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Edith Wharton in Context edited by Laura Rattray (review)

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United States. That is to say, despite the problematic prose, Adams's book is worth reading (if perhaps not buying, given the price). And Harold Frederic's *The Damnation of Theron Ware* is absolutely worth reading, and re-reading.

—William Vance Trollinger, Jr., *University of Dayton*

Edith Wharton in Context, edited by Laura Rattray. New York:

Cambridge University Press, 2012. xxi + 400 pp. Cloth, \$103.00;

E-book \$82.00.

At first glance, readers of *Edith Wharton in Context* might be reminded of Adeline Tintner's 1999 monograph with the same main title, *Edith Wharton in Context: Essays on Intertextuality* (University of Alabama Press), or upon noting its multi-essay format, they might more likely conjecture that this volume is either Cambridge University Press' updated answer to Oxford University Press' 2003 Wharton volume, *A Historical Guide to Edith Wharton* (edited by Carol J. Singley) or an update to Cambridge's own 1995 volume, *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton* (edited by Millicent Bell). However, despite the surface similarities of the three essay collections, this latest volume, *Edith Wharton in Context*, has a more encyclopedic structure than the other two, featuring a wider variety of perspectives from more of Wharton's critics. Whereas the previous two collections were significantly shorter, both in numbers of pages and of chapters—respectively, approximately 300 pages for nine chapters and 200 pages for twelve chapters—the heftier, 400-page *Edith Wharton in Context* contains thirty-four chapters, one of which is an excellent chronology with cultural and historical contexts alongside Wharton's life events. (A similar chronology is included as a chapter in *A Historical Guide to Edith Wharton*, but while it is illustrated with Wharton-related photographs, it is less comprehensive in its coverage of cultural events during Wharton's lifetime than the chronology in *Edith Wharton in Context*.) The chapters are arranged in seven sections: "Life and Works," "Critical Reception," "Book and Publishing History," "Arts and Aesthetics," "Social Designs," "Time and Place," and "Literary Milieux," and all of the chapters are conveniently compact—approximately ten pages apiece, excepting the editor's introduction and the chronology chapters, which are twice the length of the others.

In the introduction, editor Laura Rattray delineates the volume's revisionary rationale in terms of recent developments in cultural studies about Wharton's era: "Filtered through the contexts of both her own age

and those of subsequent generations, images of Wharton and her work continue to realign.” The emphasis of several essays on Wharton’s self-representations and savvy marketing, for instance, speaks to new perspectives on these matters in literary studies of the past twenty years or so. Essays by Sharon Shaloo (“Wharton and Her Editors”), Gary Totten (“Selling Wharton”), Elsa Nettels (“Serialization”), Bonnie Shannon McMullen (“Short Story Markets”), and Katherine Joslen (“Images of Wharton”) raise provocative points about different facets of these vexed commercial issues.

The compact, ten-page essay length suits these chapters’ topics well, and the same can be said for most of the other chapters’ topics. However, two chapters seem poorly served by the apparently strict length limit set for each essay in the volume: Jessica Schubert McCarthy’s “Modern Critical Reception” and Linda Wagner Martin’s “Wharton and Gender.” While these two critics can be praised for the evocative, albeit exceedingly selective, coverage they manage to achieve in ten pages on these large/broad topics, they might have contributed further insight on these crucial areas of Wharton criticism had they been allowed more space.

Of particular interest to scholars in naturalism studies is chapter 33, “Naturalism,” by Donna Campbell. In this chapter, followed by only one chapter—“Modernism,” by Jennifer Haytock—Campbell nearly gets the last word, so to speak, on Wharton’s genre of choice in many of her major texts, including “Bunner Sisters” (1892, first published in 1916), *The House of Mirth* (1905), *Ethan Frome* (1911), *The Custom of the Country* (1913), and *The Age of Innocence* (1920). In her essay, Campbell succinctly explains Wharton’s interests in “evolutionary theory and the emerging sciences of human behavior, including anthropology,” as well as discussing intersections between Wharton’s naturalist texts and those by Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, Jack London, Sinclair Lewis, and other well-known naturalists.

On the whole, this volume contributes significantly to Wharton studies and enhances critical understanding of Wharton’s place among her naturalist peers. Its varied content will benefit students of Wharton at all levels, from undergraduate students to advanced scholars.

—Linda Kornasky, *Angelo State University*