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ART AND ARTIFACT IN SELECTED FICTION
OF EDITH WHARTON

by

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ABSTRACT

The thesis is a study of Edith Wharton's functional use of the significant detail. There are three categories of details: the art of decoration or interior and exterior architecture; artifacts, predominantly such things as clothing, jewelry, china; and specific works of art, including music, literature, sculpture, and painting. These details function to reveal character and interrelationships between characters. They motivate and support the action of the novels by often foreshadowing certain events in the novel; thus they serve as structural devices. By using these details as a system of observation in the novel, it is possible to obtain insights into Mrs. Wharton's philosophy and ultimately arrive at more precise thematic definition. Finally, when such details appear as symbols, several functions are combined; and, as a result, the meaning of the novel is enriched.

In satiric novels of manners such as The House of Mirth and The Custom of the Country, functional details serve as guideposts between the various strata of society and plot the ascent and descent of characters through these levels. They also function as a means to compare and contrast the aristocracies of Europe and America. In The Reef, a novel of situation, the setting for the psychological, moral drama provides a sensitive register for the varied temperaments and moral codes of the characters.

When only one stratum of society is being discussed, Mrs. Wharton's selection of the significant detail provides for subtle dif-
ferentiation between members of that stratum and reveals their individualities. Thus, in the historic novel of manners such as *The Age of Innocence* and *The Old Maid*, the rigid social structure of New York in the third quarter of the nineteenth century is found to contain its revolutionaries whose spirit of revolt is indicated by significant details of the three categories. This description is not merely used to establish the period. An interesting dramatic extension of a symbolic artifact in *The Old Maid* provides that novelette with compounded irony and unifies the main and subordinate actions.

Observations of the symbolic detail in *Ethan Frome*, *Summer*, *Hudson River Bracketed*, and *The Gods Arrive* leads to the emergence of two main themes in Edith Wharton's fiction: the deterministic forces of the past which prevent individuals from pursuing their wants, and the utility of the tradition of the art and society which is to be found in the past. All these works have in common the use of a pervading symbol.

In her last novel, *The Buccaneers*, she has combined several functions of the significant detail. By revealing character and foreshadowing action, these details forecast the future structure of the unfinished novel. Mrs. Wharton's use of detail throughout the corpus of her fiction is consistent, and many conclusions concerning her philosophy of life and art can be obtained through the observation of this artistic method.
INTRODUCTION

An "Angel of Devastation" with a "frame of steel" was Henry James's way of alluding to his friend, Edith Newbold Jones Wharton. He wrote to her "as the worm may write to the eagle."\(^1\) The irony of the last statement is obvious when one compares the contemporary literary reputations of the two artists,\(^2\) but the former epithets are still quite meaningful. Mrs. Wharton's cultivation in the arts of decoration, landscaping, architecture, literary composition; her knowledge of languages and the fine arts; and her travels ranging from the remote countryside of New England to the interior of Morocco had made her a rather awesome figure on the American scene, which appeared to her as something of a "modern wasteland" which it was her duty to "redeem."\(^3\) A debutante in New York, her interest in the somewhat insular four hundred into which she was born in 1862 enabled her to be a competent chronicler of that society whose concern for good manners surpassed their concern for the arts.\(^4\) Her "frame of steel" was such that she was able to remain active in such a society while maintaining a steady devotion to the arts. Both were combined in her life and works. Her mornings were usually spent writing, and by afternoon she was "at home" to her friends. In such a crowded schedule she was able, from the age of thirty-five in 1897 until her death in 1937, to write fifteen novels, eleven novelettes, eleven volumes of short stories, two volumes of verses, twelve other books on travel, decoration, literary composition, and numerous reviews and articles.\(^5\)
Henry James had a similar background in the society of New York and Newport, although two decades earlier than Mrs. Wharton, and had a similar interest in the arts, particularly painting. Furthermore, as has often been pointed out, their novels have many similarities in style and theme. One of these points of comparison is the functional, often symbolic, use of visual arts in description in order to give a deeper meaning to and more precise delineation of character and to give support to the action. By observing the functional use of the arts, Edwin T. Bowden in The Themes of Henry James (New Haven, 1956), has ultimately arrived at a clearer definition of theme in James's novels and a similarity of theme in Henry James's works as a whole. A similar study will be made in this thesis; and, by the process of induction from the many particular details Mrs. Wharton has employed, conclusions drawn from her use of the visual arts and the objet d'art will be in agreement with many attitudes of James towards the arts and their use in fiction. With this "system of observation" in hand, it is possible to arrive at a more meaningful understanding and interpretation of many of Mrs. Wharton's better works and gain insights into her artistic method. In addition to the particular work of art, much of Mrs. Wharton's description of architecture and concrete artifacts will also be considered as applicable to and necessary for her artistic purposes in the novel.

In Mrs. Wharton's own life, she felt the necessity of being surrounded by the beautiful, the artful. She admits her fear of ugliness in her autobiography. The passage is also important because it reveals her consciousness of the relationship between architecture
and character:

The effect of terror produced by the house of Rhinecliff was no doubt partly due to what seemed to me its intolerable ugliness. My visual sensibility must always have been too keen for middling pleasures; my photographic memory of rooms and houses . . . was from my earliest years a source of inarticulate misery, for I was always vaguely frightened by ugliness. I can still remember hating everything at Rhinecliff . . . and from the first I was obscurely conscious of a queer resemblance between the granitic exterior of Aunt Elizabeth and her grimly comfortable home, between her battlemented caps and the turrets of Rhinecliff.

This relationship between houses and their owners is used functionally in many of her novels. Further evidence of the importance of art in her life as a novelist is her consideration of a novelist as a "mediaeval minaturist" who "encloses his subjects in a border of beautiful ornament and delicate vignettes . . . ." She refers to the novel as a "canvas," a "tapestry." Similarly, Henry James "liked to use the vocabulary of the arts in discussing his own work, and regularly referred to a novel as 'the picture' or 'the canvas' or even 'the embroidery,' and to himself as 'the painter' or the 'artist.'"

Frequently, objets d'art appear in her work as functional elements. Even in her discussion of the novelist's technique she says that George Eliot had "vibrated to nuances of conduct as an artist vibrates to subtleties of line and colour." For her, as for James, the problem was "how to express the nuances." The solution Nevius offers by suggesting her use of the Jamesian cluster of metaphors is not a completely satisfactory one. Mrs. Wharton's functional use of significant details as a realistic means of expression, whether those details were concerned with an objet d'art,
an artifact, or architecture, provides a more clearcut solution, a
solution similar to Bowden's demonstration of the visual arts in
James.

Similar attitudes toward the arts are found in James and
Mrs. Wharton. First of all, the work of art instills in its viewer
a sense of the past. James, seeing the Pitti Palace in Florence, said
that "one gets a sense of history that takes away the breath."
In great art, he added, "the past seems to have left a sensible
deposit, an aroma, an atmosphere." As Bowden summarizes, "By means
of the arts life is caught, the past is made a part of the present, and
continuity and tradition are made tangible." Similar reactions
are shown by Vance Weston in *Hudson River Bracketed* and Nan St. George
in *The Buccaneers*. In her first novel, *The Valley of Decision*, Mrs.
Wharton writes of the cathedral which Odo Valsecca visits:

> ... above the octagonal baptistery ran a fantastic
> bas-relief wherein the spirals of vine framed an
> allegory of men and monsters, symbolizing, in their
> mysterious conflicts, the ever-recurring Manicheism of
> the middle ages ... Odo lingered curiously on these
> sculptures, which ... now seemed full of the
> significance that belongs to any incomplete expression
> of human thought or feeling. Of their relation to the
> growth of art he had as yet no clear notion; but
> as evidence of sensations that his forefathers had
> struggled to record, they touched him like the
> inarticulate stammerings in which childhood strives
> to convey its meaning."

Discussing the cathedral at Amiens, Mrs. Wharton remarks that it
inspires "a reverence for the accumulated experiences of the past, [a]
readiness to puzzle out their meaning ...".

A lack of art results in a corresponding lack of any sense
of the past. This is evident in both writers in the symbol of
the American hotel which lacks art and tradition. Hoffmann writes:

James thought that the most revealing of all architectural orderings of space was the New York hotel: "... one is verily tempted to ask if the hotel-spirit may not just be the American spirit most seeking and finding itself."

The hotel is, for one thing, the most exaggerated form of the public life, and as such emphasizes the retreat of the private self from the American scene.19

The anonymity and unartful decor of the hotel connotes a similar meaning in The House of Mirth, The Custom of the Country, and The Reef. Therefore, in order to call up "the Past—or at least that vital residue of the Past for which she pleaded . . . to comment on the shrunken and degraded present," she has used, like James, the work of art or artful architecture.

Secondly, and as a necessary corollary, the arts, in summoning up the Past, recall the values of the past as held by older societies. Such human values are just as much a part of the complete appreciation of art as the strictly aesthetic. Odo Valsecca begins to feel the social and political significance of the past as it is reflected in the present by old cathedrals and works of art, and soon the atmosphere of The Valley of Decision becomes one of "disillusionment with the possibilities of a human nature freed from the discipline of a stable social hierarchy and manners of an established culture." 21

By ignoring art and its human values, says Mrs. Wharton, one ignores traditional society, "one of man's oldest works of art," and therefore exposes grave deficiencies in himself. A similar conclusion is reached by Bowden after a study of the arts in James:
If the value of art lies in its relation to human life, one means of defining the moral position of an individual is to show his particular view of the arts: is he sensitive to the human values suggested there, and so indirectly to life itself, or does he ignore with a sort of moral blindness the true values in favor of a sterile estheticism? ... the test is in the values for which the art is loved ... the lack of appreciation is itself a form of blindness which has derogatory implications of the moral state of the individual.

Taste is a primary concern for Mrs. Wharton in her fiction and non-fiction. The closest thing to a definition of taste is found in French Ways and Their Meaning: it is not

... the same thing as art ... but it is the atmosphere in which art lives, and outside of which it cannot live. It is the regulating principle of all art, of the art of dress and of manners, and of living in general, as well as of sculpture or music.

Taste in architecture—both interior and exterior—lies primarily in the appropriateness of details which structure that architecture. The interior of the house—"as much a part of its organic structure as the outside"—should not be decorated with "sumptuary excesses," but arranged according to "right proportion," "balance," and "simple unconfused lines." The book which was the result of her philosophy of decoration and taste—The Decoration of Houses—and on which she collaborated with a young architect, Ogden Godman, Jr., was purchased by "people of taste" and used as a "touchstone of taste." In this work she concluded that if the meaning of certain decorative details is lost and they are inappropriate for the house or room, they should not remain; for "beauty ... depends on appropriateness ... structure conditions ornament." Therefore if detail is appropriate,
it is tasteful; if tasteful, it is artful.

The same qualities of taste are important in Mrs. Wharton's theory of the art of fiction. The epigraph from Thomas Traherne in *The Writing of Fiction* is quite significant: "Order the beauty even of Beauty is." Here, it is the architecture of the novel which is discussed. Details of the novel, in order that it be a work of art, must be appropriate to the structure of the whole. These details must be the result of order, imagination accompanied by a talent of selection; thus they must be an ordering factor in the novel. In Mrs. Wharton's works, E. K. Brown finds such an order:

Les détails . . . sont soigneusement choisis, ordonnés et rassemblés pour constituer le dessin; tout l'effet dépend d'une seule impression . . . à laquelle chacun d'eux concourt . . . c'est la vision de l'artiste, qui fait ressortir l'unité des objets, le rapport entre les détails . . . cette fonction de l'intelligence qui réclame l'ordre et le dessin, et qu'on peut nommer l'imagination, y trouve son compte.28

[The details are carefully chosen, ordered and reassembled to form the design; the whole effect depends upon a single impression to which each of the details contributes. This is the vision of the artist who throws into relief the unity of objects, the rapport among details. This function of the intelligence which demands order and design—and which one can call imagination—finds its significance in such a vision.]

Henry James discusses further her imagination in his notes on *The Custom of the Country*:

. . . she suffers, she even encourages, her expression to flower into some sharp image or figure of thought when that will make the thought more finely touch us. Her step without straying, encounters the living analogy . . . . We note it as one of the kinds of proof of vision that most fail us in that comparative desert of the
inselective where our imagination has itself to hunt out or call down (often among strange witnessed flounderings or sandstorms) such analogies as may mercifully "put" the thing.  

Mrs. Wharton says, "To choose between [details] is the first step towards coherent expression"; thus, when she discusses the theme in a novel, she writes:

... everything not directly illuminative of it must be left out as irrelevant...[He] must use every scrap of colour, every picturesque by-product of his subject which that subject yields; but he avoids adding to it a single touch, however decoratively tempting, which is not part of the design.

Much of this simplicity and order is achieved in her own works by the use of the symbolic details. As Tindall notes, the symbol is "unitive" in that it "organizes experience into a kind of order"; and that it "embodies and offers a complex of feeling and thought." Since the symbol reveals the complex relationships between the seemingly unrelated, it provides Mrs. Wharton with an economy of means: its whole is something greater than the sum of its parts.

Her talent of selection in fiction is thus correlative to her artistic taste in decor. The superiority of architectural proportion over the "superficial application of ornament" is also a principle in her choice of descriptive detail much of which is concerned with architecture and decoration; for Mrs. Wharton believed the object of the artist must be nourished by "an accumulated wealth of knowledge and experience." Her wealth of knowledge is made evident in the three categories of her significant details discussed in this thesis: architecture (interior and exterior), artifacts (things of nature made and possessed by man), and works of art. Architectural detail in
her fiction reveals the character of the occupants of the houses or
rooms—their tastes, their sense of the past, even their moral status
in the novel. An early example of this is found in the room of Odo's
predecessor in *The Valley of Decision*:

... the new Duke felt the same moral lassitude steal over
him. How was such a puny will as his to contend against the
great forces of greed and prejudice? All the influences
arrayed against him—tradition, superstition, the lust of
power, the arrogance of race—seemed concentrated in the
atmosphere of that silent room, with its guarded threshold,
its pious relics, and, lying on the desk in the embrasure of
the window, the manuscript litany which the late Duke had
not lived to complete ... the picture of the Last Judgment
... sought to produce an impression of moral anguish by
the accumulation of physical sufferings ... 37

Evident in this passage is the "moral extension" 38 of art
and artifact. Strictly aesthetic taste does not alone account for the
existence of the significant detail in her fiction. This moral
extension should be present both to the observer and to the society
in whose tradition and convention the building, the artifact, the work
of art was made. This is the purpose for the description of the
tapestries Odo sees in the Duke's Palace: "The dusky canvases, hung
high in tarnished escutcheoned frames, presented a continuous
chronicle of the line ... ." 39 That art and architecture have
such an extension for Mrs. Wharton is seen in her views on the litera-
ary work of art—

A good subject, then, must contain in itself some-
thing that sheds light on our moral experience. If it
is incapable of this expansion, this vital radiation,
it remains, however showy a surface it presents, a mere
irrelevant happening, a meaningless scrap of fact torn
out of its context. 40

--and in her views on architecture:
... so strongly does the contemplation of the great cathedrals fortify the conviction that their chief value, to this latter age, is not so much aesthetic as moral. The world will doubtless always divide itself into two orders of mind: that which sees in past expressions of faith, political, religious or intellectual, only the bonds cast off by the spirit of man in its long invincible struggle for "more light"; and that which while moved by the spectacle of the struggle, cherishes also every sign of those past limitations that were, after all, each in its turn, symbols of the same effort toward a clearer vision.

When she discusses the farmhouses and village architecture of New England, she writes: "... [they] were still grim places, morally and physically: insanity, incest and slow mental and moral starvation were hidden away behind the paintless wooden house-fronts of the long village street, or in the isolated farm-houses on the neighboring hills ... ." The significant details thus contain moral extensions varying in meaning. She adopts, in her fiction, her own principle that "the impression produced by a landscape, a street or a house should always, to the novelist, be an event in the history of a soul, and the use of the 'descriptive passage,' and its style, should be determined by the fact that it must depict only what the intelligence concerned would have noticed ... ." Like James, the "degrees of cupidty, aberrance, naive innocence, the failure of the moral sense, are discernible in the arrangements of self and scene, of self in scene, and of the consciousness deriving appropriate and deserved qualities of effects from the scene." In summary, the conclusion reached after observing her views on art and the significant details in her fiction is the same one Bowden reached after a similar study of James:

"Taste, appreciation, love of the beautiful are not enough, a true
morality, a feeling for the life of others, is the necessary
adjunct of taste, and without it only egotism, sterility, and evil
can follow."

Critical discussion of Mrs. Wharton's fiction has been
largely confined to general treatments of several novels blended
with biographical considerations. Few have examined her technique
in these novels from the standpoint of the expressive, symbolic
detail. Thus there are few extended analyses of any particular novel.
However, in recent years, critics have become increasingly aware of
the value of such details. Walter B. Rideout, in his analysis of
The House of Mirth which appeared in 1958; Viola Hopkins, in her
discussion of the ordering style of The Age of Innocence in 1958;
and Kenneth Bernard and Joseph X. Brennan, in their discussions of
Ethan Frome in 1961 and 1962 respectively, have focused on these details.

The result of their investigations, and hopefully my own,
has been the emergence of artistically balanced structures and more
meaningful interpretations of several of Mrs. Wharton's novels and
novelettes. The artist herself has written little concerning her
own works. As she says in A Backward Glance: "Every artist works,
like the Gobelins weavers, on the wrong side of the tapestry, and
if now and then he comes around to the right side, and catches what
seems a happy glow of colour, or a firm sweep of design, he must
instantly retreat again, if encouraged yet still uncertain . . . ."

Her concrete details are intimately related to her
characterization. Even in A Backward Glance, Mrs. Wharton
characterizes Howard Sturgis by a description of the decor and particular artifacts in his drawing room. In The Writing of Fiction she extols Balzac and Stendahl for having realized that "each of us flows imperceptibly into adjacent people and things." Furthermore, "characters and scenic detail are in fact one to the novelist who has fully assimilated his material." These details concretely reveal to the reader the inner tensions within the character and his relationship to other characters in the novel and to various social strata with which he contends.

Secondly, they are suited to the dramatic structure of the novel and lend support to the main action—action which is organically connected with the characters themselves as agents. The tensions existing within these characters provide the motivation for their outward actions. The conflict, which almost always is between an individual and his society or particular stratum of society, is revealed through an "organic treatment of setting." Also Mrs. Wharton's deterministic belief in environment as a controlling factor in the lives and activity of her characters increases the importance of her description of their surroundings.

Since the details are organically related to character and actions, ultimately such a system of observation provides a means of leading the reader to the themes of the novels. Details in the novel provide "surface usefulness in the action and a less obvious but vital role in the development of the ethical theme." This ethical theme is invariably involved with the individual's relationship to society. Aside from the village society of New England, Mrs. Wharton was
primarily interested in the aristocratic and the wealthy strata. She believed that traditional society was "one of man's oldest works of art" and that only in the leisure class could wealth be transmuted into beauty "by secreting the surplus energy which flowers in great architecture, great painting, and great literature." She despises the fact that in America, the custom has been to waste this class. Reform—even in architecture and interior decoration—must begin in this class if it is to be accepted by the lower classes.

Odo Valsecca felt that luxury and fine living should be the flower of fine feeling. If this is not true, corruption in convention and morality will be the result. In general, Mrs. Wharton maintains that a "decline in moral standard is accompanied by a decline in social and aesthetic standards."

Nevertheless, the force of society is always present with its conventions to check the individual's desires, to form a kind of prison around his soul. With these forces the victim must compromise or be sacrificed. In her major works, the victim usually possesses some sort of "inner fineness," a higher level of sensibility than the society whose pressures are being forced upon him. Thus, in The House of Mirth (1905), Lily Bart is sacrificed to the society whose forces would not permit her inner fineness to reach an ethically sound solution to her problem and still remain in that society. In The Custom of the Country (1913), Undine's two aristocratic husbands are sacrificed to her untiring search for wealth and her restlessness. They are persons of great sensibility who are subsumed by the
amorality and insensitivity of their wife. In *The Reef* (1912), useless sacrifice is found in Anna's sensitive nature being submerged into that of the cold, mechanical Fraser Leath and the convention to which he was allied. Among the many subtle variations of this theme is the deterministic one of the sacrifice of Sophy Viner to the lower stratum of society into which she was born and from which she could not escape. Newland Archer in *The Age of Innocence* (1920), fails in his revolt against tradition and sacrifices "the flower of life" to the society of old New York. Also the theme of the larger nature subsumed by the smaller—Jay Welland, a representative of this society—is present. In *The Old Maid* (1924), social pressures force Delia Ralston, as they had Newland Archer, into an empty and meaningless marriage with a representative of the leisure class who lacks the sensitivity and emotional depths which her real love, the artist Clem Spender, could have offered her. *Ethan Frome*, of course, contains a supreme example of the theme of useless sacrifice, a meaningless suffering. The novelette depicts the waste of an individual who cannot escape the clutches of his quarrelsome wife, partly because of moral qualms village society would have about such a move, and finally out of a sense of duty to both his wife and the girl he loved. Because of his love for Nettie, he maimed her for life. In the duo *Hudson River Bracketed* (1929), and *The Gods Arrive* (1932), the highly sensitive nature of Vance Weston is sacrificed to the more limited nature of Laura Lou Tracy; later, in the sequel, Hale Spear Tarrant is the one whose love is unrewardingly
spent on a now more egotistical, confused Vance Weston. Finally, the theme of the sensitive artist being sacrificed to a post-war world where all standards of morality are disintegrating becomes apparent. In such a world, the seemingly non-utilitarian, the artful, the past, all remain paradoxically the only useful things for the artist.

Finally, The Buccaneers (1938), one of Mrs. Wharton's most optimistic novels, shows the final triumph of the love between two persons sensitive to art, the past, tradition, but who maintain a vital relationship with the present. However, the theme of sacrifice is still apparent in that the co-heroine, Laura Testvalley, in her abetment to this triumph of love which demands the conventional code of English aristocracy be broken, loses her own possibilities for happiness and lives out her days alone. Observation of significant details, by leading to various definitions of this theme of waste and sacrifice, will provide a more meaningful and detailed analysis and interpretation of the novels than has previously been made.
CHAPTER ONE

THE EXPENSE OF SPIRIT

I

Manners, the "half-uttered or unuttered or unutterable expressions of value," the "culture's hum and buzz of implication," are often "hinted at by arts of dress or decoration, sometimes by tone, gesture ...." These arts can readily be seen in The House of Mirth and The Custom of the Country. Both novels are in the tradition of the novel of manners. Moreover, they are satiric novels, the latter being by far the more savage just as Undine Spragg is the more unfeeling of the two heroines.

In The House of Mirth, published in 1905, Mrs. Wharton's satiric interest was largely in the society of New York City, whereas by the time The Custom of the Country was published, in 1913, her scope had increased to include people west of the Hudson River and east of the Atlantic. Whether she was tempted in later works to concentrate on the conflict between American and European manners because of James's example or simply because of the more obvious dramatic possibilities involved we cannot be certain.

At any rate, Mrs. Wharton has by the use of the visual arts and artifacts suggested the values of the society in which Lily Bart and Undine Spragg move. In these two novels, the significant details serve as guideposts to the reader in distinguishing between the many social strata Lily and Undine at one time or another occupy. And a sufficient delineation of these strata is necessary for a complete and satisfactory
comprehension of the unifying actions of both novels: Lily's gradual tragic fall from one level to the next and Undine's ironic rise. In his discussion of the two novels Blake Nevius has said:

... [Edith Wharton] uses the data resulting from her careful observation and differentiation of manners at various levels of American society not merely to enhance the illusion, but to plot the real undertaking in which most of her characters are engaged: that of determining, fixing, or altering their status in society. In the fulfillment of this purpose, no data is too trivial—not even the pattern of waistcoats.  

Furthermore, just as any undertaking or action is dependent upon the actor for its motivation, so these details necessarily increase our understanding of the characters in the novel. In some cases the objects adumbrate future events in the course of the novel, thus intensifying the reader's sense of Lily's tragic failure and the ironic success of Undine. Walter B. Rideout notes the "carefulness with which Edith Wharton has picked her settings to make implications about her characters and their subsequent fates."  

Finally the visual arts are seen to function not only on a literal level, but on a symbolic one; and, as symbols, they can in some instances develop and enrich the theme of the two novels. By analyzing the artistic merits of significant details in the particular novel, it is possible to gain insight into the implicit philosophy of the novel. One basic ethical tenet of this underlying philosophy is the inescapability of waste in a society in which wealth "has become the only active value." When the objet d'art or artifact symbolizes frivolity or a thing frivolity has destroyed, the theme of the waste of human resources in a material society has then been demonstrated.
Certainly a degree of determinism is present in both novels. Both heroines are products of their environment—their material and social conditions—and even of the houses they have lived in. Their actions and motives are to a degree determined. All this Mrs. Wharton sadly realized. However the actions, decisions, and choices of her characters are nevertheless in varying degrees not determined but are the results of free will. It is when acts of this nature are frivolous, irresponsible, and even destructive that Wharton’s satire is immediately evident. In The House of Mirth such acts destroy Lily; in The Custom of the Country, Undine herself is the destructive agent.

Therefore by examining in detail the visual arts and artifacts in these two novels on a symbolic and expressive rather than strictly literal level, their functions will be found to vary. They plot the course for the unifying action; they delineate character of an individual or of a particular social stratum; and they develop the theme. Such functions enable us to gain a clearer insight into Mrs. Wharton’s philosophy and a keener appreciation of her satire.

II

The title, The House of Mirth, has obvious implications. It is derived from Ecclesiastes 7:4, "The heart of fools is in the house of mirth." As an inclosure, "house" symbolizes the "exclusive society where Lily foolishly longs to dwell." That this is indeed what Lily’s heart is set on is made evident in the first chapter of the novel by the use of art and artifact. By using this approach in examining the first chapter, one notices an excellent combination of the three distinct
kinds of detail which Mrs. Wharton employed in this work and others: architectural detail, artifacts, and works of art. Houses and buildings are consciously described in terms of architecture and interior decoration (which Wharton considered as simply interior architecture); artifacts include such things as clothing, jewelry, dishes, gewgaws of all sorts; individual works of art are those things created within the varied disciplines of painting, sculpture, music, and literature.

The first chapter contains three settings: Grand Central Station, Seldon's apartment, and the street. Grand Central Station symbolizes Lily's point of departure—at least in terms of the span of time within the novel—from which she is about to launch on her trip through the social strata. To open her novel onto such a setting is artistically justifiable since, as Rideout says, "The House of Mirth is... a book designed to depict motion." The station also allows Mrs. Wharton to depict Lily surrounded by hundreds of "dingy" people who belong to the lower social strata of which Lily so desperately wants to avoid being a member. Lily is white, as her name signifies, and "radiant" by contrast. At the same time, the setting establishes her isolation from the crowd—the first example of this motif which appears repeatedly in later scenes. Lawrence Selden sees her standing literally "apart from the crowd."

The second setting is Selden's apartment. In a "new brick and limestone" apartment house fittingly called The Benedick, meaning "bachelor," particular details of its interior decorations have a symbolic function. Although the walls are shabby, Selden is immediately judged as a man of taste and correctness. His hallway is lined with old prints;
the window has curtains of light muslin which allow the room to be light and airy. At the same time the room is small, cozy, "cheerful" because of comfortable, though shabby, chairs; its "walls of books, a pleasantly faded Turkey rug, a littered desk."(9) Mrs. Wharton has described the "material livableness of a room" as consisting in "the position of the doors and fireplace, the accessibility of the windows, the arrangement of the furniture, the privacy of the room, and the absence of the superfluous."21 Prints "look well in a small entranceway if hung on plain tinted walls."22 Windows of a "dreary room" are "invariably supplied with two sets of muslin curtains . . . ; then come the heavy stuff curtains."23 Besides the plainest of furniture, the man of modest means should rely "for the embellishment of his room upon good bookbindings" and a subdued "old Eastern rug."24 All these things are in evidence in Selden's apartment.

A fireplace is also mentioned. This feature of the room foreshadows Lily's final visit to Selden's apartment and her use of it to destroy Bertha Dorset's letters. It is sufficient to mention it here simply as being correctly the focal point of the room. Wharton asserts that the fireplace "must be the focus of every rational scheme of arrangement."25 One must be able to sit around the hearth which means the mantle must not be covered with any "inflammable drapery, . . . for no one cares to sit around a fireless hearth."26 Later, the warmth of this fire is momentarily comforting to Lily.(492,495) Again Selden is seen to be a man of taste by Mrs. Wharton's standards. This, says Hoffman, ultimately implies he is morally uncorrupted; for, with Mrs. Wharton, moral corruption is equated to aberrations in taste. Selden is the
"principal sentry" and "guardian" of Mrs. Wharton's "limited Utopia of moral sensibility," a Utopia limited by conditions of contemporary New York society which arrest moral discretion.

Lastly, the comfortableness of the furniture and of the entire room is contrasted to the formidable discomfort of Mrs. Peniston's decor and leads to Lily's saying "if I could only do over my aunt's drawing room I know I should be a better woman."(10) This reference is an adumbration of the uncomfortable surroundings of her aunt's drawing room in the midst of which Lily will be berated by her aunt and, at the reading of the will, be startled to learn that her aunt has disinherited her—an immediate cause of her final tragedy.

Having left the intimacy of Selden's apartment, Lily enters onto the street, the third setting of the chapter. The street is notable by its very lack of detail, and as such appears as an expression of the parasitic and insecure nature of Lily's position in relation to the social structure. She is temporarily outside the "house of mirth."28 It is here, significantly, that Mrs. Wharton introduces Rosedale, a man rootless in regard to membership in the society to which Lily tries to cling. They stand in front of The Benedick which Rosedale simply owns; he does not live there. In general, scenes in the novel which take place with a street as their setting almost invariably portray Lily's vulnerability because of her constant buffetings by various social forces. Just as Rosedale misjudges her appearance on the street, so Selden will misjudge her in Chapter XIV when she emerges onto the street from Trenor's house. Here, Lily's unexpected encounter with Rosedale is "a specific instance of [her] real social insecurity, her vulnerability to the constant
reproving presence of convention, which ultimately will exclude her from the charmed circle of her aspiration."²⁹

The second category of details—artifacts—is seen in Mrs. Wharton's significant noting in Grand Central Station of "preposterous hats . . . paper bundles and palm leaf fans."(6) These are all elements of the dinginess which Lily despises. They are a part of the dingy level of society of which she will finally become a member. Contrast these artifacts with those which belong to Lily. She is wearing a sapphire bracelet, a little jeweled watch; she carries a little gold cigarette case with a pearl chain. All these details help to separate Lily from the crowd and advance the isolation motif. They are also related to the values of the society in which she desires a position, that is, to material wealth. These artifacts, along with her light silks, later contrast with the "shabby coat" of Selden. His coat in this context symbolizes his lack of interest in pursuing a permanent position in Lily's circle. She tells him:

"Your coat's a little shabby— but who cares? It doesn't keep people from asking you to dine. If I were shabby no one would have me: 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 a part of it. Who wants a dingy woman?"(17-18)

Still later at the meeting in the street with Rosedale, Mrs. Wharton notes his "smart London clothes." He, like Lily, wants to make a place for himself in the upper strata of society. Thus through the symbolic use of clothes Wharton has contrasted Selden and Rosedale, Lily's two choices as husbands. As Rideout has put it, "where Selden is outwardly shabby and inwardly elegant, Rosedale is 'upholstered' in 'smart London
clothes' and betrays an inner shabbiness through his eyes, which gave him the air of appraising people as if they were bric-a-brac."29

Another note must be added about Lily's sapphire bracelet referred to earlier. Seeing her measure out tea into a green glazed tea-pot, Selden notices:

the sapphire bracelet slipping over her wrist, [and] he was struck with the irony of suggesting to her such a life as his cousin Gertrude Farish had chosen. She was 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."(10)

First of all, note the significant juxtaposition of the green glazed tea-pot and the sapphire bracelet. The first is but another symbol of the warmth and comfort Selden proffers Lily. The warm green contrasts with the icy brilliance of the sapphire blue--expressive of the "glaze" of artificiality which Selden had noticed to be slowly covering "Lily's purity of tint."(4) With this juxtaposition in mind one can understand Selden more clearly a few pages later when he observes Lily before the mirror:

the attitude revealed the long slope of her slender sides which gave a kind of wild wood grace to her outline--as though she were a captured dryad subdued to the convention of the drawing-room; and [he] reflected that it was the same streak of sylvan freedom in her nature that lent savour to her artificiality.(19)

Without belaboring the primary meaning of the bracelet itself which has already been overtly expressed by Selden's consciousness, the sentence is useful for several other reasons. As Howe says, "It prepares us for the ordeal of a Lily Bart neither at ease with nor in rebellion against her life as a dependent of the rich; it provides a convincing example of Selden's gift for superior observation; and because, ironically, this
gift is matched with his tendency to self-protection and self-justification, it suggests that Mrs. Wharton will not require nor allow Selden to serve as a voice of final judgment in the novel.30

In regard to Selden's role as observer in the novel, the relevance of a work of art mentioned in Chapter I becomes evident and provides an instance of the third category. The "La Bruyère" which Lily casually picked up was a first edition and as such seemed to merit Lily's attention. Her interest in Selden's books largely stemmed from her interest in their monetary value, and a seventeenth century volume of La Bruyère would obviously be valuable. The book therefore is another enlargement of the money motif. The ironic discussion of the monetary value of Americana collections such as the Jefferson Gryce collection has just preceded. Americana in itself holds little interest for Selden. This foreshadows the discussion of Americana collections Lily has with Jefferson's son, Percy Gryce, in the next chapter. Percy, unlike Selden, takes great pride in his collection, primarily because of its extrinsic value. The two passages are in ironic contrast with one another when one considers Percy Gryce in light of his possibly becoming Lily's husband: his interest in Americana provides for obvious satire.

However, in thinking of La Bruyère not simply as a book, but a literary work of art, we discover its major function as a symbol. In talking about his library, Selden has said, "I simply like to have good editions of the books I am fond of."(15) That the work is part of his library is therefore symbolic of his fondness for La Bruyère, an observer of the moeurs of his own seventeenth century French society, just as Selden remains an observer of Lily and the social strata to which she aspires. His
fondness for this book justifies Mrs. Wharton's use of Selden as the structuring mentality of the two major scenes in Chapter I.

Mrs. Wharton's further approval of Selden is clear in that she has accorded him a sense of the past, an appreciation for the society of La Bruyère. Like her friend Henry James, her admiration for French society and manners, past and present, far outweighed any similar feeling for American manners. Selden has a corresponding advantage over Percy Gryce in attracting Lily Bart. When Mrs. Wharton writes that Americana must be "horribly dull," she satirizes in one stroke Percy Gryce and the social stratum he represents. He is a man of unlimited means but has a limited imagination. The theme of the waste of human effort and resources has been further defined.

Having seen the interrelations of architecture, artifact, and art in one chapter, it will perhaps be more felicitous and expeditious to organize such significant details appearing later in the novel by their classification rather than by their scenic interconnections.

At one point in the novel Mrs. Wharton justifies her symbolic use of architecture and interior decoration through the observations of a minor character in the novel, Ned Van Alstyne. The architecture and design of a person's home is indicative of the character, taste, and social stratum of that individual.

"That Greiner house, now--a typical rung in the social ladder; the man who built it came from a milieu where all the dishes are put on the table at once. His facade is a complete architectural meal; if he had omitted a style his friends might have thought the money had given out. Not a bad purchase for Rosedale, though; attracts attention, and awes the Western sight seer. By and bye he'll get out of that phase, and want something that the crowd will pass and the few pause before."
"And the Wellington Brys'?"

They were just beneath the wide white facade, with its rich restraint of line, which suggested the clever corseting of a redundant figure.

"That's the next stage: the desire to imply that one has been to Europe, and has a standard. I'm sure Mrs. Bry thinks her house a copy of the Trianon; in America every marble house with gilt furniture is thought to be a copy of the Trianon. What a clever chap that architect is, though—how he takes his client's measure! He has put the whole of Mrs. Bry in his use of the composite order. Now for the Trenors, you remember, he chose Corinthian: exuberant, but based on the best precedent. The Trenor house is one of his best things—doesn't look like a banqueting hall turned inside out. I hear Mrs. Trenor wants to build out a new ballroom... The dimensions of the Bry's ballroom must rankle... (257-258)

The first house is symbolic of the Greiners and their lack of background. More important, it now is a symbol of its owner Simon Rosedale who, like the Greiners, is a climber, an "Invader." It is symbolic too of Rosedale's movement up through the various strata, a movement dramatically contrasting to Lily's whom we see leaving Gus Trenor's house at this very moment, a symbolic expulsion—again onto the street—from the Trenors' level of society. Again Wharton's satiric condemnation of the strictly material basis of society is evident.

A higher stratum is evident in the architecture of the Bry's house. It is not a hodgepodge of styles, but a copy of the Trianon. Pretentious though it may be, and condemned as invalid and distasteful by Mrs. Wharton, it "represents a higher stage in the social ascent." Furthermore, Mrs. Wharton calls the Bry's architect "clever" for his ability to comprehend Mrs. Bry—her newly acquired position, her desired ascent, her hopes of impressing a higher stratum, even her own "redundant" body—and design her house as a reflection of herself and her motivations. But for Lily, now expelled from the Trenor set, the house represents a
lower level; and her connection with the Brys two chapters earlier makes manifest this descent.

The Trenors are members of the highest stratum. Their house is not a copy of any particular house or palace, but the result of a pure architectural style—exuberant Corinthian. However Wharton satirically shows that even though the Trenors occupy the top of the social ladder, Mrs. Trenor is influenced by Mrs. Bry, a member of a lower level. Mrs. Wharton deplores such fluctuating standards of taste. This uppermost stratum should dictate the taste of the lower strata, and not the reverse. But in a society in which money alone is the standard of social priority, such unassailable influence is no longer possible.

The question arises of how Lily can be symbolized by architecture when she does not own a house or even keep her own apartment. This lack is one which Mrs. Wharton wishes to stress. Lily is rootless and is always seen in transition from one circle of "friends" to another, from one level to another. She is characterized then not by her own house, but by means of whatever room she happens to be in at any given point of the novel. When she is in someone's house, that house is important insofar as it indicates the stratum by which she is currently accepted and in which she occupies a temporary position.

Her room in her aunt's house represents stagnation and imprisonment. It is "comfortable" (176) in comparison to the rest of Mrs. Peniston's house but at the same time dreary when compared to various guest-rooms Lily has occupied at Bellomont and other country houses. The grim black walnut wardrobe and bedstead, magenta "flock" wall-paper, and large steel engravings all symbolize a lack of taste which Lily—and Mrs.
Wharton—despised. The "lace-decked toilet table" and "little painted desk" represent Lily's futile attempts to ameliorate such an ugly décor, attempts which concretely suggest her futile attempts to check her descent down the social ladder and to get a loan from Mrs. Peniston. Mrs. Wharton writes:

What a contrast to the subtle elegance of the setting she had pictured for herself—an apartment which should surpass the complicated luxury of her friends' surroundings by the whole extent of that artistic sensibility which made her feel herself superior in which every tint and line should combine to enhance her beauty and give distinction to her leisure! Once more the haunting sense of physical ugliness was intensified by her mental depression, so that each piece of the offending furniture seemed to thrust forth its most aggressive angle. (176-177)

Therefore by means of décor Mrs. Wharton has explicitly delineated Lily's love of beauty, her hatred of ugliness—emotions dominating and motivating all her actions in the novel. The futility of such acts gradually becomes apparent through the novel. This futility, found particularly in her attempts of relieving the ugliness of her room, demonstrates the theme of waste.

Often we view Lily in restaurants. In at least three instances, they symbolize Lily's transition and rootlessness; they allow her to be seen as vulnerable and are in this respect similar to the street mentioned above. On the Riviera, the restaurant is described as "strident." This stridency is emphasized by details such as "Mrs. Bry's illuminated board," Mrs. Dorset's "intensely new gown," the "multiplied solicitations of the menu," and a "bewildering array of liqueurs." (345, 349) Lily's table "seemed set apart in a special glare of publicity, and the presence at it of little Dabham of the "Riviera Notes" emphasized the ideals of a world where con-
spicuousness passed for distinction, and the society column had become the roll of fame."(347) Here Lily is a part of society which is attempting to break into European society and believes "dabs" and notes in the press are symbolic of their success. Her isolation is noted by Selden, however, when he sees her detached "by a hundred undefinable shades from the persons who most abounded in her own style."(346) He continues: "It was in just such company, the fine flower and complete expression of the state she aspired to, that the differences came out with a special poignancy, her grace cheapening the other women's smartness as her finely discriminated silences made their chatter dull."(346)

It is also in this restaurant that Lily receives the severe, sudden, and unwarranted dismissal by Bertha Dorset from the Dorsets' yacht on which Lily had been living and travelling. This dismissal tragically represents the complete and absolute expulsion from the level of society represented by the Dorsets. Foreshadowing another restaurant scene, this exclusion is even more tragically evident later in a New York restaurant (368) when she is "cut" by Mrs. Trenor. The irony of this scene is in Rosedale's presence in the Trenor set and his consequent coolness to Lily. He has been moving all the while in the opposite direction to Lily's descent. He is the other character always in transition.

Finally, the last chapters of the novel describe Lily in surroundings of unmitigated dinginess. Architectural details here symbolize the final defeat of Lily's aspirations and her complete isolation from a wealthy society. Her room is now in a "blistered brownstone" building with Pompeian decoration in its muddy vestibule.(474) These are depressing signs of what Mrs. Peniston's parlor had earlier foreshadowed. Mrs.
Peniston's windows had looked down on Fifth Avenue; now, Lily's windows look down on "paintless rails" and an area "which revealed in increasing candour the disjecta membra of bygone dinners."(474) Furthermore, these windows are "draped with discolored lace." All these details are expressive signs of decay and dinginess. They are as depressing to Rosedale—a man of similar, although cruder, aspirations—as they are to Lily. When they are both sitting in her

peacock-blue parlour, with its bunches of dried pampas grass, and discolored steel engravings of sentimental episodes, [Rosedale] looked about him with unconcealed disgust, laying his hat distrustfully on the dusty console adorned with a Rogers statuette. Lily sat down on one of the plush and rosewood sofas, and he deposited himself in a rocking-chair draped with a starched antimacassar which scraped unpleasantly against the pink fold of skin above his collar.(481-482)

It is through such carefully chosen details of tasteless and dingy decor that Mrs. Wharton can express the inappropriateness of her heroine's condition. Here, as at Mrs. Peniston's, the colorless, austere steel engravings appear. Also blending into the grotesque décor of the room is the Rogers statuette, the embodiment of bourgeois sentimentality. Such touches vividly portray the artistic stagnation felt by Lily in such surroundings. She had been fashioned to adorn and delight; she cannot long exist in this atmosphere. Mrs. Wharton through the mouth the Rosedale speaks with tragic irony: "'My goodness—you can't go on living here.'" (482) As at Mrs. Peniston's, the waste of Lily's beauty and abilities is stressed.

Architectural details and preferences in decor very clearly characterize Lily's aunt, Mrs. Peniston. Lily rebels against her aunt's furniture (10) and even Mrs. Peniston herself (13). She is a member of
the "old New York" society of the fifties who "lived well, dressed well," and did nothing. She too is a kind of observer in the novel. In the summer she "looked on life through the ratting screen of her verandah;" and during the social season after a massive ablution of her whole house, she would observe society (like her "Dying Gladiator") visually through her Fifth Avenue window and audially through hearsay. She was not involved in the society, nor did society come to her door.

Her own background of "well-fed and industrious stock" was evident now in the "glacial neatness" of her drawing room. Elements of decor such as the purple drapes, glossy purple armchair, the mantelpiece with its ormolu clock "surmounted by a helmeted Minerva" and two malachite vases, and generally the "complacent ugliness" of her black walnut give the drawing room an oppressive, dreary and tasteless atmosphere which is symbolic of its owner. Even her fireplace remained unlighted most of the time. The "icy drawing room grate shone with a forbidding lustre."(172)

Its immaculate order and cleanliness is described as unnatural. The "slippery gloss of the vestibule tiles" is just another feature which annoyed Lily. Mrs. Peniston's standards of behavior are just as outmoded as this October ablution. Because of this, Mrs. Peniston's intolerance of Lily with her various forays with the contemporary society is in equipoise with revulsion from her aunt's standards of taste and decorum. So again as an observer from her Fifth Avenue drawing room of present society and of Lily as would-be member of it, Mrs. Peniston's vision of her niece appears warped by hearsay and the dicta of a forgotten era.

This vision is further symbolized by the statue of the Dying
Gladiator which is described as looking down through the drawing room window onto Fifth Avenue. (157) It appears in the window in mid-October because that was the beginning of the social season in Mrs. Peniston's day. Now however the street is empty. Social customs have changed and Mrs. Peniston's annual housecleaning and other habits are outmoded and purposeless. Furthermore, the choice of a bronze Dying Gladiator again reveals Mrs. Peniston's unartful taste.

Lily's final tragedy is a result of this warped and misguided vision of Mrs. Peniston. She will not listen to Lily's explanations for the events in Europe and elsewhere; she refuses to understand and then condemns. As a consequence, Lily is finally disinherited and Grace Stepney receives her fortune. The plausibility of her will is evident when Grace is described as "reading out the deaths from the Times . . . sincerely admiring the purple satin drawing room curtains, the Dying Gladiator in the window, and the seven-by-five painting of Niagara."

(161-162) Mrs. Wharton's ironic satire is apparent when, at the reading of the will, Grace says, "I couldn't bear to see the Niagara anywhere else." (355) Contrast this to Lily's detestation and feeling of imprisonment in the drawing room which in this same scene Lily compares to "a well-kept family vault." (360) Mrs. Peniston in both life and death caused her stifling limitations of vision, understanding and taste to be inflicted upon Lily. Again décor serves to demonstrate the theme. Diana Trilling discusses the parallel defeat of Lily and of art "in a crass materialistic culture."

With the considerable bitterness of her intimate experience of the spiritual desolation of society, Mrs. Wharton assures us that the rich are morally unworthy of the beauty they can
afford, that at heart they are all of them a piece with Mrs. Peniston, whose expensive, dismal furniture is so accurate a reflection of her charmlessness and such an offense to her niece. Whatever one's wealth, one cannot buy spiritual grace. . . .

It is also worth noting that the charwoman Mrs. Haffan, who is herself a symbol of moral corruption, ironically appears washing the steps in the midst of these depressing surroundings. She is a symbol of moral corruption in the novel since she has stolen letters from Selden's apartment, and now makes false insinuations, wrongly accuses Lily of being the author of the letters, and successfully blackmails Lily. Lily's distaste for and innocence in the entire episode is intensified by the complacent ugliness of the drawing room.

A contrasting scene at Bellomont early in the novel depicts Lily in the highest stratum of society. Here she is temporarily accepted in the Trenor circle. The arcaded hall with its columns of pale yellow marble and crimson carpet was lighted by a great central lantern. Bellomont is a symbol of wealth and power. The setting is one neither Lily nor the reader is likely to forget. The décor paradoxically has the dual function of gratifying "her sense of beauty and her craving for the external finish of life" (38) while at the same time giving "a sharper edge to the meagreness of her own possibilities." This forecast will be ironically remembered in the final scenes of the novel as Lily moves farther away from this level of society. With Mrs. Wharton, says Lyde, "this belief that money creates the atmosphere in which beauty grows, and that money is necessary to give this beauty form is at variance with the Christian ideal, but the basis is moral conviction, not snobbishness." 43

Another functional use of décor is the description of the
fashionable New York hotel. The people inhabiting this world are on
the lowest rung of the social ladder and, as would-be invaders, are the
objects of Mrs. Wharton's satire. The people who occupy this stratum
are just as rootless as Lily, the only difference being that they have
money. Norma Hatch is divorced and "from the west." She is described
as sitting "in a blaze of electric light, impartially projected from
various ornamental excrescences on a vast concavity of pink damask and
gilding."(441) To Lily the hotel society she is now entering appears as
a "dimly lit region," and "excesses of the upholstery" and "restless
convolutions of the furniture"(440) were just a part of this region.
It was a region which Mrs. Wharton describes as "overheated, over-
upholstered, and over-fitted with mechanical appliances for the gratifi-
cation of fantastic requirements, while the comforts of a civilized life
were as unattainable as in a desert."(441) The whole scene expresses
material excess conjoined with spiritual poverty. As such, it is a
region hateful to Lily, and one which she leaves on the advice of Selden.
The excessively decorated rooms of the Emporium Hotel, with their
elephantine sofas, have such a lifeless, smothering, futile quality about
them that they are easily analogous to Mrs. Peniston's stifling rooms in
their affect on Lily's sensibilities. Just as the annual October house-
cleaning was purposeless, so here life is a "jumble of futile activities":

Through this atmosphere of torrid splendour moved wan beings
as richly upholstered as the furniture, beings without
definite pursuit or permanent relations, who drifted on a
languid tide of curiosity from restaurant to concert-hall
.... High stepping horses or elaborately equipped motors
waited to carry these ladies into vague metropolitan dis-
tances, whence they returned, still more wan from the weight
of their sables, to be sucked back into the stifling inertia
of the hotel routine.(441-442)
The submerged imagery of slow death is unmistakeable in the passage. The conclusion of the section asserts that the people of this region have "no more real existence than the poet's shades in limbo." Having finally reached this level of society, Lily's continued existence is in fact in gravest jeopardy. She was a "highly specialized product . . . fashioned to adorn and delight"; she was "an organism as helpless out of its narrow range as the anemone torn from the rock."(486-487)

Specific, concrete artifacts, the second classification of Wharton's significant details, are also used to suggest the manners of various social strata and their individual members. These artifacts have functional importance and are occasionally used symbolically.

At Bellomont, the tall glasses, silver-collared decanters, and jewelry are explicitly mentioned to stress the importance of wealth in the highest social stratum. We see Lily's appreciation of such things as expressing an underlying devotion to the attainment of wealth in order to surround herself with beauty. She also notices the "serpentine spangles" of Bertha Dorset. Having wealth, Bertha can easily afford jewelry. But the adjective serpentine is suggestive of her nature and character, consequently her future actions. She is already coiling about Percy Gryce and eventually removes him from Lily's possible choices for a husband. She is never more the viper than when she lashes out at Lily in the Riviera restaurant scene and forever banishes her from the Trenor-Dorset circle.

Clothes are important artifacts in the novel. When Lily notes that Carrie Fisher's gowns are "as emphatic as the head-lines of her case," Mrs. Wharton has implied here and elsewhere that a person's taste
in clothes is just as revelant of his character and social position as is the architecture of his house or residence. Carrie is a notorious and wealthy divorcee, and her clothes testify to this. Moreover, Lily's attitude towards Carrie is evident in her subsequent reflections on Carrie as a kind of unavoidable vice like bridge in the society represented at Bellomont. Lily's disapproval of her gowns increases the intelligibility of Lily's morality. That Carrie is one of the destructive members of the frivolous society is evident in her relations with Ned Silverton and implied in her past relations with Mr. Fisher.

Another important mention of clothes is made in reference to Mrs. Peniston:

Her clothes looked excessively new and yet slightly old fashioned. They were always black and tightly fitting, with an expensive glitter. She was the kind of woman who wore jet at breakfast. Lily had never seen her when she was not cuirassed in shining black, with small tight boots, and an air of being packed and ready to start; yet she never started. (172)

By means of her clothes then we realize Mrs. Peniston has money but is devoted to an older social decorum and outdated social values. She indeed never "starts." She is not a member of the present society. That she wears black makes her seem the more dreary and forboding to Lily. Mrs. Wharton has then through clothes contrasted the static figure of Mrs. Peniston with Lily herself who is usually described in white, radiant clothing (cf. Chapter I and the Duy's party), who is the dynamic figure in the novel.

In the last pages of the novel, Lily goes through her dresses. By this means Mrs. Wharton intensifies our sense of tragedy. The dresses represent Lily's successes of the past and are in dramatic contrast with
her present drab situation and impending total defeat. They are concrete representations of her rapid descent from her "last phase of splendour, on the Sabrina and in London."(512) The dresses still kept the long unerring lines, the sweep and amplitude of the great artist's stroke, and as she spread them out on the bed the scenes in which they had been worn rose vividly before her. An association lurked in every fold: each fall of lace and gleam of embroidery was like a letter in the record of her past.(512)

Her dresses, like Lily, are described in terms of artistic creations. They also suggest even in her moments of final defeat that Lily is still devoted to her quest. She is still not completely disillusioned as she herself had expected, and the subsequent explanation for her continued submission to her pursuit even in face of disaster again attests to Mrs. Wharton's deterministic philosophy of the inescapability of Lily's wasted efforts. Finally, the Reynolds dress is mentioned to evoke in the reader's mind the memory of her greatest social success which was dramatically juxtaposed with her final refusal of Selden's love.

The crooked spangles which Lily sewed onto the hat in the workroom scene(455) are a particularly expressive detail. In her choice of this artifact, Mrs. Wharton concretely transmits Lily's ineptness at such tasks and the inappropriateness of her surroundings. She had been fashioned for adornment, not for performing any useful function on a strictly pragmatic level. She is not at home in the working class, and she cannot function in it. Her talents are misdirected. The spangles intensify the irony of the scene which is evident when one remembers Lily's love for clothes, her joy in buying them,(178) and considers her present position on the other side of the counter.
The photograph of Lily in Gerty's room is another artifact used to reveal character. It is described as "looking out imperially on the cheap gim-cracks, the cramped furniture of the little room." (261) Feeling Lily's eyes on her surroundings intensifies Gerty's unhappiness and hatred of these surroundings. Gerty is seen as intensely jealous of Lily's beauty and clothes. Her desire for wealth and happiness is herein defined for the first time in the novel.

The bronze box with a miniature of Beatrice Cenci in the lid has a similar function as a significant artifact. Lily is about to ask Mrs. Peniston for some money—an odious task under any circumstances. The name Peniston itself suggests miserliness. The sentence "... the pink-eyed smirk of the turbaned Beatrice was associated in her mind with the gradual fading of the smile from Mrs. Peniston's lips" (274) indicates the importance of this artifact. Lily's distaste in asking for money is intensified by her distaste of practically any artifact Mrs. Peniston might own. Mrs. Wharton's choice of Beatrice Cenci is directly applicable to the situation: Mrs. Peniston's refusal to give Lily a loan foreshadows her disinheriting Lily. It thus provides a situation which directly leads to Lily's destruction, just as Beatrice Cenci had caused the destruction and death of her father, Francesco, four hundred years earlier. In other words, the bronze box is for Mrs. Wharton a means of defining Mrs. Peniston's position in the novel as not only false judge in convicting Lily on hearsay and warped observation, but also as her indirect executioner. This motif is further elaborated when Mrs. Wharton writes that Lily's distaste for the furniture and artifacts surrounding Mrs. Peniston was "the same distaste which the prisoner may entertain for
the fittings of the court room."(274) It is worth recalling too that the
decor of Mrs. Peniston's house constantly gave Lily a sense of being
imprisoned.

Late in the novel when Rosedale has come to visit Lily in her
rented flat, the contrast between Rosedale's success and Lily's failure
in their similar pursuits is concretized by Mrs. Wharton's use of the
artifact. He extracts a gold tipped cigarette from a gold case with
his jewelled fingers.(409) Similarly Wharton's choice of significant
artifacts is evident in a passage occurring very late in the novel as
Selden is going through Lily's belongings: a few gold-topped boxes and
bottles, a rose-colored pin cushion, and a glass tray strewn with tortoise
shell hair-pins. These seem to be only trifles, but they represent for
Selden and the reader Lily's concern with external beauty: they were
"the only traces of luxury, of that clinging to the minute observance of
personal seemliness, which showed what her other renunciations must have
cost;"(528) and, in showing this, they represent her moral fineness.

And these two concerns--external beauty and inner morality--have crushed
Lily between them.

There are also some artifacts worthy of our consideration by
virtue of their symbolic nature. The first of these is Lily's seal which
is mentioned in connection with a note from Lily to Selden. It is a grey
seal with "Beyond!" beneath a flying ship. Considering the word Beyond!
for a moment, it is not difficult to discover several meanings. To Selden
it symbolizes his ability to offer himself to her as a husband and thus
take her beyond moral ugliness inherent in a materialistic society--an
ugliness involving "pettiness, the attrition and corrosion of the
However for Lily it symbolizes going "beyond"—following her aspirations for material wealth and beauty and gaining for herself a position in a social stratum far removed from the physically drab and ugly. The word also symbolizes the deterministic forces at work in separating Selden from Lily. Her desires have previously been demonstrated as being derived from inherited traits and social forces beyond her control. So also has Selden's character been predetermined; "he was, as much as Lily, the victim of his environment." (245) His delight in the physical pleasures of life was inherited from his father. However it was from his mother "that he inherited his detachment from the sumptuary side of life: the stoic's carelessness of material things, combined with the epicurean's pleasure in them." (240) The flying ship is obviously a symbol of Lily's necessary dynamism—she is constantly in motion and in transition. The ship has tragic significance in that it foreshadows the other ship in the novel—the Dorsets' yacht with its ironic name Sabrina, Milton's chaste nymph of the Severn—and its ironic function of transporting Lily to Europe and leaving her stranded there. Once the Sabrina, as representative of the Trenor-Dorset circle, has been denied to her as a means of returning to New York, Lily is indeed beyond the point of ever regaining her social status.

Artifacts in the form of jewelry are often used symbolically (cf. Lily's sapphire bracelet). The symbolism of jewels at the Van Osburgh wedding is evident. The jewels are not Lily's but the bride's and as such symbolize the social stratum to which the bride and groom belong and to which Lily aspires. Mrs. Wharton's subsequent comment adequately defines the symbolic meaning the jewels have for Lily:
The glow of the stones warmed Lily's veins like wine. More completely than any other expression of wealth they symbolized the life she longed to lead, the life of fastidious aloofness and refinement in which every detail should have the finish of a jewel, and the whole form a harmonious setting to her own jewel-like rareness. (144)

Finally, late in the novel when Lily is walking on Fifth Avenue to see Gerty Farish she notes the "interminable procession of fastidiously-equipped carriages." (424) These handsome artifacts, like the jewelry, belong to members of the upper social strata. Not only do the carriages symbolize the society of which Lily is no longer a part, but they also represent one of the deterministic forces at work in the novel over which she has no control. The carriages symbolize motion; and, in particular, their wheels are "the ever-revolving wheels of the great social machine." (424) They are symbols of a society constantly and necessarily in a state of flux since it is a society based on money.

Considering examples of the third classification—objets d'art, the final achievements in the various disciplines of art—three such art objects appear in Mrs. Peniston's house serving purposes similar to those which justified the presence of the edition of La Bruyere in Selden's apartment. These are the seven-by-five Niagara painting, the steel engravings, and the bronze statue of the Dying Gladiator. These have been previously mentioned in terms of their decorative value but will now be discussed in regard to their intrinsic value as works of art.

All three objects attest to Mrs. Peniston's lack of vitality and taste. Mr. Peniston, in his choice of the Niagara, and Grace Stepney, in her appreciation of it, are thereby satirized and placed in the same artless category. Their moral fineness is encased in Mrs. Peniston's
meaningless "copy-book axioms." The steel engravings are described as having a similar "anecdotic" character in their coldly formal, austere, colorless lines. They too suggest Mrs. Peniston's worn-out code of morality. Neither Mrs. Peniston nor her code has any significance to Lily or the present society. That Lily is not condemned to be a part of this trio is evident in the suffering of her artistic sensibility when confronted by such objets. She realizes any surroundings reflecting herself would have a "subtle elegance" due to this sensibility and, by implication, her "inner fineness." (176) Subtle elegance would be far superior to Mrs. Peniston's formal, deathlike rooms or the contrasting "complicated luxury" of many of her friends.

Particularly important too in representing Mrs. Peniston and the tribal forms of the dead society she represents is the statue of the Dying Gladiator. Its dying subject suggests the eventual death of his own society and its forms. Just as the Roman society which approved of gladiatorial bouts was superannuated, so has the society of the fifties and sixties and its code also been replaced. Furthermore, the statue symbolizes Lily's own death partly because it is a part of the stifling decor of her aunt's house, but primarily because of its subject. The gladiator is dying because of submitting to a social custom he himself had no part in originating. So Lily submits to a society whose customs and forms are derived from its basis of money—a basis which Lily is not responsible for. The gladiator's fate is decided by the whim of a corrupt and frivolous society, and so is Lily's. She will be destroyed by incurring "disfavour with that portion of society which . . . has assumed the right to decide what forms [its] amusement shall take." (209) That the
gladiator's eyes look down on the deserted street which traditionally had been filled with throngs of people from "that portion of society" in mid-October is again symbolic of the present society which does not allow tradition to govern its forms.

The use of the visual arts to portray Lily's inner fineness and artistic talents is never more in evidence than in the scene (Chapter XII) of the Wellington Bry's party. Here again is a scene in which specific details of architecture, artifacts, and works of art are interwoven by Mrs. Wharton's economic artistry and serve to intensify and enlarge the meaning and purpose of the entire episode.

The combined functions of these interrelated details display the colossal pretentiousness of the party, its host, and many of its guests. A reference has been made earlier to the architecture of the Brys' house and the fact that they occupy a position inferior to the Trenors. That Lily is now a major figure in the Brys' party is significant of her descent from Bellomont. The architecture and interior decoration of the vast town house "is as much a piece of stagecraft as the tableaux vivants." First of all, a satiric note is sounded in describing the house as expressing a complete lack of domesticity and being related to an "airy" Italian pleasure hall. Since it is a town house and not a country house, their lack of taste is revealed. Such a style is inappropriate in the north and certainly in New York City. Its décor or interior architecture is described as stagey, unreal mise-en-scène. The marble columns might be cardboard; the damask and gold armchairs might be only painted on the walls. Even the ceiling is "flushed" with Venetian splendour. In short this is evidence of the shallow pretense which Bellomont did not have. It is in
this house of mirth Lily has her last triumph.

The guests themselves are described as having dressed with Mrs. Bry in mind. They are swathed in "rich tissues" and jewels. The clothes worn thus add to the motif of the stagey unreality of the party; they were "in harmony with the festooned and gilded halls . . . ."(212) Clothes are discussed not only in relation to Mrs. Bry but to her house besides. Again surface grandeur is symbolic of the frivolous and shallow elements of society.

The tableaux vivants themselves were presented on a raised platform in the hall beneath the Veronese ceiling whose style Gerty Parish criticizes for its fat women. Art on a stage in this sense expresses Mrs. Wharton's tragic sense of the waste of art on the wealthy class. They lack true appreciation and seek only to be amused by it. Art for the sake of amusement is also satirized when the entire fete is described as a bait to bring out members of a higher social stratum. It is another phase of the Invader Brys' "attack" on this society.(210) Art is dressed and cheapened by artifact: the proper lights and "delusive layers of gauze."

Gerty Farish, the social worker who will be jealous of Lily can see in Veronese only the fat women; and in the tableaux, only the actual people presented command her interest. She has no appreciation for the work of art represented. In this way she is contrasted to Lily and Selden as being blind to some extent to art and lacking in Mrs. Wharton's eyes a necessary degree of imagination and the background which would have helped to provide it. By contrast, Lily, with her artistic and "vivid plastic sense" is able to aid successfully in the entire production. It also gave
an outlet for her dramatic sense and historical interest. These talents are in direct contrast to her lack of ability later in the more mundane technique of sewing spangles on hats.

Carry Fisher in a Goya setting and Miss Van Alstyne in a Vandyke are connected to their settings strictly by external characteristics. Their personalities have been subordinated. But in the Reynolds' portrait "Miss Lloyd" Lily Bart externally embodies the subject of the painting while at the same time maintaining her own definite personality. The white dress and notable lack of artificial adornment represents her inner fineness and "artistic intelligence" and reveals the purity of her beauty. She needs no splendid setting for her beauty. Again we see her efforts to gain such artificial luxuries as wasted and unnecessary in view of her natural beauty.

An earlier reference has been made to Bowden's statement that a person's view of the arts expresses much about his character and moral sense. This statement is applicable in the case of New Van Alstyne. His comments reveal him as a spokesman for a decadent patriciate; Lily's appearance is the occasion for the only connoisseurship of which his culture is capable: "Deuced bold thing to show herself in that get-up; but, gad, there isn't a break in the lines anywhere, and I suppose she wanted us to know it!"[217] Instead of the self-confirming and ungenerous in her spectators being outweighed by an experience of the lovely and eternal, the balance has gone the other way. Lily's "predominance of personality" can speak only to what is small-minded in her audience.48

One who is not small-minded in her audience is Selden who finally is able to see her as real and divested of all artificiality. Here again Lily is isolated in completely unreal surroundings. He sees
her as a work of art and catches "for a moment a note of that eternal harmony of which her beauty was a part" (217), a phrase which further justifies Wharton's choice of the artist Reynolds whose discourses on art leaned heavily upon the theories of Longinus. Diana Trilling suggests further that Wharton's description of Lily's body as it appears in the tableau "carries a remarkable erotic charge" and in doing so, believes Wharton suggests a radical connection between sensuality and elegance, between sexuality and sensibility. If the well ordered, the harmonious, and the classical announces itself in grace and highmindedness, Mrs. Wharton concludes that it is also the style that best serves our biological needs. Lily and Selden are designed for each other not merely in spirit but in body.

That Selden is attracted to Lily here is quite obvious, and his appreciation of the Reynolds' tableau is a testament to both his artistic sense and his love for Lily. But the aura of unreality and artificiality soon begins to intrude. Lily and Selden go out into a garden (one may recall the hill scene above Bellomont and the scene in Selden's apartment—both times the color green appearing). In this setting however, the garden is flavored heavily by the artificial. It is a formal garden with lights strung overhead which contrast with the more natural stars. The wind blows and does not contain its natural sounds but rather those emanating from Mrs. Bry's "expensive orchestra from a further room." Lily soon flees into a brightly lit room after simultaneously "accepting and rejecting his love." She would never again be free from the house of mirth until death. Nor, paradoxically, would she ever again dwell in it.
Looking first at details of architecture and décor in *The Custom of the Country*, one finds Undine Spragg situated in the gilded Stentorian hotel during the first chapters of the novel. Unlike Lily Bart, who fell to this stratum of New York society typified by Mrs. Norma Hatch, Undine has risen to this level from the small mid-Western town of Apex where she had lived in a "ragged outskirt." Here she had first spent her summers in the Spragg's "yellow 'frame' cottage," moving thence to the Mealey House when Mr. Spragg's fortunes began to rise. Mealey House, with its "tessellated floors, . . . plush parlours, and organ like radiators,"(52) was nevertheless nothing more than a mid-Western hotel; and, because of the uncomfortable mid-Western summers, it was soon superseded by a "staring hotel on a glaring lake" in the North, then a Virginia resort, an inn at Skog Harbor, Maine, and finally the Stentorian. This succession of hotels can be seen as an important means for Undine in furthering her career, the final purpose of which was to gain a foothold in the upper strata of New York society. Concurrent with each change of hotels was her rise above the previous level of society.

In Undine's life of continual transition from level to level within the structure of hotel society, hotels embody a force determining Undine's goals and character. In each hotel or resort she has visited, Undine has received a revelation of another level of society existing beyond the one she had heretofore been seeking. They have both inspired and frustrated her. These constant frustrations in her background have infused restlessness into her spirit to the degree that she is seen in the novel
as a symbol of perpetual discontent. Because of this discontent she married Ralph Marvell, Raymond de Chelles, and Elmer Moffatt. The closing sentence of the novel shows her still discontent because she is unable to become an ambassadress because of her divorces. Her name itself implies "d'ivers et ondoyant" (79) to Ralph Marvell. She is always changing, always in transition. She says at one point "that it was always her fate to find out just too late about the 'something beyond.'" (54)

Hotels, particularly the Stentorian, represent the key to social entry for Mrs. Spragg and Undine. For Mrs. Wharton, however, they symbolize temporary residences for the "Invaders" who are descending upon the aristocracy of old New York, the society of Washington Square. In satirizing them, she satirizes their occupants. She at one point compares hotels like the Stentorian to a fleet of battleships "moored" along the upper reaches of the West Side. Guests such as the Spraggs are rootless, mid-Western—products of a society which places less value on family tradition and social convention than on money. Mrs. Spragg explains to Ralph Marvell that Undine was named after a hair-waver which her father had recently invented and was successfully selling on the market. Similar to her namesake, Undine appears as a manufactured product, coldly amoral—Nevius calls her spirit a "wasteland"—whose primary values are monetary.

The details of the Stentorian's décor chosen by Mrs. Wharton become significant in that they define Undine's values, placing her within that stratum of society called the "Invader"; and they satirize the vulgarity of her materialism. Just as the name "Stentorian" connotes
the coarse, brassy sounds of trumpets, so its suites are overly decorated and ostentatiously gilded. This tasteless display is revealed in the highly-varnished "Looey" suite, with its salmon-pink damask and "oval portraits of Marie Antoinette and the Princess de Lamballe," the "gilt table with a top of Mexican onyx" on which was a "gilt basket tied with a pink bow," and the gilt armchairs. This "imitation grandeur" is emphasized by comparing Mrs. Spragg to a "wax figure in a show window." The white and gold of Undine's room are illuminated by the "blazing wall brackets." Her room is symbolic of Undine's unrefined beauty:

... Undine's beauty was as vivid, and almost as crude as the brightness suffusing it. Her black brows, her reddish-tawny hair and the pure red and white of her complexion defied the searching decomposing radiance: she might have been some fabled creature whose home was in a beam of light.

This "beam of light" becomes ironic later when Undine, after two marriages, realizes how much she misses the gay life of the Nouveau Luxe, a hotel in Paris occupied by Americans and similar in many ways to the Stentorian, from which both of her husbands, Ralph and Raymond, have tried to remove her.

As in *The House of Mirth*, the lifeless, stifling quality of the hotel is noted, but here is used to define further Undine's restlessness and frustration in her search for material wealth and position. In Chapter IV, Undine wants her father to purchase a box at the opera which would increase her chances for meeting the right people. The breakfast room is described as a "sumptuously stuffy room" with a "spongy carpet," where "coffee fumes hung perpetually under the emblazoned ceiling." Pallid and silent, the waiters and diners almost become a part of the torpid décor which greatly contrasts with the violent ambition for social
success that Undine is entertaining. The stifling level of society represented by the Stentorian is not one in which Undine cares to remain for long.

The other New York hotel mentioned is the "Malibran". The Spraggs have been forced to move to this hotel later in the novel because of Undine's increased debts in Europe. The connotation of coarseness and ugliness is contained in the description of the hotel which reveals the Spraggs' difficult financial position. The Malibran is a "tall narrow structure resembling a grain elevator divided into cells, where linoleum and lincrusta simulated the stucco and marble of the Stentorian and fagged business men and their families consumed watery stews . . . in the grey twilight of a basement dining room." (313-314) Here imagery of death is expressive of Undine's unfeeling, destructive demands on her parents which have caused their social death. Now, in greater poverty, they could only be surrounded by an imitation of the imitation.

Even in Europe Mrs. Wharton sees the Invaders causing hotels such as the Nouveau Luxe to exist. Just as the Stentorian served its purpose for Undine in allowing her to meet Ralph and thus enter Washington Square society, so the Nouveau Luxe offers her Raymond de Chelles and the chance of invading the Faubourg Saint-Germain society. Here again Mrs. Wharton describes the hotel dining room in terms of sham splendour: it "represented . . . what unbounded material power had devised for the delusion of its leisure: a phantom 'society,' with all the rules, smirks, gestures of its model, but evoked out of promiscuity and incoherence while the other had been the product of continuity and choice." (273)
European hotel society was quite similar to New York hotel society. Raymond de Chelles describes it as "'a kind of superior Bohemia, where one may be respectable without being bored.'"(274) The Invading society did not possess the independent culture of Washington Square society, and therefore its only alternative was to obtain bits and pieces of European culture through marriage and purchasing power. 

It is here Undine meets her old friend Indiana Frusk whose ambitions are quite similar to her own. Her hotel room is similar to the Stentorian; the "high-shouldered gilt baskets . . . reminded Undine of the 'Looey suite.'"(345) Also Elmer Moffatt has taken up residence here. He has followed Undine in her social climb and has become increasingly wealthy. In his room too, the crass vulgarity of the Nouveau Luxe and the moneyed Invaders it houses is emphasized by its furnishings and decor. There is a "big vulgar writing table wreathed in bronze"; and "a lapis bowl in a Renaissance mounting . . . a vase of Phenician glass that was like a rainbow caught in cobwebs," and a "little Greek Marble"--all of which "seemed to be shrinking back from the false colours and crude contours of the hotel furniture."(567) Such is the confused, tasteless decor of the Nouveau Luxe. The juxtaposition of true objets d'art in such surroundings is for Mrs. Wharton a crude violation of taste possible only in a materialistic society in which art is possessed for its monetary value alone.

Architectural details are important in delineating that stratum of New York society called the "Aborigines." Undine is first introduced into this aristocracy of Washington Square when she arrives at Laura Fairford's house. The house is described to some extent negatively:
"There was no gilding, no lavish diffusion of light: . . . green shaded lamps making faint pools of brightness, . . . rows of books from floor to ceiling."(31-32) Also there is the "old-fashioned wood fire" in the authentic fireplace. In short, the decor is tasteful and subdued. It is the exact opposite of the pretentious display Undine was accustomed to among the newly prosperous. Mrs. Fairford, the sister of Ralph Marvell, is shown by her interior architecture to be a lady of taste, unaffected by the modish, and singularly unpretentious. She abides by conventional morality and will later show shocked disapproval of Undine's treatment of Ralph revealing Undine's lack of any conventional morals.

The house of the Dagonets is described in similar terms. It had a "symmetrical old red house-front," with a "frugal marble ornament," a "quiet 'Dutch interior' effect of black and white marble."(73) Ralph Marvell admits the similarities between the beliefs and views of their entire social stratum are revealed by the houses the Aborigines live in. Their "reserves and discrimination" set them apart from "the new spirit of limitless concession."(305,306) Ralph's mother and Urban Dagonet were

. . . so closely identified with the old house in Washington square that they might have passed for its inner consciousness as it might have stood for their outward form; and the question as to which the house now seemed to affirm their intrinsic rightness was that of the social disintegration expressed by widely different architectural physiognomies at the other end of Fifth Avenue.

. . . [Popple'd society the nouveau riche] was really just like the houses it lived in: a muddle of misapplied ornament over a thin steel shell of utility. The steel shell was built up in Wall Street, the social trimmings were hastily added in Fifth Avenue; and the union between them was a monstrous and factitious as unlike the gradual homogeneous growth which flowers into what other countries know as society, as that between the Blois gargoyles on Peter Van Degen's roof and the skeleton walls supporting them.

That was what "they" had always said; what . . . the very lines of the furniture in the old Dagonet house expressed.(73)
Theirs was a "high dark dining-room with mahogany doors and dim portraits of 'Signers' and their females."(89-90) The portraits are symbolic of the Dagonets' tradition and their belief in its importance. Later the Dagonet drawing room is described as having worn damask curtains and two "prim caryatids" on the "white marble mantelpiece." The fireplace is in exact accordance with "taste." The adjectives 'dark,' 'dim,' and 'worn' again imply the contrast of the gilded nouveau riche houses; they also imply the waning fortunes of the New York aristocracy. The Invaders are beginning to take over the old fortunes Washington Square society had possessed since pre-Civil War days.

It is this pre-Civil War period that Mrs. Wharton uses as a "backdrop," as Lyde calls it, for all her fiction: "Whether or not it forms the actual setting for a particular work, it is always present indirectly as though projected through the small end of a telescope: it has formed the class of which she writes and the values which provide opposition for her characters."

Since Peter Van Degen has been mentioned previously as a member of a stratum below the Washington Square society, his marriage with Clare Dagonet can be seen even more clearly as a mismatch by contrasting architectural styles. Once the reader detects the dissimilarity between architectural styles familiar to Undine and Ralph Marvell, he can conceive of no greater mismatch "than that marriage of taste with crude desire." In the Van Degen home it is important to notice how the variations in taste express the incompatibility of Peter and Clare and point up Clare's mistake in not marrying Ralph. However, Clare was capricious, and she remains in a kind of tragic suspension between the ostentation of Peter's
stratum with its shaky morals and her own sober Dutch background. Their house too is suspended between the pretentious gilt and the sober, darker hues. Her own drawing room had "lowered awnings [which] cast a luminous shadow on old cabinets and consoles, and on the pale flowers . . . scattered . . . in vases of bronze and porcelain." Other objects blending into her drawing room décor were an "old lacquer screen" and a table which had the brown bloom and the pear-like curves of an old violin."(320) There was in the house another drawing room which was partly Peter's, partly her own creation, a "polyphonic" room with heavy decoration and "Popple's portrait of her enthroned over a waste of gilt furniture."(319) The tasteless gilding was as unlike her, thought Ralph, as her present "restlessness and stridency."

The aristocracy of France is in much the same way defined and described by carefully chosen architectural details. In America, the Dagonet house had defined their attitudes. In France, the chateau of Saint-Desert symbolizes the Faubourg Saint-Germain society which Undine suddenly finds is a higher stratum of society than she was acquainted with before her meeting with Raymond de Chelles. Mrs. Wharton writes that the benighted Undine "had assumed that Paris existed for the stranger, that its native life was merely an obscure foundation for the dazzling superstructure of hotels and restaurants in which her compatriots disported themselves."(286) Now she had begun to hear of American women, Invaders like herself, "who led, in the high-walled houses beyond the Seine . . . a life that made her own seem as undistinguished as the social existence of the Mealey House."(286)

Saint Désert, the château of the de Chelles, has a drawing room
with portraits of "high-nosed personages in perukes and orders." These, like the portraits in the Dagonet drawing room, are symbols of the family unity and lineage. They are a means by which the past tradition is kept alive. The present tenants and their friends are described as being "not unlike" the portraits. Thus Raymond and the old Marquise are representative of the whole line of maîtres de château. However, for Undine the château becomes a prison—death-like—in that she soon wearies of a life removed from her original element of hotel society, a life bound to the convention and morality Saint Désert represents. One can easily contrast, as Percy Lubbock does, the "flutter and flash of Undine's restlessness" with "the life that is lived behind the huge-ported housefronts in the narrow streets of the Faubourg . . . which absorbs the gaze with its deep layers of distinction and monotony and expressive composure, of immemorial ignorance of the world coupled with the finest expertness in manipulating the fabric of existence." She feels the dampness of the château in "the stuffing of the chairs, the threadbare folds of the faded curtains, the splendid tapestries . . . ." (490) For Paul, Undine's son by Ralph Marvell, the surroundings are depressing and somewhat frightening. Abruptly removed from his home in New York, he finds Saint Désert different and feels quite alone in the large drawing room. His mother's influence on him has been dissettling and destructive of his natural spontaneity. He is now as rootless as Undine.

In the description of the décor of Saint Désert, adjectives such as "threadbare" and "worn" emphasize the declining aristocracy of France. America and its Invaders are making their influence felt in this rarified stratum. An American had married the eldest son of the old de Chelles
family, and even the second son, Hubert, had taken an American wife. Raymond was burdened by the debts incurred from Hubert's gambling and, after his marriage to Looty Arlington, had greater debt still due to her remodeling of the premier of the Hôtel de Chelles where she and Hubert were to live. Looty, from one of the "'divorce states,'"(500) whom Hubert had met at a "skating rink," is further characterized by her choice of décor in renovating the Hôtel de Chelles. This décor also reveals Undine's nature and shows it allied to her American sister-in-law since Undine aided in the planning of the entire undertaking. Together they ordered doors moved, windows opened, partitions torn down. They gave over "the great trophied and pilastered dining-room to a decorative painter with a new theory of the human anatomy."(504) The Faubourg society were subsequently astonished to see "prehistoric episodes depicted on his dining-room walls." Such a tasteless and vulgar destruction is a concrete example of the removal by the Invaders of former social barriers and traditions. Mrs. Wharton has again made a variation on her theme of waste of material resources by a frivolous, faddish society.

Returning to the architecture and décor of Saint Désert, one sees even in the tapestries on the walls various symbols of family tradition and unity. The old Marquise continually embroiders tapestries even though "the innumerable rooms . . . were furnished with the embroidered hangings and tapestry chairs produced by generations of diligent châtelaines, and the untiring needle of the old Marquise . . . ."(513) This seems meaningless to Undine who decides the whole concern can represent only one thing: that "huge voracious fetish" called "The
Family." (513) Ironically this is true, but in a much deeper sense than she has realized. The 'family' implies also convention and morality which in France had existed for hundreds of years. Everything that is a part of the décor and the château itself represents the family. It was originally built for the protection of its owner and his family. Although mollified, this purpose has remained until the present when the family dependents make "chair coverings and bed-curtains for a house that didn't really belong to them." (513) The amoral Undine lacks the spirit to understand the morality and inner sensibility implied in such loyalty to family and tradition. Mrs. Wharton has allowed her heroine to record nothing which is "not naturally within [her] register."

The mere size of Saint Désert seems hateful to Undine because its dampness is increased by it. This inclemency forces her to sit in the Marquise's room surrounded by the tapestried four-poster, fireplace, and single carcel lamp, because the de Chelles are forced to limit their fuel consumption for economy. Thus the intimate décor of the Marquise's room symbolizes a dual burden for Undine: the lack of money which is the only medium through which she can express herself, and the unity of family which is thus forced upon her physically. Her hatred for the imprisonment and boredom she feels under such familial propinquity and moral strictures has destroyed whatever amusement she may have felt upon first entering Saint Désert and leads her ultimately to suggest to Raymond that he sell the château. This would relieve his financial problems and at the same time allow her to return to Paris and mingle with her old crowd. Raymond is horrified at the suggestion largely because of what the house itself
symbolizes. Thus architectural details structure and deepen the meaning of the dramatic action of the novel.

All these reactions are in direct relation to the château and its architecture which delineate the stratum of society being presented. Through meaningful detail, Mrs. Wharton has, as E. K. Brown writes, "avec un rare souci d'économie ... réussit admirablement à nous donner l'idée de la vie du château, et de ses maîtres."[67]

In the final scenes, Elmer Moffatt appears wealthier than ever, an important collector as a result. Elements of décor important in defining his stratum are largely those which reveal his increased opulence, which naturally makes him more attractive to Undine. He too is an Invader, but only in the business world. His attention had not been primarily centered upon social advancement so much as Undine's. His office is described as having "varnish and brass railings, ... mahogany bookcases containing morocco bound sets, and wide blue armchairs."(450) This renovation of what had previously been a relatively dingy office is similar to the change in Elmer himself. Ralph noticed that he gave "the impression of having been done over by the same hand: he was smoother, broader, more supremely tailored, and his whole person exhaled the faintest whiff of an expensive scent."(450)

Moffatt purchases a private hôtel overlooking the new quarter of Paris. This vast, pretentious structure is symbolic of both Moffatt's and Undine's materialistic values: it is large, imposing, comfortable, overly-decorated. As Régis Michaud writes of their relationship, "Moffat est plus lourd que l'or, et une loi fatale fait que le semblable attire le semblable." Their house in New York was equally pretentious: an "exact
copy of the Pitti Palace, Florence." (586) In the hotel, Paul feels an even worse isolation because of the lack of tradition evident in the house. Again removed from his home and step-father, he is presented as restive in the great house. He could find none of his old things. He ironically wonders "whether the wigged and corseleted heroes on the walls represented Mr. Moffatt's ancestors." (579) Nevius says that "Paul's loneliness and bewilderment provide the final commentary on his mother's career." 69 Mrs. Wharton describes this bewilderment in the language of interior decoration: "The newness and sumptuousness of the room embarrassed him--with the white fur rugs and brocade chairs." (578)

By her marriage to Moffatt, Undine attains complete material success; but, in doing so, she allies herself forever to the hotel society from which she began. She had never been completely accepted by either Washington Square or Faubourg Saint-Germain. But she has the physical comfort she demanded. She cares less for her lack of respect than for her lack of boredom. As a result of her divorce from Raymond, she can never enter the ambassadorial society. Therefore, in all her material luxury, she is still restless and discontented. She leaves the novel as she entered it: in the blaze of jewelry and light of hotel society which has become international in scope.

Just as architectural details have functioned as expressions of values and attitudes held by the several levels of society and their representatives, artifacts also are valuable in delineating these levels and revealing character. In the level of the Stentorian hotel society, Undine is seen comparing her own "pigeon-blood notepaper" with its silver monogram to the plain white sheet of Mrs. Fairford's stationary. Her
choice of pigeon-blood red indicates her lack of taste, her modish and imitative qualities. She had been inspired to buy it by an article in one of the Sunday papers which noted its use by "the smartest women."(18) The other side of her nature, the independent, is also revealed in her violation of Mrs. Spragg's advice against such a choice. The silver monogram is evidence of her pretentiousness and interest in wealth. Laura Fairford is easily seen as a member of another level of society.

When Undine is at the museum, opera, or the theatre, her attention is never directed upon the work of art presented but on the crowd, its clothing and jewelry. At the gallery, "her attention was drawn to . . . a tortoise-shell eye-glass adorned with diamonds and hanging from a long pearl chain."(48) The glasses soon become symbolic of the supercilious and graceful way of life Undine identifies with the higher levels of New York society. She notices the same instrument at the opera(63) and contrasts Mabel Lipscomb's violent gestures with fan and playbill with the lady's quiet turns of the opera-glass of closely set brilliants."(63) At the theatre, Undine does not recognize the actress, but several faces in the audience appear to be "familiar."(97) In focusing her attention on such artifacts and their owners, she displays her completely materialistic goals which are shared by the whole stratum of society known as the Invaders. Her blindness for the arts is associated with what Larry Rubin calls her "sordidness of the spirit."(70)

The lack of taste in this stratum is evident in the gifts Mr. and Mrs. Spragg confer on Paul; gifts such as "a kaleidoscopic tartan and a green velvet cap with a silver thistle"(316) are abhorred by Ralph Marvell. It is also evident in the pretentious display of Indiana Frusk's
jewels: her hand wound "through her pearls—there were ropes and ropes of them." (346) Undine's own pearls from Peter Van Degen are symbolic of the disgrace she has received by his defection and finally of her own materialism. Her father advises her to return them and thus terminate any continuing alliance between them, but she prefers to sell them and use the money obtained from them to return to Europe.

Artifacts also define differences between the Aborigines and the Invaders. Mrs. Fairford quietly appears at dinner in "dowdy black and antiquated ornaments;" she "was not what Undine would have called 'stylish.'" (33) Rather her clothes and jewelry are expressive of her reticence, lack of display, and sense of the past. Undine's engagement ring from Ralph is a "band of sapphires in an intricate setting" which Mrs. Heeny immediately recognizes as an ancestral ring probably belonging to the Dagonets. In aristocracy, she says, "'they never go out and buy engagement rings.'" (84-85) The ring attains dramatic importance when Ralph later realizes her desire for the faddishly correct clothes (145) but asks that she not have the engagement ring reset. (171) However Undine cares nothing for the familial tradition the ring represents and has it reset. Ralph was hurt that "she had been unconscious of the wound she inflicted in destroying the identity of the jewels." (214) Her perception is limited to such an extent that she believes he is angry only at her deception. The ring, whose gems symbolize the wealth and whose setting symbolizes the tradition of old New York society, is the concrete means by which Ralph realizes that Undine "was completely unconscious of states of feeling on which so much of his inner life depended . . . . " (214) The reset jewels "marked a new stage in their relation," (214) and
in this way become a structuring device for Mrs. Wharton. This artifact has contrasted the rootless Invaders from the tradition-minded Aborigines. The juxtaposition of this incident with that in which Clare gives Paul an old ancestral Dagonet bowl is significant. The bowl will still be kept in the family since, after all, Clare is related to Ralph. Ralph had believed, in giving the ring to Undine, it too would remain intact and in the family. All these details help place Mrs. Fairford, Clare Van Degen, and Ralph in a stratum of society recognizing taste and tradition, moral sensibility and spiritual values.

In Paris and at Saint Désert, artifacts are used in similar fashion to point up the disparity between the materialistic Invaders and the conventional Faubourg Saint-Germain society. Before meeting Raymond de Chelles, Undine's Paris was only a city whose "material details" and "surface-sparkle" allowed her senses to luxuriate.(281) After her abasement caused by Peter Van Degen, she feels her failure has no more disturbed Paris "than the motor wheels rolling by under the windows were disturbed by the particles of dust that they ground to finer powder as they passed."(346) These are similar to the "carriage wheels" Lily Bart notices after her fall from social grace. However unlike Lily, the wheels seem to be more nearly allied to fortune than Lily's, and they will soon turn in her favor. She marries Raymond de Chelles, but to his chateau she carries the same lack of taste and feeling she had taken to Washington Square. She cannot understand having tea "for the sole enjoyment of the family." This is a chance for her sense of display to express itself, and it is only thwarted. She consequently can find limited amusement in "making the ancestral plate groan under more varied viands" and
"lighting the sacrificial fires in both chimneys."

The ancestral plate symbolizes again the tradition which Undine cannot understand. Adjectives such as 'ancestral' are part of her "tribal" diction which Mrs. Wharton employs to contrast the familial tradition of Faubourg Saint-Germain society with the lack of it in Undine's background. The plate's groans are expressive of the burden Undine places on the whole of Saint Désert and the de Chelles family because of her continually increasing debts to satisfy her inherent pretentiousness. Her materialistic thirst cannot be quenched in the French aristocracy. From her viewpoint, her "dresses hung in her wardrobe like so many unfulfilled promises of pleasure" and thus are symbolic of her perpetual restlessness. They remind her "of the days at the Stentorian when she had reviewed other finery with the same cheated eyes." She cannot appreciate the standards of taste held by the Faubourg Saint-Germain society and consequently will never be totally accepted by the de Chelles. The cultivation of European society cannot impregnate her hard shell of vulgarity.

Elmer Moffatt is immediately placed in the stratum of materialistic, pretentious Invaders when Mrs. Wharton notes he was wearing "a large imitation pearl." The rapidity of his rise and measure of his increased wealth and power by the end of the novel is expressed by the pearl necklace he gives Undine: "The necklace, which was formerly the property of an Austrian Archduchess, is composed of five hundred perfectly matched pearls that took thirty years to collect." The description, couched in journalistic phrasing, gives further evidence of the scale on which the Invaders were aggrandizing the traditional property belonging
to an older aristocracy. Among his other purchases are "a necklace and tiara of pigeon-blood rubies belonging to Queen Marie Antoinette." (586) These jewels are also suggestive of the tragic victimization of the old aristocracy by the crass *nouveau riche*. Ralph, Raymond, and Paul have all been sacrificed to Undine's attempts to satisfy her discontent.

The third category of significant details—works of art—has the important role in the novel of revealing the lack of any "inner fineness" in Undine or her circle. This lack is first evident in the Spragg's display of only one book in their Looey suite—*The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Contrast this with the multitude of books possessed by the Dagonets who represent the Washington Square society, and those of Ralph Marvell which jammed "his old bookcase" and overflowed "on chairs and tables." (75) A "dramatic poem" of Whitman and a "prose critic" both lay at his elbow. (77) Also Ralph's taste is evident in his dislike for Popple's portraits in which, regardless of whom he paints, Popple "paints himself." Ralph asks Undine not to have her portrait done by him. She argues that it is the "smart" thing to do. He answers, "'Oh, if a "smart" portrait's all you want.'" (100) Undine has no taste in such matters; "'I want what the others want,'" she answers, again revealing her imitative, yet independent, nature. It is notable that Clare Van Degen, who has a Popple portrait, leads Ralph into her drawing room by a route allowing him no chance whatever of seeing it. Clare, as has already been mentioned, is capricious and, by her marriage to Peter Van Degen, is suspended between the Van Degen stratum and the Washington Square society. Her possession of a Popple portrait implies that she wants to be "smart" but she also realizes the poor taste and lack of any intrinsic, artistic
value in Popple's portraits.

Certainly the rococo tapestries at Saint Désert by Boucher are symbolic of the de Chelles' familial tradition and taste. But Undine can only suggest that Raymond sell them; and he replies, "'You don't understand.'" (527) To Undine the tapestries and portraits on the walls of Saint Désert can only intensify her feeling of imprisonment as long as they remain in the house. Once sold they would purchase her freedom and allow her to have a season in Paris. But as representatives of the tradition and values of the Faubourg Saint-Germain society, they deny her a full share of the de Chelles wealth and consequently her freedom. Her recognition only of their monetary value, or their value as an "appropriate setting of a pretty woman" (548) which she would have had as Moffatt's wife bring on a bitterly satiric tirade from Raymond concerning the Invaders:

"You come among us from a country we don't know . . . a country you care for so little that before you've been a day in ours you've forgotten the very house you were born in— if it wasn't torn down before you knew it! You come among us speaking our language and not knowing what we mean; wanting the things we want, and not knowing why we want them; . . . you come from hotels as big as towns, and from towns as flimsy as paper, where . . . the people are as proud of changing as we are of holding to what we have—and we're fools enough to imagine that because you copy our ways and pick up our slang you understand anything about the things that make life decent and honourable for us!" (545)

In a world where taste, manners, art, and ideas are all important, Undine can only be "flayed alive for her pretensions." (72)

The de Chelles also possess a fine collection of paintings by Ingres whose name Undine had only just recently learned. Even Moffatt is described as having a degree of aesthetic appreciation of these and other
works of art. They "moved him in a way Undine would not understand." (563) It is fitting that Ingres should have been appreciated by the de Chelles since Ingres relied heavily on a traditional, Neo-classical style just as the de Chelles clung to traditional convention and form. Also, the Ingres paintings have a cold, static quality about them due to the artist's concentration on line and form rather than depth of color. However, Moffatt eventually bought these paintings and the eighteenth century Boucher tapestries which Raymond had so adamantly refused to sell. He purchased the "Grey Boy" for the "largest sum ever given for a Vandyck." (583) Wealth rather than family tradition is the only medium through which the Invaders can acquire art.

Moffatt has, by virtue of his wealth, become a collector--his major enjoyment of art coming from the sheer possession of it. He will not allow his valuable books to be removed from their gilt-trellised cases. His objets d'art represent only his financial power; and he, like Mrs. Heeny and Undine, can enjoy the public acknowledgment by the newspapers of all his recent acquisitions.

Paul, however, with the potential of gaining an appreciation of the arts such as his father had, admires the bindings of the books and wishes he could read them: "They all looked as if they might have had stories in them as splendid as their bindings." (578) He also appreciates the "Grey Boy" as a work of art with intrinsic merit and not simply as an expensive holding. He makes a kind of self-identification with the grey boy who looked "noble" and "lonely." The painting in this connection is expressive of Paul's isolation and his sense of the strangeness of his new surroundings. Later, when Mrs. Heeny is gloating over the headlines
about the Moffatts, Mrs. Wharton writes that "the price of the Grey Boy did not interest Paul." (583) Finally, Paul is overjoyed at seeing the Boucher tapestries hanging in the Moffatt's hotel. For him they symbolize the security he had known at Saint Désert.

Undine can only remark that "somehow they look smaller here" in the pretentious opulence of the Moffatt hotel and later acknowledge that they made "her ballroom the handsomest in Paris." She could comprehend only the financial reasons for their being present in her house—Moffatt's wealth and Raymond's increased burdens due to "General Arlington's bankruptcy and a fresh gambling scandal of Hubert's." (592) Their value as objets d'art were beyond her. However the simple fact that Moffatt, a successful Invader, had acquired them from a member of the Faubourg Saint-Germain society is the major irony of their presence in the hôtel. Auchincloss says that "the family of the Marquis de Chelles are not sufficiently humiliated by his marriage to Undine; they must also see their tapestries stripped from their walls by her next husband, Elmer Moffatt." The theme of waste both of resources and of tradition on the Invaders is made clear through specific details concerning works of art.

Therefore, through an analysis of the significant details concerning architecture, artifact, and the arts themselves, Mrs. Wharton's shrewdness and her ability "to discriminate among the gradations of power and status in the world of the rich" are apparent in both The House of Mirth and The Custom of the Country. Through such detail Mrs. Wharton has recorded both "the surface of social life and inner vibrations of spirit that surface reveals, suppresses, and distorts."
Although little of European society appears in *The House of Mirth*, by the time *The Custom of the Country* appeared, Edith Wharton was spending less time in America; and French society represented by Raymond de Chelles was taking on a new importance for her. She found that the post Civil-war aristocracy supposed that appearance (etiquette) implied reality (ethical probity). Consequently, the lower classes "came to regard money as the chief characteristic of aristocratic respectability." 77

This is certainly Undine's error. Unlike Lily, Undine is a kind of picara whose "amorality betrays her into the one situation which she finds intolerable--the knowledge that there is something which she cannot have." 78 Howe calls her the "prototype . . . of the 'gold-digger,' of the 'international cocktail bitch.'" And in her gold-digging, her search for sound acceptance and constant amusement, she destroys Ralph, Paul, and to some degree, Mr. and Mrs. Spragg. Similarly, in *The House of Mirth*, the frivolity of the society destroyed Lily Bart.

The ascents of Rosedale, Moffatt, and Undine and the decline of Lily are carefully and significantly plotted by specific details of the three categories. In both novels, the heroine has the chameleon-like character essential for conformity to various levels of the social structure. Lily had artificiality, but an inner fineness. Undine was independent yet imitative. In both cases, Mrs. Wharton's description enables her to be a critic of the *nouveau riche* and often the groups to which Lily and Undine aspire. Her detestation of waste among the leisure classes is the reason for this satire; and with the breakdown of convention causing a divergence between morality and apparent form, the inescapable waste of the upper strata's abilities and resources is evident as a theme in these two novels of social satire.
CHAPTER TWO

THE SENSITIVE CHÂTEAU

The Reef (1912) is a moral drama according to Mrs. Wharton's own definition. It involves the "gradual unfolding of the inner life of its characters"; and as she has stated, a moral drama has its "roots deep in the soul, [its] rise far back in time." Its culmination "should be led up to step by step if it is to explain and justify itself." Of primary interest in The Reef is the moral dilemma of the four main characters and their interrelations with each other. The major conflict is again one between morality and convention. Marilyn Lyde explains it as Anna Leath's struggle to "reconcile conventional morality with the individual code of Darrow which is completely foreign to her nature."

The title Mrs. Wharton chose is symbolic of the "deep and shallow places" making up the current of the love of Darrow and Anna. It can also refer to the destructive affair George Darrow has with Sophy Viner in Paris which later wreaks havoc on the lives of the four main characters and reduces them all to a "state of quiet desperation." Details concerned with architecture, artifact, and art primarily symbolize the varied types of moral sensibilities of the various characters, thereby aiding in their overall characterization. They also serve to delineate more concretely the nature of the moral dilemma which structures the entire novel. The château, Givré, is particularly important as the "sensitive register of the moods of the characters, the luminous . . . register of their reactions to the events of the narrative."
The decorative background of both *The Reef* and *Madame de Treymes*, a novelette whose locus is France, shows "a finish which is the outward and concrete expression of a profound and general intelligence of life." As Mrs. Wharton herself put it early in her career, "la morale est purement graphique." In *A Motor-flight through France*, she writes of the amenity of French manners, the long process of social adaptation which has produced so profound and general an intelligence of life...this admirable fitting into the pattern, which seems almost as if it were a moral outcome of the universal French sense of form, has led the race to the...momentous discovery that good manners are a short cut to one's goal, that they lubricate the wheels of life instead of obstructing them.

In reference to George Sand's château, Nohant, which bears a striking resemblance to Givré, the writes:

...one beholds this image of aristocratic well-being, this sober edifice, conscious in every line of its place in the social scale, of its obligations to the church and cottages under its wing, its rights over the acres surrounding it.... an old house so marked in its very plainness, its conformity, must have exerted, over a mind as sensitive as [George Sand's], an unperceived but persistent influence, giving her that centralizing weight of association and habit which is too often lacking in modern character, and standing ever before her as the shrine of those household pieties to which, inconsistently enough, but none the less genuinely, the devotion of her last years was paid.

In Edith Wharton's "moral geography, Givré, like Nohant, could exist nowhere but in France." In the second book of the novel, George Darrow arrives at Anna's château having just come from Paris where he has had a brief affair with Sophy Viner. This affair took place in a hotel room of "featureless dullness," having a look of
the makeshift setting of innumerable transient collocations. There was something sardonic, almost sinister, in its appearance of having deliberately "made up" for an anonymous part, all in noncommittal drabs and brown, with a carpet and paper nobody would remember, and chairs and tables as impersonal as railway porters.\(^{12}\)

The hotel, representing a lack of art, and housing the anonymous wanderers divorced from any familial roots, is immediately contrasted with Anna's house, Givré. Her chateau will be seen to symbolize her moral standard and intensify its meaning. Iyde writes that "Darrow's moral code is as unlike Anna's as the dingy Paris hotel room which he shared with Sophy is unlike her home."\(^{13}\) Anna notices after his arrival that the old parquet floor is "bright and shifting."(106) Darrow appears quite alive in contrast to the "empty pale-panelled vista... the long reflections which a projecting cabinet or screen cast here and there upon the shining floors."(107) He sees Givré as representing the past: its bricks "had the bloom and texture of old red velvet," and the lichen on them "looked like the last traces of a dim embroidery."(108) Anna has told him she wants him to see her "with all [her] irrational doubts and scruples; the old ones and the new ones too." He replies, "'The new scruples are the ones I want to tackle.'"(112) He will not relent to the code represented by Givré but is determined to live in the present with its shifting moral values.

Before the arrival of Sophy, Givré offers for Darrow an "air of intimacy" in its harmonious combination of red veiled lamps, "full bodied wardrobes and cabinets," "faded hangings, and slightly frayed and threadbare rugs."(125) However, after her arrival, Givré appears in a different light: its front of "damp-silvered brick," "the high decorum of its calm lines and soberly massed surfaces" makes him feel,
"in the turbid coil of his fears and passions, like a muddy tramp
forcing his way into some pure sequestered shrine."(146-147) By means
of architectural detail, Mrs. Wharton has succeeded in delineating
Darrow's guilt when confronted by Anna's moral code. Before Sophy's
arrival Darrow is aware that the mellow beauty of Givré and Anna's
traditional moral code are intertwined with each other. But after Sophy
comes, he feels he is no longer a part of such an atmosphere, and his
tension increases since he knows Anna will not forgive him if she should
learn of his romance with Sophy. Givré thus is itself an obstacle
against his possibility of union in marriage with Anna.

Two artifacts are functional in defining Darrow's character.
The first is the "seal ring in a setting of twisted silver" which Anna
notices "on the hand he had kept on hers."(ll3) The ring in this con-
text symbolizes his "sense of possessorship."(129) He flatters himself
in thinking that only he can know Anna, who was like a picture which
"can be seen only at a certain angle: an angle known to no one but its
possessor."(129) Anna is a woman he can be proud of owning. Having
once put his "seal" on her, he will be able to display her to the out-
side world. The ring, then, symbolizes his pride of ownership just as
Anna notices in gazing at his personal possessions that "every object .
. . seemed to contain a particle of himself."(342) When Anna notices the ring
later, the context increases the symbolic value of the ring. He had
been engaged in some official correspondence with a great detachment the
night before he left Givré. Here the added meaning of Darrow's ambas-
sadorial duties to which he must return increases Anna's sensing that
the affair was to be sealed, ended, with the same official formality
one of Darrow's documents might be sealed: "the sense of the end of all
things came to her."(341) Darrow belonged to a world other than Givré.

This is further emphasized by another artifact, a photograph,
appearing in the scene in which he tries to resolve the problem of Sophy
and Owen's relationship. The photograph reveals him as "a man of the
world, confident of his ability to deal adequately with the most delicate
situations."(260) He was "well dressed, handsome, and self-sufficient." (260) The photograph emphasizes the severe test of his ambassadorial
talents which has continued during his entire stay at Givré in trying
to reconcile himself to Sophy, Anna, and Owen and ward off any tragedy
which might result. The irony of the photograph is apparent when it
offers "its huge fatuity to his gaze."(260)

By seeing Darrow in relation to his architectural surroundings
and artifacts, his character and morality can be more easily distinguished.
The moral dilemma of the novel is as a result more concretely defined.
In the same way, Anna's character is defined by her relation to Givré.

The "high-roofed house of brick and yellowish stone" has ceased
to be a concretizing of "romantic associations" and become the very sym-
bol of "narrowness and monotony"(81-82) for Anna. It was "the shell of a
life slowly adjusted to its dwelling: the place one came back to, ... where one had one's duties ... habits ... books ... a dull house ... to which one was so used that one could hardly, after so long a time, think
one's self away from it without suffering a certain loss of identity."(83)
A few lines later Mrs. Wharton writes that Anna "was not used to strong or
full emotions," therefore easily able to become identified with Givré and
its "monotony." One explanation for this lack is deterministic: in her
well-regulated background in the upper stratum of New York society, "people with emotions were not visited." Art and life were put in reverse order as "little by little the conditions conquered her, and she learned to regard the substance of life as a mere canvas for the embroideries of poet and painter." This reversal had made her attractive to her first husband Fraser Leath: "that she should be so regarded by a man living in an atmosphere of art and beauty, and esteeming them the vital elements of life, made her feel for the first time that she was understood."(90) Givre, with its faded tapestries, its formal gardens and statuary, symbolizes the unreal moral code her family and Fraser Leath had instilled in her. As Iyde says,

Anna...has always lived her real life in the recesses of the spirit, that rarefied moral atmosphere which bears no resemblance to the grimy world of social reality. Once she admits to this inner sanctuary a man like Darrow, whose values are essentially worldly, she has set the scene for inevitable tragedy. Possessing the abstract ideals of a dedicated priestess, she is unprepared for ordinary life....

She accepts Darrow out of a longing for a deeper experience than she has previously had, and out of ennui caused by living in a world of reticence and subtle evasions from reality. This is why, in answer to Darrow's question--

"You're sure you're prepared to give up Givre? You look so made for each other."

--she can answer only,

"Oh, Givre--" She broke off suddenly, feeling as if her too careless tone had delivered all her past into his hands; and with one of her instinctive movements of recoil she added: "When Owen marries I shall have to give it up."(117-118)

For Givre, having just been described as sober and "harmonious," is a
symbol of her past; and therefore, her recoil back to it is a natural one, but an imprisoning one. E. K. Brown notes that Anna is a "woman whose emotions are held in severe check by her training [New York, Givré] and her associations [her family, Fraser Leath], but who, half unknown to herself, places the ideal in a human relationship—a great love—in which she can find absolute release and serenity and a sense of escape from the bonds of civilization which are gently strangling her."  
These bonds are certainly represented in part by Givré. It is notable too that Anna's potential for love is hidden in the depths of her spirit in much the same way that her room, called "a retreat in which . . . Anna Leath had hidden the restless ghost of Anna Summers," seems apart from the shabbiness and discomfort of the yellow-stone château. (155) It was here Anna had "gathered together all the tokens of her personal tastes." (155) It is described as "quiet" and lined with books. To Givré Anna brought her own personality.

Mrs. Wharton finds artifacts such as Darrow's clothes and Anna's furniture particularly expressive of Anna's feeling for Darrow. His traveling coat and cap, "lying among her own wraps, gave her a sense of homely intimacy." (122) They are symbols of the real love no longer covered by the stage gauze which had before hung "between herself and life"(84)--; she seemed now to hold her happiness "in her hand": it had taken on "the plain dress of daily things."(122) Later Sophy notices the evidence of their love even in the "intimate propinquity of arm-chair and sofa corner."(161)

In discussing Anna in relation to the third category, that of art objects, it will be necessary to treat the character of her former
husband, Fraser Leath, who had first been attracted to Anna because of her appreciation of the arts. Her pleasure in getting an anthology of "the old French poets" and a "half-effaced eighteenth century pastel" was appreciated by Leath who explained, "'I knew no one but you would really appreciate it.'" (89-90) The remarkable difference between Anna then and now is the same as the difference between Leath and Darrow. Leath lived in a world surrounded by art. His involvement with a world of painting and collecting had totally divorced him from reality. Darrow on the other hand appreciates art but is still concerned with human values in the real world. As Bowden writes, "taste, appreciation, love of the beautiful are not enough"; without a code of morality, a "feeling for the life of others," taste can lead only to "egotism, sterility, and evil." Darrow describes Leath as a man who, as a collector of enamelled snuff-boxes, had the habit of looking slightly disgusted at having to be in a world "where authentic snuff-boxes were growing daily harder to find." (4)

When Anna first met Fraser, she felt she had "a glimpse of a society at once freer and finer, which observed traditional forms but had discarded the underlying prejudices; whereas the world she knew had discarded many of the forms and kept almost all the prejudices." (9) Her mistake in thinking she would find complete fulfillment in such a man soon became evident to her when his "symmetric blond mask" bent over her face to give her a kiss which fell "like a cold pebble." (91)

Mrs. Wharton compares this cold symmetry to the symmetry of Givre itself. To Anna, Givré's symmetry was also reflected in her husband's "neatly balanced mind" which was always absorbed in "formulating
the conventions of the unconventional." (92) All these analogies have verisimilitude insofar as the Neo-classic symmetry of Givré is but one aspect of the Age of Reason, or Age of Enlightenment as the eighteenth century is so often called. For instance, Fraser Leath's formulating is quite in agreement with Descartes' or Bacon's seventeenth century collections of encyclopedic descriptions of natural phenomena which were "the foundations of a Religion of Sciences" 18 in the eighteenth century.

Leath collected such "social instances with the same seriousness and patience as his snuff-boxes." (92) Not satisfied with comparing Leath's mental orderings to categories of snuff-boxes, Mrs. Wharton uses other artifacts such as furniture to reveal Mr. Leath's character. Anna reminisces about Leath's former wife: "And all she had to look at all her life was a gilt console . . . ! That's exactly what he is!" (107) This image appears later when she remembers him "reviewing the regiment" of his furniture and stopping midway before a mirror to inspect himself in the same manner, seeing if there were "anything to straighten or alter in his own studied attire" before continuing on with a "resulting expression of satisfaction" (107) in his external perfection.

In terms of art itself, Mrs. Wharton can easily define Mr. Leath's belief in life as "a walk through a carefully classified museum, where, in moments of doubt, one had only to look at the number and refer to one's catalogue . . . ." (94) His love for his first wife was of questionable depth if one gauges its extent after her death as expressed by his treatment of her portrait. Since Anna's arrival, it had undergone "the successive displacements of an exiled consort removed farther and farther from the throne; and Anna could not help noting that these stages
coincided with the gradual decline of the artist's fame."(97) Had the artist remained "in the ascendant" her portrait quite probably would have remained in the drawing-room in place of Anna's.

Thus, through architecture, artifact, and art, Mrs. Wharton has depicted clearly a husband who could not possibly satisfy Anna, who thought of Givré and its contents as a "symbol of narrowness." However, Anna's secret rebellions find their voice in her stepson, Owen Leath, who, in contrast to Fraser, has a "charmingly unbalanced face" and whose mind was "a quaintly-twisted reflection of her husband's. His character too is defined in his relation to Givré. He calls it "empty"; it has so many rooms full of art "and yet not a soul in it."(104) It is "a beautiful memory." He wants to get away and not become just "an adjunct of Givré." He says,

"I don't want...to slip into collecting sensations as my father collected snuff-boxes. I want Effie to have Givré--it's my grandmother's, you know, to do as she likes with; and I've understood lately that if it belonged to me it would gradually gobble me up. I want to get out of it, into a life that's big and ugly and struggling. If I can extract beauty out of that, so much the better.... But I want to make beauty, not be drowned in the ready-made, like a bee in a pot of honey."(144)

Owen displays a creativity diametrically opposed to that of his father who painted only furtively, clandestinely, "with the disdain of a man of the world for anything bordering on the professional."(4) Fraser was, ironically, anything but a man of the world in the sense of Owen's world--the world of "practical life."(144) Owen's attitude towards Givré and his father's "arts" explains to some extent his attraction for Sophy Viner, a resident in the practical world, who also possessed faculties of creativity--the ability to act in the theatre.
Darrow, who also has appeared as a man of the world, has found Sophy attractive previously. His past affair with her and his present relationship becomes clearly visible through details of architecture, artifact, and art. At Givré, Sophy Viner talks with Darrow in the study which was "a friendly heterogeneous place, the one repository, in the well-ordered and amply-servanted house, of all its unclassified odds and ends: Effie's croquet-box and fishing rods, Owen's guns and golf-sticks and racquets, his step-mother's flower-baskets and gardening implements, even Madame de Chantelle's embroidery frame, and the back numbers of the Catholic Weekly."(147) Such jetsam and the "un-Givresque" spirit they suggest is typical of the surroundings in which Barrow and Sophy always seem to meet. Like the shabby hotel room mentioned earlier, and the spring-house, the study has its "place in Edith Wharton's system of moral geography and prepare the reader for the dingy prospect of Sophy's future."(19)

The spring-house in which Darrow chooses to speak to Sophy concerning her forthcoming marriage to Owen has symbolic qualities. First of all, Darrow leads Sophy there, for in Givré he would not "know where to say it." Outside Givré he does not feel so burdened by the conventional code of morals that the chateau represents. The stucco pavilion was "crowned by a balustrade" and "rose on arches of mouldering brick." (200) The small circular room was "hung with loosened strips of painted paper whereon spectrally faded Mandarins executed elongated gestures"; and it contained "some black and gold chairs with straw seats and an unsteady table of cracked lacquer."(200) This description is expressive of the ephemeral quality of their love for each other. The present
disrepair into which their relationship has fallen is intensified by the decaying, crumbling décor.

While in the spring-house, Sophy picks up a little threadbare Chinese hand-screen. She turned the ebony stem once or twice between her fingers, and as she did so Darrow was whimsically struck by the way in which their evanescent slight romance was symbolized by the fading lines on the frail silk.(201-202)

Ironically, this fan will be used later as evidence of Sophy and Darrow's tête-à-tête by Owen. Thus the fan also takes on a deterministic flavor and a dramatic function in symbolizing their affair by its causing increased accusations and insinuations to be hurled upon Sophy. Similar evanescence in respect to their romance has been prophetically introduced earlier in the novel in other artifacts and imagery. When Darrow meets her on the pier in England, her umbrella had caught him "in the collar bone,"(10) its ribs were inverted; and, it soon became torn to shreds by the wind. Thus the whole affair began due to a chance meeting, and their relationship was destined to be severed by forces beyond the control of either just as the umbrella—the instrument of their meeting—was torn apart by the wind and rain. Similarly the umbrella appears later as they walk towards the spring-house where shadowy suggestion of their first meeting occurs: the rain causes them again to draw near one another beneath Darrow's stronger umbrella. Sophy herself has been described with a kind of imagery of the fleeting, the ephemeral: there was "a kind of sketchy delicacy in her face, as though she had been brightly but lightly washed in eater colour . . . ."(12) Later she is described in a thin dress which recalls for Darrow "the faint curves of a terra-cotta statuette, some young image of grace hardly more than sketched in the clay."(71)
At Givré she appears in the same black dress she had worn in Paris to the theatre. Darrow surmises that she has not worn it purposely to remind him of the night at the theatre, but, just as before, "simply because she had no other." Thus the dress, just as the umbrella, expresses the deterministic forces which have not only occasioned their short-lived affair, but will also eventually drive Sophy to a tragic end. In the last scene of the novel in which Anna visits Laura Birch's apartment, Laura, beneath the "roseate penumbra of the bed curtains," in stretching "her bare plump arm across the bed... seemed to be pulling back the veil from dingy distances of family history." Laura presented an "odd chromo-like resemblance... or a suggestion... of what Sophy Viner might... become." (365) Sophy's milieu—the gaudy, the cheap, the dingy—repels Anna. The deterministic forces are very much in evidence here. Sophy has left with Mrs. Barrett whose employment she had happily escaped a few years before.

Finally in the world of the lively arts, details of Darrow's and Sophy's varied reactions to Oedipe at the Theatre François aid in explaining his attraction to Sophy. Before their discussion of the play, Darrow had felt it to be "airless and lifeless." He had the impression of its

stalesness and conventionality... Surely it was time to infuse new blood into the veins of the moribund art. (57) However, the play seems in accord with Sophy's own awareness of fatalistic forces. Just as Mrs. Wharton had earlier described Sophy and Darrow being "pulled together and apart like marionettes on the wires of the wind," so in Oedipe, "the gods were there all the while, just behind [the characters], pulling the strings." (58) She had felt
the ineluctable fatality of the tale, the dread sway in it of the same mysterious "luck" which pulled the threads of her own small destiny. It was not literature to her, it was fact . . . . Seen in this light, the play regained for Darrow its supreme and poignant reality. He pierced to the heart of its significance through all the artificial accretions with which his theories of art and the conventions of the stage had clothed it, and saw it as he had never seen it: as life.\(^{(59)}\)

This passage shows quite clearly the 'art-life' motif which plays a major role in the novel in defining character; i.e., Mr. Leath's superficiality and inhumanity is in accord with his views and practices of the arts. Sophy and Darrow realize that it is by means of the arts that "life is caught, the past is made a part of the present, and continuity and tradition are made tangible."\(^{(21)}\) Mrs. Wharton has used a significant art form to intensify the deterministic nature of Sophy's condition\(^{(22)}\) and to justify further Darrow's attraction for her. By dramatizing his discovery of the meaning of art and the human values suggested there, Anna's attraction for him also appears more justifiable in view of her former husband's insensitivity to such values.

Finally, Madame de Chantelle, whom Owen has called "the soul of Givré,"\(^{(104)}\) fittingly derives her character in the novel largely through her relation to the château and its contents. Mrs. Wharton describes her, among "the flowers and old furniture of the large pale-panelled room" as having "the inanimate elegance of a figure introduced into a 'still life' to give the scale" which was, Darrow reflected, "exactly what she doubtless regarded as her chief obligation": she was "to represent . . . the forces of order and tradition"\(^{(133)}\) which Givré housed. She, like the Marquise de Malrives in Madame de Treymes, is a representative of the authority and tradition of French society.\(^{(23)}\)
Her greater concern is found to be with social forms than with their intended meanings. She had ironically "embraced her second husband's creed," the Roman Catholic dogma, since she "had become part of a society which still observes the outward rites of piety." (92) She would have found herself in complete accord with Anna's mother, a representative of the society of old New York, on "all the momentous minutiae of drawing room conduct." This is all in accord with the social tradition Givré symbolises, Fraser Leath had said.

"There are prejudices and prejudices. My mother...got hers from Monsieur de Chantelle, and they seem to me... in their place in this house." (93)

Here Givré appears in much the same light as the Hôtel de Malrive in Madame de Treymes. It strikes Durham as the incorruptible custodian of old prejudices and strange social survivals. ...Not that there was anything venerable in the attestations of the Hôtel de Malrive, except in so far as, to a sensitive imagination, every concrete embodiment of a past order of things testifies to real convictions once suffered for.

Once more Mrs. Wharton's "moral geography" comes into play.

Nor does Madame de Chantelle's conversational topics such as gastronomical details and manners of hotel servants seem out of place in Givré with its "soft tints and shadowy spaces" and its limitations which, after all, "had a grace." (135) Her own apartment "dated" and completed her." (188)

Its looped and corded curtains, its purple satin upholstery, the Sèvres jardinières, the rosewood firescreen, the little velvet tables edged with lace and crowded with silver knick-knacks and simpering miniatures, reconstituted an almost perfect setting for the blonde beauty of the 'sixties. (188)

She says later, "'I'm old fashioned--like my furniture.'" (191) Thus, in
defining Madame de Chantelle in terms of Givré and her own apartment, Mrs. Wharton shows that she represents not only the culture into which she married but also that into which she was born—old New York during the 'sixties, the only era in which America was to have what Mrs. Wharton would call a settled stratum of society. Furthermore, decorating her apartment in such a way provides another example of her self-assertion in Givré. She does not cower before it, but, along with her expatriate friend Adelaide Painter, attempts to guide it, with her customary moderation. (133) However her leadership does not hold sway in the household any more than Mrs. Peniston's held sway in the society Lily aspired to. One might note, at this point, the similarities of the two ladies' décors.

That Madame de Chantelle represents out-dated convention is further expressed in Mrs. Wharton's choice of artifacts: "Her faint corseting, the velvet band on her tapering arm, made her resemble a "carte de visite" photograph of the middle 'sixties." (133) Her handkerchief is important in the discussion of Sophy Viner, for it symbolizes for Madame de Chantelle, "the solemnity of the occasion." (188, 191) Again, when Adelaide Painter arrives to "help the family through their crisis," Madame de Chantelle clasps "the handkerchief whose visibility symbolized her distress." (214) In no instance however is Madame de Chantelle severely satirized by Mrs. Wharton. Rather the author is saying in regard to "the soul of Givré" much the same thing that Madame de Treymes tells Durham:

"Don't judge us too harshly--or not, at least, till you have taken the trouble to learn our point of view. You consider the individual--we think only of the family."
The same thing might have been said by the Marquise de Chelles in *The Custom of the Country*.

In conclusion, it is quite apparent that the "psychologic Racinian unity, intensity, and gracility" of mood which Henry James and critics since have noted as permeating *The Reef* is to a large extent a result of the architecture of Givré and its grounds, and of the countless references to artifacts and the arts often with symbolic or dramatic intentions. But in addition to the unity of mood, Mrs. Wharton's "significant details" have performed the equally important roles of unifying characters—making them consistent—and, by offering a means of ascertaining their relationships with one another, of unifying the psychological and dramatic action. Owen's ultimate rebellion, Sophy's eventual fate, Madame de Chantelle's reactions are all forecast and artistically justified by these details. Anna and Darrow's philosophy of the human values in art and their predominance over the strictly aesthetic values in which Fraser Leath had set so much store also justify their mutual attraction and suggested marriage to one another. The stages in Anna's own development and maturing and in her relationship with her former husband are marked by the shifting symbolism of Givré: it had first seemed a romantic dream, then a symbol of a narrow and monotonous life, finally only a shell in which she lost her own identity. But with the appearance of Darrow's letter, life suddenly returns to the house, and she was "surprised at her own insensibility."(83)
CHAPTER THREE

THE INNOCENCE OF OLD NEW YORK

I

The function of the arts and artifacts specifically mentioned in the historic novel *The Age of Innocence* and the four novelettes of *Old New York* is for the purposes of these works a far more valuable one than mere "period" description. As Mrs. Wharton said, "general character may be set forth in a few strokes, but the . . . unfolding of personality, of which the reader instinctively feels the need if the characters . . . are to retain their individuality for him through a succession of changing circumstances . . . requires space." She is aware of the inability of a "sharp black line" to reproduce "the bounds of a personality," and knows "that each of us flows imperceptibly into adjacent people and things." Furthermore, dramatic action can be derived "from the relation of . . . characters to their houses, streets, towns . . . [and] inherited habits and opinions."

In her novels of old New York, it is especially necessary that these details relate to character development; for in dealing with this period, Mrs. Wharton is largely concerned with a single stratum of society during a time when it maintained an almost static conformity to convention and its members bore a close similarity to one another. Differentiation between them, although often subtle, must be made in order that their individualities and the conflicts between them can be grasped by the reader. These individuals will have thereby attained "a greater value and interest than the generality of persons possess."
In *The Age of Innocence*, Newland Archer tells May Welland that he and the rest of "New York society" are

"all as like each other as those dolls cut out of the same folded paper. We're like patterns stencilled on a wall."\(^5\)

This is precisely the artistic problem Mrs. Wharton must solve; and, her solution lay in the use of the functional, significant detail to distinguish between individuals of that society. Moreover, as Viola Hopkins has pointed out, "like the fabrics and household objects in Dutch paintings, the interiors and details of dress of Mrs. Wharton's New Yorkers are richly suggestive of the inner life of their owners."\(^7\)

This is particularly true of the 'seventies, the period depicted in *The Age of Innocence*; for in that decade, as Newland Archer says, "In reality they all lived in a kind of hieroglyphic world where the real thing was never said or done or even thought, but only represented by a set of arbitrary signs."\(^42\)

II

In *The Age of Innocence*, subtle variations within the same stratum are made evident in the descriptions of architecture and decor of the characters' houses and favorite gathering places. Especially in the central characters do these details often reveal the inner tensions of the soul.

The first scene of the novel is the Academy of Music. Its "shabby red and gold boxes"\(^1\) represent its "historic associations" and consequently the sense of history and tradition possessed by the society which gathered there. The static quality of this society and
its fear of innovation are made evident in its preservation of the hall whose smallness and inconvenience kept out the "'new people' whom New York was beginning to dread . . . ."(1) Innocence as it is portrayed here is the same kind that Newland wishes May not to have: "the innocence that seals the mind against imagination and the heart against experience!"(145) A fuller definition can perhaps be found in an earlier novel, The Fruit of the Tree (New York, 1907), pp. 271 and 313: the "unanimity of view" that money was "the universal lubricant" bound together the members of this society "in the compactness of a new feudalism . . . which supplied them with their pass-words and social tests, and defended them securely against the insidious attack of ideas"; it was a society which had "an ingenious system of evasion" by which it had "contrived to protect itself from the intrusion of the disagreeable" while it was "bent on the undisturbed pursuit of amusement."

The Academy "is valued for its very decay of splendour, for its insularity, even provincialism; the old academy is "sociable," of course," only if one is a member of the world of fashion." The wealth and luxury of this society is represented by the stage setting for Faust, with its "emerald green cloth, large pink and red roses, gigantic pansies and daisies."(4) However, the sham qualities of its conventions are at the same time evident in that the roses blossom forth from "shrubs shaped like orange-trees," the pansies which looked like "floral penwipers made by female parishioners for fashionable clergymen" sprang from moss, and the daisies were "grafted on a rose branch."
Using the Academy for her setting of the first scene has thematic value for Mrs. Wharton. The convention practiced by old New York was based on both morality and prejudice. External form often becomes an end in itself for such a society, and a subsequent straying from the morality such form represents is the result. The formality of the Academy itself is a means of expressing "that all these people have the air of being constantly in attendance at a formal function," and the artificiality of the stage setting "strengthens our apprehension of the factitiousness of the age's innocence."

As a gathering place for this society, the Academy also offers Mrs. Wharton the opportunity of introducing the various members of that society among whom are its two "observers," Lawrence Lefferts and Mr. Sillerton Jackson. The former, with his "long patent leather feet" is the authority on "form"; the latter, on "family."(7) Form (manners and convention) and family (traditional morality) are the chief concerns of this society and become the predominant motif in the novel. Newland Archer will rebel against them in spirit while trying to adhere to them outwardly.

Mr. Jackson divides New York society into two "fundamental groups": the Mingotts, who cared for "eating and clothes and money," and the more sober "Archer-Newland-van der Luyden tribe, who were devoted to travel, horticulture, and the best fiction."(31) Accordingly, Mrs. Wharton describes Mrs. Manson Mingott as a great mass of snowy flesh reminiscent of "a flood of lava"(25) seated in her massive armchair; and she describes the Archers as living within "dark walls" which are covered
with the "dark" framed portraits of their own family. The Archers, the Newlands, and the van der Luydens all were the "tall, pale, slightly rounded" shoulders, and "sweet smiles and a kind of drooping distinction like that in certain faded Reynolds portraits."(32)

Mrs. Mingott's house is a symbol of her daring which, as "Matriarch of the line"(10), she can carry off with only minor displays of disapproval by the rest of society. She had put the "crowning touch to her audacities by building a large house of cream coloured stone (when brown sandstone seemed as much the only wear as a frock-coat in the afternoon) . . . . "(10) She had "bodily cast out the massive furniture of her prime, and mingled with the Mingott heirlooms the frivolous upholstery of the Second Empire."(24) Thus she is seen as one of the first to initiate what Mrs. Wharton calls "the gilded age," in contrast to the accepted somber browns more widely in use. Her upstairs reception room and downstairs bedroom was in as "flagrant [a] violation of all the New York proprieties" as was her "huge low bed upholstered like a sofa, and a toilet table with frivolous lace flounces and a gilt framed mirror."(25, 26) It was thought quite suggestive and "European" at the time to have one's bedroom in full view on the ground floor.

With similar dash, her house in Newport is in an "unfashionable region" and contains "four small square rooms with heavy flock-papers under ceilings on which an Italian house-painter had lavished all the divinities of Olympus."(213) This décor functions as an extension of her character. Again, the external form of the inanimate conforms to the animate. It represents her occasionally fearless trampling on forms
of convention which she herself acknowledges: "... when my children beg me to have all those gods and goddesses painted out overhead I always say I'm too thankful to have somebody about me that nothing can shock." (214) Only Mrs. Mingott could have allowed the "disgraced" Ellen Olenska the privilege of sitting in her box at the Academy of Music. The details of her New York house—fashioned after the "hotels of the Parisian aristocracy" and containing "pre-Revolutionary furniture and souvenirs of the Tuileries of Louis Napoleon" (10)—are all visible "proof of her moral courage" in that she was not afraid to display her European affinities even after the unhappiness they brought on her in form of her daughters' marriages. Nor would she decline her granddaughter favors because of the collapse of Ellen's marriage to the Polish Count Olenska.

Architectural details serve a similar purpose in revealing the characters of the van der Luyden family. Their house is symbolic of their own restraint and noncommittal nature. Their Madison Avenue drawing room is "high ceilinged" and "white-walled" which gives a chilling, formal air to already uneasy guests. "Pale brocaded armchairs," obviously uncovered for the occasion, and gauze which veiled the "ormolu mantle ornaments" (49) and portrait frames are details which suggest a drawing room which is seldom used. The gauze veiling is a tangible sign of a similar veil of sacred signs of form which covers their true emotions, feelings, and personalities. The van der Luydens now spend most of their time at Trevenna, a country House in Maryland, or their huge estate at Skuytercliff—all having a connection with their ancestors. Thus, the
"lately uncovered" look of the drawing room suggests what Lyde calls their "still strong but slowly diminishing influence." This diminishing influence is supported by death imagery found in phrases such as "the large shrouded room" which Archer thinks is "so complete an image of its owners." (52) Similarly their house at Skuytercliff is a formal, cold structure. It is square, wood painted pale green and white, with a "Corinthian portico, and fluted pilasters." It reminds Archer of a mausoleum. (129) It is precisely against such architecture and decoration that Charles Eastlake was striving in his "sincere, straightforward philosophy of decoration," and Archer finds his style of furniture much more pleasing. Nevertheless, the van der Luyden's power is still recognized as being greater than Mrs. Mingott's, whose invitations for a dinner in honor of Ellen Olenska had been lately refused. Mrs. Archer realizes the van der Luydents are the highest court of appeal for Ellen's cause. Another example of their seemingly permanent importance in New York society is their descent from Skuytercliff to Madison Avenue after the Beaufort failure later in the novel. Their "black walnut dining room" and tables set with "massive plate" (321) show New York that they, unlike the Beauforts, have not been thrown into disarray by the event. Their power is not so evanescent. The heavy formal dining room is indicative of their substantial familial and financial background. Mrs. Archer is led to suggest that the reason for the van der Luyden's dinner was that they "owed it to society." (320)

Diametrically opposed to the van der Luydents are the flashy Beauforts whose background was rather indistinct and dismal. They
possessed a huge ballroom which was used only once a year and into which one entered after passing "down a vista of enfiladed drawing rooms (the sea-green, the crimson and the bouton d'or), seeing from afar the many-candled lustres reflected in the polished parquetry..." (19) In short, their "heavy brownstone palace" represents the instrument of their social acceptance despite Julius Beaufort's "mysterious antecedents." Everyone went to the annual Beaufort ball. Through a substantial fortune and marriage to a Mingott, Julius had gained his position. His distinction from the rest of society is noted by Archer when he tells Ellen the reason she likes Beaufort is that "'he's so unlike us... We're damnably dull.'" (242)

Architectural details take on a dramatic value and have a moral extension when they describe the main characters: Newland Archer, May Welland, and Ellen Olenska. Newland Archer has the same moral and emotional constrictions that his "Gothic library" represents with its tasteful "glazed black-walnut bookcases and finial topped chairs." (2) But his spirit of mental revolt is reflected in his hope of having a library in May's house filled with "'sincere' Eastlake furniture, and the plain new bookcases without glass doors." (70) Eastlake furniture, with its pegs in plain sight, was a mild revolt against the Gothic revival and its scrolls and fluting. Newland's tastes were changing, but all of old New York was slower to change. His hopes are realized, but they are accompanied by the "doubts and disapprovals" of his family. It is a token step away from the conventionality and innocence of May toward the more exotic, not-so-innocent Ellen. Also, his dislike at
Newport for "the French windows of the drawing-rooms, their "swaying lace curtains, the glossy parquet floors islanded with chintz poufs, dwarf armchairs, and velvet tables covered with trifles in silver" in the Beaufort house, and his preference for a holiday on a "small island off the coast of Maine"(205-207) are other expressions of his "persistent undercurrent of revolt."

Similarly, the Welland house at Newport had a "narcotic"(219) effect on his system. The "heavy carpets," "disciplined clocks," and the "perpetually renewed stack of cards and invitations on the hall table" seemed "unreal and irrelevant." The semi-meaningless forms of social procedure seemed mild to Newland when compared with the deep emotions he felt when confronted by Ellen. His marriage and its concomitant duties were stifling to him. Even in his own library, he felt stifled and pulled back the curtains for air when he realized May would never "surprise him by an unexpected mood, a new idea, a weakness, a cruelty, or an emotion."(298)

Probably the most symbolic décor Archer comes into contact with is the Cesnola room of the Metropolitan Museum. He has decided on this "melancholy retreat" as a meeting place with Ellen Olenska. Its glass cabinets were filled with the "recovered fragments of Ilium."(312) These "hardly recognizable domestic utensils, ornaments and personal trifles" made of "time-blurred substances" are the material remains of a lost society—and, as such, symbolize the empty forms and customs of Newland's society which at one time had been meaningful and had a reason for existing just as the implements in the cabinets were at one
time useful. The life he has with May is meaningless when compared with the life he could otherwise have with Ellen. The latter tells him:

"It seems cruel that after a while nothing matters . . . anymore than these little things that used to be necessary and important to a forgotten people, and now have to be guessed at under a magnifying glass and labelled: 'Use unknown.'"

". . . Meanwhile everything matters--that concerns you," he said.(312-313)

However, Ellen will finally refuse his proposal and their relationship will become non-existent. Thereafter his life will be a kind of death which is suggested by the "vista of mummies and sarcophagi"(314) which surrounds him in the museum. In addition, the Trojan utensils complement the frequent "anthropological imagery" of the novel. In the first chapter Mrs. Wharton writes "what was or was not 'the thing' played a part as important in Newland Archer's New York as the inscrutable totem terrors that had ruled the destinies of his forefather thousands of years ago."(2) This imagery in conjunction with the scene at the museum is another artistic means Mrs. Wharton employs to reveal the primitive nature of many of the forms of Newland's society and its inherent, dying core represented by the van der Luydens. Also, the conventions of Archer's day are concretely seen as deterministic; that is, he and his generation have inherited them and are to a large extent controlled by them.

Architectural details reveal May Welland's nature as an entirely predictable one, even to the extent that she inherits her mother's taste. The house she decorated after she married Archer was unsurprising, not cleverly fashioned. Newland knows before he marries
her that "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 wainscoating of varnished yellow wood." She would have the predicted "purple and yellow tuftings . . . sham Buhl tables and gilt vitrines"(69) which were in her mother's drawing room. The prophecy is seen to be a true one (206) and May Welland is thereby represented as having no imagination and "incapable of growth."(351) As such she would never fulfill Archer's love. Knowing he must remain married to May, Archer, when he thinks of their house, "felt that his fate was sealed."(69)

The confining effect his house has upon him is especially apparent at May's farewell dinner for Ellen Olenska. Having set her conservative drawing room in an order that would please even the van der Luydens' taste, the fireplace tongs suddenly crash to the floor. This is expressive of the sudden realization of society's belief that he and Ellen are lovers which comes to him during the dinner. He felt with a shock that this dinner, after all, "was the old New York way of taking life without 'effusion of blood.'"(338) May's drawing room represents the winning of the final battle over the individual morality by "conventional or social morality." As Lyde says, "the farewell dinner party [is] a kind of official announcement that the affair . . . is finished" and is the society's final stroke "which traps Archer as irrevocably as Oedipus is trapped by the slow unraveling of the oracle." 15

Finally, architectural details are helpful in formulating the Countess Olenska's character and thus reveal in concrete fashion
many of the attractions which draw Newland to her. Her "peeling stucco house" is situated in a Bohemian area near a writer named Winsett. Newland, though he thinks it an unfashionable street(72), is nevertheless intrigued by the décor of her house. Its "low fire-lit drawing room contained some small slender tables of dark wood, a delicate little Greek bronze, and stretch of red damask nailed on the discoloured wallpaper."(68) The house had "been transformed into something intimate, 'foreign,' and subtly suggestive" by "a turn of the hand" and perhaps by "the fact that only two Jacqueminot roses (of which nobody ever bought less than a dozen) had been placed in the slender vase at his elbow."(69) Such a description, says Lyde, "evokes her strange exotic quality far more vividly than the flat verbal assertion of this exoticism, alone, could ever have done." Nor is the immediate juxtaposition of the description of May's house lacking in dramatic value. By planting the two side by side, Mrs. Wharton has compared the characters of the two women and helped to define the resulting spiritual and mental tension existing within their observer. In Ellen's décor, the meagre elements suggest the strength of her character in surrendering claim on any wealth of her former husband's. Regarding the roses, her clever "loose flower arrangements strike most of old New York as disturbingly suggestive of moral laxity," but Archer is fascinated by them.

Ellen is seen later on the Skuytercliff estate of the van der Luydens, but not in their "mausoleum" of a house with the chilling convention it symbolizes. Rather, she chooses to talk with Newland in the old "Patroon" house with its "squat walls and small square windows com-
 pactly grouped around a square chimney."(132) Again the setting is an intimate, small one with "panels and brasses shining in the firelight." It contains "an iron pot hung from an ancient crane," "rush-bottom arm chairs" facing each other, and "rows of Delft plates" on the shelves. These elements of décor are all representative of the authenticity and lack of superficiality which make up another facet of Ellen's character. Later May quotes her as saying it was "'the only house she's seen in America that she could be perfectly happy in.'"(192)

In fact, the Patroon house reminds Newland of Ellen and his recent visit with her there so much that, when told of the enormous irony that he and May will spend their honeymoon there, Archer can only stare at the speaker "blankly" and mutely.(190)

At Newport, Ellen is viewed not in Mrs. Mingott's house, but outside in a small "pagoda-like summer house." Here it is learned she has "sub-let the 'perfect' house" which the Beauforts had found her. She is living at the Blenkers after her grandmother's illness. Again, Ellen is seen outside the great houses and not bound to the conventions they symbolize. Newland wishes to see the Blenker house so he could "follow the movements of her imagined figure as he had watched the real one in the summer house."(224) What he sees, however, is only the "long tumble-down house with white paint peeling from its clapboards" and "a ghostly summer-house of trellis work that had once been white." Ellen, of course, is not present, and the entire scene expresses the futility of their relationship. She is being stifled by New York society and convention which eventually, by specific means of May's dinner party,
will sever her completely from Archer. This society is one which is blind to her true sensibilities and condemns her as being "simply 'Bohemian.'"(263) Although she respects "the traditional forms of the innocent society to the degree that they seem to her really to embody vital social and moral values," she "discards the underlying prejudices."

In the last chapter, Ellen resides in a small apartment in Paris. Archer's son decides, "it must be the one with the awnings."(363) They are significant of Ellen's artistic taste in decoration and her love for the secluded and the intimate. When these awnings are finally drawn up and the shutters closed, Archer leaves realizing he has finally seen her in surroundings suitable for her character even though the interior of her apartment exists only in his imagination.(365) Hewland's imagination has been an important means of keeping alive his memory of her. At the same time it was a curse in regard to May, for it constantly made him aware of her complete lack of such a faculty. His turning away from Ellen's apartment is also a sign that he is still a product of his own society and his devotion to its precepts remains. He is repeating the same steps he had taken away from her at the pagoda earlier.

Like the architectural details, significant artifacts function in a way which reveals character—the correspondence of the inanimate to the animate. Mrs. Mingott's character and personality are defined in terms of her "mahogany stand bearing a cast bronze lamp with an engraved globe" which lacks any reading material or "evidence of feminine employment: conversation had always been Mrs. Mingott's sole pursuit."(301) The heaviness of such artifacts reveals her bold, forthright nature. The
otherwise empty stand is evidence that a feigned interest in anything besides conversation was against her nature.

In their formidable drawing room, Mr. van der Luyden appears "tall, spare, and frock-coated."(51) Mrs. van der Luyden is dressed in "black velvet and Venetian point" which adds to the severity of the scene. More than that, it is exactly what she had worn twenty years earlier as is evidenced by the Huntingdon portrait of her (which was "fine as a Cabanel").(49) Neither Mrs. van der Luyden nor her clothes had changed since then. This constancy of form is an important expression of their long aristocratic background and their continuing and unchanging "reign" over the static New York society. This unchangeableness is intensified when, by comparing her portrait to Gainsborough's "Lady Angelica du Lac," Archer notes that "she might have been [her] twin sister."(49) Her descendance from the du Lacs of Maryland is evident in her physiognomy. Thus the portrait is a symbol of her truly aristocratic heritage since Colonel du Lac had married into English nobility. However, the insistent concern of "family" evident in the van der Luydens' many travels for the sole purpose of renewing their familial ties had made them insular to the point of being incommunicative. Newland Archer says that she had always struck him as "having been rather gruesomely preserved in the airless atmosphere of a perfectly irreproachable existence, as bodies caught in glaciers keep for years a rosy life-in-death."(50) Such an existence is supported by details of their architecture and its chilling, mausoleum-like effect.
At the dinner they finally are persuaded to give, the whole weight of New York society and its familial background is brought to light in Mrs. Wharton's choice of artifacts. The Sèvres is du Lac, the George II plate is Trevenna, and the Crown Derby is Dagonet: these are the three families of Mrs. van der Luyden's ancestry. The Lowestoft represents Mr. van der Luyden's family which was related to the first governor of New York (cf. the Patroon house which was the governor's and had been built in 1630). Mrs. Archer's seed pearls and emeralds belonged to her mother. Miss Lanning, a step lower in the social pyramid from the van der Luydens, but related to European aristocracy, wore her mother's cameos and Spanish shawl. All these artifacts point to the dense strength of forebears of old New York society which was eventually to crush its victim, Ellen, under the mere weight of its convention. This weight is emphasized by Mrs. Wharton's addition that the jewels were in "rather heavy old-fashioned settings"(59) which were *characteristic of the house and the occasion*; thus she links the previously mentioned van der Luyden architecture, in its ponderous formality, to the very weight of the jewels which its guests must wear. By such awesome signs, "the private drama is made public." The dinner is a symbol of Ellen's temporary reinstatement into this society. Also, by stressing heredity as an important force in bringing about and "ordering" the society of New York, the artifacts are just as symbolic of Mrs. Wharton's deterministic beliefs at this point as her use of "tribal" diction indicates throughout the novel. Ellen was a product of a poor marriage by one of Mrs. Mingott's daughters, and she is consequently
tainted in the eyes of old New York and appears to them as vaguely immoral.

Several artifacts seem symbolic in the eyes of Mrs. Archer, who, like Mrs. Peniston in *The House of Mirth*, opened her shutters, unrolled her rugs, and hung her triple layer of window curtains every year on the fifteenth of October. And, at the beginning of each new season, she traced each "new crack" in the society to its surface. This year this crack is recognized as stemming from the Beauforts who had a "dim" background anyway. Mrs. Beaufort's extravagance of dress was a result of Mr. Beaufort who lacked any knowledge of the propriety of New York society which insisted that new dresses be kept two years before they were worn. Consequently, the emerald necklace Mrs. Beaufort wears to the opera opening appears to be symbolic, as does their decor and clothing, of the Beaufort extravagance and ostentation. However, the necklace is organically functional in Mrs. Wharton's novel in that it finally symbolizes the Beaufort financial and social disgrace. It was out only on loan from the jeweler for the express purpose of deluding New York society. Their failure then is only a deepening of a "crack" Mrs. Archer was already too well aware of. The borrowed jewels symbolize the dishonour Beaufort has brought upon "his wife's family."(201)

Two artifacts take on dramatic significance in regard to Newland and his relationship with Ellen. When he goes to the Blenker house in order to imagine Ellen there, he notices the dilapidated summer house surmounted by a wooden Cupid who had lost his bow and arrow but con-
continued to take ineffectual aim." (225) The whole house was a place "of silence and decay." (225) The Cupid is symbolic of Archer who has himself been ineffectual in his efforts either to save Ellen from her fate (94) or to renounce May and marry her. Both efforts failed due to his submission to convention and duty. The name "Archer" itself connotes this meaning. Just as some indefinable force had torn Cupid's bow and arrow from his powerless, wooden hand, so Archer, a person moulded by conventions to the degree that it was his duty to use "two silver-backed brushes with his monogram in blue enamel to part his hair" (3), has had his "arrows" torn from him by an heredity and environment over which he had no control. At the same house, Archer finds a pink parasol which he knows belongs to Ellen. It was "silken" and made of some aromatic "rare wood." (226) As usual, the artifact, being a possession of Ellen's, has a delicate and exotic flavour about it. Its dramatic significance is that it implies Ellen's propinquity; but, ironically, the Blenker girl explains that Ellen is in Boston and had loaned it to Miss Blenker while she was gone. This twist adds meaning to the artifact as a symbol of Newland's frustration. Not only had he been ineffectual in the past in rescuing Ellen (the wooden Cupid) but now the parasol symbolized Ellen's actual distance from him. She was again beyond his reach.

The distance which is always between them is emphasized in many other artifacts throughout the novel. This is suggested in a technique which Mrs. Wharton, in The Touchstone (Scribner's, 1900), p. 11, has called the "tacit connivance of the inanimate." His wife's
dark blue brougham "with the wedding varnish still on it"(287) is the conveyance in which he meets Ellen in New Jersey. It causes her to speak of May, him to speak of M. Rivière. The dark hearse they see in the street causes Ellen to think of her grandmother. Both keep a distance between Ellen and Archer regarding their conversation. Similarly, in Boston, the old "herdic" which carried them to the pier prevents them from talking: "In the clatter of loose windows that made talk impossible they bumped over the disjointed cobblestones to the wharf."(238-239) On the ferry-boat itself, they cannot talk in the dining room which was "strident." Even in a private room, they cannot reach one another—the table with its checkered cloth had kept them apart until they finally emerge again into the stridency of the deck.

Several artifacts are just as functional in regard to May Archer's character and role in the novel. The diamond pin she wins at the Beaufort contest is significantly a diamond-tipped arrow. She is the "archer" in the family who actually shoots the protective arrows, not Newland. And her arrows are those of marriage, motherhood, and social convention which protect her husband from beguilers such as Ellen. Above all, these arrows are "diamond-tipped" with the wealth of family background and money; consequently, they strike much harder upon Ellen who is in comparative penury. May's aim will be just as accurate against her foe in the contest for her husband's love as it was literally at the contest. Throughout the novel May's clothing is described as "silvery," "white," and at the archery contest, "green
and white," which are the colors of the goddess Diana, who was also a huntress and protectress at the same time. She had hunted Archer during their courtship and now needed only guard what was by social right hers. Finally, she has the "aloofness" and classic grace of Diana(21) as opposed to the intimacy and warmth Ellen offered Newland. Lilies of the valley were her flower(21), but the "rich, strong, fiery" yellow roses(77) belonged to Ellen.

Another artifact of dramatic importance is the oil lamp May holds with her hand on the key. Newland had earlier learned Ellen was in Washington and he tells her he must go there on business. But May knows his true reason particularly after his defiance earlier that evening towards Sillerton Jackson when that observer had made insinuations about how Ellen would live now that Beaufort was financially destroyed. Just as he had shown signs of "smoke" that evening, so had the lamp. Upon hearing of his planned trip, Ellen quickly blew out the flame and said, "'They smell less if one blows them out.'"(270) Her solution is that Newland and Ellen must sever their relationship; this is the only solution which would ease his tensions and satisfy society. In her simplicity and innocence, May is completely unaware of the greater tension of rebellion and tradition within Archer.

In May's clothing the dictates of society are seen in concrete form, and her lack of imagination is followed by a dull submission to conformity. Newland notices even on the most informal, domestic occasions, May appears in a "low-necked and tightly laced dinner dress which the Mingott ceremonial exacted ... "(295) "Ceremonial"
implies the blind religiosity with which May clings to such forms. Similarly, her wearing of the "blue and white satin" and lace wedding dress at the opera a year after her engagement shows her conformity to the custom of old New York (324), and symbolizes for Newland, along with the familiar stage setting of Faust with its "giant roses and pen-wiper pansies" (323) the repetition and monotony of his life since his marriage to May. However, the dress before the evening is over becomes torn and muddied which is "symbolic of the stains on her marriage made by Archer's passion for Ellen." By the end of the evening Archer also learns that Ellen is definitely returning to Europe and his condition returns to its dull, lackluster existence it had had one year earlier. This complete cycle has been intensified by the cycle of the year and thereby is expressive of the inability of Archer to rise from beneath the deterministic forces of society. May also is described by Archer as remaining approximately on the same level. She was "so lacking in imagination, so incapable of growth," and so unconscious of change (351) that as a result she possessed throughout her life a hard bright blindness which kept her immediate horizon apparently unaltered. (351)

The importance of specific clothing in regard to May finds its counterpart in Ellen's clothing. In the opening scene Ellen appears in a headdress of diamonds giving her a "Josephine look" which was "carried out in the cut of the dark blue velvet gown rather theatrically caught up under her bosom by a girdle with a large old-fashioned clasp." (7) Her clothes place upon her the seal of "European, dramatic, imaginative" in the eyes of old New York; but her recognition of the past is still
apparent in her choice of jewelry. "Society's mute condemnation of
Ellen Olenska's dress . . . symbolizes the irreconcilable conflict
between individuality and nineteenth century convention." Or, as
Hopkins puts it, her "décolletage as well as the reactions to it
'places' for us dramatically both Ellen and New York society and
reveals important shades of differences in taste and custom that pre-
sage further conflict and complications" within the novel.

Another "flagrant violation of the proprieties of society"
is Ellen's choice of "a long robe of red velvet bordered about the
chin and down the front with glossy black fur."(103) Archer compares
it to the normal dinner dress: "a close-fitting armour of whale-boned
silk, slightly open in the neck, with lace ruffles filling in the crack,
and tight sleeves with a flounce uncovering just enough wrist to show
an Etruscan gold bracelet or a velvet band." In short, the latter
might easily be a dress May would wear. With its "armour" and "Etrus-
can bracelet," it represents the restricting convention formed by a
society which would prefer to have its ancestors lost in the mists of
the past if possible. Nevertheless the more remote, austere, but
practical Etruscans were conquered by the more artful Romans just as
Archer is to be gradually won over to the "provocative" but "pleasing"
effect of the dress as he remembers some Duran portraits of ladies in
similar dresses on his last trip to France. Ellen is again seen as
exotic, "European," and artful.

Where Newland was doubtful of Ellen's dress at the opera, he
is only hesitant in accepting her attire later in the novel. By the
time he meets her in the museum and is, for the last time, alone with her, her "sealskin coat, muff, and veil" strike him with a deep admiration. He thinks it "incredible that this pure harmony of line and colour should ever suffer the stupid law of change." This growth in Newland of an appreciation for Ellen's taste in clothing—a taste which is outside the dictates of conventional New York—is concurrent with his progressive development of character and the "intelligence of life" which comprises a deeper and truer understanding of the meaning of convention and an awareness of life which is not bound by convention.

Three other artifacts in Ellen's possession are used effectively to increase Newland's sense of her exoticism and individuality. Her huge fan of eagle feathers is a tangible symbol of the barricade which will always be between them. She keeps her hands clasped to the fan, and he does not extend his because it was not the custom.(14) Their inability to come into physical contact with each other because of the distance between their social codes is stressed repeatedly throughout the novel. On another occasion, he is attracted by the exotic Japanese cups without handles and the gold cigarette case which she detached from her bracelet.(73) Both articles imply her lack of restriction by society—a society which would demand cups with handles and non-smoking ladies who wore Etruscan bracelets or velvet armbands. The dramatic result of these artifacts is that Newland felt himself being "drawn into the atmosphere of the room, which was her atmosphere . . . ." It was from this room that he could view his own
society "as through the wrong end of a telescope," and "it looked
disconcertingly small and distant."(74) Again the artifacts together
with the decor of the room mentioned earlier afford him a view into
a life with greater potential which was far removed from his own
stifled existence under the trammels of old New York.

Several examples of the third classification of significant
details, objets d'art, are functional in arriving at a more complete
interpretation of the novel and its theme of revolt against a static
society, and an understanding of its traditional values. The Archers,
whom Sillerton Jackson had said were devoted to "travel, horticulture,
and the best fiction," have their tastes defined—and consequently
the tastes of their society since they were acknowledged as being
devoted to the best fiction—by their preferences in literature.
Ouida's novels were read "for the sake of the Italian atmosphere";
Dickens and Thackeray were abolished because they had never drawn "a
gentleman" such as Bulwer had. Other favorites were Washington Irving,
Fitz-Greene Halleck, and Joseph Rodman Drake, who had written "The Culprit
Fay." Such men were "gentlemen" and as such could have New York standards
applied to them. More recent authors were neglected because of their
"doubtful origin, their appearance, . . . [and] their intimacy with the
stage and the opera." (100) It is obvious the taste in literature of the
Archers and their society was determined by placing their own arbitrary
restrictions concerning the qualities of a "gentleman" on the author;
deterministic values are thus evident in judging the value of a work
of art by the heredity of its creator. Such restrictions figure as
only another expression of old New York's dread of innovation which
cauased them to ignore the "more vigorous talents of their age, like
Poe or Whitman."

Julius Beaufort, already controversial because of his dim
background and his affair with Fanny Ring, has hung "Love Victorious,"
the "much-discussed nude of Bouguereau," in his bouton d'or drawing room.
This painting is a concrete example of his controversial audacity.
The painting has the further irony of its title which is suggestive of
Beaufort's eventual marriage to the notorious Fanny Ring whom he continually
"visited" while his own wife Regina Dallas was alive. Beaufort's
position in New York society is a tenuous one and his taste in painting
displays his own distaste for New York. He buys only European paintings
and at one point asks "'Painters? Are there painters in New York?'" (104)
Beaufort finds New York and its paintings just as dull as his own wife.
This fact further explains his attraction for Ellen whose tastes in the
arts are more catholic, more European. He would agree with the journalist
Winsett who compares Archer, his society, and its taste in the arts to
"the pictures on the walls of a deserted house: 'The Portrait of a
_Gentleman.'" (124) By the use of an objet d'art, Mrs. Wharton has
revealed Beaufort's rebellious nature—a nature differing from Archer's
in that his prejudices against New York are just as strong and often
unfounded as New York's prejudices against the European. His rebellion
is not totally a just one.

Mrs. Wharton's choice of the opera _Faust_ is a felicitous one.
It appears in Chapter I as the current production at the Academy of Music.

First, by means of the setting discussed earlier and the language of the opera, the conventions of Newland's society are concretized and satirized. It was an unalterable and unquestioned law that the "German text of French operas sung by Swedish artists should be translated in Italian for the clearer understanding of English-speaking audiences." (3)

Mrs. Wharton continues: "This seemed as natural to Newland Archer as all the other conventions on which his life was moulded." (3) Thus, Newland is seen as a product of environment which had determined "laws" by which he was destined to abide, even though they might be absurd. The motif of tradition and revolt against tradition is established by the work of art. The revolt is evident a year later when Archer enters a box in the Academy during "Elle ouvre sa fenêtre" from Faust: "He had already broken one of the rules of his world which forbade the entering of a box during a solo." (325) This is indicative of his spirit of revolt, for he has entered the box to retrieve May. He wishes to ask her for his freedom so he may leave with Ellen. The aria itself is significant at this point since Marguerite is singing "M'ama" ("he loves me") at the same time that Archer decides he does indeed love Ellen and must end his marriage with May.

Secondly, the choice of Faust is appropriate because it offers a situation parallel in some ways to Newland and May's. Both Marguerite and May are in Newland's eyes when he says, "'The darling! She doesn't even guess what it's all about.'" (4) May's innocence throughout the novel
is comparable to Marguerite's "guileless incomprehension of [Faust's] designs."(4) This analogy is stressed even in the dresses which Marguerite and May wear. They are both made of blue and white satin, May's being the dress she wore at her wedding.(324) However, in the scene a year later when Archer watches May and decides her "innocence was as moving as the trustful clasp of a child,"(324) the observation becomes ironic since May had by this time cleverly lied to the Countess concerning her own pregnancy about which she was still uncertain. It was the one surprising move by May in the entire course of the novel.

Archer from the beginning is dismayed by May's lack of understanding and appreciation of art and literature. He will reveal Faust and other masterpieces to her(5) after they are married. He gives her "Sonnets from the Portuguese," but she has not had time to read them because of her occupation with tennis.(142) He vividly imagines meeting and talking with Merimee, Thackeray, Browning, or William Morris; but "such things were inconceivable in New York."(101) They were not gentlemen and therefore couldn't possibly be allowed into the intimacy of the New York drawing-room. Newland, when he reads "The House of Life," the Rossetti sonnets, can think only of Ellen. He has put down Middlemarch, with its stifling atmosphere, in order to revel in "an atmosphere unlike any he had ever breathed in books; so warm so rich, and yet so ineffably tender, that it gave a new and haunting beauty to the most elementary of human passions."(138) This work of art, then, symbolizes the renewal of life and a different sort of love which he
recognizes in Ellen and is capable of feeling himself. Thus their attraction for one another is precisely revealed. The total lack of understanding in May—a representative of Old New York—and her innocent blindness in regard to the deeper meanings of poetry and art had forced him to read volumes of history by Michelet instead. He could "always foresee her comments on what he read" which would be "destructive to his enjoyment of the works commented on." (297) This sacrifice of poetry for history is suggestive of the greater sacrifice of "the flower of life" which he had made by his marriage to her.

The Countess Olenska's appreciation of art has a reverse effect on Newland from May's. He had read Symonds, Pater, and other writers on Italian art; but since he was accustomed to seeing Botticelli and Fra Angelico, the Italian paintings Ellen owns seem strange to his eyes. (68) They are symbolic of Ellen's ability always to open before him a larger view of life with deeper insights. They are also evidence of their owner's subtle, elusive taste. Similarly her books, "chiefly works of fiction," are those of French contemporaries—Paul Bourget, Huysmans, and the Goncourt brothers. Not only are they by authors unacceptable to traditional society of New York, but the books themselves appear in her drawing room, "a part of the house in which books were usually supposed to be 'out of place.'" (102) Ellen after all is not concerned with the traditions and customs of New York, but leads a life governed by her own individual taste. Thus her books cause in Newland an awareness of the difference in their situations:

... as he approached her door, he was once more conscious of the curious way in she reversed his
values, and of the need of thinking himself into conditions incredibly different from any that he knew if he were to be of use in her present difficulty. (102)

Mrs. Wharton's deterministic philosophy is again displayed through various works of art. Newland can never live in the world these artists and their works portray.

Another work of art which is expressive of Ellen and Newland's relationship is the play "The Shaughraun." In one of the scenes, the lovers are about to part; but the male lead pauses at the door and returns, lifts one of the ribbons from the back of his beloved's dress, and kisses it all the while unknown to her. In its "reticence, its dumb sorrow," it is reminiscent of Newland's departure from Madame Olenska's a few days before. Newland traces its basic resemblance to his own situation as lying in Madame Olenska's mysterious faculty of suggesting tragic and moving possibilities outside the daily run of experience. . . . it was a part of her, either a projection of her mysterious and outlandish background or of something inherently dramatic, passionate and unusual in herself. . . . [she] was the kind of person to whom things were bound to happen. (113-114)

Newland however sees before himself only an "endless emptiness . . . the dwindling figure of a man to whom nothing was ever to happen." (228)

That Mrs. Wharton recognized the full dramatic possibilities in the use of this play there can be no doubt. After the psychological ruminations of Newland, she supplements his conclusions by having Ellen turn to Newland and ask if he thought the lover in the play would
"'send her a bunch of roses tomorrow morning,'"(116) thereby informing Newland that his conclusions about the similarities of the situations have been correct. Both times he had taken leave from Ellen he had sent her yellow roses the following morning.

Another dramatic work of art serves Mrs. Wharton's intents of clarifying and concretizing the exact relation at a particular moment between Archer and Ellen. Having learned the van der Luydens have again removed Ellen from the New York scene to Skuytercliff, Archer remembers Labiche's play "Le Voyage de M. Perrichon." In the play M. Perrichon's "undiscouraged attachment to the young man whom he had pulled out of glacier" is similar to the van der Luyden's removal of Ellen from an icy doom. Archer realized his own underlying attraction for her was a similar "gentle and obstinate determination to go on rescuing her."(127) The play is a specific delineation of his present attitude. He had earlier described Ellen as "an exposed and pitiful figure to be saved at all costs from . . . her mad plunges against fate"(94), and as a person who had been "plucked out of a very maelstrom."(114)

In the wealth of detail drawn from architecture, artifact, and works of art, it is apparent from their organic functions in the novel that Mrs. Wharton did not employ them simply for their historic flavor. First, Newland's conflicts with May and his attraction for Ellen is mirrored by his inner revolt from tradition and his impotence in face of the controlling factors of heredity and environment to attain fulfillment of life which would have been his had he married Ellen. Though he remains physically with May, "he never submits mentally to the dullness" of the New York society she represents, but maintains a "continued spiritual
devotion to Ellen . . . ." As is witnessed by the décor, artifacts, and works of art found in their possession and gaining their attention, Ellen and Archer's love is not "merely a matter of appetite," but a "complex of body, mind and spirit" the existence of which would have been impossible had they been "happy at the expense of anyone else."  

Secondly, the several discrete New York families involved in the enveloping action of the novel and supplying the novel with its peculiar panoramic effect have been distinguished with great care from each other by these details to avoid their being suffused by an indistinct, vague painting of "society of the 'seventies."

III

The four novelettes comprising Old New York are generally considered to be inferior works. The only one requiring any extended analysis in The Old Maid ("The Fifties"). However, there are in the others isolated examples of Mrs. Wharton's use of specific detail for purposes of satire or characterization which should be noted.

In False Dawn ("The 'Forties"), the ephemeral nature of limited sensibilities represented by Commodore Raycie is contrasted with the survival and importance of his son's collection of Italian primitives. Just as the Commodore despised Edgar Allan Poe not on the basis of his art, but his religion, so he condemned the paintings his son brought back from Europe simply because of his unfamiliality with their artists. Determinism is notable in the futility of his son Lewis's attempt to alter the tastes of an entire society.

In The Spark ("The 'Sixties"), the obtuse Hayley Delane's
inability to understand Whitman's poetry with its new verse forms is symbolic of his limited emotional sensibilities and his peculiarly heavy, cumbersome existence in present society. Whitman's only influence on Delane was a simple act of charity towards him during the Civil War. The scope of his mental powers is evident in his enjoyment of seeing Whitman's picture in the front of the book, and his final words: "'I wish, though . . . you hadn't told me he wrote all that rubbish.'"

The irony of the conclusion of New Year's Day ("The 'Seventies") lies in Mrs. Hazeldean's art of presenting a pleasing drawing room. Her drawing room with its array of books which are "just the ones that one is longing to get hold of," along with her clever arrangement of lamps and easy chairs suggest her weariness of and final revolt against the narrow restrictions of the society which had completely misunderstood her affair with Henry Prest. Her doors were now closed "to all save her intimates." But her intimates gradually decreased in quality and number until finally she became intolerably bored. Only in death would she find her husband again—for whom the enormous sacrifice of her life in the society of New York was given. The love she had felt for him was of a depth beyond the comprehension of the society of the 'seventies.

In the second novelette of the series, The Old Maid ("The 'Fifties"), Mrs. Wharton's conscious use of a single artifact as a symbol is particularly valuable in that it reveals an isolated stage in her development of the significant detail in the novel of manners. This development will be discussed later in regard to Hudson River Bracketed and The Gods Arrange.

Delia Ralston has married into a family whose spirit is quite
similar to the Archers' in *The Age of Innocence*. The Ralstons represent a spirit of compromise and conservatism. They were politically inactive and, "in all the tribe," there was the "same instinctive recoil from new religions as from unaccounted-for people." They established a precedent of "thrift and handsome living" after two marriages with the Dutch Vandergraves.\(^9\) Delia sees the Ralstons' horizon being expressed in their formal drawing room decorated according to the conventional taste of the period with its fireplace of black marble,\(^38\) the "plaster ornaments of the ceiling, the forms of the furniture, [and] the cut of [Delia's] dress."\(^6\) They are described as "closing in on her" since they had been "built out of Ralston prejudices, and turned to adamant by the touch of Ralston hands." Later Delia realizes such surroundings have become "the walls of her own grave."\(^129\)

Even in her bedroom she is surrounded by the Ralstons in the form of "family daguerreotypes in deeply-recessed gilt frames."\(^16\) Mrs. Wharton has repeatedly used family portraits to remind her characters of their background and the standards they must protect and live with. It is in her bedroom that Mrs. Wharton has chosen to place the symbolic artifact, an ormolu clock, which is the artistic means by which she develops the enormous ironies of the tale:

The ormolu clock represented a shepherdess sitting on a fallen trunk, a basket of flowers at her feet. A shepherd, stealing up, surprised her with a kiss, while her little dog barked at him from a clump of roses . . . . This frivolous time-piece had been a wedding-gift from Delia's aunt Mrs. Manson Mingott, a dashing widow who lived in Paris and was received at the Tuileries. It had been entrusted by Mrs. Mingott to young
Clement Spender, who had come back from Italy for a short holiday just after Delia's marriage; the marriage which might never have been, if Clem Spender could have supported a wife, or if he had consented to give up painting and Rome for New York and the law.(16-17)

The Ralstons had disapproved of the clock and its situation in Delia's bedroom, but she "liked, when she woke in the morning, to see the bold shepherd stealing his kiss."(17)

The clock symbolizes the exciting love Delia would have preferred to the "forecast" and "usual" (13,14) alliance she had made because of her own social position. The dramatic irony it embodies is first seen in Delia's statement that her cousin "Charlotte would certainly not have such a pretty clock in her bedroom."(18) The irony here involves the clock as an artificial token of the deeper emotional love Delia had denied herself and Spender by virtue of her marriage into the Ralston family where babies "were supposed 'to make up for everything,' and didn't."(15) Charlotte, though not married, soon is discovered to have experienced the real love of which the clock is an inanimate reminder.

Charlotte, in the first chapter, tells Delia she plans to break off her engagement with Joe Ralston. Such a remark sends Delia's world and its traditions into a state of wild alarm--"the Axminster carpet actually heaved under Delia's shrinking slippers."(27) The severing of her relationship with Joe Ralston is Charlotte's first step in renouncing the Ralston ideas and the society they represent.(29) She then admits to Delia the existence of her daughter born out of wedlock. Immediately the clock is mentioned, and its sheperdess becomes Charlotte instead
of Delia, and the fallen trunk represents the meaningless conventions of the Ralstons and their society which Charlotte has overcome. Delia "always thought of Clem Spender when she looked at the clock,"(36) which foreshadows the later revelation that Charlotte's lover actually was Clement Spender. As the hints of Charlotte's and Spender's affair are successively made, Delia begins to stare "blindly . . . at the bold shepherd."(39) Its dramatic function increases when Delia learns that Spender was planning to return to her, thinking she had waited for him, until he learns of her attachment to the Ralston's when "'Mrs. Mingott asked him to bring the clock back for [her] wedding.'"(41) The tacit connivance of the inanimate is greatly in evidence here.

Delia then goes to visit Charlotte and Clem's daughter, Clementina, in whom Delia sees a resemblance to Clem. When she returns home, the two cousins sit in silence, and "the ormolu clock ticked out the measure of their mute communion in minutes . . . ."(55) Delia realizes the profound and intense emotions she has missed but Charlotte, now destined to be an old maid, had experience. Out of deference to social convention, she is legally Delia's daughter. The ironic situation is intensified by Tina's asking Delia if Charlotte is an old maid "in her inmost soul."(91) Delia is, of course, the old maid; her inmost soul has never felt the love Charlotte has. But, again because of social convention, Tina is kept from knowing the truth. Her real mother soon begins to fear that she will have a tragic romance with Lanning Halsey just as Charlotte had with Clem. When Charlotte discloses these fears to Delia, Mrs. Wharton writes that "the steady click of her needles punctuated by
the tick of the Parisian clock on Delia's mantle." (114) The impecunious Lanning, like Spender, is the new shepherd on the clock. Its ticking accentuates Delia's sense of loss as it had before.

While waiting for Tina to return home from an evening with Lanning, Delia's "missed vision, her forfeited reality" (130) is again emphasized by the presence of the Parisian clock which slowly strikes out the early morning hours. (133) Now it reminds her, with the contrasting youthfulness of its shepherdess, of her own increasing age and "accumulating infirmities." Seeing Tina and Lanning together reminds her of the relationship Charlotte and Spender must have had. (137) The ormulu clock, with its artificial gold, contrasts the idyllic love Spender could have given her with the barren, artificial love she had encountered with Mr. Ralston; this clock has its counterpart in Delia's imaginative description of the romantic scene of Charlotte's affair with Spender in terms of their artificial surroundings and thus reveals the final truth regarding which cousin is finally to be considered "the old maid." Delia imagines the grim "drawing-room which had been their moonlit forest . . . with its swathed chandelier and hard Empire sofa . . . the shaft of moonlight falling across the swans and garlands of the faded carpet, and in that icy light two young figures in each other's arms." (138) Both cousins were surrounded by the artificial representatives of convention, the austere reminders of social form. But only Charlotte had experienced any real emotion in these surroundings.

Tina's eventual marriage and the subsequent implied fulfillment which both will find becomes for Delia a reenactment of what "she had
"(185) A marriage which includes a rich, ideal love is the final meaning of the pastoral scene on the clock. This love Delia, as Charlotte finally realizes (180), has experienced only by the vicarious means of an ormulu clock. This artifact which Mrs. Wharton constantly brings before her reader's imagination reveals continually the meaning of the situation the tale presents. The work is thereby enriched by compounded irony. The dramatic method by which the significances of the clock are carefully revealed in successive stages of the story has been heretofore unparalleled in Mrs. Wharton's work. At each allusion to the clock, new and more subtle ironies crowd upon one another until the theme of the story becomes altogether obvious: the senseless waste or sacrifice of a spirit of great sensibility to the rigidity of social convention.

Except for The Old Maid, Old New York marks a falling off of stylistic control apparent in The Age of Innocence. The stories often appear too pat, too anecdotic, too melodramatic to invite belief. Themes in the other three novelettes seem too flimsy for the novelette form, and often specific detail has been replaced by less colorful, less functional, general description. However such an extended use in The Old Maid of a single artifact is not present in The Age of Innocence; and, as a unifying device, it marks a distinct advance in her direction towards the pervading symbol in Hudson River Bracketed.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE LIMITATION AND LIBERATION OF THE PAST

Before discussing *Hudson River Bracketed* (1929) and its sequel, *The Gods Arrive* (1932), it is profitable to return to two earlier works, *Ethan Frome* (1911) and *Summer* (1917), in order to see a similar integration of symbolic detail which enriches the ultimate meaning of the novelette. Ethan's house, like the countryside surrounding it, is a barrier between his destined life on the New England farm and freedom. Similarly, in *Summer*, Charity Royall can never completely find freedom from her amoral background although she is physically removed from it. The Mountain symbolizes the "back country" and the obstacles it has placed in the path of her growth in the more civilized society of North Dormer. In *Hudson River Bracketed*, however, the use of the pervading symbol of a house, the Willows, is not to provide the hero with a pre-determined inability to overcome his environment, but is rather a source of inspiration which will allow Vance Weston to realize his talents as a writer. He makes use of the past but is not hindered or deterred in his artistic development by it. Mrs. Wharton's methods in the three works are similar in her use of a dominant symbol of the past. The two meanings Mrs. Wharton ascribes to the past through such detail can be juxtaposed in a discussion of *Ethan Frome* and *Hudson River Bracketed*: 1) to provide tangible evidence of deterministic forces of heredity and environment in the lives of its owners; and 2) to instill in the hero or heroine a sense of the past.
I

The narrator first views Ethan's house from a distance. I

Iying some distance from the nearest village of Starkfield, it juts sharply forth from the "stark field" of ice and snow with which it is associated. Near the house is the "exanimate" idle wheel of the sawmill and the "sagging" snow laden sheds. The house itself appears "forlorn and stunted" due to Ethan's removal of the "L"--"that long deep-roofed adjunct usually built at right angles to the main house, and connecting it, by way of storerooms, with the wood shed and cow-barn." The "L" symbolizes a "life linked with the soil; and, enclosing in itself the chief sources of warmth and nourishment" it seems "to be the centre, the actual hearth stone of the New England farm."(20-21)
The removal of the "L" causes the house to be associated with Frome's "own shrunken body." His own vital functions have become emotionally and physically deadened. He is trapped in his house as he is in his own crippled frame. Intellectually too, his growth has been stunted; he had been forced to return to the farm and leave his technological school when his father died.

The house is dramatically important because of its deterrent effect on Ethan's desire to display his love for Mattie: "in the warm lamplit room, with all its ancient implications of conformity and order, she seemed infinitely farther away from him and more unapproachable."(93)

It is part of what J. X. Brennan has described as "the chief pattern of contrast which runs throughout this story, that between the indoors and the outdoors, between the house as the symbolic stronghold of moral conventions and conformity, and the open countryside as symbolic of natural
freedom and passionate abandon."  

Description of the "interior architecture" strengthens the symbolic meaning of the house. The ill-fitting windows cause Ethan's candle to flicker and Mattie to shiver with cold. Any such adverse effect of the house on Zeena is not noted. Ethan shaves before a "blotted looking-glass." In the kitchen, Zeena's chair "looked like a soiled relic of luxury bought at a country auction"; besides a "greasy" table, there were "a couple of straw-bottomed chairs and a kitchen dresser of unpainted pine" which stood against the plaster walls. Thus details concerning decor and furnishings enlarge upon the sordid reality of the interior and correlate this interior with the grim architecture of the exterior. The only articles in the house pleasing to Ethan had been those belonging to Mattie. When "the red and white quilt ... the pretty pin cushion ... the enlarged photograph of her mother, in an oxydised frame" had all been packed due to Zeena's dismissal of Mattie. When Ethan sees the room, he thinks it again "bare and comfortless."(145)

Various artifacts are used to define more concretely Ethan's personal tragedy, Mattie's attractiveness and lightness of spirit, and Zeena's hideousness and persistent morose gravity. The first of these are the jagged gravestones which "slant at crazy angles" near Ethan's house.(50) The house itself had already been compared to a gravestone (49), and they, like the farmhouse, mock "his restlessness, his desire for change and freedom." They form a kind of deterministic symbol of his heredity, his inability to get away from the farm, and ultimately the ground in which his parents now lie. An epitaph on one--"Ethan Frome and
Endurance his wife who dwelled together in peace for fifty years" (80) -- is a foreshadowing of failure in his suicide attempt and lends support to one of the townsmen's prophecy that Ethan has locked the same for twenty-four years since his accident. (5) But "'the Froxes are tough,'" and Ethan will "'likely reach a hundred.'" (6) Mrs. Hale says, "'I don't see's there's much difference between the Froxes up at the farm and the Froxes down in the graveyard.'" (101) As Novius says, Ethan cannot "extend the horizon of his future beyond the family graveyard" before his accident; and his life afterwards is closer to a "life-in-death" existence which has continued for twenty-four years when the narrator arrives in Starkfield and will most likely continue for another fifty. The gravestones are integrally related to the house in that they symbolize Ethan's unfulfilled life.

Artifacts possessed by Kittle symbolize her "passion, vibrancy, and daring nonconformity" which greatly contrast to her surroundings. She has "wound a cherry-coloured 'fascinator'" about her head when Ethan, hidden in the shadows, watches her dance. (30) In the kitchen after Zeena had gone to Bettsbridge, Kittle is seen with a loop in her hand and a "streak of crimson ribbon" through her hair. In their final ride, she has a "red scarf wound about her." Significantly, since imagery of light is always used in reference to her, her last name is "Silver." The pickle dish of "gay red glass," which belongs to Zeena, is more appropriate in Kittle's hands. Joseph Brennan writes concerning its symbolic value:

As an object of beauty and gaiety, which Zeena, significantly, had never used once since her wedding, this gay red dish suggests symbolically the pleasure and passion that Ethan had
sought and Zeena had thwarted in their marriage. As Zeena’s property by marriage and by right, it represents also, respecting Ethan and Mattie, a forbidden pleasure and illicit passion. The shattering of the red dish, moreover, clearly prefigures the final shattering of their limbs and ill-starred love.9

Moreover, the shattering of the dish has been beyond Ethan’s or Mattie’s control, just as their own "smash-up" will be. When Zeena removes the pieces, she carries them as if they were "a dead body."(128) She will later have the burden of living with Mattie in the deathly solitude in which the three must live out their lives.

The burden of this existence is further symbolized by the cumbersome weight of Mattie’s trunk which Mattie offers to help him carry. She says, "'It takes two to coax it round the corner.'" But the weight is completely upon his back when he goes downstairs and, after the wreck, for the rest of his life. In context it appears as a "natural and sufficient channel of great emotion."10

Another ironic link between the red dish and Ethan’s eventual fate is noted when Zeena, the querulous hypochondriac, empties her medicine bottle before she leaves and says, "'If you can get the taste out it’ll do for pickles.'"(66) The medicine, like her other medicines, has not done her "'a speck of good,'" but she "'might as well use it up.'"(66) Her medicine had kept Ethan near bankruptcy since his marriage to her. The bottle is a symbol of the lackluster replacement for the passionate love the red dish, also used for pickles, represents.

This bottle, together with other artifacts in Zeena’s possession, emphasizes her "artificial, angular, unhealthy" qualities which are in direct contrast to Mattie’s "vibrant red" possessions. Zeena is seen
early in the tale "indistinctly outlined under the dark calico quilt."

(37) Her head is wrapped in a piece of "yellow flannel"(56) which adds a jaundiced, sickly pallor to her appearance. Her clothes consisting of a black calico wrapper, brown knitted shawl, and her "best dress of brown merino"(61,123) emphasize the dismal aspect Ethan has to look forward to and contrast with the happier colors Mattie is fond of. Zeena's empty rocking chair "had set up a spectral rocking"(95) while Mattie and Ethan sit together. It too was by right Zeena's; it suggests her spiritual omnipresence in the house—a presence from which Ethan finds it impossible to escape. Even when he refuses to sleep in the same bedroom with her after their disagreement over Mattie, he finds beneath his head in the "back parlour" the uncomfortable needlework cushion Zeena had made for him; and he flings it "across the floor and propped his head against the wall . . . ."(131) The stuffed owl in the parlour(139) is a concrete representative, says Brennan, of Zeena's "affinity for the artificial and predaceous [sic]." 12

References to the arts are notably few in the remote surroundings of Ethan's tragedy. However the few that do occur appropriately are in connection with Mattie, who has said the sunset "'looks just as if it was painted.'"(34) It is learned that before she came to Ethan's farm, she could "recite 'Curfew shall not ring to-night' and play 'the Lost Chord' and a pot-pourri from 'Carmen.'"(59) By contrast Zeena is seen at one point to be reading "Kidney Troubles and their Cure."

Mattie has the more artistic, sensitive soul which is capable of fulfilling Ethan's need for a profound love. Such a soul Zeena does not possess.

Through symbolic concrete details, Mrs. Wharton has success-
fully provided a depth to her tale she could not otherwise have achieved. The grave-like house in which Ethan has been buried alive has displayed in it the victory of the somber and unhealthy artifacts of Zeena over Mattie's light and radiance. It has denied Ethan love and intellectual development. Mattie's artistic talents have no outlet here, and her practical, domestic talents are almost non-existent.  

The house, its contents, and its surroundings, says Lyde, have "an unmistakable correspondence" with "the stunted convention of the isolated world which has twisted Ethan's life and smothered his one chance at emotional fulfillment."  

The same correspondence exists in the world of Charity Royall in Summer where, among varied but integrated symbolic elements, the Mountain remains always present, always in sight, as a naturalistic symbol of her tainted background just as the icy somberness of the New England farm has been ubiquitous in Ethan's life. Charity, who was illegitimate, had been borne away from the back country by Lawyer Royall to the village of North Dormer. The Mountain seems to prophesy Charity's failure to live within the stifling conventions of a more civilized society—a society more civilized than the back country one into which she was born.

Charity thinks of the Mountain and the back country from which she is separated as the reason for her failure in a life surrounded by convention and regards it as a means of escape from the dank library, the cold neatness of the red house of the lecherous Lawyer Royall— -- from which she is launched on her ill-starred affair and to which she must return—and the hideous brick house of Dr. Merkle where, because of social convention, she has been forced to pay for her medical
consultation with a blue brooch her lover Harney had given her. This brooch symbolizes her unending love for him as father of her child. She finally retrieves it by money the Lawyer Royall had given her to buy her trousseau with after she had married him. The cycle of the seasons, ending with winter, as symbolic of the death of her affair with Harney, is correlated with symbolic artifacts such as the fireworks (seen in the summer with Harney), the glittering lights of Nettleton (visited with Harney in the summer), and the ghostly grey house where Harney makes love to her but tells her he does not plan to marry her. The interrelation of symbolic details work for unity in the work and thus intensify the transiency of Harney's and her love for each other while at the same time symbolizing naturalistic forces which are beyond Charity's control.  

II

Thus, as Nevius has suggested, the method used in Ethan Frome and Summer of the pervading deterministic symbols of the isolated New England farm and the conflicting deterministic forces represented by the Mountain and North Dormer foreshadows her use of the "dominating symbol of the Willows," Miss Lorburn's old mansion, in Hudson River Bracketed. In this novel and its sequel, Mrs. Wharton is no longer concerned with the fashionable decorum of New York which had been her subject in her novels of manners, nor that of France (The Reef, Madame de Treymes), nor what Van Doren calls the "stubborn village decorum" and its overwhelmingly deterministic quality found in Ethan Frome and Summer. Rather the Willows, in no way symbolizing destinal forces, determines by his own choosing, Vance Weston's choice of material for his first novel which will bring him temporary success as an author. More precisely, it
inspires him, as a symbol of the "Past," to write an historical novel of manners whose main character is derived from the former owner of the house. It causes a momentous development in the artist's soul and increases his depth of perception into the past. Other details of architecture, artifacts, and works of art are primarily integrated with this symbol and only secondarily function as a specific means for satirizing society, developing character, or unifying the action.

In these two novels from Mrs. Wharton's late period, the architectural symbol of the Willows and related details of the three classifications are functional and necessary primarily for the development of theme. The dominant symbol, among its many other functions, provides a tangible demonstration of this theme not only for the reader, but for the hero, Vance Weston. The theme can be expressed in the words of Vance himself as the discovery of "the mysterious utility of the useless" and the house is the means by which he discovers it. In other respects, however, the two novels reveal a lack of direction, superficial and inconsistent treatment of characters, and action which is often melodramatic. These faults prevent the novels from attaining the ranks of many earlier, more artistically controlled works.

Regarding the two novels as a unit, it is possible to observe a movement by the hero from the midwest to the Hudson River and finally to Europe--a movement which in some respects parallels that of Undine Spragg in her movement from Apex City to New York and finally to France. It will also be observed in Mrs. Wharton's last novel, The Buccaneers (1938), with its "reverse" invasion from America to England by three sets of mothers and their daughters. The major difference in the "invasions"
lies in their purposes—Undine's is the egotistic desire to conquer the highest stratum of society and gain a position in it. This is true also of the daughters in The Buccaneers except for Nan St. George. Vance Weston's purpose lies in his need for a deepened sense of the past and knowledge of his own literary background in order that he might write a greater work of art. With such a movement present, it is possible for Mrs. Wharton to develop in Hudson River Bracketed the contrasting motifs of the real and the ideal, the present and the past, and the consequent reverence and irreverence for these values which Vance, as a literary artist, possesses. The introduction of these motifs provides Mrs. Wharton with an occasion to enunciate many of her own theories on the art of the novel.

Among the architectural details of the novel are those concerning Vance's house in Euphoria, Illinois. Vance's father is rapidly becoming an important figure in the real estate business in Euphoria, a town whose name suggests the shallow self-satisfaction of parvenus like Vance's father. Being a believer in his own product, he lives in a modern suburban house. His son's full name, Advance G. Weston, is derived from the name of one of his real estate developments in Advance, Illinois. For this reason, his name connotes, along with the meaning of "advance," the unbridled forces of the West as opposed to the largely inactive society of the East. He will literally "advance" in the novel eastward from Euphoria and will grow in spirit by using "past and present" to enlarge his artistic perception, and add a depth to his writing. However, this is not the kind of advance his father had imagined for him; he would have preferred the "getting there" spirit which was the name of
the college magazine Advance had edited. His house in Euphoria is simply described as being "photographed for the architectural papers." (4) However its interior is enough to warrant Vance's distaste for it and for Euphoria if he is in accord with Mrs. Wharton's attitude when she describes its sun-parlour as being filled with "palms and a pink gramophone." (9) His father was often "consulted by builders and decorators as to some fancy touch in hall or sleeping-porch" because of the renown of his "pretty taste in suburban architecture." (9) The concrete details here contrast the faddish taste and shallow tradition Vance sees in Euphoria with the richer past he was to find suggested in the East. The "sins" in décor of the Weston house are like those of their religion and culture. New religions must continually be invented and more iconoclastic essays must be written to keep pace with the times—which was the duty of the American. These sins are "largely those of taste." 23 They reveal only the shallow heritage of the midwest.

The next house Vance lived in was Mrs. Tracy's at Paul's Landing, New York. It was "a small wooden house, painted dark brown" with a "broken-down trellis arbour." (39) Vance cringed at its lack of materialistic comfort, but he learned to appreciate the simple fact that it was old. The house represents his first step back into the past which would be fully revealed to him in the Willows and in Eaglewood, Halo Spear's house. The three houses eventually lead him to realize "the meagreness of his inherited experience, the way it had been torn off violently from everything which had gone before." Considering what the pioneers had brought with them to the West, Vance thought "they had left the rarest of all behind" (338) —the past.
Halo, whom Vance fittingly meets at the Willows, is the living means by which his literary past is revealed. Her house, Eaglewood, is "a low studded old house of grey stone" built in 1680 and famous for its view. This view was of the historic Hudson River and its cliffs which represented for Vance another deeply artistic sensation. Though Eaglewood is another representative of the past, Mrs. Wharton has not chosen it, but the Willows, as her symbol even though the Willows had not been built until the 1830's. One reason, says Nevius, is that in the early stages of the novel, Eaglewood "represents a past too remote for Vance Weston to penetrate." Also, "the past embodied in the Willows was the chrysalis of Edith Wharton's girlhood"; its library is similar to one she had grown up with and consequently many of Vance's responses to the books in it can be considered as those Mrs. Wharton at one time felt.

Later when he discovers he has a chance of winning the Pulsifer Prize for his new novel, he meets its donor, Mrs. Pulsifer, who prefers to give the literary prize to an author who deserves it not so much for his writing ability as for his attentions to herself. She owns a house whose contrast in decor with the Willows is analogous to the contrasting literary interests of herself and the former owner of the Willows, Miss Lorburn. As she and Vance walk through the house, he decides he had never been in a house so big and splendid. From the room of the tapestries they passed to another, all in dark wood, with pictures on the panels, and great gilt standards bearing lights . . . (312)

But he later realizes her blindness both to the art which surrounded her and his literary talent; "he walked down the endless perspective of
tapestried and gilded emptiness to the hall below . . . ."(325)

The Willows is first of all a representative of a new experience for Vance: "it occurred to him that he had never seen a really old house before."(52) Details of its architecture will define its symbolic meaning for Vance. Its façade, "as fluid as the trees, suggested vastness, fantasy and secrecy."(57) After a lengthy description of the house with its bracketed balconies, the bracketed roof over the door and its tower with a "high shingled roof . . . and arched windows which seemed to simulate the openings in a belfry," Vance discovers that "its age, its mystery, its reserve, laid a weight on his heart."(58) The multitudinous brackets which seem to support every architectural feature of the house suggest the complicated standards of convention of the period in which it was built. It will consequently serve as a means by which he can describe the most minute manners of the period, including such details as the lace handkerchief of Miss Lorburn, as being significant of the "pace" of her time.(358) The tower and its windows suggest the Catholic church steeple in Euphoria whose tolling bell was the only suggestion of the past possible for Vance in Euphoria. Similarly at the Willows, "he felt in the age and emptiness of it something of the church bell's haunting sonority--as if it kept in its mute walls a voice as secret and compelling."(59)

The concrete method by which Mrs. Wharton connects the "past" with the literary past is seen in the description of the table in the library of the Willows with its "velvet table-cover trailing its faded folds and moth-eaten fringes on the floor" is surmounted by several books, one of which lay open.(60) The book is concretely linked with its owner by means of a "small pair of oddly-shaped spectacles in a thin gold
mounting" which lie on the open book. The continuity of the past and the present is further expressed by means of a portrait over the mantel in which Miss Lorburn is depicted as leaning "on a table with a heavy velvet cover, bearing an inkstand and some books." It is a specific example of Mrs. Wharton's own words: "side by side ... we should cultivate the sense of continuity, that 'sense of the past' which enriches the present and binds us up with the world's great stabilizing tradition of art and poetry and knowledge." But for now, Vance can only feel "all that was peculiar and unfamiliar" in these details; they belonged to the past—"a past so remote from anything in [his] experience that it took its place in the pages of history anywhere in the dark Unknown before Euphoria was."(61)

He soon realizes the value of the literary past in the library of the Willows as an aid for him in his own creativity: "The only hope lay in returning as often as he could to this silent room, and trying to hack a way through the dense jungle of the past."(126) In the many rooms he gained an "elusive sense of life"(331) and he discovered it to be material for his new novel. Instead; "'this is the Past—if only I could get back into it ... .'"(333) Mrs. Wharton herself seems to be speaking when Vance says, "'What interests me would be to get back into the minds of the people who lived in these places—to try and see what we came out of.'"(341)26 This is one aspect of the theme of the novel: the mysterious utility of the useless—the useless being the empty, uninhabited house. Halo Spear finds, as she reads the first chapters of the novel, that
under his touch the familiar setting of the Willows became steeped in poetry. It was the embodiment of the Past: that strange and overwhelming element had entered into his imagination in the guise of these funny turrets and balconies, turgid upholsteries and dangling crystals. Suddenly lifted out of a boundless contiguity of Euphorias, his mind struck root deep down in accumulated layers of experience, in centuries of struggle, passion and aspiration—so that this absurd house, the joke of Halo's childhood, was to him the very emblem of man's long effort, was Chartres, the Parthenon, the Pyramids. (354)

She discovers that he, like the theme of his book, has given up one vision of life only to recapture it "in another form." (358)

In her association with the house, Halo herself becomes almost a symbol of the union of past and present. She had revealed to him the literature of the past, but she also warns him not to think of Miss Lorburn as "history" but as full of vitality which shows itself in a different pace—a slowly moving one. (358) Her friend, George Frenside, had told Vance that besides a knowledge of the past, Vance needed to "see a good many people" in the present world: "'Manners are your true material, after all.'" Similarly, she is seen in the novel always glancing at her watch and keeping appointments (cf. 120). In short, she very often has had to leave Vance alone at the Willows, engulfed in the Past. Near the end of the novel she returns and realizes, besides the continuity of the past regarding art and convention, the value of her own past before her marriage to Lewis Tarrant. She sees "her own youth... in it everywhere, hanging in faded shreds like the worn silk of the curtains." (499) It had "waited there quietly for her, with a sort of brooding certainty of her return." (498) In this sense, the Willows serves as a substantial means of defining her character and motivating
the action of the story. Halo is experienced in art but inexperienced in life. This failure explains her initial attraction and marriage to Lewis Tarrant who, like Fraser Leath, had no knowledge of the soul, but only of beauty. (490) His mind was "like a chilly moonlit reflection of her own." (500) However Vance had gradually become aware of reality and life through his struggles against poverty and through the death of his first wife, Laura Lou. It is the unspoken advice of the Willows which allows her to realize at last that it is Vance whom she loves, for Vance like herself demands love with "eyes, ears, soul, imagination" being the combined faculties for its expression. These have been the same faculties which Vance has used to gain insights into the past through the Willows.

Mrs. Wharton has employed several artifacts to support the various symbolic meanings of the Willows. The clock Vance sees upon entering the old house is "guarded by an old man in bronze with a scythe and an hour glass." (59) The artifact is, of course, symbolic of time—both time-past and time-present. The past is represented in its stylized representation of Time; and the present, by the mechanical workings of the clock itself. The clock extends further the motif of past and present in the novel. The contiguity of the two is the important insight Vance will eventually attain under the influence of the house and the more "tangible presence of Halo Spear, who bears a remarkable resemblance to the dead mistress of the house and carries the cultural tradition symbolized by the Willows into the living present." 27 She has already been viewed as conscious of time-present. As Laura Lou says, "'She never stays anywhere more than five minutes.'" (71) Her
concern with time-present is of even greater influence on Vance when he finally is able to be employed as a writer for her husband's publication suitably called "The New Hour."

As one of its editors says ironically, "'We want to wipe out the past and get a fresh eye on things.'"(270) Even though Mr. Tarrant has published Vance's historical novel Instead, the magazine represents time-present in its further demands on the talents of Vance. Showing no sympathy, its publisher questions severely Vance's dealings with another publishing house and his lack of script for his own. Significantly Tarrant is described as wearing a "dark-red seal ring"(474) which confers on him an official and possessive attitude. He has the power as publisher to force Vance to stay with his firm and to write for no other publishing house. This attitude is similar to the possessiveness suggested by George Darrow's seal ring in The Reef. In both situations the artifact has the dramatic function of intimidating its observer.

Another artifact whose symbolic use aids in defining the theme of the novel is the gilt basket with a stuffed dove on its handle. (164) Vance spends thirty dollars for the basket and sends it to Laura Lou Tracy. Ironically he uses the money Mrs. Tracy had given him when he left Paul's Landing for New York and is subsequently left in a condition bordering on poverty. However the basket carries with it implications of non-utilitarian art and the past; it reminds him "of Miss Spear's description of that temple of Apollo . . . which had been built by birds and bees."(164) Although Laura Lou probably would not know what to do with it, the basket still seemed "all poetry when he chose it."(165) But the dove soon becomes the messenger of Venus, for Laura
Lou had kept it over her looking-glass; therefore, her love for Vance never completely vanished. After his marriage to her, he even identifies her with Venus and the dove. However he soon discovers she was as much of a luxury "as an exotic bird or a flower"—as much, in fact, as the stuffed dove had been when he bought it in his impecunious condition.

The basket itself, as an instrument in keeping alive Laura Lou's affection for him and finally leading to his marriage, is a symbol of the "mysterious utility of the useless." A comparable gift, a black silk bag mounted in imitation amber, is bought to appease Mrs. Tracy in the matter of his marriage to her daughter. Laura Lou says, "She's never had anything that pretty." But ironically this purse, which Vance compares to the gilt basket in its luxurious inutility, does not appease Mrs. Tracy as he had hoped; for she never completely accepts Vance. Mrs. Tracy would have preferred her daughter to be married to a successful business man: i.e., Bunt Haye. The purse has another purpose in the novel: it is the vessel which carries Halo Spear's meaningful glove, whose owner Vance has recently visited at the Willows, back to Paul's Landing in order to bring about a divorce between Laura Lou and Vance. Mrs. Tracy remains highly suspicious of Vance's platonic relationship with Halo Spear Tarrant.

The basket is mentioned again as having this symbolic meaning when Vance is sitting in Mrs. Pulsifer's splendid rooms. He notices immediately "the incongruity between the treasures and their custodian." Nevertheless Vance realizes that she, like the dove, represents the mysterious utility of the useless: for, as Vance ruminates:
Art had hitherto figured in his mind as something apart from life, inapplicable to its daily uses; something classified, catalogued and buried in museums. Here for the first time it became a breathing presence, he saw its relation to life, and caught a glimpse of the use of riches and leisure—advanced even to the assumption that it might be the task of one class to have these things and preserve them, to live like a priestly caste isolated for the purpose. (320-321)

Such utility of the leisure class has often been expressed by Mrs. Wharton herself.

The last appearance of the dove leaves no doubt as to its function as the artifact which had originally increased Laura Lou's love for Vance. He sees it "flattened out and disjointed" on top of all her possessions which she had hastily crammed into her suitcase in her half-hearted plan to leave him which resulted from Mrs. Tracy's advice. She had informed Laura Lou of Vance's meetings at the Willows with Halo. That Laura Lou had included it in the suitcase reveals to Vance that she does still love him. Thus the dove, previously foreshadowing his marriage to her, here predicts their eventual return to each other although, like the dove, their relationship can never have the artful beauty it originally had. The basket's utility is in this way emphasized again in that it offers consolation to Vance in his distraught state.

Another function this artifact has in the novel is that of revealing the irony of a similar basket which Laura's former escort, Bunty Hayes, gives her. Bunty appears in the novel as a kind of Babbitt who, like his firm of "Storecraft" which sells everything from feed to paintings, will sell anything the people are willing to buy—even reputations and false anecdotes. An instance of this occurs when, at the formal showing of a modern bust of Vance, Bunty describes with intimate detail
Vance's youth as if he had known him personally. He actually had not even met Vance until Vance was out of college; but his anecdotes offer him a chance to increase the clientele of Storecraft. After learning Laura Lou is ill, he proceeds to send her an unartful, utilitarian basket full of "perfumed grapefruit and polished mandarins and boxes of California delicacies." This artifact not only intensifies the contrast between Laura's two suitors and their visions of life, but also increases Laura's stature in the novel in choosing the impoverished Vance instead of the wealthy, vulgar Bunty Hayes.

It is important to note here the care with which in various scenes Mrs. Wharton has used additional details of decor and artifact to support and enrich the meanings of her major symbol of the Willows and the minor, more closely defined symbol of the gilded basket and dove. Regarding the former, the contrasting decors of other houses intensify the importance of the Willows for Vance; the clock, the past and the present; and the edition of "Kubla Khan," whose author Vance was unacquainted with, intensifies the lack of background in a potential creator which the Willows will help him to find. Similarly the gilt dove, aside from its relationship to things in nature, appears in conjunction with decor and two other artifacts—the purse and the foodbasket.

Another artifact is indicative of the difference in Vance's and Halo's backgrounds. The radiator appears in Vance's home in Euphoria as the "centre of family life"(196) whereas Halo is always seated in her apartment before the warmth of a fireplace.(434) The radiator subtly serves Mrs. Wharton's purposes of satire on the midwest but the "pink-mouthed gramophone" and the "congested pink china pot on a stained oak
milking-stool" seem to be overdrawn.

Mrs. Wharton's use of works of art in *Hudson River Bracketed* is primarily revealing of Vance's lack of background. However casual references are made to authors and their works strictly for satiric effect later in the novel and in "Bohemian" party scenes of *The Gods Arrive*. At the Willows, Vance hears the names of such authors as Marlowe and Coleridge whose existence he had previously been unaware of. When he was in the midwest he had been "nurtured on" verse of James Whitcomb Riley, Ella Wheeler Wilcox and Longfellow. He does not know the meaning of "Kubla Khan" but only recognizes the beauty, the "unutterable music" of the words themselves. However the poem is seen as particularly relevant to Miss Lorburn, the former owner of the Willows, who in her loneliness in the mansion had found "a stately pleasure dome" in the confines of her library, in great literary art. The musical sound of the verse however suddenly reminds him again of the tolling church bell he had heard mysteriously ringing in Euphoria. Through this work of art, Mrs. Wharton successfully infuses life into what had until then been the dead past in Vance's eyes: "but for that music the house was utterly silent." It also establishes the vast literary background of Halo Spear who informs him of its author.

The background of the non-creator is destined to eventually conflict with the lack of background of the creator in the sequel *The Gods Arrive*. As the headnote to this novel states, "The gods approve the depth and not the tumult of the soul." Accordingly, this conflict is destined to result in no novel coming from Vance's hands. He journeys to Europe to increase his sense of the past and momentarily has the
"receptive faculties of his soul" aroused by various churches in Spain. In these architectural monuments, Mrs. Wharton shows Vance occasionally mystified at their labyrinthine depths. He soon is left untouched by the massive grandeur of cathedrals such as Chartres. This is significant considering Mrs. Wharton's opinion that such cathedrals reveal "the accumulated experiences of the past" and should tell their observer to lose, "in the ardour of new experiment, the least that may be of the long rich heritage of human experience." But Vance's soul is closed and hardened towards any such receptivity partly because of Halo's constant presence when he visits them, her continual expectation of his responses. He feels he must tell her the profound meaning such structures instill in him, but he also realizes that she has seen and appreciated them many times previously.

The past considered in the sequel is largely Vance's own past, not the past represented by the Willows. He sees, even on the ocean voyage to Europe, his own past racing after him in the form of "the outstretched arms of his youth, his parents, his grandmother, Floss Delaney, Mrs. Pulsifer . . . and Laura Lou." As his interest shifts from his former vision to a more egocentric outlook, the past he sees revealed in "human monuments" becomes more interesting to him than an architectural one. The "detached and drifting fragments" of a past whose entirety was represented by the Willows appear in the forms of Miss Plummet and Colonel Churley, two lonely people on the equally lonely Oubli-sur-Mer in France where Vance and Halo take up residence. Vance soon becomes just as detached. His vision of life falls apart at the same time as his
artistic vision of life is shifting from the complete representation of the past to the solitary fragmentary human representatives of it. Nevius sees him as the "victim of post-war confusion."34

The only significant artifact in the novel is one which Mrs. Wharton had employed earlier in Summer for approximately the same purposes. Vance sees a brilliant display of fireworks while his imagination (218) is filled wholly by Floss Delaney, whom he had loved previously in Euphoria, and with whom he has a short-lived affair in Europe. It finally comes to an end with her marriage to the Duke of Spartivento. The transiency represented by the fireworks supports the peregrination of Vance throughout the Continent and England and his many short-lived inspirations which cause every book he begins to remain incomplered. Meanwhile the ignored Halo has returned home to have Vance's child. Vance's grandmother dies and he too returns to America spending the winter in the Northern Lakes country in complete isolation.

The final two chapters show Vance returning to the Willows and to Halo. Now the Willows symbolizes for Vance his own past. The past he had once viewed there appears "legendary"; the house had been, after all, only his "fairy godmother."(418) Its bracketed balconies now represent only the "perilous foam on which his imagination had voyaged ever since."(418) The unified and complete vision which had developed from the inspirations originally received at the Willows seems to be as veiled and indistinct, even hidden, as the portrait of Miss Lorburn which he finds is covered with a sheet.(413) The entire house seems to mirror his disillusionment; it seems "shrunken, smaller," just a steel engrav-
ing of itself. In other words, the Willows is still a symbol of the past, but in the eyes of its viewer, that past is blended with his own which paradoxically is filled with disillusionment and suffering. The meaning of the vision of the past the Willows actually represents seems blurred and useless to Vance.

However, Mrs. Wharton sounds a note of hope in allowing Halo, in the final chapter, to give birth to Vance's son in the Willows and near him there. The new generation will perhaps be less confused and bitter and avail itself of the sense of the past it will find within the Willows. The suggestion is also present that Vance himself will begin anew to gain what he can from the past, but this time with a deeper fund of experience. As Halo says, "'I shall have two children to take care of rather than one.'"(432) The utility of the useless is still her theme. The seemingly useless suffering he has caused Halo and himself has eventually led him back to the Willows, to Halo, and to their child. The utility of the house and its past is evident in the suggestion that it will form a basis upon which Halo and Vance will find a new order and meaning in their lives.

Mrs. Wharton's symbol has objectively remained as consistent as the New England farm in Ethan Frome or the Mountin in Summer. Its meaning blurs and changes only in Vance's eyes. The conventions and traditional manners of society which it symbolizes are, however, not such deterministic forces in Vance's life as the village convention or heredity symbolized in the former novelettes.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE UNFINISHED SYNTHESIS

Although Mrs. Wharton died before she could finish *The Buccaneers*, she wrote a synopsis of the entire plot which aids to some extent the reader's understanding of the direction the novel was to take. But also it is possible by analyzing architectural details, artifacts, and works of art to gain further justification for and understanding of the motives of the characters and their actions which were to bring to the novel to its conclusion. Mrs. Wharton's use of significant details in this novel combines many functions noted in previous works. By means of these details she defines various national and international social strata among which her characters move as she had in *The House of Mirth* and *The Custom of the Country*. Definition of character similar to that found in *The Reef* is made possible by relationships between characters and their houses. Concrete detail also makes manifest the spirit of revolt against tradition similar to that found in *The Age of Innocence* (*The Buccaneers* is also placed in the decade of the 'seventies). This spirit of revolt is combined with the sense of the past that Vance gained from the Willows in *Hudson River Bracketed*.

First of all, architectural detail delineates and distinguishes one social stratum from another. Mrs. St. George is aware that her house in New York was located on the wrong street and its decoration was faddish rather than traditional. The stratum to which she aspired lived on Fifth Avenue, not Madison Avenue. The St. Georges are members of the new wealth
which was moving into New York from the South and West but was unable to break into its insular Washington Square society. Her daughters were not accepted by this society during the winter. Similarly in the summer Saratoga was the setting for the St. Georges' holidays whereas the upper stratum of New York chose Newport.

The subsequent invasion of England by the three families of the Clossons, the Elmsworths, and the St. Georges led by the St. Georges' Anglo-Italian governess Laura Testvalley is observed by Miss Jacky March, also an American, who had formerly tried to invade London society by herself and failed. But she had remained in England. Her small house is expressive of her split loyalties to America and England and of her lack of membership in either society. Her "two-windowed wedge"—the smallest house in Mayfair—seems quite new and bright in its new pale buff paint and striped awnings. She, like her house, represents the vitality of the American society but also her appreciation for the deeper tradition of English society and its Mayfair district. In this sense, she demonstrates the theme of the novel—the combination of vitality and tradition, the continuity which must be maintained between the past and the present—and, as will be seen presently, is thus similar to Nan St. George. Such architectural details linked with the description of the interior of the house also allow her position as one of the outside observers of the novel to be more plausible. Her room is described as cluttered with photographs in heavy silver mountings of ladies of English nobility whom she has known. These mountings of the photographs are expressive of the massive weight of English tradition and convention which had prevented her
from marrying Lord Brightlingsea. Her "wedge" of a house has been in the past a key to the door of London society for Americans: "These pilgrims had learned that Jacky March's narrow front door led straight into the London world, and a number had already slipped in through it."(99) It also is called a "watchtower" which is appropriate in her role as observer from this watchtower, Miss March "had already sighted and classified"(103) the newly arrived band of Americans.

Lady Churt's summer cottage at Runnymede is symbolic of her uncertain position in English society. Hers is not a splendid country house but, in Nan's eyes, appears with its "long deck-like verandah"(155) and numerous awnings as a kind of ship ready to set sail. It ironically provides the setting for the launching of the American girls into society and for the subsequent demise of the impecunious Lady Churt whose eyes had been trained on Lord Seadown when, to her face, he announces his engagement to Virginia St. George. With this first success attained, Laura Testvalley and Jacky March now consider the cottage to be "an outpost in a conquered province."(159)

The architecture of Allfriars is appropriate for the Brightlingseas in its magnitude and shabbiness. Its "big domed hall" was "hung with tall family portraits" and moth-eaten trophies of the chase."(121) The mantlepiece is as monumental as Lord Brightlingsea himself. Lady Brightlingsea embodies the tradition of English society, but a tradition which had become lackluster and meaningless through her own ignorance and insularity. Of the continent she knows only dimly Paris and Rome; and of the western hemisphere, only that Brazil was a part of the United States.
Fittingly, Conchita's room at Allfriars is described as big, but shabby. The sofa is wide, but it has broken springs. The Lord's blind devotion to a tradition whose richness and meaning escaped him is further displayed by his ignorance of his own paintings: "the portrait of Lady Jane Grey that they were asking about must be the one in the octagon room, over the fireplace."(135)

The architectural details also function as means by which Mrs. Wharton can differentiate between the characters of the invading Americans by their varying reactions to Allfriars. The vigorous Conchita's love of London night life and its festivities outshone that for her husband, Lord Richard, a son of the Brightlingseas. She thinks of the house as a "family vault"(102) and considers its activity, when compared to London's, to be as slow as its clocks.(130) Virginia St. George describes it as a "gaol" (119) and, after dinner there, describes the dining room: "'All I saw was a big room with cracks in the ceiling, and bits of plaster off the walls.'"(132) Han St. George, to the contrary, has a much larger capacity or "register" of intelligence. To her, Allfriars appears to be a "palace" (119) in which she can imagine the "people on the walls, in their splendid historical dresses, walking about in the big rooms."(133) For her fertile imagination, Allfriars represents an aura of the past; and her sense of its continuity with the present is evident in the following passage:

... her imagination rushed out to the beauties of the visible world; and the decaying majesty of Allfriars moved her strangely. Splendour neither frightened her, nor made her self assertive as it did Virginia; she never felt herself matched against things greater than herself, but softly merged in them ... . She lay for a long time listening to the mysterious sounds given forth by old houses at night, the undefinable creakings, rustlings, and sighings which would have frightened Virginia had she
remained awake, but which sounded to Nan like the long murmur of the past breaking on the shores of a sleeping world.\(^{(134-135)}\)

In contrast to Allfriars, Honourslove, the "irregular, silver-gray"\(^{(106)}\) home of Sir Helmsley Thwarte and his son, Sir Guy, represented for them "the first and last article of the family creed,"\(^{(107)}\) and embodied a tradition "priceless" to them both. As guardians of this tradition, they had refused to let it become shabby. Sir Guy was about to leave unwillingly for Brazil to make a fortune which would insure the continued existence of Honourslove. The house and its grounds "were thick with webs of memory for [Sir Guy] . . . which tightened about him like chains at the thought" of leaving it.\(^{(109)}\) Sir Guy's departure is a direct result of his code of ethics which is connoted by the name of his house. His "love of honour" prevented him from marrying wealth; he preferred to make his own fortune and then marry whomever he loved.

Besides being representative of the Thwartes' love of their house and family, Mrs. Wharton's description of the house as "mellow," which she supports with details such as "the old yellow marble of the carved mantle"\(^{(117)}\), is in keeping with Sir Guy's mild, affable nature. This quality of the house is noted by Nan, after her brief stay in the "vast shabbiness" of Allfriars. To her Honourslove appeared warm, cared for, exquisitely intimate. The stones of the house, the bricks of the walls, the very flags of the terrace, were so full of captured sunshine that in the darkest days they must keep an inner brightness.\(^{(136)}\)

Sir Guy's and her affinity for each other is noted in their similar reactions to the house. Together they linger long "over each picture, each piece of rare old furniture or tapestry . . . ."\(^{(345)}\) Such spiritual
communion between the two resulting from their mutual appreciation of Honourslove and the past foreshadows their eventual love for each other. At this point, says Nevius, "to Nan St. George, the most attractive fact about Guy Thwarte is his deep affection for Honourslove." This affection combined with his choice finally of Nan for his wife and his elopement with her display the depth of their faculties for love and the enormity of their sacrifice in giving up Honourslove.

Where Honourslove expressed the similarities of Nan and Sir Guy, the castle of Tintagel expressed a great divergence in the feelings of Nan and her husband, Ushant, Duke of Tintagel. The refurbished ruins of what had once been King Arthur's castle struck romantic chords in Nan's heart to such a degree that her view of the Duke was slightly blurred. For her, the Cornish castle "spoke with that rich low murmur of the past . . . ."(249) Even though "the walls of Tintagel were relatively new, they were built on ancient foundations, and crowded with the treasures of the past . . . ."(249) For the Duke it hardly symbolized the past. Tintagel represented for his materialistic mind "a costly folly of his father's which family pride obliged him to keep up with fitting state."(250) Nan's romantic view is incompatible with the Duke's, whose sense of duty led him to live "in style."(168) The castle seemed "a mere milestone"(178) in the ducal line. He agreed with his entire family in considering proudly their various homes as the main supports of society but at the same time refused his tenants financial aid during an outbreak of typhoid.

Nan's romantic view of Tintagel castle changes soon after she had moved from it into the Tintagel mansion at Longlands. After a visit from
Conchita—who had fallen in love with Miles Dawnly since Han had last seen her—Han realizes the lack of any bond of real love between herself and the Duke. Tintagel now seems only a "ruin" which was prophetic of their marriage and was revelant, in the clearer vision of a more mature Han, of the emptiness of the Duke's soul, his insensitivity.

Longlands and its grounds, through Mrs. Wharton's significant details, becomes a prison for Han in all its formality. The Duke and Dowager Duchess who are its true keepers possess the same barren formality that the gardens possess. They are "a floral masterpiece" in whose center stands an "elaborate, cast-iron fountain." The fountain is expressive of the cold, though elaborate, devotion to "form" which the Duke and Dowager Duchess possess and whose meaning they have forgotten. This is also expressed in Han's vision of the house:

... the hush of boredom and inactivity fell from the curved and gilded walls. The passage was empty, and so was the great domed and pillared hall beyond.

A corresponding emptiness enters into Han's own life after a few months of married life with the Duke.

At Longlands she finds herself surrounded by "family mementoes" even in her favorite retreat—the Corregio room. The Corregios were surrounded by "illuminated views of Vesuvius in action [and] landscapes by the Dowager Duchess's great-aunts, funereal monuments worked in hair on faded silk, and photographs in heavy oak frames of ducal relatives."

Her efforts to remove these symbols of the ducal line from their position among the vivid Corregios were thwarted by the Dowager Duchess who was against change of any kind. Mrs. Wharton's description reveals Han's increasing
oppression caused by the Dowager and signs of her omnipresence at Longlands.
She had left her impression on the walls of Nan's own room which had formerly
belonged to the Dowager. For Nan, it was "a stupid oppressive room—somebody
else's room."(245)

She tries to find relief from the imprisoning décor by clearing the
"double-cube saloon" of its rugs and furniture for her Christmas party. But
still present are the "Thornhill ceiling and the Mortlake tapestries"(276)
of the Tintagels reinforced by the presence of the disapproving Dowager her¬
self. This change of decor is symbolic of the invasion of Nan's American
friends who perform the Virginia reel and form a conga line on the parquet
floors which proceeds up the stairs and throws open the doors of every room
in the house. But Nan's revolt lasts only as long as the party itself, and
the house soon returns to its deathly normalcy: "The great house had become
like a sepulchre to her; under its ponderous cornices and cupolas she felt
herself reduced to a corpse-like immobility."(317)

On the Tintagel property is an octagonal Temple of Love in whose
architectural detail Mrs. Wharton reveals similar meanings found in the summer¬
house outside the Blenkers' in The Age of Innocence or the summer-house near
Givré in The Reef. It has "rain-streaked walls of peeling stucco," a dome
surmounted by a "neglected god" with an unheeded bow, and a door hanging on
broken hinges. With such a description, the Temple can only symbolize a lack
of love, almost a lack of life in Nan's situation. It is significant that
this setting is the one in which Sir Guy appears and finds Nan weeping and
offers his assistance. As in The Reef, Mrs. Wharton shows a clandestine meeting
of the two not within the conventional and morally strict mansion of the Tinta¬
gels or the de Chelles, but in a nature-torn structure elsewhere on the grounds.
As Nan sardonically remarked, it had been a long time since "the Lord of 
Longlands had visited the divinity who is supposed to rule the world."(317-318) 
Her visit to it adumbrates her future visit to Lady Glenloe's estate, Cham-
pions, and her subsequent moves to London and finally South Africa where she 
joins Sir Guy and is completely free from the Duke's restraint. In this 
initial step away from Longlands however, her chances of escape seem just as 
improbable as the possibility that the Temple of Love will be refurbished by 
the present Duke.

A final example of important architectural detail is found in Lady 
Glenloe's house, Champions. Again, the name is fitting since this is where 
Laura Testvalley, Nan's former governess, is presently tutoring. Through her 
machinations as a "champion," Nan and Sir Guy's elopement will eventually take 
place. Laura had championed the American girls' cause previously by intro-
ducing the girls under her leadership into English society.

Lady Glenloe is as friendly and unassuming as her house. Its faç-
ade was of "broad-faced and amiable" brick with regular windows. The "pill-
lared porch had replaced the ancestral towers"(332), a detail expressive of 
Lady Glenloe's fearlessness of change. She had even introduced a telephone 
to the household which she had discovered to be quite useful on a recent trip 
to the States. Her spirit of unhesitating innovation and freedom from con-
fining convention is evident in her preference of a house with "airy passages 
and plain square rooms . . . [over] rat-infested moats and turrets, a 
troublesome overcrowded muniment-room, and the famous family portraits that 
were continually having to be cleaned and rebacked."(332) Unlike the Dowager 
Duchess who hung her portraits among the Corregios, and Lady Brightlingsea
who knew nothing of geography, Lady Glenloe had traveled to every continent
with a receptive intelligence which had consequently broadened it and made
her more perspicacious. Laura felt less imprisoned in such surroundings
than she had with her other less-traveled aristocratic employers. Furthermore, it is fitting that Nan meet Sir Guy again in this "amiable" house with
its owner who, like both Laura and Nan, was a revolutionary in thought and
action. Lady Glenloe refused to be bound to the meaningless conventions
and customs of her rank.

Turning now to Mrs. Wharton's use of the significant artifact, one
can see in many details of clothing and jewelry an importance greater than
the merely descriptive. Mrs. St. George, the Dowager Duchess, and Lady
Brightlingsea are all satirized by their judgments on clothing. Mrs. St.
George believed that "everything was changed since crinolines had gone out
and bustles came in."(4) The conservative society of New York, by which she
had desired that her daughters be accepted, was undoubtedly in crinolines and
not bustles just as it was indisputably not at Saratoga, but at Newport. A
similar adversity to change is noted in the Dowager Duchess as she watches the
conga line parade up the stairs at Longlands; she says, "When crinolines were
worn the movement were not as--as visible as now."(281) It may be noted here
that the Duchess's "enquiring eyeglass" through which she peers out at the
horrifying display of the Virginia reel and conga line is symbolic of the
barrier between her static world of blind conformity to convention and the
dynamic vitality the Americans have brought to her ballroom. As Mrs. Wharton
describes it, the eyeglass was a "window opening into an unknown world--a
world in whose reality she could not bring herself to believe."(278)
Another instance of symbolic décolletage is Conchita's "rosy
dressing-gown festooned with swansdown."(297) Her "red-heeled slippers and
a pink deshabille with a marked tendency to drop off the shoulders" were
considerably out of place with "the stately corridors of Longlands."(297)
Not only does the style of her attire separate her from the ducal proprie-
ties implied in her surroundings, but the color red becomes significant in
the ensuing scene where it is made apparent that her life is not ruled by
the proprieties of her station as wife to Lord Richard, any more than by
the marital bonds from which she contemplates breaking loose. Her life is
ruled only by emotional love which is now centered upon Miles Dawnly. Her
Latin vitality is emphasized by Nan who, comparing Conchita to her own sis-
ters and the Elmsworth girls, decides Conchita "had yet ripened into some-
thing more richly human than the others."(298)

Nan's clothing, on the contrary, is notably in accord with the
ducal conventions of Longlands but undoubtedly not in keeping with her
spirit. Conchita looks at her critically in the same scene and suggests,
"'If you'd only burn that alms-house dressing-gown, with the horrid row of
horn buttons.'"(298) Ironically even her clothes have been chosen for her
by the Dowager, and Nan is as much imprisoned within them as she is in Long-
lands itself, and her marriage with the Duke.

At Champions Lady Glenloe is described in clothes which give her
as straightforward and uncluttered an appearance as the "airy" rooms of
her house. In this sense, her "rough tweed and shabby furs"(337) are as
unaffected and frank as Lady Glenloe. However, in their lack of subtlety
in style and inappropriateness for the chill of an early English spring,
they are expressive of her insensitivity to the "finer shades" of a human situation to the same degree that she is "insensible to heat and cold." (337)

In one of the last scenes of the novel, in its present incomplete form, Lady Glenloe completely misunderstands Nan's relationship to Guy and asks her which of her own daughters Nan thinks Guy is interested in. (370)

It is in the atmosphere of Champions, fittingly, that Nan wishes to be rid of the "ponderous coronets and tiaras, massive necklaces and bracelets hung with stones like rocs' eggs." (339) The jewels are a symbol of her oppression by the Tintagels. Their dominance was evident in their choice of her clothes, and their entire familial line is represented in her heavy jewels. And just as she is now in "escape from the long oppression of Tintagel and Longlands, and the solemn London house; and freed from the restrictions they imposed," the clothes she wears for a dinner party with "her only two friends," Laura and Sir Guy, are symbolic of her new sense of freedom and her inner recognition of her love for Sir Guy. She wears a "diamond brier-rose on the shoulder of her coral-pink poulter-de-soie." (339-340) She no longer is dressed in an "alms-house dressing gown." She, like Conchita, will remarry out of love and not a romantic vision of a castle which might have belonged to King Arthur.

Artifacts other than clothes serve Mrs. Wharton's artistic purposes. The furniture Nan finds in the Temple of Love near Longlands intensifies her present mood. In the room lay "remnants of derelict croquet-sets and disabled shuttlecocks and gracerings . . . the stone table in the center of the dilapidated mosaic floor." The "remnants" are symbolic of her marriage with the Duke and can also be associated with the parts of the
clocks he continually repairs. Her vitality has been turned to stone because of the inability to attain any kind of emotional fulfillment from the Duke. Just as the mosaic floor is dilapidated (a particularly good example of Mrs. Wharton's choice of the *mot juste*), Nan feels the drifting apart and disintegration of all the strong emotions within her which required love for their expression and, ultimately, their existence: "... she felt herself sinking into depths of ... one of those old benumbing despairs without past or future ... "(318)

An opposite feeling is expressed in the furniture of her friend Lizzy Elmsworth Robinson's household. The "funereal" breakfast table in the "pseudo-Gothic breakfast room" and the "ponderous mahogany furniture" of Belfield symbolize for Hector Robinson and his American wife a security and stability in their marital relationship because "her standard of values was identical with his own."(353) The stolid furniture is expressive of her "respect as profound as his for concrete realities, and his sturdy unawareness of everything which could not be expressed in terms of bank accounts or political and social expediency."(353-354)

An artifact which Mrs. Wharton had used previously in *Ethan Frome* is again found in *The Buccaneers*. The gravestones in the former work symbolized the completely deterministic forces at play with Ethan's life which made it impossible for him to break loose from his heredity and environment. In this novel, the gravestone is evidence of Mrs. Wharton's own recognition of a possibility to remove oneself from the control of such forces while at the same time not denying their existence. Having returned from Brazil to Honourslove, Sir Guy descends to the family chapel where he sees the "stony
fringes" of the pillows beneath the effigies that mingle with each other just as his many forebears had striven together in spirit for the strength and defense of the "family acres." (268) The family crypts, like Honours-love itself, communicate a warmth in their suggestion of the mutual faithfulness and devotion of their occupants to the propagation of Honourslove and its tenants. Their agreement to such a goal is implied by the very nearness of the crypts to one another. These symbols of the family unit and continuity of the past and present are distressing to Sir Guy when he thinks of another "dazzling white" gravestone in Rio de Janeiro. Besides marking the grave of his wife who had mysteriously died in Brazil, this "far-off headstone" is symbolic of Sir Guy's straying from his earlier vow not to marry until he had returned from South America (117) and his aspirations to be a better guardian of the family tradition than his father had been. That Sir Guy was able to effect such a blatant disregard for family and tradition which the Honourslove graves symbolize is a revelation which foreshadows and helps to justify his elopement with Nan Tintagel. Thus by the juxtaposition of the English and South American gravestones, the love Sir Guy has for the "ancient habitation" of his race and his "inability to remain confined in it" (110) are found to be but two sides of the same coin.

Lastly Mrs. Wharton has chosen an artifact which enables her to define the Duke's character and psyche in the most concrete terms possible. Clocks are the Duke's only real love and express his flight and recoil from demands placed upon him as a duke and as a human being. From birth he had a "secret desire of anonymity" and wished he could replace himself "with a mechanical effigy." (171) This desire is expressed by his announcement that
he would marry the first girl who did not know he was a duke, a person to whom he appeared to be anonymous. When Nan mistakes him for Mr. Robinson, he is pleased: "For a fleeting second the Duke tried to feel what it would be like to be a Mr. Robinson ... a man who might wind his own clocks when he chose."(180)

The Duke's real tastes were for the minutiae of life of which clocks and their inner workings are a valid expression. He is totally incapable of dealing with an amorphous human emotion. From childhood he had wanted to either make or sell clocks and sit alone in his shop "watching them, doctoring them, taking their temperature, feeling their pulse ... regulating them."(171-172) Unaware of human desires of the people who surround him, he is yet aware as he hurries "past the innumerable clocks" that they "cried out to him for attention."(173-174) Clocks become for the Duke ersatz human beings.

The realization that he regards Nan as only another clock and not a human being is expressed by Laura Testvalley when she understands it is not love which has drawn the Duke to her charge, but, as the Duke says, 

. . . "her childish innocence, her indifference to money and honours and--er--that kind of thing, that I value so immensely . . . ."

"Yes. But you can hardly regard her as a rare piece for your collection . . . . Nan is one thing now, but may be quite another . . . in a year or two. Sensitive natures alter strangely after their first contact with life."(227)

A similar accusation is made by the Dowager Duchess after the Duke has told her he will "form" Nan. She says, "'You're very skilful, Ushant; but women are not quite as simple as clocks.'"(245) He often devotes his efforts to reconstructing a clock rather than mending the rent cloth of his and Nan's marriage.

The clocks in the novel also suggest the considerable amount of
regulation at Longlands which oppresses Nan. When she asks him if she might speak with him in private concerning the loan for Conchita, she finds she must make an appointment with him early in the day. When he does finally ask her into his study, he consults his watch and declares he can talk with her for fifteen minutes. (311-312) Similarly, when Nan admits to the Dowager Duchess that she has made a mistake in marrying Ushant and frames her curt dismissal of the possibility of hurting Ushant's feelings in the words, "I don't think Ushant has very strong feelings . . . ." The "gong" of the clocks announcing lunch cause the Dowager to rise immediately from the serious tête-à-tête and make the pronouncement that they must both go now to the dining room and their guests. Here the regulation the clocks represent acquires the added dimension of invariable social convention. The effect of the clocks on the Dowager herself has previously been evident when the Dowager sat at the breakfast table, "her morning duties" lying before her, "stretching out in a long monotonous perspective to the moment when all Ushant's clocks should simultaneously strike the luncheon hour." (214)

Finally, that this passionate disemboweling of clocks is symbolic of the Duke's own sexual frustration is dramatically evident in the drawing-room conversation with his mother in which the Duke recounts the events of the night before. As he forces himself to tell the Dowager that he had given Nan five hundred pounds, then proposed to stay in her room but had been rebuffed by Nan, he "felt a nervous impulse to possess himself of the clock on the mantle-shelf and tear it to pieces." (328)

The reversed values of the Dowager are apparent when, after learning of the events of the previous night which were clear signs of the perilous relationship between her son and daughter-in-law, she returns to her
conservatory, thinking:

"There were still a great many seedlings to transplant, and after that the new curate was coming..."

"...that's the trouble with Annabel—she's never assumed her responsibilities. Once one does, there's no time left for trifles."(331)

Works of art, the third classification of Mrs. Wharton's significant detail, are organically functional in the novel in explaining the various relationships of the characters to one another. An analysis of the functions of these works of art also provides justification for the plot outline of the unfinished portion of the novel.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poem, "The Blessed Damozel," which is read to Han by Laura Tesvally while Han's sister and friends are at the Assembly Ball in New York is significant insofar as it provides a means of contrasting Han's deeper sensitivities from those of her materialistic sister, Virginia, and her friends. Their mutual appreciation of the poem points to the affinity Laura feels for Han. Laura is related to Rossetti himself and is in a sense continuing his romantic revolution throughout the novel. She has cut herself off from her own country, abhorring the lack of vitality in the static English society and has come to Saratoga after a brief stay in New York with the socially correct Parmores where she found similarly inactive, lifeless qualities. Her revolt will continue in her invasion of England with her American charges. Her initial discovery at this point in the novel of sensitivities and a spirit of revolt existing in Han will ultimately result in a loyalty to her charge so strong that she will make the final attack upon her own society in abetting Han's elopement from the Duke of Tintagel.
At Honourslove, Sir Guy dwells on a portrait of his mother painted by Millais, a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and thus a friend of Dante Rossetti. Over his desk "hung a small jewel-like picture in a heavy frame, with D. G. Rossetti inscribed beneath."(117) Both of the Thwartes are described as interested in painting and poetry. Their study contains "crowded bookshelves . . . and bold unsteady water-colours and charcoal sketches by Sir Helmsley himself."(117) Their Pre-Raphaelite tastes reveal the similarity of the Thwartes to Nan and her governess and foreshadow the eventual attraction of Sir Helmsley to Laura and Sir Guy to Nan. These interests reveal their inability to be confined to the conventions of their society. Furthermore, their interest in the arts was deemed by the nobility of the county "incredible"(111) for men in their position. This reaction also provides a further definition of Mrs. Wharton's theme of waste in the novel—a waste by the leisurely classes of society of the resources which are not used to preserve art because of their failure to appreciate or understand it.

The discovery of their mutual knowledge of "The Blessed Damozel," and The House of Life leads Nan to tell Laura that Sir Guy "'loved my liking Dante Gabriel.'"(164) Earlier Sir Guy tells his father of his enjoyable day spent with Nan which was heightened when she "'came to a dead point before the Rossetti in the study, and at once began to quote "The Blessed Damozel."'"(139) These works of art, along with the Rossetti painting which Nan thinks is "'perfectly beautiful,'" enable Mrs. Wharton to reveal the first stage in Nan's and Sir Guy's attractiveness to one another. Coupled with their mutual respect for tradition as embodied at Honourslove mentioned
earlier, this agreement in taste and sense of values belies the depth of their love.

Similarly, Sir Helmsley discovers Laura Testvalley's appeal when he learns she is aware of the replica of his own Rossetti painting and can even remember that on it "the embroidered border of the cloak is peach-coloured instead of blue . . . ."(235) All this "stirred up the old collector" in Sir Helmsley.(235) Laura also "stirred up" his artistic instincts, for his son comes upon him one afternoon copying in watercolor the Rossetti painting for "that remarkable woman," Laura Testvalley. He explains to his son that Laura had persuaded her uncle, Dante Rossetti, to sell him a first study of the "Bocca Baciata." Again the objet d'art structures the novel by revealing changes in the relationships between its characters.

Unlike Sir Guy, Ushant does not paint, and "in the realm of poetry, the Duke had never willingly risked himself."(244) Furthermore he has no knowledge of Rossetti or Laura Testvalley because, in his words, "'I'm afraid I know very few Italians.'"(182) Through stressing his unfamiliarity with poetry, and particularly the poetry of Rossetti who is a favorite of Nan's, Mrs. Wharton has emphasized the insularity of the Duke and his blindness to Nan's poetic sensibilities. Such spiritual flaws make clearer the reasons for their incompatibility later in the novel. The waste of the Duke's life intensified by his turning from the arts to concentrate on his ducal duties which he also despises, but feels bound to uphold even if in form only, is another variation on Mrs. Wharton's theme of waste in the leisure class.

Ironically, the Tintagels have Raphaels on their walls as opposed
to the Pre-Raphaelite, more revolutionary paintings of the Thwartes'.

Their conservative insularity and devotion to the propagation of their ducal line is symbolized by "the Duchess's boudoir in the London house, a narrow lofty room on whose crowded walls authentic Raphaels were ultimately mingled with watercolours executed by the Duchess's maiden aunts, and photographs of shooting-parties at the various ducal estates." This is an excellent example of Mrs. Wharton's combined use of "interior architecture" and the fine arts to intensify the Tintagel's lack of taste and spiritual sensitivity.

The paintings by Corregio at Longlands offer a means of contrasting the character of Nan and the Dowager. For Nan, the room in which they hung was a retreat. She saw in the paintings, notable for their dream-like quality due to their lighting effects, /5 "tunnels of radiance reaching to pure sapphire distances." (245) This light shines on "the golden limbs, the parted lips gleaming with laughter, the abandonment of young bodies under shimmering foliage" (245-246) -- the subjects of Corregio's paintings. These pictures would seem to be out of place in what had formerly been the Dowager's sitting room; but, rather than moving them from the room in which they had "always been," convention held sway over the Dowager, and, "in a world as solidly buttressed as the Dowager Duchess's by precedents, institutions and traditions, it would have seemed . . . subversive . . . to displace the pictures . . . ." (246) She had kept the paintings not for their intrinsic value, but out of a sense of duty.

On the contrary, Sir Guy looks at them, "blood beating high as it always did at the sight of beauty." (283) Nan had called them "mysterious,"
and Sir Guy reacts in the same way: "... they seemed full of mystery, as withdrawn into their own native world of sylvan loves and revels ... ."

(284) This brilliant dream world is immediately suggestive of Nan's and Sir Guy's love. At this point any possible union seems impossible with her present marriage to the Duke and his own need to act as guardian for Honours-love. However, as Nan says later, the scene of her meeting with the Duke in a ruin and fog seemed wrong somehow: "Lovers ought to meet under limpid skies and branches dripping with sunlight, like the nymphs and heroes of Correggio."(308) The paintings are also associated with the scene which has immediately preceded in the saloon of Longlands. The lively dances, "rhythmic chant," and the "panting and laughing" couples of Americans (282, 283) are reminiscent of the "revels," the "parted lips gleaming in laughter," and the "abandonment of young bodies" which appear in the paintings themselves. Mrs. Wharton looks with approval on the triumph of the American invasion upon a society which had become static and empty. Nan represents a combination and "a balance" of the vitality of the new American society and the "sense of the past" of English society--that which is "best in both societies."  

Mrs. Wharton uses one final work of art to delineate Nan's character. She describes Nan as being similar to Clarchen in Goethe's Egmont, whose song is a concrete expression of Nan who is "always too glad or too sad."(339) The song--

With love's thrilling rapture
What joy can compare!
Blissful
And tearful,
With thought-teeming brain;
--is first mentioned when Nan has arrived at Champions and learns that Thwartes will be at dinner that evening. Her new freedom and happiness is in dramatic contrast with the last time she had seen Sir Guy "sunk in despair" in the octagonal Temple of Love. The reference to the song thus intensifies the magnitude of her present emotion. As with the Corregios, Nan's governess and Sir Guy both concur with the analogy and their familiarity with the allusion is further evidence of their similar tastes in literature. Both speak with authority having seen Nan's ebb and tide of spirits. As Nan herself said, "There are so many people in me!"(340); and Mrs. Wharton, by the use of a specific work of art, has concretely united some of these "people" in a succinct definition of Nan's depth of feeling.

Nan, sensitive to the "rich, low murmur of the past," possesses a profundity of emotion which the dull, mechanical Duke can not possibly fulfill nor the society which he represents. Only Sir Guy, whose mind and sensibilities are considerably broadened by his appreciation of the arts and his travels to other societies where he discovered his mistake in a complete repudiation of the past, is the obvious match for Nan. Laura Test-valley is the tragic figure of the novel and a representative of Mrs. Wharton's theme of waste. The perpetrators of this waste are the satirically presented Duke and Dowager of Tintagel, the Lord and Lady Brightlingsea, and even indirectly, the obscure figure of Mrs. Parmore of Washington Square.
society, who is simply a pale version of the Dowager Duchess—all of whom are representatives of the static elements in English and American societies. In contradicting the conventions of a society which had placed its indelible stamp on her intended husband, Sir Helmsley Thwartes, Laura's marriage was made impossible. However, the other theme which appears in the novel—the triumph, after all, of a "deep and abiding love"(358)—communicates some of the lovers' satisfaction to Miss Testvalley whose "sterile suffering" is consequently mollified to some extent.

Gaillard Lapsley calls the work as it stands a "noble torso and an artistic 'case'."(371) As it stands, many difficulties in characterization appear; and much of the significant detail is too obvious, too interconnected with sets of characters to avoid the disparaging judgment by the critics of "trite." However, many discoveries can be made by an analysis of Mrs. Wharton's significant details of all the three classifications which help to justify later episodes which are only hinted at in Mrs. Wharton's summary of her plan. Lapsley's major question seems to be how Mrs. Wharton would justify Han's choice to elope with Sir Guy "in wisdom as well as in passion."(371) He concludes that Mrs. Wharton must secure Han's future by a relation between her and Guy that was grounded on something deeper or at any rate more enduring than passion, otherwise her flight must end in disaster. . . ."(371) That this relation is grounded on something more profound than passion is evident, through the author's own details, in their similar responses to the past and its tradition and their spirits which are capable of feeling and understanding many of the mysteries of art, and therefore life itself. It is difficult to imagine in the novel's
completed form the possibility of its descriptive elements being any more carefully oriented to character, action, and theme, and at the same time communicating a light, though deftly aimed, satire. For these reasons, in addition to its important relations mentioned earlier to preceding works, *The Buccaneers* merits the attention of the serious reader of Mrs. Wharton's fiction. This Gaillard Lapsley, in deciding to publish the unfinished work, fortunately realized.
CONCLUSION

This thesis has been a study of one of Mrs. Wharton's artistic techniques. The importance of description in her work has often been overlooked and as a result some of her novels have been discredited unjustly. The three categories of details include much of what is important in her descriptive and scenic detail and, interestingly enough, leave very little description to be discussed. Mrs. Wharton's view of the world may seem urbane, cosmopolitan, and unduly materialistic if one considers the kind of architecture, the kind of artifact, and the kind of objet d'art which interest her and are used by her to develop her own creation. But it must be remembered she dealt with a society whose interests encompassed little else, and it was this society's manners which she depicted in most of her novels and novelettes.

Descriptive detail has been discussed in the preceding chapters to point out that such detail does not exist for its own sake, or simply to establish the "period" whose atmosphere is being evoked. Rather the details have been shown to be related organically to the particular novel and to be functional by promoting consistency in Mrs. Wharton's artistic vision. They reveal character and interrelationships between characters. They motivate and support the action of the novels by often foreshadowing certain events in the novel; thus they serve as structural devices. By using these details as a system of observation in the novel, it is often possible to obtain insights into Mrs. Wharton's philosophy and ultimately arrive at more precise thematic definition. Finally, when such details appear as symbols, several
functions are combined; and, as a result, the meaning of the novel is enriched.

This is particularly true in the satiric novels of manners such as The House of Mirth and The Custom of the Country, where functional details serve as guideposts between the various strata of society and plot the ascent and descent of characters through these levels. They are a means whereby Mrs. Wharton can express the manners and her satire on these manners. They function as a means to compare and contrast the aristocracies of Europe and America. This is applicable also to The Reef whose setting provides a sensitive register for the varied temperaments and moral codes of the characters in this psychological "novel of situation."

In the historic novels of manners, where only one stratum of society is being discussed, Mrs. Wharton's selection of the significant detail provides for subtle differentiation between members of that stratum and reveals their individualities. Thus in The Age of Innocence and The Old Maid, the rigid social structure of New York in the third quarter of the nineteenth century is found to contain its revolutionaries whose spirit of revolt is indicated by significant details of the three categories. A dramatic extension of her method in The Old Maid, where the symbolic artifact has a continued importance throughout the novelette, provides that work with compounded irony and unifies the main and subordinate actions.

This latter extension is particularly valuable for the development of the theme in Ethan Frome, Summer, Hudson River Bracketed, and The Gods Arrive. In these works emerge two main themes in much of her fiction: the deterministic forces of the past which prevent individuals from pursuing their wants, and the utility of the tradition of the art and society
which is to be found in the past. All of these works have in common the use of a pervading symbol. However, in *Hudson River Bracketed*, *The Gods Arrive*, and her last novel, *The Buccaneers*, her use of such details is often trite and heavy handed. Also, when a particular scene or section of the novel is found lacking in significant detail, that portion of the novel appears ill conceived and artistically unsavory.

In *The Buccaneers*, Mrs. Wharton has combined several functions of the significant detail. By revealing character and foreshadowing action, these details forecast the future structure of the unfinished novel. They also serve as signposts to the reader for delineating between strata of society and individuals within one stratum. Mrs. Wharton's use of detail throughout the corpus of her fiction is consistent, and many conclusions concerning her philosophy of art and life can be obtained by observing this method. Form and taste are all important for beauty in either life or art. But they must be infused with vitality if life is to be meaningful and happy.
NOTES

INTRODUCTION


5 Auchincloss, p. 8.

6 The most complete bibliography of the writings of Edith Wharton is found in Nevius, pp. 260-263. The division of her works that I have made in my thesis is the same as Edward Wagenknecht has made in his Cavalcade of the American Novel (New York, 1952), p. 255.


8 Edwin T. Bowden, The Themes of Henry James (New Haven, 1956), pp. 54-61. A particularly apt example of Bowden's system of observation is contained in his consideration of The Portrait of a Lady.


11 Ibid., 149.

12 A Backward Glance, p. 197.

13 Bowden, p. 21.


15 Nevius, p. 34.

16 Henry James, Transatlantic Sketches (Boston: James R. Osgood & Co., 1875), p. 313. Quoted in Bowden, p. 11.
Edith Wharton, The Valley of Decision, 2nd ed. (New York, 1914), p. 262; E. K. Brown notes in his Etude Critique, p. 327, that "Ses personnages les plus favorisés ont tous, un sentiment très vif 'de la présence du passé': ils conceivent tous la vie individuelle comme un minuscule atome dans la grande tradition; et leurs sympathies sociales, leurs exaltations esthétiques, ne sont qu'une contribution infinitésimale à cette civilisation qui est, pour Mrs. Wharton, la somme des valeurs humaines."

Edith Wharton, A Motor-flight through France (New York, 1908), p. 11. E. K. Brown notes in his Etude Critique, p. 326, that "M. Eliot fait remarquer que l'artiste doit toujours être conscient de la présence du passé." Nevius, p. 11, says that "... her sarcasm, according to Percy Lubbock, was never vented more freely than on the claims and assumptions of that same old honourable tradition [of Faubourg St. Germain society], 'when it is not the past that rules it with a living spirit, but convention with a dead hand.'"


Nevius, pp. 37-38.

Ibid., p. 50.

See Edith Wharton, "The Great American Novel," Yale Review, XVI (1927), p. 652, where she writes, "Traditional society, with its old-established distinctions of class, its pass-words, exclusions, delicate shades of language and behavior, is one of man's oldest works of art, the least conscious and the most instinctive; yet the modern American novelist is told that the social and educated being is an unreality unworthy of his attention, and that only the man with the dinner-pail is human, and hence available for his purpose." Mrs. Wharton considers this advice to be mistaken.

Bowden, pp. 114-115.


Ibid., p. 107.

Ibid., p. 110.

Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, Jr., The Decoration of Houses (New York, 1897), pp. 10-11.

art is re-presentation—the giving back in conscious form of the shapeless raw material of experience. The attempt to give back any fragment of life in painting or sculpture or music presupposes transposition, "stylization." To re-present in words is far more difficult, because the relation is so close between model and artist.


30The Writing of Fiction, p. 9.

31The Writing of Fiction, p. 138.


34The Decoration of Houses, p. xxi.

35The Writing of Fiction, p. 19.

36Artifacts and their artistic function in her works lend further support to her belief enunciated by E. K. Brown, p. 326, that "l'art doit être brutal où la vie est brutale, civilisé où elle est civilisée." The American and European strata of society which Mrs. Wharton depicts are notably "civilisées" in varying degrees which can be seen in the sort of artifacts used in connection with them.

37The Valley of Decision, pp. 501-502.

38Fritz, p. 54.

39The Valley of Decision, p. 249.

40The Writing of Fiction, pp. 28-29.

41A Motor-flight through France, pp. 9-10.

42A Backward Glance, p. 294.

43The Writing of Fiction, p. 85.

44Hoffmann, p. 282.

45Bowden, p. 60.

47. A Backward Glance, p. 197.

48. Ibid., p. 225.

49. The Writing of Fiction, p. 7.

50. Ibid., p. 84.

51. E. K. Brown, in his discussion of Twilight Sleep, quotes a typical descriptive passage which includes all three types of detail and concludes on p. 312:

"... ces passages sont pleinement justifiés par leur rapport intime avec le caractère des personnages. Ces pièces ne sont que la concrétisation des traits essentiels de Mrs. Landish et de sa nièce. Il est indiscutable que, si précises, si savantes, si techniques que soient les description de Mrs. Wharton, elles sont toujours révélatrices du caractère d'une classe d'un individu.

See also Marilyn Jones Lyde, Edith Wharton: Convention and Morality in the Work of a Novelist (Norman, Oklahoma, 1959), pp. 150-151 and note 15.

52. Lyde, pp. 147-148:

In her hands, the milieu, whether complex society or bare New England landscape, is never merely scenic but an integral part of the action and a tangible embodiment of convention. Again this is easier to observe in her novels of manners than in her psychological novels or in a novel demeuble such as Ethan Frome. The more dense the social background and the more intricate the patterns of behavior, the richer the subject will be in delicate shades of contrast and hence in opportunities for conflict: the slightest departure from precedent will create a potentially dramatic incident.

53. Wagenknecht, p. 266. A complete discussion of determinism in Edith Wharton's works is contained in Lyde.
54 Lyde, p. 156.


56 A Backward Glance, pp. 95-96.

57 The Decoration of Houses, pp. xxi, xxii.

58 The Valley of Decision, p. 150.

59 Fritz, p. 2.

CHAPTER ONE


Throughout the ranks of French society the diffusion of certain traits is apparent: a reverence for tradition, a sense of continuity with the past, taste, intellectual honesty, absolute probity in business, a love of privacy, and a respect for the practical and intellectual abilities of women... it is in the light of a reality conveniently implied by French manners that we may view the world of Edith Wharton's fiction. The manners of the "sham" society which figures in *The House of Mirth* helped to generate illusion because they were based largely on considerations of wealth.


4 For other reasons such references aid in our understanding of character, see Edith Wharton, *The Writing of Fiction* (New York, 1925), p. 46: the character who serves as reflector in the novel should "never record anything not naturally within his register." Also, it is as necessary for the novelist as for the playwright that "the number of objects on the stage... should be limited to the actual requirements of the drama." (p. 83) Furthermore, when his characters are confronted by a particular situation, the novelist "must... bear in mind... what his characters, being what they are, would make of the situation." (p. 140)


6 The phraseology used here is from Irving Howe, "A Reading of *The House of Mirth*," Edith Wharton: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Irving Howe (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1962), p. 129, where he specifies the waste as "waste of spirit, the waste of energy, the waste of beauty."


8 See Nevius, p. 56, where he states as the theme of *The House of Mirth* "the victimizing effect of a particular environment on one of
its more helplessly characteristic products." In Wharton's *A Backward Glance* (New York, 1934), p. 207, she writes, "... a frivolous society can acquire dramatic significance only through what its frivolity destroys." The same opinion is present in *The House of Mirth* (New York, 1905) p. 7, where she writes that Lily "must have cost a great deal to make, that a great many dull and ugly people must, in some mysterious way, have been sacrificed to produce her"; and see p. 112 where Selden says, "And a society like ours wastes such good material in producing its little patch of purple."

This is true of other novelists of manners such as Balzac and Stendhal whom Mrs. Wharton admired; see *The Writing of Fiction*, pp. 6-8.

For a complete discussion of determinism particularly in relation to *The House of Mirth*, see Lyde, pp. 125-140; in relation to *The Custom of the Country*, see Nevius, pp. 152-153. For a discussion of both novels in terms of naturalism, see Larry Rubin, "Aspects of Naturalism in Four Novels by Edith Wharton," *Twentieth Century Literature*, II (1957), 182-189.


See *The House of Mirth*, pp. 486-487; and Nevius, pp. 152-153.

In *A Backward Glance*, pp. 95-96, Wharton writes, "In every society there is the room, and the need, for a cultivated leisure class; but from the first the spirit of our institutions has caused us to waste this class instead of using it."


Rideout, p. 151.

*Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, Jr., The Decoration of Houses* (New York, 1907), p. 10.

Rideout, p. 152.


*Ibid*, p. 3. Hereafter page references from this edition will be included in the text itself in parentheses.


*The Decoration of Houses*, p. 19.

*Ibid.*, p. 120.
Out of doors, in the mean monotonous streets, without architecture, without great churches or palaces, or any visible memorials of an historic past, what could New York offer to a child whose eyes had been filled with shapes of immortal beauty and immemorial significance? One of the most depressing impressions of my childhood is my recollection of the intolerable ugliness of New York, of its untended streets and the narrow houses so lacking in external dignity...

See also The Arts and Man, p. 212-213. See also The Decoration of Houses, p. 195.
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42 Ibid., p. 110.

43 Lyde, pp. 117-118.

44 See Rideout, p. 168.


46 The Decoration of Houses, p. 4 and note.

47 Rideout, p. 164.

48 Diana Trilling, pp. 110-111.

49 Stites, p. 662.

50 Diana Trilling, p. 113.

51 Rideout, p. 165.

52 Ibid., p. 165.

53 Edith Wharton, The Custom of the Country (New York, 1913), p. 7. Hereafter page references to this novel will be included in the text itself in parentheses.

54 Nevius, p. 151.


56 The hotel is named after the loud-mouthed herald of the Greek army before Troy; see Alphonse Joseph Fritz, "The Use of the Arts of Decoration in Edith Wharton's Fiction," Doc. Diss. Ser. 19088 (University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, 1956), p. 185.

57 The Decoration of Houses, pp. 27-28.

58 Nevius, p. 151.


60 The Decoration of Houses, pp. 30, 185.
Concerning preceding details of architecture and their accordance with taste, see pp. 19, 21, 27ff.

Lyde, p. 107.

Hoffmann, p. 158.


The Decoration of Houses, pp. 22-23, 27.

The Writing of Fiction, p. 46.


Nevius, p. 213.


Nevius, pp. 150-151.

Stites, pp. 649-650.

Auchincloss, p. 24.

Howe, p. 12.

Ibid., p. 12

Lyde, p. 108.

Ibid., p. 108

Nevius, p. 159.

Lyde, p. 67n.

Nevius, p. 150.

CHAPTER TWO


2 Ibid., p. 43.


7 Ibid., p. 213.


10 Ibid., p. 47.

11 Fritz, p. 225.

12 Edith Wharton, The Reef (New York, 1912), p. 73. Hereafter page references to this novel will be placed in the text itself in parentheses.

13 Lyde, p. 148

14 Ibid., pp. 88-89.


19 Fritz, p. 147.
Italics in these passages are my own.

Bowden, p. 11.


See Lyde, p. 127, where she states: "Society is governed by law, written and unwritten, and of the two the unwritten is vastly the stronger, representing as it does the universal sanction of human will. In this sense, then, of unwritten and nearly universal power, social convention [represented in The Reef by Madame de Chantelle and Givré itself] acquires something of the same dignity as the tragic fate of Greek drama."

Edith Wharton, Madame de Treymes (New York, 1907), p. 121.


Madame de Treymes, p. 135.

CHAPTER THREE

2 Ibid., p. 7.
3 Ibid., p. 5.
5 Edith Wharton, The Age of Innocence (New York, 1920), p. 42. Subsequent page references from this edition will be included in the text itself in parentheses.
6 Lyde, p. 150.
8 Ibid., p. 350.
10 Lyde, p. 107.
11 Fritz, p. 204; here Fritz discusses Eastlake's book published in 1870 entitled Hints on Household Taste, Upholstery, and Other Details.
12 Hopkins, p. 353.
13 Lyde, p. 5.
14 Hopkins, p. 354.
15 Lyde, p. 146.
16 Ibid., p. 151.
17 Fritz, p. 253.
18 Ibid., p. 258.
19 The italics are my own.

See Hopkins, pp. 356-357. The omnipresent distance between Ellen and Archer is notable in the imagery within the novel of precipice, abyss, and vortex. Miss Hopkins says that "to step out of the established order, to seek reality in a relationship outside its pale, is to step into the void, the dark abyss." See also Nevius, pp. 188-189.

Again see Miss Hopkins's article for a discussion of the religious imagery in the novel, pp. 354-355.

Hopkins, p. 353.


Hopkins, p. 353.


Lyde, pp. 95-96.

Nevius, pp. 188-189.

Tbid., pp. 181-182.

Lyde, p. 5.

Tbid., p. 97.


*New Year's Day*, p. 138.

Edith Wharton, *The Old Maid* ("The 'Fifties") (New York, 1924), p. 5. Hereafter all page references from this edition will be included in the text in parentheses.


CHAPTER FOUR

1See H. S. Canby, in Literary History of the United States (New York, 1943), p. 121, where he notes the additional horror of the tale being the one which the observer, coming from a world where the spiritual effects of crude poverty are unknown, sees the "sordid misery" of Ethan's house and life.


3Edith Wharton, Ethan Frome (New York, 1922), p. 20. Hereafter page references from this edition will be included in the text itself in parentheses.


6Blake Nevius, Edith Wharton: A Study of Her Fiction (Berkeley, 1953), p. 120.


8Brennan, p. 352.

9Ibid., p. 352.


11Brennan, pp. 352-353.

12Ibid., p. 353-354.

13It will be remembered the dinner Mattie prepares for Ethan consists of doughnuts, stewed blueberries, and pickles. (82)


15Nevius, p. 129.

16Edith Wharton, Summer (New York, 1917), p. 236. Other page references are included in the text.
17 See Nevius, pp. 172-173 for his discussion of the fireworks scene in particular.

18 Nevius, p. 129.


21 Nevius, p. 219.


23 Nevius, p. 320.

24 Ibid., p. 222.


27 Nevius, pp. 221-222.


30 Quinn, pp. 573-574.

31 Ibid., p. 573.

32 Edith Wharton, *The Gods Arrive* (New York, 1932), pp. 22-23. Hereafter page references from this edition will be included within the text itself in parentheses.

33 A Motor-flight through France, pp. 10-11.

34 Nevius, p. 227.
CHAPTER FIVE

1 Edith Wharton, The Buccaneers (New York, 1938), p. 95. This edition contains "A Note on The Buccaneers" by Gaillard Lapsley on pages 360-371. Hereafter, page references from this edition will be included in the text itself in parentheses.


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