atlantic, a major academic conference in Florence for the Wharton Society, and an online birthday tribute. (Edith Wharton is, of all things, an established Facebook and Twitter presence.) In an article for the Sunday Telegraph to mark the occasion (“a ‘lonely-hearted’ heiress with a fearless eye”), Anita Brookner even targeted the British literary grail to propose Wharton as “a corrective to the national obsession with Jane Austen.”

In the pithy phrasing on the website of the author’s home, The Mount, “After all of these years, Wharton still packs a cultural wallop.” In the twenty-first century, the writer, born during the U.S. Civil War, infiltrates contemporary popular culture to a remarkable degree – and one imagines Wharton, insistently attuned to the marketplace and the “regular click of coin in [her] savings-box” (Letters 592), would have appreciated the financial, if not always the artistic, rewards. Her name, image, and writings inflect a wide array of popular cultures, spanning television, film, radio, music, and magazines. These range from Gossip Girl, Entourage, and the Gilmore Girls, to The Nanny Diaries, Vogue, the entertainment guides of Martha Stewart, the writings of Candace Bushnell, and the music of Suzanne Vega. Julian Fellowes’ transatlantic television success, Downton Abbey, invited fruitful parallels to his predecessor, providing a cultural shorthand for its socially elite world, and Fellowes has cited Wharton among his favorite writers.

Long after her death in August 1937, Wharton remains a marketable asset. A collection of her letters sold at a Christie’s auction in June 2009 for $182,500, while the surviving half of her library raised an eye-watering $2.6 million in 2006. Mass-market ed gift items, such as key rings, bookmarks,
and photograph frames on sale in bookstores in the United States, carry
two beautifully conceived lines from her dramatic monologue, “Vesalius
in Zante”: “There are two ways of spreading light; to be / The candle or
the mirror that reflects it” (Poems 43). “In context,” however, the lines
swiftly lose their consumer-friendly allure. The assertion, after all, is not
“Wharton’s,” but that of the physician-scientist speaker whose death-
bed “confession” to the dissection of a girl still living (“pinioned hand
and foot”) admits no regrets: “Think what she purchased with that one
heart-flutter / That whispered its deep secret to my blade!” (Poems 36).
While on the one hand chillingly inappropriate, on the other the market-
ning line provides an apt reminder that Wharton’s work, especially when it
comes in period camouflage, is not always as it first seems.

In terms of Wharton scholarship, Helen Killoran labeled the years 1938
to 1975 “The Lull,” while Cynthia Griffin Wolff, in the revised 1995
edition of her biography, hailed the “dazzling resurrection” of the writer’s reputation.1 Hermione Lee offered a more nuanced appraisal in 2007, conclud-
ing in her acclaimed biography that “[f]or all this massive interest among
general readers and academics, much still remains to be done with the
posthumous life of Edith Wharton” (Lee 758). Edith Wharton in Context
addresses one such omission, by bringing together Wharton scholars to
provide the first substantive volume focused exclusively on the social, lit-
erary, cultural, and historical contexts that produced the writer and her
long and prolific career. The collection considers the question of con-
text through seven sections: Life and Works; Critical Receptions; Book
and Publishing History; Arts and Aesthetics; Social Designs; Time and
Place; and Literary Milieux. Contributors include the authors of: Edith
Wharton’s Women: Friends and Rivals; Edith Wharton: Matters of Mind and
Spirit; Edith Wharton’s Writings from the Great War; Edith Wharton and
the Visual Arts; The Cambridge Introduction to Edith Wharton; Displaying
Women: Spectacles of Leisure in Edith Wharton’s New York; Edith Wharton
and the Making of Fashion; Apart from Modernism: Edith Wharton,
Politics and Fiction; and Edith Wharton and the Conversations of Literary
Modernism. Also writing for the volume are the co-editor of the Edith
Wharton Review, members of the Wharton Society board, the co-director
of the sesquicentennial Wharton international conference, and the editors of
The Portable Edith Wharton, Memorial Boxes and Guarded Interiors: Edith
Wharton and Material Culture, and The Unpublished Writings. All
leading Wharton scholars, their focus spans archival research, biography,
publishing history, material culture, performance and the visual arts,
gender studies, sociology and politics, and cultural studies. Each writer
Preface

brings his or her expertise to build collectively the most sustained attempt to deepen our understanding of the ways in which Wharton lived and worked with, through, and sometimes against the contexts that impressed themselves upon her.

I would like to thank Ray Ryan for commissioning this volume for Cambridge University Press, Louis Gulino and Marielle Poss for seeing the book through production, and Jennie Kassanoff for her support from the outset of this project. I am grateful to the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library and its expert staff, especially Adrienne Sharpe and Anne Marie Menta; the British Association for American Studies; and the Edith Wharton Society. I would like to thank Elizabeth Ammons, Irene Goldman-Price, Laurah Heafield, Pam Knights, and Margaret Murray. My thanks go to all of the contributors to this volume for their expertise and enthusiasm for the project, from Wharton’s Gobi Desert to the Cresta Run. I would also like to thank Julia Masnik at the Watkins/Loomis agency for facilitating permissions. Excerpts from unpublished Wharton writings are reprinted by permission of the estate of Edith Wharton and the Watkins/Loomis Agency. Special thanks to Julie Ellam, Susan Goodman, Linda Wagner-Martin, and the Rattray Club.

NOTES

2. My thanks to Clare Colquitt for alerting me to this marketing campaign.