



INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF DECADENCE STUDIES

Volume 6, Issue 2

Autumn 2023

Some Americans in the 'House Beautiful': Edith Wharton, Oscar Wilde, and Aestheticism

Ailsa Boyd

ISSN: 2515-0073

Date of Acceptance: 28 September 2023

Date of Publication: 18 December 2023

Citation: Ailsa Boyd, 'Some Americans in the 'House Beautiful': Edith Wharton, Oscar Wilde, and Aestheticism', *Volupté: Interdisciplinary Journal of Decadence Studies*, 6.2 (2023), 1-27.

DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.v.v6i2.1749.g1861

volupte.gold.ac.uk



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Some Americans in the ‘House Beautiful’: Edith Wharton, Oscar Wilde, and Aestheticism¹

Ailsa Boyd

Independent Scholar

The ‘House Beautiful’ of the Aesthetic movement was an ideal of beauty, sensuality, and taste. A reaction against industrialization, Aestheticism embraced internationalism and was frequently condemned as immoral. During his 1882 lecture tour of America, Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) became the Aesthetic movement’s most recognizable spokesman. The writer Edith Wharton (1863-1937) may have heard him speak, which is significant because her first published book was an interior design manual, *The Decoration of Houses* (1897). This is just one point within a vibrant transatlantic exchange of ideas on truth and beauty in art and design in the 1870s-80s. Familiar with life on both sides of the Atlantic from travels in her childhood, Edith Jones had been enchanted by the art and architecture of the ‘Old World’, and her literary career began with a serious engagement with art, interior design, and their importance in society. Both Wilde and Wharton put their theories of decoration into practice in their own, very different, homes. Although Wharton’s controlled taste seems diametrically opposed to Wilde’s espoused decadence, it is possible that Aestheticism gave Wharton a language with which to discuss beauty in her own writing. At several points in her career, she utilized the ideas of Walter Pater (1839-1894) in her work: a youthful poem ‘Intense Love’s Utterance’ (1881), the short story ‘The Fulness of Life’ (1893), and her last, unfinished novel, *The Buccaneers* (1938). Each would have been unthinkable without the transatlantic exchange of ideas on Aestheticism, of which Wilde was the self-acknowledged prophet.

In the late nineteenth century, what you wore and how you decorated your home were the most personal and physical fronts of a greater culture war that was being fought across society. Increased industrialization and population growth in towns and cities led to discussions about the style of public buildings, the subject matter (or lack) of great art, and the morality of literary

characters, from which could be gauged the health of society. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Pre-Raphaelites revived an interest in Britain's medieval history. Through modern art and poetry, artists like D. G. Rossetti (1828-1882) glorified a lost Arthurian Elysium while commenting on contemporary social issues. John Ruskin (1819-1900) and the design reformers of the 1860s irrevocably linked beauty to utility, and truth to materials, and a sense of the past. Designers like William Morris (1834-1896) looked to ancient techniques for dyeing textiles and the natural world for design inspiration. By the 1870s many intellectuals took the worship of beauty to new levels with the Aesthetic credo of 'Art for Art's Sake', which led them to be criticized for immorality, sensuousness, and ridiculousness. On his 1882 American lecture tour Wilde took these ideas across the Atlantic, in the process becoming perhaps the most famous British Aesthete, with statements such as: 'Today more than ever the artist and a love of the beautiful are needed to temper and counteract the sordid materialism of the age.'²

But these ideas were not limited to British artists and designers and their vernacular tradition, for the transatlantic dialogue that came from personal and professional networks in art and literature was hugely important to the development of Aestheticism. As Jonathan Freedman states, 'the American literary experience with the British Aesthetic movement may be seen as a cross-cultural dialogue of dizzying complexity'.³ Wharton and many other Americans travelled to Europe and beyond from their youth, consuming the culture of the Old World and socializing with communities of other expats. Artists and writers found new ways of looking at the world as they negotiated between two continents and cultures. The development of the artistic 'House Beautiful' in interior design can be tracked through many points of transatlantic influence. In 1860s London, Massachusetts-born artist James McNeill Whistler (1834-1901) made collecting East Asian textiles, prints, and blue and white china fashionable and essential to any home that aspired to be artistic. He entitled landscape paintings 'Nocturnes' and figure paintings 'Arrangements', disposing with the traditional narrative subject. When he decorated Frederick Leyland's London dining room, Whistler gave it a musical title: *Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Peacock Room* (1876-77).

The lavish interior, with gold decoration of stylised feathers over almost every surface, combined with the pre-existing incised shelves and sunflower andirons by designer Thomas Jeckyll (1827-1881) to house Leyland's collection of blue and white china and Whistler's oil painting of a girl in a kimono, *La Princesse du pays de la porcelaine* (1864-65) in its decorative frame. The room's title prioritizes the harmonious combination of arts and crafts on display, raising them in the aesthetic hierarchy to equal painting and architecture. Wilde described the Peacock Room as 'the finest thing in colour and art decoration that the world has known since Correggio'.⁴ After Whistler's death, the whole room was purchased by American industrialist and art patron Charles Freer, and moved to the United States to be put on public display in Detroit in 1906.

By the 1880s, the painter John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) was comfortable in studios and salons across Europe due to his fluency in French, German, and Italian. Born in Florence to American parents, Sargent's studio was where the British and American elite came to be painted, and he was at the forefront of taste. His Paris studio house showed off his perfect selection of artistic items: Japanese fabrics, ceramics, *Hina* dolls, oriental rugs, and a 'Sussex' rush-seated chair by the decorative arts firm Morris & Co. The similarly expatriate author Vernon Lee (pseudonym of Violet Paget, 1856-1935) was one of Sargent's oldest friends. She described his house as 'so extremely pretty, quite aesthetic and English, with a splendid big studio and a pretty garden with roses and all done up with Morris papers & rugs and matting'.⁵ Founded in London in 1861, Morris & Co. designed furniture, jewellery, wallpaper, carpets, and tapestry, becoming popular in Europe and North America by the mid 1870s. Later, Sargent developed his career in America through his friendships with others who facilitated the transatlantic movement of art and ideas, such as Boston collector of European art and antiques Isabella Stewart Gardner (1840-1924), and architects Stanford White (1853-1906) and Charles McKim (1847-1909), who returned from Beaux-Arts training in Paris to lead the American Renaissance in classical architecture which proved enormously popular with the enormously wealthy. Sargent worked with them on decorative projects like the Boston Public Library (1895-1919).

Although born in Boston, Henry James (1843-1916) was educated in Europe and visited the salons and drawing rooms of Europe as a young journalist. By 1876 he had settled in London, famous as *the* novelist of the American subjective experience in the ‘Old World’ of Europe. He socialized with and wrote about many of the most avant-garde artists and writers, like Whistler and Sargent, and from 1900 was very good friends with Wharton. His writing on Aestheticism is frustratingly equivocal; he responded negatively to decadence, condemning the sensual poetry of Algernon Swinburne (1837-1909). He never liked Wilde, calling him ‘repulsive and fatuous’ on meeting him in Washington in 1882.⁶ Yet he was fascinated with the connoisseur and the character of the Aesthete occurs frequently in his novels. Gilbert Osmond in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) is the consummate Aesthete, commenting that one ‘ought to make one’s life a work of art’.⁷ The cover of the first American edition is an Aesthetic design which demonstrates elements of the House Beautiful. It is arranged like a tripartite wall treatment, with dado, fill and frieze, a lily-pad *kamon* [Japanese family crest], and frieze of stylized peacock feathers [fig. 1]. The antique is another important element of the Aesthetic interior, so Osmond’s home has ‘faded hangings of damask and tapestry’ and ‘time-polished oak’, but also ‘articles of modern furniture, in which liberal concession had been made to cultivated sensibilities’.⁸ Taste and aestheticism are integral to his villainy, for he treats everyone like an object, particularly his wife Isabel. She is tricked by his perfect taste into thinking that his beautiful rooms indicate a perfect character, but she is very wrong. Aestheticism also inspires the ‘flame-like spirit’ that makes Isabel a vibrant heroine, and her Paterian visions that propel the novel’s plot. For James, and Wharton, modern life is inescapably made up of Paterian Aesthetic experiences.

Pater’s reputation as one of the most influential thinkers of the Aesthetic movement rests on *Studies in the History of The Renaissance* (1873), which Wilde described as ‘my golden book; I never travel without it’.⁹ The famous ‘Conclusion’ was attacked at the time as unscholarly and morbid, for unlike many of his contemporaries, Pater was not interested in connoisseurship or didactic morality, but the subjective impression of the work of art. The ‘stirring of the senses’ by ‘strange

flowers and curious odours, or work of the artists' hands' would 'set the spirit free for a moment'.¹⁰

In a phrase marked by Wharton in her own copy and evoked by Isabel Archer, he famously states: 'To burn always with this hard gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life.'¹¹ Every individual lives through fleeting moments in isolation, and the purpose of philosophy and culture is to 'startle' the human spirit into 'sharp and eager observation'. As Colin Cruise describes, 'the reader is thrown into [...] hectic modernity' and challenged 'to find passion in every moment'.¹²

Pater defines and elevates the amoral credo of the Aesthete:

Of this wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for art's sake, has most, for art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake.¹³

Pater's decidedly amoral and luxurious emphasis on sensation and passion is the exotic wave on which Wilde crossed the Atlantic, to explain and popularize 'The English Renaissance' in art and design, echoing Pater's title with 'eloquent vagueness', as Richard Ellmann put it.¹⁴

Aestheticism for the home was first introduced to Americans en masse at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, which had over ten million visitors and was the 'primary vehicle for the communication of British ideas' of reformed and artistic taste as Roger B. Stein writes.¹⁵ America was already familiar with the neo-Gothic of 'Eastlake style', but on display was the more modern taste of Aestheticism. There were trade stands with tiles from Minton, Hollins & Co. Doulton china, and Barnard & Bishop Ironworks brought a whole Japanese-style pavilion with railings made of Jeckyll's wrought iron sunflowers (the andirons in the Peacock Room). Furniture was represented by James Schoolbred & Co., Howard and Son, but also the more avant-garde Collinson & Lock [fig. 2], who made Anglo-Japanese furniture designed by E. W. Godwin (1833-1886). The superiority of British decorative arts and furniture was generally agreed, and the exhibition influenced a generation of American designers and craftspeople and all those who wished to decorate in the most fashionable style.

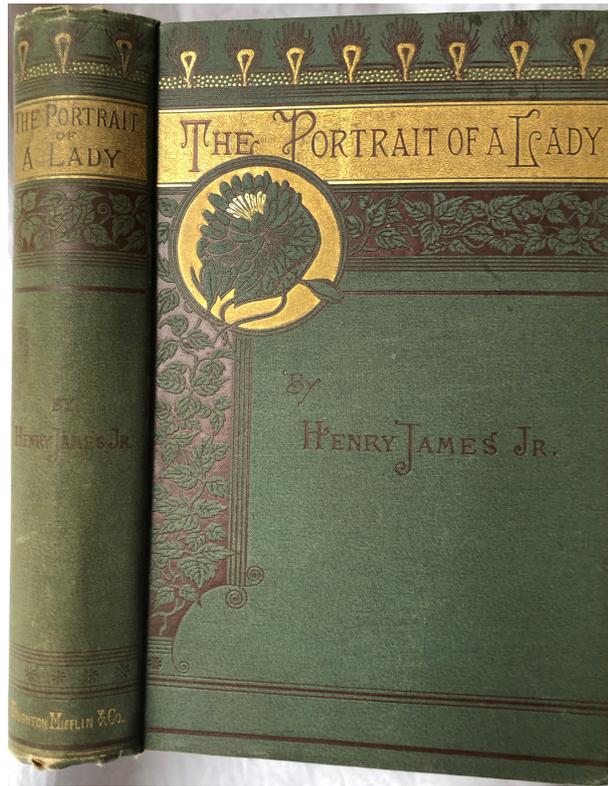


Fig. 1: Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1883). Green cloth cover decorated in gilt and maroon, 520 pp, second printing, 14 x 19.5 x 3 cm. Collection of Ailsa Boyd.

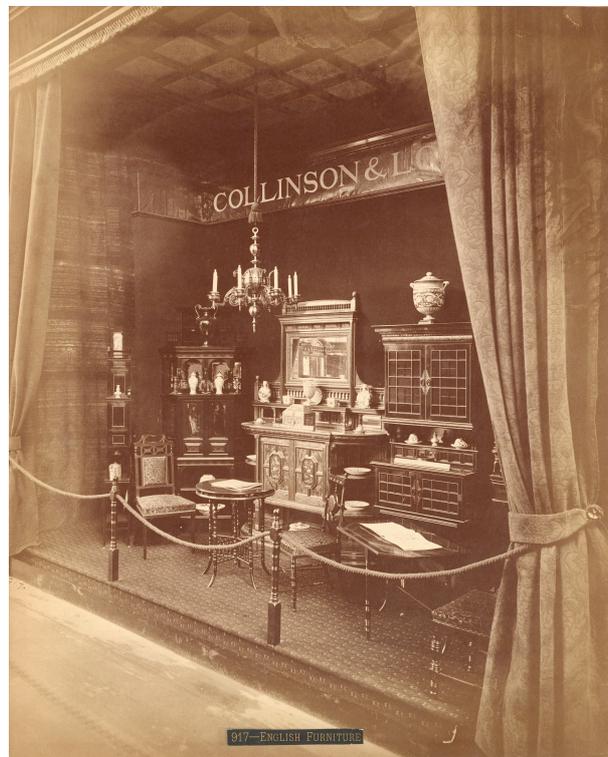


Fig. 2: Philadelphia Centennial Photographic Co., *Collinson & Lock's Furniture Exhibit - Main Building*, 1876. Photograph (silver albumen print), 26 x 21 cm. Free Library of Philadelphia, Print and Picture Collection.

Unlike the Gothic Revival, Aestheticism was not the revival of a single historical style, but a visually playful combination of items from all over the world, from antique Chippendale and Japanese ceramics, to spindly Godwin furniture and modern Morris wallpapers and stained glass. The aim was a *gesamtkunstwerk* of every aspect of life, involving all the senses, and extended to clothing, tableware, furniture, even musical instruments. In the interior, rich hangings could alter sound, and stained glass or fretwork change the colour of light. With every surface richly decorated, Aestheticism's visual complexity makes it difficult for us to comprehend. To modern eyes it can look over the top or fussy, particularly when combined with the extensive economic resources of the homeowner. Although it could also be indicated by a Japanese fan or a peacock feather, this was a privileged way of living, difficult to pin down but easy to lampoon. Manuals of household taste used the catch-all word 'artistic' to describe the 'look'.¹⁶ *Nuttall's Standard Dictionary* in the late 1880s was unsure as to the authenticity of the term, defining Aestheticism as 'devotion, real *or* affected, to the study of the beautiful'.¹⁷ This tendency to affectation was famously lampooned in the series of *Punch* cartoons by George du Maurier (1834-1896). In 'The Six-Mark Tea-Pot', the Aesthetic bridegroom, who looks a bit like Wilde and shares his first name with Swinburne, is exhorted by his 'Intense Bride' in a sprigged tea gown, 'Let us live up to it!' [fig. 3]. The aspiration is to live, in *all things*, at the intense high level of beautiful porcelain.

The boundaries of taste and appropriateness around Aestheticism were in contention, but also dependent on wealth, as young Edith Jones (later Wharton) highlights in a comic poem of 1881. The narrator of 'Intense Love's Utterance', fears he cannot provide a home with 'High art, the highest, completest | To welcome my utterest Bride'.¹⁸ He lists the 'treasures intense and intenser' that she is used to:

How far would a poor fellow's income
Extend in your dados and friezes,
Your Chippendale table, your ceiling
From a study of Paul Veronese's,
Your old Venice glass opalescent,
Your golden stamped leather from Spain,
Your majolica ware iridescent –

Yet to live without these would be pain.

Decorative arts from around the world are described, along with a lot of repurposed ecclesiastical items like portieres made of chasubles, and ‘gold panels | With wailing wan women in rows, | And sunflowers worked on green flannels’. As Laura Rattray states, Wharton was a ‘prolific and dedicated poet’, publishing her first *Verses* aged sixteen, and exploring poetic forms throughout her literary career.¹⁹ This satirical verse, written at the age of nineteen, demonstrates command of rhyme, metre, and word choice to hilarious effect. It zips along in a rhythm worthy of Gilbert and Sullivan, whose opera on the Aesthetic movement, *Patience*, had opened in London in April of that year (while Wharton’s family were in Europe). It ends with the bridegroom deciding that love pales in comparison with the beautiful objects which inspire Paterian intensity:

No, no – what is life? A succession
Of fleeting pulsations (as Pater
Has told us in Renaissance Studies)
Which must cease for us sooner or later,
And Art can alone make them precious,
And lovely and dear as old plate –
Go back to your dados and friezes,
For love is a thing out of date!

Hermione Lee notes how this ‘wry dig’ at Pater recognizes the materialism and snobbery of Wharton’s own status in society, as a debutante from a wealthy, well-connected family.²⁰ She knows fashionable tastes and ideas well enough to satirize them, and is also cynically aware of her own place in the marriage market. She would later develop this theme of valuing beauty and things over people and relationships in her fiction. The difficulty of defining Aestheticism, with its wide base of styles and influences, along with the suspicion of radical lifestyle choices, made the movement ripe for further explanation, hence the popularity of Wilde’s lecture series, initially planned for 50 dates, then extended to 141. Booking agents were told that ‘the general public would be interested in hearing from [Wilde] a true and correct definition and explanation of this latest form of fashionable madness’.²¹



Fig. 3: George Du Maurier, 'The Six-Mark Tea-Pot', *Punch*, 30 October 1880.
Glasgow University Library.



Fig. 4: Napoleon Sarony, *Oscar Wilde*, 1882. Carte de visite, no. 16, oscarwildeinamerica.org.

For eleven months in 1882 Wilde toured the United States and Canada, lecturing on the ‘English Renaissance in Art’ and ‘House Decoration’ [fig. 4]. At twenty-eight, he was internationally famous without having actually done very much – he was yet to write *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) or his successful plays. Susan Owens states that in his journalism Wilde held ‘a vital role [...] in shaping perceptions of Aestheticism’, and as figures like Pater, Rossetti and Swinburne retreated from public view, he was ‘marking out territory as spokesman’, able to entertain and engage a wide audience.²² He developed his lectures as the tour went on, and a definitive version of ‘The House Beautiful’ was only published in 1974, when Kevin H. F. O’Brien reconstructed it from contemporary newspaper reports. In it, Wilde borrows freely from the writings of designer and socialist William Morris, and, to a lesser extent, from W. J. Loftie’s *A Plea for Art in the House* (1876) and Mrs Haweis’ *The Art of Decoration* (1881). The ideas of John Ruskin are an unavoidable context when discussing art, morals, and beauty, and he was also paraphrased by Wilde. The reiteration of predecessors is fairly standard in manuals of household taste, popular guides which led the middle-class homeowner through the crowded shopping arcade of decorative styles. Even Wilde’s title was borrowed from Clarence Cook’s popular American book, *The House Beautiful: Essays on Beds and Tables, Stools and Candlesticks* (1878). This rather sentimental volume was also a transatlantic production: the text was originally published in American magazine *Scribner’s Monthly* illustrated with furniture by Scottish designer Daniel Cottier (1838-1891). As Petra Chu and Max Donnelly have described, Cottier played a ‘crucial role’ in Aestheticism as a skilled designer but also a ‘brilliant art impresario industrialist’, setting up a furnishings company in New York in 1873 selling ‘artistic’ interiors to the very rich.²³ Wilde’s recommendations to have beautiful things in one’s house and express one’s individuality over the upholsterer, are fairly standard. He pithily paraphrases Morris’ ‘The Lesser Arts’ (1877): ‘Have nothing in your houses that is not useful or beautiful; if such a rule were followed out, you would be astonished at the amount of rubbish you would get rid of’.²⁴ He describes the materials for building houses and the importance

of harmony and colour, evoking Whistler: ‘Colours resemble musical notes’. He defends his ‘Aesthetic movement’ against charges of immorality, emphasizing practicality over fashion; for example, his velvet knee breeches are warm and reduce muddy splashes from puddles. In Ruskinian vein, he exhorts this speedily industrializing nation to ‘honor the handicraftsman’ and set up schools of design.²⁵ Newspapers reported Wilde’s words everywhere he went, and the tour made his name internationally, even if by the end, as Ellmann states, he ‘had made people heartily sick of the words “beauty” and “beautiful”’.²⁶



Fig. 5: Jose Maria Mora, *Edith Wharton*, c. 1884. Carte de visite.
The Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

In March 1882, twenty-year-old Edith Wharton [fig. 5] had just returned from living in Europe, after her father’s death. She vividly records the ‘bitter disappointment’ on her first return to New York as a child – ‘How ugly it is!’ – stating ‘I have never since thought or felt otherwise than an exile in America.’²⁷ Newport, Rhode Island, was where the upper classes spent the summer

riding, playing tennis, picnicking and calling on each other, some of which activities she enjoyed, but she also had an inner 'life of dreams & visions, set to the rhythm of the poets, & peopled with thronging images of beauty'.²⁸ Wilde described Newport as 'this little island where idleness ranks among the virtues', and his lecture would certainly have been a diversion from the usual leisure pursuits of the rich.²⁹ The research of Donna M. Campbell and Emily J. Orlando puts Wilde and Wharton both in Newport in July 1882, a small town where she 'could not have been unaware of Wilde's appearance'.³⁰ So although there is no evidence in letters, it seems possible Wharton could have attended his lecture, a welcome change for the restrictive and fashionable 'little society'.³¹

On 15 July 1882, Wilde spoke on 'The Decorative Arts' at 'The Casino in Newport, a lecture with many of the same elements as 'The House Beautiful'.³² The *Sun* newspaper reported that he held 'the entire sympathy of his audience', discussing the ugliness of ladies' bonnets and artificial flowers, and also 'made a special appeal for the inculcation of art among the children'. It seems he might have taken advantage of local antiques as visual aids, for he 'made repeated gestures toward the various articles of antiquated furniture with which the stage was arranged', and spoke on 'the backwardness of Americans in the matter of art, notwithstanding the fact that we had all the wealth with which to train the mind and purchase the material' – the 'cottagers' of Newport were damned with the faint praise that they painted in colours, instead of the white 'which was so general throughout the country'.³³ With the gender assumptions of his time, Wilde praised women for their 'natural art instincts', saying 'it may be the mission of the women of this country to revive decorative art into honest, healthy life'.³⁴ With its proliferation of books and articles written by women, the Aesthetic movement allowed women to become tastemakers. As Orlando has noted, it was American women who embraced Wilde's tour in 1882, both by attending the lectures and hosting him in their homes.³⁵ That summer, Wharton became engaged to Harry Stevens, whose mother Mrs Paran Stevens was a relentless society hostess. While Wilde was staying in New York, Mrs Stevens entertained him at dinner on at least two occasions, and also attended a party for Wilde at the Newport home of Julia Ward Howe the night before his lecture.³⁶ Shortly after,

however, Wharton's engagement was very publicly 'postponed' in *Town Topics* and at the end of an emotional summer, soon after her father's death, she returned to Paris.³⁷ Although we do not know what Wharton may have thought of Wilde's lecture, the event was perhaps a cultural signpost. Orlando writes that Wilde's support of women may have acted as a 'surprising catalyst and enabler for the likes of Wharton', opening up the possibility that a woman from the leisure class could write, undertake interior decoration, or even have a literary career.³⁸

Responses to art, architecture, and design were integral to Wharton's development as a serious writer. Her first novel, *The Valley of Decision* (1902), vividly evokes the art and architecture of eighteenth-century Italy, but her first full-length book was a household taste manual, *The Decoration of Houses* (1897). This was written with her architect friend Ogden Codman Jr. (1863-1951) who, Orlando has discovered, was a gay man who spent a lot of time in Europe and was on the edge of Wilde's circle.³⁹ Orlando has usefully compared the two design treatises, *The Decoration of Houses* and *The House Beautiful*, for despite their differences 'Wilde's lecture served as a meaningful but unacknowledged influence' on the later book.⁴⁰ Both are within the literary tradition of manuals of household taste, with a shared genealogy of influence, which only Wharton and Codman made explicit. They were keen to emphasize their scholarly credentials with a list of 'Books Consulted' in which only the most architectural of contemporary household taste manuals are listed: Robert Kerr and J. J. Stevenson.⁴¹ They use historical research to describe and taxonomize room types, uses, and style, emphasizing symmetry, proportion, and privacy. As Lyn Bennett has described, their concern with emphasizing their own scholarly research would be justified by contemporary reviews, which repeatedly state they fall short of professional status due to lack of originality or 'manliness'.⁴²

The illustrations in *The Decoration of Houses* demonstrate the most obvious difference to Wilde: decorative style [fig. 6]. There are many reasons for Wharton's love of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English, French, and Italian furniture, including her youthful appreciation of European culture and the move away from clutter of the 1890s. Although she took photographs

in European palaces, her aim was to rationalize the excesses of the American Renaissance and advocate simplicity. However, it was the eclecticism of Aestheticism, and its professed position outside of changing fashions, that allowed Wharton to ‘choose’ her favourite style. Wilde’s lectures took place after the 1876 Centennial Exposition, so the Aesthetic style of black Japonese furniture, sunflowers, and peacock feathers was familiar to his audience, but along with his newly acquired velvet suit he brought a new style of furniture to the House Beautiful. It should not be Gothic, ‘so heavy and massive it is out of place when surrounded with the pretty things’, or even Eastlake, which is ‘a little bare and cold, has no delicate lines’, but ‘Queen Anne’ or Chippendale furniture, which is ‘most suitable’ for modern life, for its ‘comfort and beauty’. So, historically and stylistically, this eighteenth-century furniture aligns with Wharton, but Wilde protests that ‘the furniture of the Italian renaissance is too costly and French furniture, gilt and gaudy, is very vulgar, monstrous and unserviceable’.⁴³ As Orlando has noted, Wharton and Codman seem to respond directly to this ‘dismissal of French furniture’ when they address the ‘general impression that eighteenth-century furniture [...] was not comfortable in the modern sense’;⁴⁴ for those who have ‘not studied the subject’ did not notice the ‘easy-chairs and work tables’ of ‘simplicity and convenience’.⁴⁵

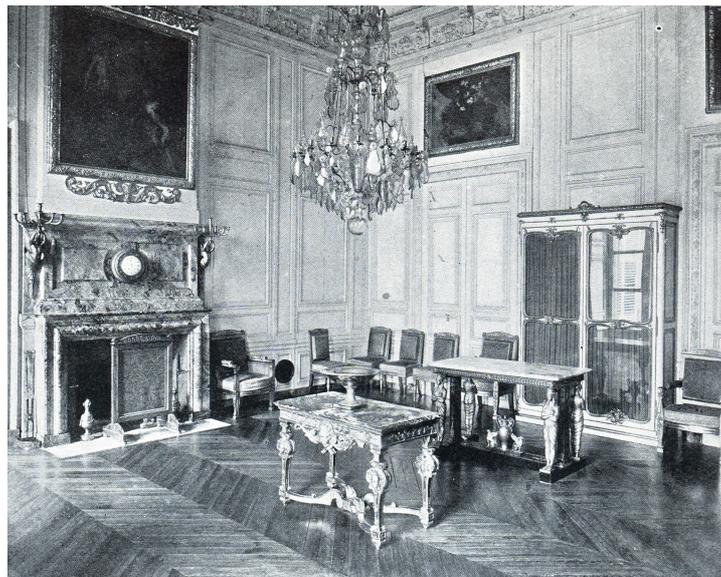


Fig. 6: ‘Room in the Grand Trianon, Versailles’, Plate V, in Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman Jr., *The Decoration of Houses* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1897). Photographed by Nick Smith-Koblitz © The Mount, Edith Wharton’s Home.

When we look at the way the two treatises approach morality, that unavoidable nineteenth-century term of reference, there is no easy opposition of amoral Aestheticism and morally rigid Classicism. They share a belief in the importance of beauty for society as a whole, with that beauty judged by taste and the informed eye, hence the need for their instruction. Wharton and Codman prioritize formal qualities: ‘Architecture addresses itself not to the moral sense, but to the eye.’ With a backhanded swipe at Ruskin, they state, ‘The existing confusion on this point is partly due to the strange analogy drawn by modern critics between artistic sincerity and moral law’.⁴⁶ But their style does have an ethical basis, and the book is full of didactic statements on order, appropriateness, and the avoidance of vulgarity: ‘Proportion is the good breeding of architecture’; ‘symmetry [...] as the sanity of decoration’.⁴⁷ Although they praise Ruskin’s ‘words magical enough to win acceptance for any doctrine’, they take him to task, specifically over his criticism of symmetry in door and window placement being ‘abysses of moral as well as of artistic degradation’.⁴⁸ Thus they dismiss Ruskin’s central stylistic thesis of *The Stones of Venice* (1851-53), that the decline of society was reflected in the change from Gothic (asymmetrical) to Classical (symmetrical) architecture. Sociology and philosophy have taught Wharton and Codman that ‘a regard for symmetry, besides satisfying a legitimate artistic requirement, tends to make the average room not only easier to furnish but more comfortable to live in’.⁴⁹ They recognize the importance of design for the health of society, an Associationist philosophy applied to the domestic interior since the 1850s: ‘If art really is a factor in civilization, it seems obvious that the feeling for beauty needs as careful cultivation as other civic virtues’.⁵⁰ Similarly, Wilde advocates ‘a democratic art, entering into the houses of the people, making beautiful the simplest vessels they contain for there is nothing in common life too mean [...] that art cannot raise and sanctify’.⁵¹ Although Wilde would later epitomize the position of Art for Art’s sake, here: ‘It is sometimes said that our art is opposed to good morals; but on the contrary, it fosters morality’ through a ‘common intellectual atmosphere between all countries’, which might even prevent wars.⁵²

Historicism was a widespread artistic strategy in the nineteenth century, but Aestheticism made it eclectic. Decorative items could be taken from any religion, country, or time period, with beauty the only criteria. This was strengthened by the transatlantic cultural dialogue, which ranged from artists inspired by encounters with the Old World, to Pre-Raphaelite stained-glass fitted into cathedrals in Boston, or millionaires furnishing their New York mansions with whole antique panelled rooms shipped from France. Chu and Donnelly have highlighted how Aestheticism uniquely came to emphasize the 'best materials and craftsmanship', departing from stricter styles like neo-Gothic by not favouring the medieval, and allowing the use of mechanical tools.⁵³ Thus, despite Wilde's supposedly democratic lectures, by the 1890s Aestheticism became popular with the new industrial millionaires. The original principles of simple taste and beauty had been replaced with displays of 'conspicuous consumption', in Thorstein Veblen's term.⁵⁴ Wharton and Codman state that 'the vulgarity of current decoration has its source in the indifference of the wealthy to architectural fitness'.⁵⁵ Their book, with a chapter on 'Gala Rooms and Ball Rooms', is addressed to these vulgar millionaires, and laments how American Renaissance architects using European Classicism and Baroque as models could 'sometimes lose sight of their relative unfitness for modern use', creating 'confused and extravagant' rooms.⁵⁶ Wharton similarly condemned conspicuous consumption throughout her novels. In the chapter 'Bric-à-Brac', Wharton and Codman advocate 'the Oriental habit of displaying only one or two objects of art at a time [which] shows a more delicate sense of these limitations than the Western passion for multiplying effects'. In an almost Ruskinian phrase, selection of anything beyond essentials (lamps, furniture) should be limited to the 'labors of the master-artist's hand'.⁵⁷

In the 1880s and 1890s, American high-end Aestheticism inspired by historically and geographically diverse models was mostly created by European craftsmen, using both hand and machine techniques, and expensive and often rare materials. For the very rich, the useful could be made very beautiful indeed. One of the largest 'cottages' in Newport was The Breakers, built for Cornelius Vanderbilt II in 1895. Its grand public rooms were decorated by French firm J. Allard

et fils, with panelling in rare woods, Baccarat crystal chandeliers, rose alabaster columns, and plasterwork gilded with platinum leaf and twenty-two carat gold. Codman was pleased to obtain the valuable commission to design the bedroom floors in a lighter, more restrained Louis XV and Louis XVI style. However, a couple of years later, Wharton complained to Codman, 'I wish the Vanderbilts didn't retard culture so very thoroughly. They are entrenched in a sort of Thermopylae of bad taste, from which apparently no force on earth can dislodge them.'⁵⁸ Wharton and Codman also condemn the way Aesthetic taste has trickled down, for by the 1890s 'artistic' furniture is cheaply made 'showy stuff' and 'hints for "artistic interiors"' in the newspapers use 'such poetic adjectives as jonquil-yellow, willow-green [...] or ashes of roses' and are 'usually cheap devices based upon the mistaken idea that defects in structure or design may be remedied by an overlaying of color or ornament'.⁵⁹ Adding more rich patterns cannot fix a badly proportioned room. In her own homes, Wharton utilized the visual playfulness she had learned from Aestheticism, but she was not swayed by fashion, preferring the historical integrity of antiques.

Both Wharton and Wilde were able to create their own House Beautiful, however briefly. Wilde lived in Tite Street, London, from 1884 until the debacle of his trial, imprisonment, and bankruptcy in 1895. Wilde's home certainly did not always follow his own rules and was perhaps a consciously theatrical interior commensurate with his celebrity status. His previous bachelor rooms were decorated with 'exquisite objects' more along the lines of an artist's studio.⁶⁰ The interior of the red brick terrace of 16 Tite Street, Chelsea, was designed by E. W. Godwin, with assistance from Whistler. The dining room, including the Chippendale chairs, was painted glossy white, like lacquer. A narrow shelf fixed on the wall around the room acted as a sideboard, with a built-in corner seat and chest for storage. There was Japanese matting on the floors rather than rugs, and doors were replaced by curtains, a lack of privacy which Wharton would have hated. He wrote to Godwin: 'Each chair is a sonnet in ivory, and the table is a masterpiece in pearl.' The practicalities of such décor in a home with two young boys is questionable: 'We find that a rose leaf can be laid on the ivory table without scratching it – at least a white one can. That is something.'

The drawing room was also white, with yellow and pink. On the walls were Whistler etchings, Japanese fans, and Regency convex mirrors, as depicted in this sketch, probably by Whistler's wife, the artist Beatrix Whistler (1857-1896) [fig. 7]. The smoking room and library had a 'distinctly Turkish note' with low divan seating and the window covered in a pierced wood screen, painted in dark blue and pale gold. Wilde probably enjoyed the dramatic impression it made on visitors, and Constance's cousin was taken aback by the bareness: 'no fire and a look as if the furniture had been cleared out for a dance'.⁶¹

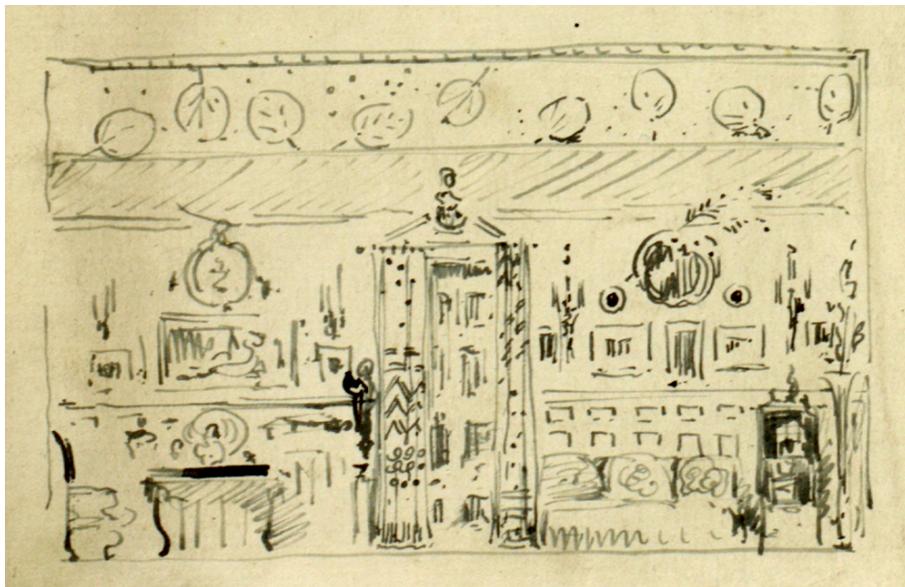


Fig. 7: Attributed to Beatrix Whistler, *Sketch of an interior, possibly Oscar Wilde's drawing room at 16 Tite Street, Chelsea, London*, c. 1884. Pen drawing (ink on paper), 17.9 x 22.8 cm. GLAHA 46408 (verso detail). Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow, Birnie Philip Bequest.

Wharton decorated several homes according to the principles of her book, and built The Mount at Lenox, Massachusetts in 1902, probably exerting influence in the architectural as well as the interior design. Wharton designed a comfortable English country house with New England shutters on the outside, and a decidedly French character within. She worked with Codman on the interior, who designed wood and plaster panelling painted in light, bright colours, apart from the library where natural wood provides a beautiful background for books. There are terrazzo floors, gilded electric light sconces and floral paintings set into the walls [fig. 8]. Throughout, the furniture is French and comfortable, not spindly or impractical. Her boudoir upstairs is furnished in pink

toile de jony, and as the most private room in the house is where she wrote. Wharton entertained here a great deal, but not at the scale of ‘gala rooms’, and on the ground floor the comfortable rooms lead out to a terrace overlooking her beloved gardens. It was reluctantly sold in 1911, by which time she was living in France, able to create authentically French interiors.

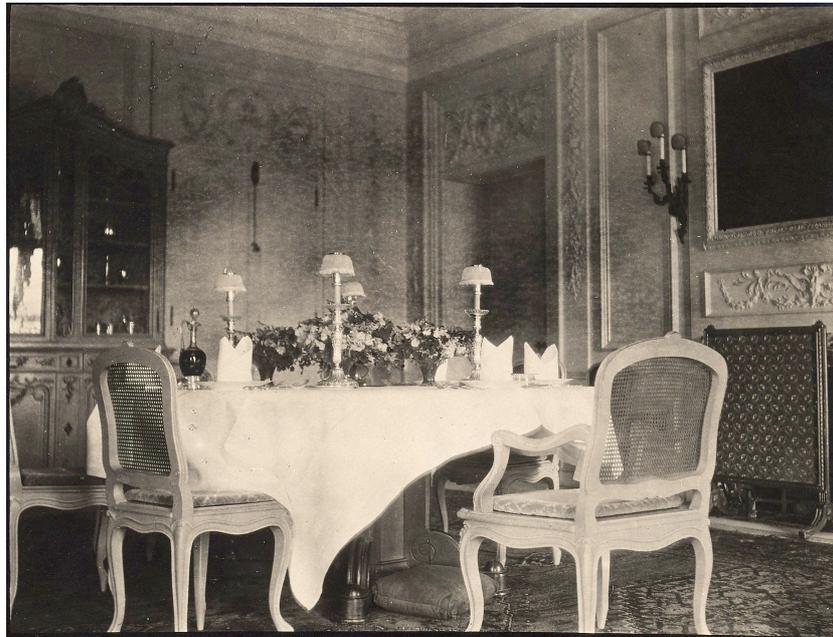


Fig. 8: *Dining Room, The Mount*, during Wharton’s occupancy 1902-11. Edith Wharton Collection. Yale Collection of American Literature. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Wharton lived up to the ideal of beauty and civilization espoused by *The Decoration of Houses*, in the restrained, tasteful way that so many American millionaires did not. As her friend Vernon Lee wrote in 1912, ‘beauty has come to be associated with all our notations of order, of goodness, of health, and of more complete life’.⁶² Both Wilde and Wharton lived within their own *gesamtkunstwerk* where décor and lifestyle were combined with their own ideals of beauty – though at Tite Street with rather less practicality. Each House Beautiful was only possible through the tenets of Aestheticism, beyond conventional expectations or morality, breaking down the divisions between the ‘lesser arts’ and fine art to build homes that were beautiful and inspiring. Wilde’s later work would fully express the surge of imaginative freedom and creativity this enabled. In ‘The Critic as Artist’ (1890), he distilled the ideas of Swinburne and Pater into the role of creative critic:

“The critic occupies the same relation to the work of art that he criticizes as the artist does to the visible world of form and colour, or the unseen world of passion and of thought.”⁶³ What we can call ‘Paterian vision’ is the emotive and physical process by which we achieve a subjective understanding of a work of art. According to Pater, ‘the movement, the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations, that analysis leaves off, that continual vanishing away, that strange perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves’.⁶⁴

Fiction from both ends of Wharton’s career demonstrates different ways in which she uses the philosophy of Aestheticism. A Paterian vision propels a short story, and in her final novel, the transatlantic exchange of money for status makes the reader examine the relationship of beauty and integrity. A quote from the short story ‘The Fulness of Life’ (1893) is frequently used to comment on Wharton’s unfulfilling marriage: ‘a woman’s nature is like a great house full of rooms’ and in the innermost, ‘the soul sits alone and waits for a footstep that never comes’.⁶⁵ However, the climax of the tale is a Paterian vision of Aesthetic beauty through meditation on an art object. A woman on the threshold of death converses with a Spirit, revealing that the fullness of her life came not from her marriage but a ‘moment’ of ‘exquisite sensations’ and happiness.⁶⁶ In the church of Orsanmichele in Florence, she contemplates the highly wrought tabernacle in which is displayed a mid-fourteenth-century painting of the Madonna and Child.⁶⁷ ‘The marble, worn and mellowed by the subtle hand of time, took on an unspeakable rosy hue, suggestive in some remote way of the honey-colored columns of the Parthenon, but more mystic.’ All her senses are aroused: the air is ‘incense-laden’, she hears the ‘wail of the priest’, seeing ‘magical light’, and the ‘flame of candles upon martyrs’ tombs, and gleams of sunset through symbolic panes of chrysoprase and ruby [...] the light of the middle ages’. The work of art inspires a vision of the whole history of humankind, where she is ‘borne onward along a mighty current, whose source seemed to be in the very beginning of things’ and ‘the mingled streams of human passion and endeavour’.⁶⁸ This transforms into a cavalcade of the symbols and styles of design history, worthy of the pages of the *Grammar of Ornament*.⁶⁹ ‘As I gazed the mediaeval bosses of the tabernacle of Orcagna seemed to melt and

flow into their primal forms so that the folded lotus of the Nile and the Greek acanthus were braided with the runic knots and fish-tailed monsters of the North'. The work of the medieval handicraftsman is then revealed: 'And so the river bore me on, past the alien face of antique civilizations and the familiar wonders of Greece, till I swam upon the fiercely rushing tide of the Middle Ages [...]; I heard the rhythmic blow of the craftsmen's hammers in the goldsmiths' workshops and on the walls of churches.' She has a physical and emotional response: 'the tears burned my lids, the joy and mystery of it seemed too intolerable to be borne'.⁷⁰ The achievement of her vision is thoroughly Paterian: the contemplation of a work of art, involving all the senses ('a group of impressions – colour, odour, texture – in the mind of the observer'), even a sense of time travel, connecting the past and present in an object, and the subjective, transformational response.⁷¹

Pater states that 'each mind [is] keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world', and this solitude is the woman's misfortune, for beside her, her husband is prosaically 'gazing into the bottom of his hat'.⁷² This is the tragic version of 'Intense Love's Utterance', for in life, she has never met one who 'could have heard it with me'.⁷³ This moment also accords with Lee's theories of 'aesthetic emotion', where looking at art, architecture, and design has an actual physical effect on emotions.⁷⁴ Friends with Wharton from 1894, Lee was her mentor during the writing of *The Valley of Decision* (1902). Wharton would have known about the theories of aesthetic empathy Lee had been developing since the 1880s, and the 'illusion of mental lucidity', inspired in particular by the architecture, structure, and decoration of Gothic churches: 'With this feeling of clearheadedness goes a keen excitement; we seem to be living at twice our normal rate, and life, for no definable reason, seems twice as much worth living.'⁷⁵ 'The Fulness of Life' demonstrates this 'hypothesis of the aesthetic perception of visible form'; the ideal Aesthetic experience.⁷⁶

Wharton also utilizes Paterian vision in her final novel, *The Buccaneers*, to demonstrate the ardent nature of Nan St George. In this unfinished historical novel, Wharton looks back at the mid-1870s of her childhood, in particular the many international marriages of rich American

women into the British aristocracy, desperate for economic assistance during an agricultural depression. This transatlantic exchange of money, status, and sex brokered by mothers like Mrs Paran Stevens, resulted in infamously disastrous marriages, like that of Consuelo Vanderbilt and the ninth duke of Marlborough.⁷⁷ Hermione Lee has described it as ‘a high-spirited, socially acute, lavish historical comedy’ with a ‘bitter theme’.⁷⁸ In this often-harsh satire, the only consolation is the misty, romantic background made up of Wharton’s love of British art, landscape, and history. Honourslove is a ‘honey-coloured’ Jacobean manor house on ‘the edge of the Cotswolds’ and the home of Sir Helmsley and Guy Thwarte, who are united in their ‘joint love of their house and the land it stood on’.⁷⁹ Unlike the other American heiresses, Nan with her ‘fresh eyes’ and ‘receptive mind’ has ‘an emotional sense [...] of its beauties’.⁸⁰ The theme of history is strengthened by references to Rossetti’s art and poetry, for the Pre-Raphaelites were inspired by English myths like Arthurian legend – one of the characters even owns King Arthur’s Tintagel Castle in Cornwall. But it is at Honourslove that Nan comes across Sir Helmsley’s treasure: ‘Well, she came to a dead point before the Rossetti in the study, and at once began to quote “The Blessed Damozel”.’ This is her moment of Paterian vision, which has accumulated from going around the ‘exquisitely intimate’ house and gardens with Guy, ‘at ease with the soft mellow place as though some secret thread of destiny attached her to it’. That she will fall in love with Guy is indicated in their shared understanding ‘about the *beyondness* of things’.⁸¹ Because she understands ‘something of her environment, which is a sealed book to the others’, the layers of history and beauty in the house make her Paterian vision inevitable.⁸²

When governess Miss Testvalley first reads the Rossetti poem ‘The Blessed Damozel’, sixteen-year-old Nan is captivated. The ‘harmonious syllables flowed on’ as though ‘it symbolized something grave and mysterious’:

The blessèd damozel leaned out
From the gold bar of Heaven:
Her eyes were deeper than the depth
Of waters stilled at even.⁸³

Rossetti worked on the poem for most of his life, revising it between 1847-70. He began painting the subject in 1871, around the time the novel is set. It is one of his ‘double works’, depicting what Jerome McGann calls the ‘foundational Rossettian subject’ of the woman in paradise, looking down on her earthly lover.⁸⁴ He famously created several versions and by the time the novel was published, one had made its way to America in the collection of Grenville Winthrop, an acquaintance of Wharton’s.⁸⁵ The combination of visual image and poem enhances the vision, and Nan is captivated by this ancient dream of medieval, symbolic beauty. It is ‘one of Nan’s magic casements’ – a window onto another world like Tennyson’s similarly medieval *Idylls of the King*.⁸⁶ In 1893, Wharton wrote to her former governess Anna Bahlmann (inspiration for Miss Testvalley): ‘I think Rossetti’s sonnets unsurpassed in English’, and marked a stanza from this poem in her copy.⁸⁷ Like young Edith Jones confronted with Aestheticism and poetry in the intellectual desert of Newport, it opens Nan’s mind to other possibilities and cultures.

Miss Testvalley is rather worried that Nan should reveal that she knows the poem, as some people would be ‘shocked’; just one of the ways the American Buccaneers manage to discomfort the British. Sir Helmsley sardonically comments on Nan’s recitation – ‘So the Fleshly School has penetrated to the backwoods!’⁸⁸ This refers to Robert Buchanan’s vicious attack on ‘The Fleshly School of Poetry’ of 1871 which accused Rossetti, Swinburne, and Morris of obscenity. Buchanan compared Rossetti’s *Poems* of 1870 with his paintings, finding ‘the same morbid deviation from healthy forms of life, the same sense of wary, wasting, yet exquisite sensuality; nothing virile, nothing tender, nothing completely sane’.⁸⁹ The decadent side of Aestheticism relates to worries over its dissolution of boundaries of all sorts – social, sexual, and hierarchical. We discover Helmsley is ‘one of [Rossetti’s] best patrons’, with his own misspent youth in Paris. His ‘odd intimacies with a group of painters and decorators of socialistic tendencies, reckless dalliance with ladies’ sounds very like the Pre-Raphaelites or even Morris, known for his Socialism.⁹⁰ Like the other literary Aesthete Gilbert Osmond, Helmsley’s own creativity is limited to copying, and by this process he reinscribes the importance and mysterious nature of his Madonna by Rossetti. The

‘small jewel-like picture in a heavy frame’ that inspires Nan’s recitation is not an identifiable actual work.⁹¹ The other Rossetti painting mentioned, *Bocca Baciata* (1859), does exist, and marked a new (and more successful) phase in Rossetti’s work. His half-lengths of beautiful women, adorned in gorgeous clothes, jewellery, and surrounded by beautiful things, prioritize formal characteristics over narrative. He designed intricate frames to augment the decorative object-ness, and often used fruit and flower symbols to indicate hidden, personal meanings. But when considered in conjunction with Wharton’s theme of women being sold on the marriage market, the objectifying of women as merely aesthetic items without their own agency or voice, is particularly pointed. Helmsley’s Madonna is a mysterious talisman, with its own hidden meaning, for only Miss Testvalley ‘knows all about the circumstances in which my D. G. Rossetti was painted and knows also the mysterious replica with variants which is still in D. G.’s possession, and which he has never been willing to show me’.⁹² The hermetic, icon-like aspect of the painting is key for Nan’s Paterian moment of poetic glossolalia, which also inspires Helmsley’s meditation through copying. It is an Aesthetic talisman linking the true love stories in the novel, which are ultimately destroyed by patriarchal society that prioritizes money, status, and convention over beauty, freedom, and love.

Wharton began writing *The Buccaneers* in 1934, at the same time as her memoir *A Backward Glance*, and by the time of her death in 1937 it was three-quarters complete. In both books, she uses memory and nostalgia to reflect on current attitudes. Drawn back to the time of her youth, the 1870s, Wharton examined society at the height of Aestheticism, when the transatlantic exchange of ideas and culture were just beginning to create new possibilities for women and her own artistic ambitions. For the Buccaneers of the 1870s, the exchange was frustratingly economic, with little space for ‘the *beyondness* of things’ and often disastrous. But it was the Aesthetes, and the ‘painters and decorators of socialistic tendencies’ who developed ideas about beauty, morality, and society that showed a way in which modern life could be elevated. ‘The House Beautiful’ was found not just in the showrooms of Morris & Co, but in the literature, poetry, and art of the world.

As Wilde said: ‘Today more than ever the artist and a love of the beautiful are needed to temper and counteract the sordid materialism of the age. In an age when [...] commerce is ruining beautiful rivers and magnificent woodlands [...] the artist comes forward as a priest and prophet of nature to protest’.⁹³

¹ This article would not have been possible without support from the University of Glasgow Transatlantic Literary Women group (#TeaWithTLW), whose regular meetings throughout the pandemic kept me connected to current research on and around Edith Wharton. With thanks to the organizers Chiara Bullen, Dr Lindsay Middleton, and Dr Laura Rattray.

² Kevin H. F. O’Brien, ‘“The House Beautiful”: A Reconstruction of Oscar Wilde’s American Lecture’, *Victorian Studies*, 17 (1974), 395-418, para. 49.

³ Jonathan Freedman, ‘An Aestheticism of Our Own: American Writers and the Aesthetic Movement’, in Doreen Bolger Burke et al., *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), pp. 385-99 (p. 385).

⁴ Wilde, quoted in O’Brien, para. 14.

⁵ Vernon Lee to her mother, 23 June 1883, quoted in Richard Ormond, ‘John Singer Sargent: A Biographical Sketch’, in *John Singer Sargent*, ed. by Elaine Kilmurray and Richard Ormond (London: Tate Gallery, 1998), pp. 11-23 (p. 15).

⁶ Jonathan Freedman, *Professions of Taste* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 167.

⁷ Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1883), p. 269.

⁸ James, p. 198.

⁹ W. B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 130.

¹⁰ Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1873), p. 232.

¹¹ Marked on p. 250 of Wharton’s edition (London: Macmillan, 1894). ‘Pater, Walter The Renaissance Studies in Art and Poetry’, *EWL* <<http://edithwhartonslibrary.org/ewl/items/show/1477>> [accessed 16 March 2023].

¹² Colin Cruise, ‘Walter Pater (1839-1894)’, in *The Cult of Beauty*, ed. by Stephen Calloway and Lynn Federle Orr assisted by Esmé Whittaker (London: V&A Publishing, 2011), pp. 60-61 (p. 61).

¹³ Pater, p. 213.

¹⁴ Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Penguin, 1988), p. 150.

¹⁵ Roger B. Stein, ‘Artifact as Ideology’, in Burke, et al., pp. 23-51 (p. 28).

¹⁶ Penny Sparke, ‘Furnishing the Aesthetic Interior: Manuals and Theories’, in Calloway et al., pp. 124-33.

¹⁷ *Nuttall’s Standard Dictionary* (London: Warne & Co., [1887]), emphasis added.

¹⁸ Edith Wharton, ‘Intense Love’s Utterance’, *Novellas and Other Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1990), p. 1093.

¹⁹ Laura Rattray, *Edith Wharton and Genre* (London: Palgrave Writings WRITINGS??? Macmillan, 2020), p. 20.

²⁰ Hermione Lee, *Edith Wharton* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2007), pp. 61-62.

²¹ Ellmann, p. 145.

²² Susan Owens, ‘Oscar Wilde’, in Calloway et al., pp. 216-19 (p. 216).

²³ Petra Chu and Max Donnelly, *Daniel Cottier: Designer, Decorator, Dealer* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2021), p. 2.

²⁴ Wilde, quoted in O’Brien, para. 5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 3-4.

²⁶ Ellmann, p. 200.

²⁷ Edith Wharton, ‘Life and I’, in *Unpublished Writings of Edith Wharton*, ed. by Laura Rattray, 2 vols (London: Taylor & Francis, 2009), II, p. 192.

²⁸ Wharton, ‘Life and I’, p. 194.

²⁹ Oscar Wilde to Charles Eliot Norton [c. 15 July 1882], in *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), p. 177.

³⁰ Donna M. Campbell, ‘Did Edith Wharton meet Oscar Wilde during his 1882 American Tour? A continuing literary mystery’ <<https://donnamcampbell.wordpress.com/2015/02/27/>> [accessed 10 September 2021]; Emily J. Orlando ‘“Perilous Coquetry”: Oscar Wilde’s Influence on Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, Jr.’, *American Literary Realism*, 50 (2017), 25-48 (p. 45).

³¹ Edith Wharton, *A Backward Glance* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1934), p. 48.

- ³² John Cooper, 'Newport' <<https://www.oscarwildeinamerica.org/lectures-1882/july/0715-newport.html>> [accessed 10 October 2021].
- ³³ Anon., 'Oscar Wilde in Newport', *The Sun* (New York, NY), 16 July 1882, p. 5, quoted in Cooper, 'Newport'.
- ³⁴ O'Brien, p. 402, para 1, n. 14.
- ³⁵ Orlando, p. 27.
- ³⁶ Orlando, p. 27, n. 18; p. 45.
- ³⁷ H. Lee, pp. 60-61.
- ³⁸ Orlando, p. 35.
- ³⁹ Codman had also recently returned from Europe to Massachusetts, and could also have attended one of Wilde's lectures. Orlando, pp. 44-45.
- ⁴⁰ Orlando, p. 28.
- ⁴¹ Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman Jr., *The Decoration of Houses* (1897; New York: Norton, 1997), p. 242.
- ⁴² Lyn Bennett, 'The Critical Reception of Edith Wharton', in Gary Totten, ed., *Memorial Boxes and Guarded Interiors: Edith Wharton and Material Culture* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), pp. 19-43 and 22-26.
- ⁴³ Wilde, quoted in O'Brien, para. 22-24.
- ⁴⁴ Orlando, p. 34.
- ⁴⁵ Wharton and Codman, pp. 130-32.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 66.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 175.
- ⁵¹ Wilde, quoted in O'Brien, para. 50.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, para. 48.
- ⁵³ Chu and Donnelly, pp. 2-3.
- ⁵⁴ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899; London: George Allen & Unwin, 1922), p. 68.
- ⁵⁵ Wharton and Codman, p. 3.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 5 and 192.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 190.
- ⁵⁸ Edith Wharton to Ogden Codman, 1 May 1897, Folder 1676. Codman family papers (MS001). Historic New England, Library & Archives.
- ⁵⁹ Wharton and Codman, pp. 28 and 32.
- ⁶⁰ Anne Anderson, 'At Home with Oscar: Constructing "The House Beautiful"', *The Wildean*, 24 (2004), 25-45 (p. 27).
- ⁶¹ Charlotte Gere and Lesley Hoskins, *The House Beautiful: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetic Interior* (London: Lund Humphries in association with the Geffrye Museum, 2000), pp. 100 and 102.
- ⁶² Vernon Lee and C. Anstruther-Thomson, *Beauty and Ugliness* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1912), p. 29.
- ⁶³ Oscar Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', in *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Richard Ellmann (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 341-408 (p. 372).
- ⁶⁴ Pater, p. 210.
- ⁶⁵ Edith Wharton, 'The Fulness of Life', *Scribner's Magazine*, 14.6 (1893), 699-704 (p. 700).
- ⁶⁶ Wharton, 'Fulness', p. 701.
- ⁶⁷ Andrea Orcagna (c. 1308-c. 1368), Tabernacle, c. 1359, marble, surrounding Barnardo Daddi (c. 1280-1348), *Madonna with Child and Angels*, c. 1346, tempera and gold on panel, in Orsanmichele church, Florence, completed 1404.
- ⁶⁸ Wharton, 'Fulness', p. 701.
- ⁶⁹ Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament* (London: Day & Son, 1856).
- ⁷⁰ Wharton, 'Fulness', pp. 701-02
- ⁷¹ Pater, p. 209.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*
- ⁷³ Wharton, 'Fulness', p. 702.
- ⁷⁴ Vernon Lee and C. Anstruther-Thomson, 'Beauty and Ugliness', *The Contemporary Review*, 1 July 1897, pp. 544-69, pp. 669-88 (p. 562).
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 568.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 688.
- ⁷⁷ Adeline R. Tintner, 'Consuelo Vanderbilt and *The Buccaneers*', *Edith Wharton Review*, 10 (1993), 15-19. Mrs Stevens married off her daughter to Lord Arthur Paget. See H. Lee, pp. 59 and 724.
- ⁷⁸ H. Lee, pp. 720-21.
- ⁷⁹ Edith Wharton, *The Buccaneers* (New York and London: D. Appleton-Century, 1938), pp. 106 and 108.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 345 and 235.
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 136-37.
- ⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 234.

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 88-89.

⁸⁴ The long publishing and production history of the poem and paintings is detailed in 'Doubleworks Exhibit: The Blessed Damozel', in *The Complete Writings and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. by Jerome J. McGann <<http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/1-1847.s244.raw.html>> [accessed 16 March 2023].

⁸⁵ Although not friends, Wharton and Winthrop both lived in Lenox, MA. See R. W. B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis, *The Letters of Edith Wharton* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 72-73 and 485.

⁸⁶ Wharton, *The Buccaneers*, p. 166.

⁸⁷ Irene Goldman-Price, *My Dear Governess: The Letters of Edith Wharton to Anna Bablmann* (Yale: New Haven and London, 2012), p. 105. Wharton owned two copies of his complete works, presents from Christmas 1895. 'Rossetti, Dante Gabriel The Collected Works of Rossetti', *EWL* <<http://sheilaliming.com/ewl/items/show/1596>> [accessed 16 March 2023].

⁸⁸ Wharton, *The Buccaneers*, p. 139.

⁸⁹ Robert Buchanan as 'Thomas Maitland', 'The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D. G. Rossetti', *Contemporary Review*, 18 (October 1871), 334-50, quoted in Calloway et al., p. 55.

⁹⁰ Wharton, *The Buccaneers*, pp. 164 and 112.

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 117 and 235.

⁹² Ibid., p. 235.

⁹³ Wilde, quoted in O'Brien, paras 48-49.