INVESTIGATING PLACE-IDENTITY THEORY IN THE LIFE AND SELECTED WORKS OF EDITH WHARTON: DEPICTIONS OF EXPATRIATES AND AMERICAN TOURISTS IN FRANCE

By

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the family and friends who have been steadfast in their support of my education even through the tough times. I could not have achieved this without you. Thank you all for being my light.

"There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that receives it."

Edith Wharton

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ABSTRACT

Place and identity are inseparably intertwined, shaping each other in profound ways. My research delves into how the nuances of place—particularly through the lens of expatriation—influence the personal identity and literary expressions of the modernist writer Edith Wharton. By situating Wharton within the context of her expatriation, this dissertation seeks to unearth fresh insights into how expatriate experiences shaped her narratives and notions of self. Building on established theories of identity by scholars such as Erik Erikson and Harold Proshansky and incorporating perspectives on environmental psychology and the theory of place-identity, my research traverses the understanding of the literary repercussions of expatriation. Contributions by theorists such as Sheldon Stryker, Peter Burke, Georg Gasser, Matthias Stefan, and Edward Relph also provide a conceptual backbone for this investigation. At the intersection of expatriation, identity, and literary creation, my research illuminates how physical and cultural displacement influenced Edith Wharton and her literary works. This project aims to broaden the understanding of how the landscapes—both literal and figurative—that she navigated informed her creative output and personal identity. By exploring the expatriate experiences and select literary works of Edith Wharton, this dissertation offers new perspectives on the complex interplay between place, identity, and literature. The findings not only expand understanding of Wharton and her works, but also offer broader insights into the enduring question of how place shapes personal identity.

Keywords: Identity, Expatriate, Place, Environment, Psychology, Place-Identity, Place-Attachment, Tourism, France, Identity Crisis, Identity Salience

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INTRODUCTION

Edith Wharton emerges as a trailblazer in the exploration of identity, both in her personal reflections and fictional works, and as this study illustrates, she created characters and worlds that exemplified the concept of place-identity before the theory of place-identity existed. Furthermore, Wharton wrote about identity on a broader scale long before psychologists such as Erik Erikson popularized the term in the mid-twentieth century, describing personal identity as being "based on two simultaneous observations: the immediate perception of one's self sameness and continuity in time; and the simultaneous perception of the fact that others recognize one's sameness and continuity" (*Identity* 22). Erikson's notion of personal identity, though still ambiguous, became well-known in the 1950s. Even famed psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud only used "identity" sparingly, opting for the term "identification." As Philip Gleason explains, identity has "been used in English since the sixteenth century. It has a technical meaning in algebra and logic and has been associated with the perennial mind-body problem in philosophy since the time of John Locke" (911). Identity, per our current, less scientific understanding "came into use as a popular social-science term only in the 1950s" (Gleason 910). Edith Wharton was, therefore, well before her time in her understanding of identity. She writes in her autobiography, *A Backward Glance* (1934):

> It was on a bright day of midwinter, in New York. The little girl who eventually became me, but as yet was neither me nor anybody else in particular, but merely a soft anonymous morsel of humanity—this little girl, who bore my name, was going for a walk with her father. The episode is literally the first thing I can remember about her, and therefore I date the birth of her identity from that day. (23)

Wharton explicitly employs the term "identity" in this passage—by dating the "birth of her identity" through a memory, it is evident that she is using the term with regard to personal identity, not in a scientific way. The description Wharton uses of herself as a "soft anonymous morsel" implies that identity is malleable. As a "soft morsel," the little girl has not yet formed an identity; she is soft, and her identity will be molded.

Throughout *A Backward Glance*, Wharton explores elements of her own identity, often including place, with chapters organized by noteworthy places: "New York and the Mount," "London, 'Qu'Acre' and 'Lamb,'" and "Paris." Locations also unify sections on her childhood travels in Europe and memories of Old New York. Similarly, Wharton imbues her fictional characters with complex identities. Anna Leath from Wharton's *The Reef* (1912) illustrates the malleability of identity through interpersonal relationships and different environments, becoming an expatriate living in France. Undine Spragg from *The Custom of the Country* (1913) illuminates the effects of place on identity by changing place several times throughout the novel—from the Midwest to New York City, and to different locations in France. Susy Lansing from *The Glimpses of the Moon* (1922) exhibits dramatic shifts in her identity as she changes place throughout the novel; Susy's identity is impacted by *specific* places as well as broader spaces. The identities of Wharton's characters make them ripe for analysis; it is nearly impossible to ignore the psychological and specifically, environmentally psychological, undercurrents in her fictional works. As her fiction illustrates, places, whether large or small, can have profoundly shape the identity of an individual.

My scholarly inquiry into the notion of identity traces back to my youth. During childhood, I grappled with an unclear sense of self and often felt as though my identity was imposed on me, whether by societal expectations or the town in which I was raised. Despite

obtaining a Bachelor of Science in Psychology, my search for identity remained elusive. It was during my pursuit of my master's degree in English that I delved deeper into the exploration of identity, as evidenced by my thesis which focuses on the imposition of outside forces on identity in the works of Vladimir Nabokov. The focal point of my investigation was how external forces shape and constrain personal identity. My thesis omitted a fundamental concept, though: I never provided a working definition of the word "identity." This omission is a recurring issue within scholarly discourse, which is problematic. If a reader does not know the writer's working definition of the word, then the communication between the two will be compromised.

My curiosity regarding identity persists, and it now extends to the interplay between *place* and personal identity. I have moved from place to place quite a lot in my adult life. It is a cliché: I moved to try to "find myself." Therefore, I feel compelled to explore the extent to which place influences the formation and evolution of personal identity. I endeavor not only to define identity but also to scrutinize its relationship with place. Just as my own experiences influenced my interests in identity, Edith Wharton's life experiences influenced her fictional work. I feel an affinity with her characters; their desires to realize new "places" in the world mimic my own. Wharton's characters also strive to navigate their personal identities in different places, and the impact of place on character is apparent in her work. My life is not a work of fiction, but I could be likened to one of Wharton's characters—trying to ascertain a consistent personal identity but, nonetheless, affected by place over time.

Edith Wharton – Lifelong Expatriate

Wharton herself tried to forge a consistent personal identity, also affected significantly by place. Why, though, is place-identity an important addition to the scholarship and conversation

on Edith Wharton's work? If identity encompasses all aspects of who a person is, then it is inescapable from place and environment. For Wharton, place enhanced her identity from a young age. There is an intimacy in her use of place throughout her novels that necessitates further analysis, and to explore the significance of place in her work, it is important to understand her background.

Born on January 24, 1862, into an upper-class Old New York family, Edith Newbold Jones frequently traveled to Europe as a child and continued to do so into adulthood before permanently moving to France in late 1906. Biographer Hermione Lee writes, "The Jones family lived in Italy and France. . .between 1866 and 1872, and so set the course of Wharton's life: after those childhood years she would always think of herself as 'an exile in America'" (7). Recalling her dissatisfaction with the New York society into which she was born, Wharton writes, "When I was young it used to seem to me that the group in which I grew up was like an empty vessel into which no new wine would ever again be poured" (*Backward* 24). Wharton reminisces on her sojourns to Italy and France as a child. One "Parisian event" she writes of is the discovery of storytelling. Wharton explains, "I cannot remember the time when I did not want to 'make up' stories. But it was in Paris that I found the necessary formula" (*Backward* 33). Much to the dismay of her parents, she abandoned her childhood playmates in order to write. Wharton states that she "had to obey the furious Muse" (*Backward* 35). She is clear about her dismay regarding New York City. Wharton shares:

> 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, so crammed with smug and suffocating upholstery. How could I understand that people who had seen Rome and Seville, Paris and London, could come

> back to live contentedly between Washington Square and the Central Park? (*Backward* 54-55)

Her father's library was the only place Wharton found solace in New York; in a society in which young girls were not encouraged to read literature, she read constantly. Wharton writes, "By the time I was seventeen, though I had not read every book in my father's library, I had looked into them all. Those I devoured first were the poets and the few literary critics, foremost of course Sainte-Beuve" (*Backward* 71). She continues:

> the books which made the strongest impression on me doubtless because they reached a part of my mind that no one had thought of arousing were two shabby volumes unearthed among my brother's college text-books: an abridgement of Sir William Hamilton's 'History of Philosophy' and a totally forgotten work called 'Coppe's Elements of Logic.' (*Backward* 71)

Wharton was fortunate to have access to her father's library. Sheila Liming writes, "during the era in which Wharton lived—one's gender dictated much of the conversation where both property and rights were concerned. Wharton had no *right* to a formalized education; but she succeeded in becoming educated all the same" (9). Her father's library and brother's textbooks were integral parts of Wharton's education, and, recognizing the importance of a library, she would go on to create a large one of her own as an adult.

Young Edith's desire to travel abroad did not dissipate, but eight years would pass before the Jones family would travel abroad again:

> During the long eight years since our return from Europe, how often had I not said to my father: "Papa, when are we going back?" and how sadly had I not listened to his answer: "My dear, whenever we can afford it." Now, unhappily, his health made it necessary that

> he should not spend another winter in New York; but the doctors seemed to think that in a warmer climate he might live for years, and, dearly as I loved him, the impending joys of travel were much more vivid to me than any fears for his health. (*Backward* 85)

Indeed, Wharton never felt at peace in New York, and she often lived in Paris for long periods before permanently moving to France in late 1906. After her father's death abroad, she and her mother returned to New York, and Edith eventually married Teddy Wharton in 1885.

While her marriage with Teddy would end in divorce in 1913, Wharton and her husband shared a love for travel. Claudine Lesage expounds on Wharton's adult travels to France with Teddy Wharton in 1906: "Perhaps most important. . . was the experience of new surroundings, which would soon become valuable material for her writing" (39). Wharton was already realizing the power of "new surroundings" on her writing; the impact of place, and France specifically, was already making itself known. Furthermore, Lesage states, "Edith once again found herself reluctantly homeward bound, faced with the unpleasant prospect of long months ahead in Lenox and, worse, New York. Her one consoling thought was of returning the following year" (39). Wharton desperately ached to stay in France; she found a place in which she felt a sense of belonging, and she did not want to leave.

In late 1906, Edith and Teddy decided to make a permanent move to Paris. They "rented George Vanderbilt's Paris apartment at 58 rue de Varenne" (Lee 227). Wharton writes,

> A year or two after the publication of 'The House of Mirth' my husband and I decided to exchange our little house in New York for a flat in Paris. My husband suffered increasingly from the harsh winds and sudden changes of temperature of the New York winter, and latterly we had spent the cold months in rather aimless drifting on the French and the Italian Rivieras. Alassio, San Remo, Bordighera, Menton, Monte Carlo, Cannes;

> we knew them all to satiety, and in none could I hope to find the kind of human communion I cared for. (257)

Ultimately, as she explains, they "hired a flat in a modern house in the same street [53 rue de Varenne], and there I remained till 1920, so that my thirteen years of Paris life were spent entirely in the rue de Varenne" (258). It seems it was not simply France, but Paris herself that provided the sense of belonging and communion Wharton desired.

After World War I, during which Wharton was involved in relief efforts in France, she made the decision to move from the city to the countryside. She writes,

> My chief feeling, I confess, was that I was tired oh, so tired! I wanted first of all, and beyond all, to get away from Paris, away from streets and houses altogether and for always, into the country, or at least the near-country of a Paris suburb. In motoring out to visit our group of refugee colonies to the north of Paris I had sometimes passed through a little village near Ecouen. In one of its streets stood a quiet house which I had never noticed. . . . (362).

The house that Wharton describes is the Pavillon Colombe. Wharton would live there until she died at the age of seventy-five years old. It is important to note that "She only returned to the United States twice after her move to France, the final time in 1923 to receive her Honorary Doctorate from Yale" ("Edith Wharton"). She is even buried in France, in the Cimetière des Gonards in Versailles.

What did France provide to Wharton, though, that sparked such a strong yearning to stay? In her book, *French Ways and Their Meaning*, Wharton reveals her thoughts on France:

> The French have always been a gay and free and Rabelaisian people. They attach a great deal of importance to lovemaking, but they consider it more simply and less solemnly

> than we. They are cool, resourceful and merry, crack jokes about the relations between the sexes, and are used to the frank discussion of what someone tactfully called 'the operations of Nature.' They are puzzled by our queer fear of our own bodies, and accustomed to relate openly and unapologetically the anecdotes that Anglo-Saxons snicker over privately and with apologies. They define pornography as a taste for the nasty, and not as an interest in the natural. But nothing would be more mistaken than to take this as proving that family feeling is less deep and tender in France than elsewhere, or the conception of the social virtues different. (59)

Wharton acknowledges the differences in French and American thinking regarding sexuality. France offered a freedom of sexuality, and of rhetoric on the topic, that one was not afforded in America. Wharton is careful not to make the French seem as if they are *only* concerned with sexuality, though. She informs her reader that the French are still "deep and tender," and that they are virtuous people. For Wharton, personally, she found this sexual freedom in France advantageous in her own life.

Sexuality is, of course, only one aspect of personal identity (though these aspects differ greatly between individuals) so, what else about France as place informed Wharton's personal identity? Wharton states, "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. It is because the French have always been so innately sure of this, that, without burdening themselves with formulas, they have instinctively applied to living the same rules that they applied to artistic creation" (*French* 41). Wharton then goes on to state that the French "are a race of artists" (*French* 51). Wharton, who had been imbued with a thirst for art and knowledge from a young age, found herself among a culture that incorporated art into everyday life.

Learning is also an integral part of the French experience, and pertinent to the lives of both Wharton and her characters. Wharton argues that, in America, education was subpar; she states, "Every sham and substitute for education and literature and art had steadily crowded out the real thing. 'Get-rich-quick' is a much less dangerous device than 'get-educated-quick,' but the popularity of the first has led to the attempt to realise the second" (*French* 67). Wharton further explicates that the French produce "minds capable of more sustained effort and a larger range of thought than our quick doses of learning" (*French* 67). Education can be viewed as an integral part of one's personal identity. For Wharton, who desired an education from the time she was a child, education and learning engulfed a large part of her personal identity. While in France, Wharton was surrounded by individuals she felt to be more intellectual than many Americans.

Wharton compares French women to American women; this is a curious task, and it would have been a necessity for Wharton to incorporate her French and American identities into her personal identity. Wharton was an American woman, but she lived in France for much of her adult life. Her national identity is unique in its duality. National identity is defined as "A sense of a nation as a cohesive whole, as represented by . . . distinctive traditions, culture, linguistic or political features" ("national"). While Wharton never relinquished her American citizenship, one may assert that she felt more of an affinity toward French traditions and customs, which aligns with a French national identity.

The duality of Wharton's national identities complicates her exposition of American and French women. Wharton describes the difference between French and American women: "Compared with the women of France the average American woman is still in the kindergarten" (*French* 88). Wharton further explains, "The reason why American women are not really 'grown

up' in comparison with the women of the most highly civilised countries—such as France—is that all their semblance of freedom, activity and authority bears not much more likeness to real living than the exercises of the Montessori infant" (*French* 88). While seemingly harsh, Wharton simply points out that the "freedoms" of American women are not real; there is only a "semblance" of freedom. This lack of freedom, in turn, keeps American women from "growing up." They have no authority, and their activity is limited. In France, Wharton notes, "The Frenchwoman rules French life, and she rules it under a triple crown, as a business woman, as a mother, and above all as an artist" (*French* 94). In France, it was not uncommon for a wife to be her husband's business partner, a role that was practically unheard of in America. While French women still play the role of mothers, they are *allowed* to be much more than that. Wharton, herself, desired more from life than to simply be an ornament at the latest society function, or a lady of the house. It is clear that Wharton, insofar as gender roles, exhibits the national identity of a Frenchwoman. In France, she found a place in which she could develop her personal identity and be more as a woman.

While experience does not fully dictate what an author writes, or how she can craft her characters, it is often a starting point. Wharton writes, "The mirror, indeed, is the artist's mind, with all his experiences reflected in it; but the work of art, from the smallest to the greatest, should be something projected, not reflected, something on which his mirrored experiences, at the right conjunction of the stars, are to be turned for its full illumination" (*Writing* 41). The artist's mind is a mirror, but it must do more than simply reflect experiences. The artist must take the experiences and expound upon them. Wharton states, "As to experience, intellectual and moral, the creative imagination can make a little go a long way" (*Writing* 17). So, the writer can use her own experiences, and the "creative imagination" then enriches those experiences to make

them art. Wharton beautifully enlightens her reader on this process: "Experience, observation, the looks and ways and words of 'real people,' all melted and fused in the white heat of the creative fires—such is the mingled stuff which the novelist pours into the firm mould of his narrative" (*Backward* 215). Per France, Wharton did use her experiences as an expatriate to create her characters. Julie Olin-Ammentorp claims, "She was an expatriate and a hybrid. . . .With a household combining French and American servants and French and American habits, she created her own environment, one that was, for her, the best of both worlds" (241). Wharton took her own experiences and observations and, through her "creative fire" turned them into characters and novels. She often situates her American characters in France, as she lived in her real life, as a "test for cultural adaptation" (Lee 281). This type of adaptation closely relates to place-identity; one must adapt and embrace new places for them to be integrated into one's personal identity.[1] This study illustrates the ways in which Wharton took her own experiences as an expatriate and, through "creative fire" penned fictional works that exemplify the expatriate experience.

Wharton Scholarship: Place and Psychology

Consistent with general trends in literary studies, Wharton scholars typically discuss identity through the lenses of gender, race, and socioeconomic status, and identity usually remains undefined, harkening back to the idea that the word "identity" is typically not defined in scholarly conversations. Most scholarly approaches to Wharton's work often overlook the importance of place. As Jessica Schubert McCarthy explains,

[1] Erik Erikson argues that two identities must come together to become one; Erikson refers to the personal identity of the individual and the communal culture of place melding into one's personal identity.

> Feminist critics. . .have found many rich veins to mine in her reflections of the challenges facing women writers, and scholars of race and transatlanticism have found much to discuss in her war writings. Even more recently, historical events such as the United States' billion-dollar banking bailout remind us of Wharton's relevance, as evidenced by renewed interest in *The Custom of the Country*, her novel of social and financial climbing. (103)

In *Edith Wharton: A Biography*, R.W.B. Lewis, Edith Wharton's first biographer, concentrates on gender and socioeconomic status in Wharton's work. Lewis states that her work is a "testimony to the female experience under modern historical and social conditions, to the modes of entrapment, betrayal, and exclusion devised for women in the first decades of the American and European twentieth century" (xiii). Maureen E. Montgomery examines gender and class formation in Wharton's work: "with the initiation of daughters into their role in high society and with the ways that the vagaries of the marriage market were negotiated" (43). Elizabeth Ammons acknowledges the "erasure of race in Wharton's writing, the ostensible nonexistence of race as a category despite the fact that Wharton lived at a time and led her life in such a way that racial difference was an inescapable part of life" (68). It is logical that scholarship would focus on such topics; it is notable, however, that each topic of major scholarship is, arguably, a component of personal identity.

There is a gap in the scholarship *specifically* regarding Wharton's entanglement with place-identity theory throughout her body of work. Several scholars touch on elements of place-identity theory in their readings of Edith Wharton's novels, but no one has used this approach as a primary lens to view her work. Scholar Cynthia Griffin Woolf has applied Erik Erikson's psychological theory of identity to Wharton's work in her biography, *A Feast of Words: The*

Triumph of Edith Wharton (1977). The second major biography on Wharton, *A Feast of Words* employs psychological theory to interpret Wharton's life and works. For example, Woolf cites Erik Erikson: "When Edith Wharton was very young, she sustained neglect at what Erik Erikson has called the 'oral-respiratory-sensory stage'" (14). Woolf employs Erikson's theory to decipher Wharton's identity as it applies to her childhood, and she concentrates largely on how identity is impacted by society and family. Woolf also explores Wharton's use of writing to "find" her own adult identity. She provides insight into "the way in which character is located or placed" (64) in Wharton's fiction. While this does tie into my research, Woolf does not investigate place and environment through the lens of place-identity theory.

Janet Beer is one of the foremost scholars mindful of Wharton's use of place and space in her fiction. Beer states that Wharton writes of "fictions that not only have a European setting but that crucially implicate that setting in the narrative and structure of the text" (52). Beer often groups her scholarship thematically by place. In her article, "The International Scene," she closely reflects on place in *The House of Mirth*, *The Valley of Decision*, *The Reef*, and *The Buccaneers*. She writes, "in most cases Wharton portrays the effect of such a confrontation on the individual and it is in the relationship between the person and the place, the person and the culture, that the struggle is enacted" (53-54). I will also examine this "struggle" between person and place, but I will do so through a lens of place-identity. Beer's concern is in Wharton's mitigation of the tension between cultures, while my concern is the effect of place on the individual. Left out of Beer's conversation, also, are *Madame de Treymes* (1907), *The Custom of the Country* (1913), *The Glimpses of the Moon* (1922), and *The Gods Arrive* (1932); these largely neglected texts will be explored in this project. Beer does not attempt to analyze Wharton's use

of place through a psychologically theoretical lens of place-identity theory or identity theory, though she does *allude* to identity in her scholarship.

Drawing on Wharton's life-long interest in architecture, landscape gardening, and interior design, several scholars discuss the significance of physical spaces in Wharton's work. Renee Somers, author of *Edith Wharton: Spatial Activist and Analyst*, argues that Wharton "spent a great deal of her life articulating what she believed to be the complex relationships that exist between people and their built environments. . . . For Wharton, ordered domestic interiors, landscapes and other spaces are not just stage settings. . . .they impose upon us as much as we impose upon them" (3). Somers acknowledges, as I do, that place was paramount in Wharton's writing. However, Somers focuses largely on built environments such as homes, rather than larger notions of environment such as different countries and cities. She also refrains from applying any psychological theory to Wharton's work.

Melanie Dawson acknowledges the importance of "domestic spaces" in Wharton's fiction and life. She cites *The House of Mirth* as a novel that "laid the groundwork for the many other architecturally and aesthetically conscious fictions to follow" (46). Dawson acknowledges Wharton's aesthetic desires through her decoration of interior spaces, and she argues that "Wharton's life as a designer of spaces suggests the tension between feeling the need to organize her material existence and allowing it to 'tyrannize' her" (46). This approach allows one the opportunity to explore the impetus behind Wharton's work. Dawson also claims that Wharton's "characters confront the material and spatial possibilities of their dwellings" (46). I am interested in the "confrontation" of characters with their environments, but I will take my research a step further and examine the impact of those confrontations on their identities. I will explore domestic spaces in Wharton's fiction, but my investigation includes larger spaces as well.

Sean Scanlan observes Wharton's use of intimate spaces in his work. He writes of the character Lily Bart from *The House of Mirth*: "Lily Bart's slide from riches to rags can be tracked through a close attention to the novel's vivid portrayal of her changing access to both imaginary, idealized homes and actual, realized homes" (207). Scanlan focuses on the "environmental embeddedness" of nostalgia, and further explains, "it [nostalgia] is transformed into a critical device for mediating the urban world in which fragmented images of the past and shadowy visions of the future collide" (223-224). Scanlan illustrates how environmental places can encompass feelings of nostalgia, and this notion is similar to the concept of place-attachment. Furthermore, Scanlan asserts, "Lily is in constant motion between various temporary homes, yet she never feels at home. Throughout the novel, her inability to adapt, to commit, or to change is structured by these three interlocking systems: family, environmental, and socioeconomic" (207). This concept closely adheres to place-identity theory: one must adapt to their environment to maintain a healthy identity. Scanlan draws on Dr. Murray Bowen's psychological Family Systems Theory as the main foundation for his article. He relies heavily on Bowen's theory and the concept of nostalgia within environmental spaces. Bowen's theory emphasizes family dynamics but does not take place into consideration.

I have provided a few examples showing how scholars approach identity and place, in general, in Wharton's works; however, few scholars (if any) have examined Wharton's work through a lens of psychological place-identity theory. It is also noteworthy that scholars often examine *The House of Mirth;* while the novel is imbued with several important aspects of place and environment, many of Wharton's other works, such as *Madame de Treymes*, *The Reef, Glimpses of the Moon,* and *The Gods Arrive* are also inundated with motifs and themes that rely on place. I examine these under-researched works in the proceeding chapters.

Identity, Place-Identity, and Place-Attachment

A central question in this dissertation is how place influences personal identity. While many scholars agree that place has an effect on identity, some, such as Theodore Sarbin, offer a different perspective. Sarbin posits that "a person's social identity at any time is a function of his or her validated social positions. These positions are validated through appropriate, proper, and convincing role enactments" (7). For Sarbin, the roles individuals inhabit in society are more critical than the significance of place itself. Other scholars explore type-identity theory, which asserts that "type identity theory [holds] that each (kind of) mental state is a (kind of) brain state, in particular the (kind of) brain state which realizes for the organism at the time the functional role definitive of being in that mental state" (Jackson 212). This theory primarily explores the relationship between mind and body, often neglecting the role of place in the discussion.

Before moving to a literary analysis of Wharton's works in the proceeding chapters, it is crucial to grasp the theories of identity, place-identity, and place-attachment that will be thoroughly explicated in Chapter One. This chapter will define identity and explore its intriguing etymological roots, which are vital for understanding its various definitions. Additionally, I will review the relevant theoretical frameworks on identity proposed by Erik Erikson, Sheldon Stryker, Peter Burke, Georg Gasser, and Matthias Stefan. Erik Erikson, widely known for coining the term "identity crisis," has significantly influenced our understanding of identity (Gleason 914). It would be impossible to engage in a discussion about identity without acknowledging Erikson's contributions. Stryker and Burke add depth to this discourse, claiming that "the identity theory conceptions of identity and identity salience suggest stability in identities and their salience across time and situations" (286). Their insights are particularly pertinent to my research, as they examine how identities fluctuate across different contexts,

which often correlate with varying environments. Gasser and Stefan further complicate personal identity by proposing that at least four distinct types exist: biographical, personhood, metaphysical, and diachronic.

Harold Proshansky's place-identity theory, which will be explored at length in Chapter One, highlights the often-overlooked role of place and environment in discussions about personal identity. Proshansky asserts that "there is a general place-identity for each individual which reflects his or her unique socialization in the physical world. . . it is important to conceptualize place-identity as a specific component (subidentity) of each individual's self-identity" (147). I will also examine the contributions of Edward Relph and Aansi Paasi as I establish the groundwork for place-identity theory.

When discussing place-identity, it is essential to consider place-attachment, defined as "the affective link that people establish with specific settings, where they tend to remain and where they feel comfortable and safe" (Hernandez 310). Moreover, "one person could be attached to a place but not be identified with it (i.e. someone who likes to live in a place and wants to remain there but does not feel that this place is part of their identity; at least not their main place identity" (311). While place-attachment and place-identity are correlated concepts, they are not synonymous.

By drawing on theories of identity and place-identity, this project targets Edith Wharton's portrayal of American expatriate characters residing in France and American characters visiting abroad in France. The expatriate perspective serves as an effective lens through which to examine the profound ways in which place can shape identity on a broader scale.

Place-Identity, the Expatriate Experience, and French Ways

Throughout Wharton's works, there are instances in which her characters are afforded freedoms, especially creative, in France that they are not afforded in America. Wharton, herself, found a sort of emancipation in France from the confines of American life. Some of her characters, however, do not flourish as well as others when they are abroad. Annette Benert states, "For young Edith, the whole of Europe became just such a window, a vision of beauty and order that colored her whole life. What I am calling her architectural imagination began in a child charmed by the visual world" (19). This idea that Wharton viewed Europe as a "window" is pertinent to my research. I want to examine how her characters also might view Europe as a sort of window to new things. Claudine Lesage also recognizes this experience: "Edith was coming to realize that in Paris, choices abounded, unlike in New York, where 'society life offers no shelter from complicated matters of the heart'" (91). Wharton's expatriate characters are often allowed creative, sexual, and legal freedoms that they are not allowed in America.

Laura Rattray echoes Wharton's reciprocal love of France: "For the French, of course, beneficiaries of her adopted home, Wharton lived as well as wrote her deep moral conviction" (89). Rattray continues to explain Wharton's work and relief efforts, stating that "Wharton was a hero to the French" (89). Wharton exhibited place-attachment and place-identity. She had become attached to France, and she identified with France. As we have seen throughout the biographical context of Wharton's life, she desired to live in France from a young age. Wharton displays place-attachment to France even from childhood, and she embraced French culture and assimilated it into her personal identity.

Wharton found inspiration in France that she lacked in America. Surrounded by passionate intellectuals, Wharton argues that the French "live more deeply" (*French* 67). One

may argue that Wharton was, in turn, able to "live more deeply" and explore her personal identity on a deeper level than on the superficial level she battled with in America. Louis Auchincloss states, "she had always been attracted by the order and grace of French living and by the assured social position of intellectuals in France, so different from what she had experienced in New York" (25). The order, grace, and ability to "live deeply" in France influenced Wharton's life and creations. Furthermore, for Wharton, "living deeply" encompasses aspects of learning, art, sexuality, and gender roles, all of which Wharton navigated in her personal life and incorporated into her fiction.

Avancer: Moving Forward

Edith Wharton's exploration of identity, deeply intertwined with the concept of place, offers a rich terrain for scholarly exploration. Her representations of characters grappling with their identities against various backdrops transcends her time and illuminates the importance of place with regard to identity formation. By examining specific texts, I uncover the intricate ways in which setting and place influences the personal identities of Wharton's characters, revealing the overlooked psychological dimensions rooted within her works. In Chapter One, I establish a theoretical framework for understanding place-identity that acknowledges its complexities and the variations in interpretation, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of both Wharton's literary contributions and the broader discourse surrounding identity. Subsequent chapters draw on this theoretical framework to analyze the role of place in Wharton's fiction. Chapter Two focuses on two of Wharton's shorter, often neglected works, *Madame de Treymes* (1907) and "The Last Asset" (1908). In each of these works, place-identity and personal identity are closely intertwined with motherhood. In Chapter Three, I focus on several characters from

Wharton's novel *The Reef* (1912) in order to illuminate place-identity and place-attachment. *The Reef* also provides examples of differences in place-identity and place-attachment between city and rural settings. Chapter Four examines Wharton's novel *The Custom of the Country* (1913), concentrating primarily on the character Undine Spragg and her navigation through several marriages and places throughout the novel. In Chapter Five, I explore the novel, *Glimpses of the Moon* (1922), in which the characters Susy and Nick Lansing both demonstrate place-identity. *Glimpses of the Moon* is also illustrative of the importance of smaller, specific places with regard to place-identity and place-attachment. Chapter Six, the culminating chapter, centers on *The Gods Arrive* (1932), and explores the vital role of place in identity formation, and the implications for social identities, identity salience, and identity crises. Throughout my inquiries, I seek to illuminate how Wharton's characters navigate the interplay of personal identity and place, prompting a reevaluation of the frameworks that categorize identity in both literary criticism and contemporary society.

CHAPTER ONE: PLACE-IDENTITY, PLACE-ATTACHMENT, AND THE HOUSE AS A SYMBOL OF THE SELF

There are a multitude of definitions for the word "identity" that deviate from root meanings and etymology. Historical definitions of the word differ greatly from contemporary definitions, but even contemporary definitions vary. Theoretical definitions often do not align with individuals' own understanding of "identity," and these differing definitions can have major implications. Further complicating the discussion, even scholars may not feel the need to define "identity" and assume a shared definition. As Philip Gleason explains, "Those who write on these matters [identity] use it casually; they assume the reader will know what they mean" (Gleason 910). That assumption, though, that the reader will "know what they mean" is problematic. If a reader does not know the writer's working definition of the word, the communication between the two will be compromised. Therefore, this dissertation begins with an investigation into the meaning of the word before turning to place-identity theory and its potential application to Edith Wharton's work.

Polysemy, Dictionaries, and Ambiguities

The word "identity" is what is known as a polysemic word. Howard Jackson and Etienne Amvela define polysemy as "the situation where the same word has two or more different meanings" (37). Polysemy is a relatively common occurrence, but it becomes complex when ambiguity arises within the different meanings of a word. When observing polysemy, "one meaning cannot always be delimited and distinguished from another; it is not easy to say without hesitation whether two meanings are the same or different. Consequently, we cannot determine

exactly how many meanings a polysemous word has" (Jackson and Amvela 38). This phenomenon is illustrated through the many, often overlapping, definitions of the word identity. Different dictionaries also contain varying definitions, so it is worth noting the variations in each of the meanings.

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) offers several definitions of "identity:"

> 1.a.: The quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness; oneness (a1460-).[2]
>
> 2.a.: The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition of being a single individual; the fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality (1596-).
>
> 2b: Who or what a person or thing is; a distinct impression of a single person or thing presented to or perceived by others; a set of characteristics or a description that distinguishes a person or thing from others (1737-).
>
> 3: Personal or individual existence (obsolete, rare) (1683-1824). ("identity")

Note that the first definition of identity does not mention a "person" at all, while the next three definitions allude to identity being related to a "person." Definitions 2.a. and 2.b. both use terminology such as "single individual" and "single person." The above OED definitions of "identity" were all in usage before Edith Jones (Wharton) was born in 1862; therefore, she theoretically could have been utilizing any of the above definitions in her writing on "identity." Or, perhaps, she had her *own* definition of the word.

---

[2] Year the definition originated.

Etymology and Meaning Change

It is essential to consider the etymology of the word "identity" to understand where the definitions of the word were derived from. The word identity comes from the post classical Latin word *identitat* or *identitas*, which refers to "the quality of being the same" ("identity"). Identity also comes from the Middle French *identite*, which means the "quality or condition of being the same" ("identity"). The etymology of the word "identity" quite clearly explains the definitions of the word related to sameness, but the etymology does nothing to help us understand the meaning of the word regarding personality or individuality. In fact, the definitions in which "identity" is related to character or personality seem to contradict the etymology of the word. Individuality and personality are unique attributes; they do not relate to sameness in any way. How can this change in the meaning of the word "identity" be explained? It is possible that "our present concept of identity is recent, or at least recent enough that dictionaries have not caught up with current usage" (Fearon 8). Not only does this seem to be the case in contemporary usage of the word, but it may even have been the case in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Edith Wharton was writing.

If we consider the OED's first definition of "identity," which posits "oneness" as part of the definition, we could surmise that the definition has changed based on the hypothesis that an individual's personality and qualities attribute to the "oneness" or "sameness" of the individual. This hypothesis does align with several identity theories that will be discussed later in this chapter. Though the change in definition can be explained by "sameness" of the individual, according to Philip Gleason, "the historically minded inquirer…soon makes an arresting discovery—*identity* is a new term, as well as being an elusive and ubiquitous one" (910). It is true; the word "identity" as we know it (or think we know it) today, is a relatively new creation.

Currently, most people likely mean "personal identity" when they think about identity as what is unique to an individual. That is, in part, why it is so striking that Edith Wharton was employing the word with a more contemporary meaning in her writing. Rather than focusing on "sameness," Wharton focuses on individual aspects of her characters' personal identities. Aitchison adds to the discussion: "the idea that it is normal for words to have more than one meaning was recognized as long ago as 1880" (164)— notably, while Edith Wharton was still a teenager. Aitchison further explicates, "the extra meanings [of words] do not always stay around, and sometimes even the original main meaning may disappear" (164). This disappearance of the original meaning may have been what happened with the word "identity."

Historical Usage and Collocations

The Corpus of Historical American English (COHA) is a tool utilized to look at both usage frequency and collocates of the word "identity." The COHA is "the largest structured corpus of historical English" (Davies). It was "developed by Brigham Young University, [and] is a structured collection of carefully selected historical English texts taken from newspapers, popular magazines, fiction and non-fiction books published between 1810 and 2009" (Alatrash et al. 6958). The COHA is an invaluable resource for linguists, and anyone who wants to research language; "the unique balance of size, genre and corpus architecture with COHA results in a resource that allows us to carry out research on many types of language change – lexical, morphological, syntax and semantic – that could not be studied otherwise" (Davies 122). I utilize the COHA to delve into the origins, etymology, and usage of the word "identity."

A COHA search of the word “identity” reveals that from the year 1820 to the year 2010 there has been a steady increase in usage.[3]

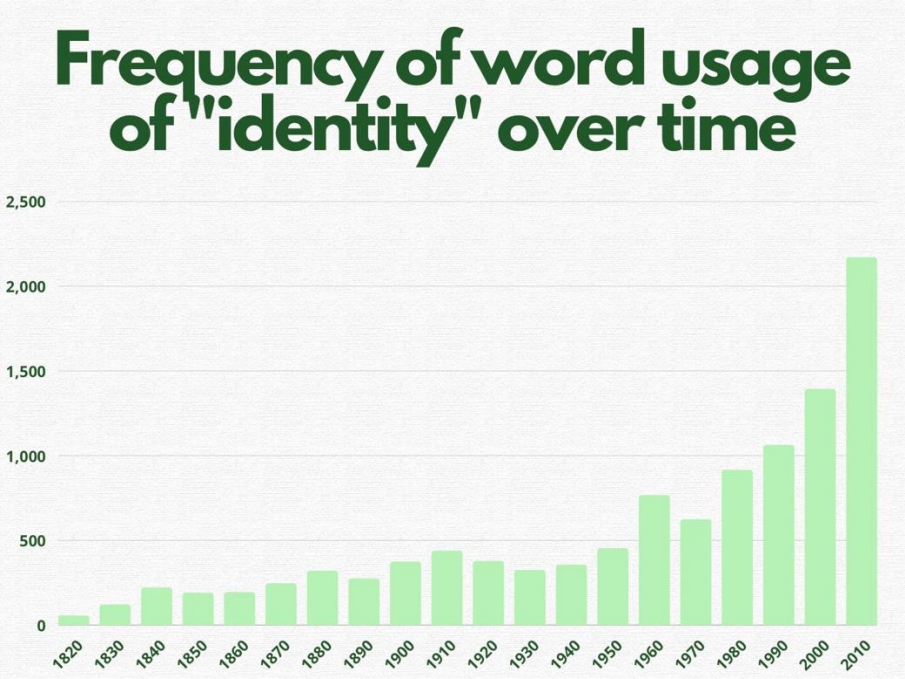

Figure 1

One can see that, during the years that Edith Wharton wrote her works (1837-1939)[4], the usage of the word “identity” was minimal. Even by 1934, when she published her autobiography, *A Backward Glance*, in which she employs the term “identity,” the word still was used sparingly. She writes,

> It was on a bright day of midwinter, in New York. The little girl who eventually became me, but as yet was neither me nor anybody else in particular, but merely a soft anonymous morsel of humanity—this little girl, who bore my name, was going for a walk

[3] All statistical information acquired from the Corpus of Historical American English.
[4] Though not published until 1977, Wharton penned the novel *Fast and Loose* in 1837 when she was just fourteen years old.

> with her father. The episode is literally the first thing I can remember about her, and therefore I date the birth of her identity from that day. (23)

A search for the word "identity" throughout all of Wharton's published works illustrates that her use of the word was not accidental. She utilizes the word *forty-two* times throughout her *forty-eight* published works.

The word "identity" often does not stand alone in general usage, which brings up the concept of collocations. The OED defines collocations as "The action of setting in a place or position, esp. of placing together with, or side by side with, something else; disposition or arrangement with, or in relation to, others; the state of being so placed. Frequently applied to the arrangement of words in a sentence, of sounds, etc." ("collocate"). Collocates are the words that are purposefully placed before or after another word. Often, collocates can slightly "modify" the meaning of the word they are juxtaposed with. Philip Gleason explores the idea that "adding a modifier complicates matters, for how are we to understand identity in such expressions as 'ethnic identity'?" (910). In 1900, the top collocate to the word "identity" is "personal." "Personal" remains the top collocate to "identity" in 1910, but in 1920 "lose" takes over the top spot with "personal" not being utilized at all as a collocate. "Lose" is an interesting collocate given the time period—after the Great War, alienation and isolation were prominent in modernist writing, and a feeling of losing one's identity likely ties into those concepts. In 1930, "mistaken" is the top collocate with "identity;" "personal" does not take the top position again until 1950.

While "personal" can be used as a collocate to identity—as in this dissertation—often when individuals speak of "identity" they are referring to personal identity without using the collocate. For example, in *The Glimpses of the Moon,* Wharton writes: "That end, invariably, was Susy; not the bundle of qualities and defects into which his critical spirit had tried to sort her out,

but the soft blur of identity, of personality, of eyes, hair, mouth, laughs, tricks of speech and gesture that were all so solely and profoundly her own" (137). Though Wharton does not use the collocate "personal," it is clear that she is referencing Susy's personal identity. Indeed, Wharton's use of "identity" throughout her works almost always alludes to personal identity.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I adopt Eric Olson's definition of personal identity: it "deals with philosophical questions that arise about ourselves by virtue of being people. What am I? When did I begin?" (69). This definition is vague, but that is purposeful. Philosophical questions about oneself are all-encompassing: questions may arise about gender, race and ethnicity, class, education, family, and one's environment, all which feed into personal identity.

Identity Theory: An Overview

The first known usage of personal identity was by John Locke in a chapter titled "Of Identity and Diversity" from his book *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689). Philip Gleason explains, identity has "been used in English since the sixteenth century. It has a technical meaning in algebra and logic and has been associated with the perennial mind-body problem in philosophy since the time of John Locke" (911). Edith Wharton owned a copy of Locke's book, and it may have informed her own thinking about identity (Ramsden 78). John Locke states: "consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes every one to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things; in this, alone, consists personal identity" (226). For Locke, consciousness is the main component to personal identity. Locke further explains, "personal identity can by us be placed in nothing but consciousness, which is that alone which makes what we call self" (232). David Behan untangles Locke's concept of personal identity: "consciousness is the key notion in Locke's theory of

personal identity. Through concerned consciousness a moral man appropriates those substances, thoughts, and actions which are his and makes them his forensic personality" (53). The view of a "forensic personality" comes from John Locke's assertion of the "forensic person." A forensic person, for Locke, "characterizes persons as moral and legal beings" (Boeker 230). The moral and legal aspects of personal identity are inherent to Locke's theory. He also suggests that personal identity is "the sameness of a rational being. . .it is the same self now [as] it was then…" (226). As we will see in future identity theories, the concept of "sameness" within personal identity is persistent and controversial.

Edith Wharton also owned work by the philosopher (and brother to her close friend Henry) William James, who discusses identity in his book *The Will to Believe* (1896) (Ramsden 65). It is James's view that, "We *comprehend* a thing when we synthetize it by identity with another thing" (85). James theorizes that one can only know what a thing is once the identity of the thing is known. This theory can be extended to the personal identity of individuals. We cannot truly comprehend someone until we know their identity. We may not ever *truly* realize the entirety of someone else's identity, though, so we may not ever *really* know or comprehend a person. James's theory does suggest that identity is unique insofar as it allows one thing to be differentiated from another. If applied to people, this would mean that personal identity is also unique to the individual, and it sets one apart from others.

William James's identity theory also partially sets the precedent for a theory that will be discussed later in this chapter. James touches on the theory of the home as a symbol of the self. He questions, "What is meant by coming 'to feel at home' in a new place, or with new people?" (78). James suggests, "after a few days [when] we have learned the range of all these

possibilities, the feeling of strangeness disappears" (78). James's early considerations mirror Claire Cooper's more modern theory of the home as symbol of the self.

Though Sigmund Freud was a prominent psychoanalyst in the late 1800s and early 1900s, Edith Wharton was notoriously critical of him, as evidenced by letters to her friend Bernard Berenson. In one letter she writes, "Above all, please ask Mary not to befuddle herself with Freudianism and all its jargon" (*Letters* 451).[5] Though he pioneered ground-breaking theories about the self, Sigmund Freud only used "identity" sparingly, often opting for the term "identification." Freud writes, "different [object] identifications seize hold of consciousness" (639). Here, Freud refers to multiple object identifications by an individual. He posits that "If they [object identifications] . . . become too numerous . . . a pathological outcome will not be far off" (639). Freud views humans as objects as part of his theory, but the objects can be inanimate as well. In this sense, per place-identity theory, which will be discussed later in this chapter, the "objects" are places, and one must integrate different places into their identity to prevent pathology. Freud does not allude to place throughout his works, though he does, perhaps unconsciously, touch on it in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which is a highly autobiographical account detailing, among other things, what it was like for Freud to grow up as a Jewish boy in Austria-Hungary. Without realizing it, Freud may have been anticipating place-identity theory in his autobiographical account.

Though Wharton was critical of Freud, one cannot surmise what she would have thought about psychologist Erik Erikson. Erikson *did* work with Sigmund Freud and Anna Freud, but he maintained his own unique theories on identity. Identity, per our current understanding, "came

[5] The "Mary" that Wharton writes of is Bernard Berenson's wife.

into use as a popular social-science term only in the 1950s" (Gleason 910). The popularization of "identity" in the 1950s was due, in part, to Erik Erikson. Gleason argues that "Erikson was the key figure in putting the word [identity] into circulation. He coined the expression *identity crisis* and did more than anyone else to popularize *identity*" (914). Erik Erikson states, "I can attempt to make the subject matter of identity more explicit only by approaching it from a variety of angles" (*Identity Life* 109). Erikson hesitates to "fix" identity to one definition, because it is a rather ambiguous term. The angles Erikson chooses to define "identity" by are "biographic, pathographic, and theoretical" (*Identity Life* 109). He writes: "At one time. . .it [identity] will appear to refer to a conscious *sense of individual identity*; at another to an unconscious striving for a *continuity of personal character*; at a third, as a criterion for the silent doings of *ego synthesis*; and, finally, as a maintenance of inner *solidarity* with a group's ideals and identity" (*Identity Life* 109). The "continuity of personal character" Erikson refers to is a reference to "the awareness of the fact that there is a selfsameness and continuity to the ego's synthesizing methods and that these methods are effective in safeguarding the sameness and continuity of one's meaning" (*Identity Life* 22). Basically, one must be strong enough to maintain his or her identity even in the presence of others. Identity should not change based on the influence of others; it should be continuous. This view of identity mimics John Locke's proposition of "sameness."

Erikson questions, "Is the sense of identity conscious?" (*Identity Life* 127). This question also harkens back to John Locke's assertion that identity is a product of consciousness. Erikson believes that identity is often the most conscious when "we are just about to enter a crisis and feel the encroachment of identity diffusion" (*Identity Life* 127). Identity diffusion is similar to an identity crisis. Of identity crises, Erikson writes, "At a given age, a human being, by dint of his

physical, intellectual, and emotional growth, becomes ready and eager to face a new life task, that is, a set of choices and tests. . .a new life task presents a crisis whose outcome can be a successful graduation, or alternatively, an impairment of the life cycle" (*Reader* 350). Changing one's place in the world can be considered a "new life task," which may cause an individual to suffer an identity crisis. Also noteworthy is Erikson's association between *choice* and identity crises. He claims one can defer an identity crisis, "as long as he [an individual] can convince himself that the next step is up to him and that no matter where he is staying or going he always has the choice of leaving or turning in the opposite direction if he chooses to do so" (*Identity* 42). The importance and impact of choice on identity is pertinent in Edith Wharton's works, especially when characters change place.

Also integral to Erik Erikson's identity theory is the notion that identity is not fixed; it is malleable, dependent upon experience, and constantly in flux. Erikson writes, "identity is never 'established' as an 'achievement' in the form of a personality armor, or of anything static and unchangeable" (*Identity Youth* 24). Erikson's view that identity is in flux mirrors Wharton's notion in her autobiography that her identity was, as a child, malleable. There is no end goal to identity; its creation will never be complete. This may seem counterintuitive to Erikson's concept of continuity within identity, and, in fact, it is. Justin Sokol writes of Erikson:

> [He] viewed it [identity] as an ongoing process that captures one's investments throughout the long years of adulthood. Thus, identity development is both a normative period of adolescence and an evolving aspect of adulthood. In contrast to Erikson's extensive writings on the adolescent identity formation process, he did not offer detailed comments regarding identity's evolution throughout the adult life. (5)

Although Erikson does not devote as much time to the lifelong process of identity formation as he does to the formation of identity in adolescence, his theory can still be applied to adults—he himself acknowledges that identity is never fixed. One may surmise that Erikson refers to the *core* identity of an individual when he insists on continuity. One's core identity can remain the same while *aspects* of their identity, such as place-identity, may grow and change.

Many other philosophers and psychologists do build on Erikson's theory, though, and provide the necessary elements that Erikson omits with regard to identity throughout the lifespan. Georg Gasser and Matthias Stefan are two scholars who attempt to expand on Erikson's theory. They write:

> We take it for granted that a person persists over time: when we make plans, we assume that we will carry them out; when we punish someone for a crime, we assume that she is the same person as the one who committed it. Metaphysical questions underlying these assumptions point toward an area of deep existential and philosophical interest. . . "What are we?" "How do we persist?" and "Which conditions guarantee our identity over time?"

Gasser and Stefan work to answer these questions and delve into the "continuity" of identity through the lifespan. They further complicate the notion of personal identity by arguing that there are, at least, four types: biographical, personhood, metaphysical, and diachronic. Biographical identity refers to "how an individual understands and defines herself in light of her values, convictions, and aims" (Gasser and Stefan 2). Biographical identity is most likely the type of identity that most people are referring to when they speak of their personal identity. Personhood entails what makes a person and "calls for necessary and sufficient conditions, such as being an intelligent, conscious and feeling agent" (Gasser and Stefan 2). Personhood is what makes

human beings different from non-human animals. The metaphysical aspect of personal identity consists quite simply of being part of the human species. Diachronic identity refers to how our personal identities change throughout time—a polarizing topic among identity scholars and one that will be continuously discussed throughout this dissertation.

Sheldon Stryker is another key theorist within the realm of identity theory. He states, "The identity theory conceptions of identity and identity salience suggest stability in identities and their salience across time and situations" (286). Stryker's theory is particularly useful to my research because he examines identity across different situations. Because different situations often equal different environments, his work is important. Stryker's theory resembles the ideas put forth by John Locke, Erik Erikson, and Georg Gasser and Matthias Stefan, insofar as he examines identity salience over time. Locke assumes that personal identity remains the same over time; Erikson believes sameness and continuity in identity is healthy; Gasser and Stefan dissect diachronic personal identity, which consists of "attempt to explain what it is that makes an entity existing at one time be identical with an entity existing at another time" (Pruss). The question this will raise throughout the dissertation is: does a person's identity remain identical over time? Edith Wharton, as evidenced by her autobiography, realized that identity is malleable. She creates characters in her works whose identities are also impressionable, though some of her characters exhibit Erikson's notion of "sameness" as well.

Place-Identity Theory

Setting and environment in Wharton's works are integral to comprehension; therefore, place-identity theory will dominate much of the discussion throughout this dissertation. Place-identity theory is an offshoot of the identity theories previously examined. Harold Proshansky

created place-identity theory. Just as Wharton scholars have largely neglected place, Proshansky recognized that place and environment were often left out of conversations about personal identity. As one can gather from the overview of identity theory previously discussed, there is no mention of place. Place-identity encompasses "those dimensions of self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals, and behavioral tendencies and skills relevant to this environment" ("City" 155). Note that the elements one realizes in relation to their environment may be conscious or unconscious. There are certain aspects of place that one may consciously acknowledge the effect of, but there are also influences of place that an individual may be completely unconscious or unaware of.

Place-identity delineates the myriad ways in which individuals negotiate and construct their identities within the context of their environment or place. In order for an individual to achieve a healthy place-identity, she must fully embrace her surroundings. She must allow place to become a part of her identity. Inability to assimilate with one's surroundings can engender anxiety or an identity crisis. Proshansky et al. suggest, "place-identity represents physical setting cognitions that serve to define, maintain, and protect the self identity of a person" ("Place" 80). Because the physical setting helps to "define, maintain, and protect" one's identity, a strong personal identity is contingent upon an individual's integration with her surrounding environment. Place must be assimilated into one's identity in order to maintain a healthy personal identity. Erik Erikson further explains, "we deal with a process 'located' in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture, a process which establishes, in fact, the identity of those two identities" (*Identity Youth* 22). Erikson echoes the notion that two identities must come together to become one; in this case, however, Erikson refers to the

personal identity of the individual and the communal culture—the communal culture is in a *place* though.

Harold Proshansky also notes the differences in place-identity between rural and urban settings. He writes, "Cities of course, are noisier, dirtier, and more crowded than smaller communities, and, in general, they are less than serene and predictable places to live" ("City" 148). Edith Wharton situates her characters in both urban and rural settings, so it is relevant to include the division in this discussion. Wharton herself lived in both rural and city settings; after World War I she wanted to leave the city. She writes, "My chief feeling, I confess, was that I was tired oh, so tired! I wanted first of all, and beyond all, to get away from Paris, away from streets and houses altogether and for always, into the country, or at least the near-country of a Paris suburb" (*Backward* 362). Stanley Milgram argues, "City life, as we experience it, constitutes a continuous set of encounters with overload, and of resultant adaptations" ("Experience" 495). This "overload" is often a sensory overload, which also ties into what Proshansky conceives as "ambience." He writes,

> The term "ambience" is often used to suggest an elusive total "quality," "sense," or "feel" about a community setting based on a kaleidoscope of sights, sounds, and even smells that are experienced and internalized by long-time residents and others who visit it. While poets, dramatists, and the rest of us have often attempted with difficulty to describe the ambience of a town, for understanding place-identity in the context of conceptualizing an environmental psychologist's task seems to be somewhat less difficult. ("City" 164)

The sensory information that one gathers from an urban setting creates an "urban ambience." Of course, as with most places, this ambience can be subjective to the individual. One person might find the sights, sounds, and smells of a city completely anxiety inducing, while another person

might enjoy the sensory overload. Milgram also advises that "even among great cities there are marked differences in 'atmosphere.' The tone, pacing, and texture of social encounters are different in London and New York. . . ." ("Experience" 502). So, when we talk about the difference in place-identity between rural and urban settings, the *specific* settings are of the utmost importance. Milgram conducted a study in which he asked people to "characterize" cities they had lived in. He found that "contrasting profiles" emerged for each of the different cities: New York, London, and Paris. These conceptions may be skewed by the subjects' personal perceptions of the cities, how long the subject spent in the city, and "popular myths and expectations" of the different cities. There is, however, little doubt that there is what Proshansky refers to as a sub-category of place-identity: "urban place-identity." Within Edith Wharton's novels, specifically *The Reef*, we will see the division between rural and city settings on display, and the impact each setting has on the characters.

Place-identity not only refers to how individuals construct their identities with regard to their environment, but also to "a spatial category, since the ideas of territory, self and 'us' all require symbolic, socio-cultural and/or physical dividing lines with the Other" (Paasi 10). Anssi Paasi is a dominant theorist regarding this type of place-identity. In short, it is the identity of the *place itself* to which Paasi refers. Peng et al. describe Paasi's theory: it "refers to those features of nature, culture, and people that are used in the discourses and classifications of science, politics, cultural activism, regional marketing, tourism, governance, and political or religious regionalization, to distinguish one place from others" (2). Individual consciousness plays a role in the identity of a place. Peng et al. explain, "Differences between places are attributed or perceived by inhabitants living in or outside of those places. It is, to some extent, if not entirely, a subjective social construct based on objective physical settings" (4). Therefore, the identity of a

place "comprises not only a material basis but also a 'mental sphere'" (Peng et al. 4). An individual's perception of a place can "differ from the identity discourses produced by media, regional administrations, and others" (Peng et al. 11). The identity of a place is loose; like personal identity, it is malleable and in flux, because individual subjective perceptions of places differ.

Though individual subjective perceptions of a place often differ, there are instances in which a group of people may have the same perception of a place. Attributes such as race, socioeconomic status, or gender can influence perception of place. For example, individuals of a lower socioeconomic status would assign a different "identity" to a place where they are not welcome. To cite an example from Wharton's novels, the Hôtel Nouveau Luxe is a hotel in Paris where wealthy American tourists stay. The hotel is based on the Ritz Carlton—a well-known luxury hotel chain. Individuals of lower socioeconomic status would not be able to stay at the Hôtel Nouveau Luxe, so their perception of that place would differ from individuals of a higher socioeconomic status. Also important is the fact that the hotel is a tourist destination, so tourists would have a much different perception of the place than native Parisians or locals. In fact, Wharton herself had a rather negative perception of the Ritz Carlton in Paris.

Stanley Milgram conducted a research study in which he had Parisian subjects draw maps of the city; his goal was to "explore the way in which Parisians mentally represent their city," and view the "way that reality is mirrored in the minds of its [Paris's] inhabitants" ("Map" 104). Milgram found that "Class factors shape the maps of the subjects by segregating rich and poor residentially. . .[with] subjects locating the very poor in the northeastern districts; while the wealthy are overwhelmingly situated in the 16th arrondissement, at the western edge of the city" ("Map" 119). Though Milgram's study was published in 1976, it is still demonstrative of the

contrasting perceptions individuals may have of the same city. Often perception is dependent upon socioeconomic status.

Communal perceptions of place based on race are also possible. At an address delivered at Atlanta University in 1938 Dr. Will Mercer Cook, "a foremost American authority on Black Francophone life and culture" (Guirdex 1), explains "there are probably not more than 15,000 to 20,000 Negroes in Paris, which has a population of between 3 and 4 million" (674). Furthermore, he reminds his audience that "France is not Utopia" (673). Though France provided a liberal environment for Black individuals in the early twentieth century, Cook argues that fascism still reared its ugly head. He also notes that "Many of the Negroes living in Paris constitute an elite. They are, for the most part, students, teachers, professional and business men, writers, governmental officials and the like" (675). The point of this tangent is to portray the Paris in which Edith Wharton lived; Black characters are noticeably absent from her work, and race is an oft-discussed topic in Wharton scholarship. Per place-identity theory, though, race is important as well. The non-elite Black individuals living in France, perhaps on the outskirts of Paris, would have a much different perception of the city that of the Black elite. Moreover, the White elite in Paris would likely view the city differently than the Black elite due to the fascism that still existed. All of this is to prove the point that different racial groups, etc. can and *do* experiences places in distinct ways—giving places *several* varying identities.

Place itself surfaces as "an inescapable dimension of human life and experience" (Seamon 44). There is simply no way to remove oneself from place. Edward Relph builds on this notion through his research on place-identity theory. Relph, who has his doctorate in the field of geography, asserts that the identity of a place entails "persistent sameness and unity which allows that [place] to be differentiated from others" (45). Seamon and Sowers explain, "Relph describes

this persistent identity in terms of three components: (1) the place's physical setting; (2) its activities, situations, and events; and (3) the individual and group meanings created through people's experiences and intentions in regard to that place" (45). Notice the similarity between Relph's third component of place-identity and Passi's place-identity theory. For both scholars, people's experiences (whether individual or group) create the meaning of a place. Relph also suggests that different places are "significant centres of our immediate experiences of the world" (141). A place may be significant to one individual, yet entirely inconsequential to another. This notion of significance will be key to discussion of place in Wharton's works.

Perhaps Relph's most novel approach to place-identity is that he differentiates between outsideness and insideness—the degree to which an individual feels like she "belongs" in a place. Relph states that insideness is "knowing implicitly that this place is where you belong" (55). Relph's theory can be likened to a puzzle—if one tries to force a puzzle piece into a spot where it does not belong, that is "outsideness." When a piece fits seamlessly into the puzzle, it is "insideness." The intimate relationship between place and identity is showcased when an individual finds her place; she fits perfectly into the puzzle. Seamon and Sowers further explicate: "If a person feels inside a place, he or she is here rather than there, safe rather than threatened, enclosed rather than exposed, at ease rather than stressed. Relph suggests that the more profoundly inside a place a person feels, the stronger will be his or her identity with that place" (3). Alternatively, when experiencing "outsideness" "people feel some sort of lived division or separation between themselves and world—for example, the feeling of homesickness in a new place" (Seamon and Sowers 3). Wharton's works are ripe with examples of both "insideness" and "outsideness." For example, in *The Reef*, one will see how Anna Leath experiences insideness at Chateau Givré. In *The Gods Arrive,* Halo Spear illustrates

"outsideness" during her time in Montparnasse, France. These two examples are only the beginning—nearly all of Wharton's characters experience insideness or outsideness to some degree.

Relph further breaks down insideness and outsideness into smaller categories. One may experience "existential outsideness," which "involves a selfconcious and reflective uninvolvement, an alienation from people and places" (51), "objective outsideness," which is the "deliberate adoption of a dispassionate attitude towards places" (51), or "incidental outsideness" which is an "adopted intellectual attitude . . . a largely unselfconscious attitude in which places are experienced as little more than the backround" (52). Per insideness, one may experience "behavioral insideness," which "consists of being in a place and seeing it as a set of objects, views, and activities arranged in certain ways" (53), "empathetic insideness," which requires "emotional and empathetic involvement in a place" (54), or "existential insideness," which "characterises belonging to a place and the deep and complete identity with a place" (55). Several of these subsets of insideness and outsideness are illustrated throughout Wharton's works and will be discussed in later chapters.

Pertinent to the discussion of place-identity, and the works of Edith Wharton, is Relph's assertion that "sense of place may be authentic and genuine, or it can be inauthentic and contrived or artificial" (5). He explains, "An authentic attitude to place is thus understood to be a direct and genuine experience of the entire complex of the identity of places—not mediated and distorted through a series of quite arbitrary social and intellectual fashions about how that experience should be, nor following stereotyped conventions" (64). Inauthenticity of place, on the other hand, "is essentially no sense of place, for it involves no awareness of the deep and symbolic significances of places and no appreciation of their identities. It is merely an attitude

which is socially convenient and acceptable—an uncritically accepted stereotype" (Relph 82). Authenticity of place and inauthenticity of place are both concepts that are explored in depth throughout Edith Wharton's works, particularly in the distinction between the expatriate (authentic) and the tourist (inauthentic). Inauthenticity is often illustrated in Wharton's novels through the use of American tourists' stereotypes of France, and their creation of American scenes or spaces in Paris (such as the Hôtel Nouveau Luxe).

When one writes of place-identity, she must take into account social identity. Places are, often, full of people; the socialization that occurs within places is also pertinent to place-identity. Personal identity and social identity are interrelated, and, per place-identity, they cannot be completely removed from one another. Furthering his research on place-identity, Harold Proshansky included social identity as an important aspect of place-identity. He "described place identity as comparable to a *social identity*, encompassing different types of place identities (such as urban identity), highlighting place as a dimension of social roles, and a part of both person and social identity formation" (Strandberg and Styven 4). Moreover, Proshansky et al. state, "Place-identity cognitions express and reflect the physical settings and their properties that support and are directly relevant to the social roles and attributes that define who the person is, how he or she is to behave, and what he or she is worth" ("Place-identity" 80). Different places indicate the different social roles one must take on, and these "social roles. . . not only distinguish what individuals do, believe, and think, but also [create a] specific pattern of cognitions of places, environment skills, and person/physical setting relationships that underlie the place-identity of the person" (Proshansky et al. "Place" 81). When one considers her personal identity and asks questions such as "Who am I?" she will likely answer that question, in part, with her social roles. For example, I am a teacher, I am a student, I am a daughter, etc. So, it is not simply the place

that is important, but the social role one takes on *within* said place. Individuals act accordingly when they are in different social roles. A teacher would act differently in the classroom than she would during happy hour at a bar.

It is not only the social roles that are significant to personal and place-identity; "people are important in shaping the place-identity of the person" (Proshansky et al. "Place" 82). The people one encounters in the different places she inhabits will, to a degree, enforce social roles and affect her perception of the place. For example, one may desire to go to church and enjoy the *place*, but if she does not like the *people* at the church, her perception of the church will be negative. Also, individuals often have supervisors in their workplaces who will enforce their social roles at work—the supervisors dictate how one should act and what one should do while at work. Spouses and parents can also cause infringement on personal identity by imposing social roles onto their significant others or children. The home can, then, become a positive or negative space. The concept of parental infringement on personal identity is explored in "The Last Asset" and *The Custom of the Country*. Wharton is noticeably aware of parental and spousal infringement on personal identity throughout her works.

Social bonding is also integral to place-identity. Social bonding is defined as: "(1) the strength of social connection between individuals and places, and (2) the feeling of individuals of belonging to places" (Chen et al. 327). The feeling of belonging one experiences in a place can be due to the people in the place or the place itself. The stronger the social bond in a place, the stronger one's place-identity will be. Several aspects of social place-identity coincide with place-attachment, which I will discuss shortly.

Inclusively, all aspects of place-identity theory are catalogued via the following list:

1. a type of, or aspect/part of, a personal or social group identity;

> 2) identification (categorization) *as* a (type of) person, member of a group, or a place;
>
> 3) identification (feeling similar, belonging to) *with* a group or a place on a personal and social level;
>
> 4) the mental perceptions and identification *of* a person, a group or a place itself, based on its distinctive features. (Strandberg and Styvèn 4)

Place-identity theory may seem to be a slippery subject, but it is necessary to investigate one's relationship to place in order to fully understand one's identity. Throughout the works of Edith Wharton, characters represent a multitude of ways in which place affects personal identity.

Place-Attachment

Recent scholars have built on Harold Proshansky's place-identity theory, namely through the creation of place-attachment theory. Place-attachment is, "the affective link that people establish with specific settings, where they tend to remain and where they feel comfortable and safe" (Hernandez et al. 310). Furthermore,

> in fact, one person could be attached to a place but not be identified with it (i.e. someone who likes to live in a place and wants to remain there but does not feel that this place is part of their identity; at least not their main place identity) and vice versa; someone could have a high personal identity with a place and not a high place-attachment (for example, to feel that one belongs to a place but prefers not to live there). (Hernandez et al. 311)

I will utilize an example from my own life to illustrate the difference between place-identity and place-attachment. I have a high personal identity with my hometown (I lived there for twenty-eight years), and I have no doubt that it strongly influenced my personal identity. I have

absolutely no place-attachment to my hometown, though. While I may feel like I still "belong" there, I have no desire to live there because I have no place-attachment to the town.

Place-attachment correlates with place-identity, but the two are not interchangeable. Bernardo Hernandez et al. further explain this correlation:

> Place identity […] has been defined as a component of personal identity, a process by which, through interaction with places, people describe themselves in terms of belonging to a specific place. Most research has observed positive correlations between these variables in populations that have maintained ongoing interactions over long periods of time. (310)

The central tendency, per place-identity and place-attachment, is for an individual to become attached to a place *and* incorporate that place into her identity. We should bear in mind, though, that these tendencies are variable. Edith Wharton's representation of American expatriate characters living in France and American characters traveling abroad in France exemplify both place-identity and place-attachment, but the two do not always correlate with one another. A character's personal identity may be affected by place, but she may not be *attached* to the place. In turn, a character may find her personal identity affected by place *and* experience place-attachment. The variability of the correlation between place-identity and place-attachment is illuminated through several of Wharton's characters that will be discussed in later chapters.

Place-attachment is not limited to one *type* of place. Hernandez et al. explain, "This affective link [place-attachment] can be developed towards places that differ in size and function: the house, the neighbourhood, the city, recreational settings, communities, rural places, etc" (310). When examining Edith Wharton's works, I will explore small spaces such as homes,

churches, gardens, and streets. I will also investigate place-identity in larger spaces such as cities and countries.

Another aspect of place-attachment is length of stay—how long a person lives in any given place. Gail Kelly and Karin Hosking found that there are "positive relationships between levels of place attachment, [and] the amount of time spent in the region" (1). The longer an individual spends in a place, the more likely they are to become attached to the place. Non-residents can, therefore, experience place-attachment. Kelly and Hosking conducted a study in which they found that non-residents who spent over seventy-five days in a place experienced the highest rates of place-attachment. Non-residents who planned to move to the region also exhibited slightly higher percentages of place-attachment (586). This finding can be likened to Wharton's own life; she spent a lot of time in Europe as a child—she experienced place-attachment to France at an early age. Her plans to move to France also likely increased her place-attachment. Place-attachment can also be seen throughout Wharton's novels. While some of her expatriate characters exemplify place-attachment, others do not.

Place-attachment can lead to individuals caring more about where they live, be it in environmental, economic, or community ways. Individuals who are attached to a place "are likely to play an ongoing role in the region's evolution" (Kelly and Hosking 91). Again, this can be observed in Wharton's own life. She took part in the relief efforts in France during World War I. Wharton was also hyper-critical of industrialization; often place-attached individuals are more likely to be protective of their environments. In *A Motor Flight Through France*, a travel narrative Edith Wharton published in 1908, she travels through France via motorcar. During her travels she often comments on the repercussions of industrialization, which is ironic given the fact that she is driving a car—a result of industrialization. She writes:

> Southward from La Chatre, the road runs through a beautiful hilly country to Montlucon on the Cher: a fine old border town, with a brave fighting past, and interesting relics of Bourbon ascendancy; but now deeply disfigured by hideous factories and long grimy streets of operatives' houses. In deploring the ravages of modern industry on one of these rare old towns, it is hard to remember that they are not museum pieces. (*Motor* 49)

Perhaps it is Wharton's place-attachment to France that makes her so adamantly against the destruction of the country by modern industry.

The House as Symbol of Self

As stated earlier, place-identity is not limited to large spaces, but can include small spaces such as houses. Due to Wharton's interest in interior design, this aspect of place-identity is indirectly addressed by Wharton scholars who discuss *The Decoration of Houses* as well as domestic spaces in her novels. Claire Cooper delves into the concept of the house as a symbol of the self—the house as an outward representation of one's personal identity. She writes, "For most people the self is a fragile and vulnerable entity; we wish therefore to envelop ourselves in a symbol-for-self which is familiar, solid, inviolate, unchanging" (447). The house mimics the person in that it contains both an interior, personal identity, and an outward façade that may be likened to the "mask" worn when one performs social roles (Cooper 436). This also means that when one invites people into her home, she is exposing her personal identity. Cooper explicates, "The house therefore nicely reflects how man sees himself, with both an intimate interior, or self as viewed from within and revealed only to those intimates who are invited inside, and a public exterior. . .or the self that we choose to display to others" (436). It is not simply the outside of a

house that is reflective of identity, in fact, the interior of the home reflects personal identity far more than the "mask" of the outside.

The interior of the home, and interior decorating, "symbolizes the inhabitants' feelings about self" (Cooper 439). If one does not have a strong personal identity, then she may feel the need to hire an interior decorator: "It has been suggested that the rise in interior decorating is in some way related to people's inability to make these decisions for themselves since they're not sure what their self really is" (Cooper 439). If one *does* have a strong personal identity and sense of self, then she will welcome decorating the interior of her home on her own. Edith Wharton is an exemplary example of this. Wharton designed and built The Mount in Lenox, Massachusetts. She, and her husband Teddy, lived there off and on from 1902 to 1911, and it has been called "an autobiographical house, one that embodies the spirit of its creator" ("The Estate"). The Mount is illustrative of the house as symbol of self; it is a "full expression of Wharton's influential architectural and landscape theories," which she wrote about in *The Decoration of Houses* ("The Estate"). In *The Decoration of Houses*, it may seem as though Wharton is insistent upon specific architectural and interior design. However, she is an advocate of originality. She maintains, "originality lies not in discarding the necessary laws of thought, but in using them to express new intellectual conceptions; in poetry, originality consists not in discarding the necessary laws of rhythm, but in finding new rhythms within the limits of those laws" (*Decoration* 9). Wharton believes that one must take the necessary "features of architecture" and add "new intellectual conceptions" to them in order to make a house unique to the individual. Wharton did so herself with The Mount. In designing The Mount, she drew on French, Italian, and English traditional architecture, but she made it *her own* ("The Estate").

As Wharton's experiences suggest, most people do not stay in one house for the entirety of their lives, so what happens when they move? Wharton left The Mount for her apartments in Paris and later the French countryside. Cooper posits, "Most of us have had the experience of moving from one house to another, and of finding the new abode initially strange, unwelcoming, perhaps even hostile. But with time, we get used to the new house and its quirks, and it seems almost as though it gets used to us; we can relax when we return to it, put our feet up, become ourselves" (436). The interior decoration of a new house can accelerate the time it takes for one to "get used to" it. Individuals, once they designate a place as "theirs," will put their own mark on it— "we project something of ourselves onto its physical fabric" (Cooper 436). Wharton herself put her own "mark" on many homes. She and her husband Teddy build their home, The Mount, in Lenox, Massachusetts. Wharton writes in her autobiography, "The Mount was my first real home, and though it is nearly twenty years since I last saw it (for I was too happy there ever to want to revisit it as a stranger) its blessed influence still lives in me" (*Backward* 125). Wharton recognizes the influence that the place had on her, just as much as she influenced the place. She also renovated two homes in France—the Pavillion Colombe and Ste-Claire-du-Château. Wharton tailored both of these homes: "she did not design from scratch, but adapted two substantial houses to her needs, carefully preserving their best features while making some comfortable and elegant additions" (Lee 544). Wharton tailored the houses to suit her personal needs and identity, explicit examples of the home as symbol of the self.

There are also numerous examples of the home as symbol of self in Wharton's fictional works. For example, in *The Age of Innocence*, the interior of Countess Olenska's house is viewed as unique and eccentric—just as she is viewed throughout the novel. Newland Archer reflects on being inside Countess Olenska's home for the first time:

> What he saw, meanwhile, with the help of the lamp was the faded shadowy charm of a room unlike any room he had known. He knew that the Countess Olenska had brought some of her possessions with her — bits of wreckage, she called them — and these, he supposed, were represented by some small slender tables of dark wood, a delicate little Greek bronze on the chimney-piece, and a stretch of red damask nailed on the discoloured wall paper behind a couple of Italian-looking pictures in old frames. (Wharton *Age* 67)

The room is "unlike any room he had known," much like the Countess is unlike any other woman he had known. The interior of the Countess's house beautifully reflects her personal identity, and allowing Newland Archer into her home is an intimate choice. *The Age of Innocence* is certainly not Wharton's only work that demonstrates the house as a symbol of self. Wharton pays great attention to detail in the descriptions of both the interior and exterior of homes throughout all of her works—possibly because of her own interest in design. Wharton purposefully positions her characters in specific settings and places; there are no "accidents" when it comes to where a character resides or stays. Every single place in each of Wharton's works has a purpose.

The Best is Yet to Come

To understand the analysis of the literature in the upcoming chapters, one must first be familiar with several aspects of identity theory and place-identity theory. It is my hope that my reader will now find herself qualified to embark on a journey of identity and place-identity throughout the literature of Edith Wharton.

CHAPTER TWO: PLACE-IDENTITY IN WHARTON'S SHORTER WORKS: *MADAME DE TREYMES* AND "THE LAST ASSET"

Nouvelle: The Novella and the Short Story

"One of the chief obligations, in a short story, is to give the reader an immediate sense of security. Every phrase should be a sign-post, and never (unless intentionally) a misleading one: the reader must feel that he can trust to their guidance" (Wharton, *Writing* 37).

While Edith Wharton is highly recognized for her novels, she wrote a multitude of shorter works, including at least six novellas and eighty-five short stories. She recognizes that a story can be told successfully in a shorter form: "The effect of compactness and instantaneity sought in the short story is attained mainly by the observance of two 'unities' — the old traditional one of time, and that other, more modern and complex, which requires that any rapidly enacted episode shall be seen through only one pair of eyes" (*Writing* 43). If a work requires what Wharton refers to as a "lapse of time" or "the gradual unfolding of the inner life of its characters," then she believes it better suited as a novel.

In her novella *Madame de Treymes* (1907) and short story "The Last Asset" (1908) Wharton utilizes a limited omniscient narrator to tell the stories—this is the "one pair of eyes" that explicates everything for the reader. Both *Madame de Treymes* and "The Last Asset" also take place within a relatively short span of time. Although Wharton believes a longer work is necessary to "gradually unfold" the characters' lives, she manages to *rapidly* unfold the lives of the characters in her shorter works. *Madame de Treymes* and "The Last Asset," feature characters

whose personal identities are completely changed because of place and social connections within different places.

As in her novels, Wharton utilizes place and setting, and their effect on personal identity, throughout *Madame de Treymes* and "The Last Asset." One might conceive that it would be difficult for place to be as important in a shorter work, but it seems the opposite may be true. Since the setting of these works is in one place, namely France, the reader realizes the importance and impact of the place more notably—the importance of smaller places within France also becomes illuminated. For example, in both *Madame de Treymes* and "The Last Asset," Wharton concentrates almost entirely on Paris, France and the specific areas within the city.

Wharton wrote both pieces shortly after she and her husband Teddy permanently moved to Paris in 1906. They "rented George Vanderbilt's Paris apartment at 58 rue de Varenne" located in the Faubourg Saint Germain (Lee 227). R.W.B. Lewis, writer of the first definitive biography of Edith Wharton, states, "Edith Wharton believed. . . that the Faubourg manner of living. . . encouraged a certain experimenting with life which she simultaneously felt the need of: the assertion of one's individuality, an expression of the self. . . to a degree beyond that of New York society" (176). The Faubourg impacted Wharton's identity insofar as she felt freer to express herself. The Faubourg is also an important place in *Madame de Treymes*; Wharton published the novella in 1907, shortly after moving to Paris, so it is conceivable that she incorporated her current "place" into her work.

Though Wharton knew she could write fiction successfully in novella or short story form, she sometimes ran into roadblocks with publishers. Wharton had both an American publisher and a British publisher. Shafquat Towheed writes, "Wharton remained surprisingly faithful to her

first choice of publishers in both countries, staying with Scribner's in New York (1897-1916) and Macmillan in London (1903-23) for two decades" (15). Though she remained faithful, her time with Scribner's was not without difficulties. Charles Scribner did not want to publish Wharton's "The Bunner Sisters" because it was, "just a little small for the best results in separate form" (qtd. in Lee 161). Biographer Hermione Lee asserts that "this subdued, realist masterpiece of thwarted lives never gained the status it would have had if it had come out as a separate novella, like *Ethan Frome*" (161). With regard to *Madame de Treymes*, Scribner's first published it in its magazine, which was common practice, and then as a book. On February 18, 1907, Charles Scribner wrote to Edith Wharton: "I feel that you will be pleased with the appearance of the book and that the sale will justify making a book of this single story."[6] In the same letter, Scribner requested that Wharton's royalties be lowered from twenty percent to fifteen percent because of the cost of binding and publishing the book. While Wharton was pleased with the book, calling it a "charming little book" in a letter to Edward Burlingame, editor at Scribner's, she was displeased with the advertising. She wrote to Burlingame on March 3, 1907: "will you please 'voice' for me a 'qui de droit' a loud and violent protest as to the hideous portrait of me that accompanies/in the magazine/the 'ad' of Madame de T.?" She goes on to request that Scribner's "suppress all portraits until I can have myself photo'ed!" Though still relatively early in her career as a published author, Wharton was always fully transparent about her feelings.

Though she had an American publisher, Wharton recognized the importance of securing a British publisher as well. She developed an affable relationship with Frederick Macmillan, and

[6] Unless otherwise cited, all correspondence between Edith Wharton and Scribner's Publishing is culled from the Archives of Charles Scribner's Sons, Manuscripts Division, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

the two often corresponded privately. Towheed states, "As Wharton's London publisher for most of her illustrious literary career, Macmillan's criteria for selecting her works for publication were largely managed informally, through private meetings and personal correspondence" (27). While other authors had to send manuscripts directly to the publishing house for consideration, Wharton dealt almost entirely with Macmillan on a personal level. Her work was "never subjected to Macmillan's allegedly 'standard' house policy for manuscript submissions" (Towheed 26). In 1903, Wharton's novella *Sanctuary* would be her first work published by Macmillan. In March 1907, Wharton writes to Frederick Macmillan about *Madame de Treymes*:

> I have just realized that I have forgotten to write you about a novelette of mine which has just been brought out by Mr. Scribner. The story—called "Madame de Treymes"—came out in Scribner's last August, & attracted so much attention in the magazine that. . . Mr. Scribner told me he meant to publish it in a small volume (*Correspondence* 97).

Frederick Macmillan responds: "there is not much to be made in this country of novelettes. . .[but] we should be very sorry to see any book of yours in the list of another publisher and we will do what we can" (97-98). In a follow up letter, Macmillan writes, "I find it [*Madame de Treymes*] a charming little story which certainly ought not to remain buried in the back numbers of a magazine. I fear that we shall not be able to do very much with it, but if you agree, we shall be happy to bring it out immediately as a little half crown volume" (*Correspondence* 99). Wharton was surprised that Macmillan agreed to publish *Madame de Treymes*. In a letter to Edward Burlingame (her Scribner editor) dated March 30, 1907, she wrote: "Mr. Macmillan, to my surprise, is publishing Mme de Treymes in a volume. I did not suppose it would be worth bringing out in London." So, unlike "Bunner Sisters," *Madame de Treymes* was published as a stand-alone work by both Scribner and Macmillan. In 1904, Wharton wrote to Macmillan: "I

have just heard from Mr. Scribner about the volume of stories. It is to be called 'The Descent of Man' on the cover, & on the title page 'The Descent of Man and Other Stories'. . . They have decided that they have too much material for one volume, so they will not include 'The Last Asset'" (*Correspondence* 75). "The Last Asset" was not included in *The Descent of Man* and, ultimately, would not be published until 1908 in another collection of short stories, *The Hermit and the Wild Woman*; the collection was published by both Scribner and Macmillan.

Bourse: Scholarship

Scholars often overlook *Madame de Treymes* and many of Wharton's short stories. In one of the few pieces on *Madame de Treymes* Marta Miquel-Baldellou writes, "From her room at the Rue de Varenne, she [Wharton] could easily feel part of this milieu [of Paris], while she also noticed that, as a foreigner, she was necessarily removed from certain circles. We see similar feelings of belonging and detachment in her portrait of Fanny de Malrive. . . in her novella *Madame de Treymes*" (23). Miquel-Baldellou also acknowledges identity as an integral component of the novella. She states, "Fanny de Malrive has literally and metaphorically married into the Parisian society, having sworn allegiance to her newly acquired French identity" (28). Though Miquel-Baldellou touches upon identity in her scholarship on *Madame de Treymes*, she does not delve into the complexities of place-identity.

Jean Meral is a scholar who focuses on American writers in Paris and American literature written about Paris. Given her specialization, Meral references a myriad of places throughout her work—these places are often written about by Wharton as well. Meral cites identity as an issue for Americans in Paris. She writes, "Wharton focuses attention on the identity crisis suffered by the American colony and on the ambiguity of its position. . . Americans in Paris are unhappy

with their role as foreigners" (117). Meral's recognition of an "identity crisis" is a novel approach to Wharton's work for most scholars, and myself, and she also writes about both *Madame de Treymes* and "The Last Asset." These are works that many scholars neglect.

Madame de Treymes

Madame de Treymes (1907) is the first of Edith Wharton's works that she penned after her permanent move to France. Hermione Lee writes, "*Madame de Treymes* acts out Wharton's argument with herself about leaving America and moving to Europe" (218). While it is clear that Wharton wanted to move to France for a myriad of reasons, she did not view herself as an exile from America. In fact, Wharton always maintained her American citizenship. Percy Lubbock writes, "She never became, she had no call to become, any more of a European than she had been from the first; but with Europe around her she had room, liberty, encouragement, to be what she was" (50). Percy Lubbock was a close friend whom Wharton met through Henry James. In 1927, however, the two had a falling out. Hermione Lee explains, "their friendship ended badly after his marriage to Sybil Cutting in 1927" (551). Lubbock published the *Portrait of Edith Wharton* in 1947, and Hermione Lee suggests that there may be "exaggeration and vindictiveness" in Lubbock's accounts of Wharton. Nonetheless, Lubbock's accounts of Wharton's life in 1907 are firsthand, and as they were fond of each other then, one may surmise that many of his accounts are sincere. These accounts give insight into Wharton's life during the year that *Madame de Treymes* (1907) was published. In *Madame de Treymes*, Wharton crafts a character who struggles to integrate her American and French identities, as did Wharton herself. R.W.B. Lewis further explains: "Something of Edith Wharton's sense of herself in 1906 went into her portrait of the American born Marquise de Malrive" (164). In *The Writing of Fiction*,

Wharton alludes to the writer utilizing her own experiences as “creative fire,” so it is not unthinkable that her exposure to life in France might underscore her fiction.

Une Résumé: A Summary

A brief plot summary reveals how place-identity theory may help readers understand *Madame de Treymes*. An American expatriate, Fanny Frisbee marries into a French family but separates from her husband, the Monsieur de Malrive. Fanny is unable to divorce her husband because French law dictates that her son would stay with her French husband. Unwilling to leave her child, Fanny accepts her position and remains separated from Monsieur de Malrive, yet not divorced. John Durham appears as an American love interest for Fanny; they knew each other when Fanny lived in New York, but Durham did not desire her then. Durham wishes to marry Fanny, but her unwillingness to divorce Monsieur de Malrive is an obstacle. Durham attempts to help Fanny get a divorce by appealing to her mysterious sister-in-law, Madame de Treymes. While it seems as though Madame de Treymes is eager to help Durham and Fanny, she is plotting an elaborate scheme to gain custody of Fanny’s son. The Malrive family tells Durham and Fanny that they will allow the divorce, but under French law, once Fanny remarries the Malrives will gain custody of her son. Durham and Fanny are unaware of this loophole until the novella’s end, in which Madame de Treymes confesses her plot to Durham. He intends to tell Fanny and, knowing she will not give up her son, all hope for his relationship and marriage to her is lost.

Une Identité Qui Change: A Changing Identity

As the plot summary suggests, Fanny Frisbee finds herself constrained by her French environment, and her environment affects her personal identity. There is a marked change between Fanny Frisbee and Fanny de Malrive, and it is due almost entirely to Fanny's time in France. Fanny's name suggests this shift. Wharton's choice to use "Frisbee" as Fanny's maiden name makes it sound as if she is something to be toyed with and unimportant. While the modern toy, the frisbee, was not invented until 1948, "Legend says that in the early 1900s, students at Yale University began to buy empty pie tins from the Frisbie Pie Co. in nearby Bridgeport, Conn. They skimmed the tins to each other, yelling "Frisbie!" as they threw" (Hoyle). Wharton spent a lot of time in New England, so she may have known about the game or, at the least, the pie company. Fanny de Malrive, though, as a name, sounds quite serious. John Durham was acquainted with Fanny when she lived in New York, but he did not love her then. He acknowledges that she was "especially dashing," but that he "remained content to enjoy them [her charms] from a safe distance of good fellowship" (228). Furthermore, for Durham, "there were many other Fanny Frisbees. . . whereas, never before, had there been a Fanny de Malrive" (228). Fanny's new French identity attracts Durham. Wharton writes:

> She was the same, yet so mysteriously changed! And it was the mystery, the sense of unprobed depths of initiation, which drew him to her as freshness had never drawn him. He had not hitherto attempted to define the nature of the change: it remained for his sister Nannie to do that when, on his return to the Rue de Rivoli, where the family were still sitting in conclave upon their recent visitor [Fanny], Miss Durham summed up their groping comments in the phrase: 'I never saw anything so French!'" (229).

Not only does Durham notice the change from Fanny Frisbee to Fanny de Malrive, but his family also exalts the changes in her. The "depths of initiation" refer to the initiation Fanny has received into French society. John Durham is only in love with Fanny de Malrive, the Frenchwoman. Wharton describes the alterations in Fanny's persona:

> It was the finish, the modelling, which Madame de Malrive's experience had given her that set her apart from the fresh uncomplicated personalities of which she had once been simply the most charming type. The influences that had lowered her voice, regulated her gestures, toned her down to harmony with the warm dim background of a long social past—these influences had lent to her natural fineness of perception a command of expression adapted to complex conditions. (229)

Durham acknowledges that, while Fanny's French experience might not have been pleasant, her time in France has created the "Madame" for whom he now yearns. Ultimately, whether or not Fanny finds solace in her French environment, it still strongly impacts her personal identity.

The representation of Fanny's identity suggests Erik Erikson's notion, as described in Chapter One, that an individual must integrate place into her identity in order to maintain a healthy identity. Erikson also delineates the importance of *choice*, though. Fanny successfully assimilates into her French environment and integrates France into her personal identity, yet she has no choice but to stay. Erikson deems this lack of choice problematic, as one might suffer an identity crisis as a result. Erikson posits that a "certain element of deliberate tentativeness" (*Identity* 42) is necessary; no matter what place an individual finds herself, she must feel as though she has a conscious choice in staying or leaving. Erikson notes this as a "most private and individual decision" *(Identity* 43). Fanny does not see any choices, though. She consciously recognizes her *lack* of choices. R.W.B. Lewis writes, "Fanny de Malrive enacts another, Paris-

based version of Edith Wharton's dominant theme. She [Fanny] has escaped New York only to be imprisoned within a disastrous marriage — an entrapment more complete than anything Edith had contrived for the women in her American tales" (164). Wharton leaves the ending of *Madame de Treymes* open for interpretation—the reader does not know how Fanny will react when she learns of Madame de Treymes' scheme to gain custody of her son. The reader does know, though, that Fanny will not relinquish custody of her son to marry Durham. Her devotion to her child means, then, that she will have to remain in France indefinitely. Fanny's son is only eight years old, and she states, "French mothers part late with their sons, and in that one respect I mean to be a French mother" (219). Fanny will not leave her son, so she cannot leave France; "freedom is to be achieved only at fatal cost" (Lewis 164). For Fanny, this "fatal cost" is, to a large degree, her personal identity. Her lack of freedom and choice to leave her current "place" has detrimental effects on her personal identity.

Throughout the novella, Fanny maintains her American identity and combines it with her French identity. In many ways it seems as if Fanny's French identity has overtaken her American identity, but that may be a façade necessary for her to survive successfully in her French environment. In a conversation with Durham she says, "It is fifteen years since I was in America" (218). Durham replies, "And you're still so good an American" (218). It is important to note that the reader only receives Durham's view of Fanny; there is no insight from her. It is unclear why Durham believes Fanny to still be "so good an American," especially because it is precisely the opposite that attracts him: her Frenchness.

Fanny de Malrive is not the only woman whose "Frenchness" attracts John Durham. Durham has heard that Madame de Treymes is a "beauty, and was surprised to find her. . . a mere stick to hang clothes on" (231). When she begins speaking to him, though, he has a revelation:

"She is a beauty. . . if beauty is a pervasive attribute informing the hands, the voice, the gestures. . . in this impalpable *aura* of grace Madame de Treymes' meagre presence unmistakably moved, like a thin flame" (231). Durham is so enamored by Madame de Treymes; Wharton writes,

> It was not through the groping speech which formed their apparent medium of communication that she [Madame de Treymes] imbibed her information: she found it in the air, she extracted it from Durham's look and manner, she caught it in the turn of her sister-in-law's defenceless eyes — for in her presence Madame de Malrive became Fanny Frisbee again! — she put it together, in short, out of just such unconsidered indescribable trifles as differentiated the quiet felicity of her dress from Nannie and Katy's "handsome" haphazard clothes.

As with Fanny de Malrive, Durham is attracted to the French aspects of Madame de Treymes's personal identity. Durham refers to Fanny's new voice, gestures, and "natural fineness," but Madame de Treymes's "aura" transcends Fanny's Frenchness. Even Madame de Treymes's clothing, compared to Durham's American sisters, is more notable than Fanny's, even though Fanny's clothing is also French. The suggestion appears that Madame de Treymes, as a French-born woman, has a *natural* style, while Fanny's French style is more forced. The difference between Madame de Treymes's and Fanny's style harkens back to the idea that the integration of Fanny's French identity was out of necessity—her French style may not necessarily be natural to her. It is layered over her Americanness, and not purely as French as Madame de Treymes's style.

Just as Durham idealizes French identities, Fanny idealizes Americanism and associates it with freedom from her problems. After having tea with Durham's family, Fanny exclaims: "To be with dear, sweet, simple, real Americans again!" Perhaps a bit perturbed by her exclamation,

Durham rebuts, “If it’s merely our Americanism you enjoyed—I’ve not doubt we can give you all you want in that line” (216). Fanny responds, “Yes, it’s just that! But if you knew what that word means to me! It means—it means—. . .it means that I’m *safe* with them” (217). She views Americanism as “safe;” therefore, she feels safe and happy when she is with Durham’s American family. Fanny is captivated by the Americanism that the Durham family brings to her French life; her American identity craves enrichment. Fanny also views the Americans as a way out of her problems. She tells Durham, “Just now, sitting there with your mother and Katy and Nannie, the difficulties seemed to vanish; the problems grew as trivial to me as they are to you. And I wanted them to remain so a little longer; I wanted to put off going back to them. But it was of no use — they were waiting for me here” (225). Fanny follows this up by gesturing across the river to the Faubourg, where she lives, and says, “They are a part of me—I belong to them. I must go back to them” (226). After recognizing how “safe” she felt with the Americans, her return to the Faubourg and her French family is wrought with anxiety and an insidious feeling of doom. She wants to remain in “that clear American air where there are no obscurities, no mysteries” (223). Fanny’s romanticizes America, though, just as Durham romanticizes France.

Fanny’s feelings about America inform her complicated relationship with France. She exhibits place-identity throughout the novella—France is a significant component of her personal identity. However, she does not necessarily exhibit place-attachment. Hernandez et al. define place-attachment “as the affective link that people establish with specific settings, where they tend to remain and where they feel comfortable and safe” (310). Fanny’s affective link to France stems from affection for her son. She does not feel “comfortable and safe” in France, but she must remain there because of her love for her child. If given the choice, Fanny would not stay in France; she bears no attachment to the place. Her attachment is to her son, and, by proxy, France.

While the length of stay in a place often encourages a greater level of place-attachment, such is not the case with Fanny. The reader learns that she has been in France for fifteen years, which would seem like a long enough time for an individual to become attached. Durham questions why she never returned to America. Fanny replies: "It was impossible—it has always been so. My husband would not go, and since—since our separation—there have been family reasons" (218). Durham does not believe her entirely. He retorts, "Why do you talk of reasons? The truth is, you have made your life here. You could never give all this up!" (218). Durham is wrong, though. He views Paris as "a background for the enjoyment of life" and New York as "unenlightened ugliness" and "lamentable" (213). It is understandable, then, that Durham's own views of France would skew his understanding of Fanny's struggles. He cannot accept that she would willingly choose to leave France, because the country enamors him. Her experience in France is what Edward Relph refers to as "authentic." She has lived in France long enough to know the intricacies of the place, for better or worse. Durham, though, has "an attitude which is socially convenient and acceptable" (Relph 82); it is the attitude of one who has an "inauthentic" view of a place because they do not know it on a deeper level. This difference in authenticity occurs several times throughout the novella. One example transpires when Fanny attempts to explain the nature of French families to Durham. She states, "There is nothing in your experience—in any American experience—to correspond with that far-reaching family organization" (221). Durham cannot comprehend the complexities of French family dynamics. Durham derives his "vague knowledge" of France from "the perusal of yellow-backed fiction;" therefore, his views of France are inherently fictive and inauthentic (213). Fanny lives an authentic, real life in France—one that Durham can never fully understand.

In France, Fanny finds herself in different social roles and encounters different societal expectations than she did when she was in America, a point that suggests Harold Proshansky's emphasis on the importance of the people, not simply the place, when deciphering place-identity. Fanny's primary engagement with the French is through her marriage—France is "the civilization into which her marriage had absorbed her" (215). She must perform the social role of a French wife, which differs from that of an American wife. In *French Ways and Their Meaning*, Wharton explains, "the French wife has less legal independence than the American or English wife, and is subject to a good many legal disqualifications from which women have freed themselves in other countries" (*French* 105). It is precisely this lack of legal independence that causes much of the conflict in Fanny's life. Furthermore, "Marriage, in France, is regarded as founded for the family and not for the husband and wife" (*French* 128). Fanny not only married the Marquis de Malrive; she married his entire family, and they can exert control over her. Wharton also suggests, "the French marriage is built on parenthood, not on passion" (*French* 128). If that is the case, then it is reasonable that Fanny and the Monsieur de Malrive never divorced—their son is the most crucial factor in the marriage. Likewise, since the marriage encompasses the entire family, it is not unusual for the Monsieur de Malrive's family to want custody of the child. Madame de Treymes recognizes that her brother is an unfit husband and father, but she says, "his father is only a fraction of the whole. What we really do is to give him back to his race, his religion, his true place in the order of things" (276). Whether the Monsieur de Malrive will care properly for his son is irrelevant. What *is* important is that the family can raise the child in France and maintain the "unity of the family" (277).

Fanny Frisbee and John Durham are not the only American expatriates to make an appearance in the novella. Durham's cousin, Mrs. Boykin, and her husband, Elmer, are also

American expatriates living in France. Wharton writes, “in the isolation of their exile they had created about them a kind of phantom America” (234). The Boykins are a perfect illustration of Edward Relph’s account of inauthenticity of place. The Boykins refuse to accept any of France into their identities. In fact, they have a great disdain for the French. Wharton discloses, “It was a part of the Boykins’ uncomfortable but determined attitude—and perhaps a last expression of their latent patriotism—to live in active disapproval of the world about them” (234). The reader gets the impression that the Boykins moved to France to live a wealthier lifestyle than they could afford in America. They have no intentions of assimilating in France; Mrs. Boykin states, “Personally, I have no desire to thrust myself into French society—I can’t see how any American woman could do so without loss of self-respect” (235-236). Mrs. Boykin looks down upon Fanny because Fanny has successfully incorporated France into her identity. In *French Ways and Their Meanings*, Edith Wharton ruminates on American travelers: “the self-respecting American on his travels frequented only the little ‘colonies’ of his compatriots already settled in the European capitals, and only their most irreproachable members!” (*French* 62). Through the Boykins, Wharton illustrates her disdain for the Americans in France who created their own little “America” there. Jean Meral writes, “The American colony. . . is a hybrid group that. . . has often failed to comprehend the city fully” (51). While all members of the American colony are different, some may be more open to French ways than others, but the Boykins do not take the time to understand Paris or French ways at all. They purposefully maintain their American identities and do not allow any French identity to infiltrate. Wharton herself believes that one should “dig down to the deep faiths and principles from which every race draws its enduring life” (*Backward* 16) to truly understand a culture and country such as France. If one can

successfully dig deeper into a culture, then she can incorporate that culture into her personal identity.

Of all the characters in *Madame de Treymes*, the reader gains the least insight into the personal identity of Fanny's son, described only as "the boy" or "son." Wharton does not grace the boy with a name. Emilia Aldrin states that the naming of children is "a resource for contributing to the creation of different identities" (5). Furthermore, "The link between name and personal identity seems to be constructed from early on. Psychological studies show that, as children, we often consider names to be actual parts of objects, carrying the same characteristics. Many children even believe that things cannot exist without their names" (Aldrin 5). Without a name, Fanny's son barely exists in the novel—he is but a pawn between Fanny and Monsieur de Malrive's family. It is a curious decision for Wharton not to name the boy, but, as many Wharton scholars know, everything she does has a distinct purpose. Names are often of the utmost importance for Wharton, so not naming the boy implies that he is in the background and not a relevant character in the story. The irony here is that the boy is the *most crucial* character—everything that Fanny does is a direct result of her son.

Born in France, the boy's identity is influenced from birth. He has been born into a culture and religion that is inescapable. Fanny explains: "this forming of the mind begins with the child's first consciousness; it's in his nursery stories, his baby prayers, his very games with his playmates! Already he is only half mine, because the Church has the other half, and will be reaching out for my share as soon as his education begins" (221). Fanny wants to retain her "half" of the boy. That is, she wants to make sure she also has an influence on his identity. This seems nearly impossible, though, as her husband's French family and the boy's birthplace weigh far more heavily on his identity than Fanny ever can. Erik Erikson further explains: "the social

order may first grant to the infant as it keeps him alive and as, in administering to his needs in specific ways, it introduces him to a particular cultural style" (*Youth* 47). The boy is engrained with French culture from birth, and it will aid him in navigating his way through life in France as he grows older. Fanny's desperate attempts to hold on to half of the boy might do him a disservice, as knowing his French culture and the social order "keeps him alive" so to speak.

The reader also gets few glimpses into any interactions with the boy. He has no dialogue, and in a brief scene, he plays with a toy Durham gave him. This lack of interaction with the boy makes it difficult to discern any of his personal identity. As an eight-year-old child, the boy falls into Stage Four of Erik Erikson's psychosocial stages. Erikson refers to Stage Four as "Industry vs. Inferiority." Erikson's use of the term "industry" can be likened to competence—the child feels as though he is capable. Erikson writes, "he [the child] now learns to win recognition by producing things" (*Youth* 124). The child must have agency to become industrious. The "inferiority" part of this stage occurs when a child feels as though he is not competent enough. Erikson writes,

> It is at this point that wider society becomes significant to the child by admitting him to roles preparatory to the actuality of technology and economy. Where he finds out immediately, however, that the color of his skin or the background of his parents rather than his wish and will to learn are the factors that decide his worth as a pupil or apprentice, the human propensity for feeling unworthy may be fatefully aggravated as a determinant of character development. (*Youth* 124).

The background of the boy's parents in *Madame de Treymes* dictates everything about his personal identity and worth. This lack of agency would, likely, cause him to feel inferior or incompetent in social settings. It is not his own personal identity that matters; it is the identity he

carries because of his family that mandates his life. Wharton's choice to leave the boy nameless and give the reader little insight into his personal identity exemplifies the insignificance of his identity within the larger scheme of the family unit and French society.

In addition to Frenchness and Americanness, Wharton uses specific locations in France to connect characters and their identities to place. Early in *Madame de Treymes*, Durham and Fanny go on a walk together after having tea with his family. She suggests they cross the Tuileries and sit on the terrace of the Feuillants. Durham views the "complicated beauty" of the gardens, which stands as a metaphor for Fanny herself. The Tuileries are gardens located near the Louvre in Paris, France. Wharton studied gardens and gardening throughout her life, even publishing the book *Italian Villas and Their Gardens* (1904). Of French gardens she writes: "The deeper civilisation of a country may to a great extent be measured by the care she gives to her flower-garden— the corner of her life where the supposedly 'useless' arts and graces flourish. In the cultivating of that garden France has surpassed all modern nations" (*French* 38). The setting of the Tuileries, then, is of great importance for Wharton. Edith Wharton and her once lover Morton Fullerton spent time together at the Tuileries. Wharton met Fullerton in 1907 while still married to Teddy Wharton. Fullerton was a writer for the London *Times* in Paris, "in 1907 [and] Their attraction soon progressed to intense emotional and physical intimacy" (Lewis *Letters* n1). Wharton found him to be "intelligent but mysterious" and "the love affair. . . came fully into being in the first months of 1908, the scene being Paris and its environs" (Lewis *Letters* 121). While Wharton's affair with Fullerton occurred after the writing of *Madame de Treymes*, her private encounters with the place reinforce the importance of the gardens in her life. Lewis writes, "Later in the afternoon they went to the Tuileries, where they found a quiet spot under the trees from which they could look down onto the Seine. They sat for a while in silence, until

Fullerton exclaimed softly: 'My love! My darling!'" (224). The Tuileries make an appearance in several of Wharton's works. The importance of these gardens as a "place" cannot be underestimated.

Wharton also references the Faubourg throughout *Madame de Treymes.* Mrs. Boykin says of the Malrives: "You know they're really horribly bored in that poky old Faubourg" (248). The Faubourg Saint Germain is "a district of Paris, on the Left Bank, which became a centre of aristocratic society in the 17th and 18th c. and particularly after the Restoration [1814-1830" (France 302). The Faubourg was the first place Wharton lived when she made the permanent move to France. Hermione Lee writes, "the Whartons rented their first apartment in the Faubourg from the millionaire Vanderbilts — old acquaintances from New York and Newport days, and more recently their hosts at Biltmore — suggests their place in the world of wealthy Americans in Paris in the 1900s" (274). By the time Wharton moved to the Faubourg in late 1906, the "class [still] consisted of the old royalist aristocracy, also known as the *gratin*. . . It was a world composed of a thousand to twelve hundred families, organized in a rigid hierarchy" (Lesage 18). Wharton embraced the Faubourg and found intellectual and creative inspiration there. Mrs. Boykin's criticism of the Faubourg only solidifies the idea that she is unwilling to accept French culture into her identity. Meral explains,

> Americans in Paris do not supplant the Parisian aristocracy, which is so deeply rooted in the faubourg that this physical setting engages with their lives almost as if it were a living natural habitat. The high walls surrounding its *hotels* are the concrete symbols of an easily recognizable caste whose way of life remains a constant source of interest and astonishment to the Americans. (42)

The Boykins have no access to the Faubourg; the area houses a caste of Parisians that the Boykins are, insofar as class, below. There may be a hint of jealousy tinging Mrs. Boykin's critical view—when Wharton wrote *Madame de Treymes* the Faubourg was limited to only wealthy Parisians.

Wharton herself made many friends at the Faubourg. She writes, "My new friends came from worlds as widely different as the University, the literary and Academic milieux, and the old and aloof society of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, to which my early companions at Cannes all belonged" (*Backward* 258). Her admittance into the Faubourg highlights her affluence as both a writer and with regard to her wealth. Jean Meral states, "The meeting between Americans and Parisians, impossible in the context of tourist Paris, can now take place, but within strictly defined limits. It may be defined as the meeting between different aristocracies. Almost all of the American protagonists are millionaires" (43). Wharton can be considered "aristocracy" in her own right because of her wealth and notoriety, and several of her American characters are wealthy as well. For those characters who are not overtly wealthy, the Faubourg seems "uncomfortable and inhospitable" (Meral 42). While the narrator does not clearly illustrate Durham's financial status, one may surmise that he is well off. He offers to stay in Paris indefinitely, and his family is there as well. They have enough money to travel abroad and not work for extended periods of time.

The characters in *Madame de Treymes,* Fanny most of all, illustrate the continuity of identity over time, especially as it relates to place. Erik Erikson claims, "The conscious feeling of having a personal identity is based on two simultaneous observations: the perception of the selfsameness and continuity of one's existence in time and space and the perception of the fact that others recognize one's sameness and continuity" (*Youth* 50). If such are the criteria for a

"conscious feeling of personal identity," Fanny likely has no conscious knowledge of her personal identity outside of her societal roles (such as being a mother). The reader gets little insight into what Fanny Frisbee was like in New York; the only information the reader receives comes through John Durham's viewpoint, which is unreliable. However, his perception that she is not the same, and how drastically she has changed, reinforces the concept that Fanny lacks a strong personal identity. As the narrator explains, "The Frisbees were bold, experienced, enterprising: they had what the novelists of the day called 'dash.' The beautiful Fanny was especially dashing; she had the showiest national attributes, tempered only by a native grace of softness" (228). In many ways, this description of Fanny makes it seem as though she *did* have a personal identity prior to her marriage. Wharton's use of the words "national" and "native" are noteworthy. Both terms call the reader's attention to Fanny's native country: America. Fanny's native American identity may be subdued by her marriage and move to France. Sheldon Stryker and Peter Burke recognize the impact of social roles and groups on the salience of identity. They write, "each role or set of roles is embedded in one or more of a variety of groups that provide context for the meanings and expectations associated with the role" (289). Fanny's roles, once married, are that of wife and, eventually, mother. These roles are attached to the family group—in France, the family is arguably the most important "group." Therefore, Fanny would have little choice but to relinquish some of her "bold," "native" American identity in order to acquire salience within her French identity. As stated prior, though, Fanny is still infatuated with Americanism, as evidenced by her interactions with the Durham family.

Fanny is not the only character in the novella who struggles with personal identity. John Durham has little to no concept of his own personal identity; he bases much of his identity on Fanny's choices and other people's perceptions of him and is also caught between two worlds—

America and France. He views New York as “lamentable,” and his perception of France is based mainly on fiction. His views of France are also subject to change due to his interactions with Fanny. Wharton writes, “whether it [Paris] were the most loveable or the most detestable depended for him. . . on the buttoning of the white glove over which Fanny de Malrive still lingered” (214). Fanny forgets to put her gloves on, as a lady should, before she and Durham leave tea with his family. Durham hopes that this social faux-pas means that she is free and uninhibited, making him hopeful about his time in France. However, Fanny is simply confused; once she composes herself, her responsible side returns, and he fears what she will do. For Durham, the “sense of a personal stake” in Paris influences his identity, not Paris itself.

On the surface, *Madame de Treymes* seems to criticize the French and exalt Americanism. Louis Auchincloss states,

> Principles and ideals, for the last time in Edith Wharton's fiction, are found on the side of the Stars and Stripes, and Madame de Treymes ruefully recognizes the moral superiority of the Yankee in her final sob: “Ah, you poor, good man!” In later years, unhappily, Mrs. Wharton's Americans abroad were to become the corrupters and not the corrupted. (17)

While, politically, Wharton does seem to side with the Americans in the novella, a close reading illustrates equal criticism of both the American and French characters. Fanny Frisbee’s transformation into the much more desirable Fanny de Malrive is a direct result of her change in place. Wharton appears to commend the French forces that turned Fanny Frisbee into Fanny de Malrive. Wharton is also critical of several American characters in the novella. John Durham only knows of France what he has read in fiction. Wharton writes in *French Ways*, “we Americans [should] apply ourselves to finding out what they [the French] have to teach us. It is

obvious that any two intelligent races are bound to have a lot to learn from each other" (9). Wharton was adamant that Americans could learn from the French and vice versa. However, instead of taking the opportunity to learn, several characters in *Madame de Treymes* are happy with their superficial knowledge of France. Conversely, some French characters in the novella, such as Madame de Treymes, feel as though they have nothing to learn from the Americans. She tells Durham, "we are of different races, with a point of different honour" (272). Though she appreciates that Durham is honorable, she will make no exceptions for him or Fanny—her allegiance is to her French family.

Edith Wharton's *Madame de Treymes* presents a complex exploration of identity, place-identity, and place-attachment. The novella may reflect Wharton's struggles and transitions as she permanently moved from America to France. Fanny Frisbee (de Malrive) embodies the tension between American and French identities, and the difficulty in integrating the two into one personal identity. Wharton never viewed herself as an exile from America and she retained her American citizenship; she found the freedom and encouragement to be herself in Europe. Fanny's entrapment within French society and her constrained personal identity illustrate Erik Erikson's notion of the necessity of choice in maintaining a healthy identity. Fanny must assimilate into French culture, without the freedom to choose. Wharton's decision to leave the novella's ending open invites readers to ponder the complex interplay of personal identity, cultural environment, and the elusive concept of freedom. In *Madame de Treymes*, Wharton weaves her personal experiences into a narrative that illustrates the profound impact of place on identity.

“The Last Asset”

“The Last Asset” (1908) shares a remarkable number of similarities to *Madame de Treymes*, at least on the surface. Both works feature the relationship between a mother and child, and both works have an American woman marrying into a French family. In “The Last Asset,” however, Wharton’s portrayal of the mother, Mrs. Newell, is harsh at best. Hermione Lee describes the story: a “coldly brilliant story. . .of rich Americans marrying into the prim and proper French aristocracy. . .Greedy, exploitative Mrs. Newell, sliding down the social scale, is desperately in search of her long-discarded husband in Paris to give the proper tone to her meekly innocent daughter Hermione’s wedding to a young French count” (350). Mrs. Newell enlists the help of an American journalist, Garnett, to find her discarded husband so that he may attend her daughter’s wedding. If her husband is not in attendance, then her daughter will not be permitted to marry. Mrs. Newell tells Garnett: “The French are like that—especially the old families. I was given to understand at once that my husband must appear—if only to establish the fact that we’re not divorced” (62).

From the beginning of the story, Wharton comments on the significance of place. In *The Writing of Fiction*, Wharton explains that: “The rule that the first page of a novel ought to contain the germ of the whole is even more applicable to the short story, because in the latter case the trajectory is so short that flash and sound nearly coincide” (51). The first two pages of “The Last Asset,” introduce the reader to two American characters in Paris: Garnett and an unnamed, older gentleman. Garnett meets an American man at a restaurant close to his hotel, and, when Garnett is in town, the two often meet there to converse. Garnett refers to the man’s “unbending American intonation” and acknowledges that “the American sage’s conversation had

the crisp and homely flavor of a native dish—one of the domestic compounds for which the exiled palate is supposed to yearn" (46). The reader also learns of the old American:

> the city [Paris] itself seemed to have made as little impression on him as its speech. He appeared to have no artistic or intellectual curiosities, to remain untouched by the complex appeal of Paris, while preserving, perhaps the more strikingly from his very detachment, that odd American astuteness which seems the fruit of innocence rather than of experience. (47)

Garnett seems surprised that Paris has not made any impact on the man's identity, and he keenly acknowledges this detachment. Why does Garnett continue to meet with this man whose name he does not even know? Stryker and Burke suggest that commitment to one's personal identity can encourage interactions with "others to whom one is connected by possessing a particular identity. . .This aspect of commitment reflects density of ties, a characteristic of the social structure in which an identity is embedded" (290). Garnett maintains a commitment to his American identity and, through his engagement with the older, overtly American man, he feels a connection. The reader learns no more of the unnamed American man except that he has likely lived in Paris for years; there is no insight into the man's background. As with the boy in *Madame de Treymes*, Wharton initially leaves the man unnamed; he has no identity other than being an American in Paris, which sets up the rest of the story for the reader.

As in *Madame de Treymes*, Parisian locations often provide clues about characters' identities. After lunching with the elder American, Garnett returns to his hotel and receives a note from from Mrs. Newell, who requests his presence at the Ritz's at five o'clock. Garnett immediately thinks, "If one came to Paris, where could one go but to Ritz's?" (48). The Ritz Carlton in Paris was an American tourist destination, and Wharton detested it. The fact that she

situates Mrs. Newell there immediately signals the character's inauthenticity. As a tourist, Mrs. Newell does not appreciate Paris, or the French, on any deep level. Indeed, her superficiality is palpable throughout the story. Wharton writes, "Mrs. Newell's Paris was non-existent in September" (50). Her appearance in the off-season leads Garnett to wonder why she is there, and he is suspicious of her.

As her association with the Ritz implies, Wharton depicts Mrs. Newell as an upper-class parasite. She "used up everything too quickly—friends, credit, influence, forbearance. It was so easy for her to acquire all these—what a pity she had never learned to keep them!" (49-50). The character's personal identity is, as Erikson said of everyone's identity, in flux and malleable. However, Mrs. Newell changes her identity to manipulate people—it is how she survives. For instance, she both embraces and denounces her Americanism as the situation demands. Mrs. Newell "despises all things American," but she also uses her Americanism when it can advance her social standing: "she had manufactured for herself a personality independent of geographical or social demarcations" (51). Mrs. Newell's ability to navigate in different cultural atmospheres suggests a fragmented personal identity; however, the reader receives little insight into who Mrs. Newell is on a deeper level (if there is one). Sheldon Stryker suggests, "If . . . competing or conflicting identities reflect greatly different commitments. . .the identity based on greater commitment and higher salience will be reflected (in situations where alternative identities can be invoked)" (290). Mrs. Newell's commitment is to wealth and social status, so she will evoke whichever identity she must in order to reach her goals.

As with Fanny in *Madame de Treymes*, Mrs. Newell has a child: Hermione (Hermy). Hermy "doesn't fit in anywhere" and "became invisible in the glare of her mother's personality" (53). She does not have any identity of her own other than being her mother's daughter, and this

is, in large part, due to her mother's treatment of her. Wharton writes, "She [Mrs. Newell] got, of course, what she could out of Hermione. . .but such small returns on her investment were not what Mrs. Newell had counted on" (54). She views Hermione as an "asset;" she only cares what her daughter can bring to her in the form of wealth or social status. Mrs. Newell tells Garnett the news that Hermy will be getting married to a noble Frenchman. Of course, Mrs. Newell orchestrated the engagement; a "superlative stroke of business" through which she would find herself in a better financial situation (59).

Hermione's marriage into a French family, unlike Fanny de Malrive's, coincides with her personal identity. She is "too goody-goody to take in England, but . . . with her little dowdy air she might very well 'go off' in the Faubourg" (58). French ways suit Hermione; she is "simple, unsuspicious and tender, with an inclination to good works and afternoon church, a taste for the society of dull girls, and [has] a clinging fidelity to old governesses and retired nursemaids" (54). Hermione and Comte Louis de Trayas (her fiancé) share a "kindred nature" (69). They are in love, which Mrs. Newell does not care about when she arranges the marriage. Meral writes, "If the characters should happen to fall in love, as do young Hermione Newell and Louis du Trayas, that is only a happy coincidence that serves as a romantic counterpart to the sordid transactions preceding their union" (70-71). Mrs. Newell does not concern herself with Hermione's happiness; she arranges the marriage only to further her place in society. Surprisingly, though, Hermione finally "fits" in with her fiancé and his family. Her personal identity is a far cry from her mother's. Perhaps that is why she never was able to "fit in" before. Mrs. Newell only cares about material things and social climbing, and these are things that Hermione does not concern herself with. Her "fidelity to old governesses and retired nursemaids" makes it clear that her maternal attachments were to those women, and less to her own mother. While Mrs. Newell

views Hermione's marriage as a way to gain wealth, it is an escape into a better world for Hermione, and a world in which she can more deeply develop her personal identity.

Hermione's name provides clues to her personal identity; her nickname is Hermy, and the story was published in *The Hermit and the Wild Woman*. In many ways, Hermy's quiet, unassuming behavior and identity may be likened to a hermit. Hermits are also known to live in solitude for religious reasons, and Hermione is interested in the church. In fact, she quickly becomes Catholic to marry Louis, and her mother says she will get to attend church more once they are married and she joins the French family. Hermione is also a key figure in Greek mythology: "the only daughter of Menelaus and Helen. . .[she] became the wife of Neoptolemus, son of Achilles, but Orestes assassinated him and married Hermione, who had already been betrothed to him" (Murphy 468). Edith Wharton owned several books on Greek mythology, so she would have been familiar with the story of Hermione. The common theme between the myth and Hermione's character is that they are both betrothed to be married by their parents. In another parallel, Helen, Hermione's mother in Greek mythology, is said to have abandoned her child to have an affair, which suggests the selfishness of the mother. Emilia Aldrin suggests that "As identity is created in relation to others, the perception of names may also be of importance for identity formation" (5). Wharton recognizes that her readers may have a pre-existing perception of the name Hermione, and she may purposefully choose names to begin formulating her characters' identities from the reader's first glance.

Utilizing the first "place," the restaurant, that occurs in the story, Wharton executes an identity plot twist. The unnamed, older American at the beginning of the novel turns out to be Mr. Newell, Mrs. Newell's discarded husband and Hermione's father, and who Mrs. Newell charges Garnett with finding. Garnett learns of Mr. Newell's *true* identity at the same place that

he met the, until now, unnamed man—the restaurant they both frequent. It becomes clear that Mr. Newell was left by his wife when he had no more money, and he is unhappy about his daughter marrying a Frenchman. He exclaims, "Old French families be damned! She had better marry an American" (76). This outburst only reinforces Mr. Newell's American identity. Eventually, due to Garnett's repeated attempts and his latent love for his daughter, Mr. Newell acquiesces and consents to appear on Hermione's wedding day.

Mr. Newell, who was unnamed at the beginning of the story, still has little more than an overtly American identity at the end of the story. When Hermione throws her arms around him before her wedding, after having been away from him for years, he makes almost no gesture at all. Mr. Newell has no identity as a father or husband but, this is, again, Mrs. Newell's doing. She used her husband until she could no longer, and then she abandoned him. Stryker and Burke suggest, "When persons interacting in a common situation have difficulties in verifying their identities, existing ties are broken and structures dissolve" (290). The "ties" are broken between Mr. and Mrs. Newell, likely due to Mrs. Newell's inauthentic, chameleon-like identity; she becomes who she needs to be in order to use people. Mr. Newell probably never knew the *real* Mrs. Newell—she used him until he had no more to give, and then she left. Early in the story, Mr. Newell (yet unnamed) advises Garnett. He says, "There are lots of ways of being miserable, but there's only one way of being comfortable, and that is to stop running round after happiness" (45). Once a spontaneous man, Mr. Newell resolves himself to live a predictable life. It is feasible that this "predictable life" stems from his marriage to Mrs. Newell and her leaving him unexpectedly. He does say of his life: "For a good many years I never did *know,* from one minute to another" (44-45). His life was unpredictable for years, and one feels that Mrs. Newell was to

blame for that. In some ways, she has created who he has become, just as she *thinks* she is creating who Hermione will become.

Furthermore, Mr. Newell lives in the city of Paris, and his compulsive need for structure and predictability may also be a symptom of living in the city. Harold Proshansky deems cities "less than serene and predictable places to live" ("City" 148). Proshansky writes of "urban place-identity," which assumes "the physical characteristics and requirements of life in the urban setting socialize the individual to move, think, feel, play social roles, and solve problems in relation to all physical settings in ways that are uniquely urban" ("City" 161). One could argue that Mr. Newell has no urban place-identity, though. While he lives in the city, he solves problems by eating at the same restaurant every day, traversing the same streets, and frequenting the same places. Mr. Newell is not *socialized* into the city, because he prevents nearly all interactions. Proshansky describes "behavioral reaction systems," which "take cognizance of the fact that many of our reactions to physical settings, including feelings and perceptions, occur without. . . awareness" ("City" 161). Mr. Newell may not realize that his physical settings have caused his routinely predictable pattern of behavior and life. It seems as though his behavior is a direct result of Mrs. Newell, and it partially may be, but it also may be a behavioral reaction to the physical setting of the city.

As the reader learns at the beginning of the story, Mr. Newell rejects French culture completely, but he *does* exhibit place-attachment. While his American identity remains unchanged by living in France, he is attached to where he lives—Mr. Newell's routine is in Paris, so he is attached to the city. He tells Garnett:

> Get your life down to routine — eliminate surprises. Arrange things so that, when you get up in the morning, you'll know exactly what's going to happen to you during the day—

> and the next day and the next. . .That's why I always take my meals at this restaurant. I know just how much onion they put in things — if I went to the next place I shouldn't. And I always take the same streets to come here — I've been doing it for ten years now. (44)

Hernandez, et al. found that "immigrants score higher for measurements of attachment regarding the three places studied (neighbourhood, city and island) than for measurements of identity" (317). Therefore, an immigrant, regardless of time spent in a given place, may exhibit higher levels of place-attachment than place-identity—such is the case with Mr. Newell. While immigrants differ from expatriates insofar as they usually become citizens of their new country, the two share the commonality of living outside of their native country, often permanently or for long periods of time.

As in all of Wharton's works, specific places are just as important as larger settings. Furthermore, she does "not simply limit tourist Paris to its rather cliched charm, but work[s] it in with a fuller exploration of the city and the way it is linked with the destiny of certain characters" (Meral 39). Garnett does not stay at the Ritz like Mrs. Newell; he strays from tourist Paris. Garnett stays at a hotel in the Latin quarter, described as "dingy" (46). The Latin quarter itself, though, is home to the Sorbonne, and housed many writers and artists. Garnett is a writer, so it is a fitting neighborhood for him. His choice to stay in the Latin quarter could be a matter of identity salience. Stryker and Burke explain, "identity salience implies that persons are more likely to define situations they enter, or in which they find themselves, in ways that make a highly salient identity relevant" (289). Garnett may consider being a writer a significant component of his personal identity and, to make that identity relevant, he might choose to stay in a location where artists and writers live.

Garnett's name, like Hermy's, may also say a lot about his identity. While spelled differently, the semiprecious stone "garnet" may be a reference point. Garnet stones are said to have "stabilising power over chaos whether internal or external, and ensure[s] survival in crisis or trauma. Garnet is said to release bad karma and to promote success" (Emerson). Garnett's main job throughout the story is, indeed, to "stabilize" the situation for Mrs. Newell. He ensures that Mr. Newell will attend Hermione's wedding, which fends off a crisis. Furthermore, if not for Garnett, Hermione may not have had a happy ending.

In "The Last Asset," Wharton's expatriate characters are ideal examples of individuals whose personal identities are affected by place. Mrs. Newell's pursuit of social standing and wealth at the expense of genuine relationships highlights the superficial nature of her identity. Even though Mrs. Newell changes her identity to suit the place she is in, the place itself causes the change. In contrast, Hermione's quiet resilience and ultimate escape into a more authentic personal identity, through marriage and changing her place in the world, accentuate the theme of self-discovery. Hermione exemplifies how place can correlate with an already existing personal identity; she "fits in" in France. Mr. Newell, initially an unnamed, detached American, serves as a poignant counterpoint to his wife's material motives. His refusal to integrate French culture into his identity and his rigid routine in Paris highlight his impermeable American identity. While he refuses to incorporate French culture into his identity, he exhibits place-attachment to Paris. Garnett is illustrative of identity salience—he stays at a hotel where he feels he belongs. His role as a writer permeates his personal identity.

Avancer: Moving Forward

Edith Wharton's mastery of novellas and short stories demonstrates her versatility as a writer. Despite the perceived constraints of shorter fiction, Wharton deftly adheres to the unities of time and narrative point of view, and she creates succinct narratives that still exemplify the importance of place on identity. *Madame de Treymes* and "The Last Asset" embody Wharton's ability to quickly yet thoroughly develop characters and explore the significance of place, incorporating distinct sites among the larger backdrop of France. The importance of place in Wharton's work is not merely a backdrop, though. It is a vital component that shapes the personal identity of her characters and underscores the themes of her stories.

Wharton's engagement with publishers, highlighted by the mixed reception of her shorter works, illuminates the challenges she faced in gaining recognition for her shorter works. While *Madame de Treymes* eventually found its place as a standalone publication, hesitation from publishers reflects the market's inconsistent appreciation of novellas and short stories.

Nonetheless, Wharton's persistence ensured that her shorter fiction, such as *Madame de Treymes* and "The Last Asset," reached audiences. In both *Madame de Treymes* and "The Last Asset," Wharton addresses themes of identity and place identity, illustrating how the environment influences her characters' lives and choices. Her ability to depict the intricate relationship between individuals and their surroundings within the constraints of shorter narratives highlights her skill in creating a sense of place that impacts the reader's understanding of the characters.

CHAPTER THREE: NAVIGATING *THE REEF*

Edith Wharton penned her novel *The Reef* (1912) in less than a year and during an especially challenging time. Bert Bender writes, "When Edith Wharton began working on *The Reef*, in November of 1911, she was emerging from the most tumultuous period in her life" (326). Wharton sold her beloved home in Lenox, Massachusetts, The Mount, in 1911. Though she was already living in Paris, her sale of The Mount made the permanency of her residence in France all the more palpable. Hermione Lee writes, "She [Edith] left the house they [Edith and her husband Teddy] had built together, and sailed for Europe on 7 September 1911. When she landed, she received a cable telling her that The Mount — that 'gorgeous millstone,'. . .— was sold" (391). Edith and Teddy had agreed that no one would sell The Mount until she returned to Paris (he was going to a spa in Indiana); however, Teddy sold the house while Wharton was in route to Paris. She wrote to Morton Fullerton on September 22, 1911: "Yes—he *promised* not to sell the Mount to any one, at any price, till after I had reached Paris. . . [.] Yet when I landed I found his cable saying he had sold!" (*Letters* 255-256). Wharton was dismayed by Teddy's disregard for their agreement. On October 16, 1911, she told Fullerton: "Teddy is telling everyone that I 'insisted' on selling The Mount, & thus have deprived him in his old age of a home & of his one hope of getting well" (*Letters* 261). Teddy initially did not want to sell The Mount, and it seems that he ignored his agreement with Edith, and sold The Mount before she arrived in Paris, perhaps out of spite. Wharton now had no residence of her own in America, and she would never again permanently live there. Her tumultuous marriage also caused an enormous strain on her. For years Edith Wharton endeavored to save her marriage, but Teddy's mental

illness made that impossible to do. As early as 1909, Wharton considered divorce. Hermione Lee explains,

> Once Teddy had become impossible to live with, divorce would have looked like a desirable option. There is good evidence that it came to seem to her — in her case — a reasonable and practical thing to do, and not a cause of moral anguish. She considered that she had a right to free herself, though she did not do it without great pain. (366)

Wharton remained in the marriage for four more years and, ultimately, divorced Teddy in 1913.

Wharton's time in 1911 was transitional for another reason as well; "her two-year affair with Morton Fullerton had ended in the summer of 1910 (though they would continue a friendly correspondence for many years)" (Bender 326). As Bender observes, Wharton and Fullerton still maintained correspondence, and she even asked for Fullerton's help on *The Reef* in a letter dated June 25, 1912. Wharton asked: "Do you think you could perhaps come & see me somewhere for a day or two next month, so that I cd [could] go over the Reef with you? I don't think I've ever been so worried & uncertain about the 'facture' of a book" (*Letters* 271). By a "facture," Wharton likely refers to the "The action or process of making or creating" of the novel ("facture (*n.*), 3). On August 12, 1912, Wharton updated Fullerton: "I shan't send the chapters till I've read them to you" (275). Wharton appreciated Fullerton's input on the novel, and Fullerton also helped her with her contract with a new publisher: D. Appleton and Company. Hermione Lee explains, "She asked Fullerton to negotiate the contract. . . and she held out for 20 percent royalties" (424). Changes abounded in Wharton's life, and she still sought out Fullerton's help even though their love affair had ended.

Wharton's decision to publish *The Reef* with D. Appleton and Co. instead of Scribner's marked yet another major change in her life. Unhappy about the lack of advertising and editorial

errors on previous works, such as *Ethan Frome*, Wharton offered *The Reef* to Appleton. As she explained to Charles Scribner,

> I have received from the Messrs. Appleton a very high offer for a novel. As I was just finishing the short novel I have been working on during the last year, and as the terms they offered are so advantageous, I have decided to give them the tale in question, which they are to publish in September or early October. I believe this will be to your advantage as well as mine, as it will perhaps be the means of reaching a somewhat different public.[7]

Mr. Scribner responded on June 12, 1912: "It has taken me a month to recover from the shock caused by your announcement that you arranged with Appletons for the publication of your next book." Wharton's choice to publish with Appleton was not necessarily because they were a more popular publishing company (Lee 424). They were, however, "known for more enterprising business methods and aggressive advertising campaigns than Scribner's" (Lee 424). Given Wharton's disdain for Scribner's both insufficient and inept advertising of her previous work,[8] it is no surprise that she would turn to a publishing company known for their "aggressive advertising." While Wharton would go on to publish subsequent works with Scribner's, she did not initially offer them *The Reef.*

As a result of Wharton's tumultuous life while she wrote *The Reef*, several scholars interpret the novel as autobiographical, neglecting pertinent criticism on place and place-identity. Often, Wharton is likened to the character Anna Leath, and Morton Fullerton is likened to

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[7] Unless otherwise cited, all correspondence between Edith Wharton and Scribner's Publishing is culled from the Archives of Charles Scribner's Sons, Manuscripts Division, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

[8] See Chapter Two for information about Scribner's advertising of *Madame de Treymes*.

George Darrow.[9] Rather than reading the novel autobiographically, one may ascertain that Wharton used her experiences as most authors do in their writing. In *A Backward Glance*, Wharton asserts that it is the novelist's job to take her own experiences and apply a "creative fire" to them (251) While Wharton may have drawn on her own experiences while writing *The Reef*, it is an oversimplification to say that any of the characters are autobiographically representative. R.W.B. Lewis quotes Wharton as he writes, "replying to a letter of praise for The Reef from Brownell, she was able to say candidly that his words went to her 'innermost heart, because I put most of myself into that opus.' But to Berenson, at the time of publication, she said in a troubled way: 'It's not me, though I thought it was when I was writing it'" (326). Furthermore, Margaret McDowell suggests, "Wharton identified with all her characters, not just with Anna" (534). Wharton may have used her own experiences to craft the characters, so it is not unrealistic that she might identify with the characters in the novel. What are, arguably, the most autobiographical aspects of the novel relate entirely to place—Wharton writes about specific places that she knows well, and in this sense, place-identity theory provides an especially productive lends for reading *The Reef*.

Whether or not Wharton identified with the characters in *The Reef*, she definitely identified with the backdrop of France in which the novel takes place. Alan Bellringer writes, "*The Reef* is not directly about the French, but it uses France as a significant background. *The Reef* presents material with which Edith Wharton was most at home, the personal problems of Americans living in Paris and in French country houses" (120). The concept of place throughout *The Reef* is prominent, so much so that certain places almost become characters. Suzanne Jones

[9] George Darrow is a character who has relationships with two different women and is portrayed as a bit of a playboy.

explains, “Wharton sought to. . . explain not only the power of people to project feelings onto places, but the power of places to produce feelings in people” (180). By doing so, Wharton exemplifies place-identity; places can affect one’s identity, but individuals can also affect the identity of a place. In *The Reef*, several main characters are linked not only to place in the larger sense of countries such as France and America, but also in smaller spaces such as hotels and gardens.

Un Résumé: A Summary

The Reef opens with George Darrow receiving a letter from Anna Leath. It says, “Unexpected obstacle. Please don’t come till the thirtieth” (3). The reader learns that Darrow and Anna have reconnected after many years—Anna is a widow now, and she and Darrow are exploring a romance. They knew each other when they were young, but much like Fanny Frisbee and John Durham in *Madame de Treymes*, their relationship did not materialize then. After receiving Anna’s letter, Darrow is put off—he believes the “unexpected obstacle” is an excuse because she does not want to be with him. Dismayed, Darrow meets a fellow traveler: Sophy Viner. He enters into a romantic liaison with the younger woman; he uses her as a distraction to try to forget about Anna. Eventually, Darrow returns to Anna who, in fact, does want to marry him. Much to Darrow’s surprise, Sophy Viner appears as the governess for Effie, Anna’s daughter. She also is engaged to Anna’s stepson, Owen. Frantically, Darrow tries to hide his sordid past with Sophy, but she, still in love with him, cannot tolerate being around him. All of Darrow’s secrets come out, and Anna must decide whether or not she wants to marry him after all. Sophy chooses to leave both Owen and her work as a governess. Wharton’s ambiguous

endings tend to be a hallmark of her work, and the ending of *The Reef* is no exception. The reader does not know whether Anna will return to Darrow or not in the end.

An in-depth analysis of specific characters and their experiences with places is necessary in order to fully understand how place-identity informs *The Reef*. Certain places themselves, specifically places with dominant identities of their own, are also pertinent to the discussion.

Anna Leath: Stable au Fur et à Mesure – Steady as She Goes

Anna Leath (Summers) displays the most obvious examples of identity and place-identity theory throughout *The Reef*. As a girl, growing up on West Fifty-fifth Street in New York, Anna Summers perceived that a "veil. . .had always hung between herself and life" (68). This "veil" created an obstacle to realizing her personal identity. If she could not experience life, then she could not incorporate any experiences into her personal identity. She is much like Wharton described herself as a girl: "an anonymous morsel of humanity" (*Backward* 23). Anna, like Wharton, awaited the influences that would mold her personal identity. Anna dreams of a "magic bridge between West Fifty-fifth Street and life" (69). For a moment, she believes young George Darrow could be this bridge, but she is mistaken. In Anna's West Fifty-fifth Street life, she "wondered why everybody about her seemed to ignore all the passions and sensations which formed the stuff of great poetry" (68). Anna, much like Wharton, wants to live life on a deeper level; she wants to acknowledge the artistic, emotional and intellectual parts of life that her New York society seems to ignore.

Anna searches for a way to enhance her personal identity and live life more intensely. Upon meeting her soon-to-be husband, Fraser Leath, Anna believes she has found some hope. The narrator explains: "he presented Miss Summers with a prettily-bound anthology of the old French poets and, when she showed a discriminating pleasure in the gift, observed with his grave

smile: 'I didn't suppose I should find any one here who would feel about these things as I do'" (71). Another instance occurs in which Fraser shows Anna a "pastel" he bought at an auction. He tells her, "I know no one but you who would really appreciate it" (71). Anna is convinced that Fraser is a kindred spirit; he appreciates the arts and has passion for things others ignore. He is someone who can understand her, and her confidence in herself grows as a result. One can already see Anna's personal identity being molded by her interactions with Fraser. Fraser tells Anna that she lives in "a dreadfully conventional atmosphere" (72). One can gather from the knowledge of Anna's girlhood that she already knows this and feels much the same. Fraser deems Anna "worthy of a different setting" (72), and Anna appreciates this sentiment. She trusts and respects Fraser's love for art, and she is complimented when he deems her "worthy." Wharton writes, "Every word, every allusion, every note of his agreeably modulated voice, gave Anna a glimpse of a society at once freer and finer" (73). Fraser has convinced Anna that Europe and, specifically France, will provide everything she has ever dreamed of. He is influenced by his French father's views, and his mother's conformity to French ways. Wharton explains, "Life, to Mr. Leath, was like 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" (75). As Tuan argues, one may find solace in never having to make any decisions about who one is; being *told* who one is and how one should act removes any "anxiety of freedom and . . . necessity for choice" (139). Fraser Leath never had to wonder about his identity; he had only to look in the "catalogue" to find out. Anna, on the other hand, is beginning to think about how she, and her identity by proxy, might change in a different place.

Anna does, indeed, find herself in a place that will impact her personal identity. After marrying, Anna and Fraser move to Givré, a chateau located in rural France. Wharton chose to

set Chateau Givré in a rural area near Dijon, France. This is evidenced in the novel when Anna leaves Givré to pick up her daughter and mother-in-law from a train station in Dijon: the "main line was eight to ten miles from Givré" (104). Wharton wrote of Dijon in her travel book, *A Motor Flight Through France*. She writes, "The continuity of life at Dijon is as striking as its diversity and individuality" (155). While Givré is not located directly in the city of Dijon, it is interesting to note Wharton's opinion of the city. The "continuity of life" Wharton writes of mimics the continuity of identity—Dijon's place-identity has endured. Perhaps said continuity is a reason for Wharton's setting Givré nearby. It is reliable, stable, and unchanging, much like the city of Dijon.

Chateau Givré was inspired by Chateau de Breau, which was an "enchanting eighteenth-century house near Fontainebleau, set in a three-hundred-acre walled park" (Lee 275). Chateau de Breau was owned by Wharton's good friends, Walter and Matilda Gay. It is rumored that Chateau de Breau even influenced Wharton's design of her own country home, Pavillion Colombe. Hermione Lee writes, "Wharton loved this house [Chateau de Breau]; it inspired the Chateau Givré, in *The Reef*; and it influenced her decoration of . . . the Pavillon Colombe. Ironically, Walter and Matilda Gay were critical of the Pavillon; Matilda wrote in her diary, "Had the little place fallen into other hands, it could have been made a gem" (qtd. in Lee 530). Though the Gays were not impressed by the Pavillon Colombe, many of Wharton's other friends spoke highly of it, specifically of the gardens, which "became . . . as admired as her books" (Lee 531).

When Anna first arrives at Givré, she is open and optimistic about the impact that France and Givré might have on her personal identity. Wharton writes,

The possibilities which the place had then represented were still vividly present to her.

> The mere phrase ‘a French chateau’ had called up to her youthful fancy a throng of romantic associations. . . and the serene old face of the house seated in its park among the poplar-bordered meadows of middle France, had seemed, on her first sight of it, to hold out to her a fate as noble and dignified as its own mien. (66)

After spending time at Givré, though, “the house. . . [became] to her the very symbol of narrowness and monotony” (66). Anna is surprised to realize that it is not that unlike the America she abandoned for a “better” life. The reader is informed that “Anna. . .had discovered in her amiable and elegant mother-in-law an unexpected embodiment of the West Fifty-fifth Street ideal” (73). Givré is isolated, so Anna’s main interactions are with her mother-in-law and her husband. Fraser’s desire to exact “a rigid conformity to his rules of non-conformity” (73) is also quite problematic for Anna. To a degree, as in New York, Anna is ruled by conventions. Erik Erikson explicates, “cultural surroundings. . .become an ‘environment’ of vague supports or of blind pressures and mere ‘conventions’” (*Identity Youth* 221). Anna’s new cultural surroundings have become an environment of *new* pressures and conventions, rather than offering her the freedom for which she hoped. Givré is not inspiring her personal identity; she is still a blank slate.

The birth of Anna’s daughter, Effie, does, for a moment, spark new life inside of her; it is short-lived, though. Wharton writes, “With the exception of the little girl herself, everything connected with that time had grown curiously remote and unimportant” (75). Like Fanny Frisbee from Madame de Treymes, Anna’s only identity is that of wife and mother. When her husband dies, her only role is of mother—her relationship to her daughter and stepson are the most integral to her identity.

While the reader receives some insight into Anna's thoughts and feelings throughout the novel, which alternates between hers and Darrow's points of view, many of the descriptions of her are from George Darrow's point of view. On the first page of the novel, always important to Wharton, Darrow ruminates on Anna's "sweet reasonableness" (3). It is precisely this "reasonableness" that seems to rule Anna's behavior. Likely, she has become this way, molded her identity, to conform to the societal roles that she embodies—a mother and, for a long while, wife in France. Anna and Darrow's reunion occurs, having not seen each other for years, at an American Embassy dinner in London. Wharton writes, "He still felt the throb of surprise with which, among the stereotyped faces of the season's diners, he had come upon her unexpected face. . . in the plumed, starred crowd, she had stood out for him, slender, secluded, and different" (3-4). Also occurring early in the novel, this description of Anna is important. In New York, when Anna and Darrow were much younger, he was only concerned with having fun. Their short relationship ended when he dined with Kitty Mayne, a "silly girl" who Darrow describes as "good fun" (71). Much like John Durham and Fanny Frisbee from *Madame de Treymes*, Darrow did not appreciate Anna when they were young. Now, after she has lived abroad for many years, he views her as "different." Furthermore, he thinks "how much finer and surer an instrument of expression she had become" (4). These may be changes one could attribute to age, but it is also plausible that living in France has contributed to the differences in Anna's personal identity, much like the changes that occur for Fanny Frisbee.

As stated earlier, Anna's role as a mother is an important aspect of her personal identity, and the novel reveals the differences between American and French families. The narrator explains from Darrow's point of view: "she [Anna] was beset by family duties and, as he thought, a little too readily resigned to them" (7). While Anna's husband was American, she has

lived in France for long enough to have adapted to French customs. Family duties come above all else, as is the case for Fanny in *Madame de Treymes* as well. Darrow seems frustrated that Anna is so "resigned" to her family duties; he cannot comprehend the importance of such things. Anna's identity, though, is heavily based on her roles in the family—she is an exemplary mother, stepmother, and daughter-in-law, and she prides herself on being so. Proshansky asserts, "Whatever the. . . social role of the person, it clearly and necessarily involves the behaving and experiencing individual in a particular physical setting" ("City" 159). Anna's social roles occur primarily within the physical setting of Givré, and within the larger setting of France. These physical settings related to her social roles are "represented in a very focal way by expectations, beliefs, feelings, ideas, and aspirations about this setting" (Proshansky, "City" 159). Therefore, Anna's physical settings of Givré and France dictate how she must adhere to her social roles as wife and mother. Anna does not have much of a social identity to speak of; her only social roles are at Givré with her family, and these roles distinguish how she behaves, how she thinks, and what she believes (Proshansky et al., "Place" 81).

Given that Givré encompasses Anna's social roles in the family, the place is integral to her personal identity. Whether consciously or unconsciously, Anna begins to "synthesize" herself with Givré. As William James writes, "We *comprehend* a thing when we synthesize it by identity with another thing" (85). Anna becomes so closely entangled in Givré, that the two can barely be separated. Wharton describes Givré:

> with the passing of years, it had gradually acquired a less inimical character, had become, not a castle of dreams. . . but the shell of a life slowly adjusted to its dwelling: the place one came back to, the place where one's duties, one's habits, and one's books, the place one would naturally live in till one died: a dull house, an inconvenient house, of which

> one knew all of the defects. . . but 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. (66)

Per place-identity theory, one must integrate place into her identity in order to maintain a healthy personal identity. Moving to Givré is what Erik Erikson refers to as a "new life task." New life tasks often present identity crises, and one major way to avert a crisis is a "successful gradation" by slowly unifying place and personal identity. Anna successfully integrates Givré into her identity, and it becomes such a large part that she does not know who she is without it. Givré becomes an "immediate centre of [Anna's] experience of the world" (Relph 141). She feels as though she belongs there, and this belonging illustrates Edward Relph's theory of insideness versus outsideness. Anna's intimacy with Givré marks the insideness she feels there, but when she leaves Givré she experiences outsideness: she feels a "separation between [herself] and the world" (Seamon and Sowers 3). Anna's experience suggests place-identity and the successful incorporation of place into identity.

Anna also exemplifies place-attachment—bear in mind place-identity and place-attachment do not always correlate, but, in Anna's case, they do. Anna has an "affective link" to Givré; she has lived there for a long period of time. Kelly and Hosking observe "positive relationships between levels of place attachment, [and] the amount of time spent" (1). It is notable, however, that Anna may not necessarily be *attached* to France. She is attached to Givré and her family, and they simply happen to *be* in France. M. Carmen Hidalgo and Bernardo Hernandez acknowledge the "importance of the social dimension in the growth of attachment, to the point that place attachment has become identified with attachment to the people who live in that place;" however, they also recognize that "besides social attachment, people feel attached

to the physical dimension of places" (279). Therefore, there is a correlation between social attachment to people *and* the physical place. In Anna's case, she is attached to her family, but she is also attached to Givré itself—even when she is at Givré alone she experiences place-attachment.

Givré becomes, as Claire Cooper posits, a symbol of the self for Anna—the chateau reflects Anna's personal identity. Cooper writes,

> Most of us have had the experience of moving from one house to another, and of finding the new abode initially strange, unwelcoming, perhaps even hostile. But with time, we get used to the new house and its quirks, and it seems almost as though it gets used to us; we can relax when we return to it, put our feet up, become ourselves. (169)

Anna's experience with Givré is precisely as Cooper describes—at first, she feels the house to be "narrow" and "monotonous," but she grows comfortable there. Cooper's theory echoes William James as he questions,

> What is meant by coming to feel at home in a new place, or with new people? It is simply that, at first, when we take up our quarters in a new room, we do not know what draughts may blow in upon our back, what doors may open, what forms may enter, what interesting objects may be found in cupboards and corners. When after a few days we have learned the range of all these possibilities, the feeling of strangeness disappears. (78)

Wharton owned William James's work, *A Will to Believe*, so it is plausible that she might have utilized his theory in her work (Ramsden 65). As Anna synthesizes with Givré, though, the two become almost inseparable. Darrow questions her regarding their possible marriage: "You're sure you're prepared to give up Givré? You look so made for each other!" (94). Here, we can see

that Anna's identity has become almost synonymous with Givré; they are both comforting, reliable, and conventional. Cooper writes, "For most people the self is a fragile and vulnerable entity; we wish therefore to envelop ourselves in a symbol-for-self which is familiar, solid, inviolate, unchanging" (447). At Givré, Anna is enveloped in a safe place; it is familiar, and she identifies with the place in a healthy way. The "reliability" of Givré is evidenced when Wharton writes of the "stable-clock of Givré" (104). The stability of the clock is a metaphor for the stability and reliability of Givré, and of Anna's own reliability and stability.

When Anna does leave Givré, she relinquishes a major part of her personal identity. Place has become so impactful to her identity that she has difficulty knowing who she is without Givré. For example, Anna experiences "outsideness" when she travels to Paris. When she does so, she longs for the serenity of Givré. Wharton writes, "She had come up to Paris hardly knowing what peril she feared" (238). Anna's fear stems not only from her personal relationships, but also from a generalized anxiety of the city. In her Paris apartment, she "seemed to be seated on the hearth in her sitting-room at Givré" (245). Givré has become an integral part of Anna's personal identity; so much so that, while in Paris, "she seemed immeasurably far off from every one, and most of all from herself. It was as if her consciousness had been transmitted to some stranger whose thoughts and gestures were indifferent to her" (246). Anna does not know who she is in the city; she has no access to her personal identity, and she feels like a stranger to herself. Anna has become used to the solitude of Givré, and she requires that solitude in order to know herself. This solitude calls back to the beginning of the novel, when Darrow thinks of her as "secluded." Wharton writes, "The solitude of her inner-life had given her the habit of these hours of self-examination, and she needed them" (252). Givré represents Anna's "inner-life;" it is solitary, and she has time and space to reflect while she is there. In the city, she is bombarded with

uncertainty. As Harold Proshansky notes, urban ambience can differ greatly between individuals. For Anna, the sights and sounds of Paris induce anxiety, while other characters in the novel enjoy those attributes. When Anna returns to Givré, the reader learns that, "It was wonderful to be once more re-entering the doors of Givré . . . and . . . she had the sense of passing out of a dreadful dream into the reassurance of kindly and familiar things" (255). Anna feels "extinguishable bliss" (266) . She feels as though she is able to live more easily there; the serenity and certainty of Givré comfort her. Harold Proshansky et al. explain that often individuals need privacy and freedom from "external observation" and that they make an "attempt to minimize all sensory input from outside the boundaries of [a] physical setting" ("Freedom" 177). Being at Givré removes Anna from the sensory input that she experiences in Paris. While consciously Anna might not recognize the influence on her personal identity from Givré, she *does* find comfort, stability, and peace, all of which reflect her personal identity. Harold Proshansky might argue that place *unconsciously* influenced Anna's personal identity in these ways.

Sophy Viner: Un Travail en Cours

Sophy Viner is another character in *The Reef* who depicts place-identity. The reader receives no insight into Sophy's thoughts or feelings—descriptions of her come from Darrow's point of view. Wharton writes, "He had immediately classed her as a compatriot; her small nose, her clear tints, a kind of sketchy delicacy in her face. . . all confirmed the evidence of her high sweet voice and of her incessant quick gestures. She was clearly an American" (12). Sophy's mannerisms are described quite differently than Anna's. While Anna is an "instrument of expression," Sophy makes "incessant quick gestures." This difference in Darrow's view, and his

assertion of Sophy's Americanness, mark the disparities between Anna's Frenchness and Sophy's Americanness.

Sophy's personal identity is in the process of being molded. Upon her arrival in Paris, she embraces all that the city has to offer. Jean Meral states, "Tourist Paris also consists of a psychological stage in the development of certain characters ready to embark on their Parisian adventure. This stage may be described as one of heightened receptivity in which the characters, having shed their cultural habits, can stand open and vulnerable to the city's influence" (39). Sophy's receptivity is, indeed, heightened— "For her Paris was 'Paris' by virtue of all its entertaining details, its endless ingenuities of pleasantness" (34). Because Sophy's personal identity is still so malleable, she welcomes the city's influence with open arms. Unlike Anna, for Sophy the urban ambience of the city is pleasant—she enjoys the sights and sounds. Because Sophy is open to the influence of place, she is adaptable and flexible, and not in a superficial or manipulative way such as Mrs. Newell from "The Last Asset." Wharton writes, "the girl before him [Sophy], with her changing face and flexible fancies, seemed destined to work in life itself rather than in any of its counterfeits" (35). Sophy awaits the influences that will mold her personal identity. At times, these influences can come not only from place, but from the people within the place—Harold Proshansky acknowledges the probability of other people shaping one's place identity. He states, "dwellers learn to respond to the changeability of public physical settings, that is, to the stream of. . . responses of others—their movements, changing postures, and even facial expressions—in ways that maximize the adequacy of their own responses in these settings" ("City" 167). Sophy learns how to respond properly to the "changeability" and "responses of others" in urban settings. Her ability to shift her behavior depending on the setting is evidenced by her flexible personal identity. Darrow ponders her identity: "such expertness

qualified by such candour made it impossible to guess the extent of her personal experience, or to estimate its effect on her character. She might be any one of a dozen definable types, or she might. . . be a shifting and uncrystallized mixture of them all" (49-50). Sophy's identity is difficult for Darrow to pin down, but he does recognize that she seems to be an amalgamation of her experiences and of the people that she has encountered. Erik Erikson would find this problematic—Sophy's identity is *so* malleable that she cannot safeguard the "sameness and continuity" of her personal identity (*Identity Life* 22). People and places may have *too* much influence on her.

Sophy's background and history may explain why her personal identity is so impressionable. As a child, after the death of her parents, she was "consigned" by her guardian to a "New York boarding school" (20). Then, Sophy worked at a "Fifth Avenue school-room" until she was "accordingly left to her own resources" (20). She then travels around Europe with a childhood friend, Mamie, but is again left to her own devices after Mamie elopes. Finally, Sophy finds work at Mrs. Murrett's at a "dreadful house in Chelsea" (21). Wharton writes, "Things came one's way or they didn't; and meanwhile one could only look on, and make the most of small compensations" (21). Sophy has lived her life based on what has come her way; she has had little to no choice in her position in life, even from childhood. Erik Erikson suggests, "It is the free choice that counts and the conviction that nobody can either 'fence you in' or 'push you around'" that is important to identity formation (*Childhood* 39). Sophy has been "fenced in" for the majority of her life and has been forced into situations in order to survive. Furthermore, she never has a permanent or stable residence, so it is difficult for her to experience place-attachment.

After parting from Darrow, left again to her own devices and with little choice, Sophy accepts another job as a means of financial stability. She is now Anna's daughter Ellie's governess at Givré, and Darrow does not see her again until he travels there. When Darrow questions why Sophy gave up her dreams of being in the theatre, she simply replies: "I had to live" (132), acknowledging her lack of choice. Darrow also notices a change in Sophy's demeanor: "Darrow was struck, and vaguely troubled, by the change in her look and tone. There was in them an undefinable appeal" (132). Living abroad has impacted Sophy and, as with Anna and Fanny Frisbee, Darrow finds her even more appealing now. The "undefinable appeal" Sophy radiates can be likened to the changes in Anna's demeanor that Darrow acknowledged after her living in France. For both Anna and Sophy, living in France has affected their personal identities.

Sophy's transient identity does not end in France; after leaving Owen and Givré, she goes to her sister, Mrs. Birch, for help. Quickly realizing her sister cannot help her, Sophy hurriedly embraces the opportunity to once again work for Mrs. Murrett, a woman she finds deplorable. This time, though, she travels to India with Mrs. Murrett. Mrs. Birch tells Anna, "Naturally I didn't altogether approve of her going back to that beast of a woman. I said all I could . . . I told her she was a fool to chuck up a place such as yours. But Sophy's restless—always was—and she's taken it into her head she'd rather travel" (290). Mrs. Birch's assertion that Sophy is "restless" is inaccurate; Sophy leaves because she has nowhere else to go. She is, yet again, forced into a vocation for the purpose of simply surviving. Erik Erikson suggests, "a man must have and must preserve and defend the freedom of the next step and the right to make a choice and grasp opportunities" (*Childhood* 38). While it *appears* as though Sophy is "grasping opportunities," she has no choice; the opportunities are, in fact, necessities.

George Darrow: Envolée de Fantaisie: Flight of Fancy

Unlike Anna and Sophy, the personal identity of George Darrow is based entirely on selfish motivations. William McNaughton argues that Darrow "will undoubtedly survive and prosper . . . because he is a male without family obligations, and with physical freedom, a successful career and economic self-sufficience" (49). Unlike Sophy, Darrow has *choices*; he is self-sufficient, so regardless of his interpersonal relationships, he will survive. Adrian Raine and Stepheni Uh define selfishness as "an inordinate focus on one's own welfare, regardless of the well-being of others" (503). Darrow, immediately after receiving a vague telegram from Anna, quickly assumes she does not want to be with him and encounters Sophy, who he does not hesitate to dally with. This dalliance is at the expense of both Anna and Sophy, for he hurts both of them through his actions. Raine and Uh might argue that Darrow suffers from egocentric selfishness, which occurs when "individuals are not concerned about the needs of either individuals or society, but are single-mindedly centered on themselves" (504). Because Darrow possesses egocentric selfishness, place has little effect on his personal identity.

Though place may not alter George Darrow's personal identity, it does have the ability to change his behaviors. He is a striking example of a change in behavior between the city and rural France. Harold Proshansky writes: "whatever its values, an urban existence by its very nature lays waste to the human potential to think and act in a rational, humane, and ethical fashion" ("City" 148). Darrow illustrates Proshansky's proposition. He does, indeed, act irrationally, inhumanely, and unethically during his time in Paris. His dalliance with Sophy Viner encompasses all three of these transgressions. When he is at Givré, though, his conduct is wildly different. Proshansky writes, individuals must be "ready to behave in quite different physical settings which vary from one another not only in form and substance, but also in their use by the

person, in space and time" ("City" 163). Darrow tailors his behavior in different settings so that he can "use" the settings to his advantage. It may seem as though his disparate behaviors mark an identity shift, but it is more likely that Darrow performs an identity at Givré and leads a more hedonistic lifestyle while in the city.

In Paris, it is possible for Darrow to indulge his decadence because he attempts to remain somewhat anonymous. After arriving in Paris, Darrow and Sophy stay at the Gare du Nord hotel, located next to the train station. The Gare du Nord is likely based on the Hôtel Terminus du Nord, which is "opposite the exit" of the Gare du Nord railway station (Baedecker 10). From the Hôtel Terminus du Nord, one can clearly see the railway station. Darrow, looking out the window of his hotel room, "could just discover the face of a clock in a tall building beyond the railway roofs" (61). Since Darrow could see the "railway roofs," he must have been quite close to the station. It is notable that the Hôtel Terminus du Nord is not on Karl Baedecker's list of "Hotels of the First Class." While the Hôtel Terminus du Nord is very near the railway station, one can also argue that Darrow would not want to be seen with Sophy at a five-star hotel. By taking her to the Hotel Terminus du Nord, he runs less risk of encountering anyone he knows. Sizemore and Baker argue that people act "more selfishly when they are anonymous, and thus are free of consequences or retribution, compared to when their identity is known" (3). If not seen by anyone he knows, Darrow remains relatively "anonymous" and feels free to act more selfishly. Also, the Hôtel Terminus du Nord is an exceptionally transitory place. While all hotels are, to a degree, transitory, this particular hotel is even more so because of its proximity to the railway station. The hotel can act as a metaphor for Darrow and Sophy's relationship—short and transitory.

Darrow, initially, wants to hide his affair with Sophy while in Paris; the longer he is in the city, though, the more gratuitous he becomes. He begins to think that "he should not be at all sorry to be seen with her [Sophy] in public" (38). He takes Sophy to see Cerdine in *Le Vertige* at a theatre. While one cannot be certain, the theatre they likely go to is the Theatre Athénée, and Cerdine is likely based on the actress Jane Hading, who did perform in *Le Vertige* at the Theatre Athénée in 1901 (Provins). Stephen Orgel notes, "Since Wharton was not in Paris until April 1903, she certainly never saw it [*Le Vertige*]: though it was immensely popular. . . it was published, and widely reviewed; Wharton would have read or read about it" (291). Not only was *Le Vertige* popular, but the Theatre Athénée was a popular theatre in Paris, and Darrow would be cognizant of the fact that people might see him there. Indeed, Owen Leath does see Darrow and Sophy there— "the encounter, to Darrow, could hardly have been more inopportune" (42). Darrow begins to question his assertion that he would not mind being seen in public with Sophy. He realizes that being seen with Sophy will be considered salacious. One can ascertain the importance of place on Darrow's *perceived* identity—it is less about his personal identity and more about others' perception of him.

George Darrow's personal identity is continuously selfish, though he is not entirely conscious of it. Wharton writes, "he had built himself a fairly marked personality . . . As for the private and personal side of his life, it had come up to the current standards, and if it had dropped . . . below a more ideal measure, even these declines had been brief, parenthetic, incidental. In the recognized essentials he had always remained strictly within the limit of his scruples" (102). In the city with Sophy, Darrow's personal life "drops below an ideal measure," but it is not simply parenthetic. The implications of his actions are far-reaching; he affects the lives of nearly everyone in the novel through his actions. Darrow has an inauthentic view of his own personal

identity. Melvin Seemen writes, “he is self-deceived and acting on a discrepancy of self-image . . . the inauthenticity involved constitutes a kind of self-estrangement: those who are inauthentic . . . do not fully know themselves” (72). Darrow deceives himself by convincing himself that he has maintained his scruples, and this self-deception further estranges him from his personal identity.

Un Point Culminant: A Culmination

At the end of the novel, place is on display as Anna returns to Paris, despite her anxiety about the city, to try to locate Sophy. Anna learns that Sophy is staying with her sister, Mrs. Laura McTarvie Birch, at the Hotel Chicago in the Place de l’Etoile. Wharton’s decision to situate the Hotel Chicago in the Place de l’Étoile is intriguing. The Place de l’Étoile is “so named for the star formed by the twelve different boulevards or avenues which radiate from it. This Place occupies a slight eminence, on the summit of which rises the—Arc de Triomphe de l’Étoile, the largest triumphal arch in existence, and visible from almost every part of the environs of Paris” (Baedecker 158). The Place de l’Étoile is a place of convergence—it is where all of the boulevards and avenues come together. The location is where Anna also attempts to reconnect with Sophy. The location also marks the ending of the novel, so it is almost as if every plot and theme throughout the novel converge at the end just as the boulevards and avenues do. The Arc de Triumph is also relevant thematically. Karl Baedecker notes that “the arc conveys a somewhat heavy impression when approached” (158). This mimics the way that Anna feels in the moment as she attempts to meet Sophy again. Their meeting would likely also leave a “heavy impression” on Anna, so the Arc de Triumph stands as an omen of the anxiety Anna feels as she approaches this meeting with Sophy.

The Hotel Chicago is a "dingy" fictitious hotel. While there are several hotels Wharton may have used as inspiration for the Hotel Chicago, it is plausible that she may have been criticizing the relatively newly built (1910) Hotel Plaza Étoile. Even by today's standards, the Hotel Plaza Etoile is rated a three-star hotel; it is not the lavish, luxurious type of hotel that Anna Leath would have been accustomed to. Wharton herself was also sometimes critical of new hotels. In *The Decoration of Houses*, she criticizes modern hotels: "about as much comfort and privacy as are afforded by the public 'parlors' of one of our new twenty story hotels" (134). The vestibule that Anna waits in can be likened to one of these public "parlors" that Wharton writes of. In a 1910 letter written to her friend Bernard Berenson, Wharton pokes fun at the hotels he stays at. She writes, "your party doesn't alarm me — au contraire — but your hotel does! Your hotels always do! (*Letters* 209). She follows this up by calling herself a "slave to the picturesque" (*Letters* 21). Wharton did not believe many newer hotels, like the Ritz, to be very "picturesque." In a 1904 letter to her friend Sara Norton, Wharton describes an American hotel: "I have been spending my first night in an American 'Summer hotel,' & I despair of the Republic! Such dreariness, such whining sallow women, such utter absence of the amenities, such crass food, crass manners, crass landscape!! And, mind you, it is a new & fashionable hotel" (*Letters* 93). Wharton's disdain for this new, fashionable, American hotel may have been the impetus for her naming of the Hotel Chicago. By giving the hotel the name of a large American city, Wharton alludes to the crassness of it. Its inhabitants are also quite crass Americans—Anna Leath's sister is, in the opinion of many scholars, working as a prostitute. Scholar Hutchison argues, "the name 'Hotel Chicago,' which only Wharton has chosen . . . [is] a jibe at the modern America of railroads and stockyards and the decline in standards Wharton

associates with it" (437). I argue, however, that Wharton is making a jibe at new American hotels (and perhaps Americans themselves), not so much the industry of railroads and stockyards.

Hotel Chicago marks the end of the novel, and it also leaves the reader wondering what will become of Anna, Sophy, and Darrow. Sophy has gone to work for Mrs. Murrett, her former employer, in India. Her sister, and the Hotel Chicago, foreshadow what Sophy might become. Wharton writes of Mrs. Birch: "she presented to Anna's startled gaze an odd chromo-like resemblance to Sophy Viner, or a suggestion, rather, of what Sophy Viner might. . . become" (289). Given Sophy's easily permeable identity, one may ascertain that surrounding herself with people like Mrs. Murrett again, who is described as "shrieking" and "unescapable," may cause her demise.

Personnages Secondaires Importants: Important Secondary Characters

Madame de Chantelle

Madame de Chantelle is Anna Leath's mother-in-law, and she is an enigmatic character regarding place-identity. Anna states, "my mother in law. . . has lived so much in the country [France] that she's practically lost sight of all of her. . . American friends. . . you can see how completely she has identified herself with Monsieur de Chantelle's nationality and adopted French habits and prejudices" (74). It is intriguing that Wharton uses the term "identified" in this passage. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "identify" as: "To regard or treat as identical" (1a) and "To be made, become, or prove to be identical" (1b). Madame de Chantelle's personal identity has become "identical" with her husband's by her adoption of his French ways. She abandons most of her American identity in order to comply with her social roles in France.

Madame de Chantelle's "French habits and prejudices" are problematic for Anna. She is reminded of the social conventions and prejudices she faced in New York City—what she wanted to escape from. Fraser Leath tells Anna, though, that his mother's prejudices are actually "traditions" (74). Fraser sees Anna as "a stranger in an old society" and encourages her to listen to Madame de Chantelle and follow the "considerations" of old French ways (74).

Madame de Chantelle displays place-identity by relinquishing her American identity and adopting French ways. She still bases a lot of her choices on her American friend, Adelaide Painter, though. Wharton writes, "Yet when anything goes wrong she always sends for Adelaide Painter, who's more American than the Stars and Stripes" (126). This implies that Madame de Chantelle's Frenchness may be inauthentic and superficial. Yu-Fi Tuan suggests that a person may "seek refuge in identity, with a status that society assigns him. . . the person is then removed from the burden of creating his own nature" (139). Madame de Chantelle sought refuge in her husband's French identity; it removed any burden from her to create her *own* identity. Yet, when a problem arises, she calls on an American for help. One can ascertain that, under the surface, Madame de Chantelle has sustained a small portion of her American identity.

Adelaide Painter

As with the Boykins in *Madame de Treymes*, Wharton introduces the ancillary character Adelaide Painter into *The Reef* to suggest the limits of place identity. Miss Painter is:

> a spinster of South Braintree, Massachusetts, who, having come to Paris some thirty years earlier, to nurse a brother through an illness, had ever since protestingly and provisionally camped there in a state of contemptuous protestation. . . Her long residence on Gallic soil had not mitigated her hostility toward the creed and customs of the race. (125)

Adelaide Painter, much like the Boykins from *Madame de Treymes* and Mr. Newell from "The Last Asset," does not allow any French ways to permeate her personal identity. She refers to the French as "those people," even though she has lived there for thirty years. Adelaide's view of France is inauthentic; she has no awareness of any "deep and symbolic significances" of France (Relph 82). Adelaide surrounds herself with other Americans in France, and this American community gives her a sense of belonging. Jean Meral suggests, "The American colony. . . is a hybrid group that. . . has often failed to comprehend the city fully" (51). Adelaide's "American colony" is her comfort zone, but these individuals do not appreciate France in a profound way.

Though Adelaide Painter lives in rural France somewhere near Givré, she also has a place in Parison the rue de Matignon. Interestingly, the rue de Matignon is named for Charles Auguste Goyon de Matignon—named Marshal of France in 1693 ("Charles"). While later abolished and then reinstated, "The office of marshal of France (*marescallus Franciae*) was instituted under King Philip II (d. 1223), and the marshal became one of the great officers of the crown" ("marshal"). The honor of becoming a Marshal of France usually coincided with chivalrous acts during times of war. Adelaide Painter is the one person that Madame de Chantelle calls upon whenever she needs help, and during turbulent times; one might say that Adelaide is fulfilling the role of "marshal" for Madame de Chantelle and even Anna. In countries such as America, marshals often "execute orders" ("marshal"). Adelaide Painter does not *technically* give orders, but everyone does seem to obey her when she gives her opinion.

One may assert that Adelaide (much like Mr. Newell) exhibits place-attachment. The reader is not told why Adelaide never left France if she so despised it, but one gets the impression that she became attached to the place. As with Mr. Newell, Adelaide's routine is in

France, and she has become comfortable there. This has little to do with the place, and everything to do with habit and convenience.

The Farlows: Les Artistes

The Farlows are other secondary characters in *The Reef* that illustrate both place-identity and identity salience. Mr. Farlow is a painter, and Mrs. Farlow is a magazine writer—they live in the Latin Quarter in Paris. Though she frequently published in a variety of magazines, Wharton was critical of magazine writers. In a letter dated October 31, 1902, to William Crary Brownell, Scribner editor, she wrote, "I don't wonder that my recent magazine-ubiquity suggests to you feasts of quail-eating & other betting exploits—I am annoyed to find myself figuring as a 'magazine bore' (a thing Mr. Burlingame once warned me not to become)."[10] Furthermore, in a 1907 letter to Mr. Scribner, Wharton pokes fun at the *Sunday Herald* as per what one should *not* do with illustrations in a travel novel. They were, at the time, working on illustrations for her travel book, *A Motor Flight Through France*. The jocular title of the article she refers to is "A Motor Trip Through the Chateau District." Wharton writes of the Farlows: "a necessary withdrawal to the country (subsequently utilized as 'Peeps into Chateau Life') became necessary for the couple" (32). There seems to be a likeness between the *Sunday Herald* article Wharton jokes about and the names of both Mr. Farlow's artwork and the articles Mrs. Farlow writes. Works of Mrs. Farlow include "Behind the Scenes at the Français" and "Inner Glimpses of French Life." Wharton is clearly being ironic with these titles; the Farlows "lived in Paris as if it

[10] Unless otherwise cited, all correspondence between Edith Wharton and Scribner's Publishing is culled from the Archives of Charles Scribner's Sons, Manuscripts Division, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

were a Massachusetts suburb" (32), much like Adelaide Painter. So, they would not have any *true* "inner glimpses" of French life. They only appreciate France on a superficial, inauthentic level, one in which they are inclined to accept "socially convenient" stereotypes rather than any deeply significant or authentic sense of place (Relph 82).

While the Farlows exhibit inauthenticity of place, they do illustrate identity salience. Identity salience is "the probability that an identity will be invoked across a variety of situations" (Stryker and Burke 286). The Farlows are both artists, and their identities as artists are illustrated by where they live. Jones claims, "she [Wharton] used. . .spaces to identify characters and symbolically to reveal personality traits" (180-181). As with Garnett in "The Last Asset," Wharton situates the Farlow's in the Latin Quarter because they are artists/writers. Where the Farlow's live suggests identity salience. They choose to live in a place where artists and writers converge. Even if Wharton pokes fun at the Farlows' art and writing, she still acknowledges that they would likely find themselves in the Latin Quarter among other writers and artists.

Dénouement

Wharton's attention to detail of place throughout *The Reef* such as her use of the Latin Quarter, the Gare du Nord, different theatres in Paris, and Givré as settings, highlights the significance of place and place-identity throughout the novel. Both the city of Paris and the rural countryside of France are showcased throughout *The Reef.* As the discussion of Anna's connection to Givré suggests, where Wharton situates her characters is of the utmost importance. Elif Armbruster explains, "Wharton's characters are often best understood by. . . the places. . . they live" (81). Furthermore, Armbruster remarks on "Wharton's unique awareness of both the power of appearances and the way in which a home can or should (in her opinion) 'reflect' its

inhabitants" (81). This idea that a home reflects its inhabitants clearly mimics Claire Cooper's theory that the home is a symbol of the self. I argue, however, that it is not only the smaller spaces such as homes which are reflective of Wharton's characters, but larger spaces such as cities and countries as well.

Wharton also revisits a familiar theme throughout *The Reef*—Americans' adaptability in France. Indeed, in Chapter One, Wharton writes that Sophy Viner is "the composite product of an enquiring and adaptable race" (12). This opinion does, though, come from George Darrow's point of view, so whether or not Wharton herself believed Americans to be adaptable is left in question. Wharton owned several books by Charles Darwin, including *The Origin of Species* (Ramsden 32). Darwin is famous for his work on evolution, and, under the umbrella of that topic, he writes about adaptation: "One of the most remarkable features in our domesticated races is that we see in them adaptation, not indeed to the animal's or plant's own good, but to man's use or fancy" (45). While Darwin writes of animals and plants, Wharton writes of the adaptability of human beings. Perhaps the adaptability of the human race can also be used for "man's fancy." Anna Leath adapts in order to fulfill her social roles, Sophy Viner adapts to survive the various environments she encounters, George Darrow adapts his behavior to suit different settings, and ancillary characters such as Adelaide Painter and The Farlows fail to adapt entirely. This failure to adapt does a disservice to their personal identities because they have not fully incorporated place. For Wharton, adaptation becomes a matter of culture and place, but it is still "survival of the fittest" (Spencer 444)—those who cannot or do not incorporate place and culture into their personal will not thrive.

CHAPTER FOUR: LEARNING *THE CUSTOM OF THE COUNTRY*

It is unclear when, exactly, Edith Wharton first conceived *The Custom of the Country.* In a letter dated August 9, 1907, her American publisher Charles Scribner wrote, "A story from you with such a presentation of contemporary society and such a girl from the West climbing into it would be sure of its interest and readers. I could not let it go elsewhere."[11] Wharton is, once again, writing a novel that delves into the intricacies of place-identity. Place, coupled with old and new money families in New York, make *The Custom of the Country* a thematically desirable novel for her publisher and readers. Charles Scribner alludes to the fact that he heard about the novel through Edward Burlingame, an editor at Scribner's with whom Wharton often shared correspondence. On July 13, 1908, Wharton wrote to Burlingame that she "ha[s] written about half" of *The Custom of the Country* and even offers to send the partial draft to him to read. On September 9, 1908, she wrote to Charles Scribner: "I will (I hope!) have "The Custom of the Country" early next year." By October 1908, however, Edith Wharton decided to pull the novel from its planned serialization in Scribner's magazine. She wrote to Charles Scribner: "I am glad indeed that I with-drew "The Custom of the Country" from the magazine, for I have suffered so much from insomnia. . . that my work has been paralyzed by it." Hermione Lee further explains, "From early in 1908, Scribner kept asking hopefully about *Custom*. Was it coming on? Could they have it for the magazine? Would it be ready by 1909 and if so—by spring?—or autumn?" (423). In April 1909, Charles Scribner wrote to Wharton: "It is a long time since you wrote

[11] Unless otherwise cited, all correspondence between Edith Wharton and Scribner's Publishing is culled from the Archives of Charles Scribner's Sons, Manuscripts Division, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

anything about your novel 'The Custom of the Country.' I suppose the stories [*Tales of Men and Ghosts*] have taken its place for the present but I hope it will not be long before you go on." The abundance of correspondence about *The Custom of the Country* shows how interested Scribner's was in the novel and exhibits Wharton's troubled life during the years in which she wrote it.

It seems that the turmoil Wharton was experiencing in her marriage stunted her ability to finish *The Custom of the Country*. As she explained in a 1910 letter to her then lover, Morton Fullerton: "The Whartons [Teddy's family] adroitly refuse to recognize the strain I am under, & the impossibility, for a person with nerves strung like mine, to go on leading indefinitely the life I am now leading" (*Letters* 215). She agonized further: "what is killing me is doing him no good!" (*Letters* 215). Amidst traversing Teddy Wharton's severe mental illness, Edith Wharton still managed to finish a few other works. While Teddy was at a Swiss mental hospital, Edith found respite and "did some work on her next book of stories, *Tales of Men and Ghosts.* And she took out the story set in rural Massachusetts which she had begun as a French exercise. In the dark days of her marital crisis—and as a relief from it—she wrote *Ethan Frome*" (Lee 377). Wharton also attempted to work on *The Custom of the Country*, but she continuously suspended her work on the novel in lieu of other projects.

Scribner's published both *Tales of Men and Ghosts* (1910) and *Ethan Frome* (1911) while they were awaiting completion of *The Custom of the Country.* Scribner's believed that *Custom* would "help what seemed to them at this point a flagging reputation" (Lee 423). Wharton had not yet matched the success of her novel *The House of Mirth* (1905), and Scribner's thought the concept behind *Custom* would "remind people of *The House of Mirth*" (Lee 423), because of the thematic similarities in "old" and "new" New York. Though Wharton published *The Reef* (1912) with D. Appleton and Company, she had already promised Scribner's *The Custom of the*

Country, so she honored her contract with them. She attempted to justify her decision to Charles Scribner in May 1912: "if the story [*The Reef*] is a success—[it] will in some sort act as a preparation for "Custom of the Country." *The Custom of the Country* was eventually serialized in *Scribner's* magazine in 1913. Readers initially found themselves enthralled by the main character, Undine Spragg. Wharton corresponded with Charles Scribner in May 1913: "I am glad to hear that Undine is already interesting our readers so much, and I hope that the concluding phases of her career will not be less closely followed." Unfortunately, "*Custom*. . . [had] a big initial success, though sales dropped off disappointingly" (Lee 425). Perhaps the drop-off in sales speaks to the controversiality that surrounds the main character of the novel: Undine.

If scholars believed *The Reef* to be autobiographical, some consider *The Custom of the Country* to be one of Wharton's *least* autobiographical novels. However, Wharton was well-acquainted with the *places* she utilizes in the novel. In her autobiography, *A Backward Glance*, she declares, "my problem was how to make use of a subject—fashionable New York—which, of all others, seemed most completely to fall within the condemned category. There it was before me, in all its flatness and futility, asking to be dealt with as the theme most available to my hand, since I had been steeped in it since infancy" (206-207). Wharton often utilizes places as subjects throughout her novels, not simply characters. She further acknowledges, "a frivolous society can acquire dramatic significance only through what its frivolity destroys. Its tragic implication lies in its power of debasing people and ideals" (*Backward* 207). This was not a new theme for Wharton; her novel, *The House of Mirth*, explores a deplorable New York society and its tragic implications. In *The Custom of the Country*, Wharton revisits her homeland of New York, but also branches out to her newer home of France. Both places feature prominently throughout the novel. The main character, Undine Spragg, provides the dramatic significance of New York by

illustrating "what frivolity destroys." Undine leaves a trail of destruction in her wake, and she is spurred on by the ideals of a "frivolous society." An examination of Undine's marriages and the places she lives during her marriages illuminates the importance of place and place-identity in the novel.

Wharton ultimately continued to write about New York while living in France and doing so at a distance may have provided her a more objective viewpoint. Hermione Lee, though, suggests that Wharton may have struggled with the subject matter of New York. She asserts, "social obligations are meshed in . . . with the characters' personal choices. . . it points to her internal struggle, now very acute, about whether the American novelist had an obligation to use native subject matter, and to stay put. Would exile mean the loss of responsibility, even, the loss of a subject?" (209). It does not seem as though Wharton felt an "obligation" to use her native New York as a subject; rather, after living there for much of her life, she would naturally draw from her experiences. Furthermore, leaving America for France and becoming an "exile" did not stop Wharton from continuing to write about New York. Now, though, she drew from her experiences in both New York and Paris while still critiquing themes of society.

Bourse Limitée: Limited Scholarship

Scholarship on *The Custom of the Country* often gravitates towards conversations about gender, socioeconomic status, and commodity culture. P. Nehru offers an interpretation of the women in the novel: "Their identity is influenced by the commodity culture; women become the main consumers of material goods and through the purchase of material goods they create their self-image and social status" (132). It is true that Undine creates her identity through social status, but place is a pertinent factor with respect to social status. Margaret B. McDowell focuses

on feminism in *The Custom of the Country*: “the woman's search for the self is a difficult process at best, but becomes even more complicated when a husband, father, son, or lover imposes his restrictive standards or expectations upon her. Wharton's women achieve liberation sometimes either through renunciation or through courageous, independent responses to a challenge” (529). McDowell’s reading is unique; rather than viewing Undine as an opportunist, she regards her as independent and courageous. Kedon Willis attends to socioeconomic themes in the novel: “Undine Spragg evidences Wharton’s most withering critique on modern societies being governed by the precepts of market economies. In Undine’s desire to scale the heights of the jet-set class in both Europe and North America, she forces her father to move the family to New York, ultimately precipitating her parents’ financial decline” (65). Willis calls Undine a “monstrous character,” and centers his research primarily on the capitalist nature of Undine’s actions. While scholarship on *The Custom of the Country* varies, place is rarely, if ever, the focus of research on the novel. Scholars may touch on elements of place in their readings of *Custom*, but it is usually an ancillary topic.

Un Petit Croquis: A Short Sketch

The Custom of the Country serves as a harsh critique of a social climber named Undine Spragg. She, her mother, and her father, move to New York City from Apex, a fictional town in the Midwest. From a “new money” family, Undine attempts to infiltrate old New York society and, when she meets Ralph Marvell, she believes she has done so. The two marry and have a child, Paul, but Undine soon realizes that she wants a divorce. Ralph Marvell ultimately commits suicide, and Undine remarries a French count, Raymond de Chelles. She moves to France and lives with Raymond in Saint Désert, which is in rural France. Again, Undine finds herself

wanting more out of her life and marriage. She divorces Raymond and marries Elmer Moffat, a man from Apex who the reader learns was actually Undine's first husband. She kept her first marriage a secret after moving to New York. The novel ends with Undine pondering her current marriage to Elmer Moffat and hoping she might marry an ambassador one day.

An initial examination of Undine Spragg is the foundation for the chapter. Subsequently, each of Undine's marriages, to Ralph Marvell, Raymond de Chelles, and Elmer Moffat, and the places in which she lives during her marriages will be analyzed in order to explicate place-identity.

Undine Spragg: Le Grimpeur Social – The Social Climber

Undine Spragg is a rather polarizing character. She elicits anger from some readers for her seemingly parasitic behavior and social climbing. Other readers empathize with Undine's lack of independence within her marriages. Alicia Mischa Renfroe writes, "both men [Ralph Marvell and Raymond de Chelles] view marriage through the lens of marital unity and neither fully recognizes Undine's independent identity" (128). While Undine's personal identity is elusive, one may assert that her goals and aims in life make up the entirety of her identity. Georg Gasser and Matthias Stefan write of biological or narrative identity: it is a "concept which incorporates an individual's self- understanding and her broader life-plan" (2). "Convictions and aims" are also integral to one's biological personal identity. Undine *does* have a broader life-plan; she wants to further her social status. Her self-understanding is primarily where her personal identity is lacking.

Undine is hyper-aware of how place affects her life, but that does not necessarily mean that place affects her identity. Where Undine lives, and the places she frequents, dictates the

people that she meets. This, in turn, governs the social ladders she can climb. Upon moving to New York, the Spraggs live in the Hotel Stentorian; Undine has convinced her parents to live in a hotel because that is what "fashionable" people do. The Hotel Stentorian is fictional, but, as with many of the names Wharton utilizes, it may have a larger meaning behind it. The Oxford English Dictionary defines stentorian as "Of the voice: Loud" ("stentorian"). A description of the Spraggs's suite at the hotel reveals that the decoration is quite "loud": The drawing-room walls . . . were hung with salmon-pink damask and adorned with oval portraits of Marie Antoinette and the Princess de Lamballe. In the centre of the florid carpet a gilt table with a top of Mexican onyx sustained a palm in a gilt basket tied with a pink bow" (3). In *The Decoration of Houses* Wharton writes of color and ornamentation: they are "usually cheap devices based upon the mistaken idea that defects in structure or design may be remedied by an overlaying of color or ornament" (30). Furthermore, "Where the walls are covered with tapestry, or hung with a large number of pictures, or, in short, are so treated that they present a variety of colors, it is best that curtains, chair-coverings and carpet should all be of one color and without pattern" (29). The Hotel Stentorian, with its salmon-pink damask and florid carpet, is clearly the opposite of what Wharton deems fastidious. From early in the novel, Wharton "teaches us . . . to read architecture and interior decoration, and indeed the entire environment of fabricated objects, as an intricate network of symbolic systems that make visible and reinforce the behavioral mores and severe social stratification" (Chandler 157). Wharton situates the Spraggs at the Hotel Stentorian in order to introduce their nouveau riche practices to the reader.

Undine, therefore, continuously builds on what is already a seemingly superficial personal identity in order to "make it to the top" so to speak. While the reader is aware of her goals, which are a part of her personal identity, the reader never really gets insight into any other

aspects of Undine's personal identity. When the narrator explains her childhood, she seems, even at an early age, to only care what other people think of her. For example, Undine encourages her parents to sell their house because "all the fashionable people she knew either boarded, or lived in hotels" (11). The reader also learns of the difference in opinion between Undine and "old New York." At a dinner, there is a conversation about divorce; Mrs. Marvell states, "in New York. . .a divorced woman is still. . .at a decided disadvantage" (62). Undine replies, "Out in Apex, if a girl marries a man who don't come up to what she expected, people consider it's to her credit to want to change" (63). The difference in place between Apex and New York means that there are different rules. Undine does not want to assimilate her Apex opinions into New York society, though. Later in the novel, Ralph Marvell expounds on this notion. He says to Undine, "You know nothing of this society you're in: of its antecedents, its rules, its conventions," to which Undine responds, "I don't believe an American woman needs to know such a lot about old rules" (108). Undine has no respect for old New York ideals; she will not play by their rules. Thus far, Undine's personal identity is unchanged; New York has not influenced her or changed her opinions.

Undine's personal identity is elusive; the reader rarely glimpses anything other than superficial elements. Carol Sapora argues, "It is easy to blame Undine for being what she is—or what she is not—but in Undine, Wharton has not created a real woman. Undine is a void" (284). The idea that Undine is simply a void explains her lack of a personal identity, regardless of her aims in life. A void is something that is completely empty, and, in some ways, Undine does seem to try and fill the void inside of her through people and places. Yi-Fu Tuan explains that some individuals have a "tendency to fill the void of . . . being with thing-like traits" (139). Furthermore, "One [might] . . . seek refuge in identity with a status that society assigns him"

(Tuan 139). Undine seeks her identity through her status in society, and she constantly works to improve that status. Ultimately, she never realizes a true personal identity, which "consists of those properties [that] . . . 'define me as a person' or . . . 'make me the person I am,'" (Olson). Undine defines herself by her status in society, which keeps changing. Therefore, her personal identity fluctuates throughout her social and physical environments.

Because Undine bases her identity on social status, she must learn the art of imitation in order to succeed. Wharton writes, "Undine was fiercely independent and yet passionately imitative. She wanted to surprise every one by her dash and originality, but she could not help modeling herself on the last person she met" (13). Undine's imitative nature echoes Erik Erikson's notion of how children develop their personalities. He argues, "early and rigorous training is absolutely necessary for the kind of personality which will function efficiently in a mechanized world in which time is money" (108). Children often learn this "training" by imitating adults. For Undine, she "trains" herself by imitating those she views as members of "high society." Omnipresent in the novel are descriptions of Undine as a child or childlike. Throughout the novel she is referred to as "poor child" four times. She "resign[s] herself [to Ralph] like a tired child" (101), Ralph calls her a "foolish child" (108), and she "want[s] to burst into sobs like a child" (349). Wharton's constant references to Undine as a child reinforces the notion that Undine is still developing her personal identity and basing it on other people, just as children are apt to do. Basing one's personality and identity off imitation is dubious, though, because the individual becomes what Erikson refers to as a "machine" rather than a human being. Undine's behavior, down to her movements, is often dictated by society. Wharton writes, "her incessant movements were not the result of shyness: she thought it the correct thing to be

animated in society" (15). She does what she deems "correct" in society. It is as if Undine is a marionette, and the strings attached to her are held by society.

Throughout the novel, Undine's performativity illustrates the inauthenticity of her personal identity. Proshansky et al. explain, "Self-identity is . . . structured by a pattern of evaluations and value characterizations derived from the interaction of how the individual actually performs, his own judgments of these performances, and how others judge him. At root what the person experiences is some level of self-worth or feelings of self-esteem" (74). Undine, from childhood, has always been performative. Her "chief delight was to 'dress up' in her mother's Sunday skirt and 'play lady' before the wardrobe mirror" (15). Undine bases her identity on how well she can perform in given situations. John Bruni suggests, "Undine performs a self that is constantly destabilized in the act of 'becoming' herself. What is her self, who she is, is constantly in question" (50). By consistently performing, Undine loses sight of who she is, if she ever really knew to begin with. Her personal identity, so tied up in her performativity, never reaches fruition.

Often, Undine succeeds in her performances, but when she is in France. her performativity falls short. Carol Sapora notes, "Not only does Undine's electric brilliance fail in France, but also her ability to imitate falls short in a society that values originality, intelligence, and cultivation more than a beautiful experience" (278). An example of this failure is seen in a conversation Undine has with Madame de Trezac. Madame de Trezac is a fellow compatriot who Undine knew as Miss Wincher when she was younger. Undine views Madame de Trezac as a threat to her superficial identity; she fears that the Madame will "out" the Undine from Apex. Madame de Trezac has married into the upper echelon of French society, and she tries to give Undine advice. She tells Undine that she is in the "wrong set," and follows up by saying: "you

don't work hard enough—you don't keep up. It's not that they don't admire you—your looks, I mean; they think you beautiful . . . But a woman has got to be something more than good-looking to have a chance to be intimate with them" (360). By "them," Madame de Trezac refers to Raymond de Chelles' social circle who seem to have distanced themselves from him since his marriage to Undine. Undine has never been able or willing to incorporate French culture into her identity. She can mimic the French, but she does not actually understand them or their ways. Undine still has the mentality of a tourist in France. William Bloom writes,

> Identification, as well as being the initial mechanism for the creation of social identity and the assurance of social survival, is also an ongoing and dynamic adaptive mechanism to changes in the life situation that threaten identity. Without this adaptation, there would be ongoing anxiety - and, of course, the non-resolution of this dynamic is a distressed pathological state. (40)

Undine is unable to identify with her new social French world; this new world can threaten her personal identity if she does not find a way to identify with it. Indeed, while it may seem as if Undine is able to adapt to many different places, she is only *acting* as if she has adapted. Her lack of ability to identify with new places causes an anxiety within her, which is most likely why she always looks for "the next best place." Her anxiety as a result of her inability to identify with new places causes her to consistently search for a place that she *can* identify with.

Undine's refusal and inability to incorporate places into her identity can also be understood through the lens of place-attachment. Place-identity and place-attachment often, but do not always, correlate. For Undine, there is actually a negative correlation between the two; she does not experience place-identity or place-attachment. It is important to remember that "the amount of time spent in the region" (Kelly and Hosking 1) tends to coincide with place-

attachment. Undine spent most of her time in Apex, and she is described as "too big" for Apex (9). Wharton writes, "There was something still better beyond, then—more luxurious, more exciting, more worthy of her!" (36). This one quotation describes Undine's behavior through the whole of the novel. She is always looking for somewhere "more worthy of her," and because of this search for "more," she changes place continuously throughout the novel. The amount of time Undine spends in each place is limited, so she never becomes attached. Moreover, Undine does not experience belonging, which is a marker of place-attachment. Hernandez et al. explain, "through interaction with places, people describe themselves in terms of belonging to a specific place" (310). While Undine may want to "belong" on Fifth Avenue or in Paris, it really is the social aspect of those places that she is attracted to. She wants to belong in the group of high society individuals that inhabit those places.

Undine rarely, if ever, exhibits insideness with regard to place; insideness is "knowing implicitly that this place is where you belong" (Relph 55). Again, Undine does not view place without involving social aspects. She never experiences insideness because she never finds a place where she feels like she organically belongs. No one place is a "significant centre of [her] immediate experience" (Relph 141). One might say that high society is the only significant center of Undine's experience—place is secondary. Though Undine does not experience insideness, she does experience outsideness. Outsideness occurs when "people feel some sort of lived division or separation between themselves and the world—for example, the feeling of homesickness in a new place" (Seamon and Sowers 3). Undine faces outsideness when she resides in the house on West End Avenue after her marriage to Ralph Marvell. At first, she is content with her outsideness because she is pregnant: "while she awaited her boy's birth she was glad to be out of sight of Fifth Avenue" (132). After her son's birth, though, Undine feels an

"incongruity between her social and geographical situation" (132). She is removed from the upper crust of New York society while living on West End Avenue, and she feels isolated from the world she wants to belong to. On a larger scale, Undine experiences outsideness whenever she is not encompassed by people from elite New York society. During her honeymoon with Ralph in Italy, she says that she is homesick, but her reasons are due to the lack of people around her. She says of New York, "there are always people around. All these places [in Italy] seem as if they were dead" (102). Once again, the places themselves are not the overriding concern for Undine—the *people* in the places, and what the places can provide to her materialistically, are her concern.

Undine Marvell

Undine's marriage to Ralph Marvell exemplifies her superficiality and inability to appreciate and subsume new places into her identity. After their engagement, Undine dines with Ralph's family; Wharton writes "The part was not hard to play, for she *was* in love, of course. . . but it was . . . part of her larger pleasure . . . in the sensations of interest and curiousity excited by everything about her, from the family portraits overhead to the old Dagonet silver on the table—which were to be hers too, after all!" (60). Undine is already performing for Ralph. While she may try to convince herself that she loves Ralph, she actually is more taken with the material items that she believes will be hers after their marriage. There is a marked difference between Old New York and "new" New York throughout Undine's relationship with Ralph. He comes from old money, while Undine comes from new money. Though she often scoffs at the appearance of Old New York homes, she does want to be respected in that realm.

Undine and Ralph's travels during their honeymoon also demonstrate Undine's concept and devaluing of place. While in Italy, Ralph feels "the Sienese air was not only breathable but intoxicating" (94). Ralph finds inspiration in Italy; he wants to begin writing again and is filled with an "individuality" that is new to him. Wharton writes, "What he most wanted . . . was to learn and to do—to know what the great people had thought, think about their thinking, and then launch his own boat: write some good verse" (50-51). While in New York, Ralph cannot finish any of his prose or verse: "charming things . . . but . . . unfinished" (49). In Italy, though, place clearly affects his personal identity in positive ways. He feels as though he can finally finish his work. He tells Undine, "I saw the vision of a book I mean to do" (102), and directly after he tells her this, she expresses how unhappy she is in Italy. She argues with Ralph to take her somewhere else; Ralph obliges, but he does begin to realize the difference between himself and his new wife. Wharton writes,

> An imagination like his, peopled with such varied images and associations, fed by so many currents from the long stream of human experience, could hardly picture the bareness of the small half-lit place in which his wife's spirit fluttered. Her mind was as destitute of beauty and mystery as the prairie schoolhouse in which she had been educated. . .her ideals seemed to Ralph as pathetic. (98)

Undine does not support Ralph as a writer, so she does not care whether he is inspired. Once she meets a magazine editor, though, and is "dazzled by the figures" and money a successful novelist can make, she reconsiders Ralph's writing career. The narrator explicates, "She already saw herself, as the wife of a celebrated author, wearing 'artistic' dresses and doing the drawing room over with Gothic tapestries and dim lights" (188). Undine recreates her entire identity in her mind as she mulls over Ralph's writing career. The identity switch that occurs exemplifies how

pliable her identity actually is—a simple daydream can turn her into a completely different person.

Ralph realizes a transformation of his own personal identity while abroad, yet his discovery of Undine's lack of ideals troubles him. Her personal identity has remained the same as it was when she was a child in Apex. Ralph believes he can "open new windows" in her mind, and this gives him some reprieve from his worries. Robert Laufer elucidates, "there are experiences in and with places that contribute to the development of a sense of self. Places have specific meanings for self — they may enhance, threaten, or simply define" (212). For Ralph, his time abroad contributes to his sense of self and personal identity; his personal identity is enhanced. Undine, though, is still defined by her Apex origins. New places do not seem to enhance her personal identity.

Undine displays a tourist's dismay with her surroundings; she has been programmed by accepted stereotypes of places, and when those stereotypes do not correspond with reality, she is unhappy. While still on their honeymoon, Undine is homesick. She states, "I don't like Europe. . .it's not what I expected, and I think it all too dreadfully dreary" (102). Undine goes on to say, "It's dirty and ugly—. . .I loathe the smells and the beggars" (102). She acts as if she has been personally attacked by the place; Edward Hall expounds on tourists in foreign countries, "Almost without exception, the newcomer uses words and tones associated with a personal affront, as though the town held something against him (159). Undine's reaction baffles Ralph; he sees the beauty in Italy, and he cannot understand how she could possibly want to return to New York. His solution is for them to travel to Switzerland; he acquiesces to Undine's desires. Undine always looks for the next best place, but it is only the *stereotypical ideas* of these places that draw her attention.

The concept of identity salience is exhibited throughout Ralph and Undine's honeymoon travels. Sheldon Stryker and Peter Burke define identity salience as "the probability that an identity will be invoked across a variety of situations, or alternatively across persons in a given situation" (286). Often, identity salience dictates the "behaviors tied to the roles underlying identity" (Stryker and Burke 287). Undine, though her identity is frequently shallow and performative, does display identity salience. While abroad, Ralph also illustrates identity salience. A specific instance that exemplifies identity salience occurs when Undine and Ralph are in Paris. She is going to the rue de la Paix to meet Mrs. Harvey Shallum, a compatriot and "showy Parisanized figure" (104). Karl Baedecker lists the rue de la Paix as one of the areas where the "most fashionable shops" are found in Paris (42). Undine has previously expressed to Ralph that she needs new dresses, and she will likely find them on the rue de la Paix. Undine's identity salience is notable through the materiality of her identity; she chooses to go shopping. While Undine is shopping on the rue de la Paix, Ralph "seize[s] the opportunity of slipping off to a classical performance at the Français" (114). The Français is a theater that "occupies the highest rank among the theatres of Paris. The acting is admirable, and the plays are generally of a high class" (Baedecker 33). Ralph chooses to go to the theatre, because his identity is salient with creativity and artistic endeavors. Moreover, Ralph chooses to go to the Theatre Français, while Undine "pin[es] for the Folies Bergère" (116). The Folies Bergère "is a very popular resort, half theatre, half cafe-concert. Visitors either take seats or promenade in the gallery" (Baedecker 36). Undine would rather the Folies Bergère, because she describes the Theatre Français as a theatre "where they walk around in bath-towels and talk poetry" (116). The Folies Bergère, on the other hand, is a place where Undine can gather with her compatriots and socialize. Undine

and Ralph's disparate choices of where to go during their Parisian vacation illustrate identity salience for both characters.

Undine's objections to places that do not align with her aspirations do not end after her return to New York. Ralph and Undine find themselves living in Undine's old home on West End Avenue that she so desperately wanted her parents to sell because "all the fashionable people she knew either boarded or lived in hotels" (18). Wharton writes, "It was not the least of Undine's grievances that she was still living in the house which represented Mr. Spragg's first real-estate venture in New York. It had been understood, at the time of her marriage, that the young couple were to be established within the sacred precincts of fashion" (132). Financially, though, neither Ralph nor Mr. Spragg can afford a place on Fifth Avenue, so the Marvells stay in the house on West End Avenue. Undine attempts to make the house "better" by filling it with material things such as new "curtains and carpet, and . . . some fragile gilt chairs" (152). She does not feel as though the house reflects her personal identity or the identity she wants to portray, so she tries to change things about the house in order to make it more "like her." Here, Clare Cooper's concept of house as a symbol of the self comes into play. She states that most individuals desire for a house to reflect their own self-image; in America, money is important, so the house one lives in is equally important, which reflects Undine's opinion. Marilyn Chandler suggests, "In Wharton's New York the structures of indoor life were fraught with symbolic significance" (150). Undine's attempt at making the West End house reflect herself is unsuccessful, partially because she still wants to leave the house, and she has a "nervous breakdown" (152). Recall Erik Erikson's theory that choice is pertinent to place: one must have the ability to choose to leave a place, and Undine feels trapped. She uses her nervous breakdown as an excuse to go abroad, and she begs her father to give her the money to do so. Wharton writes, "her desire to go to Europe and rejoin the little

New York world that was reforming itself in London and Paris was fortified by the reasons which seemed urgent enough to justify an appeal to her father" (156). Undine only wants to return to the "little New York" in Europe—it has nothing to do with the place itself. Rather, she wants to be with the people that are there. Undine is the picture of a tourist in France. Jean Meral suggests, "Paris . . . is itself a marvelous spectacle, but a spectacle of illusion and artifice that the visitor observes without taking part in" (40). Undine only appreciates the illusion of Paris; the real city remains unknown to her.

The Countess Raymond de Chelles

Undine's inability to understand or "know" France is most apparent in her next marriage to the French aristocrat Raymond de Chelles. Undine searches for identity not only through places, but also through people. Raymond de Chelles initially provides "the most potent of . . . influences" on Undine (189). He is described as "a charming specimen of the Frenchmen of his class, embodying. . .that happy mean of simplicity and intelligence of which no other race has found the secret" (182). Undine's identity does *appear* to be influenced by Raymond; Wharton writes, "the charm of Chelles's devotion, had almost effaced the ugly memories of failure, and refurbished that image of herself" (266). Undine did say that when she went to Paris, she would be able to start over, and that is exactly what she does. It seems as if she is completely "refurbishing" her personal identity; she wants to forget everything about her previous life and marriages and become someone new. There is an obstacle, however, to Undine's marrying Raymond: she will be a divorcee. Madame de Trezac tells her, "In France, a man of position who goes through the form of civil marriage with a divorced woman is simply ruining himself and her. They might be better— . . . 'friends,' as it's called over here: such arrangements are

understood and allowed for" (266). In France, it would be more acceptable for Raymond to be "friends" with Undine than to marry her. Undine states that she hopes no woman ever gets "used to the French view" (267). Undine continually refuses to respect or incorporate French ways into her identity.

Despite her reluctance to embrace French customs, Undine eventually realizes her transformation into the Countess Raymond de Chelles. Her marriage to Ralph ends because he commits suicide. Wharton writes, "He [Ralph] said to himself: 'My wife . . . this will make it all right for her . . .'" (315). Subsequently, Undine marries Raymond de Chelles, and she initially stays at the Hôtel de Chelles in Paris. She "had supposed that on her marriage one of the great suites of the Hôtel de Chelles would be emptied of its tenants and put at her husband's disposal; but she had since learned . . . considerations of economy would have hindered it" (320). Undine is not pleased with the "old mouldering house," but she "regarded these arrangements as merely provisional" (321). She believes that she can convince Raymond of "modern ideas," which highlights the differences between old and new money yet again. Regardless of the hotel, Undine seems more content with her new life: "The Countess Raymond de Chelles, contrasting her situation with that of Mrs. Undine Marvell, and the fullness and animation of her new life with the vacant dissatisfied days" (326). Undine acts as a completely different person now; she was Mrs. Ralph Marvell, and now she is The Countess Raymond de Chelles. She finds, in her new life, that "the world was radiant, the lights were lit, the music playing" but, suddenly, "the lights went out and the music stopped" (327) when Raymond tells Undine they are going to Saint Désert, which is the de Chelles' country home. Saint Désert can be likened to Givré in many ways; both are near Dijon, but Undine experiences "one vast monotonous blur" (327). Undine does not find comfort in the peace of Saint Désert as Anna did at Givré; she desperately wants to

return to Paris. Saint Désert may be the first place in the novel that begins to have an actual effect on Undine's identity, albeit negative.

Though her identity may be superficial, Undine begins to lose some aspects of her personal identity while at Saint Désert; whether these are superficial aspects is debatable. She is so dismayed that she does not even seem cognizant of her "life plan" anymore. Her time at Saint Désert is intolerable to her: "the dullness of her life seemed to have passed into her blood" (347). We see Undine *becoming* the way she feels about Saint Désert: dull, monotonous, and numb. As with her time at the house on West End Avenue, Undine has no *choice* but to stay at Saint Désert. The lack of choice, once again, becomes problematic. Money remains a motive for Undine, though, and, when a man comes to Saint Désert wanting to buy the de Chelles tapestries, Undine is eager to sell them. This turns into a major argument between Raymond and Undine. Much like Ralph, he has come to the realization that his wife does not care about anything other than the material or superficial. Raymond states:

> 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; aping our weaknesses, exaggerating our follies, ignoring or ridiculing all we care about. . .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 honorable for us! (362-363)

The reader should note the use of the word "copy." As with all of Undine's interactions, she has been trying to imitate and copy French ways, but she does not actually understand or appreciate them.

Undine's inability to incorporate French ways into her identity becomes problematic, especially in her marriage to Raymond de Chelles. Madame de Trezac tells her, "My dear, a

woman must adopt her husband's nationality whether she wants to or not. It's the law, and it's the custom besides . . . If you wanted to amuse yourself with your Nouveau Luxe friends you oughtn't to have married Raymond" (324). The Nouveau Luxe is a fictional hotel likely based on the Ritz in Paris, which Wharton often refers to in others works. Jean Meral writes, "The Nouveau Luxe provides an excellent vantage point from which to study American behavior and could be any one of the capital's palatial hotels—The Ritz, the Meurice, or the Bristol" (35). The Nouveau Luxe is a sort of microcosm of tourist Americans in Paris. While in Paris, Undine "felt herself naturally akin to all the bright and careless freedom of the scene" (186). The "scene", though, consists entirely of material things such as "brilliant shops. . .dresses. . . flower carts. . .the surface sparkle" (186). Undine only enjoys Paris on a superficial level, not on the deeper level that Wharton, herself, suggests the native French live. In *French Ways and Their Meaning,* Wharton writes, "we must dig down to the deep faiths and principles from which every race draws its enduring life to find how like in fundamental things are the two people whose destinies have been so widely different" (16). Undine refuses to "dig down" into the French race. The reader learns that the Paris scene "typified to Undine her first real taste of life" (186). There is nothing "real" here though; Undine only cares about cursory aspects of Paris. Undine realizes an inauthentic view of Paris. Inauthenticity is an "attitude which is closed to the world and to . . . possibilities" (Relph 80). Undine might acknowledge possibilities of material gain when in Paris, but she does not allow the city to influence her identity. Relph acknowledges the possibility "that authenticity may come from inauthenticity" (64), though, and there does come a point in Undine's stay where the reader begins to wonder if Paris might actually be influencing her in an authentic way. The narrator explains that she is experiencing the "art of living" for the first time, and that her taste is becoming refined because of being in Paris, but her time in Paris is often

spent with other Americans, so it is still unclear whether the place is having any true effect on her identity.

Undine's disdain for business suggests another way that she refuses to accept French ways into her identity. Early in the novel, Mr. Charles Bowen, described as "elderly" American, states that, "the average American looks down on his wife" (136). Bowen believes that men should express more interest in their wives, and then the wives might be more interested in their work. He continues by saying, "Why haven't we taught our women to take an interest in our work?" and follows that up with: "Why does the European woman interest herself so much more in what the men are doing? Because she's so important to them that they make it worth her while!" (137). The conversation Bowen has revolves around Undine and Ralph's marriage; Bowen explains that Ralph Marvell would never tell Undine about any "serious affairs" because it is "against the custom of the country [America]" (137). In France, however, "the Frenchwoman is always her husband's business partner" (Wharton, *French* 103). Undine's French husband, Raymond de Chelles, would naturally expect to share his business dealings with her. However, Undine is uninterested in any of Raymond's business—she is not accustomed to being included in these dealings. Raymond tells her, "my dear child, you've always professed the most complete indifference to business matters—you've frequently begged me not to bore you with them" (335). This interaction illustrates Undine's refusal to integrate French ways into her identity. She holds fast to the American "custom of the country" which excludes women from any business matters. For example, early in the novel Undine asks her father to buy her an opera box, to which he replies, "Fact is . . . I'm a little mite strapped just this month" (29). Undine cannot comprehend her father: "Her eyes grew absent-minded, as they always did when he alluded to business. *That* was man's province" (29). In addition to business matters, Undine does

not understand Raymond de Chelles' hobbies. Similar to Ralph's appreciation for writing and art, Raymond "took to dabbling with a paint box, or picking out new scores at the piano" (337). The narrator explains, "Raymond, to her surprise, had . . . developed a disturbing resemblance to his predecessor [Ralph]" (337). Undine disdains Raymond's artistic endeavors. She still has no appreciation for the deeper things in life. Undine is "a monstrously perfect result of the system" (138); the system is a capitalist one in which art and creativity are not appreciated unless financially motivated. Undine has been molded into who she is by the system of a capitalist American society, which harkens back to the concept that personal identity is malleable. She lacks any personal identity other than what has been imposed upon her by society and her upbringing, all of which point to her life goals.

Undine Moffatt

A recurring theme throughout the novel, Undine believes there is "something still better beyond" (36) her life with Raymond de Chelles. She reconnects with Elmer Moffatt, her first, secret husband from Apex. Elmer is now a wealthy "Railroad King" and "a notable figure in the worlds represented about the crowded tables" (371). Undine visits him at the Nouveau Luxe hotel. The narrator explains: "For the moment all thought of self-interest was in abeyance, and she felt again, as she had felt that day, the instinctive yearning of her nature to be one with his" (378). This may be the first glimpse the reader receives into Undine's true personal identity. The allusion to her "nature" generates the feeling that her relationship with Elmer is, and has always been, organic. Subsequently, Undine travels with Elmer to Reno, Nevada to get a divorce from Raymond de Chelles. She "got a decree of divorce at a special session of the Court . . . and was remarried fifteen minutes later to Mr. Elmer Moffatt . . . who was [her] first husband" (388).

Though initially it seems as if Undine may be exhibiting her true identity in her relationship with Elmer, Wharton writes, “Even now, however, she was not always happy” (392). Even with money and living in Paris, where she begs to be, she is not happy. Erik Erikson suggests that unrealistic ideals or demands of a place or person can cause an individual to struggle with personal identity. He writes, “sense of inadequacy, of course, does not usually reflect a true lack of potential; it may, rather, convey the unrealistic demands made by an ego ideal willing to settle only for omnipotence or omniscience; it may express the fact that the immediate social environment does not have a niche for the individual's true gifts” (*Identity Youth* 185). Undine does not feel inadequate, but she will not settle for anything less than the most desirable, powerful place in society. Her current place and marriage to Elmer does not have the “niche” for her to achieve the power she so strongly desires. Undine wishes to marry an ambassador, which would provide her with more omnipotence. The last line of the novel reads: “She could never be an Ambassador’s wife; and . . . she said to herself that it was the one part she was really made for” (394). Because of her divorce, Undine cannot be the wife to an ambassador. Notably, Wharton utilizes the word “part” again in the last line of the novel. Undine never ceases her performativity or desire to find another, more powerful role to play. The reader is left questioning whether anything will ever be enough to fill the void of Undine’s personal identity.

La Mere: The Matter of the Mother

Although Edith Wharton had a strained relationship with her mother and never had children, the maternal figure frequently appears throughout her fiction. Gloria Elrich writes, “In memoirs, Wharton described her mother as cold, reproving, and remote, the nanny as benign and loving” (99). The description of Wharton’s mother aligns with Undine’s behavior as a mother.

When Undine finds out she is pregnant with Ralph's child, she displays a "reasoned resentment" (123). Undine believes being pregnant and having a child will prevent her from taking part in the pleasures of society. Her disdain for having a child does not change after Paul is born—his needs are secondary to her material motivations:, "little Paul Marvel, from his beautiful pink cradle, was already interfering with his mother's plans" (132). Unlike Fanny Frisbee from *Madame de Treymes* and Anna Leath from *The Reef*, Undine does not incorporate the role of mother into her identity until it is advantageous for her to do so. She is more akin to Mrs. Newell, from "The Last Asset," who uses her daughter as a steppingstone to society. The first instance after Paul's birth that illustrates Undine's lack of mothering occurs when she forgets his birthday. She is to bring him to a party at the Dagonets, Ralph's relatives, but she forgets and chooses to spend the time with Peter Van Degen: "the son of the great banker, Thurber Van Degen, the husband of Ralph Marvell's cousin, the hero of 'Sunday Supplements,' the captor of Blue Ribbons at Horse Shows, of Gold Cups at Motor Races, the owner of winning race-horses and 'crack' sloops: the supreme exponent, in short, of those crowning arts" (33). Peter's fame attracts Undine, so spending time with him is more important to her than her own son. Her actions align with her superficial identity—the materiality and fame of Peter Van Degen is her primary concern.

Undine never fully accepts her role as a mother. Throughout the remainder of the novel, she either leaves Paul under the watch of others, or she uses him as a pawn to further her own motives. When Undine goes to Europe after her "nervous breakdown," she tells Ralph to take Paul to his grandparents—Ralph hopes that Undine might "miss the boy and himself more than she imagined" (176). Realistically, though, while in Europe, "she never made a suggestion concerning his [Paul's] care" (204). It is not until Undine wants to marry Raymond de Chelles that she files for sole custody of Paul, because being a mother will "give her the appearance of

respectability" (296). As with Mrs. Newell from "The Last Asset" using her daughter to further her status, Undine will play the part of mother only if it will help her to improve her place in society.

If Undine resembles Wharton's thoughts about her own mother, then Mrs. Heeny can be likened to her nanny. Mrs. Heeny is described as "a 'society' manicure and masseuse. Toward Mrs. Spragg and her daughter, she filled the double role of manipulator and friend" (4). As with Madame de Chantelle's relationship with Adelaide Painter in *The Reef,* Mrs. Spragg and Undine follow Mrs. Heeny's advice without question. While Mrs. Heeny seems manipulative at times, she becomes an integral figure in Paul's life. Wharton notes, "During Undine's illness of the previous winter Mrs. Heeny had become a familiar figure to Paul, who had learned to expect almost as much from her bag as from his grandmother's pockets" (209). Mrs. Heeny begins to fill the "nanny" role for Paul—he is closer to her than he is to Undine. It is, in fact, Mrs. Heeny that brings Paul to France when Undine wins custody. When Mrs. Heeny leaves Paul with Undine and the de Chelles family, he grows "fretful and restive" (328). After Undine remarries Elmer Moffat, she takes Mrs. Heeny back to France with them to stay with Paul while she and Elmer galivant around Europe. The narrator explicates, "Vague as his recollection of her was, she gave him at once a sense of reassurance" (386). Mrs. Heeny's role of "nanny" further illustrates Undine's *lacking* motherhood in her personal identity.

Undine's own mother, Mrs. Spragg, is the opposite of Undine—being a mother fully encompasses her identity. Of Mrs. Spragg, the reader is told, "New York seemed to offer no field for any form of ladylike activity" (8). In Apex, Mrs. Spragg belonged to a circle of upper-crust ladies; in New York City, she has "no ambition for herself" (8). Her only real ambition is her daughter; she is "passionately resolved that Undine should have what she wanted" (8). Mrs.

Spragg, indeed, seems to be living vicariously through Undine. Wharton writes, "she seemed to have transferred her whole personality to her child" (8). Per Gasser and Stefan, Mrs. Spragg has no aims in life or goals of her own. Her only aim is for her daughter to reach high society status. Mrs. Spragg has almost completely lost any semblance of personal identity in New York City; the only part of her personal identity she still acknowledges is that she is a mother.

La Considération Finale

Undine Spragg is a character who almost completely *rejects* place-identity. Her "ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals, and behavioral tendencies" (Proshansky 155) have little or nothing to do with place and everything to do with society and improving her status. Kelly and Hosking assert that "Positive and significant relationships exist between place attachment and time spent in [a] region" (584). Undine, however, lives a transitory existence, one in which she does not spend an extended amount of time in one place. This lack of time could explain her rejection of place-identity and her lack of place-attachment. Furthermore, Undine spent most of her life in Apex, so that may be the only place that significantly affected her identity.

Certain places do factor into Undine's goals, which is an aspect of her personal identity, but it is simply the people that occupy those places that interest her. While specific places in the novel, such as Paris and Saint Désert *appear* to affect Undine's identity, their effects are fleeting. Undine's never-ending quest for something "more" or "better" causes her to travel to many different places and take on several inauthentic roles. Charlee Sterling suggests, "For Wharton, newness and change cannot signify real progress when they are at the cost of family, continuity, and one's very identity" (13). Undine sacrifices family for "progress;" there is no continuity in

her life—it is almost as if her life is made up of several disparate short stories. Undine's only personal identity is comprised of advancing her station in society. Wharton would not view this as real progress, though, because Undine must forfeit everything else to achieve it. Perhaps because she does not make what Wharton would consider significant evolvement, Undine never realizes true happiness.

CHAPTER FIVE: CATCHING *THE GLIMPSES OF THE MOON*

"A region is *inside* the writer with a sense of place, and what he writes is not superficial description, but has significance that goes beyond this locality and speaks to the actual or potential genius loci of everyone" (Relph 67).

Après la Guerre—After the War

The years leading up to Edith Wharton's writing of *The Glimpses of the Moon* (1922) were filled with devastation from World War I. Friends advised Wharton to leave France at the start of the war, and she got a visa to go to England. There she rented "Stocks," "a charming old house in beautiful gardens" (*Backward* 342). Beautiful as Stocks may have been, Wharton felt suffocated by the solitude of the place. She writes in her autobiography, "I had never intended to follow the advice to stay in England 'till the end of the war.' I meant to pay my bills, hand back Stocks to its owners, and return immediately to Paris, where I could be of use, and should have the blessed drug of hard work" (343). Though she was waylaid in England for a few months, she finally returned to Paris in September of 1914 and immediately began the "hard work" she speaks of in her autobiography. During the war, she was instrumental in relief efforts. Wharton quickly helped to establish the American Hostels for Refugees, "opened a grocery depot . . . and a clothing depot . . . [and] set up fund-raising committees in America" (Lee 473). She also created the Children of Flanders charity for children orphaned by the war. In 1916, Wharton "opened two sanatoriums for refugees with TB" (Lee 477). She also compiled *The Book of the Homeless*, "a collection of poetry, drawings, essays, and other pieces from distinguished contributors that included Henry James, Paul Bourget, W. D. Howells, Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad, and Theodore Roosevelt, among others," to raise money for her charities (Campbell).

Hermione Lee writes, “there seemed to be no end to what she [Wharton] would take on” (478). Wharton’s wartime relief efforts highlight her passion for France; rather than escape to America, she plunged herself into work in France.

Wharton’s relief efforts in France exemplify place-attachment. Per place-attachment “people form emotional bonds to places as well as to other people. . . reflect[ing] the embeddedness of individuals within their social-physical environments” (Kelly and Hosking 578). Wharton’s “embeddedness” and “emotional bonds” in France illustrate her strong place-attachment. Furthermore, “One component of place attachment is the emotional investment people have in their community; referred to as community attachment” (Kelly and Hosking 578). When individuals experience place-attachment or community attachment, they are more likely to care about the community, do the work to better the community, and often volunteer to help the community. Clearly, Wharton was “willing to do the work,” and her volunteer efforts were monumental.

Wharton admits in her autobiography that she did not have time or the emotional capability to work on any novels during the war. She writes, “at a moment when my mind was burdened with practical responsibilities, and my soul wrung with the anguish of the war. Even had I had the leisure to take up my story-telling I should have had no heart for it” (355). Wharton, though, ever prolific still managed to write several works. She states:

> Such freedom was seldom to be achieved during those terrible years, and between 1914 and 1918 I had time only for ‘Fighting France,’ ‘Summer,’ a short tale called ‘The Marne,’ and a series of articles, ‘French Ways and Their Meaning,’ which I was asked to write after our entry into the war, with the idea of making France and things French more intelligible to the American soldier. (*Backward* 357)

Edith Wharton traveled throughout World War I, and she spent much of her travel visiting war zones; “Wharton volunteered to observe and write up the conditions in the war zone” (Lee 483). With her friend Walter Berry at her side, she “made five journeys . . . into the war zone between February and August 1915, which were condensed into four articles published in *Scribner’s Magazine*” (Lee 486). These articles eventually became condensed into a book, *Fighting France: From Dunkerque to Belforte* (1915).

Wharton tried to begin work on *The Glimpses of the Moon* in 1917, but she was unable to finish it until 1922. In 1921, she writes to her friend Bernard Berenson:

> The book isn’t new—dear no! . . . I began it two years ago, or more, & have been hard at it for a year. It’s called “The Glimpses of the Moon,” and tries to picture the adventures of a young couple who believe themselves to be completely affranchis & up to date, but are continually tripped up by obsolete sensibilities, & discarded ideals—A difficult subject, which of course seemed the easiest in the world when I began it. (*Letters* 446)

Wharton frequently mentions her inability to write fiction during the war years, so it is no surprise that she had difficulty working on *The Glimpses of the Moon*.

World War I took quite a toll on France; Margaret Macmillan writes, “A quarter of French men between eighteen and thirty had in died in the war, over 1.3 million altogether out of a prewar population of 40 million” (28). Paris was resilient, though, and “Those with money could still find wonderful clothes and jewels [and] . . . restaurants . . . were still marvelous” (Macmillan 26). The war had left devastation too, however, such as “piles of rubble and boarded-up windows where German bombs had fallen,” and “a gaping crater” in Wharton’s beloved Tuileries Garden (Macmillan 26). Toward the end of the war, Wharton considered leaving Paris. Hermione Lee explains, “the war left Wharton . . . haunted by the dead” (Lee 518). Furthermore, “She was

beginning to hate Paris . . . She was tired of it . . . By the end of the war she had started to look elsewhere for a home" (Lee 511). In a letter to Bernard Berenson, Wharton laments, "Paris is simply awful—a kind of continuous earth-quake of motor-busses, trams, lorries, taxis . . . with hundreds & thousands of U.S. citizens rushing about in them" (*Letters* 432). She expressed gratitude for the American financial help her charities received during the war, but she had little patience for American tourists—a common theme in her novels.

Looking to escape the city, Wharton bought her home, the Pavillion de Colombe, in 1918. The Pavillion is in St-Brice, "a still rural village half an hour's drive from Paris" (Lee 524) so she was not exactly far from Paris, but far enough to find peace. In April 1919 Wharton also rented, on a long-term basis, Ste. Claire du Vieux, in Hyères, in the South of France, which she renam[ed] Ste-Claire-du Château (Lee 539). In 1927, she purchased it for 1,250,000 francs (Lee 546). The Château would be her winter home then, and for the remainder of her life (Campbell). Hermione Lee explicates, "To choose a house in old Hyeres in 1919 was to invest in that particular idea of French life—tradition, beauty, taste, exclusiveness—which had always inspired Wharton's writing" (540). Wharton lived in many areas of France, and she situates her characters outside of Paris as well. Her experiences with place, once again, enhance her writing and her character's interactions with different places.

Problèmes de Publication

While Wharton still regularly published her work in America with Scribner's, D. Appleton and Company published *The Glimpses of the Moon*. Wharton's letters to Charles Scribner provide evidence behind Wharton's reasoning for her change. On May 23, 1918, Wharton wrote, "I have received in the last few years such large offers that in my present

financial situation I cannot refuse them."[12] The war years put a financial strain on Wharton, and she was offered more money for her work by Appleton. Also, there seems to be a misunderstanding between Wharton and Scribner's. When questioned as to why she chose to publish her work elsewhere, Wharton explained that Scribner told her that they did not want any of her work until she finished "Literature," an unfinished novel. Charles Scribner insisted that Wharton misunderstood: "you certainly interpreted [the letters] to mean something never intended by me." In a letter dated May 6, 1918, he added: "Is not this treating us with less consideration than our previous relations entitle me to expect?" Scribner was clearly upset that Wharton chose to publish with Appleton, as she had done with *The Reef*. She does redeem herself, however, by offering them her *Fighting France* articles for serialization, *The Book of the Homeless*, and *In Morocco.* Wharton also offered Scribner's *A Son at the Front,* and, while they did publish it in 1923, on December 19, 1921, Charles Scribner wrote to her: "I might wish that the story was not so exactly a war novel." After the publication of *A Son at the Front*, Charles Scribner tried to prepare Wharton for what he believes will be low sales. On November 19, 1923, he observed, "Readers who wish something merely entertaining are a little afraid that the book may be too serious or too sad." Unfortunately for Scribner's, Wharton's fictional novels, such as *The Age of Innocence* (1920), which won her a Pulitzer Prize, were largely published by Appleton.

[12] Unless otherwise cited, all correspondence between Edith Wharton and Scribner's Publishing is culled from the Archives of Charles Scribner's Sons, Manuscripts Division, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

Bourse sur *Les Aperçus de la Lune*: Scholarship on *Glimpses of the Moon*

Though *Glimpses of the Moon* was "a huge bestseller, as big as *The House of Mirth*, selling 100,000 copies in a few months" (Lee 632), scholars often disregard the novel as middle brow. What scholarship there is on *The Glimpses of the Moon* explores topics such as evolution, marriage, and sexuality, but little to no work has been done on identity or place-identity.

Linda Kornasky takes an interesting approach as she interprets *The Glimpses of the Moon* through a Darwinian lens. Wharton did, indeed, own many books on evolution; George Ramsden writes, "Books on evolution and science (Darwin, Huxley, Haeckel, Tyndall) . . . feature . . . largely in the library" (xix). Kornasky's work features *Glimpses* as an ideal text to apply literary Darwinism. She writes about "Wharton's paradoxical depiction of both the sexual allure and the distastefulness of marriage for economic advantage as well as her female characters' potent agency in sexual selection" (12). Darwinism and adaptability are inextricably linked, and Wharton's expatriate characters must learn to adapt to new environments. However, Kornasky does not examine the personal identity of the characters.

Laura K. Johnson scrutinizes marital unity in Wharton's works, including *Glimpses.* She states of the novel, it "take[s] up a critical turning point in American marriage law, when the principle of marital unity becomes overwhelmed by the principle of marital contract" (948). Johnson *does* allude to identity in her research; she writes, the "concept of marital unity, depends on the fictional suspension of individual identity" (957). This suspension of individual identity during marriage is akin to one's suspension of individual identity when in a new place. Often, individuals act differently in new places to adapt and conform, just as they do in relationships. Johnson's scholarship, though, focuses entirely on personal identity, but not on place-identity.

Un Bref Résumé : A Short Synopsis

The Glimpses of the Moon tells the story of Susy Branch and Nick Lansing, a young, newly married couple who enter a marriage of convenience. They spark a "deal" of sorts: if either of them finds a better "choice" of someone to marry, and can increase their status, they will happily divorce each other. Neither Susy nor Nick is wealthy; they live off their friends and acquaintances. Susy even refers to herself and Nick as "born parasites" (111). On their honeymoon, the couple takes advantage of staying abroad at their friends homes. They begin in Como, and eventually find themselves living at the Vanderlyns in Venice, Italy. While there, Susy hides an essential detail from Nick: Mrs. Vanderlyn is having an affair, and Susy has implicitly agreed to provide a cover story. When Nick learns of Susy's deceit, and her willingness to lie for material gain, he leaves Susy. The apparent differences between Susy and Nick's identities begin to reveal themselves. One may say apparent, though, because things are not necessarily what they seem to be on the surface. Eventually, the two find their way back to each other, but not before entertaining other "love" interests. Wharton situates Nick and Susy in Paris and other French locales throughout the novel, once again exemplifying the effects of place on the personal identities of her characters.

La Lune de Miel: The Honeymoon

The Glimpses of the Moon opens with Susy and Nick Lansing, newlyweds, on their honeymoon. As with all of Wharton's works, the novel's first page is vital. The first dialogue occurs as Susy says, "It required a total lack of humour, or as great a gift for it as ours, to risk the experiment" (1). The "experiment" is the marriage itself; she and Nick have agreed to stay married until each of them finds a better partner. The opening also foregrounds the materialistic

nature of the couple. They converse about all the places that they have been offered to stay during their honeymoon. Susy says, "I hate to brag—just consider . . . Violet Melrose's place at Versailles, your aunt's villa at Monte Carlo, *and* a moor1" (2). Each of these places becomes integral to the story; Wharton's early introduction of both the places and the couple's materialism is purposeful.

Susy and Nick are on their way to Como, Italy; they have been given the opportunity to stay at Charlie Strefford's villa there. Strefford is Susy's friend and confidante. While traveling to Como, they ruminate on all the possible places they could have gone: Nick states, "Versailles in May would have been impossible: all our Paris crowd would have run us down within twenty-four hours. And Monte Carlo is ruled out because it's exactly the kind of place everybody expected us to go. So . . . it wasn't much of a mental strain to decide on Como" (2). Susy retorts by saying, "It took a good deal of argument to convince you that we could face the ridicule of Como!" (2). Nick and Susy's preconceived notions of places dictate where they choose to go. Como appears to be the lesser of the evils for them. Harold Proshansky et al. write, "Place-identity is the source of meaning for a given setting by virtue of relevant cognitive clusters that indicate what should happen in it, what the setting is supposed to be like, and how the individual and others are supposed to behave in it" (Proshansky et al 79). Nick and Susy's cognition about certain places dominates their perception of the places, even if they are wrong. For example, Nick "should have preferred something in a lower key" (2) than Como, but when it comes time for them to leave, they "hope for a reprieve" (24). Their month at Como "had been exquisite" (24), not "idiotic" (2) or worthy of ridicule as they initially thought. This change in cognition regarding place occurs several times throughout the novel.

The importance of place-identity to the novel begins instantly, and where Susy and Nick choose to go after they leave Como furthers the plot and exposes more of their personal identities. The couple chooses to go to the "Nelson Vanderlyns' palace on the Guidecca" (25). The Giudecca is an island in Venice, Italy. While Susy expected the Vanderlyn place to be luxurious, she is surprised to find it "oppressive" (32). She states, "I thought I liked grandeur; but this place is really out of scale" (32). Furthermore, the narrator explicates, "She [Susy] loved luxury; splendid things always made her feel handsome and high ceilings arrogant; she did not remember having ever before been oppressed by the evidences of wealth" (33). Susy, who has been depicted as materialistic, begins to feel overwhelmed by the wealth. This change in Susy is notable; her first impression of the Vanderlyns sets in motion a change in her personal identity.

Venice inspires Nick's creativity and literary ventures during his stay at the Vanderlyns. Much like Ralph Marvell, from Wharton's novel *The Custom of the Country*, Nick "revelled in Venice, he rejoiced in his work" (56). Nick, like Ralph, is a writer whose "previous literary ventures had been timid and tentative" (64) but being in Venice stimulates Nick. He feels that "if this one [his novel] was growing and strengthening on his hands, it must be because the conditions were so different" (64). The "conditions" referred to are almost entirely related to place. Unfortunately, for Nick, "it was becoming the fashion, that summer, to pop down to Venice and take a look at the Lansings" (67). The crowds that Nick wanted to avoid are now at his doorstep. He humors them, though, knowing that "By mid August all of their party would be scattered . . . and Lansing and Susy [would] be left alone . . . The novel, in that blessed quiet, would unfold itself as harmoniously as his dreams" (97). The constant visitors annoy Nick, but "the arrival of their friends heightened her [Susy's] animation" (68). He begins to question the compatibility of their marriage, as he is "vaguely irritated" by Susy's sociability. In truth, Susy's

social networking determines the couple's material worth. The narrator explicates Nick's feelings earlier in the novel: "He knew on how frail the thread of popularity of the penniless hangs . . . It was a part of his difficulty and of hers that to get what they liked they so often had to do what they disliked" (15). At Venice, Nick seems to forget this sentiment; Susy knows she must put on a "show" and a superficial, outward identity to placate those with wealth who may help them in the future. Susy recognizes that "there were necessary accommodations" needed for her and Nick to succeed. Geoffrey Miller writes of "consumer narcissism," which is "buy[ing] things for status or for hedonism, to show off to others or to please ourselves" (55). While it may seem as though Susy is the most concerned with status, both she and Nick display consumer narcissism. Miller notes, however, that "We rarely have clear insight into our own forms of consumer narcissism" (Miller 59). While Susy at least acknowledges her consumerism, Nick acts as if he is not materialistic at all. Either he does not want to admit to his consumerism, or he is unconscious of it. Miller explains, "consumer narcissism allows people to display their wealth, status, and taste" (71); of these three attributes, Susy and Nick concern themselves primarily with status. Indeed, "most people went through life making a given set of gestures, like dance steps learned in advance" (113). The "music" dictates the dance, though. For Susy and Nick, the "music" is the people they are around, and the dance steps are the accommodations they must make to appease high society.

La Lune de Miel est Finie: The Honeymoon is Over

Multiple factors, such as place, can affect identity. Other people can also play a massive role in the formation of one's personal identity. Julian Connelly writes, "People perish not only from the discourse of others, but from the very imagination of others" (204). Nick imposes an

identity onto Susy, one in which he believes, “Money, luxury, fashion, pleasure: those were the four cornerstones of her existence” (134). Nick reaches this conclusion because of one major accommodation that Susy makes to pacify Mrs. Vanderlyn, which changes the course of her relationship with Nick, and, ultimately, her personal identity. Mrs. Vanderlyn is having an affair; In order to stay at the Vanderlyn estate, Susy must keep Mrs. Vanderlyn’s secret. However, Susy does not learn about Mrs. Vanderlyn’s expectations until she and Nick are already at the Vanderlyn estate. Mrs. Vanderlyn has gone to stay with her lover and has left her daughter under the watch of Susy and Nick. Initially, Susy does not want to keep Mrs. Vanderlyn’s secret because she views it as a “trap,” but she realizes that she and Nick will have to leave Venice if she does not accommodate Mrs. Vanderlyn. Susy keeps this secret from Nick, and when he learns of it, he leaves Susy. Realistically, she wanted to stay in Venice because she knew how happy Nick was there. Her true identity is far more sentimental than Nick realizes; he believes she only cares about material wealth. Ultimately, the *place* that Susy and Nick choose to stay, the Vanderlyns, changes the course of the entire novel.

Throughout the novel, Susy is described as a “child” or “childish” at least eight times. This depiction of Susy is similar to that of Undine in Wharton’s *The Custom of the Country*. Nick also thinks of Susy as “his property” (64), which is ironic because he believes Susy to be the materialistic one in the relationship, but he views her as a material object that he “owns.” Martha Nussbaum signifies ownership as a feature of her theory of objectification. She defines ownership: “the objectifier treats the object as something that is owned by another, can be bought or sold, etc” (218). His objectification and view of Susy as his “property” paradoxically makes *him* the more materialistic one in the relationship. Yet, he “could not picture Susy out of her setting of luxury and leisure” (132). Objectification can dehumanize an individual, and when

Nick perceives Susy's identity to be entirely materialistic, he dehumanizes her and leaves her. Nick's perceived vision of Susy's personal identity and her true personal identity are disparate. Moreover, Nick's perception of Susy's materialism makes him *believe* that she *can* be bought. Again, Nick does not take the time to dig deeper and speak to Susy; he leaves her because he has an inaccurate vision of her identity.

La Vraie Susy: The Real Susy

Susy quickly realizes she must change *place* once Nick leaves her. She goes to Violet Melrose's at Versailles: "no visitors were to be feared at Versailles at the end of August . . . To be alone—alone!" (142). Susy wants to be alone to process what has happened between her and Nick: "If she could have chosen she would have crawled away into a dingy inn in a rainy northern town, where she had never been and no one knew her" (143). Her reaction reveals that Nick is wrong about Susy's personal identity—she is depressed that he left; she cares more for him than luxury and wealth. Furthermore, Susy tells Strefford, who visits her in Versailles, that "instead of asking me to try—to try to live differently. . .as I was ready to do . . . he wrote me that it had all been a mistake from the beginning" (159). Here Susy admits that she would have given up wealth for Nick, but he didn't give her the option. At Versailles, Susy thinks, "If we'd come here . . . everything might have been different" (150). While Susy's thought does appear to illustrate the importance of place in the novel, the *people* in the places are likely the reason things would have been different. The demise of Nick and Susy's relationship is due, in large part, to Mrs. Vanderlyn, not Venice. Versailles is no better a destination; it is still a tourist trap for Americans. Jean Meral writes, "There is simply no question of embarking on the long tourist circuits that take them [tourists] from the Louvre to Notre Dame and then to the Eiffel Tower and

Versailles" (149). In Versailles, Susy and Nick would still have been inundated with outsiders and "friends" who may have also challenged their relationship. Susy associates the Vanderlyn's with her "doom," though, and she now believes "in solitude lay her salvation" (150). Her desire for solitude exemplifies the superficiality of her prior sociability; she is social when she *must be*, but it is not always inherent to her identity.

While staying at Versailles, Susy entertains an engagement with Charlie Strefford, and as in *Madame de Treymes*, Wharton situates a romantic encounter at the Tuileries. Due to a death in his family, he has gained the title of Lord Altringham. He and Susy go to the Tuileries Gardens: "Susy and Strefford sat on the terrace of the Tuileries above the Seine. She had asked him to meet her there, with the desire to avoid the crowded halls and drawing-room of the Nouveau Luxe" (156). At the Tuileries, Strefford says he was going to ask Susy to marry him. In this instance, the reader gleans a change in Strefford's identity. He states, "It's not Streff who's asking you now. Streff was not a marrying man: he was only trifling with you. The present offer comes from an elderly peer of independent means" (162). Strefford's reference to himself in the second person as "Streff" further illustrates his change in identity. Strefford's social role has changed from playboy bachelor to the Lord of Altringham. He is now part of a noble ranking social class, and with that comes the need for a wife.

Susy's shifting relationship with Strefford illustrates the tension between two personal identities: materialistic Susy and sentimental Susy. Erik Erikson suggests, "We are thus most aware of our identity when we are just about to gain it and when we . . . are somewhat surprised to make its acquaintance; or, again, when we are just about to enter a crisis and feel the encroachment of identity diffusion" (127). Erikson also questions whether the "sense of identity" is conscious. Susy experiences an identity diffusion after Nick leaves; she tries to sort out *who*

she is but is pulled in two different directions. One part of Susy's identity still desires wealth, so she entertains marrying Strefford. Soon, though she realizes that she will not be happy even though she will have all the material items she has ever dreamt of. Daniel Miller argues, "abundant possessions signify most of all what they cannot be" (103). Material possessions cannot fill the void of a lost love, and Susy begins to realize this concept. Wharton writes, "All human happiness was thus conditioned and circumscribed, and hers [Susy's], no doubt, must always be of the lonely kind, since material things did not suffice" (220). Moving forward, Susy's identity transforms; she finally begins to "make the acquaintance" of the real Susy Branch (Lansing).

Susy's identity changes markedly after she turns her back on materialism. She goes on a bit of a dérive,[13] where she is "drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters [she] find[s] there" (Debord 65). Susy's dérive begins after she tells Strefford she will not marry him. She begins walking in Paris, first in the La Muette quarter where she looks into shop windows at "all of the things she would never again be able to buy" (270). Her attitude quickly changes, though, as she wonders why she should not get a job in one of the shops. As Susy continues walking, "The artificiality and unreality of her life over-came her" (271). She sits down on a bench on the Avenue du Bois; "not far off the Arc de Triomphe raised" (271). The Arc de Triumph was built to honor those who died during the French Revolution. Wharton would have been aware of that fact. As Susy stares at the Arc de Triumph, she realizes a revolution of her own—her identity is changing. Wharton writes that Susy, "seemed to be looking at it all from the

[13] Dérives are "unplanned tours or 'drifts,' through urban environments" (Gieseking and Mangold 42).

other side of the grave" (131). It is as if the "old" Susy has died, and the "new" Susy has risen. This instance also marks a turning point in the novel regarding Susy's identity.

As Susy realizes an identity shift, her social roles change as well. Sheldon Stryker and Peter Burke explain: "a link between identity salience and behaviors tied to roles underlying the identities; theorists argue that expectations attached to roles were internalized and acted out" (287). Susy's previous roles were socialite and then wife to Nick. One might also include her role as a hanger-on to rich people. As Susy realizes her changing identity and becomes less materialistic, her social roles also change. Susy accepts a job watching the Fulmer children whose American artist parents travel to Italy. Wharton writes, "the task she had undertaken . . . gave Susy no sense of a missed vocation: 'mothering' on a large scale would never . . . be her job. Rather it gave her . . . the sense of . . . taking her first steps in the life of immaterial values" (298). Susy's new role as a "mother" figure to the Fulmer children comes with a new set of internalized expectations and behaviors. While the "old" Susy cared about dresses and jewelry, the "new" Susy wears "ready-made boots, an old water-proof and a last year's hat; but none of these facts disturbed her" (295). Furthermore, the children themselves influence Susy's identity. Stryker and Burke suggest, "Situations . . . involve relations to others; the extent to which persons can verify their identities depends on the identities of those others, on how the others respond to identity claims, and on whether behaviors that could alter the situation to align perceptions with standards of self-meanings in fact are viable" (289). When surrounded by socialites, it was easier for Susy to embrace a materialistic identity, because the people she was involved with were materialistic. The Fulmer children, however, are "all intelligent; and . . . their intelligence had been fed only on things worth caring for" (297). The children were not brought up to value superficial things; "good music, good books, and good talk had been their daily food"

(298). Susy's relationship with the children aligns with her new, non-superficial, personal identity.

The Fulmer children do not value superficial things because their parents, Grace and Nat, are both artists. The reader's initial meeting with the Fulmers occurs early in the novel, before Nick and Susy marry. They meet at the Fulmer's home in New England: "it was unsettling to be with her in such a house as the Fulmers', away from the large setting of luxury they were both used to, in the cramped cottage where their host had his studio in the verandah, their hostess practised her violin in the dining-room, and five ubiquitous children sprawled and shouted" (18). Nick and Susy question the Fulmers' decisions; they believe "the case of the Fulmers was an awful object-lesson in what happened to young people who lost their heads" (18). They believe the Fulmers are crazy for living so poorly, but they are also intrigued by the fact that Grace, Nat, and the children are all so happy regardless of their lack of wealth. Nick questions Susy, "You mean: Nat and Grace may after all be having the best of it?" to which she replies, "How can I say, when I've told you I see all the sides? Of course . . . *I* couldn't live as they do for a week. But it's wonderful how little it's dimmed them" (20). Susy recognizes that there is more than one way to view the situation, but she does not believe she could live happily the way the Fulmers do. Ironically, it is precisely living at the Fulmer's home in Passy that irrevocably changes Susy's identity for the better, or at least makes her conscious of that part of her identity. Susy acknowledges, "From their cramped and uncomfortable household Grace and Nat Fulmer had manage to keep out mean envies, vulgar admirations, shabby discontents" (298). When Nat Fulmer is "discovered" by Susy's wealthy friend Violet Melrose, wealth and fame begin to enter the Fulmer household. There are rumors that "the Fulmers are not hitting it off very well since his success" (336), yet Grace Fulmer "says she and Nat belong together" (336). Here, the reader

sees the Fulmer's encounters with wealth and fame damage their relationship—they were happier when they were poor, and this is a lesson that Susy begins to learn.

Susy changes place, which will impact her identity; she goes to live with the Fulmer children at a home in Passy, France, which is a suburb of Paris. Passy, and the home there, is of the utmost importance regarding place-identity. One must remember that the majority of traveling Susy and Nick did, and where they stayed, can be considered social tourism: "travel for social ends: rather than experience" (85). At the Fulmer's home in Passy, France, "one of the communes annexed to Paris in 1860" (Baedeker 170), Susy's *experiences* are valuable. She is not there for "social ends." The Fulmer's home in Passy is a "a six-windowed house, huddled among neighbors of its kind, with the family wash fluttering between meagre bushes . . . its front. . . had the look of a tired work-woman's face" (318). The Fulmer home is not luxurious or grand, but Susy begins to feel a kinship with it. When Nick learns Susy's new address, "The address in Passy surprised him: he had imagined that she would be somewhere in the neighborhood of the Champs-Elysees or the Place de l'Étoile" (315). Again, Nick imposes a materialistic identity onto Susy. Meanwhile, "the noisy uncomfortable little house at Passy was beginning to greet her with the eyes of home" (302). Claire Cooper argues that individuals often decorate their homes for "performative" reasons; the home "reflects the individual's conscious and unconscious attempts to express a social identity" (170). Susy no longer worries what others think of her, though, so she does not feel the need to make the Passy home performative in any way. Just as she has stopped performing a superficial identity and societal roles, she does not need the home she lives in to perform either. If anything, Susy becomes reflective of the home, not the other way around.

Susy realizes insideness during her time at the Fulmer home; specifically, she experiences empathetic insideness, "which involves emotional participation in and involvement with a place" (50). Susy is emotionally invested in the lives of the Fulmer children, and she unselfishly cares for them. Relph further explains, "To be inside a place empathetically is to understand that place as rich in meaning, and hence to identify with it, for these meanings are not only linked to the experiences . . . of those whose place it is, but also stem from one's own experiences" (54-55). For Susy, the Fulmer home, though not technically her place (she is only staying there), she is still able to identify with the home because her own experiences are linked to the place. It is, arguably, the most significant place Susy encounters throughout the entire novel.

Un Nouvel Homme? A New Man?

Just as Susy negotiates several places during her time away from Nick, he also travels to many places—whether or not those places affect Nick's identity, though, is in question. He first escapes to Genoa, a commercial port in Italy. The name Genoa comes from the Latin Genua, and some theorists believe it "to be perhaps from janua 'gate,' or from the Italic god 'Janus'" ("Genoa"). There are various reasons why Wharton may have situated Nick in Genoa after he leaves Susy. One obvious intention may be that it is a port-town. The Hicks family, whom Nick will soon travel with, has their boat docked there. A less evident intention behind Wharton's choice of Genoa may be the etymology of the name. If, as many theorists believe, the name suggests "gate," one might ascertain that Nick views Genoa as a gateway to a different life.

Although Nick does travel with the Hicks family, they are on the Hicks's boat, the *Ibis*, so the travel may be considered transient. One should not deny a place such as a boat the same level of identity as other, more permanent places, though. Edward Relph writes, "the most

mobile and transient people are not automatically homeless or placeless, but may be able to achieve very quickly an attachment to new places either because the landscapes are similar to ones already well-known or because those people are open to new experiences" (30). The landscapes Nick sees on his travels on the *Ibis* may not be well-known to him, but the boat itself and the Hicks family *are* well-known to Nick. He has traveled with them on the *Ibis* prior to his marriage, and he forms place-attachment. It is important to remember that people and places are inextricably linked; Nick's relationship with the Hicks family forms part of Nick's place-attachment to the *Ibis*. Of the Hicks family, he believes them to be "uncomplicated . . . a wholesome honesty and simplicity breathed through all their opulence . . . the mere fact of being with such people was like a purifying bath" (181-182). The Hicks family is from Apex City, a fictional city in the Western United States, which one may remember from *The Custom of the Country*. They travel through the Aegean Sea, and Nick "had nearly three weeks of drug-taking on the *Ibis*. The drugs he had absorbed were of two kinds: visions of fleeing landscapes . . . and visions of study absorbed from the volumes piled up" (179). Nick's reading of books is like an anesthetic which numbs the pain of his loss, and he says it has been a long while since he has been near a good library. The library on the *Ibis* also encourages Nick's place-attachment.

Nick also realizes identity salience whilst with the Hicks. Stryker and Burke explain, "the higher the salience of an identity relative to other identities incorporated into the self, the greater the probability of behavioral choices in accord with the expectations attached to that identity" (286). Nick's identity as a writer and bibliophile remains salient across place and time. His behavioral choice to travel with the Hicks family, specifically with the daughter Coral Hicks, aligns with the expectations attached to his identity. Coral Hicks has a "lucid intellectual curiosity," and Nick's identity is drawn to that part of her. Nick's attraction to Coral Hicks

speaks to his identity salience, and much like Susy and Strefford, Nick entertains a relationship with Coral. Coral's intelligence attracts Nick, not her physical appearance: "Miss Coral Hicks projected on the world a glance at once confident and critical" (58). Susy, on the other hand, is "not a great reader" (184), and Nick believes Susy only uses her intelligence for material gain. Though Coral is wealthy, Nick does not view her as materialistic. Coral does choose *power*, though, over happiness. She wants to marry Nick, but when she realizes that is unlikely, she gets engaged to a Prince. Coral says, "I want to buy a place at the very top, where I shall be powerful enough to get about me the people I want" (290). Nick views Coral's goals as noble, but her behavior is largely comparable to Susy's—Coral will make necessary accommodations to get what she wants.

In addition to place-attachment and identity salience, Nick experiences empathetic insideness while on the *Ibis*. He has a "willingness to be open to significances of place" (Relph 54). This openness Nick exudes may be a result of his search to fill the void that Susy left in his mind. Nick loses his feeling of "insideness" after arriving in Rome with the Hicks, though. While he experienced "insideness" on the *Ibis*, he now feels like an outsider. In many ways, Nick put the Hicks on a pedestal. They have wealth, but he does not view them as overtly materialistic. That is, until they establish themselves in Rome after their cruise. Mrs. Hicks chooses to stay at the Nouveau Luxe hotel in Rome. Given Wharton's disdain for the Nouveau Luxe in Paris, one may ascertain that she would feel the same about the location in Rome—a stomping ground for wealthy American tourists. Nick is unnerved by the Hick's decision to stay at the Nouveau Luxe; normally, they would stay at "antiquated hostelries" (230), but now he notices a "change in the Hicks point of view" (230). They are moving in "different standards of society" (234) and getting a taste of the "higher life" (233). Because Nick's personal identity has remained the

same, he no longer realizes identity salience with the Hicks. Nick's empathetic insideness is replaced with existential outsideness: "a selfconscious and reflective uninvolvement, an alienation from people and places" (Relph 51). Nick feels alienated from the "new" Hicks behavior and the social hierarchy they strive to be a part of. He begins to retreat from them, conscious of his lack of involvement in their lives.

No longer feeling belonging or insideness with the Hicks family or current place, Nick leaves Rome and returns to Paris to officially divorce Susy. When Nick is in Paris, he realizes that "hidden away somewhere in that vast unheeding labyrinth was the half-forgotten part of himself that was Susy" (312). Nick's realization that Susy is a "part of himself" is striking, but this means that she has been a part of him all along; Nick's identity has remained relatively unchanged. Erik Erikson notes that identity is "for the most part unconscious except where inner conditions and outer circumstances combine to aggravate a painful, or elated, "identity consciousness" (*Identity Youth* 23). The part of Nick's identity that encompasses Susy was unconscious until "inner conditions and outer circumstances" cause him to become painfully aware of her presence. Being in Paris is one of the most powerful circumstances that causes Nick's identity consciousness.

Nick's newfound identity consciousness causes him to want to see Susy. Just as Susy sits on a bench on the Avenue du Bois, Nick sits on a bench at the Luxembourg Gardens. A sculpture by Alfred Boucher titled "Au But!" (To the Goal!) is in the Luxembourg Gardens. The sculpture features three runners at a finish line struggling to cross. While Wharton does not mention the sculpture in the novel, she would have been aware of its presence. Nick is, indeed, trying to cross a finish line of his own. Instead of going out to dinner, which he originally intended, he hops in a taxi and goes to the house in Passy to see Susy. When Nick arrives at the house, he "vainly tried

to fit his vision of Susy into so humble a setting" (318). He sees her and the narrator explicates she is "his Susy, the old Susy, and yet a new Susy, curiously transformed, transfigured almost" (319). Nick immediately recognizes the change in Susy, adding that "she looks *poor!*" (320). Ironically, now it is Nick who is more materialistic—he assumes that she must have found herself in some kind of "trouble" for her to be living this way. Meanwhile, Susy is happy.

The meeting of Nick and Susy's identities occurs the next day—Nick goes back to the Passy house to speak with Susy. The house at Passy has influenced Susy's personal identity, so it is almost as if Nick is meeting a "new" Susy when he arrives there. The two have an awkward interaction, neither admitting to how they feel. Susy thinks, "If he doesn't see that I am different, in spite of appearances . . . and that I never was what he said I was . . . what's the use of trying to make him see it now?" (337). She finally recognizes that Nick always believed her to be someone she was not—her true identity was not materialistic. All the things she did that he frowned upon she did out of her love for him. Before leaving, Nick tells Susy that he will be going to Fontainebleau, "a quiet place with broad, clean streets" and "a fashionable and expensive summer-resort" (Baedeker 362). Once more, the irony of Nick's behavior is revealed—Susy, whom he believed to be ostentatious, is now happy at Passy with the Fulmer children. Nick, on the other hand, is traveling to an expensive summer resort, though it is off season there. Ultimately, it is Nick's unchanging identity that is arguably the most pretentious in the end. He and Susy do meet again the day after they say "goodbye." She is about to leave the house at Passy, and the children in the care of the eldest daughter, when Nick arrives. He admits that he has been "a cursed arrogant ass," and beckons her to come with him (348). Though he tries to make her leave the children, an example of his selfishness, Susy refuses to go unless she can bring them. He acquiesces and they all travel to Fontainebleau together. Nick views the

presence of the children as “a necessary consequence of all the rest” (359), while Susy embraces the children with a motherly instinct. This difference in perception speaks volumes about the marked difference in their identities.

Une Fin Heureuse? A Happy Ending?

Ultimately, while it may seem as if Wharton wrote a happy ending, one must wonder if Nick and Susy’s identities are compatible, and if they even truly know each other. Stryker and Burke write, “depression and distress” can result from problems in verifying the spousal identity” (288). Nick and Susy have not “verified” each other’s identities yet, and, just as it did previously, this may result in depression and distress. Linda Kornasky suggests:

> the materialism demonstrated by Nick and Susy is clearly shown to be a valid factor in their attraction, and it will be a factor with which they will have to cope as they face a life of what seems to them to be modest means upon returning to the US. With minimal or no support from domestic servants to start a family and limited income from Nick’s literary career or their inherited incomes, they will have to live modestly. (18)

For the time being, it seems as if Susy and Nick have renounced their “narcissistic consumerism,” but whether that will last is questionable. One must remember that identity is ever-changing and malleable—it is not static (Erikson *Identity Youth* 24). When Nick and Susy find themselves in a new “place,” their identities will likely shift again.

The Glimpses of the Moon offers an intriguing perspective on place identity, identity salience, and identity consciousness. It is essential to consider how these concepts interplay within the novel’s narrative, independent of the backdrop of war. Indeed, despite Wharton’s dedication to war relief efforts, she does not include themes of war in the novel. Perhaps this was

a way for Wharton to mentally escape from the war, as well as a way for her readers to do the same. Nonetheless, she crafts a story that explores the complexity of personal and social identity. With little to no allusion to the war, Wharton focuses instead on the internal turmoil of her characters.

Place identity within the novel is intricately tied to setting; these settings and places are integral to the plot. Places are not just backgrounds but are reflective of the characters' internal states and their sense of belonging and identity. Identity salience is evident in how Susy and Nick prioritize different aspects of their identities throughout the novel. They struggle to balance personal desires with societal roles, and that balance becomes a central theme. The novel also explores the malleability of identity and shows how Nick and Susy's choices bring various facets of their identities to the forefront, highlighting identity consciousness. *The Glimpses of the Moon* presents complex themes related to identity, devoid of the external pressures of war but deeply entangled in the social fabric of the era it portrays. Wharton uses the narrative to explore how place, social roles, and personal interests intersect and shape the identities of her characters.

CHAPTER SIX: HEAVEN ON EARTH? *THE GODS ARRIVE*

The years leading up to Edith Wharton's publishing of *The Gods Arrive* (1932) were strenuous. As Cynthia Griffin Woolf explains, in 1929, at the age of sixty-seven, Wharton "suffered a genuinely severe crisis: an episode of flu reduced her to total exhaustion; her heart was affected . . . Any novel that she wrote now was liable to be her last novel, her last opportunity to make some statement through her fiction" (Woolf 391). *The Gods Arrive* would be Wharton's penultimate fictive novel. Wharton desperately wanted to leave 1929 behind; it was an arduous year due to both her health and the New York stock market crash, which affected the sales of her novels and her income. Indeed, "Wharton's royalties plummeted from $95,000 in 1929 to $5000 in 1930" (Lee 691). Despite *living* in Paris, Wharton relied on American sales of her works. In a letter to Appleton, Wharton explains that "like everyone in America, I find my income diminishing from day to day" (qtd. in Lee 691). Wharton was not actually *in* America, though, so it is interesting, per place-identity, that she identifies so closely with the country during her financial hardships.

During these years in Wharton's life, and for the remainder of her life, she split her time between living at the Pavillion de Colombe and St. Claire de Château. She lived a "life divided between the temperate climate of the southern coast [St. Claire] from December to June and the peaceful village at just the right distance from Paris [Pavillion] for the rest of the year" (Lewis 421). Wharton found much needed tranquility after leaving Paris, yet she remained close enough for "the wide world to come around to her" (Lewis 425). Rather than travel to Paris to visit friends, most of them made trips to the Pavillion. Wharton's reasons for leaving Paris were due, in large part, to the influx of American tourists there. Harold Proshanky writes, "the individual's

strong preference for an identification with an urban existence may endure through his lifetime but may change in the way that existence is defined as he or she ages physically, as the city changes, or because of the changing economic, social, and cultural conditions of his personal life" ("City" 157). Wharton's preference for city dwelling did change as she aged, and Paris, in her opinion, changed as well. She saw the scene in Paris being "darkened" by Americans, so the social and cultural landscape of the city deteriorated for her as well.

While Wharton was faced with her own mortality in 1929, she also lost several close friends and family members in the years leading up to *The Gods Arrive*. In 1922, Wharton lost both her close friend Sara Norton and her brother Harry Jones (Lewis 447). Perhaps the most devastating loss for Wharton was the death of her longtime friend and confidante, Walter Berry, in 1927. She wrote in her diary, "The Love of all my life died today, & I with him" (qtd. in Lee 655). Though Wharton and Berry were probably not lovers, they shared a "dear and intimate" friendship (Lee 660). She writes in her autobiography, "I suppose there is one friend in the life of each of us who seems not a separate person, however dear and beloved, but an expansion, an interpretation, of one's self, the very meaning of one's soul. Such a friend I found in Walter Berry" (*Backward* 115). Wharton's association with Berry as an "expansion" of herself means that, when he died, she lost a part of herself.

Though Wharton lost Walter Berry, his advice lived on through her work. She writes of him, "No critic was ever severer, but none had more respect for the artist's liberty. He taught me never to be satisfied with my own work, but never to let my inward conviction as to the rightness of anything I had done to be affected by outside opinion" (*Backward* 114). Perhaps spurred on by Berry's death, Wharton undertook the exposition of the life of an artist in *The Gods Arrive*. She often referred to the novel as "Walter Berry's book because he had always urged her to tell the

story of an artist" (Goodman 36). While initially the novel received good reviews, it was not a best seller. Benstock writes, "An American middle-class readership was perhaps bored by her detailed analysis of the literary process" (433). Though the novel did not gain mainstream popularity, or make her a lot of money, Wharton "would put *The Gods Arrive* on her list of her five personal favorites" (Lewis 490). She honored Walter Berry's advice and did not let outside criticism skew her own perception of her work.

The 1920s also brought permanent changes in Wharton's relationships with her publishers. She permanently left Charles Scribner's, her American publisher for much of her career, and began publishing solely with D. Appleton Company. Often critical of Scribner's lack of advertising, Wharton "had great confidence in his [her Appleton's editor] judgment, and seemed pleased rather than embarrassed by Appleton's aggressive advertising methods" (Benstock 371). Wharton did not only abandon Scribner's, but she also ceased publishing with her British publisher, Macmillan, because Appleton had a London branch. In 1921 she wrote to Frederick Macmillan, "For the present, in view of the fact that Messrs. Appleton now have their own house in London, it seemed to me only fair to give them the English rights of the novels which they publish for me. I am sure you will understand this, and believe that it does not in any way affect my pleasant associations with the house of Macmillan" (*Correspondence* 226). While Wharton was happy with Appleton's American advertising of her novels, she was not pleased with the London branch. Benstock writes, "She wanted better distribution of her books in Great Britain" (422). Wharton's trusted her American Appleton editor, Rutger Bleecker Jewett, and he was able to smooth things over with the "crisis" at the London branch (Woolf 422). Wharton would remain with Appleton for the rest of her literary career.

Le Sommaire: The Summary

The Gods Arrive is the sequel to Wharton's novel *Hudson River Bracketed* (1929), but it is also a self-standing novel. Benstock explains, "it had to stand as a self-contained novel and also refer briefly to events described in the novel published three years earlier [*Hudson*]" (432-433). Readers do not need prior knowledge of the events in *Hudson River Bracketed* to make sense of *The Gods Arrive*, but for the purposes of this dissertation it is important to refer to certain passages throughout *Hudson*. Per identity formation, one must consider a character's *past* identity to determine their *present* identity. Place, and France, is eminently displayed throughout *The Gods Arrive*; in *Hudson River Bracketed* Wharton concentrates place primarily on the Hudson River Valley and New York City. Both novels showcase place-identity, but I will primarily examine the places exhibited in *The Gods Arrive*.

The Gods Arrive begins in a transitory place—the main protagonists of the novel, Vance Weston and Halo Tarrant (Spear), are on a "big Atlantic liner" leaving New York City. Again, the first page of Wharton's novel is integral. Vance and Halo's journey throughout *The Gods Arrive* is as transitory as the boat they are on when the novel opens. The reader learns the backstory of the couple—Vance is a widower and writer, and Halo is a still-married woman whose husband, Lewis Tarrant, refuses to divorce her. Rather than stay in New York and try to get a divorce, Halo chooses to run away with Vance, and this becomes an important aspect of the novel. The narrator explains that Vance has published one novel, and he is on the hunt to write his next major work. Halo symbolizes a sort of muse for Vance; she acquiesces all her own needs for him and his creative work. The couple first travels to Spain, then they move on to Montparnasse, a neighborhood on the left bank of Paris. The couple then leaves Paris and migrates to Oubli-sur-mer, a "little Mediterranean town" on the French Riviera (162). Throughout their travels, Vance

attempts to write. Initially, he finds inspiration in places, but often he becomes overwhelmed. Halo, who used to be Vance's muse, is no longer appreciated by Vance; he scoffs at her criticism of his work. Furthermore, the couple's unmarried status, because Halo's husband will not grant her a divorce, creates turmoil in their relationship. They consistently face criticism from their peers for not being married, and, ultimately, they choose to part ways. This decision is also based on a dalliance Vance entertains with a former flame, Floss Delaney. After some time has passed, both Halo and Vance find themselves, separately, back in New York. Halo has been granted a divorce finally, and she is pregnant with Vance's child, unbeknownst to him. In a twist of fate, the couple meets again, and she exposes her pregnancy. They embrace, and Halo says, "You see we belong to each other after all" (432). As with the ending of many of Wharton's novels, the reader is left to wonder what will happen.

Critique Scientifique: Scholarly Criticism

Scholarship on *The Gods Arrive* focuses extensively on autobiographical aspects of the novel. Many scholars, such as Jean Meral, believe that Edith Wharton was out of touch with both the places and the age group of the people she wrote about in the novel. Meral writes, "Cut off from the younger generation, isolated at her home at Saint-Brice-sous-Foret, [she] restates the case she put in her war novels: Paris, the real Paris, is hers; the only intellectual circles with any claim to authenticity are those she frequents" (Meral 168). Meral does acknowledge, though, that "in *The Gods Arrive* Paris is firmly associated with the idea of fertility and creative initiation" (178); though Meral believes Wharton to be out of touch, she still acknowledges the strong associations to place throughout the novel. Place-identity is, indeed, highlighted throughout Wharton's use of setting in the novel. Jianchao Peng, et al. explain, "people do not discern places

in the same way. They perceive identities of places differently and differentiate them by drawing on different elements, such as physical features, cultural attributes, historical associations, [and] experiential ties" (4). It is important to remember that place-identity not only represents the influence of place on the individual, but also the individual's subjective perception of place. Wharton's perception of Paris, based largely on her historical associations and experiential ties, may have differed from others' perceptions. That does not mean, however, that her perception was "wrong." The identity of a place differs for each individual; it is entirely subjective.

Scholar Diana Wallace approaches *The Gods Arrive* through a theoretical lens of gender. She writes of "Wharton's development of a critique of both masculinity and femininity" (328). Furthermore, Wallace argues that "Wharton . . . forces her reader, whatever their gender, to become a 'resisting reader' . . . critical of the misogyny of Vance's attitudes as well as Halo's inclination toward self-sacrifice" (328). Wharton does alternate between male and female points of view in the novel, but this is not a new strategy for her. In previous novels, such as *The Reef*, Wharton also oscillates between male and female perspectives. Wallace ties Wharton's use of gender to the common assertion that the novel is autobiographical. She reads it as "autobiographical text in which the development of the male protagonist as a writer is closely modeled on that of his female creator" (324). Though Wallace focuses on gender, she still reinforces the autobiographical nature of the text.

Gloria Elrich also hones in on Wharton's assumed self-portrayal in *The Gods Arrive*. She focuses primarily on sexuality throughout the novel. Elrich argues,

> In certain ways Vance Weston's sexual career, his bisexuality and his dalliances with a long series of women, reflects that of Edith Wharton's lover, Morton Fullerton. Wharton used the Weston books to derive still newer meanings from that old relationship. Like

> Halo Tarrant, Wharton was somewhat older than her lover, more experienced in the literary world, and maternal in her relationship to him. Halo exhibits the noble attitude Wharton had tried to take toward Fullerton—that of total submission to her lover and his putative genius, as one who asks nothing for herself but the opportunity to serve him. (155)

Elrich's assertion that Vance Weston is a representation of Morton Fullerton is intriguing; most scholars believe Wharton wrote *herself* into the character of Vance Weston. One should not lose sight of the fact that Wharton was clear in *The Writing of Fiction* that, while authors utilize their own experiences, works of fiction should not be entirely autobiographical. As in *The Reef*, Wharton could be likened to any of the main characters in *The Gods Arrive*.

As with the vast majority of Wharton's works, place-identity is left out of the scholarly conversation on *The Gods Arrive*. If one is to argue, though, that the novel is autobiographical, then place is an inextricable part of life. Proshansky et al posit that "place-identity is influenced by a wide range of person/physical setting experiences and relationships based on a variety of . . . contexts that from the moment of birth until death define . . . experience" ("Place" 77). From birth to death, place is integral to one's experience and personal identity. Wharton's own environment and experiences with place enhanced her writing, so it is integral to consider place when entering critical discussions of her work. Moreover, to clarify place-identity theory, one must closely analyze Wharton's characters and their relationships to their settings within the novel.

Halo Spear: Une Femme Restreinte – A Restricted Woman

In order to consider the impact of place-identity in *The Gods Arrive*, it is important to understand how the characters' personal identities take shape in *Hudson River Bracketed.* Halo is a character who has a strong personal identity, but she often relinquishes her identity for the benefit of her interpersonal relationships. Admittedly, Halo's "real gift . . . was appreciating the gifts of others" (*Hudson* 104). Prior to Halo's first marriage, she is described as someone who "never stays anywhere more than five minutes" (*Hudson* 91-92). She is fiercely independent, drives the family's motor herself, and cares little about what others think of her. When Vance first meets her, he sees her as "goddesslike and remote, mistress of the keys of knowledge and experience" (*Hudson* 92). Halo confesses to Vance that she is "never kind . . . but [likes] to share [her] treasures—sometimes" (*Hudson* 84). She makes this assertion as an unmarried, independent woman. She still has the freedom to choose who to share her "treasures" with. After marrying Lewis Tarrant, though, Halo must relinquish the independent aspects of her personal identity; she must share everything with Lewis.

Halo's marriage to Lewis is a "rational action" that takes into account the "concerns of other people and groups" (Noordwijk 4). Indicative of her sense of personal identity throughout both novels, Halo marries Lewis Tarrant to ensure the financial stability of her family. Meine van Noordwijk describes "relational values," which "invoke . . . foundations of morality and of human priorities beyond physiological needs and primary security" (1). Halo does not marry Lewis for her *own* security. Halo's relational values cause her to marry Lewis, but she renounces much of her personal identity by doing so.

During Halo's marriage to Lewis, she experiences a breakdown of her personal identity. Laura Soulsby and Kate Bennett discuss "challenges in consolidating a married identity with a

desire for people to acknowledge them as individuals with their own independent identity" (13). Halo feels as if she has paid a price for her marriage and the financial security with Lewis: "that price was herself; her personality . . . the something which made Halo Spear and no other" (*Hudson* 173). Furthermore, Jennifer Pals identifies "four identity-in-marriage prototypes—anchored, defined, restricted, and confused— [which] reflect different approaches to and evaluative outcomes of the processes involved in identity consolidation, contextualized within the marriage" (300). Halo represents a restricted prototype in marriage: "A woman whose identity is *restricted* by marriage feels frustrated and dissatisfied about the identity-limiting situation she perceives marriage as having imposed on her" (Pals 301). Throughout her marriage to Lewis, Halo is frustrated with her inability to assert her own identity. Her "individuality is lost at the expense of the married relationship" (Soulsby and Bennett 14). She feels indebted to Lewis, though, because he financially helped her family, so she acquiesces to his needs and her own identity fades into the background.

Halo begins to, albeit secretly, explore her identity while still under the restrictions of her husband; this exploration leads her straight to Vance Weston. Pals writes, "women with identities restricted by marriage would be actively exploring identity options (moratorium) or be identity-achieved if it were not for marriage" (301). Halo begins exploring identity options while still in her marriage. She wants, again, to be Vance's "Muse, his inspiration," believing that "there really was some meaning in the stale old image!" (*Hudson* 464). The "stale old image" is how Halo views herself in her marriage with Lewis, but through Vance she finds meaning in herself again. However, "relational values" and "foundations of morality" once again affect Halo, and she tells Vance "I won't take a lover while I have a husband—or while my lover has a wife" (*Hudson*

423). Though Halo is desperate to be free, her relational values cause her to remain in her marriage and nourish her identity elsewhere.

Halo and her family have been indebted to Lewis because of his generosity, so much so that she has abandoned her own identity to maintain her relational values. She tells Vance, "People do what they must—what they think they must. It's all bound up with my family history . . . Lewis was generous to them at a time when I couldn't be, and that held me fast" (*Hudson* 532). After Halo receives an inheritance, though, she no longer needs Lewis's generosity or financial help. There is a shift in her relational values; she can take care of herself and her family financially without Lewis's help, so she leaves him to be with Vance and to find herself again.

Halo believes she can retain her personal identity while in a relationship with Vance, but in both relationships her identity is largely defined for her. When Halo leaves with Vance, setting off on a sojourn, she thinks, "Before entering on a new existence she wanted to find herself again, to situate herself in the new environment into which she had be so strangely flung" (*Gods* 8). Halo has not yet divorced Lewis, but she has left him to travel with Vance. Ironically, she has traded one interpersonal identity for another. With Lewis, Halo felt restricted, but with Vance she feels defined: she "willingly defines herself in terms of his career, goals, and values" (Pals 301). Wharton writes of Halo, "everything had been done not for herself but for Vance" (*Gods* 102). Whether restricted or defined, Halo still is not realizing her own personal identity. Her relationships dictate her identity, and she has no identity continuity.

Halo experiences a great deal of shame as a result of her marriage to Lewis, and this shame negatively affects her realization of her personal identity. Erik Erikson writes, "He who is ashamed would like to force the world not to look at him . . . He would like to destroy the eyes of the world. Instead he must wish for his own invisibility" (*Childhood* 223). After leaving Lewis,

he will not grant Halo a divorce, so she feels shame as a still married woman gallivanting around the world with another man. Perhaps Halo's shame is a reason she accepts her defined identity; she can hide behind Vance's identity and try to remain invisible to the world around her. There are several instances throughout *The Gods Arrive* in which Halo is shamed for being with Vance yet still married to Lewis. For example, during her travels with Vance she "would have suggested they go to Paris" (*Gods* 65), but they would encounter people they know there, and she does not want everyone to know about her personal life. Ultimately, Halo trades one prototype of identity in marriage for another—restricted to defined.

While Halo's relationships often dictate her identity, place also plays an important role in her identity formation. Halo and Vance first travel to Spain, specifically Cordova, Granada, and Cadiz. These places do not impact Halo's identity directly; rather, they have an impact on Vance's identity, which governs Halo's identity. She was Vance's Muse in the past, when she was still with Lewis, and she intends to remain Vance's Muse throughout their relationship. Her identity, then, is of the Muse. However, in Cadiz, where Vance writes a novel, "The Puritan in Spain," he feels as though "he had not felt her imagination flaming through him as it had when they used to meet" (*Gods* 72). Halo's identity as the Muse is slipping away.

Halo's identity is frail at this point; she is no longer the Muse, and she does not feel "defined" by Vance any longer. Therefore, she is desperate to please Vance and regain her Muse status, so she indulges him, and they travel to Paris. She "looked forward to the adventure with dread" (*Gods* 82). Halo knows she will be ostracized by society for being a married woman with another man. The couple stays in Montparnasse. Jean Meral writes, "Montparnasse, a secondary myth grafted onto the myth of Paris, reintroduces the motif of bohemia" (139). Furthermore, Meral refers to Montparnasse as "a new center of artistic life" (146) and "the symbol of

everything having to do with American writers in the Paris of the twenties" (152). Vance realizes identity salience in Montparnasse. Stryker and Burke suggest, "persons are more likely to define situations they enter, or in which they find themselves, in ways that make a highly salient identity relevant" (289). Because Vance is a writer, and Montparnasse is the axis for writers in Paris, the environment his salient with his identity. For Halo, however, Montparnasse further limits her search for individual identity: "from the first she had felt herself an outsider in this world which was to set her free" (*Gods* 82). Initially, Halo hoped that the bohemian lifestyle of the artists in Montparnasse would limit the prejudice they felt for her marital situation. She believes bohemianism is a "contrast to convention" (*Gods* 83), but Montparnasse turns out to be more conventional than she thinks. Her brother, Lorry, who is described as morally corrupt in *Hudson River Bracketed*, now lives in Montparnasse and works as a theatrical designer. Halo believes her brother will support her new relationship, regardless of her lack of a divorce. He surprises her, though, when he states, "Look here, Halo, I've made myself a situation I'm proud of, and here you come along and behave as if you wanted to do me all the harm you can—as if you'd gone out of your way to offend our family pride and ridicule our traditions!" (*Gods* 89). Coming from Lorry, who was "predestined to ruin them [the Spear family]," a few years earlier, Halo is shocked (*Hudson* 174). Jean Meral suggests, "Halo soon discovers that bohemia has its own laws, which are just as strict as those of more conventional society" (168). After her talk with Lorry, Halo walks out onto the street and sees an acquaintance from New York, Mrs. Glaisher. Though Halo knows Mrs. Glaisher sees her as well, the woman does not acknowledge Halo—the "attitude of Mrs. Glaisher's was the outcome of a prolonged and conscientious study of what her particular world approved and disapproved of" (*Gods* 94). Though Halo laughs about this instance, the shame of not being divorced and unable to marry Vance is insidious, and it

further hinders the development of her personal identity. Rather than "the Halo Spear who had lit up the dark," "youth and laughter were gone, her face was worn and guarded. 'This is the real Halo,' he [Vance] thought; and he knew it was the effort to hide her anxiety behind a laughing welcome which had left those furrows between her eyes" (*Gods* 123). Halo has been masquerading under a false identity, one in which she does not care about the opinion of others or of Vance's actions. In truth, though, she is anxious and shameful about her situation, and this shame exposes her true identity.

A marked change takes place in Halo's identity when she and Vance travel to the Oubli-sur-mer, a Mediterranean town on the French Riviera. The couple rents a "little house . . . full of a friendly shabby gaiety" (*Gods* 169). Halo begins to regain her independence; "she no longer asked how the book was getting on . . . her exquisite detachment almost made it seem as if she were quietly preparing for a friendly parting" (*Gods* 179-180). Halo's detachment from Vance is the beginning of her reclaiming her own identity. Vance wants to leave Oubli, but Halo wants to stay, so he travels to London without her. Halo experiences existential insideness during her time at the Oubli. Existential insideness "characterizes belonging to a place and the deep and complete identity with a place that is the very foundation of the place concept" (Relph 55). Moreover, "there exists between place and person a strong and profound bond" (Relph 55). It is, specifically, the garden at the pink house in which Halo finds existential insideness: "The seeds she had sown in the spring . . . contended in a bonfire of bloom" (*Gods* 303). Halo's garden is a metaphor for her own identity. When the couple moved to the little pink house, Halo began planting the seeds for the flowers and her own identity, and as time went on, both the flowers and her identity begin to bloom. Wharton, an avid gardener, writes in her autobiography, "A house

and a garden of my own . . . would have made me happy" (*Backward* 257). Wharton writes of this in a time during which she experienced an "emptiness of life" (*Backward* 257).

In *The Gods Arrive,* Wharton endows Halo with the same wishes she had—a house and a garden of her own. Indeed, the time at the house and in the garden does make Halo happy. She recognizes that "her solitude was self-imposed," but that solitude was necessary for her to regain her personal identity without the presence of a partner. While at the house, Halo's old friend George Frenside (Frenny) comes to see her. He says, "I didn't come to see a new Halo. I came to find out if the old one survived" (*Gods* 308). By "the old one," Frenny refers to the Halo he knew before she was married. When Frenny presses Halo about marrying Vance, she says,

> If I had my divorce my people would expect me to marry Vance. And I can't—I can't. If there were a divorce I couldn't prevent his hearing of it, and if he did he'd feel he ought to marry me—and that might ruin his life, and ruin mine too . . . It's been a beautiful adventure, but . . . I want it to end before the wings turn into chains." (*Gods* 313)

Up until this point in the novel, Halo has not been honest with herself about her relationship with Vance. After being alone at the little pink house, though, and regaining a semblance of self, she does not want to give that up again by marrying Vance. She now views marriage as "chains," when she once saw her relationship with Vance and their love as giving her "wings."

Halo's newfound identity no longer coincides with Vance's needs, and when he returns from England, she must remind herself to "be natural, be natural" in his presence (*Gods* 332). Being "natural" with Vance at this time actually means Halo must put on a façade once again, though. When she fails to do so and tells Vance her true opinion of his new book, he calls her an "amateur critic" (*Gods* 340). Once his Muse, Vance now denounces Halo's criticism, likely

because she is finally presenting her authentic personal identity, one that Vance is not familiar with.

After Vance's departure for New York, Halo finds herself alone in Paris and uses the time there to further recover her personal identity. Wharton writes, "During the long slow months since she had parted from Vance in Paris this detachment and reassurance had grown in her with the child's growth; a kind of calm animal beatitude of which she was at first ashamed and then glad, as she understood that this was the season allotted to her by nature for rest and renewal" (*Gods* 422). As with the flowers blooming at the little pink house, Halo's identity further blooms, now incorporating the role of mother. She is pregnant, yet she does not intend to tell Vance; she is free "to live without a name" (*Gods* 355), at least not the name of a spouse. Halo not only accepts her new identity, but she also rejoices in it.

Vance Weston: L'écrivain Têtu – The Stubborn Writer

If Halo Spear's identity largely depends on her relationships, Vance Weston's identity is almost entirely based on his career choice. Wendy Murphy and Elizabeth Volpe suggest, "Individuals can experience meaningfulness or a sense of calling toward any career domain" (428). Vance feels called to be a writer. The narrator reveals, "He had always known that his father wanted him to be a real estate man . . . [but] he had made up his mind to be a writer" (*Hudson* 25). Vance maintains continuity and sameness of identity as a writer throughout his life. His career as a writer is at the top of the "hierarchy of [identity] salience" (Stryker and Burke 290). Furthermore, Stryker and Burke suggest, "the identity based on greater commitment and higher salience will be reflected (in situations where alternative identities can be invoked) in the

operative identity standard" (290). As a result, Vance's identity as a writer takes precedence over all other roles he undertakes throughout his life, such as husband and lover.

Though Vance's identity as a writer is continuous, Halo has a large impact on his identity. When Vance first meets Halo at the Willows, an old house in New York owned by his cousins, "he became conscious of her presence as something alien, substantial, outside of his own mind" (*Hudson* 61-62). Halo educates Vance on poetry, the books in the library, and even the architecture of the area. He views her as "self-assur[ed]" and "draw[s] her into his dream" (*Hudson* 63-64). In this instance, Vance begins to view Halo as intertwined with his identity as a writer; he begins to view her as a Muse, and he is "the disciple" (*Hudson* 342). He feels "at her touch, wings had grown from him" (*Hudson* 100). Halo supports Vance's desire to be a writer, and he has never had that support from anyone before. Vance and Halo lose touch, though, and he marries Laura Lou. Throughout his marriage, Vance struggles as a writer because he does not have the support he needs from his spouse. Murphy and Volpe acknowledge that "Researchers have . . . identified . . . personal relationships as influences on the meaning of work" (436). One's spouse can have a huge impact on the work one accomplishes; support is integral to success. Vance's wife, Laura Lou, "seemed to belong equally to his body and soul—it was only his intelligence that she left unsatisfied" (*Hudson* 322). Vance begins to resent Laura Lou as a result of her inability to enhance his career. Wharton writes, "These women! Of course his work had been going badly as of late—how could it be otherwise with the endless interruptions and worries he was subjected to? A man who wanted to write ought to be free and unencumbered" (*Hudson* 499). As Vance becomes further dismayed in his marriage, "the thought of her [Halo] had been a means of escape from his misery" (*Hudson* 389). Vance does not view Halo as the type of woman who would interrupt his work, rather, she inspires it. Laura Lou's inability to

nourish Vance's intelligence, as Halo is able to do, causes Vance to look outside of his marriage for the support he needs to maintain his identity as a writer.

Vance longs for freedom from his marriage just as Halo does, but his own relational values will not allow him to leave. Wharton writes, "Leave Laura Lou? No, of course he couldn't. What nonsense! There was nobody else to look after her. He had chosen to have it so—and it was so. His world had closed in on him again, he was handcuffed and chained to it" (*Hudson* 423). It is at this point that Vance's identity as a husband, for a moment, overtakes his identity as a writer. Laura Lou's subsequent death, however, does not change Vance: "All he was certain of was that, after all, no great inner change had befallen him" (*Hudson* 527). Laura Lou was not integral to Vance's identity, so her death does not change him; it only frees him to be with Halo Spear.

Vance believes, as it was when he met Halo, that she will enhance his identity as a writer. When the couple travels to Spain, the narrator explicates, "With Halo at his side, and the world opening up about him . . . his imagination would have room to range" (*Gods* 24). Vance insists on traveling to Cordova, and the hierarchy of his identity begins to rear its ugly head. Vance's identity as a writer now overpowers his identity as Halo's lover, just as it did with Laura Lou. Wharton writes, "It was not that he was forgetful of her, but that, now that they were together, his heart was satisfied, while the hunger of his mind was perpetual and insatiable" (*Gods* 27). The importance of Vance's identity as a writer causes him to be selfish. He tells Halo that he does not think he could write anywhere else. Shortly thereafter, Vance says "I don't believe I'll ever write a line again; not in this place anyway" (*Gods* 36). He subjects Halo to the whims of his identity, and she must adapt in order to please him. Sizemore and Baker suggest, "Selfishness is defined as behaving in a manner that benefits the self at the expense of others. In the context of romantic

relationships, selfishly-motivated people tend to provide lower levels of support and be less responsive to their romantic partner's needs" (1). Vance's behavior is often at the expense of others. Even when he knows Halo does not want to travel to a particular place, he pressures her to do so. Halo did not want to travel to Cordova; she is "disconcerted by his taking the plan of travel into his own hands" without her having any say (*Gods* 27). Furthermore, research suggests that "perceived partner commitment may . . . increase selfish behaviors in romantic relationships because people who perceive that their partners are highly committed should anticipate fewer harmful interpersonal consequences from their selfish behavior" (Sizemore and Baker 3). Vance perceives Halo's steadfast commitment to him, so he does not concern himself with any harmful consequences. Whether or not Halo's commitment to him is real or a façade, Vance's perception of it allows him to further explore his identity as a writer.

Halo's adjustments to Vance's whims as a writer continue as he implores her to travel to Granada next. Changing place too often can have a negative effect on the continuity of one's identity. Proshansky et al suggest, "The perceived stability of place . . . that emerges from . . . recognitions . . . validates the individual's belief in his or her own continuity over time" ("Place" 79). If an individual does not spend enough time in a place for it to become "stable" or "recognizable," she will not be able to validate the continuity of her own identity within that place. This issue explains why Halo must make a "mental readjustment" before traveling to Granada; there is no stability of place for Halo, so she must readjust each time they move (*Gods* 42). During their time in Granada, Vance leaves Halo alone a great deal while he spends time with a new friend, Alders. Alders is a "roving American with a thin glaze of culture . . . and a taste for developing in conversation theories picked up in random reading . . . among his friends . . . he was known as 'The Gypsy Scholar' . . . adding that the name had been conferred on him

because of his nomadic habits [and] . . . his scholarly tastes" (*Gods* 44-45). Alders inspires Vance, and "Halo saw that he [Vance] ascribed her own lukewarm share in their talks to feminine inferiority" (*Gods* 45). Again, Vance places Halo low on the hierarchy of importance; he views Alders as inspirational to his writing, so he spends more and more time with the man. Kenneth Price states, "Vance abandons Halo for a time in favor of the bogus intellectual Alders, and Vance registers surprise that Alders and Halo become jealous of one another" (395). Vance views Alders as a companion who can offer him things that Halo cannot. It is, perhaps, the companionship between Vance and Alders that causes some scholars to view Vance as "bisexual" (Erlich 155). Alders is a bachelor, and as Eve Sedgwick argues, "the bachelor is at least partly feminized by his attention to and interest in domestic concerns. (At the same time, though, his intimacy with clubland and bohemia gives him a special passport to the world of men, as well)" (189-190). Furthermore, the bachelor displays "physical timidity and, often, by a high value on introspection and by (at least partial) self-knowledge. Finally, the bachelor is housebroken by the severing of his connections with a discourse of genital sexuality" (190). Alders is described as "woman shy" (*Gods* 62) and having "art and philosophy at his fingers' ends" (*Gods* 45). These descriptions, coupled with his "mysterious affairs" supports queer interpretation of the character. Regardless of sexuality, Alders is the first individual who outranks Halo through Vance's commitment to his identity as a writer.

Continuity of identity, such as Vance's continuity as a writer, is a sign of a healthy identity. Erik Erikson writes, "there is a selfsameness and continuity to the ego's synthesizing methods and that these methods are effective in safeguarding the sameness and continuity of one's meaning" (*Identity Life* 22). Vance's "meaning," his calling in life, is that of a writer. However, Erikson also suggests, "The sense of ego identity, then, is the accrued confidence that

the inner sameness and continuity arc matched by the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others" (*Childhood* 228). Vance's meaning for others does not remain continuous; his outward identity and mood are dependent not only on the people he is surrounded by, but also by the place he is in. Though initially believing Cordova was the best place for him to write, he "lost even the desire to store up his sensations" (*Gods* 37). These "sensations" provide the fodder for his work; he is overcome by impressions in new places and cannot write. This inability to write causes Vance to become somewhat nomadic. While in Granada, Vance is distracted by Alders and a desire to learn the Spanish language, which he learns by "tramping the streets with Alders" (*Gods* 63). Vance maintains the inner continuity of his identity as a writer, but to outsiders he is not actually in the process of *writing* anything.

Vance finally realizes a "continuity of development," that is the further development of his identity, in Cadiz. Vance and Halo spend three months alone in Cadiz, and he finishes his book "A Puritan in Spain." While there, though, he realizes that due largely to habit, he no longer appreciates Halo's input on his writing as he once did. The couple also seems to be further drifting apart. Wharton writes, "During their first months together he and she had lived in a deep spiritual isolation; at times they seemed too close to each other, seemed to be pressing on each other, pinning down each other's souls. With the first intrusion from the outside, with the appearance of his queer friend Alders, from being too near they had suddenly become too far apart" (*Gods* 73). The distance between Vance and Halo can be explained by their reason for their closeness. Erik Erikson writes,

> To keep themselves together they temporarily overidentify, to the point of apparent complete loss of identity . . . This initiates the stage of 'falling in love,' which is by no means entirely, or even primarily, a sexual matter—except where the mores demand it. To

> a considerable extent . . . love is an attempt to arrive at a definition of one's identity by projecting one's diffused ego images on one another and by seeing them thus reflected and gradually clarified. (*Childhood* 228)

Vance, in the past, reflected his ego images onto Halo, and her vision of him clarified his vision of himself. She was once a "mysterious custodian of the unknown" (*Hudson* 342), but now she cannot successfully verify Vance's identity as a writer because he believes she does not "care for" his new book. Halo's criticism, once sparking answers in the "coverts of his mind," now makes his identity as a writer fragile.

Vance chooses Paris as the next destination in their travels, and this is largely due to his identity salience and sense of belonging in the literary world of Paris. While in Montparnasse, Vance experiences empathetic insideness, which "demands a willingness to be open to significances of a place, to feel it, to know and respect its symbols" (Relph 54). Vance's arms are wide open to all that Paris has to offer. Wharton writes, "Life in Paris had roused in Vance a thousand new curiosities and activities. So far he had chiefly frequented the young men and women who met at the literary cafes of Montparnasse" (*Gods* 74). Moreover, the scenery in Paris has an effect on Vance as well: "He swung along down the Boulevard Montparnasse and the Boulevard Raspail to the Seine. The sight of moving waters always arrested him . . . the sun-flecks on the water mimicked the yellowing leaves . . . Vance felt young and happy, and full of power" (*Gods* 72). The feeling of power that Vance experiences while walking along the Seine is intriguing. The Seine,

> since the early Middle Ages . . . has been above all the river of Paris, and the mutual interdependence of the river and the city that was established at its major crossing points has been indissolubly forged. The fertile centre of its basin in the Île-de-France was the

> cradle of the French monarchy and the nucleus of the expanding nation-state and is still its heartland and metropolitan region. (Dacharry)

The Seine, itself, is quite a powerful river—the city is dependent upon the river, just as Vance becomes dependent upon the city. Vance also becomes somewhat attached to the Seine itself, when walking one evening he "found it harder than ever to leave the Seine" (*Gods* 107). Jean Meral further explicates, "Vance Weston, strolling along the banks of the Seine, finds himself carried away toward a kind of poetic meditation" (172). Illustrative of his empathetic insideness, Vance attempts to intimately understand the identity of places in Paris; thus, he experiences a much "deeper and richer" identity of the place than one who is physically present and simply observing a place (Relph 55).

Vance experienced insideness and belonging in Paris, but in Oubli-sur-mer he experiences incidental outsideness. Incidental outsideness is "a largely unselfconscious attitude in which places are experienced as little more than the background or setting for activities" (Relph 52). Vance initially believes that he will be inspired by the Oubli. The narrator explains: "the queer little community, so self-contained and shut off from his agitated world, gave him the sense of aloofness, which his spirit needed; yet somehow—as so often before—the fullness of the opportunity seemed to oppress him, his work lagged" (*Gods* 170). Places that Vance thinks will stimulate his literary career often do not. Subconsciously, the pressure of utilizing place as motivation actually does the opposite for him. Since Vance's identity as a writer is foremost, he contemplates his career incessantly, regardless of place. While his moods may alter because of place, his core identity remains continuous. The narrator explains, "These alternations of mood, which he had once ascribed to instability of aim, no longer troubled him. He knew now that they were only the play of the world of images on his creative faculty, and that his fundamental self

remained unchanged under such shifting impulses" (G*ods* 200). Vance is capable of experiencing insideness, but often he experiences incidental outsideness because places cannot change his unalterable identity.

People may not always be able to influence Vance's steadfast identity, but neither Laura Lou, nor Halo, was Vance's first love. His first love was a girl named Floss Delaney, and he meets her again when he travels alone to Monte Carlo from the Oubli. When they were young, Floss broke Vance's heart: "He had never been able to imagine what excruciating physical pain was like . . . but he knew . . . that when the soul is smitten deeply enough it seems to become one with the body, to share all the body's capacity for suffering a distinct anguish in each nerve and muscle" (*Hudson* 23). When Vance encounters Floss again, in Monte Carlo, he recognizes that "she had not changed; perhaps . . . no one *does* change" (*Gods* 260). Described as a capitalistic "undemocratic good looking American girl" (*Gods* 228), Floss maintains a sameness of identity, and Vance, once again, loves her. Wharton writes of Floss: "money's her god . . . she says it's the only thing that'll get her what she wants" (*Gods* 228). Floss is unlike Laura Lou or Halo in her obsession with money. Laura Lou was happy with very little, and Halo, though she initially married for money, did so for her family and not for herself. Vance, though a published author, is a struggling artist who is not wealthy. He would never be the type of man Floss would settle down with, and she forgets him the same way she did when she was young. Floss is, perhaps, the one person in the novel that causes Vance to experience a crisis of identity. Wharton writes, "Vance knew there were selves under selves in him, and that one of the undermost belonged to Floss Delaney" (*Gods* 260). This is the first instance in the novel in which more than one "self" has been attributed to Vance, and it is a result of Floss Delaney. The theme of more than one self *does* briefly arise in *Hudson River Bracketed* when Vance is only nineteen years old. Wharton

writes, “He often felt as if his own soul were a stranger inside of him . . . the idea of the mysterious stranger within one’s self . . . forever unknown to him” (45). The reappearance of Floss causes Vance to regress to his nineteen-year-old self, a self who had not yet been fully formed or consolidated.

The regression of Vance’s identity remains an obstacle; his “selves” reappear in London: “His selves, as he had long since discovered, were innumerable, and there were times when each in turn had something interesting to say to him” (*Gods* 284). Erik Erikson suggests that “identity confusion usually becomes manifest at a time when the individual finds himself exposed to a combination of experiences which demand his simultaneous commitment to *physical intimacy*, to decisive *occupational choice*, to energetic *competition*, and to *psychosocial self-definition*” (*Identity* 128). Vance faces the physical intimacy of Floss Delaney and psychosocial self-definition. Once Vance perceives his many selves, he must attempt to consolidate them into one concrete identity as he had before. Erikson does recognize that identity can be continuously “lost and regained” (*Identity* 128), so while Vance has lost the assuredness of his identity, he can regain it.

When Vance returns to the Oubli, the house feels unfamiliar to him, which is likely a result of both his outsideness and his identity confusion. Claire Cooper writes of moving to a new home, and finding it “initially strange, unwelcoming, even hostile” (169), but for Vance, this is not a new home. It is not *his* home, though. Halo is the one who experiences insideness while there; Vance is an outsider. The house is not the only thing that seems unfamiliar to him. Halo also “seemed strange” to him (*Gods* 325). While in London, Vance finished his next novel, and he asks Halo to read it. Recognizing Vance’s fractured identity, she tells him he has not “expressed his real self” in the novel (*Gods* 336). Her criticism, though, throws Vance further

into a downward spiral, and he tells her "I only care for myself what I think of my work" (*Gods* 391). Though Vance likely knows that Halo is right, his pride and confusion cause him to lash out at her. The literary world echoes Halo's criticism after the book is published. Ultimately, Vance's identity confusion which was spurred on by his reunion with Floss, and Halo's newfound independence and criticism, cause his return to the house to be almost foreign.

As a result of his transitory nature, Vance is unable to obtain place-identity stability, so he begins to search for identity stability through a relationship with Floss after leaving Halo. He travels to Euphoria, his hometown, where he once felt "stifl[ed] in the unchanged atmosphere" (*Gods* 16). He only goes back there because Floss is supposed to be there. Typically, he avoids Euphoria and his family: "Exile allowed [him] to keep his famil[y] at a manageable distance, making it possible for [him] . . . to live [his] inner life in [his] own ways" (Goodman 12). In Euphoria, "his first impulse was to fly or to lie concealed" (*Gods* 363). Vance does "fly," to New York, but it is once again to chase Floss. Wharton writes of Vance's meeting with Floss:

> He would have felt ashamed to admit that anything but the need to stabilize his life, to be in harmony again with himself and his work, could have forced him to such a step. Halo had seen that, he was sure . . . Marriage and a home; normal conditions; that was what he craved and needed. And Floss Delaney seemed to personify the strong emotional stimulant on which his intellectual life must feed" (*Gods* 382-383).

Vance's desire for stability is a result of his fractured identity. His craving for marriage is odd, because his marriage to Laura Lou did not stimulate his work. He then believed Halo would provide him with the necessary stimulation for his work, just as he now imagines Floss will do. Initially, Halo is the character who seems to search for her identity in relationships, but now Vance does the same thing.

Vance's realization that he cannot find stability with Floss causes him to seek complete solitude. Like Halo, the solitude is necessary for Vance to regain his identity. He travels to the northern woods to a place called Lake Bel Air. While there, Vance ruminates on his identity: "All he wanted was to be himself, solely and totally himself, not tangled up in the old deadly nets of passion and emotion" (*Gods* 407). It is important to remember that roles are associated with place: "the physical dimensions and characteristics for each specific role-related identity are influenced . . . by place" ("City" 155). In his solitude at Lake Bel Air, it is precisely the *lack* of roles that allows Vance to "be himself." As with Halo, he realizes that he cannot stabilize his identity through relationships; he must do so on his own.

Les Sauls: Le Debut et la Fin – The Willows: The Beginning and the End

Though Vance and Halo search for their identities through people and places abroad, they end up embracing their American identities by returning to The Willows, a home in New York, which is, potentially, the most important place throughout the entirety of both *Hudson River Bracketed* and *The Gods Arrive*. The Willows is the only place in which Vance and Halo experience stability as well. The first time Vance goes there he feels an "air of fantasy and mystery" (*Hudson* 56), and he acknowledges it is "where his real life had begun" (*Gods* 416). Vance and Halo met for the first time at the Willows, and in that setting, she became his Muse. It is the place in which he found the inspiration to write his first novel; "the old house had been his fairy godmother" (*Gods* 418). Vance returns to the Willows because he yearns for rebirth—the Willows recalls his "embryonic stage" (*Gods* 416) in life, and he wants to be reborn into a new man. Still struggling with his identity, Vance believes the Willows will help him "regain his strength and then face life afresh" (*Gods* 420). What Vance actually finds there, though, is Halo.

She has also returned to the Willows: "the decision to live at the Willows had been her final step toward recovery" (*Gods* 422). Vance and Halo both return to the Willows to "recover" their fragmented identities and to find themselves again. While having work done on the Willows, Halo stays in her childhood home at Eaglewood, and Vance goes there to see her. He tells her "she [Floss] took something with her; my belief in things, my old reasons for living and working. It's as if my mainspring was broken. I've got to get it mended first" (*Gods* 431). Here, again, one surmises that Floss is the impetus for Vance's identity crisis. He wants to return to Halo, but he does not want to do so until he has "mended" his identity. Once more, Wharton leaves her readers with an ambiguous ending. Halo reveals her pregnancy to Vance, and they embrace, but one cannot ascertain what happens next. Halo now has a secure, independent identity, but Vance is still searching.

Finale

There are two protagonists in *Hudson River Bracketed* and *The Gods Arrive*, and the reader must navigate the changing identities of both Vance Weston and Halo Spear. Diana Wallace writes of "Wharton's development of a critique of both masculinity and femininity while still maintaining the reader's sympathy with both characters. Wharton thus forces her reader, whatever their gender, to become a 'resisting reader' . . . critical of the misogyny of Vance's attitudes as well as Halo's inclination toward self-sacrifice" (328). Vance's apparent misogyny, however, stems from his hierarchical view of identity—being a writer takes precedence over everything else. Halo's "self-sacrifice" illustrates her need to find an identity through her interpersonal relationships.

Regardless of where Vance and Halo travel throughout the novel, the connection between identity and place is profound. The exploration of Montparnasse highlights how displacement and adaptation shape personal identity, as Vance and Halo navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by the new environment. Additionally, the examination of the Willows reveals how a place can contribute to a deeply rooted sense of belonging. By acknowledging the vital role of place in identity formation, one can not only understand how people relate to their environments, but also recognize the implications for social identities, identity salience, and identity crises.

LA CONCLUSION ULTIME

This dissertation undertakes a thorough and detailed examination of the role of place-identity in Edith Wharton's life and literary output. It also seeks to illustrate how her works may be understood through the lens of place-identity theory. The decision to approach this analysis chronologically, beginning with *Madame de Treymes* (1907) and concluding with *The Gods Arrive* (1932), is crucial for illuminating the importance of place throughout the entirety of Wharton's literary career and her life experiences. Central to my research is the exploration of how Wharton's geographical settings—primarily her experiences in Paris and her retreat to the French countryside—shaped her literary style and thematic concerns. As such, this dissertation is not just a literary analysis but also an interdisciplinary work that bridges literature with psychology and sociology.

In exploring the connections between place and identity, I draw on the theories of key scholars such as Erik Erikson, Peter Stryker, John Burke, Edward Relph, Bernardo Hernandez, and others. Erikson's notion of identity development, particularly the idea that place can play a pivotal role in forming an individual's identity, builds a solid foundation for understanding Wharton's complex relationship with her environments. Stryker and Burke's identity theory further informs this examination by emphasizing how social contexts and external environments influence identity formation and expression. They argue that individual identities are not only personally constructed but also socially negotiated and reflected through places we inhabit. This theoretical framework becomes particularly essential to understand Wharton's works, highlighting how her lived experiences and the sociocultural environments shaped her understanding of self, community, and artistic expression.

During my research process, I engaged with a wide array of both primary and secondary sources, including Wharton's own letters, correspondence with her publishers, and a range of biographical and scholarly analyses. This approach facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of place-identity in Wharton's work. Notably, Wharton was cognizant of the word "identity" long before it gained widespread popularity during the mid-twentieth century, which indicates her own awareness of how her physical surroundings affected her sense of self and creativity. This prescience underlines Wharton's significant contribution to the discourse on identity—an aspect that has often been overlooked in previous scholarship.

The concept of place-attachment emerges as a vital theme in my research, as it emphasizes how Wharton's settings often served as symbols for the self and reflections of the inner lives of characters. For instance, Wharton's dislocation and attachment to spaces in her novels often parallel the emotional landscapes of her characters, suggesting that homes and expansive environments stand as metaphors for personal identity and cultural belonging. Anna Leath from *The Reef* is a prime example of this metaphor—Chateau Givré becomes a metaphor for her personal identity. In this context, the home is not merely a physical structure but a repository of memories, emotions, and social ties, acting as a crucial element in the construction of Wharton's characters' identities. This theme suggests Claire Cooper's theory, "the house as a symbol of the self," and is evident in nearly all of the works examined throughout this dissertation.

As I delved deeper into her works, I noted how Wharton's literature encapsulated the tension between belonging and alienation, insideness and outsideness, a duality made apparent through her detailed settings. Through novels like *The Custom of the Country*, *The Reef*, and *The Gods Arrive*, Wharton manipulates place as a character, revealing how environments can evoke a

sense of home or dislocation, thereby shaping personal identities. Each setting provides a backdrop for exploring the interconnectedness of identity and place, a theme poignantly expressed in her portrayal of social dynamics and individual aspirations.

Looking toward future research, I anticipate more extensive studies on place-identity theory across Wharton's entire oeuvre, particularly examining other novels and short stories. Expanding upon this research could lead to a deeper understanding of the psychological implications of various settings and how they contribute to the identity narratives within her stories. Furthermore, a comparative analysis of Wharton's treatment of place-identity alongside other early 20th-century authors, such as Djuna Barnes, Henry James, and Gertrude Stein, who grappled with similar themes, could uncover shared narratives and divergent perspectives. Shari Benstock writes of Barnes: "a refugee from the moribund literary culture that had been Greenwich Village, Djuna Barnes had come to Paris as a journalist" (*Women* 235). Furthermore, Barnes was a homosexual woman "writing to some degree against the predominant patriarchal and heterosexual culture" (32). As with Wharton, Barnes found freedoms in Paris that were lacking in America, and she utilizes her experiences with place in the creation of her work. Henry James, also an expatriate, lived in England for most of his adult life. In his book *The American Scene* (1907), Henry James describes his impressions of America after living abroad for twenty-one years. James's critique is scathing, and it would be intriguing to read through the lens of place-identity. Benstock writes, "For Stein, America held the potential for the twentieth century, but Paris was required to develop that potential . . . [she was] making a place for her own creative endeavors" (89). Much like Wharton, Stein found inspiration in Paris that she lacked in America. The works of Barnes, James, and Stein reflect the intricate relationship

between person and place and suggest that a broader contemplation on place-identity could yield innovative insights into the literary context contemporaneous to Wharton.

Additionally, investigating how modern authors reference and utilize place throughout their novels could provide valuable insights into the continuing relevance of place-identity theory in contemporary literature. In literary studies, scholarship on identity focuses primarily on race, class, gender, and sexuality, but often entirely ignores the role of place. Harold Proshansky created place-identity theory for the very same reason—place was left out of scholarship on identity theory. I strive to apply Proshansky's theory to literature for the same reason he created it—to not ignore the importance of place and provide a new lens through which to explore identity in literary works. By applying this theory to a multitude of authors, scholars can deepen their understanding of how environmental contexts shape narrative dynamics and character development, which reinforces the assertion that place is a crucial element in the construction of personal identity.

This dissertation contributes significantly to the field of literary studies by foregrounding the concept of place-identity theory as a key framework for understanding Edith Wharton's work. By illustrating the profound impact of physical environments on her artistic output, I have illuminated a significant aspect of her legacy that has been insufficiently explored in previous scholarship. Through an array of works—*Madame de Treymes*, "The Last Asset," *The Reef*, *The Custom of the Country*, *Glimpses of the Moon*, and *The Gods Arrive*—Wharton writes through a lens of how place shapes our identities and creative expressions. Her work underscores her importance as a foundational figure in American literature, particularly in her exploration of dynamics between place and identity. By emphasizing place-identity as a central theme in her work, this dissertation enriches the understanding of the literary context of Wharton's time,

revealing how deeply personal and external landscapes converge in the construction of artistic identity and literary output. Ultimately, this dissertation highlights the necessity of recognizing the critical role of place in both the life of an artist and its representation in literature. Edith Wharton's legacy serves as a powerful reminder of the intricate ties between our environments and our identities, emphasizing that our stories are shaped not only by who we are but also by where we find ourselves.

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